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Navigating the waters of uncertainty… Learning for sustainability and the small organisation

A Thesis submitted to the School of Education, Faculty of Humanities
University of the Witwatersrand
in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Adult Education)

Submitted by:
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Johannesburg
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ABSTRACT

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa experience one of the highest failure rates in the world with 75% to 80% of SMEs failing in their first ten years. This data suggests that few small organisations in South Africa are sustainable entities and this in turn impacts on employment and the GDP of South Africa.

In order to be sustainable, organisations should be learning ones (Garvin, 1993; Marquardt in Hattingh & Smit, 2004, p2). Senge's (1990) ground-breaking model of a learning organisation identifies the disciplines companies should practice in order to contribute to their sustainability. This model, previously researched in large global companies, is used as the basis of researching a small company in a local, South African context. This study explores whether by being a learning organisation, a small company is able to sustain itself.

Senge's concept of a learning organisation includes five disciplines. These disciplines have adult and workplace learning theories embedded in them. The study attempted to identify whether the small company drew on these learning theories in day-to-day operations and practise, and if this contributed to its development as a learning organisation.

In addition to learning theories, literature reviewed included factors that impact on small business sustainability in the South African context. The study reveals an interesting blend of a business management concept ("the learning organisation") with adult education principles that give insight into developing a small company as a learning organisation.

A qualitative, ethnographic case study approach was used for this study, using an interactive model to accommodate the dynamic nature of the workplace with its variety of events and activities. Data collection took place during two intensive research periods in 2008 and 2012, in a single Johannesburg-based company. A multi-method approach was used and included observations, document analysis, questionnaires, transect walks, auto-photography, focus groups and interviews.

The study revealed that a small company can ensure its sustainability by being a learning organisation, even though the company did not hold the same understanding of a learning organisation that Senge (1990) did. By practising various adult and workplace learning theories, especially the theory of communities of practice, a small company can develop the disciplines of a learning organisation. Furthermore, organisations may practise the disciplines of a learning organisation organically, without specific intent, and this may assist in their sustainability.

Key terms:
Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) sustainability, Small business management, Learning organisations, Adult learning, Workplace learning, Learning theories, Organisational learning, Organisational leadership, Organisational culture, South African small business environment

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

Signed ……

Genevieve Hundermark

_____ day of _____ in the year _____

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And to my Creator who has helped me in this journey. Thank you.

PREFACE

I began this study in 2008 as a Masters in Education (Adult Education). During the course of my study, in 2010, my supervisor and I applied for an upgrade of the study to a Ph.D. Our application was granted and the study was externally assessed to determine what changes/ enhancements needed to be made to upgrade the study.

I made these changes, which included additional literature related to the fields of a learning organisation, adult learning, sustainability and research methodology. I also included another round of data collection and analysis in 2012. The result of this process is the product set before you.

I presented a paper based on extracts from Chapters Two and Three at the International Learning Conference in Mauritius in July 2011. I was invited to submit it for publication and it was published by the International Journal of Learning as follows:
Hundermark, G. (2012). Learning and the Sustainability of Small Organisations: An Examination of Senge's Theory of a Learning Organisation in a South African Context. *The International Journal of Learning,* Vol. 18 No. 12, pp 195-214.

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Abbreviations

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
AIG	American International Group (company name)
ANT	Actor-Network Theory
BDD	Business Development Director
B-BBEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment (shortened version of B-BBEE)
BP	British Petroleum
BSV	Building Shared Vision
CHAT	Cultural-Historical Activity Theory
EME	Exempt Micro Enterprise
FD	Financial Director
IBM	International Business Machines (company name)
MD	Managing Director
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MM	Mental Models
MTN	Mobile Telephone Networks (company name)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
ODC	Organisational Development Company (pseudonym for research site)
PM	Personal Mastery
PWC	PriceWaterhouseCoopers (company name)
QSE	Qualifying Small Enterprise
SADC	South African Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SARS	South African Revenue Services
SME	Small to Medium Enterprise
SETA	Sector Education Training Authority
ST	Systems Thinking
TL	Team Learning
VAT	Value-Added Tax
VW	Volkswagen (company name)
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION –
CLIMBING ABOARD

The ocean is a vast expanse that captures the imagination and sets many of us in awe of its magnificence and countless hidden wonders. I am one whose imagination is often captured by the ocean. At the seaside, I often gaze at the brilliance of waves breaking against the rocks, enamoured by the huge splashes and spray. My thoughts drift time and again as I shift my gaze to the horizon, contemplating what lies beyond and beneath… I frequently find myself thinking about the pleasures of the ocean – on the beach families play; children build sandcastles; jetskiers and speedboaters frolic in the waves; the occasional yacht eases by and I imagine cruise liners in the distance navigating the waters with passengers enjoying the relaxation and entertainment available on board. My thoughts then drift to the terrors of the ocean – the tsunami on December 26, 2007, and more recently in Japan on March 11, 2011; the powerful force of hurricanes that have regularly damaged the American coastline; the enormity of waves in storms – can we ever truly predict what the ocean will do?



But we set sail upon these waters, uncertain as they may be… some on speedboats, some on yachts, others on cruise liners; passengers on all hope that their vessels will be adequate to deal with whatever the ocean may bring their way. If the vessel is on the water and encounters a storm, it is hoped that the crew and/or navigator(s) will be able to provide some guidance and direction during these times due to their experience, past learning and ability to learn in the current situation by gathering information, assessing the situation and making informed, rational decisions.

The ocean can be a metaphor for the world of business – vast and somewhat unpredictable, where there are days like those at the beach: pleasant, calm, fairly predictable and fun; while there are also days that are stormy and uncertain – markets crashing; shares plummeting, and just as quickly rising; demand depleting and little optimism. The cruise liners are the large organisations in the business world that may be global, such as General Motors, IBM, AIG, Xerox, Anglo American, General Electric and Canon, while the yachts and speedboats are the lesser-known, local small organisations, classified as Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Both the large and the small to medium enterprises have the capacity to catch the eye – the large luxury cruise liner has onlookers gazing in awe at the splendour and magnificence of what they behold and the smaller yachts and speedboats have spectators admiring their speed, agility and manoeuvrability. But if you had to ask onlookers which vessel they would prefer to board, they would most likely opt for the cruise liner for the popular reason that "bigger is better", or at least perceived to be better.

If we further explore this metaphor, the larger cruise liner has more crew and resources (such as technology and supplies) and seems to sail with relative ease, whereas the smaller yacht and speedboat appear to be quicker and slicker, able to turn and change direction more easily. A change in speed in these smaller vessels is also felt more quickly.

If either type of vessel, large or small, is hit by a large wave when in turbulent and stormy waters, one would expect that a cruise liner may stay above water for some time so that survivors and possibly some materials can be rescued. However, the impact on smaller vessels requires little imagination – there is very little chance of survival and the vessel would sink quickly.



Despite these differences between the two types of vessels, all pilots of sailing vessels need to be aware of their surroundings and pick up on any change in the environment so that they can move out of a threatening environment into safer waters. In other words, they all need to be learning – gathering information from their surroundings, thinking critically about this information and making decisions based on the information for future actions, in order to make new meaning of the situation (definition adapted from de Jager, 2006, p8). The learning needs of different sized vessels may vary, but the need to learn still exists. All vessels need to be aware of the chart they are on and any rough waters they may encounter so that they can plan accordingly – the larger vessel needs more time to plan as its turning circle is larger, while the smaller vessels need to be aware of how long they can continue in the same direction before turning. This need and ability to learn will influence their capacity to survive impending rough waters.

So, what do cruise liners, yachts and speedboats have to do with my study?



I have researched a small organisation, which could be likened to a yacht, or a speedboat. This small organisation, along with global business, found itself in uncertain waters due to the crash in stock markets that began in September 2008. The organisation is currently, in 2013, still trying to navigate the uncertain waters of a recession. In order to survive these uncertain times, the organisation should be learning and the purpose of my research was to establish if the company is indeed a learning organisation.

I have selected Peter Senge's model of a learning organisation as he is a well-known expert in this field, and has been credited with popularising the concept of a learning organisation (Fenwick, 2001). My research was based on the disciplines of a learning organisation proposed by Senge (1990) namely personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. According to Senge, by practising these disciplines, organisations can excel in the future. The research findings indicate whether the researched company is able to navigate the waters of uncertainty as a small vessel upon these waters, that is, whether the organisation practises the disciplines of a learning organisation in order to be sustainable. It is the departure point of this research that a learning organisation is a sustainable entity.

1.1 Research problem

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa experience one of the highest failure rates in the world: 75% to 80% of SMEs fail (Olawale & Garwe, 2010, p729; Smit & Watkins, 2012, p6325). 40% of new SMEs fail in their first year, 60% in their second year, and 90% in their first ten years (Cant, 2012, p1107). These figures are alarming when placed in context - the SME sector is one of the largest contributors to the South African economy (Smit & Watkins, 2012, p6325) – 90% of South African formal businesses are SMEs (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009, p7; Smit & Watkins, 2012, p6325). Furthermore, small businesses account for 70% of employment and 80% of new job opportunities (Cant, 2012, p1107). SMEs contribute 36% of the gross domestic product (GDP) (Olawale & Garwe, 2010, p729). In addition, SMEs play a critical role in developing and sustaining national economies, alleviating poverty, creating jobs, participating in the global economy and creating economic growth and equity (the dti. Department: Trade and Industry. Republic of South Africa, n.d.; Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009; World Business Council for

Sustainable Development (WBCSD) & SNV, 2007). This data suggests that few small organisations in South Africa are sustainable entities and this in turn impacts on employment and the gross domestic product of South Africa.

Small organisations may find it more difficult to sustain themselves in the current business environment that is rapidly changing. In order to survive, or be sustainable, "…organisations must learn faster and adapt to the rapid change in the environment" (Marquardt, in Hattingh & Smit, 2004, p2) and as such should be learning organisations. A widely accepted model of a learning organisation is Senge's (1990) groundbreaking study that identifies the disciplines companies practice in order to contribute to their sustainability. Senge's disciplines have been researched in large organisations which are also global companies. In a local, South African context, Cooper (2006; Walters & Cooper, 2011) has researched a South African trade union as a learning organisation, and Walters and Cooper (2011) have researched learning in South African workplaces. However, there is little evidence of research into small companies as learning organisations, using Senge's disciplines as a base. This study intends to explore whether by being a learning organisation, a small organisation is able to sustain itself in a rapidly changing business environment.

1.2 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to understand how Senge's (1990) concept of the learning organisation is practiced within a small company in South Africa. This study intends to research whether a small company in South Africa practises the five disciplines of a learning organisation and how the practise of these disciplines contributes to the sustainability of the company.

1.3 Research questions

Based on the research aims, the following research questions were formulated:

Main question

How is the concept of a learning organisation taken up in a small company?

1. What facets of a learning organisation are reflected in the company?
2. What does sustainability mean in the context of the small company?
3. How can facets of a learning organisation be corrected or strengthened in the company in order to contribute to its sustainability?

1.4 Rationale

Senge (1990, p3) describes the learning organisation as an organisation

> where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

This description contributes to a personal rationale for researching learning organisations – the description is appealing and offers a compelling alternative to how many businesses are run. It has been my experience that few companies offer an environment that is conducive to learning in the way described. Many organisations focus on profit - the bottom line - and pay little attention to their people. However, it is people who keep the organisation going, and help to keep it afloat on the waters upon which it finds itself. Surely if an organisation practises that which Senge describes, the potential and capacity for that organisation to attain great results (even in terms of profit) is huge – organisations rely on their people to deliver their service and product, and if people are nurtured in a learning organisation, then the organisation's ability to deliver should be enhanced.

Furthermore, the rate of change in the environment is constantly increasing and in order for organisations to be sustainable and keep up with the rate of change, organisations need to be learning ones (Hattingh & Smit, 2004). Organisations learn through their people, and as such they should provide the environment that Senge describes so that people are encouraged to learn and

share their learning. If people and learning are neglected, and companies/organisations are not learning organisations, then these organisations will not be able to adapt to change with the implication that these organisations will not be sustainable and will not survive into the future (Senge, 1990).



As with the cruise liner that is larger and has more staff and resources, one might postulate that because large companies have more staff, they have avenues to investigate and anticipate changes in the environment thus contributing to their sustainability. The smaller vessels upon the water, that is, small companies, may not have access to such resources and thus their sustainability may be threatened. It is important for all organisations to be learning, but in turbulent waters, such as the current market conditions, where all vessels are affected to some degree, the smaller vessels may be the ones that are hardest hit as they do not have the resources to fall back on that larger vessels do. It is thus more important for these smaller vessels, that is the smaller companies, to be learning organisations, so that they may be sustainable. Senge (1990) proposes a model for learning organisations, namely the five disciplines of a learning organisation (personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking). This is a widely accepted model and is the model used in this study. The concept of a learning organisation and the learning disciplines are discussed in depth in Chapter Two.

Many large and global organisations have been studied and identified as learning organisations, for example IBM, Xerox, General Electric, Canon, MTN, Ernst & Young and PricewaterhouseCoopers (Hattingh & Smit, 2004). However, when searching for information on small South African companies as learning organisations, after trawling numerous websites, I came across little information on such companies. Where companies did identify themselves as being learning organisations, there was no indication whether or how Senge's learning disciplines were practised in these companies.[1] A repetitive element that does appear on these companies' websites is that of "training". However, it may not be possible to readily identify learning organisations through a web-search as "organisations may not even use the terms learning organisation (and knowledge management) for one reason or another but they may still be very successful in implementing and managing the principles on which these disciplines are based" (Loermans, 2002, p285).

[1] For example: AS Automation Solutions; MMP Projects; QS Systems; Samfort Systems

In current market conditions where share prices fluctuate on a daily, if not hourly, basis, and where it is difficult to follow trends in the market as there seem to be few, this is most likely to be the hour that reveals whether organisations are learning, if and how the learning disciplines are practised, and how practising these learning disciplines contributes to an organisation's sustainability.

Significance of the research

This study is unusual in that it considers a business notion of sustainability and links it to a focus on learning in the context of a small organisation. The concept of a learning organisation is also placed within the field of adult learning, as it is through people learning that organisations learn - these matters are discussed at length in Chapter Three. This study should benefit a variety of fields, such as the research site itself, small organisations and practitioners in the field of adult education and workplace learning as the study focuses on the notions of sustainability, learning organisations and adult learning, and how these are interlinked in order to ensure that organisations are sustainable.

1.5 Context

My research site was a small organisational development company based in Midrand, Gauteng. The company operated mainly in the mining industry and was a knowledge company, that is it was a company that made its money by selling knowledge (their know-how or advice) (MIT Sloan, n.d.). The company, which shall be referred to as ODC (Organisational Development Company) provided organisational design and human resource planning services and, worked with mining companies, many of which were global, such as Anglo-American, Lonmin, and Murray & Roberts, within the southern African region. ODC did not restrict itself in the type of mines it consulted to and had experience with companies that mined iron, palladium, platinum, gold and nickel.

ODC was small in size. For organisations to be considered small enterprises, the generally accepted number of permanent employees is no more than 50 (the dti. Department: Trade and Industry. Republic of South Africa, n.d.). According to the National Small Business Act No. 102 of South Africa, a small business is one that has fewer than 50 employees and in the business services sector has a turnover that does not exceed R10 million. The South African Revenue Service (SARS) describes a small business as one "that has a turnover of no more that R14 million" (South African Revenue Services, n.d.(a)). For the purpose of this thesis, a small organisation is one that has less

than 50 permanent employees – it can be seen from the above that it is difficult to quantify an organisation as small based on its turnover, as these values are discrepant. When this research began in April 2008 ODC consisted of a permanent staff complement of sixteen permanent employees, and so this company could be considered as small. The reason for selecting a small company as a research site is for the focus on sustainability.

Research of the site took place over two periods – there was a stint of research in 2008 and another in 2012. Reasons for this approach are provided in Chapter Five. The staff of ODC in 2008 consisted of directors, principal consultants/managers, senior consultants, consultants, interns, and administrators (a marketing assistant and a receptionist). The directors included the MD (Managing Director), Business Development Director (BDD) (who moved to the role of Operations Executive towards the end of 2008) and Financial Director (FD). The consulting team (eight members) consisted of industrial psychologists and labour planning specialists, while the interns (two) were university students studying towards their industrial psychology Masters degrees. The marketing assistant and receptionist fulfilled the role of their titles.

When this research concluded in December 2012, the staff consisted of the same MD, a Business Development Executive/director, an Operational Readiness manager, a Capital Projects manager, a Finance manager, a finance administrator (in the dual role of Office manager), and five consultants.

The demographic make-up of the site is described in detail in Chapter Six.

ODC was small by design and its staff composition purposely consisted of more women than men. ODC operated mainly in the mining sector and, according to the MD, men within this sector tended to conform to masculine stereotypes, which include the traits of toughness, aggression, self-reliance, resilience, confidence and being looked up to (Brannon, 2011). ODC had a high female staff complement as the MD was of the opinion that "women had an effective way of engaging men" within this sector, specifically related to the workplace, and were thus able to encourage the men with whom they engaged to behave and think differently, rather than in stereotypical ways.

Besides specifically having a higher female staff complement, ODC was also small by design for the reason that the founding partners wanted to be close to clients and the solutions ODC offered them, with its focus on creating and managing solutions for clients. The organisational structure

was intentionally flat, with no more than three levels in order to keep all staff close to clients. The MD stated that even if ODC grew in size, the intention would be to keep the structure flat.

ODC operated mainly in the mining sector due to the background and personal preference of the founding partners, particularly the MD. The MD had always been involved in the mining sector and foresaw the application of organisational design and development in the mining environment. He viewed the mining environment as being one of the most challenging but also an environment that offered some reward, as in his words:

> *the mining industry has a profound effect on (the) world economy and if ODC is able to have an effect on the mining industry, it is like throwing a stone into a pond – there is a ripple effect which is possibly more noticeable than in other industries.*

ODC previously operated in three sectors – government, private (non-mining) and mining. However, most of ODC's work came from the mining sector and with that most of their income. As such, in June 2008 ODC decided to focus solely on the mining industry and to spend time and energy in gaining business from this sector. If business from other sectors was to come across ODC's path, they would not turn it away, but they did not actively market or pursue business outside the mining sector. The reason for this, according to the MD, was that ODC's name was not sufficiently known in other sectors; ODC did not have sufficient operational experience in all sectors to access industries for relationships; there was much competition in other sectors, whereas ODC had a niche in mining. A dependency on the mining sector could be interpreted as being risky, especially when the markets turned and were in a downswing, but, in the words of the MD, during a downswing "all sectors are affected, so it's best to stay with the businesses you know and trust and who know and trust you".

There is an obvious effect of commodity prices on ODC's business. When my research commenced in the first quarter of 2008, commodity prices were soaring and ODC had more business than they had human resources to allocate to projects. However, the markets turned sharply in the latter part of 2008 with commodity prices (as well as other share prices) dropping and ODC losing two projects that were in their forward books for 2009. The Managing Director of ODC did not appear overly concerned about the downswing in the market – ODC had been through three such cycles and survived. This survival was attributed to ODC changing the focus of its service during these times – in an upswing market, the focus was on capital (investment) projects (known as "Greenfields"), while in a downswing the focus was on labour optimisation (known as

"Brownfields"), thus risk was, or should have been, mitigated through the change in service offering in a downswing.

The following graphs (p10-11) indicate the changes in the market prices of gold, platinum and palladium before and over the research period (2008–2012). The drop in commodity prices by the end of 2008 is evident.



Source: InfoMine (1990-2013)

Figure 1.1: Gold prices prior to and over duration of research



Source: InfoMine (1990-2013)

Figure 1.2: Platinum prices prior to and over duration of research



Source: InfoMine (1990-2013)

Figure 1.3: Palladium prices over duration of research

Having survived three such market downswings previously is a feat, especially as ODC's business was largely influenced by commodity prices. However, the make-up of ODC during the last three market downswings was quite different to what it was during the research period of 2008 to 2012. In the past, ODC consisted of four permanent staff members (the directors in 2008 – not all in the capacity of directors then - and one other) and contracting staff. In a downswing, contracting staff were not hired and the four permanent staff would carry the business. During these swings, ODC increased their marketing and networking initiatives and decreased their costs, particularly of the "nice-to-haves", such as flowers for the foyer. In extreme cases, the offices were let out and staff operated from home, ensuring they were contactable through cellphones. During the research period, ODC had more permanent staff, and staff salaries made up most of ODC's monthly expenses. ODC could have difficulty in implementing similar actions in the downswing they were experiencing during the research period. ODC survived these market fluctuations in the past, but the question remained: was ODC sustainable now, especially considering its small size?

A key element of a knowledge company is knowledge sharing and creation, which includes learning (Zack, 2003). As ODC was a knowledge company, it could thus be expected that it was a learning organisation but a question that came to mind is what concept of a learning organisation was taken up by the business and did it match Senge's concept? Other questions were, if ODC was sustainable, was it because it was a learning organisation? What facets of Senge's concept did ODC reflect in its practice and how could these facets be corrected or strengthened that could further contribute to its sustainability?

1.6 Theoretical framework

Senge's concept of a learning organisation, which includes the five disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking have adult and workplace learning theories embedded in them. These theories include self-directed learning, transformative learning, collaborative learning, action learning and generative learning and these theories leverage off critical reflection. Workplace learning theories include Activity Theory/Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, Actor Network Theory, Communities of Practice and Complexity Theory. If workplaces engage in these learning theories in their day-to-day operations

and practise, workplaces may be contributing to the development of a learning organisation. This concept is developed in Chapter Three.

1.7 Contribution to knowledge

Although extensive research has been done on the learning organisation (Senge's as well as other proposed models) much of this research has been done from a Human Resources/ Organisational Development/Management perspective, which is evident from the frequency that articles relating to the subject are published in journals from these fields[2]. This study looks at the concept of the learning organisation from an adult education perspective and relates the concept of the learning organisation to adult learning theories.

With regard to adult learning theories, much research examines the learning organisation in terms of a specific learning theory, for example, the learning organisation and communities of practise (Hendry, 1996; Hildrath & Kimble, 2004; McDermott, 1999; Wenger, 1998); the learning organisation and social learning (Cullen, 1999; Gibb, 1997; Stewart, 2001); the learning organisation and action learning (Choueke & Armstrong, 1998; Jones & Hendry, 1994; Limerick, Passfield & Cunnington, 1994; Miller, 2003), and so on. This study takes a different perspective on learning theories and the learning organisation and looks at which learning theories are inherent in the different disciplines of the learning organisation. This study does not look at the learning organisation in terms of one adult learning theory, but considers the full range of adult learning theories evident in Senge's theory, as it is through understanding the learning theory that the disciplines can be more easily understood and practised.

Furthermore, research that links learning theory to workplace education is very rare in South Africa. A search for 'learning' on the Human Sciences Research Council's research outputs webpage yielded a large number of publications for school learning and a few for recognition of prior learning (RPL), but very little relating to workplace education and training, learning organisations and learning theories. Thus, this study contributes to the development of an under-researched area of adult education locally.

[2] Examples include: Sloan Management Review; The Learning Organization; Harvard Business Review; Management Learning; Knowledge Management journals.

1.8 Research methods

The research was conducted as an ethnographic case study. This approach focuses on qualitative methods of data collection, which in this study included observations, document analysis, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. The approach and methods contributed to insight, discovery and interpretation in context (Merriam, 2009, p42) as well as to a broad understanding of the phenomenon under study (Abrahamson, in Merriam, 2009, p46). The research methods and approach are discussed in Chapter Five.

1.9 Outline of the remainder of the study

This thesis has eight chapters. It continues with a conceptual framework that expands on Senge's view of a learning organisation as well as others' concepts of a learning organisation in Chapter Two. Chapter Two deals specifically with how the concept of a learning organisation is taken up in a small company, examining the concepts of 'learning' and 'the learning organisation' within a South African context. Senge's (1990) disciplines of the learning organisation are reviewed as well as other factors that contribute to organisations being learning ones. Senge's model is critiqued and the evolution of his model is looked at.

In Chapter Three, the theoretical framework of the learning organisation is reviewed, related to the various adult learning theories inherent in the learning disciplines. This discussion includes the theories of, but not limited to, cognitivism; constructivism; self-directed learning; experiential learning; single-, double- and triple-loop learning and communities of practice. By practising the learning theories discussed in this chapter, organisations can ensure that the disciplines of a learning organisation are practised.

Chapter Four reviews literature related to the sustainability of small companies in South Africa and considers the impact of external and internal factors, such as economic, market, infrastructure and labour, social, regulatory, financial, and leadership and management. How to develop the sustainability of a small company in the face of the challenges presented by these factors is discussed, which includes the development of the company as a learning organisation. Obstacles to

developing the learning organisation are presented with a discussion of enablers to overcome the obstacles.

Chapter Five presents the research design. This chapter commences with a reflection of the researcher as instrument and the influence that the researcher has on the research process. It includes a discussion on the research paradigm and the ethnographic case study approach that was used, with a description of the methodology, data collection and data analysis methods.

Chapters Six and Seven present the findings of the research over the two research periods of 2008 and 2012, respectively. Chapter Six looks solely at the learning disciplines that were evident in ODC in 2008. Chapter Seven presents findings on the learning disciplines in 2012 and continues with findings concerning the sustainability of ODC and how the facets of a learning organisation could be strengthened or corrected over both research periods.

Chapter Eight closes the thesis with conclusions and recommendations. Conclusions are provided concerning ODC as a learning organisation and how this small company takes up the concept of a learning organisation. Recommendations are made with regard to how ODC can correct or strengthen the facets of a learning organisation in order to contribute to its sustainability. Finally, reflections concerning the study and the research process are included with recommendations of areas for further study.

CHAPTER 2:
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK -
LOCATING AND PERUSING THE NAVIGATION MANUALS – PART 1

2.1 Introduction

As I walk along the piers in the harbour, observing various sailing vessels, my thoughts flow to whether these vessels are sustainable; whether they will be able to sail into the future. One indicator



of sustainability is the vessel's ability to stay afloat and provide for those on board. I consider my role as harbour-master and my duty to evaluate what is above the water, such as the crew, the structure of the vessel, the resources and materials that are visible, such as the sails; as well as the elements below the water that are equally important, such as the rudder, without which the vessel would not have direction. These "invisible" elements can be likened to the less tangible aspects of an organisation, such as the leadership, culture and disciplines of the organisation which are practised – the elements that greatly influence whether the organisation is learning. These are discussed in this chapter and expanded on in Chapter Four. The visible elements include the environmental factors that contribute to the vessel's ability to sail, such as the economy, the market, infrastructure and labour and other factors that will be discussed in Chapter Four. Prior to investigating these elements, I pause to consider the nature of sailing and being a vessel upon the water, specifically in the context of the waters in which the vessel is docked.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and provide an understanding of the learning organisation. Senge's (1990) concept of a learning organisation is a valid and worthwhile one to use for studying a small organisation in South Africa as the conditions for a learning organisation have been studied in large organisations, but there are few examples in the current literature for small organisations (Wyer, Mason & Theodorakopoulos, 2000, p257) and especially in the South African context. Being a learning organisation contributes to the sustainability of organisations (Bennet & O'Brien, in Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Hitt, in Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Garvin, 1993; Senge, 1990) and within South Africa, it is important for small organisations to be learning and sustainable as they employ more than half of the working population and contribute approximately 36% to the gross domestic

profit (Cant, 2012, p1107; Olawale & Garwe, 2010, p729). Senge's concept of a learning organisation is a popular one (Fenwick, 1997) and provides a model that can be taken up in small businesses in South Africa for reasons of sustainability and addressing legacy issues inherited from the apartheid regime. Senge's concept of a learning organisation is also one that has evolved and adapted to the times, taking cognisance of global issues in how the concept can be implemented in organisations.

This chapter provides the conceptual framework for this study by describing Senge's concept of a learning organisation, and how this concept is taken up in the small company and within the context of South Africa. The disciplines and facets of a learning organisation are presented and Senge's critics and alternative concepts of the learning organisation are considered. The chapter ends with a discussion of the evolution of Senge's thinking, locating his thinking in his own work.

2.2 How is the concept of a learning organisation taken up in the small company?

The concept of a learning organisation is a broad one and has various influences. In order to clarify the concept of a learning organisation, in this section I explore what is meant by 'learning', 'organisation' and the collective concept of a 'learning organisation'. This collective concept is then compared to Senge's concept of a learning organisation and contemporary understandings of this concept. I examine where the concept of a learning organisation stems from and consider how the concept is practised and understood. As Senge's learning disciplines form the basis of my research study, a discussion of these disciplines, and other practices that have a bearing on these disciplines, is required. Senge's model of a learning organisation has been both admired and critiqued, and I discuss and reflect on positions taken against Senge's model. I then look at the rationale for becoming a learning organisation as provided by Senge and others and consider this in the context of small organisations.

2.2.1 What "learning" means

Learning is understood to be a product, a process and a practise (Argyris & Schön, 1996, p3; Fenwick, 2010b, p7). Different theories of learning have been developed to assist with understanding what learning means. This section looks at these concepts.

As a **product**, learning is seen as "something that is learned" – lessons, information, content and outcomes which are seen in a change in the learner's behaviour (Argyris & Schön, 1996, p3; Fenwick, 2010b, p88). In the current era of globalisation, learning is also seen as a possession, "something to be traded for gain in the market place" (Walters & Cooper, 2011, p30).

The **process** of learning yields the product of learning through the input of information or skills, the synthesis of this information or skills with existing knowledge structures held by the learner and the output of learning which leads to action or a change in behaviour (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Fenwick, 2010b). This description relates to what takes place at an individual level, while at an organisational level learning can be understood to be the "process of collective change, such as knowledge creation as a movement from the birth of an innovation to its embedding in organisational routines" (Fenwick, 2010b, p88). According to Fasokun, Katahoire & Oduaran (2005, p35) (whose publication is specific to Africa), learning can be seen to involve "interaction between a source of knowledge, skills or change in attitude" (through a person, people, books or any other practical source), "the process of transfer (the learning situation) and the learner". The concept of the process of learning is explored in more detail later in this chapter.

The **practise** of learning is described in terms of knowledge-circulation where learning "is a web of micro-interactions socialising workers and their tools to a community" and so learning tends to occur mainly in the community in which the participants practise (Fenwick, 2010b, p88).

Theories of learning

There are various theories of learning based on the perspective used to conceptualise learning. These theories can be divided into two streams, namely individual learning theories and workplace learning theories.

Current literature is filled with theories of learning based on 'people as containers of knowledge' and texts consider the impact of other people on knowledge, learning and skills acquisition (of an individual, cognitive and social nature) (Fenwick, 2010b), thus learning is seen as being largely an individual process impacted by others. However, learning is also influenced by the shapes and spaces within which learning occurs, the tools that are available and other 'things' within organisations such as interests, value systems, purposes, power dynamics, leadership, facilitation

and structure of the organisation (Fenwick, 2010b). Within organisations, learning may occur quite differently to how it does within individuals and so both streams of learning theories are explored in Chapter Three.

2.2.2 What are organisations?

Various descriptions of the term "organisation" exist. The description that I make use of is Argyris and Schön's as their work has close links to Senge's work, and ideas between the writers are shared.

"Organisations are collectivities made up of individuals" (Argyris & Schön, 1996, p6) which meet three conditions. In order to become a recognisable 'we' that makes decisions and converts the decisions into action, organisations:

- create procedures, which are agreed upon, for making decisions in the name of collectivity;
- assign authority to individuals to act for the collectivity; and
- set boundaries between the collectivity and the rest of the world, that is they create rules and a constitution (Argyris & Schön, 1996).

As such, organisations are "cooperative systems governed by constitutional principles" (Argyris & Schön, 1996, p11).

2.2.3 What is a learning organisation?

By combining the above understandings of "learning" and "organisation", a "learning organisation" is a cooperative system that is governed by constitutional principles and where learning as a process, product and practice occurs. This definition is significantly different to Senge's view of a learning organisation

> where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. (Senge, 1990, p3)

The definition provided by linking the two terms of "learning" and "organisation" is more closely aligned to Ortenblad's description of "organisational learning" which consists of enablers that encourage learning in the organisation, while Senge's concept of a learning organisation describes an ideal form of organisation (Ortenblad, 2001). As such, the differences in the understandings of "learning organisation" are like moving from the engine room to the captain's deck of a sailing

vessel – one based on the "doing", while Senge's is focused on where the organisation is going to or can be. However, Argyris and Schön's (1996) description of organisational learning is linked to Senge's (1990) discipline of team learning, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

A learning organisation in an African context, and especially in a South African context could be viewed quite differently to Senge's view of a learning organisation. By linking the African concept of "learning" as described by Fasokun et al (2005) with Argyris and Schön's (1996) concept of "organisation", a "learning organisation" is a cooperative system that is governed by constitutional principles and where learning takes place that involves interaction between a source of knowledge, skills or change in attitude, a learning situation and the learner. Based on this definition, in an African context a learning organisation could be understood to be one which adopts a didactic approach to learning - where there is a greater emphasis on learning situations, sources of information and the learner, much like a traditional, formal setting. However, in any context, "there appear to be as many models of the learning organisation as there are learning organisations" (Loermans, 2002, p285), which highlights the difficulty of defining a learning organisation.

The definition of a learning organisation is a problematic one as there are many definitions of the concept. I have attempted to compose a definition based on the root definitions of the words that make up the concept, but there are also various definitions for these two words. Understandings of a learning organisation will be further discussed in this chapter. However, a learning organisation can be put simply as an organisation where learning takes place, and this learning is influenced by the view the organisation holds of sites, processes and products of learning.

Sites and processes of learning

Rogers (2003) provides a distinction between sites of learning and processes of learning, which provides insight into what learning means and how learning can occur in organisations. Rogers (2003, p25) suggests that two types of sites of learning can be identified, namely formal (institutional or school-type environments) and informal settings (non-institutional or out-of-school environments, including the workplace). He also identifies a minimum of two broad types of learning processes, namely formalised and acquisition learning. He departs from contemporaries, such as Resnick and Carl Rogers, in stating that the two processes of learning "are not always and firmly to be equated with the two kinds of sites of learning" (Rogers, 2003, p25), that is formalised learning does not only occur in formal settings and acquisition learning does not only occur in

informal settings. Rather, "both acquisition learning and formalised learning take place in both formal and informal settings" (Rogers, 2003, p25). These two processes of learning are different, as summarised in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Processes of learning

Formalised learning	Acquisition learning
Process tendency: - Individualised - Competitive - Mental - Decontextualised - Generalised - Generalisable	Process tendency: - Use tools rather than minds alone - Collaborative - Contextualised - Situation-specific
Learning-conscious learning: - Making learning more conscious (more aware of learning taking place) - Based on consciousness of learning goals and strategies - Breaking down material so it can be mastered - Evaluation based on how much has been learned	Task-conscious learning: - Used when engaging in new cultural settings or to cope in everyday experiences
Formally lays down elements of tacit knowledge and comprehension	Develops tacit knowledge and comprehension through experience, play, exploration
Abstract/ universal learning – involves cognitive thinking for generalisations of application	Situated learning – practical, concrete, based on the application of knowledge and skills in real situations for real purposes
More likely to lead to critical reflection	More likely to assist in developing conformity and acculturation

Adapted from Rogers (2003, pp25-30)

Rogers (2003, p26) suggests that:

> When adults engage in their own purposeful learning, they choose those sites of learning available to them which they feel are most appropriate to their situations as well as to their preferred learning processes, and they choose those processes which they are most comfortable with.

Thus, in terms of organisations, learning includes the perception that organisation members have of the organisation as a site of learning and how they choose to engage in learning processes. They may view the organisation as a formal or informal learning site and engage in either a formalised or acquisition process of learning. This diversity in organisation members' individual understanding of site and processes of learning highlights the importance of the role of a facilitator. For learning to occur in an organisation, and for the variety of understandings of sites and processes to meet, a facilitator has a key role to play in realising that both formalised and acquisition learning have their

own value; to be aware of the assumptions of the different processes - not asserting one as better than the other; and identifying opportunities to learn so that an organisation is set on the path to learning (Rogers, 2003). This role of facilitator of learning may be unrealistic as the implication is that the facilitator is required to walk the organisation hallways, seeking out opportunities for learning and bringing these opportunities to the awareness of respective individuals – the facilitator simply may not be able to identify all these opportunities, and so some learning may be missed.

The above differences in understanding learning may influence the way members view their organisation with regard to it being a site of learning and the processes of learning that take place. This can impact on how the organisation practises being a learning one and the 'richness' of the learning that occurs in day to day occurrences (Walters & Cooper, 2011). The processes and theories of learning will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Three.

2.2.4 Contemporary understandings of the learning organisation

Various contributors (Senge, 1990; Garvin, 1993; Hitt, and Bennet and O'Brien, in Hattingh & Smit, 2004) in the fields of business and learning hold understandings of learning organisations with common claims, namely learning organisations have the capacity to learn, the ability to change, people learn together, creativity and thinking skills are developed, experimentation is encouraged, the organisation's culture supports learning, and there is a quest for improvement and excellence (Hattingh & Smit, 2004, p3).

I have selected Peter Senge's model of a learning organisation as he is a well-known expert in this field, and has been credited with popularising the concept of a learning organisation (Fenwick, 2001). As this research focuses on his disciplines of a learning organisation, it is prudent to examine Senge's view of what a learning organisation is, what Senge means by the term discipline and what the disciplines are.

Senge's definition, or understanding, of a learning organisation (provided earlier in this chapter) is slightly different to that of his counterparts – Senge's definition appears to be more focussed on people and human values, while his counterparts are more focused on the organisation. Garvin (1993, p80) refers to the following definition: "A learning organisation is an organisation skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new

knowledge and insights". Garvin's understanding of a learning organisation reflects his emphasis on the organisation, rather than on the people comprising the organisation.

Hitt (in Hattingh & Smit, 2004, p3) also focuses on the organisation and the process of learning rather than people and the practise of learning. He views the learning organisation as one that is "striving for excellence through continual organisational renewal… one that is continually getting smarter. In a never-ending cycle, it gets smarter and smarter. The organisational IQ continually increases" (Hattingh & Smit, 2004, p3).

Bennet and O'Brien (in Hattingh & Smit, 2004, p3) view the learning organisation as

> an organisation that has woven a continuous and enhanced capacity to learn, adapt and change into its culture. Its values, policies, practices, systems and structures support and accelerate learning for all employees. The learning results in continuous improvements in areas such as work processes, products and services, the structure and function of individual jobs, teamwork, and effective management practices to name a few. More than anything, however, it results in a more successful business.

I find it interesting that the definitions of Garvin, Hitt and, to a lesser degree, Bennet and O'Brien view the learning organisation as somewhat removed from the individuals that comprise the organisation. At the heart of an organisation are the people who perform the functions that keep the organisation in existence, and so, especially in terms of learning, I would expect definitions of learning organisations to have more of an emphasis on people, similar to Senge's (1990) definition.

Senge's definition of a learning organisation is appealing – it describes a workplace that values individual efforts and encourages collective learning. I do, however, think that Senge's definition describes an ideal, which may be unattainable. On the other hand, Senge states that a learning organisation is not a destination, it is a journey and that organisations are, or should be, in the continual state of striving to be a learning organisation (Senge, 1990). Senge's view of a learning organisation is quite different to those quoted above – his counterparts seem to view a learning organisation as one with purpose (modifying behaviour, striving for excellence, continuous improvement) rather than that of a journey. Even though Senge's concept of a learning organisation may be idealistic, it is worthwhile pursuing if organisation members are encouraged to learn and develop, and where they are valued.

Where the concept of a learning organisation stems from

The concepts of a learning society and lifelong learning underpin the concept of a learning organisation and are closely intertwined. A learning society, which is "in part a description and in part an aspiration" (Tight, 1996, p48) is based on the concept of lifelong learning, irrespective of how that learning occurs – formally, non-formally or informally (Hesburgh, in Edwards, 1997, p184; Cropley, in Tight, 1996, p36) and as such "a learning society stimulates and allows all its members and groups continually to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes" (Raggat, Edwards & Small, 1996, p165). In other words a learning society encourages lifelong learning to take place. Even in the twelfth century, the concept and importance of a learning society was commented on by Maimonides who wrote:

> …Until when should a person continue to learn? Until the day of his death… Learning is the most important of all the rules of behaviour given in the Torah. Even stronger: learning is more important than all other rules of behaviour together… Make learning a regular habit… (Abram, in Raggat et al, 1996, p162)

Although the idea of a learning society has been promoted in the past as a noble undertaking, as highlighted in the above quotation, perhaps it is a more important quest in the environment in which we now live – where there is increasing change and organisations are in "continuous processes of transformation", placing a demand on people to develop the capacity and ability to "understand, guide, influence and manage these transformations" (Schön, in Smith, 2001).

Tight (1996, p49) argues that in order to be a learning society and promote lifelong learning, access to learning needs to be equal otherwise the idea of a learning society will remain just that – an idea. In the South African context, issues of access present a challenge as apartheid enforced unequal access to learning, with black people having limited access to learning at all levels. This historical discrepancy influences the prior skills and knowledge that employees bring in to the workplace and the ability, capacity and confidence of all staff to participate in and contribute to learning. This unequal access has been the focus of recent legislation in South Africa, with measures being put in place to attempt to correct the discrepancies of the past. This legislation is discussed in Chapter Four.

At this point, we are in the harbour where I have attempted to understand what type of vessel I am on before it sets sail on the sea. I have looked at the concepts of 'learning', 'organisation' and 'learning organisation', contemporary understandings of the concept



of the learning organisation and where the concept stems from. I will now continue to explore the concept, particularly in the South Africa context, and investigate Senge's model in more detail.

2.2.5 The learning organisation in a South African context

Within South Africa and the government domain, lifelong learning has become a priority. This can be seen through the adoption of a framework for lifelong learning by the government in 1994 that mirrors international trends (Walters, 2000). In addition, the National Directorate was renamed the Adult Education and Training Directorate from the ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training) Directorate, which indicates the focus of extending adult education beyond that of the basic literacy and numeracy level (Walters, 2000). The government's focus on lifelong learning appears to be to allow individuals disadvantaged by apartheid the opportunity to learn and to skill the workforce to compete globally (Walters, 2000).

Legislation adopted in South Africa highlights the importance of lifelong learning (which is also a component of the disciplines of personal mastery). With the advent of the Skills Development Act, the Skills Development Levies Act, the NQF (National Qualifications Framework) Act and the SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) Act, companies are steered to encourage access to learning and lifelong learning (SAQA, 2006).

The issue of access to learning can be seen particularly clearly in the Skills Development Act. Two of its purposes are:

> To encourage employers--
> i. to use the workplace as an active learning environment;
> ii. to provide employees with the opportunities to acquire new skills (Skills Development Act No.97 of 1998, paragraph 2c)

The Skills Development Levy Act of 1999 states that every employer must pay a Skills Development levy at the rate of 1% of the leviable amount, which is the total amount of remuneration (that is, payroll). The only companies/employers exempt from the Act are those whose remuneration during the following twelve month period will not exceed R250 000 (approximately €25 000). The aim of this Act is to encourage workplaces to be sites of learning and to train employees, as companies can claim back a portion of the costs of training from the SETA (Sector Education Training Authority) that the organisation falls under. This Act encourages

workplaces to train employees, and if training can be associated with learning opportunities, then workplaces are encouraging learning.

"Within policy documents, lifelong learning hinges mainly on the construction of a National Qualifications Framework", the NQF (Walters, 2000, p202).

> The NQF is the set of principles and guidelines by which records of learner achievement are registered to enable national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge, thereby ensuring an integrated system that encourages lifelong learning. (SAQA, 2006, para 2).

"The objectives of the NQF … to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large" (SAQA, 2006, para 15) by enabling learners to access the education and training system and to move across institutions and learning pathways more easily (Walters, 2000). The NQF also mirrors developments in other countries and so facilitates the transferability of qualifications across our borders (Walters, 2000).[3]

The SAQA Act of 1995 was drafted to provide for the development and implementation of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) through the formation of a regulating body known as SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) (SAQA, 2006). The implication of this Act and the NQF is that organisations have a role to play in developing learners so that the nation can be developed. If legislation is encouraging companies to develop their employees, then companies within South Africa, which comply with or embrace the legislation, should be learning organisations. However, making training and development initiatives accessible to all staff does not necessarily mean that the disciplines of a learning organisation, according to Senge, are being practised. Although employees may be exposed to an environment that provides training, the environment may not be one of a learning organisation that practises the disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking (Senge, 1990). Even though legislation may encourage organisations to be learning ones, the leadership and culture of the organisation play an important role in determining if the environment of the organisation is that of a learning organisation.

[3] National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) are now being developed in several SADC (South African Development Community) countries, and the NQF has functioned for more than a decade in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand (SAQA, 2006).

Within a South African context, the understanding that companies hold of what a learning organisation is, are quite varied. Larger, global organisations based in South Africa, such as BMW (BMW South Africa, n.d.), PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC, 2010-2011) and VW (Volkswagen South Africa, 2011) include "learning organisation" and a description of their interpretation of this term on their website, and their understandings of the term are quite diverse. A repetitive element that does appear is that of "training". BMW places the theme of "learning organisation" under the banner of "Competitive edge" and lists their focus points as the integration of training and development with organisational objectives, equipping managers with tools and incentives to develop staff and all staff having access to development (BMW South Africa, n.d.). PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) views its transformation into a learning organisation through their corporate university, which serves to fill the void between solely practical and theory based learning (PwC, 2010-2011). VW has established a learning academy in "its aim to become a knowledge driven organisation that offers skills development and training of scarce skills for the company and for the country" (Volkswagen South Africa, 2011, para 3).

Smaller companies also hold a range of ideas concerning the learning organisation. C4L, the Desmond Tutu Centre for Leadership, a non-governmental organisation, views itself as a (non-profit) learning organisation as it offers training to develop the community, with courses offered to individuals, organisations and society (Desmond Tutu Centre for Leadership, n.d.). QS Systems, a small IT company based in Cape Town sees itself as a learning organisation as it constantly increases its knowledge base and refines its approach, products and services, focusing on empowering members and the continuous improvement, training and development of skills and technology enablement to achieve its vision (QS Systems, n.d.). Samfort Systems, another small IT company based in Pretoria, applies the concept of a learning organisation to itself as it believes the "company is a learning institute" in which everyone learns and grows, therefore maximising each individual's potential (Samfort Systems, 2002-2005).

These understandings of a learning organisation are quite different to Senge's concept: Senge views a learning organisation as more than opportunities to learn - in the South African context, a learning organisation seems to be interpreted as one where learning is encouraged and individuals have the opportunity to pursue skills and qualifications, where the process of learning is encouraged. Senge, on the other hand, views learning in a learning organisation as a collective effort, and something that is to be practised.

Although legislation in South Africa is supposed to encourage companies to embrace lifelong learning, I have witnessed the abuse of a vehicle that is meant to facilitate learning, namely learnerships. A learnership agreement involves a learner, an employer or a group of employers and an accredited provider, and the purpose of a learnership is to lead to a qualification registered on the NQF while the learner gains work experience (SAQA, 2006). Companies offer learnerships in areas where a skills shortage has been identified and learners are employed by such companies for the duration of the learnerships, usually one year. Thereafter the companies decide if the learners should be appointed permanently. However, many of the companies for whom I have facilitated the fundamental components of qualifications (literacy and numeracy) do not place learners in the appropriate departments for learnerships. For example, learners who were employed by a company for a food and beverage packaging learnership were not being exposed to food and beverage packaging as they were based in an office, performing office administration tasks. The learners felt frustrated at this situation. This is not an isolated case – there are many more examples of this abuse of practice (Grawitszky, 2007). Learnerships are a tool that is intended to encourage lifelong learning, but if learners have a negative experience of learnerships, it is questionable if they will want to engage in further learning through such vehicles in the future.

This example points to whether policy plays a regulatory or facilitative role when legislation is implemented. The role of policy (regulatory environment) will be discussed in Chapter Four together with other factors that contribute to business sustainability.

2.2.6 The disciplines of a learning organisation

In order to understand Senge's view of the disciplines of a learning organisation, it is important to first understand Senge's notion of "a discipline". Senge describes a discipline as "a body of theory and technique that must be studied and mastered to be put into practice. A discipline is a developmental path for acquiring certain skills or competencies" (Senge, 1990, p10) and can be developed through practice, which is initially a conscious effort (Senge, 1990). Furthermore, to "practice a discipline is to be a lifelong learner" as you constantly "spend your life mastering disciplines" (Senge, 1990, p11) as "the more you learn, the more acutely aware you become of your ignorance" (Senge, 1990, p11.). Thus, according to Senge, learning is a never-ending process which constantly drives us to learn more, and this learning is underpinned by a discipline - a body

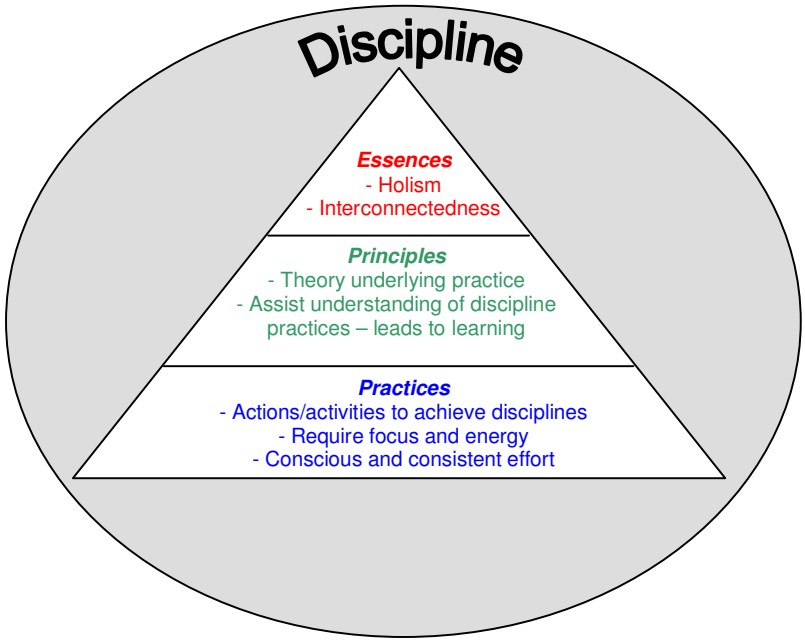
of theory that we need to master in order to put it into practice (which could be understood to be a cognitive approach to learning).

It follows that a discipline is distinct from a practice. For Senge (1990, pp373-374), practices are activities that practitioners of a discipline focus their time and energy on and "are the most evident aspect of any discipline". Practices are "the primary focus of individuals or groups when they begin to follow a discipline". Furthermore, "for the beginner, they require 'discipline' in the sense of conscious and consistent effort because following the practices is not yet second nature". Simply put, a practice is a discipline in action which initially requires conscious effort, but as the discipline is practised more frequently, the practices of a discipline become more automatic.

Senge (1990, pp373-374) explains that underlying the practices of a discipline are the principles which influence the practices. In order to master the disciplines, it is important for beginners and masters to understand both the principles and the practices. For beginners, an understanding of the principles provides a rationale and contributes to making sense of the practices of the discipline; while the master is able to continually refine the practice of the disciplines and his explanations of it to others. An understanding of both principles and practices contributes to learning, rather than simply an intellectual understanding, and in turn leads to new ways of thinking and doing.

According to Senge (1990, p374) the third level of the disciplines is known as the essences, which are the "state of being that comes to be experienced naturally by individuals or groups with high levels of mastery in the disciplines" and underlie the meaning and purpose of each discipline. At the level of essences, these disciplines start to converge – united by the common "sensibility of being learners in an intrinsically interdependent world" (Senge, 1990, p375) and the differences between the disciplines become progressively more subtle. For example, the distinction between interconnectedness (systems thinking and an awareness of how things relate to one another) and connectedness (personal mastery and an awareness of being part of rather than apart from the world); as well as "the distinction between commonality of purpose (shared vision) and alignment (team learning)" (Senge, 1990, p375) become more subtle. The more one or a group are masters of the disciplines, the more their awareness of the essences - both the convergence and distinctions between the disciplines (Senge, 1990, p375). Both the convergence and awareness are important in order to identify how practices need to be adapted in order to reflect the essence and principles underlying the discipline.

The practices, principles and essences of a discipline can be illustrated, and summarised as follows: "The practices are activities engaged in by groups. The principles must be understood by groups. And the essences are states of being experienced collectively" (Senge, 1990, p375). Related to Roger's (2003) description of sites and processes of learning, the organisation can be seen to be a site of learning, where practices can be encouraged, that is, activities can be engaged in by the group. However, the process of learning is dependent on individual views of the organisation as a site of learning and how the individuals choose to engage in the learning process. Some may focus on the practices alone, while others seek to collectively understand the underlying principles, and both can lead to learning. The potential for conflict between holders of these varied perceptions exists, as some individuals may resist learning in the organisation, exploring theory or sharing their knowledge, while others willingly engage in learning. From the outset of developing a learning organisation, it is thus important to establish that the organisation is, or will be, a site of learning, and the need may arise to address mental models of organisation members concerning this concept of the organisation.



Adapted from Senge (1990, p375)

Figure 2.1: Practices, principles and essences of a discipline

From the above description, it is evident that the pursuit of the disciplines requires time and effort, which organisations may perceive to be problematic as the purpose of most organisations is the bottom line, profit. Organisations may perceive the time required to practise the disciplines as wasteful as the practices may not be directly related to the attainment of profit. Thus, there is an issue of sincerity and integrity – it seems that some organisations profess to be learning organisations in the same way that they believe in human capital; but often these claims are not backed by a coherent set of actions. This may be because the organisations do not view themselves as being sites of learning (Rogers, 2003). This is where an understanding of the organisation's culture and leadership plays a role as these are largely drivers of the success of the practices. Aspects of culture and leadership will be discussed later on in this chapter and further expanded in Chapter Four.

The five disciplines of a learning organisation

Senge sees the disciplines of a learning organisation as personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking (Senge, 1990). He states that these disciplines can be developed separately but each is critical to the success of the others (Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Senge, 1990). The umbrella of the five disciplines can be seen to be the fifth discipline, namely systems thinking, which integrates the other four disciplines (Senge, 1990). Systems thinking aims to understand how each element/discipline relates to, is affected by and impacts on the entire system (Senge, 1990). By recognising this interdependency, one is able to view the entire system as a whole, rather than as fragmented parts, and as such "make the full patterns clearer, and help us see how to change them effectively" (Senge, 1990, p7). This change is what drives a learning organisation and assists it to meet the demands of the environment in which it operates, thus contributing to its sustainability.

According to Senge (1990) personal mastery is concerned with members within an organisation clarifying and deepening personal vision, focussing energies, developing patience and seeing reality objectively. It can be seen in employees caring for and helping each other so that each may live fully. Personal mastery is also evident when managers encourage and support learning and personal development of staff members. Personal mastery forms the spiritual foundation of the learning organisation as each member becomes committed to his or her own lifelong learning. This discipline starts with members identifying that which matters to them and living in such a way that they serve their highest hopes and desires. This discipline may sound idealistic in an organisational

context, but spiritual foundations often do. It can be said that without hopes and desires, people may not have the need to engage in personal mastery and as such commit to lifelong learning, which in turn will hamper their organisation from being a learning one. It is thus imperative that in order for organisations to be learning organisations, they encourage personal mastery.

Mental models "are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalisations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (Senge, 1990, p8). We are often not aware of these assumptions and generalisations and the impact that they have on our behaviour. In order to reveal these mental models, according to Senge, we have to start with examining ourselves (Senge, 1990, p9), which could be likened to Brookfield's critical self-reflection, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. However, the exercise of self-examination is not an individual effort but a community one where "learningful" conversations take place that assist members to expose their own thinking effectively and to be open to the influence of others (Senge, 1990). It has been said that our thoughts determine our actions and in order to act as a learning organisation, it is important for members to think in a way that will promote a learning organisation, and for companies to have the environment, or culture, that encourages "learningful" conversations. These conversations are crucial for practising the discipline of managing mental models and building learning organisations. Brilliant ideas sometimes fail to be implemented because they "conflict with deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting" (Senge, 1990, p174). By having "learningful" conversations, organisation members can surface, test and improve their internal pictures of how the world works and this can change their mental models and resultant actions. This in turn can contribute the organisation's competitive advantage and sustainability (Senge, 1990, p178).

Building shared vision is a discipline that involves creating a genuine vision that members want to commit to rather than comply with (Senge, 1990). This practice "involves the skills of unearthing shared 'pictures of the future'" (Senge, 1990, p9). A shared vision is one that members commit to because it reflects their personal vision. Shared vision also provides the impetus for learning and encourages generative learning to take place, where members are able to focus on that which they want to create (Senge, 1990). There appears to be a link between the discipline of building shared vision and that of mental models in that in order to build shared vision, it would seem necessary to have "learningful" conversations.

The discipline of team learning begins with dialogue where team members partake in an authentic "thinking together" by initially suspending their assumptions (Senge, 1990, p10). For Senge, what is meant by suspending assumptions is not to negate that assumptions exist, but to reveal, or expose, assumptions to the rest of the team so that these can be spoken about and examined. The purpose of this suspension is to reflect if the assumptions held are true or not. This is an important step in the dialogue process as, if these assumptions are not exposed and dealt with, they will continue to provide stumbling blocks to any team learning endeavours. Dialogue also involves learning to identify aspects in team interactions that undermine learning, such as patterns of defensiveness. If these aspects are identified and dealt with creatively, they can enhance learning. The discipline of team learning is an important one in a learning organisation because if teams cannot learn, then the organisation cannot learn (Senge, 1990).

It is evident that these five disciplines are intertwined, and that systems thinking pulls the disciplines together. One could start with any discipline and see how it rests or is dependent on another, for example, in order for mental models to be revealed, "learningful" conversations need to take place, which can lead to team learning. This conversation or dialogue can lead to the building of shared visions which may encourage members to deepen their personal visions and commit to lifelong learning, thus contributing to personal mastery. It is possible to begin an example with any one of these disciplines – and that is partially what systems thinking is about – the connectedness and inter-dependence of the disciplines.

Senge also discusses the attribute of openness in the context of a learning organisation, and sees this attribute, together with vision, as a vehicle to transcend the internal politics and game playing that dominates traditional organisations (Senge, 1990). Openness is "the norm of speaking openly and honestly about important issues (participative openness) and the capacity continually to challenge one's own thinking (reflective openness)" (Senge, 1990, p274). I think that openness is an attribute that underpins all the disciplines of a learning organisation, and serves as more than a vehicle to overcome internal politics and game playing. Without the attribute of openness, it is difficult to even attempt to develop the disciplines of a learning organisation. Being open implies that organisation members should be honest with themselves and what is 'real' to them. To develop the discipline of personal mastery, members should be open in realising what their reality is and what it is that is really important to them individually. Related to mental models, members should reveal their hidden assumptions and examine these assumptions, irrespective of how painful this process

may be. In order to develop shared vision, members ought to be open with others about what it is that they envision and want to pursue. If they are not open, they may not be willing to participate in dialogue and so team learning may not be effective. Lastly, if members are not open, they are less likely to recognise their dependence on others and see the role that they play within the system, thus preventing an engagement in systems thinking. However, very few people display the attribute of openness – "people only feel safe sharing their views to a degree" (Senge, 1990, p277). People often feel vulnerable when they are concerned about what others think of them, thus preventing openness. Furthermore, openness requires the skill of critical reflection, "the willingness to challenge our own thinking" (Senge, 1990, p277), which is intellectually demanding and time consuming (Brookfield, 2000). The environment should also be conducive for openness to be expressed and be an environment of trust and honesty. In my view, being open is a skill, or attribute, within such an environment that needs to be developed before undertaking any of the disciplines, and whether the context of an organisation is an appropriate platform for developing this skill is questionable.

Senge (1990) includes a chapter in his book entitled "A Sixth Discipline?" but does not explicitly state what this discipline is, although he hints at the role of technology by providing an example of how technology revolutionised commercial air travel with the introduction of the jet engine and radar (Senge, 1990). It is my view that technology could indeed be the sixth discipline in the form of knowledge management. When people learn, the learning becomes knowledge and is stored in their individual memories. If we compare organisations to people, organisations do not have memories – the memory of an organisation is made up of the memory of its individual members. The implication here is that if a person leaves an organisation, that person takes with him/herself a part of the memory, learning and knowledge that the organisation has acquired through that person. "The challenge for most organisations is to … ensure that individual knowledge becomes organisational knowledge in order to improve organisational performance" (Steyn, 2003, p212). Knowledge management within organisations would appear to be important and

> the successful management of knowledge implies that the tacit (unspoken) knowledge of practitioners needs to be developed continuously if organisations are to survive and prosper in a competitive environment. After such knowledge has been developed, it has to become explicit by being laid out in the form of documentation or data, or by other means of sharing. (Steyn, 2003, p223)

This recording and sharing of information, and knowledge, should be a discipline that members of learning organisations practise frequently, perhaps even daily, so that individual learning can

become organisational learning and contribute to the development of the organisation as a whole (English, 2005; Viljoen & Klopper, 2001). However, the flipside of this sharing is that in many organisations knowledge is capital, and encouraging members to share their capital means individuals lose control of this resource (English, 2005). This may be seen as a questionable practice. Some may view it as unethical. The learning organisation thus requires a view of knowledge sharing that may require a paradigm shift.

2.2.7 The facets of a learning organisation



At this point we are still in the harbour, admiring and examining the sailing vessel. Our examination of the vessel now moves to those aspects that are more visible, namely the behaviours and actions of the members of the vessel, indicating if the vessel is practising the disciplines of a learning organisation.

The disciplines of a learning organisation are reflected in its practices and facets, or characteristics (Senge, 1990). Table 2.2 (p36-37) provides an overview of the characteristics of an organisation that practises the five learning disciplines. If an organisation is practising the first four disciplines then the organisation can be said to be practising systems thinking to a large extent (Senge, 1990). However, there are additional characteristics that reflect the discipline of systems thinking, as indicated in the right hand column of the table. The table indicates the behaviours or actions that an organisation's members should be engaging in if they are practising the related discipline.

Table 2.2: Characteristics reflecting disciplines of learning organisations

Discipline	Definition as ability	Characteristics reflecting the discipline demonstrated in the organisation
Personal mastery	The ability to clarify and deepen personal vision; see reality as it exists.	• Positive reinforcement from role models/ managers • Sharing experiences • Interaction time between supervisory levels • Emphasis on feedback • Balance between work and non-work life • Commitment to organisation and work • Ability to deal with change • Ability to face reality • Taking responsibility
Mental models	The ability to expose assumptions and generalisations, compare these with reality and reconcile assumptions and reality into coherent understanding.	• Time for learning • Reflective openness • Inquiry • Forgiveness of oneself • Flexibility/adaptability of people and the system • Little, if any, blaming of others • Looking for better ways of doing things • Dealing with difficult situations
Shared vision	The ability of a group of individuals to hold a shared picture of the desired future.	• Participative openness • Trust • Empathy towards others • Sharing information • Co-operation is emphasized • A common language • Commitment to vision • Group trust • Effective communication flows

Discipline	Definition as ability	Characteristics reflecting the discipline demonstrated in the organisation
Team learning	The ability of a group or team to suspend assumptions and think together by engaging in dialogue.	• Participative openness • Building consensus • Communication flow throughout organisation – top-down, bottom-up • Creative thinking • Heightened collective learning • Cohesiveness • Learning throughout the organisation • Engage in dialogue
Systems thinking	The ability to see interdependency and to view an entire system, and appreciate the consequences of actions on other parts of the system.	• Personal mastery • Mental models • Shared vision • Team learning • Little organisational conflict • Long-term improvement or change • Continuous learning

Adapted from Senge (1990).

In order for the disciplines of a learning organisation to be practised, the organisational culture and leadership should encourage these practices. Organisational culture can be defined as "the values, norms, beliefs and assumptions embraced by participants" (Nystrom, in King & Anderson, 2002, p133). The organisational culture of a learning organisation should be one that values learning and as such reflects a 'learning culture' (Farago & Skyrme, 1995), where "'learning' is not simply equal to "courses" but is part of everyday, organisational life" (Walters & Cooper, 2011, p34). In addition to Table 2.2 (p36-37), a learning culture is one where:

- There is a future, external orientation concerning the organisation's environment in which senior teams take time to think about the future, and external sources and advisors are used, for example customers may be included in planning teams.
- There is a free exchange and flow of information – systems are in place to encourage the flow of information and individuals are able to network across organisational boundaries to develop their knowledge and expertise.
- There is commitment to learning and personal development with support from top management, rewards for learning and where time is set aside for thinking and learning (understanding, exploring, reflecting, developing) (Mason, 2007).
- People are valued and their ideas, creativity and experimentation are encouraged, used and developed.
- There is a climate of openness and trust - diversity is recognised and views are challenged (Mason, 2007).
- Learning from experience is encouraged and recognised; mistakes and failure are not punished but tolerated because of the lessons learnt from these. (Farago & Skyrme, 1995).

The responsibility of leadership in an organisation is to be responsible for learning (Mason, 2007) and encourage the organisation to reflect a learning culture. In order to develop this learning culture, leaders should:

- Share their learning – be committed to their own learning and share what they have learnt with the organisation members (Senge, 1990; Smith, 2001).
- Practise the learning disciplines (Senge, 1990; Smith, 2001).
- Ensure that management policies, procedures and practices allow time for learning and encourage, recognise and reward a learning culture as outlined above (Smith, 2001).
- Create the environment wherein people naturally grow (Senge, 1999).

- Live their lives in service to others – recognise the potential in each individual and support individuals to reach their potential (Senge, 1999).

It is my experience that organisations reflect some, and not all, of the above-mentioned aspects of organisational culture and leadership. In order for a learning organisation to be developed, the culture and leadership may have to change to reflect the above. Strategies to develop the culture and leadership will be discussed in Chapter Four and will be related to developing a sustainable learning organisation. Obstacles to implementing the strategies will also be considered.

I have considered Senge's model of a learning organisation in a South African context as well as the facets that contribute to being a learning organisation. I now turn my thoughts to the type of sailing vessel that this model applies to and whether this model is attainable within the context of a small organisation, before locating Senge's thinking in his own work.



2.2.8 Why Senge's model is suitable for small organisations

Senge's model encourages a sense of community based on human connectedness to the world and each other (Senge, 1990). This sense of community is likely to be more readily experienced in a small organisation as these often use a metaphor of a family (Ram & Holliday, 1993), with the founder-manager leading the organisation and driving its culture (Schein, 2002).

"Community" and "family" are centred around a commitment to or focus on a greater or common good (Mintzberg, 2009; Ram & Holliday, 1993) where there is care demonstrated for work, colleagues, a member's place in the world (geographic and otherwise) which results in members being inspired by this caring (Mintzberg, 2009). Relationships are also more personal than would be found in a large organisation (Schein, 2002).

However, there are challenges that are associated with being a community or "family" – as the organisation matures, politics build up (Mintzberg, 2009, p142) and as with all families, complexities and contradictions as well as disharmony exist (Ram & Holliday, 1993). Families also have obligations which may entail self-sacrifice, self-denial and hard work. They can be autocratic (Ram & Holliday, 1993). Although politics may exist together with power relationships, within a community/familial type organisation, these relationships are likely to be negotiated, as relationships tend to be less formal with the result that interaction between staff and management is neither consistently autocratic nor harmonious (Ram & Holliday, 1993).

What is meant by "community" or "family" is the environment or culture of mutual respect where people are seen as human beings and not human resources, where leadership reaches out rather than down, where trust and engagement are promoted encouraging people to share and learn together and collaborate for the organisation's sustainability (Mintzberg, 2009). This type of culture may be cultivated by managers to increase the degree of alignment between the goals of managers and employees (Ram & Holliday, 1993).

Yet as the organisation ages, and the founder may become less personally involved, there tends to be a trend away from this community feeling to a more rational, bureaucratic type of organisation where general managers often care less about the original values and culture introduced by the founder-manager (Schein, 2002). If a family member of the founder is introduced to the organisation who perpetuates the values of the founder, the original culture and sense of community may survive, but at some point these may be morphed or displaced (Schein, 2002).

The sense of community or family in small organisations may contribute to their sustainability. Despite the relationship complexities that may exist, as members interact, care and learn with one another, collaborating for the organisation's sustainability, small organisations in South Africa may continue to employ the large segment of the population that they do (more than half of total employment) and maintain their 36% contribution to the total gross domestic product (Cant, 2012, p1107; Olawale & Garwe, 2010, p729).

Moreover, there are a number of reasons for being a learning organisation, which are applicable to small and large organisations alike.

Why be a learning organisation?

Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, and Smith (1994, pp9-12) summarise reasons for being a learning organisation as follows:

- For superior performance
- To improve quality
- To attract and retain customers
- For competitive advantage
- For an energised, committed workforce
- To manage change

- Because the times demand it
- Because interdependence is recognised
- Because organisation members want it
- And the highest ideal of all: For the truth!

In addition to these reasons, the following statements from a collage of anonymous responses to Learning-Org's question "Why a Learning Organisation?" provide personal motivations or reasons for building or being a learning organisation:

1. I choose to contribute to human evolution, to stretch the fabric of our soul. Not knowing how, I choose to learn with others, to start where I am. Where I am becomes a learning organisation the moment I perceive it to be one, as I share insights with others. It is born with the discovery that together we can contribute to evolution, that not knowing how to stretch – together – we can each learn how.

2. *The old way is for senior managers to do all the thinking while everyone else "wields the screwdrivers". The old way works, but doesn't tap the greater energy available when the team is fully engaged. Tapping into this energy can result in improved products and services for customers, and an improved work environment. The learning organisation approach is a new way that promises to tap this energy. Any approach that increases joy in work and the quality of products and services raises the overall quality of life.*

3. I like to think that those involved in creating learning organisations are balancing the need for economic viability and continuously improving productivity with creating environments in which people can excel (contribute fully to something that matters for them individually and collectively).

(The World, n.d.).

These quotes indicate, from the point of view of various individuals, that learning organisations provide a favourable environment to attain business objectives of profit, productivity and quality, which contribute to an organisation's sustainability, while also building an environment where individuals are valued, can learn and excel. The first quote also simplifies how to develop a learning organisation – by perceiving the organisation to be one. This may appear too simplistic, but I refer to Ghandi's words "be the change you want to see".

2.2.9 Senge's learning organisation – attainable goal or lofty ideal?

No model is without critique and Senge has a number of critics. The idea shared by these critics is that although the pursuit of a learning organisation seems to be a noble and worthwhile one, the practicability of being or becoming a learning organisation which practices the five disciplines, seems unattainable. Some of the arguments presented by Fenwick (2001), Garvin

(1993), Tight (1996), English (2005) and Walters and Cooper (2011) will be examined and discussed in this section. Aspects relating to small organisations and the South African context will also be discussed as these provide a specific context for the pursuit of a learning organisation.

Fenwick (2001, p74) views the concept of the learning organisation as a cuddly vision of "community" and collegiality and argues that it is difficult to build Senge's disciplines of a learning organisation as most employees lack the skills required for critical reflection, visioning and team learning. I share this concern – the skill of critical reflection should be developed before endeavouring to develop a learning organisation. Critical reflection is discussed in Chapter Three.

Fenwick (2001) and Tight (1996) question who controls the vision, goals and definition of learning and state that managers and educators play a dominant role in this. Fenwick (2001) notes that the reality in the workplace is that not all people have the opportunity to participate as equals in team dialogue. In response to both of these concerns, my understanding of Senge is that all members have input into the process of determining vision, goals and learning - no-one dominates - there is continual collaboration. In order to ensure that no-one dominates the above processes of defining vision, goals and learning, and dialogue, Senge (1990) suggests that a skilled facilitator be used in order to ensure collaboration and hold the space, or focus, of such discussions, or dialogues. There are methods to ensure this, for example the talking stone (or stick), where each person is allowed time with the talking stone, and for as long as the person is holding the stone, others are not permitted to interrupt. This also encourages others to listen and gives the person talking the opportunity to articulate his/her thoughts, without having to rush through what he/she wants to say in fear of interruption (Brown & Isaacs, 2001, p125). However, it is questionable whether such methods to encourage participation are practicable. Although an individual has the talking stone and may not be interrupted, it does not guarantee that the other participants in a dialogue are indeed listening and that the individual who is talking is truly heard and understood. There are underlying internal politics and game playing, which Senge (1990) admits are present in organisations, that are difficult to overcome if there is no true aspiration to, and practice, of openness. The role of the facilitator becomes increasingly important as this person needs to monitor group dynamics constantly and ensure that all participants are being heard, and as such, that they are all active participants in the dialogue, listening to and hearing what is being said. However, small companies may not have the financial resources to employ an external facilitator as these companies are often more aware of

saving costs. Small companies seem to be more adept at developing trust, relationship and community (Fenwick, 2010b) and so may not need the skills of a facilitator, but would need a leader who is able to encourage an environment conducive to a learning organisation and who also participates in the dialogue, or team learning without dominating it. However, this would require a mature and skilled leader who is able to play a dual role and not drive his/her agenda during these times. The leader would need to be a 'learning leader' and willing to negotiate his/her role and the power relationships that exist (Ram & Holliday, 1993), which is a tall order and a difficult role to maintain. A possible solution would be for the leader to have a mentor, a critical friend, with whom he/she can reflect and explore alternative ways of facilitating team learning interactions.

Senge proposes that in a learning organisation, members suspend assumptions, exposing their beliefs and values – Fenwick (2001) sees this as an invasion of privacy, as the organisation appropriates this information for the organisation's purposes. The act of exposing beliefs could be viewed as an invasion of privacy, but it could also be viewed as a worthwhile endeavour - unless organisation members are honest with themselves concerning their assumptions, beliefs and values, they may never become aware of the role that they potentially can and do play in the organisation. They may be there because they have nowhere else to work – the organisation was the best or only choice available – and they should be honest if the organisation is somewhere they really want to be. This honesty and openness can lead to personal mastery as organisation members identify what is really important to them. Once they know this, they may feel empowered to do something – either accept that they should stay at the organisation for reasons they are aware of, or make a change. Kets De Vries (2001) explains that a disorientating event can influence a person to take charge of a situation by bringing assumptions, beliefs and values to the fore. If the practice of suspending assumptions, exposing beliefs and values is a disorientating event, then organisation members should be empowered to make the changes they want to see.

Garvin (1993) states that Senge's concept of a learning organisation is discussed in reverential, utopian and mystical terms. In order to overcome these idyllic discussions of a learning organisation, he proposes the 3M (Meaning, Management and Measurement) model for a learning organisation and states that the learning organisation should be purposefully designed. I intuitively believe that many organisations would accept his model as it includes the factor of measurement: cognitive, behavioural and performance improvement – allowing organisations to measure their level of learning or their progress towards a destination. Garvin's model appeals

to the mindset of achieving a goal and arriving at a destination, which is quite different to Senge's concept of the learning organisation as a journey, not a destination. The learning organisation model that a company selects is influenced by its view of a learning organisation – if they view a learning organisation as a destination, they may be more likely to adopt Garvin's model, but if they view the learning organisation as a journey, they may be more likely to adopt Senge's model.

The concepts included in Garvin's (1993) model of a learning organisation are not dissimilar to Senge's, for example, to encourage experimentation, share learning through teams or forums, reflect on experiences, promote a learning culture, and systems thinking; but his model is packaged differently and provides more structure as to how to develop a learning organisation. Senge's approach to a learning organisation is not as structured as Garvin's. He does not provide steps to follow, but states that how a learning organisation is developed is dependent on the context and the organisation – in developing a learning organisation, each organisation needs to be approached individually as all organisations are different and it is not wise to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach (Senge et al, 1994).

Tight (1996) questions whether the purpose of a learning organisation is the value and development of members, or maximising profits. English (2005) also reflects this concern, noting the power imbalances in organisations. She highlights that the learning organisation could be a tool for managers to dominate and control the resources of workers for the benefit of owners. Senge (1990) states that we should not forget that the purpose of business is business – making profits. He provides an example of a company that was focussed on people but still failed (People Express Airlines) (Senge, 1990).

Walters and Cooper (2011) question whose knowledge counts in the context of a learning organisation. They state that as an organisation pursues its goals, workers' learning needs may be neglected. They also assert that learning and work cannot be "discussed outside broader socio-economic and political contexts" (Walters & Cooper, 2011, p30) and that the role of politics and power in learning in organisations needs to be considered. These are relevant concerns, particularly in a South African context, with its Apartheid legacy and related socio-economic inequalities.

In response to Tight (1996), English (2005) and Walters and Cooper's (2011) concerns, Senge does provide a model for making the business environment more conducive to personal

development, learning and change and in the attainment of business profits, an organisation can be developed that values its members.

Wyer et al (2000) researched small companies as learning organisations and documented additional constraints for small companies to become learning organisations, including leadership, staff, the culture and the environment of the small company.

Regarding development opportunities and support structures for learning to occur, owner-managers (leaders) may have difficulty with this as they may feel threatened by an open management approach that will encourage learning because the authority, information and knowledge of the owner can be challenged (Wyer et al, 2000). Owner-managers may also feel threatened by staff wanting to implement learning acquired outside of the organisation as owner-managers may interpret new ideas as a criticism of existing approaches and may not want to change the status quo (Wyer et al, 2000). These points indicate that owner-managers should be willing to be 'learning leaders' where the success of their company is more important than their egos, existing mental models or propensity to change if the small company is to pursue being a learning organisation.

The quality and level of staff play an important role in pursuing the learning organisation ideology and small companies tend to attract less experienced or committed staff that may not have the drive to participate in a learning organisation (Wyer et al, 2000). Staff may also have difficulty moving into new roles and may continue to look at the same problems through unchanged lenses.

> In the face of new emerging change situations, quite often the small business has to ask long-serving staff to grow into completely new roles which they frequently approach from fixed mindsets and comfort zones of 'that's the way we've always approached things around here'. (Wyer et al, 2000, p255)

The culture of a learning organisation is one where learning is ongoing and time is set aside to learn and reflect on learning (Senge, 1990). This type of culture may be more difficult to attain in small companies due to the demands of meeting the day's schedule and responding to unforeseen problems. Furthermore, in learning organisations, mistakes are treated as opportunities to learn (Senge, 1990) but in a small company, mistakes may have a large impact on the finances of the company and consequently making mistakes is discouraged or even punished (Wyer et al, 2000). The learning that takes place is likely to be through everyday activities. Gibb (1997) states that this everyday learning through activities is what can contribute to the small organisation being a learning one – small companies are better able to

incorporate learning into their policies, operations, thinking and doing and there is more and easier integration of learning in day-to-day operations.

Pertaining to culture, within a small organisation, the potential for 'groupthink' exists where members hold similar ideas or mental models and these remain unchallenged, permitting the organisation to continue with the status quo.

The constraints above may render a small organisation unable to reach the ideal of a learning organisation. However, the environment in which small organisations operate is so unpredictable and uncertain that a learning organisation approach may be more suitable than a long-term planning approach (Wyer et al, 2000).

Within a South African context, the pursuit of the learning organisation is further impacted by the legacy of Apartheid and the consequent dehumanising of black people. This has left an imprint on the psyche of many South Africans, where interactions between different race groups are sometimes tainted by distrust (Horwitz, Bowmaker-Falconer & Searll, 1996; Seekings, 2008). An important enabler for the pursuit of a learning organisation is that of openness (Senge, 1990). An environment of openness could also contribute to an awareness of the broader socio-economic and political context in South Africa (Walters & Coooper, 2011). However, developing an environment of openness in an organisation can prove difficult with the legacy of apartheid and associated feelings of distrust. An additional effort is required to overcome this legacy.

Although these criticisms of Senge's concept of a learning organisation hold water, I believe that organisations should attempt to practice the disciplines of a learning organisation. The disciplines help to create a working environment where members are valued, where they contribute to a vision, feel in control of their lives, collaborate and are able to view their impact within and on the organisation as a system. I think that where people are valued, they will want to spend their time and work together with those who value them. The value that organisation members experience should assist in increasing the bottom line value of the organisation and so contribute to its sustainability. However, there are other factors that influence being or becoming a learning organisation, such as leadership and organisational culture, as well as factors, external and internal to the organisation that affect its sustainability. These factors will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

2.3 The evolution of Senge's model (Locating Senge's thinking in his own work)

Senge's concept of the learning organisation has developed over the past 20 years, as can be seen in his publications since the first edition of "The Fifth Discipline" in 1990. "The Fifth Discipline" introduces the concept of the learning organisation and discusses the five disciplines (systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision and team learning) that organisations should practise in order to be learning ones. In this book, Senge also asks and explores important questions concerning how to achieve or set up the conditions in organisations to pursue the disciplines, such as:

- Openness: How can the internal politics and game playing that dominate traditional organisations be transcended?
- Localness: How do you achieve control without controlling?
- How do managers create the time for learning?
- How can personal mastery and learning flourish at work and at home?
- How can we rediscover the child learner within us?
- What does it take to lead a learning organisation?

Senge then explores and shares ideas on how to develop a learning organisation in the context of the questions he raises.

"The Fifth Discipline" was followed in 1994 by "The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook", written by Senge with four co-authors. This book is sub-titled "Strategies and Tools for building a Learning Organisation" and provides strategies to assist organisations to practise the disciplines for organisation members to be lifelong learners "on a never-ending developmental path" (Senge et al, 1994, p7). The book includes concepts related to the disciplines and strategies and tools to practise and achieve the disciplines, with cross-references to other exercises in the book. For example, to practise systems thinking, exercises that are suggested (amongst others) are "Exploring your own story" and "The 5 Whys" (Senge et al, 1994, pp103,108). The book also includes exercises to develop the other four disciplines of mental models, building shared vision, team learning and personal mastery. The Fieldbook includes "arenas" (Senge et al, 1994) of practice (different types of organisations that can be learning, such as newspapers, hospitals, family businesses, schools and government) with examples of where learning organisations have been practised in these arenas.

Senge notes in the Fieldbook that "The Fifth Discipline" was written in response to the "fragmentation and isolation" that occurs in society, workplaces and businesses where "people within organisations often compete more with one another than with external competitors" (Senge et al, 1994, p565). The Fieldbook provides strategies to help overcome this fragmentation and isolation and contribute to the sustainability of organisations:

> The politics, game playing, and internal competition that characterize modern organisations sap people's energy and commitment and can never be a foundation for a great enterprise *or a sustainable society*. (Senge et al, 1994, p566)

The Fieldbook was followed by "The Dance of Change" in 1999, written by the same authors and one other, Roth. This book was written as a follow-on to the Fieldbook to address the constraints/limiting factors that inhibit change from being sustained in organisations that are trying to improve their long-term financial success, as organisations generally do not have a good track record of sustaining significant change – change initiatives start and dwindle (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth & Smith, 1999). Other aspects, or challenges, in organisations need to be addressed to bring about and sustain profound change. Profound change means

> organisational change that combines inner shifts in people's values, aspirations and behaviours with "outer" shifts in processes, strategies, practices, and systems. … In profound change there is learning. The organisation doesn't just do something new; it builds capacity for ongoing change. This emphasis on inner and outer changes gets to the heart of the issues that large industrial-age institutions are wrestling with today. It is not enough to change strategies, structures, and systems, unless the thinking that produced those strategies, structures, and systems also changes. (Senge et al, 1999, p15)

"The Dance of Change" focuses on aspects and challenges in bringing about and sustaining profound change (Senge et al, 1999). The key aspects addressed are the role of leadership in generating, sustaining and assessing change, and developing strategies and processes to bring about change (support for change such as coaching). The emphasis in this book is on leadership acknowledging these challenges and working to address these challenges for a learning organisation to be practised (Senge et al, 1999).

The next book published by Senge in 2004, with four different co-authors is "Presence", subtitled "Human Purpose and the Field of the Future". This book is focused on addressing peoples' thinking and mental models that cause actions and behaviours. The book looks beyond the organisation to questions of humanity, meaning, purpose and the connectedness of organisations and people. The purpose of exploring or examining mental models is to bring about profound change in thinking and ways of thinking and seeing, that then bring about changes in ways of doing, which is illustrated by a U-shape (p46) (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2004, p88):

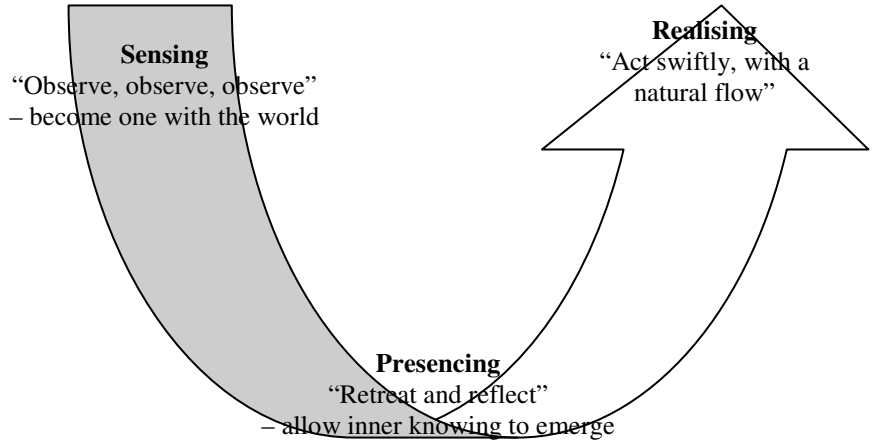


Figure 2.2: U-shape of perceiving reality and actions that follow

This book is written differently to the others by Senge as it is a narrative of a series of dialogues that the authors engaged in and shares their learning and emergence of their thinking together. In the emergence of their thinking, the authors become aware of a larger whole – the connectedness of people and planet.

Senge's next book published in 2008, "The Necessary Revolution", subtitled "How Individuals and Organisations Are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World", picks up from this note of the connectedness of people and planet with the focus as indicated in the subtitle. The book is written with four co-authors, one of whom collaborated with Senge on the Fieldbook and "The Dance of Change". The book includes examples of organisations recognising their interdependence due to globalisation and the impact they all have on sustaining non-regenerative resources and how organisations engage in new thinking that brings about new choices through:

1. Thoughtful people see arising problems earlier than the rest of us.
2. They begin to understand how severe those problems are.
3. The combination of deep concern and sense of possibility for a better future causes them to think differently about the problems and how they are interconnected.
4. Different ways of thinking lead to different ways of acting. By focusing on long-term strategies, groups and organisations begin to take into account the larger systems in which they operate, instead of simply fixing isolated problems. (Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur & Schley, 2008, p43).

Such organisations demonstrate mastery of three areas, which are needed for creating regenerative organisations, industries and economies - if one is removed, the core learning capabilities collapse (Senge et al, 2008, p44):

- They see larger systems
- They collaborate across boundaries
- They create the futures they truly desire.

Examples of such organisations include Coca-Cola which partnered with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to improve Coca-Cola's water efficiency and reduce water waste in their production process (Senge et al, 2008). The Global Sustainable Food Lab is a global alliance of over 50 organisations, which includes some of the largest food companies and NGOs working together to bring sustainable agriculture into the mainstream.

The book offers tools, skills, techniques and strategies around the five disciplines, but focuses on sustainability issues, for example a dialogue technique (which develops team learning) addressing sustainability issues (particularly of the environment) for organisations, addressing mental models about sustainability issues and building shared vision and commitment (Senge et al, 2008). These tools have been developed to achieve the 80/20 Challenge, that is to achieve 80% reduction in global carbon emissions in 20 years, which is the focus of the book.

Senge's books demonstrate a progression in his work. "The Fifth Discipline" is the starting point of his focus on systems thinking (which he sees as the umbrella for the other four disciplines) and the sustainability of organisations and leads to a focus on a larger system, namely our planet and sustainability issues related to the planet in "The Necessary Revolution". Each book adds more detail and strategies on how to practise being a learning organisation, with the most recent publication focusing on learning for sustainability of the planet. The progression of his work can be illustrated as follows:

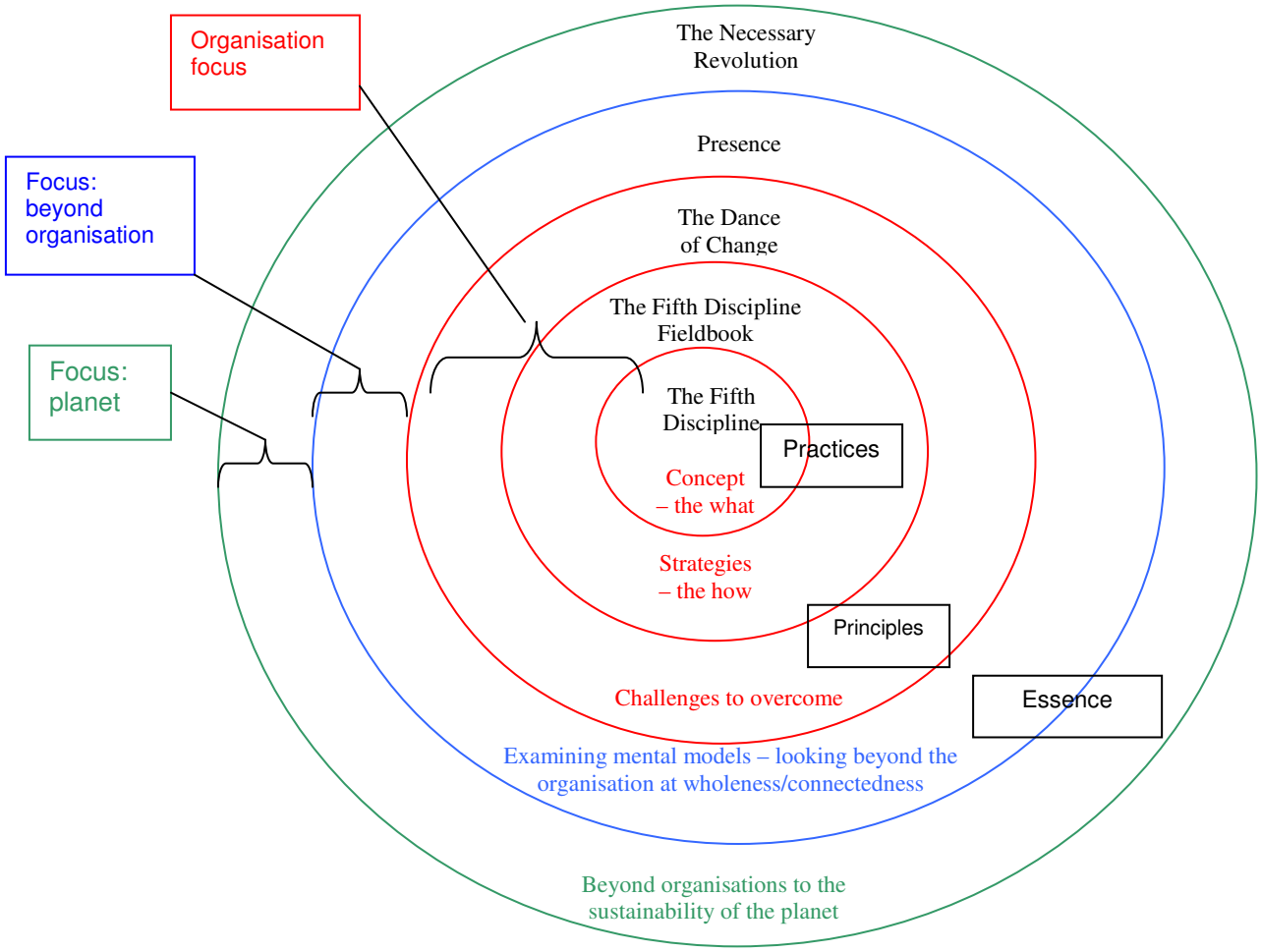


Figure 2.3: The researcher's interpretation of the progression of Senge's thinking and areas of focus

Figure 2.3 illustrates the focus of Senge's books – the red circles and writing show his focus on the organisation as an entity. "Presence" is a transition point where the connectedness between people, organisations and planet is expanded on and this becomes the focus for his most recent book, "The Necessary Revolution".

2.4 Conclusion

The concept of a learning organisation varies between writers in the field/s of business and learning and between organisations that claim to be such. Senge's understanding is distinct as he has a collective focus in developing a learning organisation. This collective focus would seem to naturally suit small organisations, which are generally viewed as communities with a sense of 'togetherness'. However, small organisations have their own challenges in attempting to be learning organisations. Senge's model of a learning organisation and the models of his counterparts are based on large organisations, while small organisations face different challenges. The current literature focuses mainly on the characteristics of large organisations with regard to "identifying, learning about and acting upon open-ended change" (Wyer et al, 2000, p257). It is likely that the conditions that small businesses must establish to facilitate learning are significantly different (Wyer et al, 2000).

The South African context also presents challenges to organisations, large and small. However, it is these very challenges that should encourage small South African organisations to be learning – the volatile, changing environment that small organisations operate in seems to require a learning organisation. In addition, legacy issues in South Africa contribute to a lack of trust and equality in the workplace, which need to be recognised and overcome. The learning organisation could be a mechanism to overcome these and other challenges as the disciplines of a learning organisation help to create an environment where members are valued, and as such where they are likely to contribute positively to the organisation, so increasing the bottom line value and sustainability of the organisation. The evolution of Senge's theory of a learning organisation also points to a vitality of the original concept and its capacity to maintain a central vision while changing and developing with the times, countering critiques concerning the concept being 'soft', 'cuddly' or 'idealistic'.



Having reviewed Senge's (1990) concept of a learning organisation, I pick up my telescope and look beyond the harbour to the open water of the ocean. After perusing a portion of the navigation manuals, I now consider other aspects of a learning organisation that will contribute to the vessel successfully sailing upon the waters. The concept of a learning organisation has been explained, but I wondered how a small company becomes a learning organisation. What theories of learning relate to the learning disciplines and how does this assist an organisation with becoming a learning one? I also thought ahead and considered the most appropriate approach to research this concept on the vessel, one that would capture the

environment and setting of the vessel as well as contribute to, without swaying, the learning that was taking place.

The journey proceeds as we continue to peruse the navigation manuals of a learning organisation before boarding a vessel to investigate it.

CHAPTER 3:
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW - *LOCATING AND PERUSING THE NAVIGATION MANUALS – PART 1*

3.1 Introduction



Having reflected on the nature of sailing and the context of the waters in which a vessel may find itself, I now move on to understanding the theory underpinning sailing and what makes it possible for a vessel to practice the activities that enable it to sail. Relating this metaphor to learning organisations, this chapter provides the theoretical framework of my study, focusing on the theories that underpin a learning organisation – theories of learning in the individual as well as in the workplace – and how these theories relate to Senge's disciplines.

Chapters One and Two established that the pursuit of Senge's (1990) learning organisation was a worthwhile one. The purpose of this chapter is to focus on learning theories that assist with this pursuit. The literature studied reveals that there are links between learning theories and Senge's disciplines. The learning organisation encompasses many learning theories and accommodates various perspectives on learning, illustrating that the concept is well-grounded in theory.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

A concept becomes a theory when it is acknowledged to be one and when the concept can be generalised to a wider population. The concept of a learning organisation has been researched by Senge in larger organisations (Senge, 1990; Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur & Schley, 2008) such as Hewlett Packard, IBM, British Petroleum (BP) and many others. This study takes the concept of a learning organisation to a wider population as it focuses on small organisations. Senge's concept of a learning organisation forms the conceptual framework of this study and in this chapter is linked to adult learning theories, forming a theoretical framework.

Senge's concept of a learning organisation, which includes the five disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking have learning theories embedded in them. These theories include individual learning theories as well as workplace or organisation theories of learning. If workplaces engage with these learning theories in their day-to-day operations and practices, they may be contributing to the development of a learning organisation. This engagement can be illustrated as follows – looking at the concept of a learning organisation in terms of learning theories (1) and seeing how learning theories inform the practise of a learning organisation (2):

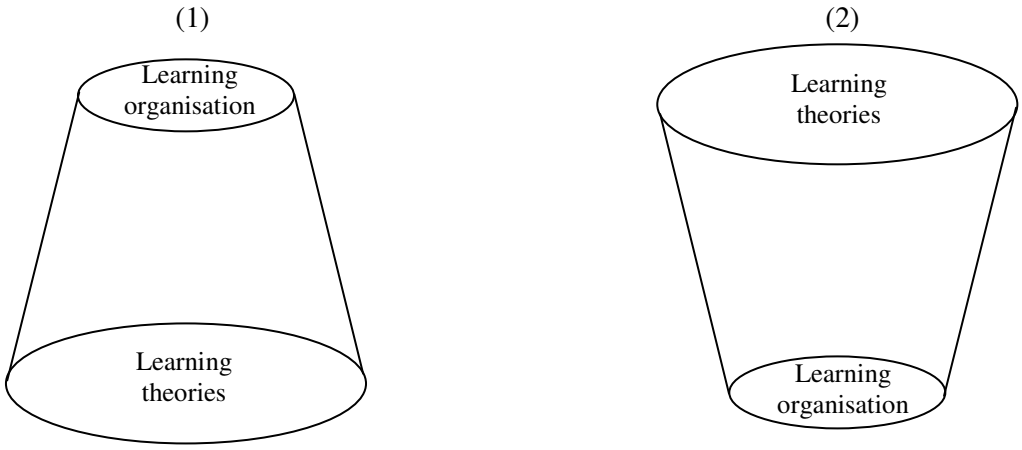


Figure 3.1: Learning organisation and learning theories

3.3 How organisations learn

Learning starts from individuals and "a learning organisation is founded on the learning process of individuals in the organisation" (Wang & Ahmed, 2003, p9). Senge's learning disciplines are linked to theories of how adults learn as individuals, which will be discussed in this section. However, individual learning does not necessarily lead to learning taking place in the organisation and it is the task of the organisation to integrate individual learning into the organisation (Wang & Ahmed, 2003, p9). "The qualitative difference between the learning organisation and other organisations is shown to be the coordination and cooperation that the individuals perform in a close working relationship" (Jensen, 2005, p53), which relates to workplace learning theories. Thus workplace/organisational learning theories are also discussed in this chapter to understand how individual learning can become the learning of the organisation. This section is important as the concept of a learning organisation largely ignores

current understandings of adult learning and development in the context of the workplace/organisation (Fenwick, 1997).

Although Senge does not state the learning theories embedded in his concept of a learning organisation, the concept of learning organisation is linked to social learning theory which "takes place in a meaningful environment and is acquired through social interactions with other people" (Rotter, in Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p136). Fenwick (1997) states that social theories of situated cognition (evident in the theory of communities of practice) and transformative learning contradict many of the precepts of the learning organisation. However, I propose that there is a link between these theories and the learning organisation and the application of the theories can assist with the disciplines of a learning organisation. I propose that the disciplines of a learning organisation are embedded in the following learning theories:

Table 3.1: Embedded learning theories in learning organisation disciplines

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory – individual learning theories	Embedded learning theory – organisational learning theories
Systems thinking	▪ Cognitivism ▪ Constructivism	▪ Double-loop, generative learning ▪ Triple-loop learning ▪ Activity Theory/Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) ▪ Actor-Network Theory (ANT) ▪ Communities of Practice ▪ Complexity Theory
Personal mastery	▪ Cognitivism ▪ Constructivism ▪ Self-directed learning	▪ Action learning ▪ Triple-loop learning ▪ Communities of Practice
Mental models	▪ Cognitivism ▪ Constructivism ▪ Critical reflection ▪ Experiential learning ▪ Transformative learning	▪ Triple-loop learning ▪ Communities of Practice ▪ Complexity Theory
Building shared vision	▪ Cognitivism ▪ Constructivism	▪ Collaborative learning ▪ Triple-loop learning ▪ Communities of Practice
Team learning	▪ Cognitivism ▪ Constructivism	▪ Collaborative learning ▪ Action learning ▪ Single-loop learning ▪ Double-loop learning ▪ Triple-loop learning ▪ Communities of Practice ▪ Complexity Theory

These embedded theories will be explored in turn, starting with theories of learning in the individual.

3.4 Theories of how individuals learn

In order for organisations to learn, individuals need to learn (Senge, 1990). Senge's disciplines have less likelihood of being practised if individual learning does not take place and so theories of how individuals learn are examined in this section. These theories include cognitivism, constructivism, critical reflection and experiential learning. Specific individual learning theories that can be linked to Senge's disciplines are then examined; these are transformative learning and self-directed learning, as indicated in Table 3.1 (p56).

Constructivism is based on cognitivism. Cognitivism views learning as an internal process of meaning-making which depends on the knowledge (cognitive) structures of an individual (Fasokun, Katahoire & Oduaran, 2005; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991), while constructivism views learning as a more reflective process where learning is a process in which the learner constructs and builds knowledge based on a personal interpretation of experience (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1996). Thus a difference between the two theories is that cognitivism states that we build new knowledge on existing knowledge, while constructivism advocates that in addition, we reflect and build new knowledge on experience, and both state that learning is an internal meaning-making process. Since organisations consist of members that have both previous knowledge and experience, both theories are applicable to how its members learn.

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Systems thinking	***Cognitivism***
Personal mastery	
Mental models	
Building shared vision	
Team learning	

Cognitivism

According to Piaget, in order to develop the knowledge or cognitive structures required to learn, we need to go through a series of stages in which we build on the constructs of the preceding stage. These stages include sensorimotor (0-2 years of age), pre-operational (2 years-7 years), concrete operational period (7 years-11 years) and formal operational period (11+ years). The final stage is a level where abstract and conceptual thinking takes place. Different scholars agree that the first three stages are general but whether all adults develop to the formal operational stage is a point of debate (Long, 1983; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

The theory of cognitivism occurs in all disciplines as individuals make meaning and learn based on their existing knowledge structures. A discipline cannot be practised if there is no exposure to or knowledge of what the discipline is and how it can be practised.

It is evident from the descriptions of the disciplines of a learning organisation in Chapter Two that these require abstract and conceptual thinking in order to be practised. Whether a company is a learning organisation would thus seem to be dependent on the cognitive stage that its members are at – if most members are at the formal operational level, and not at the final stage of abstract and conceptual thinking, it may be difficult for the organisation to practise the disciplines of a learning organisation. However, this level of thinking can be developed in adults, but would potentially require additional resources and time to do so and it is questionable whether the workplace would provide the setting to do so. Examples of how to develop the abstract and conceptual level in adults include using visual aids and models when engaging with them; providing opportunities to discuss political, cultural and social issues; and exposing adults to broad concepts rather than facts, and situating these in a context that is relevant and meaningful to them (Wood, Smith & Grossniklaus, 2001). The examples that are provided can be incorporated into existing interactions with adults in the organisation, be it in a group or individual setting, and so can counter the need for additional time to develop this level. However, the services of a skilled practitioner or facilitator with the knowledge of how to develop this level of thinking would be required.

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Systems thinking	***Constructivism***
Personal mastery	
Mental models	
Building shared vision	
Team learning	

Constructivism

An individual or radical constructivist view of learning is influenced by the work of Piaget, and purports that "more emphasis is placed on the mental processes of the individual than on the context in which individuals learn" (Gravett, 2005, p21). Constructivism refers to how we acquire information about the world and turn it into personal knowledge that we can store and retrieve to direct our behaviour, and as such, focuses on the construction of meaning as an individual process (Gravett, 2005; Wadsworth, 1996).

Social constructivism

Senge's view of a learning organisation is based on a social constructivist perspective of learning. This perspective places emphasis on social factors in learning and views the knowledge-making process of individuals as taking place in a dynamic social context (Wadsworth, 1996) which, in the context of this study, is the organisation. This perspective also emphasizes the influence of language, dialogue and shared understanding in learners' constructions:

> Social constructivists claim that the meaning-making activities of the individual do not take place in isolation but are shaped by the context, culture and tools (e.g. language and computers) in the learning situation. (Gravett, 2005, p21)

According to social constructivists, knowledge is internalized in the individual through first engaging in an external, social interaction, and as such "thought" can be considered to be a product of social interaction (Gravett, 2005, p22). Social constructivism claims that to understand and analyse the thoughts and mental functioning of an individual, one needs to begin by looking at what is external to the individual, that is social aspects (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1996). Individual constructivism differs from this analysis in that the focus of thoughts and mental functioning is located in the individual (Gravett, 2005).

Social constructivism could be considered to be an organisational learning theory. For a learning organisation to be practised, learning takes place within the constructs of the organisation, which is external to an individual. However, this theory also considers how the individual takes what is external and makes meaning of it internally, and as such is also an individual learning theory. The theory of constructivism (both individual and social) is applicable to all the disciplines. Although the organisation is external to the member, the meaning that is made of the disciplines and other aspects of the organisation, interacted with externally, occurs individually so that members can make meaning of and practise the disciplines.

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Mental models	***Critical reflection***

Critical reflection

Critical reflection, which is an important practice in the discipline of mental models (Senge, 1990), is about questioning a situation, or information, rather than accepting it at face value (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, in Mezirow & Associates, 1990), giving attention to the "root of the problem" and examining "the grounds of one's beliefs and feelings as they contribute to the

validity of one's thinking" (O'Neil & Marsick, 1994, pp22-23). Critical reflection is an intellectual skill that depends on a complex interplay of socialisation, emotions, personality traits, past experience and information stores available to individuals and groups against which they evaluate new experiences (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, in Mezirow & Associates, 1990). When individuals or groups engage in critical reflection, they are provided with an opportunity to change their patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving based on taking action on these reflections. Thus the product of critical reflection is informed and committed action as seen in praxis (O'Neil & Marsick, 1994). This description of critical reflection helps one to understand the importance of critical reflection in a learning organisation – if members of an organisation do not reflect critically, then they will not be able to learn and take action for future changes.

However, the process of critical reflection appears to be one that requires members to be at Piaget's final stage of abstract and conceptual thinking. This may be problematic as it is debatable whether all adults develop to this stage (as stated previously). If members have not developed to this stage, then it could be difficult for them to practise critical reflection.

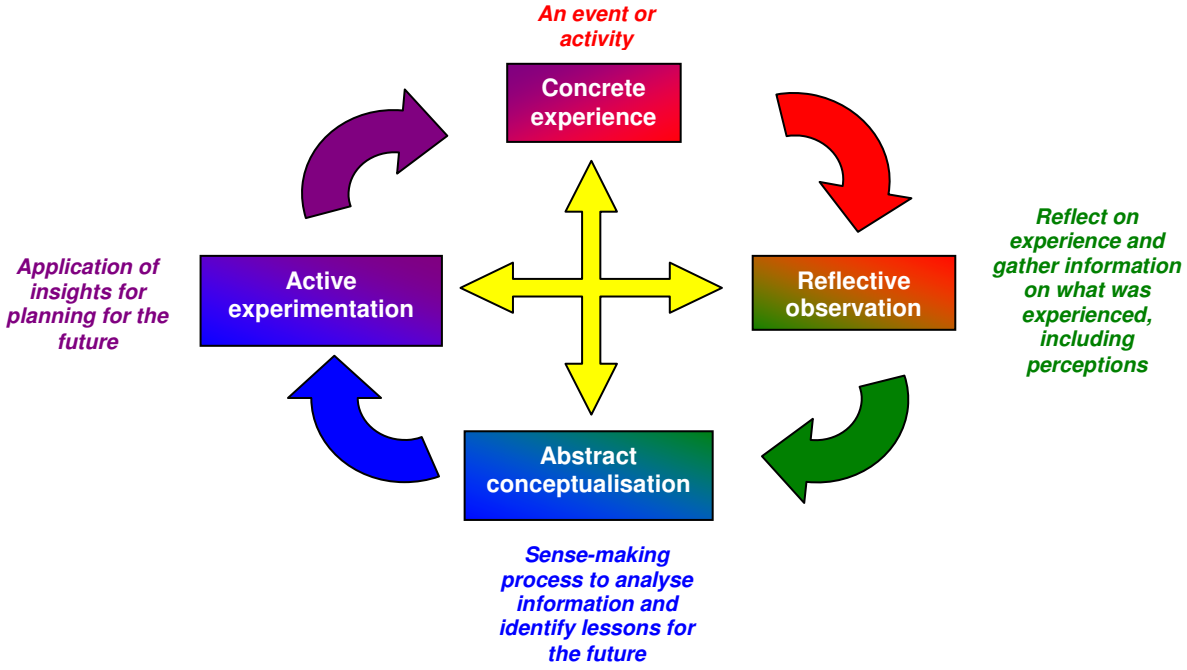
Critical reflection requires a certain amount of skill, especially in the context of an organisation – where the background and orientation of members, their socialisation, emotions and personalities all influence the critical reflection process. In an organisation, critical reflection could be a time-consuming process to engage in - in order to reflect on an event, each member should be aware of the background and orientations of other members so that they are better able to understand why individuals reflect in a certain way, or why individuals' reflections reveal certain aspects that others may not have thought of (O'Neil & Marsick, 1994). Some members may also get 'stuck' in the reflection process and not move on from there to devise alternative ways of thinking and acting (O'Neil & Marsick, 1994). These factors should not inhibit the critical reflection process and this process could possibly be simplified and less time-consuming if organisation members have critical friends (Brookfield, 2000; Sagor & Barnett, 1991), such as mentors, coaches or supervisors, who can assist members to reflect critically in order to reach 'praxis'. In order to bring about change and for the learning that is required in a learning organisation, critical reflection is an essential practice. In addition, "critical reflection helps to begin changes in organisational culture" (O'Neil & Marsick, 1994, p29), and therefore the change process is an important aspect in building a learning organisation, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Mental models	***Experiential learning***

Experiential learning

Just as critical reflection is an important practise for developing a learning organisation, so, too, is experiential learning, which includes reflection in the learning process.

Kolb's theory of experiential learning can be illustrated as follows:



Adapted from Hattingh & Smit (2004, p10)

Figure 3.2: The experiential learning cycle as experienced in organisations

According to Kolb, learning is continuous, grounded in experience and "is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, in Tight, 1996, p22). As such, experiential learning requires reflection on experience, as a disciplined event, and as a result of that reflection there should be a change in learners', or organisational members', behaviour or actions, based on the knowledge that they have gained (Kolb, 1984; Tight, 1996). Although reflection and action are on opposite poles in Kolb's cycle, these two stages are dialectic, and this is an important process in the context of the learning organisation as described by Senge – for organisation members to learn, there needs to be dialogue, which includes reflection, in order for change to take place, if necessary (Senge, 1990).

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Mental models	***Transformative learning***
Team learning	

Transformative learning

Transformative learning is evident in the discipline of mental models of learning organisations (Senge, 1990). Transformative learning occurs when, through critical reflection, individuals question their assumptions, beliefs and world-views and then gain an enhanced level of awareness and a critique of these assumptions and the reasons, or premises for such (Gravett, 2005; Mezirow & Associates, 1990).

Mezirow proposes facets and phases of transformative learning. Organisations should be mindful of these facets as these can be useful in guiding the discipline of mental models in the organisation and what may take place during "learningful" conversations in team learning. These phases are (Gravett, 2005, p30):

1. A triggering event that causes an awareness of existing incongruent thoughts, or a realisation of views and approaches that no longer seem adequate
2. A feeling of disequilibrium, or uncertainty
3. Recognition and expression of presuppositions and assumptions that are mostly held unconsciously
4. Examining and questioning these assumptions and the reasons why these are held
5. Engaging in dialogue for reflecting on assumptions and constructing viewpoints
6. Revising assumptions and perspectives to make them more justifiable and discerning
7. Planning a course of action
8. Acquiring knowledge and skills for the plan
9. Action based on the revision of assumptions
10. Experimenting or trying out new roles
11. Building competence and self-confidence in the new roles and related relationships.

Phases 7 to 11 should be helpful for learning organisations to consider to ensure that the reflection and revision that take place in dialogue lead to action. The implication for organisations is that the leadership and culture of the organisation should support new perspectives gained within the context of the organisation so that individuals can become confident and competent in practising these perspectives. Furthermore, in order to foster transformative learning and "learningful" conversations, leaders should be cognisant of Mezirow's suggestions for dialogue, or discourse, to take place - that participants will:

- Not be forced into dialogue
- Be open to different points of view and care about the way others think and feel
- Be able to reflect critically on assumptions and their consequences
- Have equal opportunity to participate. (Mezirow, in Gravett, 2005, p29).

If the transformative dimensions inherent in phases 1 to 6 are openly acknowledged in the organisation, especially examining and revising assumptions, then it is likely that phases 7 to 11 will be successfully practised. If not acknowledged, the result is action, but not praxis.

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Personal mastery	***Self-directed learning***

Self-directed learning

Related to the theory of self-directed learning, the discipline of personal mastery in learning organisations is relevant. Personal mastery is the pursuit of lifelong learning (Senge, 1990) and in order for lifelong learning to occur, the learning should be self-directed. According to Brookfield, self-directed learning is an "exhibition of critical reflection on the part of adults" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p216), and as we have seen this critical reflection is a significant feature of learning organisations. Guglielmino (in Merriam & Caffarella, 1991) states that people should display certain characteristics in order to pursue self-directed learning, namely openness to learning, initiative and independence in learning, acceptance of responsibility for learning and future orientation. These characteristics reflect elements of personal mastery. Self-directed learning is important to consider in the context of learning organisations because in order for an organisation to learn, individuals should learn (Senge, 1990). If this learning is self-directed, and accommodates individual needs and learning styles, then the learning should be effective and individuals may be encouraged to share their learning within teams and the organisation.

Learning theory fills a large portion of the vessel's hull and thus far the individual learning theories of cognitivism, constructivism, critical reflection, experiential learning, transformative learning and self-directed learning have been discussed. Learning theories that complete the vessel's hull and still need to be considered are organisational/workplace learning theories.



3.5 Theories of how organisations learn

For organisations to be learning ones, individuals need to learn. However, understandings of "learning in work as confined to the personal and individual have gradually given way to more collective or participative understandings of knowledge construction" (Fenwick, 2010a, p107). It is for this reason that theories concerning how learning takes place within the organisation/workplace are examined in this part of the chapter. These theories are collaborative learning; action learning; single-loop/adaptive and double-loop/generative learning; triple-loop learning; activity theory/cultural-historical activity theory; actor-network theory; communities of practice and complexity theory.

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Building shared vision	***Collaborative learning***
Team learning	

Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning is evident in the disciplines of building shared vision and team learning in a learning organisation. Collaborative learning is "a co-ordinated, synchronous activity that is the result of a continued attempt to construct and maintain a shared conception of a problem" (Roschelle & Teasley, in Dillenbourg, 1999, p17). Collaborative learning occurs in teams in the above two disciplines as the outcome of events related to these disciplines is shared understanding. Collaborative learning takes place when the interaction of team members triggers cognitive mechanisms in the team that encourage learning to take place (Dillenbourg, 1999). The characteristics of such interactions are that team members relate to each other by doing something together (talking, building, etc.) and the interaction requires negotiation, which occurs through dialogue (Dillenbourg, 1999).

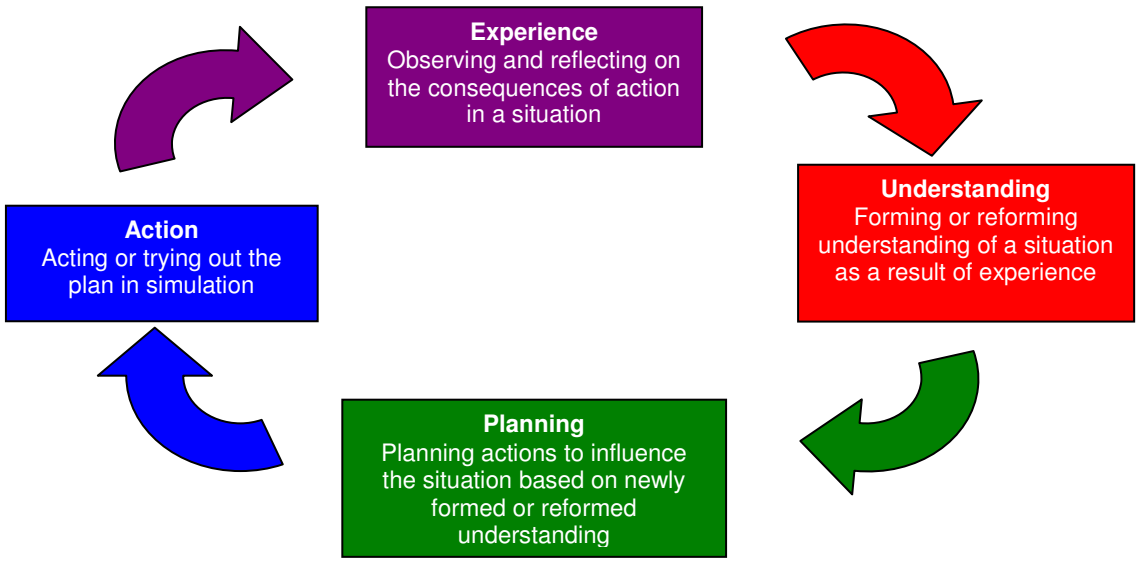
Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Personal mastery	***Action learning***
Team learning	

Action learning

Another learning theory, or approach, that also includes critical reflection is action learning (O'Neil & Marsick, 1994). Action learning is basically a method of decision-making based on the model of experiential learning (Hattingh & Smit, 2004) and is incorporated into the learning organisation by Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross and Smith as the "Wheel of Learning" (Senge et al, 1994, pp59-65).

The action learning process is illustrated in Figure 3.3. Action learning focuses on teams working together to solve a real problem, committing to an action plan, monitoring results and then reflecting on the process and their experiences for continuous improvement (Hattingh & Smit, 2004; McGill & Beaty, 1992). Specific attention is given to the action-reflection relationship to enhance the learning experience (McGill & Beaty, 1992). Action learning occurs in teams but is instigated by team members who propose what action to take or not to take, while the rest of the team listens actively (McGill & Beaty, 1992). This process helps members to draw out assumptions which the team can challenge. An individual team member may proceed with the action while the rest of the team support the individual, increasing the likelihood of the action taking place (McGill & Beaty, 1992).

This process may seem to be individually based and construed to be autocratic, and there does not appear to be much allowance for critical reflection. However, if this learning is facilitated as proposed by Senge (1990), then the whole team should be learning and all views should be heard. The reason for an individual team member proceeding with action is to prevent inertia, as a criticism of the dialogic process is that there is talk and no action (Brown & Isaacs, 2001). As the action learning process is cyclical, the individual who took action returns to the team and they participate in the process again for the purpose of continuous improvement.

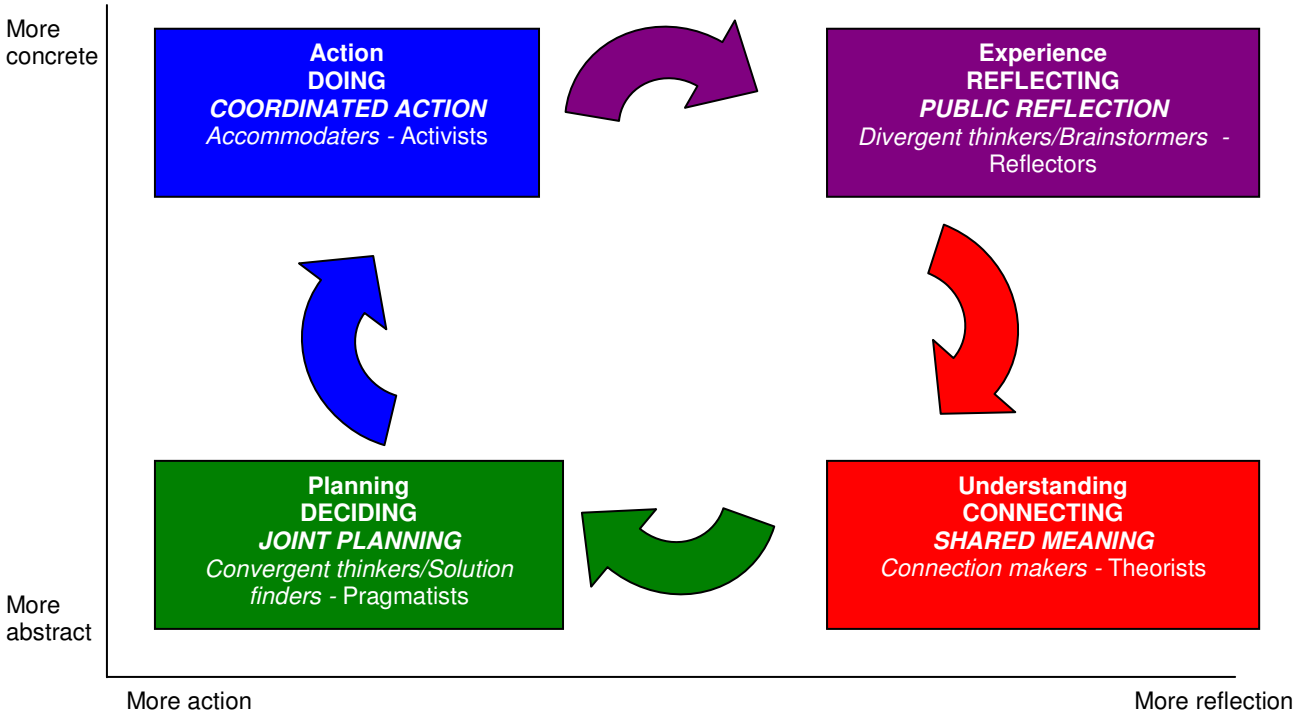


Source: McGill & Beaty (1992, p21)

Figure 3.3: The action learning process

Action learning considers all learning styles in the process (McGill & Beaty, 1992) and as such is well-situated as a learning approach in a learning organisation, contributing to personal mastery – if a person is able to learn using their preferred learning style, then he/she may be more inclined to commit to lifelong learning, a feature of personal mastery. Relating action learning to the four learning styles of activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist (Honey & Mumford, 1982) – activists enjoy action and the experience itself; reflectors spend much time reflecting on and understanding the experience; theorists also enjoy the understanding process in that they make connections between the experience and reflection; while pragmatists enjoy the planning process, but as they tend to rush through the other stages, their plans may be weak (McGill & Beaty, 1992).

The learning wheel of Senge et al, (1994) is translated from an individual to organisational setting as described above. Where the action learning process, the individual learning wheel, team learning wheel and learning styles meet can be illustrated as follows:



Key – wording represented in different font for the following:
Action learning process terminology
INDIVIDUAL LEARNING WHEEL TERMINOLOGY
TEAM LEARNING WHEEL TERMINOLOGY
Learning wheel learning style – Action learning process learning style

Figure 3.4: The action learning process / Learning organisation learning wheel

Figure 3.4 (p66) can be briefly explained as follows: the action learning process of 'Experience' (purple block) can be related to the individual learning wheel phase of 'Reflecting'. At a team level, this reflection also takes place where members expose their thinking as 'Public Reflection'. Senge, et al (1994) state that this phase suits the learning styles of 'divergent thinkers/brainstormers', while Honey and Mumford (1982) refer to the learning style of 'reflectors'. This phase of the action learning process/learning wheel is likely to occur in instances that are more concrete (for example, problem based) and require more reflection (as indicated on the two axes).

The implication here for learning organisations that employ the action learning approach is to ensure that their teams are balanced in their make up and reflect all learning styles – this should ensure that the team works through all stages of the action learning process and the solution to the problem at hand is well thought through. Such purposeful composition of teams may be achievable in smaller organisations, but does present some challenges for larger organisations such as mining houses, banks or engineering companies. This challenge exists if teams are to be composed cross-functionally, but within departments may be more achievable as members' preferred learning styles can be assessed through various tools, for example those proposed by de Jager (2006) and Honey and Mumford (1982).

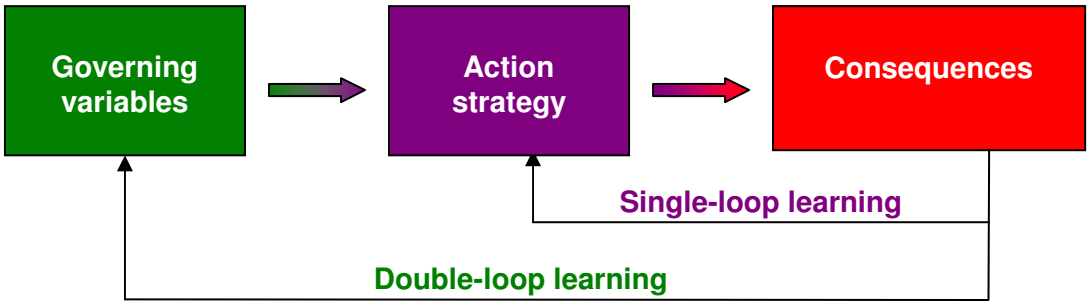
Furthermore, the team leader's key role is to "keep the 'wheel' moving" (Senge et al, 1994, p63), which can be a challenging task as the leader needs to remain focused on the sense of purpose and the willingness to understand the different learning styles of team members and their associated mental models.

Action learning caters for the discipline of team learning in that the values that underpin action learning are also those that are reflected in a learning organisation. These values relate to aspects of team, an organisation member's approach or outlook and the value of reflection (McGill & Beaty, 1992; Senge, 1990). With regard to team, membership is voluntary, team members are supported and challenged, members display empathy and are empowered through personal responsibility, there is trust within the team and commitment to the team and the issue at hand. Concerning an organisation member's approach, values relate to having a positive approach to life and a holistic approach or systems thinking in all matters. In addition, each person is to be respected as the expert on his/her own issue. Reflection is valued as it is key to learning from experience and time is taken to act, reflect and develop.

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Systems thinking	***Single-loop, adaptive learning*** ***Double-loop, generative learning***

Single-loop, adaptive learning and double-loop, generative learning

For organisations to learn, they should engage in double-loop and generative learning as opposed to single-loop and adaptive learning (Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Malhotra, 1996). Concerning single- and double-loop learning, the main difference between these two is the extent to which learners are allowed to and do question existing beliefs and practices (Hattingh & Smit, 2004), that is, the degree to which critical reflection occurs. Essentially, single-loop learning does not challenge the core principles from which the individual or organisation operates, whereas double-loop learning does and as such allows for profound and fundamental change (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Malhotra, 1996). Single and double loop learning can be illustrated as follows:



Source: Anderson (1997)

Figure 3.5: Single- and double-loop learning

The governing variables in Figure 3.5 refer to the values, or mental models, that individuals or organisations hold (Anderson, 1997; Argyris, 1980). Entities have many governing variables and try to keep these within an acceptable range. This concept will be illustrated through an example after an explanation of action strategy and consequences.

Action strategies are the strategies used and actions taken in order to keep governing values within an acceptable range. These strategies have both intended and unintended consequences; intended consequences being those believed to be the result or desired outcome and unintended consequences are those that individuals, teams or organisations are unaware of when they design strategies (Anderson, 1997; Argyris, 1980).

An example of the single- vs double-loop learning process is a person who may have a governing value of being honest and one of respecting authority. In any situation she will design action strategies to keep both these governing values within acceptable limits. For instance, she may be confronted by an authority figure about a situation where, if she is honest, she may appear to disrespect the authority, and so she chooses instead not to be completely honest with various consequences for all involved. An intended consequence may be that she has still maintained her value of respecting authority (by not confronting the authority). An unintended consequence may be that she thinks the situation is unresolved and likely to recur, leaving her dissatisfied. In turn, she may be forced to reconsider her governing variables. If this person reconsiders her action strategy and how she would handle the same situation again in future, she is engaging in single-loop learning. However, if she questions the governing variables (values) that influence her action strategy (behaviours), she is engaging in double-loop learning.

There appears to be a link between double-loop learning and practice, principle and essence of a discipline. It seems possible that if consequences are examined at the level of governing variables, the essence of a discipline can be developed, as discussed in Chapter Two. This examination would include an assessment of the principles underlying a discipline and could then impact on the action strategy or practice, leading to a different consequence (a process of critical reflection). At first, this examination and resultant change in practice may be a conscious effort, but as a person develops mastery in their practice, by understanding the principles and governing variables, essence can develop, which recognises the interconnectedness of individuals and groups (systems thinking). In other words, through critical reflection, individuals learn to be system thinkers.

Double-loop learning also leads entities, through critical reflection, to examine their espoused theories and theories-in-use (Anderson, 1997; Argyris, 1980). An espoused theory is a world view or value that entities believe they base their behaviour on, while a theory-in-use is the map they act on (Anderson, 1997; Argyris, 1980). In many instances, espoused theories differ from theories-in-use and entities are generally unaware of their theories-in-use. When they examine their theories-in-use, they consider the values they base their actions on, not as they *believe* them to be, but as they *are*. In doing this, entities are able to identify the match or mismatch between these theories and examine the governing variable/s that they may need to change in order to align these theories (Anderson, 1997; Argyris, 1980). It is evident that Argyris and Schön's (1996) organisational learning is linked to Senge's (1990) discipline of team learning, as discussed in Chapter Two.

The process of double-loop learning leads to deep learning where we examine aspects of ourselves that we often hold at a subconscious level (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Malhotra, 1996). The process of bringing these aspects to the conscious level tends to be a long and sometimes difficult process as we examine our own behaviours and their congruence with our espoused theories (Anderson, 1997; Argyris, 1980). For an individual this tends to be a long process; for an organisation that consists of many individuals, this process can be even longer.

A comparative summary of the single- and double-loop learning approaches can be seen in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Summary of Single- and Double-loop learning

	Single-loop learning	Double-loop learning
Description	• Error-detection-and-correction process • Strive to achieve existing objectives • Policies and processes remain the same	• Error-detection-and-correction process • Changes to organisational norms, policies and objectives
Features	• No questions or altering of values that drive the system • Work within the existing organisational framework • Improve or strengthen the status quo, the existing way things are done	• Examine underlying values and assumptions that drive the organisation • Identify values and assumptions that need to be changed to achieve new and changing organisational goals • Question relevance of plans to the survival of the organisation • Occurs during conflicts, disputes or situations demanding radically different responses • Adjusting the status quo to meet new challenges
Example	• Discussing which aspect of the marketing strategy needs to be improved to ensure a growth in sales	• Analysing the underlying approach to customers and product development to determine whether these are still appropriate for the new customer target market
Disadvantages	• No questioning or altering of theories, assumptions and values underlying policies and processes • No significant change in culture, systems, structure or power relations needed to cope with changing environment	• Time-consuming – requires reflection and collaboration

	Single-loop learning	Double-loop learning
Advantages	• In the context of a changing environment and the demands being placed on organisations – no advantages	• Facilitates organisational renewal – essential for long-term survival and growth • Enables the organisation to alter basic assumptions and paradigms and to discover more appropriate strategies for tackling new challenges

Adapted from: Hattingh & Smit (2004, p12)

With regard to adaptive learning and generative learning, adaptive learning is reactive and occurs as a reaction to environmental input, while generative learning is proactive, looking at the world in a way that focuses on enhancing the organisation's capacity to create its future (Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Malhotra, 1996). Malhotra (1996) distinguishes between adaptive and generative learning as "being adaptive and having adaptability" and stresses that organisations need generative learning with the attribute of adaptability and "should maintain themselves in a state of frequent, nearly-continuous change in structures, processes, domains, goals, and so on even in the face of apparently optimal adaptation". This type of learning places severe demands on organisations and their members and a concern that comes to mind is whether humans are capable of coping with such rapid and continuous change. It would seem that in our ever-changing environment, adaptability needs to be a basic function, and in order to cope it is necessary to understand change processes and change management, which will be discussed in Chapter Four. A comparison of adaptive and generative learning approaches can be seen in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Summary of Adaptive and Generative learning

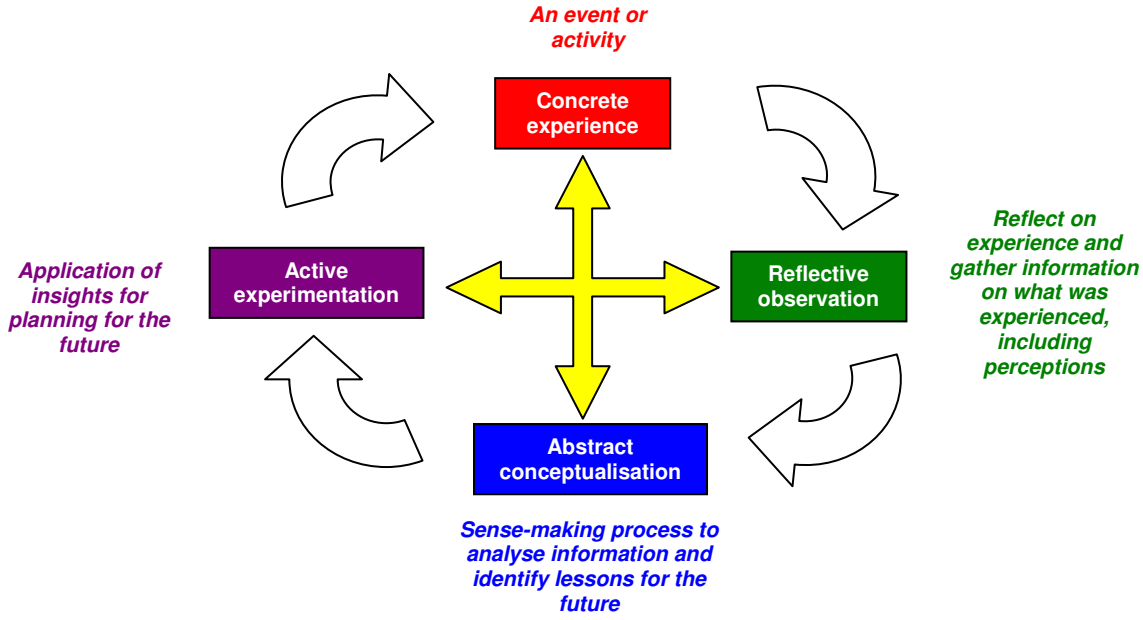
	Adaptive learning	Generative learning
Description	• Stimulus-response learning – reacts to environmental changes with limited actions • Does not tackle the problem directly	• Emphasises continuous experimentation and feedback in an ongoing analysis of how the organisation defines and solves problems
Features	• Similar to single-loop learning • Deals with solving current problems as they exist without considering the appropriateness of the solution for the future • Results in change, but within narrowly defined parameters • Focuses learning on one level at a time	• Similar to double-loop learning • Relies on systems thinking to address interrelated issues and how they impact one another • Involves changes in predominant ways of thinking that empower people and organisations to analyse how their actions can influence reality • Mistakes are translated into valuable learning experiences

	Adaptive learning	Generative learning
Example	• Planning salary adjustments in view of Government's announcement of inflation figures	• Investigating alternative remuneration packages to find new ways of recruiting and retaining highly skilled and innovative people, e.g. profit sharing, consulting, informal working relationships
Disadvantages	• Does not assist organisations to examine the way they define and resolve problems	• Need to develop the skill or awareness of systems thinking in order to perform – could be time consuming
Advantages	• Results in element of change	• Enables the organisation to learn what they need to do at a systems level and transform to the future that they create

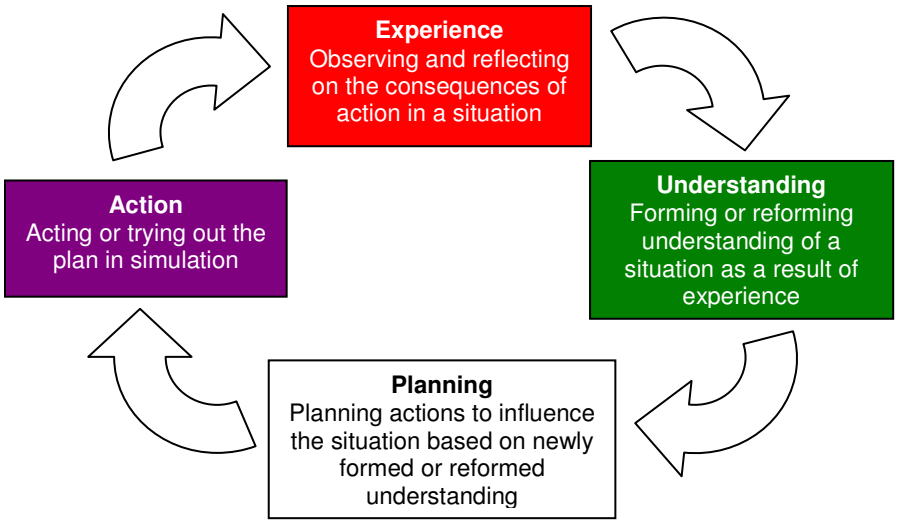
Adapted from: Hattingh & Smit (2004, p13)

Double-loop, generative learning can occur by going through the experiential learning cycle while single-loop, adaptive learning could be seen to take place through the action learning cycle (as illustrated in Figure 3.6, p73).

Experiential learning cycle



Action learning cycle



Single- and double-loop learning

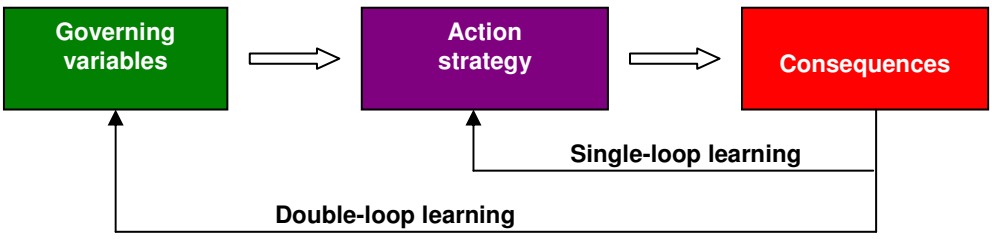


Figure 3.6: Comparison of experiential learning, action learning and single- and double-loop learning

The use of colour in Figure 3.6 (p73) illustrates the common aspects of the models of experiential learning, action learning and single- and double-loop learning. Experiential learning, action learning and double-loop learning include similar features. The stage of reflective observation in experiential learning includes reflection on perceptions, which can be likened to governing variables or values in double-loop learning. The stage of understanding in the action learning process includes inquiry and examination of assumptions, or underlying values. Double-loop learning includes a sense-making process (abstract conceptualisation in experiential learning or planning in action learning) where the consequences of actions are considered in light of perceptions to influence the way that action is taken in future (Tight, 1996; McGill & Beaty, 1992). The stage of abstract conceptualisation or planning can also be the stage where espoused theories and theories-in-use are considered, analysed and made sense of so that future actions reflect congruence between these theories.

Action learning in a team context can lend itself to a single-loop process if team learning is not facilitated (Senge, 1990). Often teams are narrowly focused on solving the problem at hand and do not consider the underlying values that influence their actions. The role of the facilitator will then be to expose and highlight assumptions so that these can be addressed and challenged, if necessary, for the purpose of improving future action (continuous improvement) (McGill & Beatty, 1992). If the process is not facilitated, the underlying values or perceptions (assumptions) that influence action may be overlooked resulting in a single-loop learning process.

Organisations are often quite content with engaging in single-loop, adaptive learning where problems can be quickly addressed at a superficial level by changing actions (Altman & Iles, 1998). However, many of these problems re-appear at a later stage, for example the action strategy had been addressed, but it is the governing variable that should be examined to ensure that the problem does not recur. When facilitating team interventions, I have noticed that when the team is led into the space of examining values, they are quite quick to throw down the anchor and stop themselves from sailing forward into this space. Double-loop, generative (experiential or action) learning involves reflecting critically, at a deeper level, not just on behaviours or actions, and many tend to find this a difficult process for various reasons – one being that perhaps we are not adequately skilled at critical reflection (Brookfield, 2000) and another being that reflection at this level can "hurt" as it requires us to examine taken-for-granted values that we have held closely and use as a compass or guide for behaviour, although we are not always aware that we do so. In order to identify these values, we are required through

double-loop learning to take a deep inward look, which is not always a pleasant exercise. If individuals have difficulty practising critical reflection and double-loop learning, how much more can we expect teams to experience difficulty where team members are not only vulnerable with one another, but also with outsiders?

Senge's model encourages double-loop learning, but it is questionable if this learning is attainable in organisations, irrespective of their size. The process of double-loop learning requires an environment of trust where individuals and teams are at ease with being vulnerable, and one can only wonder if this level of trust exists in organisations. Often, in the hope of developing trust between organisation members, team-building exercises are arranged, which are often treated as once-off events, where trust is intended to be developed over a day or weekend. The trust that is developed over that time is gradually lost once the team returns to the workplace owing to day-to-day workplace pressures, and a lack of support in the workplace for sustaining trust. Unless a conscious effort is made to maintain the trust, such as ongoing dialogues between the organisation members, the team-building exercise becomes a distant memory.

There may be some small organisations, such as family businesses, that can engage in double-loop learning as they are more likely to have a deep level of trust. But, as discussed in Chapter Two, families are also influenced by a set of beliefs and assumptions of their members (Ram & Holliday, 1993). Unless these beliefs and assumptions (governing variables) are addressed, the organisation and family members may be hindered from engaging in double-loop learning.

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Personal mastery	***Triple-loop learning***
Mental models	
Building shared vision	
Team learning	
Systems thinking	

Triple-loop learning

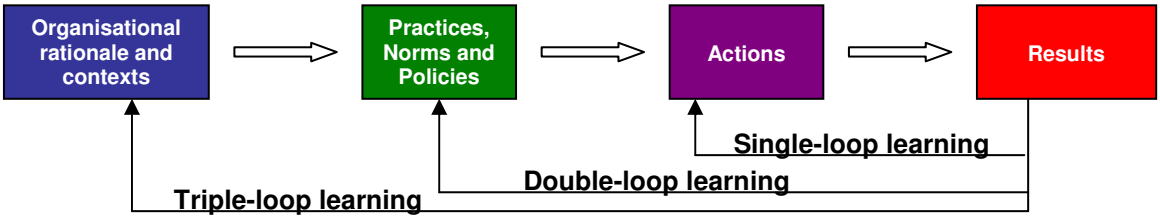


Figure 3.7: Triple-loop learning

Triple-loop learning is concerned with questioning key principles on which the organisation is based, inquiring into and challenging the underlying "why's" of the organisation's mission, vision, market position and culture (Altman & Iles, 1998; Isaacs, 1993). Triple-loop learning relates to the very purpose of our individual being or existence, where we question who we are and how that impacts on what we do, how we act and the results we achieve. It is a process of inventing where we become "aware of the limitations of all grand frameworks, creating ways of coming up with new structures or thought and action suitable for particular occasions and monitoring the effects of these frames" (Snell & Chak, 1998, p340). Within organisations, triple-loop learning is manifest through co-inventing where "members discover how they and their predecessors have facilitated or inhibited learning and produce new strategies and structures for learning" (Snell & Chak, 1998, p340).

From the above description, it is evident that triple-loop learning encompasses all of the disciplines of a learning organisation: there is a process of self-examination where individuals examine their purpose and the way they do things which relates to personal mastery. Mental models are reflected on and there is a process of co-inventing which involves team learning and building shared vision. The discipline of systems thinking integrates the other four disciplines in the triple-loop learning process and considers how these disciplines impact the system that the organisation operates in.

Triple-loop learning is a demanding process and inherent in this learning is critical reflection and introspection, requiring organisation members to think about how they think that impacts on what they do or are. Organisations or their members may not be open to this process. The founders or managers and directors may see this process as challenging them directly (Ram & Holliday, 1993) and are "often averse to risk such basic questioning" (Altman & Iles, 1998, p46). Furthermore, triple-loop learning may be resisted by organisation members where the association is made that the individual is part of the organisation and if the organisation is to change in a profound way, individuals, too, are to change and this may be an uncomfortable process – especially for individuals who come to work to earn money, rather than to experience profound change (Torbert, 1994). Some may be cynical and refer to spiritual organisations as being places to experience profound change, not business organisations.

However, triple-loop learning holds water if the way organisations conduct business is fundamentally influenced by the methodology that is impressed in its practice. If the

methodology promotes, for example, a certain process of learning, while what organisation members aspire to (such as a learning organisation) requires a different process of learning, individuals within the organisation may experience conflict between the two processes. By examining the root embedded in the methodology, this conflict can be understood and the processes of learning examined as part of the rationale of the organisation.

I have examined the hull of the vessel bit by bit, consulting theories I have about sailing and the



construction of a vessel. I now turn to thinking about the vessel in its entirety, considering how this vessel manages to function as a system and the theories that assist me in understanding this.

The following theories relate to the discipline of systems thinking, namely activity theory/ cultural-historical activity theory, actor-network theory, communities of practice and complexity theory. I propose a link of these theories to systems thinking based on the acknowledgement contained in the theories that in order for learning to take place, systems thinking in organisations and individuals is required. As systems thinking is the umbrella of the disciplines and integrates the other four disciplines, the theories listed above should relate to all the disciplines of the learning organisation. Activity theory/cultural-historical activity theory and actor-network theory do not fit into this framework as they do not link to each of Senge's disciplines, but they do link to the concept of a learning organisation. Communities of practice and complexity theory, on the other hand, display links to the various disciplines.

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Systems thinking	***Activity Theory/Cultural-Historical Activity Theory***

Activity Theory/Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

Activity theory is a "philosophical framework for studying different forms of human praxis as developmental processes, both individual and social levels interlinked at the same time" (Kuutti, in Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999, p62). Activity theory, as its name implies, focuses on activity as the unit of analysis (Fenwick, 2010a) where a historically evolving collective activity system is seen in its network of relations to other activity systems (Engeström, 2000). This theory posits that conscious learning emerges from the performance of activity and activity is a precursor to learning (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). The learner is the driving character in defining activity and knowing can only be interpreted through doing as the mental (mind) and physical (body) are interrelated (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). Actions become

understandable "when interpreted against the background of entire activity systems" (Engeström, 2000, p964) and thus learning is understood to take place within a (specific) context (Cooper, 2006; Cooper in Cooper & Walters, 2009).

Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) adds to activity theory by highlighting the "sociomaterial interactions particularly among artefacts (objects, tools, technologies, signs), system objects and patterns, individual/group perspectives, and the histories through which these dynamics emerged" (Fenwick, 2010a, p109). Learning is mediated through artefacts and cultural means (language, theories, technical artefacts, and norms and modes of acting) by participating in common activities with others (Fenwick, 2010a; Miettinen, 1999; 2001) and can lead to the system's objectives and practices expanding. Consciousness emerges in interaction through material activity with other individuals through the mediation of the artefacts in the context of a system (Fenwick, 2010a; Miettinen, 1999; Miettinen, 2001). Attention is also given to "divisions of labour, cultural norms and perspectives enmeshed in the system" (Fenwick, 2010a, p109) and the contradictions or conflict that occurs between these and the artefacts, which influence whether learning takes place – if the contradictions are addressed, learning occurs (Fenwick, 2010a).

Activity theory is based on activity systems and so a link can be made to the discipline of systems thinking, with its consideration of network relations of different systems. Systems thinking is "a framework for seeing interrelationships" (Senge, 1990, p68). It also considers underlying structures which shape individual actions (Senge, 1990), which relates to activity theory as these structures can be seen as part of the system artefacts. Senge (1990) also refers to systems thinking as a language for describing interrelationships, which, like CHAT, mediates learning.

Activity theory would appear to favour an activist learning style (Honey & Mumford, 1982). Someone who enjoys learning through doing would likely find resonance in activity theory/ CHAT. This could be problematic if the leader of an organisation is an activist and favours this learning style above all others, without considering how differently reflectors, theorists and pragmatists learn. Activities should thus cover all learning styles if organisation members are to learn through the various activities that they are presented with or expected to perform.

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Systems thinking	***Actor-Network Theory***

Actor-Network Theory (ANT)

Actor-network theory is viewed by its proponents as more of a sensibility than a theory (Fenwick, 2010a). This "sensibility" posits that learning, or knowledge building, is a joint exercise within a network or collective that is spread across time and space and includes animate and inanimate (books, mobile phones, measuring instruments, etc.) objects or actors (Edwards & Clarke, 2002; Fenwick, 2010a; Miettinen, 1999). "The more actors mobilised, the stronger and more durable the network" (Miettinen, 1999, p172). These actors influence each other through persuasion, coercion, resistance and compromise as they join together (Fenwick, 2010a) and so shape and constrain the network's activity (Spender, 1996). The networks and their activity give rise to skill or knowledge only recognisable within the networks (Fenwick, 2010a). For example, within a manufacturing organisation, labourers may negotiate with each other and their tools and materials on hand to perform a task if there is a breakdown of a machine that usually performs the activity.

The concept of a network and networks connecting to other networks can be linked to systems thinking – networks connect as they are a part of a larger network. However, the learning that occurs in these networks is constrained to the context of the network. This explanation seems to provide a limit to the learning that can take place in an organisation as actors are only exposed to the learning that takes place within a particular network. To harness and further encourage the learning that takes place within networks across an organisation, it seems necessary to understand what networks are at play, who and what are the actors in the various networks and to encourage additional networks to form or that they consist of varying actors. A variety of networks can also assist in overcoming silo learning that often takes place in organisations, that is where certain networks become disconnected from others in terms of their learning and actors are only exposed to the learning within that network (Edwards & Clarke, 2002; McDermott, 1999). If learning does not occur across networks, and remains within the context of a network, then the validity of this theory for the learning organisation is questionable as the networks are not contributing the development of systems thinking and the organisation being a learning one.

Furthermore, this theory implies that power relations come into play through the need for actors to exercise persuasion, coercion, resistance and compromise (Fenwick, 2010a). Power relations are not only evident in networks, but also in organisations, and are discussed in Chapter Four.

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Personal mastery	***Communities of Practice***
Mental models	
Building shared vision	
Team learning	
Systems thinking	

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice are, simply put, "groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise" (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p139) and these groups "share their experiences and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems" (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p140). Communities of practice consist of newcomers and old-timers, who are the masters or experts, within the community. Newcomers learn the practices of the community through legitimate peripheral participation and become old-timers through increasing centripetal participation (Lave, 1991). Competences are developed by newcomers as they engage in, commit and contribute to joint enterprise; build the community through relationships of mutual engagement; and participate in a shared repertoire of communal resources (language, routines, artefacts, tools, styles, stories, etc.) (Wenger, 1998; 2000).

Communities of practice can contribute to the discipline of personal mastery as newcomers develop their identity as a practitioner and become a full participant in the community while they learn the practises, skills and knowledge of the community (Lave, 1991).

Through engaging in a shared repertoire of communal resources, a community of practice opens itself for the discipline of mental models. If the community is reflective on its repertoire, this enables it to understand "its own state of development from multiple perspectives, reconsider assumptions and patterns, uncover hidden possibilities, and use this self-awareness to move forward" (Wenger, 2000, p230).

Concerning building shared vision, communities of practice can develop this discipline by encouraging alignment of its members through "a mutual process of co-ordinating perspectives, interpretations and actions" to realize higher goals (Wenger, 2000, p228).

Links can be seen between communities of practice and the discipline of team learning. A team is a social unit engaged in collective learning and activity. Teams provide sites for the cross-

fertilization of ideas and for setting learning norms (Altman & Iles, 1998; Senge, 1990), and can consist of "people who need one another to act" (Senge, 1990). Teams can be either formal or informal (Altman & Iles, 1998). Wenger (1998) and Wenger and Snyder (2000) state that communities of practice are informal, organise themselves, establish their own leadership (Wenger & Snyder, 2000); are defined by their knowledge rather than by task; and exist because participation in the community adds value to its members, not because they are institutionally mandated (Wenger, 1998). Although communities of practice should not be enforced as this often proves to be unsuccessful, managers can encourage these communities by bringing the "right people together", providing an infrastructure in which communities can thrive and measuring the communities' value in non-traditional ways (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p140). By doing this, the discipline of team learning through informal teams, as communities of practice, can be encouraged in the learning organisation (McDermott, 1999).

Communities of practice can also contribute to the discipline of systems thinking as members can be encouraged to think of themselves as a member of not only their community, but of a larger community, such as their workplace and so see themselves as connected to the larger "whole" (Lave, 1991; Wenger, 2000).

Communities of practice appears to be a theory that can be implemented in organisations in order for them to be learning ones (Cooper, 2006; Cooper in Cooper & Walters, 2009), as the tenets of the theory provide opportunities for the disciplines of a learning organisation to be practised. However, as is the case with Senge's model of the learning organisation, relations of power are inadequately addressed by the theory of communities of practice (Fox, 2000). Power relations are addressed in Chapter Four.

Learning organisation discipline	Embedded learning theory
Mental models	***Complexity Theory***
Team learning	
Systems thinking	

Complexity theory

Complexity theory is closely related to systems thinking and originates in, amongst others, general systems theory (Fenwick, 2010a). Complexity theory provides two premises concerning understanding learning processes in a system: firstly, context and person are inseparable when representing systems and, secondly, when emerging systems intentionally tinker with each other, change occurs (Fenwick, 2010a). The key theme is emergence where through events and actors being mutually dependent, dynamic and unexpected structures and behaviour are

produced (Fenwick, 2010a; Flood, 1999). This dynamic nature of interaction shifts the overall shape and direction of a system and creates new, unpredictable unions of action and identities that could not have been achieved independently (Fenwick, 2010a; Flood, 1999). Such systems are described as self-organising as the system adapts without the imposition of rules or devices (Fenwick, 2010a; Flood, 1999). "Out of …continuous and non-linear interactions emerge dynamic wholes that exceed their parts" (Fenwick, 2010a, p108) and new possibilities for action constantly emerge. Knowledge is thus constantly emerging and spills over into other systems, and connections between these systems (learners and the environment, including people, language, objects and technologies) are important for learning to occur. Learning is encouraged through experimentation leading to more sophisticated, flexible and creative action (Fenwick, 2010a).

Senge's mental models and team learning disciplines are also practised through complexity learning. "Human systems involve many people, each with their own interpretation and experience of social rules and practices that affect them. People therefore act in co-operation and/or in conflict" and through this they learn (Flood, 1999, p87).

The disciplines of personal mastery and building shared vision are less obvious to identify. As systems are in a constant state of flux, it may be difficult to identify when one is reaching personal mastery, but this in itself encourages lifelong learning, a principle of personal mastery, as one has to continually learn in order to understand the system. Building shared vision appears to be implicit and the shared vision may include awareness of the system in order to adapt and generate more creative action, which in turn could contribute to the sustainability and competitiveness of organisations.

3.6 So what? (Or Implications of theory for practise)

Knowledge and awareness of these learning theories is important for the development of a learning organisation as the application of these theories can assist in building or strengthening a learning organisation. Organisations which adopt these theories set the organisation on the path of developing the disciplines of a learning organisation. If organisations consciously implement these theories, they can continue to use the theories to strengthen the disciplines of the learning organisation.

However, knowledge and awareness of these theories may be a tall order for an organisation and thus the concept of a learning organisation as "reverential, utopian and mystical" (Garvin, 1993, p78) can be reinforced. How, then, can the learning theories that assist in developing a learning organisation be applied? How is individual learning translated into organisational learning? How is organisational learning harnessed and stored in the organisation's memory so that the learning can be taken forward?

Learning in the context of an organisation suggests that when individuals learn something, the organisation learns; but this is not necessarily the case. Sometimes the knowledge that is held by an individual fails to enter the stream of organisational thought and action, resulting in the organisation knowing less than the individuals who comprise it. There are also situations when the organisation knows more that its members, for example technology in an environment can allow an organisation to perform brilliantly, even though its members may not (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p7).

From observation and experience, the work of developing learning organisations is usually done with an organisation's leadership working in collaboration with organisational learning consultant/s. The consultant has the knowledge and expertise of how to implement the learning theories that translate into practices that lead to the learning disciplines. The consultant works with the leadership and its members to unearth and design practices that can be continued as a discipline. The relationship between the organisation and the consultant is a partnership that leads to a joint understanding of the specific needs and culture of the organisation. The practices that are designed also influence the organisation's culture and the culture influences the practices that will be adopted. Thus, an understanding of the organisation's culture assists in strengthening the actions undertaken by members of an organisation and the related discipline.

"It is the task of the learning organisation to integrate individual learning into organisational learning" (Wang & Ahmed, 2003, p8). The use of teams together with leadership can assist with bridging organisational and individual learning by focusing on key transforming processes of trust, support, training and development, open communications and 'role model' leadership (Altman & Iles, 1998, p50). Wang & Ahmed (2003) identify five focuses for transforming individual into organisational learning. Firstly, there is a *focus on the collectivity of individual learning* where individuals consciously interact with others taking cognisance of the role of the individual as well as organisational complexities (Wang & Ahmed, 2003, pp9-10). Secondly, there is a *focus on process or system* where organisations understand and manage their

experiences through knowledge management (Wang & Ahmed, 2003, p11). The third *focus of culture or metaphor* is where organisation members are viewed as knowledge workers who engage in conscious communal processes to generate, retain and leverage individual and collective learning to improve the performance of the organisational system (Wang & Ahmed, 2003, p11; Jensen, 2005, p61). Fourthly, a *focus on knowledge management*, which involves knowledge acquisition, dissemination, refinement, creation and implementation, can contribute to the organisation's performance (Wang & Ahmed, 2003, p12). Organisational knowledge is stored partly in individuals through their experiences, skills and personal capability and partly in the organisation in the form of documents, records, rules and regulations. Knowledge management thus requires an interaction between individuals and the organisation to strengthen each other's knowledge base and enhance the organisation's memory (Jensen, 2005). Lastly, *a focus on continuous improvement* is at the centre of a learning organisation and entails improving processes, involving members and developing them, satisfying customer needs and incremental innovation (Wang & Ahmed, 2003, p12).

In order to harness organisational learning, so that the learning can be taken forward and stored in the organisation's memory and become part of how the organisation operates, a "meaningful change in the processes, structures, assumptions or concerns connecting individuals" (Snell & Chak, 1998, p341), including artefacts and routines (Jensen, 2005) should take place and should cater for variations and experimentation within the context of the organisation's setting (Snell & Chak, 1998).

3.7 Conclusion

The concept of the learning organisation has embedded in it various learning theories and this chapter provided a theoretical framework for the learning organisation, illustrating the concept in terms of learning theories, both individual and workplace, and seeing how learning theories can inform the practice of a learning organisation. The many learning theories that are embedded in the learning organisation indicate that this concept is well-grounded in theory. In addition, the range of theories caters for broad application in the pursuit of the disciplines of a learning organisation – different theories can be implemented to attain a specific discipline. For example, in practising the discipline of personal mastery, theories that can inform this discipline are self-directed learning, action learning, triple-loop learning and communities of practice. Depending on the context and need of the organisation, the practitioner has a selection of theories to use and adapt to assist organisation members to practise personal mastery.

This chapter has also demonstrated the links between triple-loop learning, communities of practice and complexity theory to all learning disciplines. It can thus be concluded that in order to be a learning organisation, these theories should be focused on and, by employing one or all of these three theories, an organisation can be set on the path to becoming a learning organisation. The other theories discussed can be used to further develop the disciplines that they are linked to.

It is evident that Senge's concept of a learning organisation has a very broad base in learning theory. However, a question that comes to mind is whether this breadth is at the expense of depth. This question will be investigated and answered in the context of an organisation in the final chapter.



This chapter looked at features that lie below the water line of a sailing vessel. The other features will be reviewed in Chapter Four, namely sustainability and factors that impact the sustainability of small organisations in South Africa; how being a learning organisation can promote sustainability of the organisation; and obstacles and enablers to developing the facets of a learning organisation.

CHAPTER 4:
REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE -
PERUSING THE NAVIGATION MANUALS – PART 3: HOW TO STAY AFLOAT

4.1 Introduction



Chapters One and Two established that the pursuit of Senge's (1990) learning organisation is a worthwhile one. The previous chapter demonstrated that Senge's model is well-grounded in theory. However, knowledge of theory does not a sustainable sailing vessel make. Being a learning organisation contributes to the sustainability of organisations (Bennet & O'Brien, in Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Hitt, in Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Garvin, 1993; Senge, 1990) and this chapter continues to explore the aspects of a sailing vessel that contribute to sustainability.

This chapter starts by exploring what the term 'sustainability' means and looks at factors external and internal to organisations within the South African context. Leadership and culture are considered both in the context of sustainability and the learning organisation. As being a learning organisation contributes to its sustainability, this makes the pursuit of becoming a learning organisation worthwhile. This pursuit implies a process of change, and so change management is discussed with a view to developing the learning disciplines. A change process also implies that obstacles are likely to occur and obstacles to developing a learning organisation, as well as how to overcome them, are investigated. Enablers of a learning organisation, and small businesses as sustainable entities, are considered.

4.2 What does sustainability mean?

Many definitions of sustainability exist, and the area of business sustainability is a study in itself. There are many factors that impact sustainability. These include factors that are external and internal to organisations. External factors are economic, market, infrastructure and labour, social and regulatory while internal factors include financial, and management/leadership (Abor & Biekpe, 2007; Cagnin, Loveridge & Butler, 2006; Cant, 2012; Certo & Paul Peter, 1990;

Mohsam & van Brakel, 2011; Neneh, 2012; Olawale & Garwe, 2010; Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009). In reporting on sustainability, companies are now encouraged to include their Triple Bottom Line, that is to "define their worth in financial, social and environmental terms" (Norman & MacDonald, 2003, p3), a framework designed by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (Institute of Directors of Southern Africa, 2002; Jamali, 2006). The financial dimension includes the reduction of operating costs; the social component includes values, ethics and stakeholder relationships; and the environmental dimension includes the impact on the environment of processes, products or services produced by the company (Institute of Directors of Southern Africa, 2002; Jamali, 2006; Zhao, 2004).

For the purposes of this research, I will narrow the concept of sustainability and use a definition adapted from Zegarowski (2006) – corporate, or business, sustainability refers to a company's ability to generate long-term value through mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders, that is, sustainability may be viewed as the longevity, or survival, of an organisation. This definition is closely linked to a purpose of being a learning organisation - to ensure sustainability or long-term value.

4.3 Factors that impact on the sustainability of a small South African organisation

It is naïve to think that one factor influences the sustainability of an organisation more than another – all external and internal factors have a bearing on an organisation's sustainability. This section will provide an overview of the different sustainability factors experienced by small organisations in a South African context. Factors that are unique to the South African context will receive attention, such as the regulatory environment, as well as factors that particularly influence the internal environment of the organisation with regard to its sustainability and its ability to be a learning organisation, namely management and leadership of the organisation.

4.3.1 External factors impacting sustainability

External factors that impact the sustainability of small organisations include economic, market, infrastructure and labour, social, and regulatory factors.

Economic factors

Economic variables are one of the reasons for the high failure rates of small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa (Cant, 2012; Neneh, 2012). These variables include "fiscal and monetary policies of the government, inflation, interest rates and foreign exchange rates" (Olawale & Garwe, 2010, p732) and have a significant effect on organisations in different industries and in different locations, influencing the demand for goods and services and thus the sustainability of small businesses (Olawale & Garwe, 2010).

South Africa is currently experiencing challenges in its economic environment, inhibiting small business sustainability. These challenges include high inflation rates, low growth rates and declining exchange rates. Unemployment is high while consumption and confidence in many firms are low. All these factors affect sales, revenues and market potential for small businesses (Olawale & Garwe, 2010; Smit & Watkins, 2012).

With regard to ODC, which consults to the mining sector, the recent spate of illegal strikes at local mines, such as Lonmin (Marikana), Harmony Gold and Amplats in the latter part of 2012 and early part of 2013 has had an impact on ODC's business. The strikes have negatively impacted investor confidence and the local economy (Reuters, 2012; Steyn, 2012). Some of the mines that experienced strike action have shut down some shafts, resulting in job losses. On platinum mines, this is not solely a consequence of the strike action but also of the reduced demand internationally for the commodity (Reuters, 2012). Fewer human resources are needed and this reduction in need impacts ODC's business as human resource planning is a key part of ODC's products and services. ODC's market could be shrinking locally.

Owners and managers of small businesses need to be continually alert to economic and market changes to maintain their firms' performances (Olawale & Garwe, 2010).

Market factors

Closely linked to economic factors are market factors and the skills and abilities that enable small companies to participate in the market and remain sustainable. These factors can be broadly categorised into three main areas: competition, resource constraints, and communication and networking.

Competition

"Globalisation poses threats to local markets and tends to create the kinds of environment in which it is very difficult for SMEs to survive" (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009, p12). In South Africa, SMEs "do not complement larger organisations with specialised products or services, but they compete with larger enterprises in the same product markets" (Rogerson, in Smit & Watkins, 2012, p6327). These conditions contribute to an increase in competition for small businesses, impacting their sustainability (Cant, 2012).

To overcome these challenges, small businesses need to be aware of and research their competitors, ensure they provide a speciality of service (niche) and generate new alternatives for their future development, that is, plan to change and adapt, so that they can remain competitive and sustainable (Brunninge, Nordqvist & Wiklund, 2007; Mohsam & van Brakel, 2011).

Resource constraints

Small organisations/companies due to their size often lack the resources necessary to effectively participate in the market (Cant, 2012; Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009; Sawers, Pretorius & Oerlemans, 2008), such as a shortfall in marketing skills and abilities of the company. This shortfall can result in a deficiency in marketing actions (Cant, 2012) such as inconsistency in pricing, quality of products and services and delivery from suppliers (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009). A contributing factor to this deficiency is the pressure on the owner-manager, who is responsible for a wide range of tasks. Marketing may not receive the attention it requires (Cant, 2012).

A way to overcome these marketing resource constraints is to establish relationships with larger organisations (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009). Such relationships can allow small companies to access resources of larger companies, such as distribution channels and marketing infrastructure (Sawers, Pretorius & Oerlemans, 2008).

However, South Africa may not be conducive to such relationships as small and large companies compete in the same markets. Furthermore, large companies may behave opportunistically and appropriate the knowledge embedded in small partner companies or they may buy out the small company. This is not to say that such relationships do not and should not exist. If small companies enter into partnerships with large companies, there should be formal (monitoring) and informal (trust) mechanisms in place to mitigate opportunistic behaviour. However, partnering large organisations is not always possible – the more strategic capabilities a small business has, the lower the perceived partnership success (Sawers et al, 2008).

Effective marketing is essential for small business sustainability and even though resources may present a challenge to small firms, a mechanism to enhance marketing efforts is to appoint a staff member dedicated to this function, someone who thinks systemically and browses and scans the environment for competitor achievements and marketing opportunities (Mohsam & van Brakel, 2011).

Communication and networking

Communication and networking are important contributors to small business sustainability. Networking can be seen to be part of a small company's marketing efforts and provides opportunities for it to communicate information about its products and services and overcomes a low demand for them (Cant, 2012). Communication can be further enhanced through feedback loops from customers, local suppliers and community organisations, which can lead to a strengthening of relationships with these entities and their loyalty to the company (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009).

Networks can be developed through company representatives attending conferences, forums and seminars (Mohsam & van Brakel, 2011). Attendance at these events not only contributes to the development of the attendees' knowledge, but also provides an opportunity to develop relationships with other businesses. By being part of a wider business network, business practices can be shared and learned and skills can be transferred (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009). Such networks provide opportunities to collaborate on projects, provide business-to-business learning, publicise products and services and receive referrals (Dess & Picken, 2000; Gibb, 1997; The National Centre for Business & Sustainability, 2006; Zegarowski, 2006).

With regard to developing relationships, the benefits and risks of forming a relationship between a small company and larger companies have been previously discussed. However,

working with larger organisations, in non-competing markets, in a mentoring relationship can aid learning in the small company and also assist the small company to gain credibility (The National Centre for Business & Sustainability, 2006). If a small company has good relationships in the sector, with authorities and other companies, this can also assist it to be sustainable (Mohsam & van Brakel, 2011). Furthermore, if the small company's brand or reputation is positive, it is likely to be viewed as a favourable business partner (Ernst & Young, 2007), further enhancing its sustainability.

Infrastructure and labour

Infrastructure costs, including technology needed for the production of goods and services and the rising costs of electricity and petroleum in South Africa, can constrain small business sustainability (Olawale & Garwe, 2010). South Africa has a scarcity of suitably-skilled labour (Olawale & Garwe, 2010; Smit & Watkins, 2012). Small businesses often experience a high turnover of staff and associated replacement costs, in terms of time and productivity (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009), and experience challenges in attracting and retaining good quality staff, competing with larger companies who can offer higher salaries and more benefits (Mohsam & van Brakel, 2011). Furthermore, in trying to attain business, small companies often over-commit and do not have the capacity (skills or resources) to deliver (Mohsam & van Brakel, 2011). It is evident that infrastructure and labour constraints in South Africa pose an obvious challenge to small business sustainability.

Social factors

According to Olawale and Garwe (2010), social factors that inhibit small business sustainability in South Africa include crime and corruption. According to the South African Police Services Crime Statistics of 2009, crime on business is growing, with most robberies taking place in small business premises. Rather than focusing on how to grow their businesses and stay ahead of competitors, many small business owners concentrate on operational matters because of the high crime rate.

Corruption and low business ethics standards in South Africa also impact small businesses. In a study, "the World Bank (2005) found that about 70% of (South African) SMEs perceive corruption as an impediment to their business" (Olawale & Garwe, 2010, p732). Bribery and other unethical business practices occur frequently (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009). Furthermore, "the types of preconditions placed on organisations wanting to gain access to

funds or contracts serve to undermine, rather than protect, SME sustainability" (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009, p12) as SMEs may resort to unethical practices to secure business.

Regulatory factors

Regulatory factors such as compliance measures and legislation impact small business sustainability in South Africa. Many small businesses in South Africa experience the environment as over-regulated and cannot afford to put the required compliance measures in place (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009). Multiple taxation is also experienced by small businesses as burdensome (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009), as can the process to become a VAT (Value Added Tax) vendor in order to qualify for government work (Gleason, 2012). Less rigid regulations are a key element to fostering small business development and sustainability (Smit & Watkins, 2012).

Zegarowski (2006) highlights the impact of legislation on business sustainability. The role of legislation in South Africa as it impacts on business is an important consideration in ensuring small business sustainability. Legislation unique to South Africa is the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act of 2003. Meeting the requirements of this legislation is referred to as being 'BEE compliant'.

The purpose of this Act is to provide

> an integrated and coherent socio-economic process that directly contributes to the economic transformation of South Africa and brings about significant increases in the numbers of black people *(Black, Coloured, Indian and Chinese)* who manage, own and control the country's economy, as well as significant decreases in income inequalities. (Portfolio Committee on Trade & Industry, 2010 - italics mine).

In order to achieve this purpose, the Act currently includes elements of ownership, management control, employment equity, skills development, preferential procurement, enterprise development, and socio-economic development (Government Gazette No. 29617; Portfolio Committee on Trade & Industry, 2010). Companies are guided in the implementation of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act through the "Codes of Good Practice on B-BBEE" (Government Gazette No. 29617) as gazetted in February 2007. The codes provide a framework for measuring broad-based black economic empowerment across all sectors of the economy and define seven measurable B-BBEE scorecard elements. Organisations are required to obtain a verification certificate indicating its awarded B-BBEE (or BEE) status. The certificate is valid for one year only (Government Gazette No. 29617).

The B-BBEE Act was reviewed and gazetted towards the end of the research period – it went through public comment over a 60 day period from 5 October 2012. Reasons for amendments to the Act include revising the structure to ensure genuine and broad empowerment of South Africans, focusing more closely on the economic growth and development of the country (Political Analysis South Africa, 2011-2012), and to prevent the fraudulent act of "fronting" (Political Analysis South Africa, 2011-2012; SME Toolkit – South Africa, 2002-2012). "Fronting" is when "companies pretend to be compliant with the Act by placing black people in positions that would make it seem as if they either owned the company, or were at a level to make decisions in the company" (Sapa, n.d.). Furthermore, the South African economy is still controlled by a white minority; the BEE amendments seek to rectify this by placing the economy in the hands of the black majority. The amendments also aim to achieve better BEE compliance levels of companies than the previous overall Level Six (Political Analysis South Africa, 2011-2012). BEE levels are discussed later in this chapter.

Proposed amendments to the Act include a reduction of the current seven scorecard elements to five elements of ownership, management control, skills development, enterprise and supplier development, and socio-economic development (Government Gazette No. 35754). These elements and their weightings can be seen in Table 4.1, with the wording in blue indicating proposed changes to elements and their weightings. Employment equity is now included in management control and preferential procurement in enterprise and supplier development (Government Gazette No. 35754; Transcend Corporate Advisors, 2012). The new weightings introduce "priority elements" of ownership, skills development, and enterprise and supplier development (seen in their weighting) with minimum requirements that need to be met (Laher, 2012; Political Analysis South Africa, 2011-2012; Transcend Corporate Advisors, 2012).

Table 4.1: B-BBEE scorecard (targets for compliance)

Element	Current weighting	Proposed weighting
Ownership	20 points	25
Management control	10 points	15
Employment equity	15 points	-
Skills development	15 points	20
Preferential procurement	20 points	-
Enterprise and supplier development	15 points	40
Socio-economic development	5 points	5
Total	**100 points**	**105 points**

(Government Gazettes No. 29617 & 35754)

Another proposed change to the Act is the three bands that a company is measured against on the B-BBEE scorecard, with the wording in blue indicating proposed changes in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Company bands on the B-BBEE scorecard

Type of enterprise	Current annual turnover	Proposed annual turnover	Required scorecard elements - current	Required scorecard elements - proposed
Exempt Micro Enterprises (EMEs)	Less than R5 million (± €500 000)	Less than R10 million (± €1 000 000)	Not required to complete	Indicate the level of black ownership
Qualifying Small Enterprises (QSEs)	Between R5 million (± €500 000) and R35 million (± €3 500 000)	Between R10 million (± €1 000 000) and R50 million (± €5 000 000)	Four of the seven B-BBEE scorecard elements	All five elements of the B-BBEE scorecard
Generic Enterprises	More than R35 million (± €3 500 000)	More than R50 million (± €5 000 000)	All seven elements of the B-BBEE scorecard	All five elements of the B-BBEE scorecard

(Government Gazette No. 29617 & 35754)

Currently, the weightings of the scorecard are adapted for Qualifying Small Enterprises (QSEs) as they are only measured on four elements. Each element has a weighting of 25 points, to total 100 points. QSEs can select any four of the seven elements to be measured against. If they do not make a selection, the four elements of the seven that generate the highest scores form the scorecard measures (Government Gazette No. 29617). This means that these QSEs are measured according to various criteria, unlike Generic Enterprises that are measured against all seven elements. In order for the element to be measured in QSEs, compliance targets need to be met. As part of the amendments to the B-BBEE Act, these targets are being reviewed and QSEs will be measured against all scorecard elements. ODC fell into the category of Qualifying Small Enterprises, as its turnover in its current certification period issued on 31st January 2012 was based on its 2011 turnover of R32 837 562.

The compliance targets are translated into a score that indicates the BEE status (level) of organisations. It is important to note that it is possible to achieve more than the maximum amount of points by meeting certain scorecard criteria, such as bonus points. The BEE status levels are indicated in Table 4.3 (p95), with the wording in blue indicating proposed changes.

Table 4.3: B-BBEE scorecard (proposed targets for compliance)

B-BBEE status	Current qualification	Proposed qualification	B-BBEE recognition level
	(points on Generic Scorecard)		
Level One Contributor	≥ 100	≥ 100	135%
Level Two Contributor	≥ 85; < 100	≥ 95; < 100	125%
Level Three Contributor	≥ 75; < 85	≥ 90; < 95	110%
Level Four Contributor	≥ 65; < 75	≥ 80; < 90	100%
Level Five Contributor	≥ 55; < 65	≥ 75; < 80	80%
Level Six Contributor	≥ 45; < 55	≥ 70; < 75	60%
Level Seven Contributor	≥ 40; < 45	≥ 55; < 70	50%
Level Eight Contributor	≥ 30; < 40	≥ 40; < 55	10%
Non-compliant contributor	< 30	< 40	0%

Note: ≥ means greater or equal to; < means less than.

The "priority elements" of ownership, skills development, and enterprise and supplier development have amended requirements and scoring. Currently, Exempt Micro Enterprises (EMEs) are awarded Level Four status, but if they are more than 50% black-owned, they are promoted to Level Three status (Government Gazette No. 29617). Amendments to the B-BBEE Act state that if EMEs are more than 50% black-owned, they qualify for a promotion to Level Two status. 100% black-ownership qualifies them for Level One status (Government Gazette No. 35754). Changes to the skills development element include the awarding of points for employing unemployed black people and absorbing black learners from learnerships into the workforce. Concerning enterprise and supplier development, recognition will be given for early payment to suppliers. The proposed amendments also state that the supplier must be value-adding to the procurer and more points are awarded for the procurement of such majority black-owned suppliers (Government Gazette No. 35754).

Companies that adhere to the BEE standards stipulated in the codes increase their chances of successfully tendering for government work, applying for licenses, getting authorization for projects or having concessions granted (Horwitz & Jain, 2011).

Small companies in South Africa are mainly EMEs or QSEs and often provide products and services to larger companies (Generic Enterprises). "Where private sector firms do not necessarily transact directly with the state or its agencies, the 'cascade effect' pressurizes them

towards compliance given the supply chain effect of supplier compliance in order to secure business" (Horwitz & Jain, 2011, p309). Thus, for large companies to remain BEE compliant, the small companies that they procure products or services from should be BEE compliant so that the larger company is better able to meet its BEE targets. If companies have a high BEE status (level) they tend to be viewed more favourably in the procurement process as the procurer can score more points for this category. If small companies are not BEE compliant, their sustainability may be threatened.

The amendments to the B-BBEE Act may place more pressure on small businesses. QSEs will be required to revisit their BEE strategies to ensure that they are able to meet the criteria of all five scorecard elements so that their entire scorecard is not discounted (Government Gazette No. 35754; Laher, 2012). QSEs need to ensure that they are able to meet the threshold requirements of ownership and skills development or ownership and enterprise and supplier development (Government Gazette No 35754; Laher, 2012) - failure to do so may result in their status being discounted by one level (Government Gazette No 35754), potentially making them less attractive as suppliers or business partners. However, companies that previously fell into the QSE band may benefit from the amendments if their status changes to EME (Exempt Micro Enterprise), owing to the revised turnover ceiling.

Small businesses that are not BEE-compliant may find it difficult to secure government contracts or participate in procurement programmes. A form of "fronting' may be encouraged as black-owned EMEs could bid for work on behalf of white companies that are unable to meet scorecard requirements (Gleason, 2012).

The amendments to the Act have been criticised with regard to contributions to socio-economic development – 100% of the contributions are to go to black people. Companies donating to charities (such as orphanages) that care for white and black people may have their contributions discounted for scorecard purposes (Gleason, 2012). If small companies are not able to meet the amendments to the B-BBEE Act, their sustainability may be threatened.

The amendments to the Act may be intended to speed up the broad empowerment of South Africans and the economic development and growth of the country, but the approach is mechanistic rather than transformative, requiring a high level of monitoring and reporting to measure and ensure compliance with the Act (Horwitz & Jain, 2011). The requirements of the amendments increases the complexity of attaining a BEE rating and may prove to be onerous

for businesses, especially since it is a voluntary process, and its success so far has been dependent on private sector goodwill (Gleason, 2012).

These legislative amendments pose challenges even to currently BEE-compliant companies. Small businesses need to focus on increasing their black ownership if they want a high BEE status to increase their chances of securing business. The alternative is to 'go out of business' (Gleason, 2012).



As with any vessel sailing upon the ocean, the external environment of the wind, waves and weather influences its ability to remain afloat. In the context of an organisation, its ability to operate is impacted by external factors such as economic, market, infrastructure and labour, social, and regulatory influences its sustainability. However, an organisation may cope externally but still not be sustainable, owing to internal factors.

4.3.2 Internal factors impacting sustainability

Internal factors that impact the sustainability of small organisations include finance, and management and leadership.

Finance

Many small businesses experience finances as one of their major challenges due to insufficient cash flow or scarce cash reserves, impeding their sustainability (Mohsam & van Brakel, 2011; Neneh, 2012; Olawale & Garwe, 2010; Smit & Watkins, 2012). They also have difficulty accessing finance or credit as banks are less inclined to finance small businesses (Smit & Watkins, 2012). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, preconditions tend to exist for SMEs to access funds or contracts, such as BEE compliance (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009). If businesses are unable to meet these preconditions, their sustainability could be at risk.

One of the proposed amendments to the B-BBEE Act is that recognition will be given for early payment to suppliers – companies can earn points towards the scorecard element of enterprise and supplier development (Government Gazette No. 35754). This amendment could assist suppliers with short-term funding. This is likely to be a welcome change as it would assist small businesses to cope with one of their major challenges.

Management and leadership

The challenge in small businesses is that they tend to be owned by founders and managed by the founder-owner (as discussed in Chapter Two). The owner plays a dual role of manager and leader and is responsible for a wide range of tasks (Cant, 2012). In managing the business, he/she is responsible for and involved in day-to-day operations (short-term focus). In leading the business, he/she is concerned with setting the strategy and vision for the organisation (long-term focus) (Brunninge, Nordqvist & Wiklund, 2007; Stonehouse & Pemberton, 2002).

Management

The business experience and management skills of owner-managers influences the sustainability of small enterprises (Cant, 2012; Mohsam & van Brakel, 2011; Olawale & Garwe, 2010; Neneh, 2012; Smit & Watkins, 2012). Small business owners require a wide range of management skills which include, but are not limited to, people management, risk management, marketing management, knowledge management, finance management, quality management and in the context of ODC, project management.

Owners as managers need to have effective people management skills: acquiring quality staff, planning staff, managing and minimising staff turnover, training staff and ensuring their productivity (Ernst & Young, 2007; Smit & Watkins, 2012). Part of staff planning is succession planning, which is sometimes problematic in small businesses - the business tends to be intrinsically entwined with the owner, and the owner has extensive knowledge and experience making it difficult to plan for a successor. Succession planning can impact the viability of the business on the retirement of the owner-founder (Coulson-Thomas, 2007; Mohsam & van Brakel, 2011).

Risk management is an activity that is not widely practised in small businesses, as "South African SMEs do not aspire to corporate governance best practices such as the non-compulsory implementation of King III" (Smit & Watkins, 2012, p6325) of which risk management is a component. Owner-managers may also lack risk management skills. Risk management can help owner-managers anticipate and mitigate risks and assist them to achieve acceptable results at reduced costs (Smit & Watkins, 2012).

Owner-managers require the ability to survey and respond to the environment in which their businesses operate and need marketing management skills so that they can act appropriately (Cant, 2012).

Knowledge management is a skill that owner-managers should have. Mohsam and van Brakel (2011) state that the management of knowledge internally is important for a company's competitive advantage and owner-managers need to ensure that they have formal and informal mechanisms in place to store knowledge in the organisational memory. Formally, technological systems and processes can be used, while informally meetings and debriefings can be held.If a small company networks and/or forms alliances with large companies, there should be mechanisms in place to safeguard against unintended knowledge transfers that may negatively impact the small company's competitive advantage, such as a "clear specification of collaborative outcomes and monitoring the behaviour of the partner" (Sawers et al, 2008, p180).

Managing financial resources is key to small business sustainability and is a requisite skill for owner-managers who need to ensure that their businesses remain solvent, profitable and have adequate cash flows (Coulson-Thomas, 2007).

Quality management skills practised by owner-managers can assist with the sustainability of small businesses as quality controls and the setting of standards can enhance the products and services provided (Olawale & Garwe, 2010), ensuring that the businesses' clients return to them.

The nature of ODC's business is project-based, thus project management skills would be an essential skill for managers of this small business. These skills assist with the planning and control of time, cost and quality of projects (Munns & Bjiermi, 1996) and an overrun on any of these aspects can influence the profitability of a company and thus its sustainability.

Small business owner-managers may possess the necessary management skills, but if they are unable to perform the role of leader, their businesses are not likely to be sustainable.

Leadership

Mirjam van Praag (2003) states that the sustainability of a small company is largely dependent on the company's leadership. As discussed in Chapter Two, the leaders of small organisations tend to be founder-owners. Leadership in small businesses requires that founder-owners/owner-managers have entrepreneurial, creative and strategic mindsets, "a way of thinking about business and its opportunities that captures the benefits of uncertainty" (Neneh, 2012, p3364). This type of mindset requires that owners focus on the long-term, while the tendency in small

businesses is to engage mostly in short-term thinking (Neneh, 2012; Stonehouse & Pemberton, 2002), impacting on their competitiveness and sustainability (Bonn, 2001; Stonehouse & Snowdon, 2007). To overcome this tendency, small businesses can appoint a board of directors with outside (external to the business) directors and make better use of their top management teams (Abor & Biekpe, 2007; Brunninge et al, 2007; Coulson-Thomas, 2007; Gabrielsson & Huse, 2005).

A board of directors can assist with providing a forum for strategic discussions to take place, focused on the long-term (Brunninge et al, 2007; Coulson-Thomas, 2007; Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009). Outside directors can be beneficial for the growth and development of small businesses (Gabrielsson & Huse, 2005) as they are not operationally involved and are able to think freely concerning strategic alternatives (Brunninge et al, 2007). Boards can also assist with ensuring corporate governance is practised by infusing better management practices and stronger internal auditing (Abor & Biekpe, 2007) and so enhance the legitimacy and reputation of small businesses (Brunninge et al, 2007).

However, owners may be apprehensive about appointing a board owing to a perceived loss of control and the costs associated with setting up a board (Brunninge et al, 2007; Coulson-Thomas, 2007). Businesses can be creative in how they compensate directors, as compensation does not have to be monetary (Coulson-Thomas, 2007). If owners resist the concept of a board of directors, they can instead make better use of their top management teams, provided that the teams are diversified in their make-up so that they can engage in strategic, creative and innovative discussions (Bonn, 2001; Brunninge et al, 2007). Top management teams can influence the way their small businesses process and interpret information about their markets and customers and this 'insider' knowledge can impact their strategies (Brunninge et al, 2007). It is important for top management teams to ensure that time is scheduled to have strategic dialogues and that these do not become operationally-focused (Bonn, 2001). To engage in strategic conversations, top management teams should practise systems thinking (Mintzberg, 1994).

It is a widely accepted view that the leadership of an organisation sets the tone for the culture of the organisation (Dess & Picken, 2000; Mason, 2007; Senge, 1990) - as the leader displays certain attitudes and behaviours, he/she sets the tone for the rest of the organisation concerning the way things are done (as noted in Chapter Two). In order to relieve some of the demands that they experience, owing to the nature of leading and managing a small business, leaders

(founder-owners) should encourage a certain culture. For example, a "culture of environmental awareness" where the organisation is "in touch" with its environment, responsive to the early signs of change with regard to opportunities and threats (Dess & Picken, 2000). A culture of building relationships of trust and confidence with key stakeholders should also be encouraged (Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2009) as

> its ability to survive will be a function of its ability to learn from these stakeholders, to educate these stakeholders, to build trust and interdependency with these stakeholders, to use them to scan the wider business environment and to define, meet and bring forward their future needs. (Gibb, 1997, p18)

In addition, "progressive organisations have realised the need to nurture the principles that underpin the concept of a learning organisation" (Jamali, 2006, p814) in order to ensure its sustainability. These principles include a learning culture and continuous learning; reflection on actions to adjust mental models and organisational thinking; actions for the future and an awareness of the systems (economic, social and environmental) that impact the organisation; team building and shared purpose; and information sharing and collaboration (Ernst & Young, 2007; Cagnin, Loveridge & Butler, 2006; Jamali, 2006).

The above strategies focus largely on what leaders could **do** in order for their organisations to be sustainable. However, sustainability also depends on how leaders should **be**, the qualities they should display, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

4.4 How being a learning organisation contributes to sustainability

Chapter Two referred to various authors (Bennet & O'Brien, Garvin, Hitt, Senge) who argue the departure point of this research. Being a learning organisation contributes to sustainability because learning enables people to gain skills, knowledge and insight that enable them to adapt to situations. As organisations are constituted of people, organisations, by default, are able to adapt (Robinson, Anumba, Carrillo & Al-Ghassani, 2006; Senge, 1990; Wang & Ahmed, 2003). If organisations are able to adapt to changing environments, then they are likely to be sustainable. This process of learning and adaptation is not as clear-cut as presented here – the learning that takes place in an organisation is a process that is more involved and more complex than learning in individuals and small groups, as discussed in Chapter Three. However, the premise remains that through learning, organisations are more likely to adapt and be sustainable. Within South Africa and small organisations, this sustainability can be encouraged by developing organisations into learning organisations, and by so doing, continue to employ 70%

of the population (Cant, 2012, p1107) and contribute 36%, or potentially more, of GDP (Olawale & Garwe, 2010, p729).

4.5 Developing the sustainability of small organisations

The facets of leadership and organisational culture for a learning organisation were discussed in Chapter Two. This section expands on the leadership and organisational culture required to develop the sustainability of an organisation, which overlaps with how to change these facets to develop the organisation into a learning organisation. As organisations will most likely go through a change process to develop into a learning organisation, approaches to change management will be discussed. Furthermore, how specific disciplines can be developed in building a learning organisation will be discussed, as well as strategies that can be used to develop the discipline and contribute to the sustainability of the organisation. It would be naive to think that such a change process would be plain sailing and so challenges that are experienced in change processes will also be discussed.

4.5.1 Leadership and organisational culture

Earlier in this chapter, there was a discussion on what leaders can **do** to sustain their organisations. This section looks at how leaders should **be** for this purpose.

Kotter (1990, p104) states that leadership "is about coping with change" in order to cope with the business world that has become increasingly volatile and competitive. This change should be constructive and requires that leaders set a direction by developing a vision of the future and strategies that support the changes that enable the attainment of the vision. As such, a leader needs to be **visionary**. This vision will lead to the leader performing certain actions that contribute to the sustainability of the organisation, such as aligning people by creating coalitions and networks that encourage informal relationships and share information across the organisation (Dess & Picken, 2000; Kotter, 1990; Lee, Bennett & Oakes, 2000). A visionary leader is also able to motivate and inspire employees as this is key to generating highly energized behaviour "important for coping with the inevitable barriers to change" (Kotter, 1990, p107). This motivation involves stressing the values of employees, involving them in decisions regarding how to achieve the vision so as to encourage commitment to it (Dess & Picken, 2000), supporting their efforts to achieve the vision through coaching and feedback, and

recognising and rewarding success, which gives a sense that the organisation, in turn, cares about them (Kotter, 1990).

These values (**be**-ing) and behaviours (**do**-ing) exhibited by a visionary leader may appear to be manipulative – the leader acts in a certain way so that his/her organisation can continue into the future. However, a leader also needs to be credible so that his/her message can be believed. A number of aspects contribute to leadership credibility and include the track record of the leader, the message content, the communicator's reputation for integrity and trustworthiness and the match between words and actions of the leader. Leaders should value strong leadership and strive to create it, and so develop a leadership-centred culture (not to be confused with a leader-centred culture) (Kotter, 1990). This may be challenging for the leader of a small organisation to do because, as discussed in Chapter Two, the leaders of small organisations tend to be owner-managers and may see an emerging leader as a threat because the authority, information and knowledge of the owner can be challenged (Wyer, Mason & Theodorakopoulos, 2000).

Leaders should also be **servants** and be willing to assume a variety of roles, such as coach, provider of information, teacher, facilitator, supporter, listener and decision-maker, depending on what the need in the organisation and for their employees is (Dess & Picken, 2000). Evidence of leaders as servants can be seen in the creation of an empowering environment – one "in which employees can achieve their potential as they help move the organisation towards its goals" (Dess & Picken, 2000, p22); where the needs of employees are served so that the leader does not have to do employees' jobs for them, but the environment enables them "to learn and progress on the job" (Dess & Picken, 2000, p22). Such an environment produces business results as well as supports personal growth.

Where leadership for sustainability and a learning organisation meet

Chapter Two included a discussion on the type of leadership and culture that supports and is indicative of a learning organisation. These elements are common to the type of leadership and culture required for a sustainable organisation. However, a theme that needs to be stressed for leadership for sustainability and a learning organisation is servant-leadership.

Senge does not view leadership in the traditional, Western sense where "leaders are heroes who 'rise to the fore' in times of crises" (Senge, 1990, p340) to lead people who lack personal vision, are powerless and unable to master the forces of change. Senge's view is far more dynamic in that leaders are "responsible for *building organisations* where people continually

expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models – that is, they are responsible for learning", they empower people who at the end of a task can say "we did it ourselves" (Senge, 1990, pp340-341).

In a learning organisation, Senge (1990) sees the leader as performing three roles: designer, steward and teacher. The leader is responsible for designing the learning process and developing the vision, values and mission of the organisation; he/she is responsible for taking care of (stewarding) the organisation, its members and its vision, value and mission; and the leader is responsible for teaching or helping others to constantly see reality, the picture of the system (Senge, 1990). Such leaders are characterised by servantship and a willingness and openness to learn (Senge, 1990, p359), known as servant-leadership, which is a term originated by Robert Greenleaf:

> The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead… The best test is…: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants. (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002, p27)

Senge has a non-traditional view of the organisation and as such it follows that he also has a non-traditional view of leadership. Servant-leadership is contrasted with traditional leadership and can assist in developing the five disciplines as can be seen in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Traditional vs Servant leadership and the five disciplines

Traditional leadership	Servant leadership	Discipline servant-leadership develops
Motivated by personal drive to achieve.	Motivated by desire to serve others.	Team learning
Highly competitive; independent mindset; seeks to receive personal credit for achievement.	Highly collaborative and interdependent; gives credit to others generously.	Team learning Building shared vision
Understands internal politics and uses them for personal wins.	Sensitive to what motivates others and empowers all to win with shared goals and vision.	Building shared vision Personal mastery
Focuses on fast action. Complains about long meetings and about others' being too slow.	Focuses on gaining understanding, input, and commitment from all parties.	Building shared vision Systems thinking
Relies on facts, logic, proof.	Uses intuition and foresight to balance facts, logic, proof.	Mental models
Controls information in order to maintain power.	Shares big-picture information generously.	Building shared vision Systems thinking
Spends more time telling, giving orders. Sees too much listening or coaching as inefficient.	Listens deeply and respectfully to others, especially to those who disagree.	Team learning Mental models

Feels that personal value comes from individual talents.	Feels that personal value comes from mentoring and working collaboratively with others.	Personal mastery Team learning
Sees network of supporters as power base and perks and titles as a signal to others.	Develops trust across a network of constituencies; breaks down hierarchy.	Building shared vision
Eager to speak first; feels his/her ideas are more important; often dominates or intimidates opponents.	Most likely to listen first; values others' input.	Team learning
Uses personal power and intimidation to leverage what he/she wants.	Uses personal trust and respect to build bridges and do what's best for the 'whole'.	Building shared vision Systems thinking
Accountability is more often about who is to blame.	Accountability is about making it safe to learn from mistakes.	Team learning
Uses humour to control others.	Uses humour to lift others up and make it safe to learn from mistakes.	Personal mastery

(Adapted from McGee-Cooper & Trammel, 2002, pp145-146).

If leaders are able to practise servant-leadership, it would seem that they would place their organisations on the path to a learning organisation. My experience, however, has indicated that there are very few leaders who practise this leadership style – they may display some of the characteristics of a servant leader as tabulated, but rarely all characteristics. As such, it may be necessary to have a team of leaders who are able to display all qualities between them. In small organisations, however, the owner-manager tends to be the leader, and so the gap in characteristics may be accentuated.

Although the traditional view of leadership may be presented in a negative light in Table 4.4 (p104), it is evident that this type of leadership is driven by attaining quick results, and the descriptions used indicate a style that can be readily employed in a fast-moving world. However, this type of leadership can be a stumbling block to the learning organisation and can impede sustainability as little time is given to understanding the environment, with the result that action may be taken, but it may not be the appropriate action. The traditional view of leadership also tends to be so entrenched in organisations, individuals and leaders themselves that it seems necessary for leaders to change their existing mental models concerning leadership if they are to lead as servants so that their organisations can learn: "Servant-leadership requires a revolution in thinking, intention and practices applied first to oneself" (Showkeir, 2002,p159). If such a leadership style exists in an organisation, the culture should reflect the corresponding values and behaviours.

Servant-leadership does not readily occur in many organisations as the basic assumption exists (largely throughout entire organisations) that only top management can cause significant change (Senge, 1996). Other hindrances to leading an organisation to learn are that leaders may view the learning organisation initiative as a fad; leaders encourage compliance rather than commitment to initiatives such as the learning organisation; and that leaders tend to use initiatives to encourage competition rather than collaboration (Senge, 1996). Thus, in order to develop the leadership that is required in a learning organisation, leaders need to be developed first (Charlton, 1992) and need to change their existing mental models concerning leadership (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith, 1994).

Organisations tend to have various mental models, for example that leaders are responsible for decision-making and that they are the only people in the organisation who are capable of this task (van Niekerk & Waghid, 2004). O'Brien of Hanover Insurance in the USA states that, "It's not about making decisions. If I do a good job of understanding tough issues and clarifying and disseminating our principles, good decisions can be made throughout the organisation" (Senge, 1990, p346). With change in their mental models, leaders are able to change the systems, processes and procedures to support the changes (Senge, 1990).

In addition, leaders should display the disciplines of a learning organisation and in order to develop these disciplines leaders may be required to learn the skills that will enable them to display the discipline. A requisite skill for the disciplines of a learning organisation is that of critical reflection. This skill can be developed further if leaders have 'critical friends', as discussed in Chapter Two, to assist them in developing their ability to reflect critically.

Leaders contribute largely to the culture that is adopted in an organisation (Kotter, 1990). In order for an organisation to reflect a "learning culture" in a learning organisation, the support and commitment of leadership is required. The characteristics of a learning culture were discussed in Chapter Two, along with practices evident of a learning culture. In addition to this culture, the organisation should have an adaptive culture, enabling it to adapt to the demands of a changing environment in order to "secure its long-term competitive advantage" (Viljoen & Klopper, 2001, p54), that is its sustainability.

This culture can be brought about by organisations engaging in generative learning, resulting in learning organisations

> that can transform themselves successfully, members share a feeling of confidence that the organisation can deal with whatever threats and opportunities come down the pike; they are

> receptive to risk-taking, experimentation, innovation, and changing strategies and practices whenever necessary to satisfy the legitimate interests of stakeholders – customers, employees, shareowners, suppliers, and the communities where the company operates. (Viljoen & Klopper, 2001, p53)

To develop the leadership and culture that is necessary to bring about a learning organisation, which is a sustainable entity, the organisation is likely to experience a change process, which will incorporate developing the learning disciplines.

4.5.2 Change management

> The global business environment is changing faster than ever. We are living in an era where businesses constantly need to reshape their ideas merely to survive. But to achieve sustained success it is not sufficient merely to manage existing operations better, businesses need to do things radically different to secure an advantage over their competitors. Thus, in the future, we shall need to focus …not on restructuring the organisation but on transforming it. (Carnall, 2003, p14)

The literature that has been reviewed intimates the learning organisation is an organisation able to keep up with the changing business environment. In transforming an organisation to a learning organisation, a change process is necessary, so that the disciplines of a learning organisation can be developed (Henderson, 1997). In order for organisations to become learning organisations, their leaders need to be the forerunners of this change process. Before embarking on developing a learning organisation, leaders need to "recognise the need for change and to persuade other key people in the organisation to understand the seriousness for the need for change" (Viljoen & Klopper, 2001, p52). The need for change has to affect both the head (cognitive) and the heart (emotions) of organisation members – they should see the benefits of the change as well as be touched by it (Kets De Vries, 2001). There should also be an awareness of the process of change, how change is resisted and how to overcome the resistance to change at an individual and organisational level so that "by applying the insights derived from individual change to the domain of organisational transformation, we can induce, facilitate, and even speed up organisational change" (Kets De Vries, 2001).

Various models of the change process exist, namely the incremental model, where "change takes place through successive limited and negotiated shifts" (Coldwell, Williamson & Cameron, 2007, p124); the punctuated equilibrium model where organisations experience "short periods of radical change followed by long periods of stability" (Coldwell et al, 2007, p124); and the continuous transformation model that suggests that organisations need to be in a continuous state of change and have the capacity to regularly and fundamentally change in order

to survive (Coldwell et al, 2007). Senge's model appears to be a continuous transformation model and he suggests that the "learning disciplines flourish more readily in organisations undergoing organic change compared with those undergoing driven change" (Senge et al, 1994, p121). However, Senge has also stated that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to developing a learning organisation as "everyone's needs are different" (Senge et al, 1994, p15) and in introducing the five disciplines, "it's difficult to practice all five disciplines…at once" (Senge et al, 1994, p77) and so a serial progression is recommended, starting with systems thinking. A study conducted by Coldwell et al (2007, p133) has, however, suggested that forced change, rather than organic change, using the punctuated-equilibrium change model, may "increase the perceived awareness of the importance of these disciplines in generating effective work outcomes".

The model that is used to introduce the learning disciplines to an organisation is not as important as the type of approach that is taken – a human-centred approach is essential, with less focus on the technical aspects of change (Lee et al, 2000). Table 4.5 summarises such a human-centred approach to organisational change that can be used with the corresponding steps of the individual change process which may be experienced during each stage. These stages may not necessarily correspond as indicated, but do give an indication of what can be expected at the different stages. The introduction of a learning discipline is suggested for each stage, starting with systems thinking (as suggested by Senge et al, 1994), so as to build a learning organisation throughout the change process.

Table 4.5: The change process at an organisational, individual and learning discipline level

Stage	Organisational change	Individual change	Learning discipline to be introduced
1	Awareness of change process	Concern	Systems thinking
2	Creating a shared mindset	Confrontation	Building shared vision
3	Changing behaviour	Clarification	Mental models
4	Building competencies, practices, attitudes	Crystallization	Personal mastery
5	Improving business performance	Change	Team learning

Adapted from Kets De Vries (2001).

In stage 1 when organisation members become aware of the change process, at an individual level they may experience concern. It would be worthwhile to introduce the discipline of systems thinking during this stage so as to provide organisation members with the reasons for the change, relating the change to the inter-relatedness of the system. For example, a rationale

similar to the quotation by Carnall (2003) at the beginning of this section could be used to assist in allaying members' concerns.

During stage 2 it is important for the organisation to create a shared mindset so as to overcome initial concern by devising a picture of the future. Developing a shared mindset assists organisation members to confront the change that is to take place. The discipline of building shared vision can be aptly introduced at this stage so that all organisation members participate in creating the future of the organisation they desire, encouraging buy-in to the change.

Stage 3 is a stage where self-examination and reflection takes place – the organisation looks at how to change its culture and practices, and individuals clarify the changes that are required of them. In order for these changes to be made, it is necessary for organisation members to examine their mental models and hidden assumptions so that they can embrace the changes they need to make, ensuring that they will not resort to old ways of doing things, that do not have a place in the learning organisation.

During stage 4, the organisation goes about changing and building competencies and practices and at that time individuals experience crystallization where they work through the changes they need to make and increase their self-knowledge. As such, this stage is well timed with introducing and supporting the discipline of personal mastery.

Stage 5 is where individuals accept the change and internalise changes they need to make, and business performance improves. By introducing the discipline of team learning, the organisation can further improve performance by sharing information and learning together.

As with all change processes, resistance to change is likely to be experienced, such as fear of the unknown, fear of lacking the skills to change, a perceived loss of freedom and the loss of alliances or friends (Kets De Vries, 2001). Other barriers (resistors) that further complicate a change process include a commitment to the status quo (the current way of being and doing things); structural barriers in the organisation that hinder the flow of information and its evaluation; political barriers with their underlying power relations, contributing to conflict and mistrust; behavioural barriers related to the mental models that people hold; and time constraints owing to demands on time to meet workload and the time required for a change process (Dess & Picken, 2000).

The economic environment can also pose a barrier to change, especially in a small organisation – to prevent the possibility of having to re-enter the labour market, employees may build "a position of irreplaceability" (Macri, Tagliaventi & Bertolotti, 2002, p304) where they resist delegation, hold onto information and oppose participating in the transference of skills. Organisational learning is required to develop a learning organisation (as discussed in Chapter Three) and in a stable organisation, where profit levels and market share are consistent, learning may only be localised and not across the organisation as there is no perceived need to learn and change to a learning organisation (Macri et al, 2002). The question then comes to mind, for a small organisation, what is the "right" economic environment to develop into a learning organisation? In difficult or stable economic times, there are likely to be resistors to change, contributing to the inertia experienced by small organisations to become learning ones. How this and other barriers to change can be overcome will now be explored.

Resistance to change can be overcome by, in addition to developing systems thinking, building support and systems that allow for change and using successes of the past to build a new vision for the future (Kets De Vries, 2001). These endeavours require the input of all organisation members to ensure that the change is sustained (Kets De Vries, 2001).

In order to challenge the status quo, leaders can create a sense of urgency by, for example, creating a convincing picture of the risks of not changing (Dess & Picken, 2000). Another way to overcome the status quo is through facilitating constructive dissent where, for example, employees are given the opportunity to openly question a leader's perspective without fear of reprisal (Dess & Picken, 2000). However, this may be challenging in a small organisation that is owner-manager led, for reasons previously discussed. Risk-taking can be encouraged and when failures occur, these can be used as opportunities to learn (Dess & Picken, 2000). One again, within a small organisation, where mistakes may impact the bottom-line in a way that the organisation cannot absorb, risk-taking may be a strategy that needs to be carefully considered and planned for (Smit & Watkins, 2012). A strategy to overcome resistance to change that is likely to be successful in small organisations is to get everyone involved in the change, by encouraging ideas and rewarding efforts (Dess & Picken, 2000).

As there appears to be no 'right (economic) time' for a small organisation to engage in a change process to become a learning organisation, the impetus seems to be on the leader and his/her ability to motivate and communicate the change as being desirable and necessary (Macri et al, 2002). Macri et al (2002) highlight that the leader also needs to be aware of the emotional

intelligence of employees so as to gauge employees' ability to change. The leader can use this information to guide them through the change process. Employees may also perceive it to be their role to resist change, as a type of self-fulfilling prophecy. This behaviour reiterates the importance of involving employees in the change process so as to minimise employees acting on their perceived role of resistor. A summary of barriers and strategies to overcome these is provided in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Barriers (resistors) to change and strategies to overcome these

Barrier to change	Strategies to overcome barriers
▪ Commitment to the status quo - Fear of the unknown - Fear of lacking skills for change - Loss of freedom - Loss of alliances and friends ▪ Structural barriers ▪ Political barriers ▪ Behavioural barriers ▪ Time constraints ▪ Poor economic environment ▪ Stable economic environment ▪ Employees' 'role' to resist	▪ Leader motivation and communication ▪ Leader awareness of employees' emotional intelligence ▪ Involve all organisation members ▪ Develop systems thinking ▪ Build support and systems for change ▪ Create a sense of urgency ▪ Facilitate constructive dissent ▪ Encourage risk-taking



As a vessel that has undergone a process of changing the way things are done on board enters into new and unknown waters, the inclination may be for its crew to resort to previous ways of doing things. This is a natural response when one enters into unfamiliar territory – the tendency is to do things the way one has in the past, as new ways are not yet etched on one's psyche. The process of change and its implementation needs to be sustained to overcome this obstacle. This sustained process applies to any vessel and in the context of a learning organisation, a sustained process will ensure that the learning disciplines continue to develop. The next section will describe how to develop the learning disciplines and will raise issues which may arise in developing a learning organisation.

4.5.3 Developing the learning disciplines

Senge et al (1994, p15) state that "everyone's needs are different" and in building a learning organisation, the needs of the organisation take precedence. In addition to organisation leaders modelling the disciplines, Senge suggests the following for developing the learning disciplines, summarised in Table 4.7 (p112).

Table 4.7: How to develop the disciplines of a learning organisation

Learning discipline	Suggested strategies to develop discipline
Systems thinking	• Empower and encourage organisation members to form partnerships to maximise their exposure to various issues • Develop relationships and networks – formal and informal - throughout the organisation • Integrate members across organisational functions/ business areas • Engage in simulations of real-world problems to determine the impact of actions on the system
Building shared vision	• Hold organisation-wide meetings with all members present • Allow members to share what really matters to them and be heard – by leaders and other members • Allow informal networks to develop where people talk and visions can be shared • Allow mentoring to take place – formal and informal
Mental models	• Engage in scenario planning – members describe plausible futures of the organisation and reveal their views of the world • Engage in learning labs – where members share their attitudes and beliefs, to allow others to point out these attitudes and beliefs, causing members to examine their mental models • Allow job rotation to reveal mental models
Personal mastery	• Provide access to learning • Encourage and support learning • Allow members to share and clarify their personal visions • Relate learning to members' visions
Team learning	• Recognise interdependence of team members • Have systems in place to share information and learning • Provide conditions for dialogue to take place • Have a skilled facilitator to guide dialogue, ensuring that the focus is kept

Adapted from Senge et al (1994)

In addition to the above, the following strategies are suggested to support the development of a learning organisation (Senge et al, 1994; Smith, 2001):

- Develop a learning infrastructure that allows time and resources to support reflection and the sharing of ideas and experiences.
- Have check-ins and check-outs in meetings - start a meeting with all members taking a minute to check-in with what they are thinking. At the end of the meeting, take a few minutes to check-out - finding out what people are thinking at the conclusion of the meeting. Initially the comments may appear thoughtless, but as trust and safety develops, members start sharing ideas and feelings and take time to understand concerns, problems, and hopes.
- At the outset of trying to build a learning organisation, ask members the following, and try to answer these questions:
  - What do we have to do to become more competitive?

- What do we really want?
- What do we really believe?
- Do we really want to distribute power?
- Do we really believe we have to organize in a different way?

If members are able to answer these questions clearly without hesitation, they are displaying the necessary commitment to build a learning organisation.

4.6 Obstacles to developing a learning organisation

Certain barriers to change provide obstacles to developing a learning organisation, as previously discussed. Some of these obstacles and others will now be explored in the context of a small organisation in South Africa. These include the organisation's understanding of key concepts or references, such as the learning organisation and its view of its people; people and power dynamics within the organisation, which are closely linked to the legacy of Apartheid; an understanding of learning theories and how these apply to the learning organisation; and the very nature of business itself.

Diverse understandings of what a learning organisation is

As discussed in Chapter Two, organisations have diverse understandings of what it is to be a learning organisation and this factor is likely to impact the implementation of Senge's model. With the many definitions and understandings of 'learning' (Fenwick, 2001) and 'learning organisation', companies may not adopt Senge's model, but may adopt a different model, such as Garvin's 3M approach (Meaning, Management and Measurement) (Garvin, 1993) or Ortenblad's (2001) four aspects: learning at work; organisational learning; developing a learning climate; and creating learning structures. The adoption of a different understanding of a learning organisation does not make the company any less of a learning organisation, but it makes it a different type of learning organisation to Senge's.

Related to diverse understandings of what a learning organisation is, cultural context cannot be ignored.

> Many researchers and management theorists argue that a wide range of behavioural and management theories and models may not be universal and that many have been developed in industrialised countries and based largely on cultural assumptions predominating in that specific national cultural context. (Coldwell et al, 2007, p121)

Thus, the effectiveness of Senge's five disciplines in non-Western countries may be influenced by cultural dimensions and "may not be …successful when implemented in societies with cultural values that differ from those held in the United States" Coldwell et al, 2007, p126). This statement is applicable to South Africa, which is considered to be essentially non-Western, and so the successful implementation of Senge's model may be limited.

Leadership view of staff

How the leadership of an organisation views their people may also impact the setting up of an environment that is conducive to a learning organisation. For example, people (staff) are often referred to in the policies and documentation of an organisation either as 'human resources' or 'human capital'. Although the difference may be argued as being semantics, there is a connotation associated with the different terms: the term 'human resources' can be understood to reflect resources that can be exploited and used for the organisation's purposes (as resources are), while the term 'human capital' is associated more with an asset, something that has value and is valued, is invested in and assists in generating more wealth (Hitt, Bierman, Shimizu & Kocchar, 2001). The term used may have an impact on how the leaders perceive and treat their staff and the consequent culture of the organisation.

People and power dynamics

> Underlying the notion of a learning organisation is the assumption that there is some degree of openness, democracy, and freedom from duress present and valued with organisations that enables organisational learning to flourish. Sadly, in many contemporary organisations, such values are impoverished and simply lead to a different kind of learning, a dysfunctional sort. (Mavin & Cavaleri, 2004, p285)

This quotation implies that organisations should be democratic to enable the learning organisation to develop. However, in the absence of democracy, the process of organisational learning, which contributes to developing a learning organisation, still occurs, but the learning may not drive performance improvement, which ultimately contributes to sustainability; it "may in fact undermine performance" (Mavin & Cavaleri, 2004, pp285-286). The role of the leader is highlighted here and the type of culture that he/she encourages to develop – if the leader practices democracy, then he/she assists in developing the course to becoming a learning organisation.

It is often difficult for individuals to agree on mental models; this difficulty can be exacerbated in groups, even in a democratic organisation. For example, organisation members may agree to solve a problem, but their different disciplines (departments or skill sets) may present a

challenge on how to solve it: a consultant, accountant and marketer may perceive the same issue as a problem, but may have difficulty reaching consensus on its resolution due to their differing frames of reference, or mental models (Henderson, 1997).

Small organisations may often be perceived as being more 'family-oriented' with closer relationships and a sense of community and trust. However, they are not exempt from power dynamics and organisational politics. Irrespective of the size of the organisation, power relations and dynamics occur and impact the working environment. These relations often undermine the trust, community and openness that are needed for a learning organisation, making this state of being a more difficult one to attain (Macri et al, 2002). Such dynamics are evident at an individual level (individuals trying to assert their views over others) and team or departmental level (with a 'silo mentality' and different departments being unaware of what is taking place outside of theirs within the same organisation).

Related to power dynamics is the perception on the part of organisation members about who is empowered by or benefits from Senge's model. In implementing this model, staff may be urged to learn more, better, and faster, with little control of what is to be learned or explanations why. This may lead to worker subjugation and control (Fenwick, 1997).

Furthermore, Brookfield (2000) comments on the purpose of education and learning to transform society. He states that through critical reflection and informed action, transformation can take place. For Senge, the purpose of critical reflection is to trigger changes in the business environment (Senge, 1990). However, power relations between management and employees in organisations cannot be neglected, and impact on whether the changes, and vehicles that encourage critical reflection, will be implemented. If changes are implemented, managers may attempt to dominate and control these (English, 2005). In addition, critical reflection features quite frequently in Senge's model and is a skill that not all people practise – it is a skill that needs to be developed in order to be effectively practised. Time is needed to address the development of this skill (as discussed in Chapter Two).

Leaders of small companies may inadvertently contribute to a lack of empowerment of staff. These leaders often tend to be the founders of their companies and hold the company, its vision and ownership very closely to themselves. They may find it difficult to allow decision-making throughout the organisation and be reluctant to hand over responsibility. A scenario may occur where the company desires to be a learning organisation and begins the journey, but the leader

may change his/ her mind concerning the implementation of certain factors, possibly confusing the staff as they receive mixed messages. The qualities of trust in the organisation and servant-leadership are important to be able to overcome these obstacles (Choueke & Armstrong, 1998).

Power relations based on the position of the role may also influence the development of a learning organisation. An individual who attains new knowledge and insight may be unable to influence a change in behaviour in the organisation because of his/her lowly position while a particular individual, such as the leader/owner-manager may be able "to affect organisational behaviour and learning in a spurious way" (Henderson, 1997), particularly if this leader is domineering and does not display servant-leadership.

Within a South African context, the pursuit of the learning organisation is further impacted by the legacy of Apartheid and the consequent dehumanising of black people. This has left an imprint on the psyche of many South Africans, where interactions between different race groups are sometimes tainted by distrust (Horwitz, Bowmaker-Falconer & Searll, 1996; Seekings, 2008). Developing a learning organisation with this type of legacy can prove difficult in the South African context, as additional effort is required to overcome the legacy.

Learning theories and their application to the learning organisation

As discussed in Chapter Two, the learning organisation encompasses many learning theories and accommodates various perspectives on learning, illustrating that the concept is well-grounded in theory. However, knowledge of these theories may be too much for the leader of a small organisation to understand and implement, making the pursuit of a learning organisation an unattainable one.

Learning theories also tend to ignore power relations and so provide little, if any, insight on how to deal with these in the context of organisations (Fox, 2000; Henderson, 1997). Managing people and power dynamics is thus an important skill for a leader to possess.

Nature of the business

The nature of business itself can impact the implementation of a learning organisation, specifically with reference to time, the focus of the organisation, the stress of the environment and the pursuit of profit. There is often a perception in organisations that there is insufficient time to plan and reflect (Farago & Skyrme, 1995). Organisations tend to be too focused on systems and processes, and have an inadequate focus on people and learning (Farago & Skyrme,

1995) with time being sacrificed for critical reflection, a skill which is key to developing a learning organisation.

The skill of critical reflection lends Senge's model to being a cognitive model. Cognitivism views learning as an internal process of meaning-making which depends on the knowledge (cognitive) structures of an individual (Fasokun, Katahoire & Oduaran, 2005; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Related to learning and the human brain, learning is impacted by stress (de Jager, 2006). When people experience stress, little cognitive processing takes place as the human system is focused on survival behaviour (staying alive), which is processed in the lower-order survival (reptilian) brain (de Jager, 2006). Change causes stress, and the rate of change in the environment is constantly increasing. It is quite difficult to access the cognitive functions of critical reflection, when individuals are in a state of stress and survival functioning. In such situations reactive behaviour is common place supplanting planned responses and critical reflection. Small companies are not exempt from this stress and it may make the journey of being a learning organisation a difficult one to attain or maintain.

Organisations need to maintain a balance between profit and people. If too much attention is given to people, not enough profit is produced in order to sustain the company. If too much attention is given to profit, people may fall by the wayside. Senge (1990) states that we should not forget that the purpose of business is business – making profits. He provides an example of a company that was focussed on people but still failed (People Express Airlines) (Senge, 1990, p128). It is important for organisations to set up structures, approaches and an environment that assists them to pay attention to both and develop a learning organisation.

"Managers rarely set knowledge as their prime target of activity" and "learning is seen as a consequence of carrying out managerial activity rather than a prerequisite" (Henderson, 1997, p101). As such, learning is not given priority and learning that occurs may be superficial, based on guesswork and anecdotal evidence (Henderson, 1997). This impedes double-loop learning (discussed in Chapter Two) from taking place and increases the risk of the organisation repeating the same behaviours and actions while expecting a different result.

Organisations may be too focused on planning rather than on setting direction (Kotter, 1990). Planning complements direction setting, but organisations may plan even without charting a direction, with the result that planning becomes a burdensome activity, absorbing much time and energy (Kotter, 1990). "A competent direction-setting process provides a focus in which

planning can then be realistically carried out" (Kotter, 1990, p105), which aids in determining what kind of planning is relevant, especially in a dynamic business environment where the unexpected is often the norm.

4.7 Enablers of a learning organisation

Although there are many and varied obstacles to developing a learning organisation, there are also enablers. These include the organisation's ability to naturally practise the learning disciplines, a forced change process to encourage the adoption of learning disciplines, knowledge management and a 'learning' leadership and organisational culture.

Organisations may be able to implement Senge's model if they naturally practise the disciplines and so, almost 'organically', adopt Senge's model. This may be possible in small companies due to the relationships, trust and openness that exist. There are also fewer divisional lines in small companies and so the 'cross-divisional' sharing of ideas may take place more easily (Gibb, 1997; Wyer et al, 2000).

Although Senge states that becoming a learning organisation should be an organic process, there is evidence that forced change may enhance the adoption of the learning disciplines (Coldwell et al, 2007, p133). This forced change can be a result of creating a sense of urgency and highlighting the risks of not changing (Dess & Picken, 2000).

Knowledge management is key to sustainability (Robinson et al, 2006) and has a role to play in the learning organisation (Wang & Ahmed, 2003), as discussed in Chapter Three. This enabler, although not explored thoroughly in this study, is an area that should not be neglected as it contributes to an organisation's performance.

There appear to be more obstacles to implementing a learning organisation than there are not. If obstacles are present and cannot be overcome, the desire and commitment of organisation members, especially leadership, need to be questioned and addressed. If the development of a learning organisation is truly desired, then the leadership of the organisation should ensure that the culture of the organisation is able to change and that they support the change process by making changes to the systems and processes as required.

4.8 Conclusion



The reviewed literature has assisted in understanding the concept of sustainability, factors external and internal to organisations within the South African context that impact on the sustainability of small organisations, the leadership and culture of a sustainable and learning organisation, how being a learning organisation contributes to the sustainability of companies and how to develop organisations into learning ones. In order to be sustainable (that is in order to survive), organisations need to learn, as learning means the ability to adapt to change, and if an organisation is not able to adapt to change, then it will die. The ability to learn and adapt is essential to ensure that today's Shosholoza[4] does not become tomorrow's row-boat.

The South African small business environment is clearly a challenging one to operate in, with many demands placed on the founder-owner/owner-manager. There are many factors that impact the sustainability of small businesses, and an awareness of these factors and how to respond to them highlights the need for small business owners to think and act strategically and systemically so that their businesses can be sustainable. To alleviate some of the pressure and demands on small business owners, they should encourage their businesses to develop into learning organisations so that organisation members can knowingly and willingly contribute to the success of these businesses.

Obstacles to small companies becoming learning organisations in a South African context exist, but can be overcome. Organisations must ensure that they meet legislative requirements of being BEE-compliant, to assist with alleviating supply chain pressure. However, compliance does not assist in being a learning organisation; it assists with being sustainable in the South African market. Being a BEE-compliant organisation also does not make it a learning organisation – the practice of the learning disciplines and the characteristics of a learning organisation do, including curiosity, forgiveness, trust and togetherness (Gibb, 1997). These characteristics are more likely to exist in small organisations owing to their size, but are not without challenges in their development, as illustrated in this chapter. A change process can assist with developing these disciplines and characteristics, encouraging the transformation to a learning organisation.

[4] *Shosholoza* is a yacht designed and built in South Africa that competed in the finals of the America's Cup in Valencia, 2007. It was the first time that a South African team participated in this event (Team Shosholoza, n.d.).

A large responsibility for developing a learning organisation remains with the leader. The willingness of the leader to adopt a learning culture, one that is democratic and open and where the leader is willing to engage with his/her team, and, when necessary, be challenged, is key to developing a learning organisation and the requisite culture.

Perhaps the key to the sustainability of small organisations in South Africa is foremost leadership development and training, incorporating how to be a 'learning' leader. If this characteristic can be developed, or is present, in the leader, then it would appear that the course is charted for a sustainable, learning organisation.

The next chapters contribute to determining the type of vessel my research site is. In Chapter Five, I discuss the research design; Chapters Six and Seven present the results of my research leading into Chapter Eight where I discuss the results of the research, draw conclusions and make recommendations as to how the research site can become more of a learning vessel, able to sail upon the uncertain waters that are currently evident in the ocean of business.



CHAPTER 5:
RESEARCH DESIGN –
CHARTING THE COURSE

5.1 Introduction

Having considered what I will evaluate aboard the sailing vessel, I sauntered through the harbour and located ODC. I paused on the pier before boarding and glanced over her bow, keel and stern, taking note of the condition of the rudder. I looked up at the mast and sails, and checked the boom and rigging devices. My trip would be one during which I would evaluate the performance of the yacht, the captain and the crew. I reminded myself of what it was that I actually wanted to research, the purpose of my research and my research questions.



The purpose of my study was to understand how Senge's (1990) five disciplines of a learning organisation were practised in a small vessel (organisation) and how the practice of these disciplines contributed to the sustainability of the vessel. The main question that would guide my time spent on the vessel was: How is the concept of a learning organisation taken up in a small vessel? In order to answer this question, I considered the following questions:

1. What facets of a learning organisation are reflected in the organisation?
2. What does sustainability mean in the context of the small organisation?
3. How can facets of a learning organisation be corrected or strengthened in the organisation in order to contribute to its sustainability?

With this in mind, I was ready to design my approach to research. Before proceeding, I took stock of what I knew - I had an understanding of the context of the vessel (an organisation) as well as a conceptual and theoretical understanding of what indicated that the yacht would stay afloat. I understood what it meant to be a learning organisation based on historical concepts and definitions. I was aware that the crew should be practising certain disciplines in order to learn, and that these disciplines translated into characteristics. Leadership and organisational culture had a role to play. I was conscious of what it meant for the yacht to be sustainable and how the disciplines of a learning organisation promoted sustainability.

My attention turned to "what a learning organisation actually looked like" and being able to recognise the physical manifestation of the theory that I had considered. I was mindful that my view of the yacht may be different to others' and reminded myself that I would be looking at the yacht and its crew through coloured lenses, tinted by my experiences, ideas and assumptions; that I was an instrument of my research. I also considered what approach it was that I would take to research the yacht and reminded myself that although I was the harbour master, whose role it was to observe and evaluate, the vessel was small, and I was likely to become part of the community aboard. It was with these thoughts that I boarded ODC to conduct an ethnographic case study.

In this chapter the design of the study is described. This chapter begins with philosophical descriptions that colour the lens through which the research was conducted, and thereafter the paradigm adopted is described. A description of the methodology and a discussion of the data collection and data analysis methods follow. The scope, limitations and assumptions of the study are disclosed, followed by ethical considerations and a description of the validity and reliability of the study. This chapter concludes with an overview of how the study is written up as an ethnographic case study.

5.2 "Researcher as instrument"



Before boarding the vessel, I paused to consider "Who am I on this sailing vessel as we embark on this journey on the open water and how am I going to view this vessel?"

"A case study is as much about the case (object) as about the researcher (subject) who studies it…" (Rule & John, 2011, p7).

The importance of the "researcher as instrument" is highlighted in many texts (Dunne, Pryor & Yates, 2005; Gillham, 2000; Rummel, 1964). My understanding of this concept is that the researcher should be aware that she is an instrument of data collection, just like the tools/methods that she uses; and that the researcher has a direct impact on the type and quality of data that is gathered and collected through the way that she conducts herself (Hartley, 2004). Merriam & Simpson (1984) highlight the responsibility of the researcher as instrument by

stating that the validity of the results of data collection rests with the skills of the researcher and that the researcher should "elicit pertinent information in the investigation" (Merriam & Simpson, 1984, p130).

Hartley (2004, p223) highlights that the researcher should be aware of two aspects:

> first, how the researcher's interactions with and perceptions of the organisation affect the observations made (for example through projection, introjection and so forth); and second, how to attend to and manage feelings which arise in the course of doing case study work (for example, curiosity, excitement and concern as well as anxiety, fear or anger).

Awareness of these aspects is important for the researcher as these impact on the data collected (Hartley, 2004, p224). In response to the above quotation and in an attempt to explore and expose the above-mentioned aspects, I am aware that I had certain preconceptions of the organisation being researched. I had previously done some work with the site in the three-year period prior to this research. This work involved drafting client documentation for two different projects and was a collaborative effort between myself, the managing director and other staff working on the projects. I had enjoyed my experience with them as they appeared to value individuals and the contributions that each was able to make. My perception of ODC was that it was probably a learning organisation and I had to be aware, while collecting data, that I was not looking for evidence that deliberately proved the site was a learning organisation, but to preserve a degree of open-mindedness in terms of the evidence I collected. I had to question whether the data collected was accurate.

At times during the research I was aware of the feelings I was experiencing, often feelings of frustration during observations and sometimes excitement when learning disciplines were observed. I think that the dichotomy of feelings highlighted that I was indeed capturing relevant data and I was able to link the data to the learning disciplines. I felt frustrated when role players "missed" the learning disciplines when I thought they were close to practising them and I felt excited when I observed the learning disciplines being practised. I also experienced the "organisational boundary position" to be quite frustrating – being "partly insider, partly stranger; partly accepted, partly not; partly understanding the culture, partly still being able to question it" (Hartley, 2004, p223). At times I wanted to leap in and be a full participant, but an awareness of my organisational boundary position assisted me to remain detached and to deliberately withdraw from participating in events where I felt my involvement would sway events unduly. This deliberate withdrawal was an attempt to heed Hartley's (2004, pp218-219) advice: "some distancing from the organisation is also advisable so the researcher is not

overloaded with impressions and does not get so close to the data that he or she is unable to see their wider significance".

Related to the concept of the researcher as instrument is the researcher's identity – the role that the researcher plays in the research process as well as the researcher's understanding of herself, or self-knowledge, as these elements influence what data is collected (Dunne et al, 2005). In order to accommodate the possible bias that results from the researcher's identity and understanding of self, Dunne et al (2005) suggest that the researcher, in writing up the research report, provides a description of herself – what role she assumed in data collection and what her self-perception is. Gillham (2000) states that it is necessary for the researcher as instrument to have a comprehensive and analytical self-awareness and that she is able to expose, if not completely, at least partially, her understanding of self and the possible influence she will have on collecting and interpreting data – she is able to reflect on the lens that she will be using for research (Dunne et al, 2005). With that, my philosophical assumptions are the next port of call.

Researcher's philosophical assumptions towards education and research

I understand the term "philosophical assumptions" to mean my personal beliefs concerning education and research, and how these impacted or influenced my choice of research topic, methodology and methods. It is important to understand and surface these beliefs and how they influenced my choices, because these beliefs also influenced my focus in collecting data and how I interpreted the collected data (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Dunne et al, 2005; Merriam & Simpson, 1984; Rummel, 1964).

Concerning education, my philosophy is influenced by Mezirow's (1990) theory of transformative learning and Brookfield's (2000) thinking on critical reflection, as I believe that education should be for the purpose of transformation, change and empowerment. Individuals are exposed to information regularly, but whether this information becomes knowledge is for the individual to decide. The individual may choose to learn the information and so through internalising and transforming the information into something meaningful, the information is constructed into knowledge (Gravett, 2005).

I believe that once a person has learnt something, through thinking and critically reflecting on new information, that this knowledge has an impact on the person. This process, I believe, varies in different people – people who reflect more on information will examine their actions, behaviours, thoughts, beliefs and philosophies more regularly, internalise this information more

quickly, and adapt their actions more rapidly to reflect their new knowledge. Those who reflect less often still engage in the examination and internalisation process, but adapt their behaviours at a slower rate. I see the educator's role, during the learning intervention, as one that offers information to learners and asks relevant and challenging questions about the information to encourage critical reflection. Once the learners leave the intervention, they should be stimulated to continue thinking about the content so that they can internalise the information, they can learn, and be changed by their new knowledge. Changed to what and for what? That is for the learner to decide.

I see the place of empowerment in education as "knowledge is power" – that by exposing learners to new information and opportunities to reflect critically on it, an educator has the ability to encourage learners to become empowered. Furthermore, the educator, through asking challenging questions, encourages learners to think critically and reflectively. This is a skill that learners can use in any situation and relates to the skill of critical reflection, as discussed in Chapter Two. Learners should be able to look at a situation and critically reflect on what is taking place, why it is taking place, how it could be different and as such be motivated to make changes if necessary, leading to their empowerment. However, the ability to experience empowerment in different situations and settings is dependent on various factors, such as the control learners have in particular settings (their sense of agency), for example, it may be easier for a parent to reflect critically and change a situation at home than it is at his/her workplace. Thus a learner can be empowered depending on his or her ability or freedom to act on knowledge gained.

This philosophy has had an impact on the selection of my research topic, learning organisations. Learning organisations are concerned with keeping up with change in the global village and so should be concerned with <u>how</u> to keep up with this change. Theories of transformative learning and critical reflection certainly have a place in learning organisations and if adopted in a relevant manner, can assist organisations to keep up with change.

With regard to research, I am interested in how people interact and behave in their natural settings and how they interpret the settings in which they are situated. I believe that people have an intimate knowledge of their environments and so have valuable contributions to make. In addition, I have an interest in the way people do things, the culture that is present in the setting, and how people perceive themselves and I believe that this information has much to add to a research study. For this reason, an ethnographic case study approach was adopted for this

study, as this approach explores multiple interpretations of reality of the community being researched and describes the community, focussing on their cultural patterns and perspectives, their history and environment, and how they think and behave (Bickman & Rog, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

5.3 Research Paradigm

The research conducted is empirical, interpretive and qualitative: it is empirical as it was guided by evidence from the research methods that were employed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006); and it is interpretive as it looks at how the staff of a small company interpreted their experience in terms of the company being a learning organisation (Mouton, 2001). Interpretive research departs from the premise that "knowledge is subjective because it is socially constructed and mind dependent" (Chilisa & Preece, 2005, p29). Interpretivism asserts that truth lies in human experience (Chilisa & Preece, 2005) and so interpretivism researches experiences of people and how they interpret this experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Mouton, 2001).

Intepretivism falls under the qualitative school of inquiry (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Creswell, 1998) where researchers collect data in face-to-face interactions in an effort to understand, describe and analyse the social actions, beliefs, perceptions and thoughts of individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Qualitative research occurs in the natural setting of the individuals being researched, with the researcher as the instrument of data collection who through inductive analysis builds intricate pictures based on the information gathered (Maxwell, 1996; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). As such, the researcher immerses herself in the setting in order to see events in context (Creswell, 1998).

The model that was used for the research design is Maxwell's Interactive Model of qualitative research. This model is illustrated as follows (on p127):

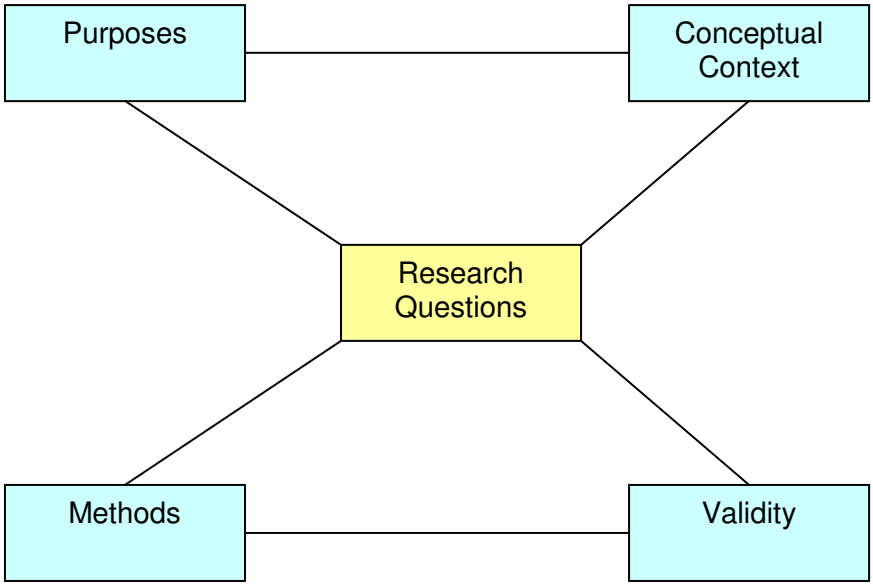


Figure 5.1: An Interactive Model of Research Design

Although the five components illustrated are not radically different from those presented in various discussions of research design, what is innovative in Maxwell's model is the relationship among the components (Maxwell, 1996). The components in this model are not linked in a linear or cyclical sequence, but are closely linked to several others to form an integrated and interacting whole. There are many other connections between the components than those illustrated in the model, but the ones illustrated are generally the most important. These connections are not rigid, but allow for a certain amount of flexibility. However, this does not mean that the design can be changed at whim as the constraints that the various components impose on each other should be considered so that the design is not rendered ineffective (Maxwell, 1996).

Maxwell's model also allows for consideration of other factors that impact on the design of a study, but are not necessarily part of the design of a study. These factors belong either to the "environment within which the research and its design exist or are products of the research" (Maxwell, 1996, p6) such as resources, ethical standards, perceived problems, the research setting and the data collected. These factors allow for the design of a qualitative study "to change in interaction with the situation in which the study is conducted, rather than being a fixed determinant of research practice" (Maxwell, 1996, p8).

I subscribe to Maxwell's model particularly because of its flexibility and the capacity to change the design of the study as required based on the environment in which the research is conducted. One can never be certain how an intended design will play out and whether a site is indeed able to participate in a certain aspect of the research design, for whatever reason. Eisenhart (2001) also explains that the researcher's concept of the culture of the research site impacts on the research methods used. Maxwell's model allows for the flexibility needed to accommodate a research site as well as preliminary data findings that impact on the use of other data collection methods.



Having considered who I am on this journey and how I will view this vessel, I now focus on the map and charting the course of the journey as well as how the vessel will be researched while I am on board.

5.4 Methodology

The research was conducted as an ethnographic case study. As can be seen from the description of a learning organisation in the preceding chapters, the culture of an organisation contributes largely to determining if the organisation is a learning one. An ethnographic case study describes a community's culture and so a study of the organisation's cultural patterns and perspectives, its history and environment, and how organisation members' think and behave provided insight as to whether the culture of the organisation was a learning one (Bickman & Rog, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Rule & John, 2011). Furthermore, an understanding of the organisation's culture is an important one as it impacts and informs the research methods to be used (Eisenhart, 2001).

An ethnographic case study approach describes a group or community (Bickman & Rog, 1998) and looks at multiple interpretations of reality within the community being researched. This approach suits the paradigm of a learning organisation, as the essence of a learning organisation considers how individuals interpret their reality and how this interpretation can contribute to the development and sustainability of the organisation (Senge, 1990). The community in this study consisted of the staff at the research site, ODC, and as each staff member interpreted their reality differently, owing to their different backgrounds, experiences and outlooks, an ethnographic approach was apt.

In addition, a case study strategy was appropriate for conducting this research for the reasons put forward by Hartley (2004). This approach assisted me, as researcher, to:

- Understand organisational behaviour
- Capture developing, impending properties of life in an organisation
- Explore organisational behaviour that was informal and unusual
- Gain trust from research subjects as information was provided over and above that which was shared in research interviews
- Understand everyday practices in the organisation.

An ethnographic study is usually conducted over a long period of time - six months and longer and requires the researcher to adopt both an emic and etic perspective (Bickman & Rog, 1998). In terms of my study, an emic (internal) perspective was required in order to understand why members of the community (company) behaved as they did in order to recognise and accept the multiple realities of the community (Bickman & Rog, 1998). An etic (external) perspective looked at the data collected from a social, scientific viewpoint. This research followed the approach most ethnographers take – by first collecting data from the emic perspective, then trying to make sense of what was collected in terms of the community's views and scientific analysis (etic perspective) (Bickman & Rog, 1998; Maykut, 1994).

"A case study method is not a method as such but rather a research strategy" (Hartley, 2004, p209) and "can provide rich insights into particular situations, events, organisations…" (Rule & John, 2011, p1). Albeit a strategy, a case study is generally understood to be a qualitative, intensive, holistic description and explanation of a detailed investigation of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit with a view to providing an analysis of the context and processes involved in the phenomenon under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Hartley, 2004; Merriam, 2009).

Case studies are useful for researchers who are interested in insight, discovery and interpretation in context (Merriam, 2009) and this approach helps to uncover the interaction of noteworthy aspects of a phenomenon, particularly in situations where it is difficult to separate the phenomenon's variables from the context (Merriam, 2009). Through an "interpretation in context" (Cronbach, in Merriam, 2009, p42) and by getting close to the phenomenon/subject of interest and spreading the "net for evidence" wide (Merriam, 2009, p46), I was able to arrive at a broad understanding of the phenomenon under study (Abrahamson, in Merriam, 2009).

The knowledge gained from a case study may be different based on the level of experience of the reader. Case study knowledge tends to be more concrete, more contextual, more developed by reader interpretation and based on reference populations determined by the reader – the reader is able to apply the case to a population they have in mind, based on their experience (Stake, in Merriam, 2009).

For these reasons, the knowledge gained from a case study can be seen to be fluid as the knowledge can vary from reader to reader. As such, it is imperative that the case and related theory is described clearly and accurately, as well as the findings and conclusions so that readers gain a similar understanding of the phenomenon researched.

As with case studies, the research/project plan was an emergent design in which each research decision was dependent on prior information (Maxwell, 1996; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). For the research to be successful, a "heightened awareness" was required where I was able to knit together various aspects of the research in order to gain a full understanding of the research site. It was also imperative that a clear understanding of the five disciplines according to Senge (1990) was accurately translated into the research instruments so as to elicit valid information concerning the conditions wherein learning organisations can be found.

5.5 Research Site

In selecting a site for this research, purposive and convenience sampling was used. The sampling was purposive as the selected site had to comply with selection criteria, that is the sample was selected based on the criterion of a population of small companies whose permanent staff complement was no more than fifty (Merriam, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The sampling was convenient for the reasons of accessibility and expediency (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

The site selected for this study was a small organisational development company with whom I had a relationship. It operated from an office park in Midrand, Gauteng and consulted to the mining sector. This company had seventeen employees at the commencement of the study in April 2008, which included two interns working in the organisation who were completing a Masters Degree in Industrial Psychology. By the end of Phase 3 of the study (as can be seen in Table 5.1, p132) in November 2008, the company still had the same number of staff, but some

staff turnover had taken place – four staff had resigned and four were recruited. On returning to the site in 2012, the company's staff complement consisted of 23 permanent members, fifteen of which were based at the head office in Midrand. Only three were of the original (2008) complement. By the end of the research period in 2012, the head office staff complement consisted of ten employees. The company occasionally sub-contracted consultants depending on the number of projects and resources at a point in time.

A detailed description of the research site over the two research periods in 2008 and 2012 can be found in Chapters Six and Seven respectively.



I now need to consider what navigation aids would be most appropriate and for what purpose…

5.6 Data Collection Methods

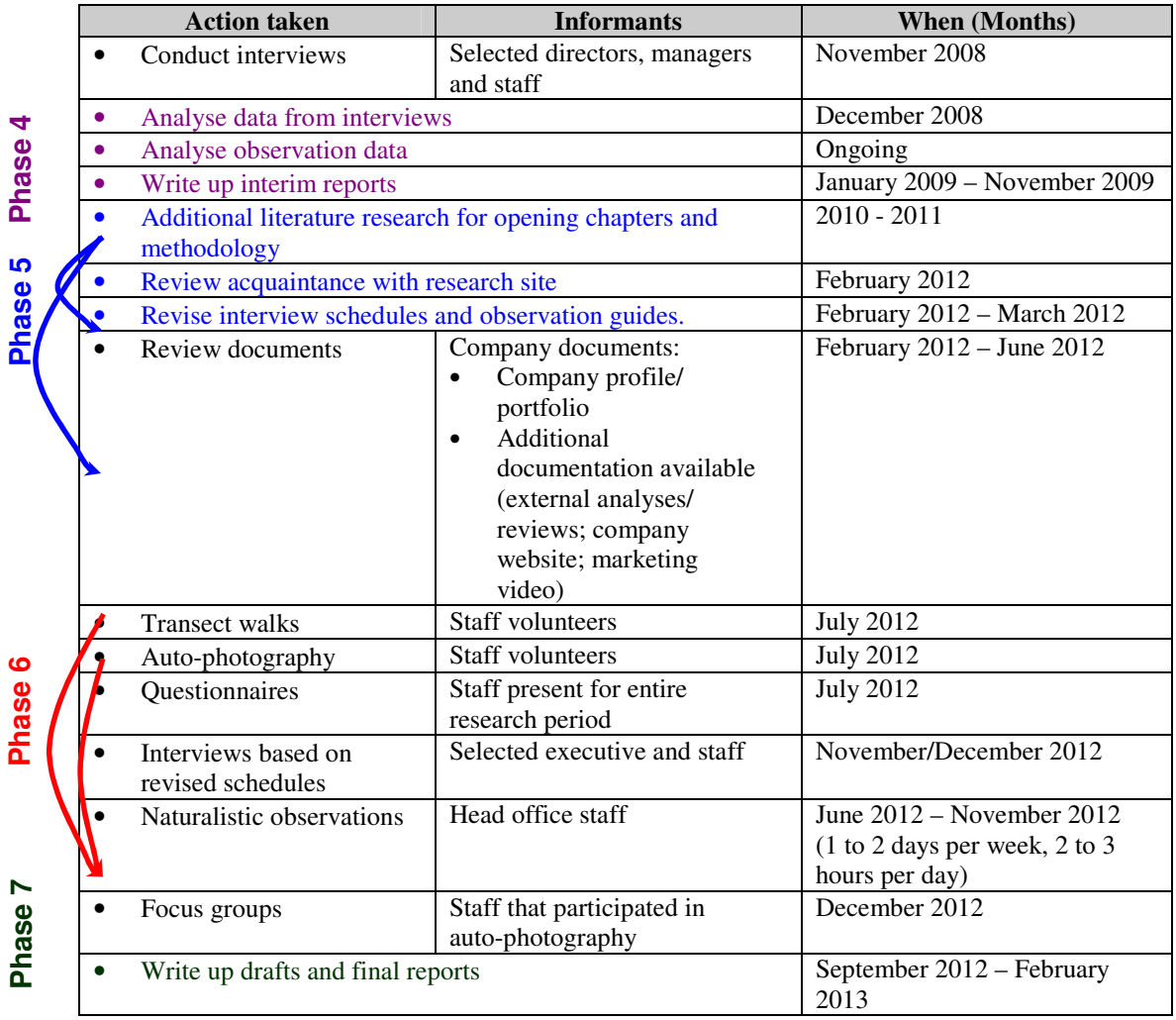
An ethnographic case study strategy allows for a range of data collection methods to be used, with the emphasis on qualitative methods owing to the types of questions that are addressed through the case study method (Eisenhart, 2001; Hartley, 2004). The qualitative methods used for data collection were observations, document analysis, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups (Bickman & Rog, 1998; Hartley, 2004). Participants were also included as sources of data and participatory methods of transect walks and auto-photography were used (Rule & John, 2011). The multi-method approach assisted in validating the data collected through triangulation and overcoming the drawbacks that each method presented (Bassey, 1999; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). This multi-method approach also assisted in identifying the organisation's espoused theories and theories-in-use (as discussed in Chapter Three). The documentation could be viewed as including the espoused theories, as well as parts of the questionnaire, while the other methods provided insight into the theories-in-use.

The methods and sequence of the data collection process can be seen in Table 5.1 (p132). Although the table reflects a linear process, Maxwell's interactive model was used as this model accommodated the dynamic nature of the workplace with its variety of events and activities, and so the study went through various phases. Phase 1 was the initial phase where observations were made, followed by document analysis of pertinent company documents. Observations continued to take place in a variety of workplace settings on an ongoing basis – in the open office space,

staff meetings, project team meetings, training and operations meetings. When I became aware of these meetings, I requested that I be present to observe. The observations were helpful in contributing insights that could be included as questions in questionnaires and interviews. I used observations and document analysis to inform the next data collection method; for example, data from observations and document analysis were used to contribute to the questionnaire (Phase 2). Thereafter, data from observations and questionnaires were used to inform themes to be explored in interviews (Phase 3). An interim report was drafted in Phase 4, based on this data. Additional literature research took place in Phase 5, which informed further interview and observation guides and other research methods to be used. Thereafter all data was analysed from the interim report and Phase 6 data collection and the final report was written. The arrows on the table indicate the interactivity of the methods, through the various phases of the study. Data collection took place from April 2008 to November 2008 and then again in 2012 from February to December.

Table 5.1: Data Collection Process

	Action taken	Informants	When (Months)
Phase 1	• Naturalistic observations – 'casing the joint'	Entire company	April 2008 (1 day per week, 2 to 3 hours per day)
Phase 1	• Collection of company documentation	Company documents: • Mission, vision and value statement • Company profile/ portfolio • Personal development plans (PDPs) • Performance appraisals	May 2008
Phase 1	• Analysis of company documentation		June 2008
Phase 1	• Naturalistic observations	Entire company	Ongoing – April 2008 to November 2008 (1 to 2 days per week, 2 to 3 hours per day)
Phase 2	• Update questionnaires based on information from document analysis and observations		June 2008
Phase 2	• Pilot updated questions in questionnaires	Sample similar to sites selected	June 2008
Phase 2	• Review questionnaires based on pilot	Pilot sample	July 2008
Phase 2	• Questionnaires submitted to sites and completed	All staff	August 2008
Phase 2	• Analyse data from questionnaires		September 2008
Phase 3	• Update interview guide based on information from questionnaires and observations		October 2008
Phase 3	• Pilot updated interview guide	Sample similar to sites selected	October 2008
Phase 3	• Review interview guide based on pilot	Pilot sample	October 2008



Action taken	Informants	When (Months)
• Conduct interviews	Selected directors, managers and staff	November 2008
• Analyse data from interviews		December 2008
• Analyse observation data		Ongoing
• Write up interim reports		January 2009 – November 2009
• Additional literature research for opening chapters and methodology		2010 - 2011
• Review acquaintance with research site		February 2012
• Revise interview schedules and observation guides.		February 2012 – March 2012
• Review documents	Company documents: • Company profile/ portfolio • Additional documentation available (external analyses/ reviews; company website; marketing video)	February 2012 – June 2012
• Transect walks	Staff volunteers	July 2012
• Auto-photography	Staff volunteers	July 2012
• Questionnaires	Staff present for entire research period	July 2012
• Interviews based on revised schedules	Selected executive and staff	November/December 2012
• Naturalistic observations	Head office staff	June 2012 – November 2012 (1 to 2 days per week, 2 to 3 hours per day)
• Focus groups	Staff that participated in auto-photography	December 2012
• Write up drafts and final reports		September 2012 – February 2013

Observations

The research commenced with naturalistic observations in order to gauge the culture of the site. At the outset the observations were casual and served to 'case the joint' in order to gain an understanding of how the company operated and the reasons why the company operated as it did (Yin, 2003, p92). Thereafter observations were more formal where occurrences of certain phenomena were noted and the disciplines of a learning organisation, as suggested by Senge. Any observations over and above these disciplines were noted as these potentially had a bearing on the research where the focus of the observations, using an open-ended format where significant behaviour or actions were recorded (Rule & John, 2011, p68). Phase 6 observations included looking for aspects based on additional literature researched during Phase 5. The observations also served to verify data collected in questionnaires and interviews "to ensure the

match between evidence-based categories and participant reality" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p325).

The advantage of using observations was that this form of data collection revealed what informant data, through interviews and questionnaires, could not (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). For example, questionnaire responses reflected that team learning as a discipline is encouraged, but my observation was that often opportunities for team learning were cut short and discouraged. Observations also served to cover events in real time in the context in which they occurred (Bickman & Rog, 1998). This form of data collection was time-consuming and was possibly influenced by observer bias (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). This method also showed elements of reflexivity as site members may have adapted their behaviours and actions because they were being observed (Bickman & Rog, 1998). For example, initially my presence and topic seemed to sway members to ensure that they included the words "learning" and "sustainability" in their discussions; after interviews, certain subjects were raised in staff meetings that may have been as a result of topics raised in interviews, such as the Black Economic Empowerment rating of the organisation.

The role I assumed in naturalistic observations was that of 'observer as participant' whereby I was involved to a greater or lesser extent in the setting so as to develop rapport with the participants in the hope of collecting more accurate data than I would as an independent observer (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). As observer-participant I attempted to become 'part of the furniture', to be as unobtrusive as possible (Merriam & Simpson, 1984), so that my presence in the setting had little impact on the natural behaviour of the participants as the presence of an observer has the tendency to influence participant behaviour and as such sway the data (Rule & John, 2011) – participants, "knowing they are being observed, may deliberately try to create favourable or unfavourable impressions on the observer" (Rummel, 1964, p97).

In order to become 'part of the furniture', I spent time at the research site prior to all data collection phases so that participants were not particularly aware of my presence when data collection began (Rule & John, 2011). Also, I needed to develop a rapport so that participants could respond to me as a colleague rather than as an outsider. I was able to facilitate these relationships by inviting conversations with participants prior to data collection when I visited and spent time at the research site.

Specific observation skills were required in order to collect data. These included knowing what it was that I wanted to observe; taking note of situations, interactions with people and behaviours as they took place and recording these specifically (Merriam & Simpson, 1984; Rummel, 1964). Another observation skill was to examine general and specific activities that could have a bearing on the research problem. Relating this skill to my research, I needed to have an intimate knowledge of the practices or disciplines of a learning organisation, and other relevant themes obtained from literature, to be able to recognise situations, interactions and behaviours that reflected those disciplines and themes so that I could see accurately what I was supposed to see (Rummel, 1964).

Note-taking skills were important for collecting data in observations and I used a system of symbols/abbreviations so that I did not spend too much time writing and possibly miss a significant event (Merriam & Simpson, 1984; Rummel, 1964). I also had to be well-practiced in this system so that note-taking was fluid, as no other recording device was used. I attempted to be specific and descriptive in taking notes and not to use value-laden judgements of what I was observing, but to interpret what I was observing and hearing according to the five disciplines or other relevant themes. These notes were then typed up, within two days of the observations while the information was still fresh in my mind, and coded. An example of the observation notes and the typed notes, with data coding, is in Appendix A.

Documentation

Company official documents, which included the company profile; performance appraisals, business and marketing strategy, consulting methodology and policy statements were collected and analysed. These documents were examined in order to gauge what facets/ disciplines of a learning organisation were reflected in the company (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The advantage of using documents was that the collection of these was not time consuming – most were readily available and accessible. The documents were used to corroborate evidence from other sources and sometimes to indicate a concept previously not considered but important to the research (Bickman & Rog, 1998). A shortcoming of these documents was that they were not all accurate or unbiased (Bickman & Rog, 1998) and some documents changed or were updated during the research period and my notes had to be revisited. Analysis of documentation also prompted "important questions about the case which could be pursued by means of interviews or observations" (Rule & John, 2011, p67) and other research methods assisted in validating the information in these documents - observations, questionnaires and interviews were able to confirm or refute claims made.

I collected and analysed official company documents as these texts can be seen as "communications with an intended reader" and as "platforms for cultural activities" (Freebody, 2003, p181). I analysed the documents to identify major issues and themes (Rule & John, 2011) and ascertain if and how the company (the research site) located itself as a learning organisation. When analysing these documents, I looked for the communication of the "cultural activities" that the company participated in and attempted to identify which of the activities reflected those of a learning organisation. This is possible as I have an intimate knowledge of the activities (disciplines) of learning organisations. Identifying the activities was an important component of document analysis because an organisation may not necessarily include the term 'learning organisation' in its documentation. This does not mean that it is not one (Dess & Picken, 2000).

Questionnaires

"To gain a holistic understanding of a case … collecting and analysing both qualitative and quantitative data are often required" (Rule & John, 2011, p61) and questionnaires have a place within a case study where the results are interpreted within the context of the case (Hartley, 2004). To add to my understanding of the case, a questionnaire was sent to all company members after initial observations and document analysis during both research periods in 2008 and 2012. The questionnaire was used to collect data on the members' perceptions of their behaviours and beliefs concerning their company as a learning organisation (Chilisa & Preece, 2005).

This method had the advantage of being economical and posed the same questions for all respondents (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open questions – closed, scaled questions were used to ascertain beliefs and opinions concerning the respondents' perceptions about the disciplines of a learning organisation that were practiced within their company. A scale was used to allow for fairly accurate assessments of beliefs and opinions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Open questions were used to generate specific individual responses that provided further insight into the company (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Although this method was quite efficient in terms of time, its limitations were the distance between the researcher and the respondent which may have led to misinterpretation of the questions; the respondents may have responded as they thought I, the researcher, wanted them

to and the questions asked may have reflected a certain bias (Bickman & Rog, 1998). In an attempt to overcome these limitations, I piloted the questionnaires and their revisions with a sample similar to the sample being studied in another organisation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Rule & John, 2011). A further limitation was the number of questionnaires returned. Although the return rate was relatively high (ten respondents out of seventeen employees), for a small site the data could have been altered by more responses and a more accurate picture of the site could have been gained if all employees had completed the questionnaire.

In piloting the questionnaire, individuals from organisations similar to the research site were requested to answer all the questions and where there were questions that were unclear and ambiguous, to circle or mark these to discuss with me. After our discussion of these problem questions, changes were made to the relevant questions. I also asked the individuals for feedback concerning the layout and format of the questionnaire – if it was easy to use and if all instructions were clear. Their feedback for this element was mainly positive, but minor adjustments were required in terms of clarity of instructions, for example in Part 3 one of the individuals commented that she was not able to answer the questions on the company mission statement as she did not have the information required, but was not sure what to do as she could not answer the questions. These questions were changed to provide clearer instructions and the questions were also checked for ambiguity, and changed, if necessary, to be unambiguous. I also discovered that I did not include some questions that I needed to collect certain data. These were then included in the final questionnaire.

Although there was a distance in time and space between the researcher and participants with respect to the questionnaires, (I, as researcher, was not readily available on site to assist participants with the questionnaire) the use of questionnaires places a demand on the researcher as instrument – I had to draw the participant in to complete the questionnaire. As such, when the questionnaire was emailed to staff, I included a cover letter (information sheet), which incorporated a restatement of the letter of informed consent, stating the purpose of the questionnaire with a convincing argument about the benefits of the study to the participant, and guaranteed confidentiality of their participation (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Rummel, 1964). The questionnaire included a title that helped keep the respondent focussed on the purpose of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was also user-friendly in its design, provided instructions on how to complete the questionnaire, began with easier questions relating to demographics and short responses, had questions that were straight-forward and unambiguous, and included procedures for returning the questionnaire (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). An additional feature was

that the questionnaires could be completed electronically, which assisted in the issuing and returning of these – email was used. A follow-up procedure was also included so as to encourage the return of questionnaires (Rummel, 1964). I contacted the respondents telephonically and by email if the questionnaires were not received on the agreed upon date and some respondents then returned the questionnaire via email.

I requested that participants who were present during the research process in phases 1 to 3 (in 2008) and completed the questionnaire that was used then to redo the same questionnaire with two additional questions, namely "Do you view your company as being a learning organisation? Please explain your answer" and "What has changed in your company since you last completed this questionnaire that has made it more or less of a learning organisation?" Their responses assisted in gauging if and how the organisation had changed over the period in terms of its learning characteristics.

The cover letter used and a completed copy of the final questionnaire for 2008 are included in Appendix B.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with two of the three directors, three staff and one intern during phase 3 in 2008. Initially more senior staff were interviewed and at the completion of the interview, these staff provided unprompted answers to the unasked question of "Are there other people who might have a different view or explanation of this?" (Hartley, 2004, p218). The case study design allowed me to follow these leads and interview staff suggested by more senior personnel to check for the significance of points made in the interviews (Hartley, 2004).

During phase 6 in 2012, an executive, a manager and two staff were interviewed on themes that had emerged from additional literature researched during phase 5. A manager and one staff member who had been working with the company during the entire research period were included in the cohort.

The interviews were semi-structured and were guided conversations rather than structured queries so that a line of enquiry could be pursued in a fluid, as opposed to a rigid, manner (Rubin & Rubin, in Yin, 2003; Rule & John, 2011). In phase 3 in 2008, the focus of the interviews was to enquire from participants what facets/disciplines of a learning organisation were reflected in the company as well as what they perceived sustainability to be in the context

of a small organisation. Questions that have a bearing on the culture of the organisation were also explored. The themes that were explored in the interviews were also influenced by "ad hoc and opportunistic data collection" in the form of informal conversations (Hartley, 2004, p218). In phase 6 in 2012, the interviews focussed on gaining a deeper understanding of additional themes related to the research question, such as the learning organisation and leadership, small business management and sustainability.

A benefit of using interviews was that the questions were flexible and could be adapted to provide deeper insights into the research. In addition, I was able to gauge both the verbal and non-verbal responses of the respondent, who was regarded as an informant owing to the insights that he/she was able to share (Yin, 2003). In structuring the interview guide, proposed guidelines were considered such as to be aware of using "how" questions rather than "why"; to use open-ended questions that ask about facts and opinions in a non-threatening way (Yin, 2003, p86) and to be culturally sensitive (Chilisa & Preece, 2005).

A difficulty experienced in interviewing was that I had to be constantly aware of the potential for subjectivity and bias if I used poorly constructed questions (Yin, 2003). As the interviews were semi-structured, I had to consider carefully what data I wanted to collect and ensure that I phrased my questions accurately so that the intended meaning of the questions was understood and I could gather the data I needed. I also needed to be aware of power relations in face-to-face interactions as these relations had the potential to bias the data collected (Maxwell, 1996). However, there were no overt power imbalances and participants interacted and responded to me in interviews in an open manner.

Yin (2003) warns that informants may be uncomfortable and unwilling to report their true feelings and that informants may be led resulting in the interviewer's perception of what was said being inaccurate. The informants appeared to be honest in the interviews and openly shared information. This was probably due to me being viewed as being a neutral player (Yin, 2003) – I was not an employee of the company and their confidentiality was guaranteed. In order to recall and articulate the informants' responses as well as check if body language matched spoken language, I video-recorded all the interviews in 2008 (which were held in a meeting room at ODC's offices). The video-recordings were done by setting up my laptop with a web-cam and microphone. Prior to recording, I requested permission from the participant to do so and on their agreement, I would push record. I also informed the participants that if at any stage they felt uncomfortable with the interview process, they could request that the interview

be stopped and they could withdraw from the process. None made the request. The participants tended to sit stationary with a few moving slightly while being recorded. These movements did not impact on the quality or sound of the recording. I also took short notes in the interview on pertinent points that were made, which I would return to during the interview to gain clarity or to probe further (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). After the interview, these notes also assisted to highlight aspects for transcription. I transcribed the interviews from the video-recordings by firstly capturing all that the participant said, and then summarising and coding themes from the responses, similar to data collection for observations. This research method was included in the application for ethics clearance and granted.

In 2012, interviews took place in ODC's offices or in the coffee shop in the office park where ODC was located. ODC moved its premises and the layout of the new premises did not cater for interviewing staff who did not have their own offices. Two staff members had an office and were interviewed there behind closed doors, while another two worked in an open plan area and there was little privacy for an interview to be held. Their interviews took place in the coffee shop. These interviews were audio-recorded and the same procedure as for the 2008 interviews was followed.

The interview guide, which outlined certain topics that required data, initially consisted of semi-structured questions and was piloted with a sample similar to the research sample so as to identify where it could be improved and how I could better manage the interview. Feedback was gained from pilot participants on the questions and how I handled the interview. However, the questions posed in the schedule were used as a guide rather than systematically working through each question.

In order to collect data through interviews, I, as research instrument, needed to have certain skills and an awareness of certain aspects. I listened actively by showing interest and concern for the participant; making appropriate eye contact; using head nods sparingly to encourage the participant to continue talking; using facial expressions and gestures appropriately; being aware of personal space and distance, and, during the interview, being aware of my own posture and orientation as well as that of the participants' in order to show and gauge interest (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Gillham, 2000, Nisbet & Entwistle, 1970). I was also aware of the use of my voice. I attempted to listen more than talk and appreciate and work with silences (Gillham, 2000).

As interviewer, I needed to be skilled in guiding the interview through the four stages of introductory phase, opening and development of the interview, the central core of the interview and the close of the interview (Gillham, 2000). During the introductory phase, I set the participant at ease and explained the purpose of the interview and why the participant had been asked for the interview (Gillham, 2000; Rummel, 1964). I asked the participant permission to begin the interview so as to encourage openness (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Gillham, 2000). The interview flowed based on the themes being explored and I probed the participant for more information, when necessary, as the interview progressed (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Dunne et al, 2005; Gillham, 2000). In closing the interview, I summarised the information, which served as a member check, a method that increases the validity and reliability of the data findings: I, the researcher, checked with the participant if I had captured the data accurately and understood it as the participant expressed it (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Gillham, 2000; Rule & John, 2011; Rummel, 1964).

Other skills required for interviewing were that I needed to know what answers I was looking for and ensure that the question asked was answered (Freebody, 2003; Rummel, 1964). I also attempted to look for the meaning behind the words – not only listen to what was said, but how it was said, any emphasis that was placed in the response, if more or less information was given than asked for and to try and understand the reasons for such inflections (Freebody, 2003).

In preparing for the interviews (in both phases 3 (2008) and 6 (2012)), I piloted the interviews with a sample of people whom I know quite well and whom I knew would be candid in their responses to the content of the interview, as well as its structure and process. I invited their comments on how I conducted the interview, what I did to encourage or discourage contributions, my body language, gestures, eye contact, and so on. While posing the interview questions, I realised that some of the questions included in the interview guide were closed questions and so did not generate the data I was looking for. I then reworded the question, checked with the participant if the question was clear and I was able to check again if the question was indeed clear based on the response I received from the participant. Here, too, I discovered that I did not include some questions or themes that I needed to collect certain data, which were then included in the final interview guide. The feedback that I received concerning how I conducted the interview was positive and the participants commented that they felt comfortable and could respond quite easily.

I am not convinced that I guided the pilot interviews through all stages of the interview appropriately, for example setting the participant at ease at the beginning of the interview and closing the interview appropriately. I focussed mainly on the content of the interview, and provided a brief summary of the interview at the end. As I knew the participants well and I wanted to get candid responses, the interview was rather artificial, but it did provide me with an opportunity to reflect and consider the opening and closing aspects of the interview, even if we did move through these rapidly.

I have had previous experiences in conducting interviews for the purpose of research for colleagues, and as such have had the opportunity to develop my interviewing skills. On occasion, I have been accompanied by someone who has sat in on the interviews, not for the purpose of assessing my performance, and has then commented afterwards on what I did well in the interview and how I managed to encourage the interviewee to talk so that I could get the data I was looking for. I know that I am able to encourage others to talk and give information by actively listening and asking relevant and pertinent questions at the right time.

The interview guides for phase 3 (2008) and 6 (2012) are included in Appendix C and D, respectively.

Transect walks

Transect walks can provide an understanding of the environment from the perspective of an informant where the informant points out things in the environment that he/she considers to be significant (Rule & John, 2011, p69):

> This form of a guided tour allows participants to show the researcher issues of importance, concern or pride while explaining the history and impact of various landmarks and developments in their lives and their immediate context.

Participants were requested to volunteer to take me on a transect walk of the site, and in instances, participants were requested to do so to allow for "a more diverse range of issues and understandings to be captured" (Rule & John, 2011, p69).

A limitation of this approach was that the site is not a large one and participants could be apprehensive to share their viewpoints on aspects they identify in the environment. My previous presence on site and the relationships that I had been able to develop, as well as guidelines on how to make participants feel comfortable (as with an interview setting), assisted me to encourage conversation and discussion of the environment.

Auto-photography

Photography "can overcome language and cultural barriers between researcher and participants and … it can help tap into unconscious and unquestioned domains of experience and beliefs" (Rule & John, 2011, p70). As such, this method could assist in unearthing the mental models of participants and provide insight into this and other disciplines of a learning organisation as experienced by participants. Another reason for incorporating auto-photography is because sometimes "it is impossible to truly 'say' something" (Creswell, 2007, p179). This method encouraged all voices to be heard, in different ways.

Disposable cameras were given to all participants and they were requested to capture any image or instance that they saw as significant to the area of study, with the theme of "we are a learning organisation". This theme was quite open-ended in order to understand how participants interpreted the concept in their context. The photographs were then used as the basis of a focus group discussion where participants grouped the photographs according to themes and dialogue was encouraged to generate new understandings of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007).

The limitation of this approach was that it was costly to purchase and develop the disposable cameras and participants forgot to use their cameras to capture relevant and significant instances of learning. In a small organisation, another limitation was that there were often times when there were not many people in the office as they were on site or attending meetings. To overcome these limitations, participants were given a two-week timeframe during which to complete this exercise and I sent them regular email reminders (twice a week) to look for instances to use their cameras. The two-week timeframe could also prevent relevant images from being captured thus restricting data that could be incorporated into research. However, this method in itself could encourage participants to be mindful of instances where learning took place and they would be able to discuss these instances in the ensuing focus group.

Focus groups

I planned to have two focus groups, one with staff and one with management, but time constraints resulted in one focus group consisting of three staff participants being held. The auto-photographs, which reflected similar aspects to the transect walks, formed the basis of discussion. I handed the photographs to the participants and requested that they group the photographs according to themes to answer the question: "Describe how your photos illustrate that your company is a learning organisation". The photographs were numbered so that these could be referred to during discussion. The participants were involved "in a process of dialogue

aimed at making sense of the visual data" (Rule & John, 2011, p83). I had an additional set of questions to initiate and prompt further discussion, which I facilitated, to move "participants from literal descriptions of images into deeper exploration of significance and meaning of the images" (Rule & John, 2011, p84). These questions can be seen in Appendix E.

The purpose of the focus groups, which was communicated with the participants at the beginning of the sessions, was to identify how the concept of a learning organisation was taken up in a small company, the facets of a learning organisation that were reflected as seen by participants, practices that promoted and/or hindered the disciplines of a learning organisation, to gather data to inform a strategy for the site to develop as a learning organisation, and to identify mechanisms to put in place to encourage learning in the company. This purpose included the mission of a focus group and "it is important for the group to identify its mission – which is to provide information – and support this mission if the interview is to be successful" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p41), emphasising the need for focus groups to be a collaborative effort.

The focus groups were audio-recorded while I took brief notes of salient points of discussion. I have often facilitated such discussions and am able to "handle the demands of questioning, listening and being sensitive to group dynamics" (Rule & John, 2011, p66). I was confident in my ability to manage the focus groups to gain a "sense of the range and diversity of views, of whose views are dominant and marginal in the group, of resistance and dissent, and of how dialogue shifts the understanding of members in the group" (Rule & John, 2011, p66).



My role had transitioned from harbour-master to a participant on the vessel. I had used various instruments to collect data while aboard the vessel. As with any journey, it is necessary to take stock of where the vessel is and its condition by analysing the data that has been collected while on course. I now turn my attention to how the data will be analysed in order to inspect the seaworthiness of the vessel.

5.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of "examining, sorting, categorising, evaluating, comparing, synthesizing and contemplating coded data as well as reviewing raw and recorded data" (Creswell, 1998, p467). This process was followed during data collection as an early and

ongoing activity, as Maykut (1994) suggests, because this assists to inform further data collection.

Data analysis in qualitative, interpretive research tends to make use of inductive techniques (Hartley, 2004) whereby the researcher analyses data to draw conclusions from the data. In using inductive techniques, categories and patterns, based on themes, concepts and similar features, primarily emerge from the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) when explanations, descriptions and discussions are sorted (Creswell, 1998).

These categories and patterns were coded as the data passed through open, axial and selective coding processes (Creswell, 1998). Open coding was the first coding of data where the data was condensed into preliminary categories or codes Creswell, 1998; Rule & John, 2011); that is, I looked at the data and decided if the data related to Senge's five disciplines or other themes that influence the five disciplines, such as leadership and culture. The data then moved into axial coding where the codes were organised and linked to main categories (Creswell, 1998; Rule & John, 2011); that is the data was separated into two main categories – the five disciplines or other. Selective coding was then used to examine previous codes to identify and select data that supports the coding categories developed (Creswell, 1998). The selective coding represented the five disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking, or other categories such as leadership and culture.

"Looking for and analysing discrepant data and negative cases" (Bickman & Rog, 1998, p93) is as important in identifying common themes in order to test proposed conclusions. These discrepancies were considered so as not to solely focus on supporting cases and to identify if the conclusions were more credible than the possible alternatives (Bickman & Rog, 1998; Hartley, 2004; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

I was mindful of the above caution throughout data collection and will expand on how this heeding contributed to my data analysis of observations, document analysis, questionnaires, interviews, transect walks and focus groups, which included auto-photography analysis.

Observations

During observations, I took notes of what I was observing in the work environment, for example the way staff went about their work (for office observations), the way they interacted with each other, their actions and behaviours at their work consoles or in meetings, and so forth to "try

understand the patterns of behaviour and culture from the participants' perspective" (Rule & John, 2011, p81). Using open coding, I then coded my observations into categories according to the five disciplines – PM (personal mastery), BSV (building shared vision), MM (mental models), TL (team learning) and ST (systems thinking). Identifying the behaviours related to the disciplines was based on the descriptions provided by Senge (1990). Any observations that did not belong in these categories were considered in terms of additional categories, such as displays of trust, concern, care, encouraging participation and taking ownership, thus open and axial coding was employed. The categories of codes were further analysed in the process of selective coding and the categories were examined for further coding, for example some additional categories were narrowed into categories of organisational culture and leadership.

Documentation

I attempted to follow a similar process to the one described above with the research site's official documentation, company profile, performance appraisals, business and marketing strategy, consulting methodology, policy statements and any other relevant documentation provided, such as reports from surveys conducted by external consultants (for example, communication). I looked for themes relating to the learning disciplines of personal mastery, building shared vision, mental models, team learning and systems thinking and coded these. I also identified additional themes in the company's documentation relating to their espoused practises and beliefs. This analysis assisted me to identify whether the organisation claimed to be a learning organisation, be it overtly or covertly, and what wording indicated this claim. I was also able to identify information that could be probed during interviews to gain a better understanding of the organisation and its context.

Document analysis was undertaken in phase 1 (2008) and 6 (2012) as the company had reviewed and was in the process of reviewing its documentation after a branding survey and report had taken place. The same process adopted in phase 1 was used in phase 6 to identify themes. I attempted to gauge how the documentation had changed in light of the branding exercise as this provided insight into how the organisation took up the concept of a learning organisation.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires were structured with categories related to the learning disciplines and included a general section that covered information concerning the organisational culture and leadership. "Counting and comparing are standard analytical moves" (Rule & John, 2011, p82)

in case study questionnaires, and as such the questionnaires included a tally for the different categories in order to identify a correlation between the tallies and the learning disciplines. Responses to the open ended questions were analysed and coded according to themes and categorised. The questionnaires, particularly the open ended questions, were helpful in understanding the context of the case (Rule & John, 2011) and in identifying discrepant data that provided information for further probing during interviews.

Questionnaires that were completed in Phase 6 by staff employed over the entire research period were compared and analysed. This analysis assisted to identify if and how the organisation had changed over the period in terms of its learning characteristics.

Interviews

I found Maykut's suggestion to conduct data analysis as "an early and ongoing research activity" (Maykut, 1994, p123) helpful as through analysing observations, documents and questionnaires prior to interviewing participants, I was able to pick up on themes (Rule & John, 2011) that needed further probing in the interviews in phase 3 (2008). In phase 6 (2012), additional themes from literature researched were included in the schedule. These themes were over and above those identified in phase 3.

In both phase 3 and 6, interviews were semi-structured and although I had themes/questions that I wanted to discuss, I was able to follow a line of discussion as I felt necessary. These lines of discussion were coded and categorised across all interviews in order to identify further themes or discrepant data that would contribute to my findings.

Focus groups

Focus group discussions were also analysed according to content and themes (Rule & John, 2011). Participants were requested to interpret visual data from auto-photography and group the photographs according to themes. I made notes on their discussions, identifying the meaning that was associated with the visual data. The focus groups were also video recorded. Working in the interpretive paradigm, I was careful about "facilitating and not directing the analysis and interpretation process" as I was keen "to understand the phenomenon under study through the eyes of the participants" (Rule & John, 2011, p84). When participants reached an impasse in their discussion, I referred to a question in Appendix E I identified as being appropriate to stimulate discussion so that the photo could be grouped according to a theme.



Data analysis and research, as with sailing, occur in a certain context. A vessel is not always permitted or able to sail all waters, and the same applies to research. There are certain limitations that exist which need to be considered before boarding and while aboard the vessel.

5.8 Scope, limitations and assumptions

Although an ethnographic case study approach was an apt one, this methodology was not without limitations, which I needed to be mindful of while conducting the research. These limitations included the philosophical paradigm of the methodology; the demands placed on the researcher, such as the researcher's ability to participate in various settings, awareness of herself and the participants, and demands resulting from the design of the research; the presence of multiple voices in the group; overlooking or ignoring data and the value of knowledge gained with regard to the single case being researched (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998; Eisenhart, 2001; Rule & John, 2011).

A limitation of a qualitative approach is that this approach is based on a constructivist philosophy which assumes reality is a multi-layered, interactive, shared social experience interpreted by individuals, and where people's perceptions are what they consider real and thus direct their actions, thoughts and feelings (Creswell, 1998). As such, multiple realities should be presented based on considerable time spent in the field, with no specific guidelines on how to proceed with such a study (Creswell, 1998). The data collected in this study was based on participants' actions and experiences, and was a time-consuming exercise to collect and sort.

I was the sole researcher who worked alone to "collect the data, analyse the results and write up the findings" (Eisenhart, 2001, p18). These processes are limited by "the researcher's ability to participate in various settings and the amount of time the researcher can devote" (Eisenhart, 2001, p18) which is further exacerbated when the researcher is an outsider to the research site (Rule & John, 2011). As I had limits in terms of my ability to participate in various events and time for research, and as I was an outsider to the site, I may have missed data, which would influence the analysis and write-up of results. A multi-method approach was adopted to verify data that was collected in an attempt to overcome this limitation.

An ethnographic approach requires that the researcher is aware of how the members being studied interpret reality and how they behave. As such, I had to be aware of my biases and preconceived notions of these aspects so as not to focus on how I thought people should be behaving, instead of how they *were* behaving and how that contributed to an understanding of their reality (Bickman & Rog, 1998). An ethnographic approach also requires the researcher to have an understanding of cultural behaviours within given contexts and to keep an open mind (Bickman & Rog, 1998; Eisenhart, 2001). This balance between emic and etic perspective (Bickman & Rog, 1998; Merriam, 2009) was difficult to achieve as I had to immerse myself in the context and then objectively remove myself in order to comment in a rigorous way. It was also difficult to check if I was keeping an open mind as I was the sole researcher and did not have a fellow researcher to pick up on the aspects identified and to check my understanding. I attempted to overcome this obstacle by reflecting on my research with two "critical friends" (a concept discussed in Chapter Three) who were also practitioners in the field of learning organisations. I shared my experiences with them from an emic perspective, and through critical conversations, they assisted me to reflect from an etic perspective by asking questions, such as what else I observed, was there any evidence to contradict what I thought I had observed or experienced, and similar questions.

As a case study approach is an emergent design (Yin, 2003), as researcher, I needed to be aware of how the research informed further decisions, and thus needed to continually make links between data collected and next steps. This was mostly based on gut-feel and the decisions made were largely intuitive. As the study was based on a single site, the correctness of these decisions could not be examined against another site (Merriam, 2009).

The presence of multiple voices in the group impacts the decisions made about change or an intervention (Eisenhart, 2001). Questions that need to be considered in presenting results of an ethnographic case study include "How should divergent voices be handled? What should one do when needs and desires are contradictory?" (Eisenhart, 2001, p19) as these impact the presentation of results and the recommendations that emerge from the research. This challenge can be overcome by focussing on "cultural productions" (Eisenhart, 2001, p20) which are "discourses, meanings, materials, practices and group processes to explore, understand, and creatively occupy particular positions in sets of general material possibilities" (Willis, in Eisenhart, 2001, p20). Cultural productions allow groups to draw on multiple sources of influence to respond to conditions they experience (Eisenhart, 2001, p20), thus reducing competing voices. I attempted to understand cultural productions through including transect

walks and auto-photography and using these as a base for focus groups, which encouraged multiple voices to be heard in a non-competing way.

In compiling the case study, an ethnographer may overlook or ignore inconsistent or ambiguous data as a result of searching for patterns, coherence, good stories and typical instances (Eisenhart, 2001). This outlying data may provide valuable insights into the research and so a word of caution needs to be heeded when compiling data: consider everything; ignore nothing. Furthermore, to understand data in its context, I had to immerse myself in the context as

> Only by watching carefully what people do and say, following their example, and slowly becoming part of their groups, activities, conversations, and connections do we stand some chance of grasping what is meaningful to them. (Eisenhart, 2001, p23)

"Most ethnography has been directed toward contributing to disciplinary knowledge rather than toward solving practical problems" (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998, p119). Thus, ethnography may be viewed as having little value in addressing problems that are identified through research. This limitation may be overcome through a dialogic approach that allows for multiple voices to be heard (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998), where the organisation can pick up on the problems identified through the research process and identify ways of addressing these.

The case study is based on a single case, which allowed for in-depth study of the case, but there is a lack of a comparative dimension within the study (Rule & John, 2011). Being an ethnographic case study, the findings of the study cannot be generalised to the entire population from which the sample was selected, known as external generalizability (Maxwell, 2005, p115), but it would be reasonable to interpret results as valid to organisations similar to the site studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). This is known as "reader-determined transferability" which allows the reader to transfer the findings and conclusions to other cases familiar to the reader (Rule & John, 2011, p105) based on the "development of a theory that can be extended to other cases" (Maxwell, 2005, p116). However, the purpose of the study is not to generalise, but to better understand relationships and experiences that exist within the case selected (Bassey, 1999; Maxwell, 1996; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006), and this understanding is enhanced by seeking out possible contrasts within the case (Hartley, 2004), for example contrasts between different types of meetings, or experiences of different participants. This is known as internal generalizability, which refers to the "generalizability of a conclusion within the setting or group studied" and is dependent on "descriptive, interpretive and theoretical validity of the conclusions" (Maxwell, 2005, p115).



I am now aware of factors that influence my research while aboard the vessel. The captain has given me permission to board and the staff have welcomed me. I need to be aware of how I treat them and ensure it is in an ethical manner.

5.9 Ethical considerations

In conducting this study, certain ethical issues were taken into account. As suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2006), individuals' responses to questionnaires were kept confidential and during the research process I attempted to consider all informants in a caring and fair manner to prevent them experiencing exposure, humiliation or loss of trust. In order to treat informants fairly, I attempted to consider carefully what was asked, how it was asked, and what I permitted informants to disclose (Maxwell, 1996).

During Phase 1 (2008), all informants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study during a staff meeting prior to commencing the study and a protocol for informed consent was signed by each participant (Maxwell, 1996) during the meeting. This informed consent included the participants' permission to participate in the study; withdraw their consent at any stage of the study; permission for me, the researcher, to use the data collected in ways deemed fit, to interpret and analyse data and publish or reproduce the data and analysis thereof. With regard to observations and document analysis, permission was granted by the site managing director to conduct the study. Although there was staff turnover, this did not adversely affect the study as the remaining staff formed the core of the study. On return to the site in Phase 6, new staff that participated in the study provided insights through additional methods that were used. These staff were informed of the nature and purpose of the study in a one-on-one discussion and they each signed a protocol for informed consent. The permission letter is in Appendix F.

In writing the data, pseudonyms were used for the organisation and participants in observations, questionnaires, interviews, transect walks, auto-photography and focus groups so as "to protect the individuals' confidences from other persons in the setting and to protect the informants from the general reading public" (McMillam & Schumacher, 2006, p334). An exception to complete anonymity was the focus groups as participants would be aware of the comments made by their colleagues. I attempted to ensure that confidences would be protected by setting up a safe space for communication to establish trust and allowed the participants to set up ground rules that would make the focus group a safe space for them to talk freely (Brown & Isaacs, 2001). Such

"open discussion and negotiation usually promote fairness to the participants and to the research inquiry" (McMillam & Schumacher, 2006, p335).

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity for interviews that were video-recorded and audio-recorded, interviews took place in a room that was obscured from the general public, so participants' identities remained confidential, or in a setting away from the office (for example, a coffee shop). When participants suggested other staff that should be interviewed, I did not disclose that the person would definitely be interviewed, but thanked them for the offer of information. The recordings were kept on my laptop which is password protected to ensure that there could be no unauthorised access to these. After transcribing the interviews, the recordings were transferred onto disk and stored safely off-site.

A successful application for ethics clearance was made to the Education Sub-committee of the University of Witwatersrand's Human Research Ethics Committee. The letter awarding clearance is included in Appendix G.



I am collecting data and engaged in this research process, but to whom does this data relate? And how do I know that it is valid and reliable? These considerations are my next port-of-call.

5.10 Validity and Reliability

According to McMillan & Schumacher (2006, p324), validity is "the degree to which the interpretations have mutual meanings between the participants and the researcher" and thus they agree on the description or composition and the meaning of events. Rule & John (2011, p107-108) view validity (which they refer to as "trustworthiness") as "the extent to which a case study recorded the fullness and essence of the case reality" and is dependant on "thick descriptions" of the case. However, validity threats exist - alternative explanations or "rival hypotheses" which are ways "you might be wrong" (Maxwell, 2005, p106). In order to minimise the impact of these threats, strategies have been included in the design to try identify and "rule out these threats" to my interpretations and explanations (Maxwell, 2005, pp106-107).

A multi-method approach that included observations, document analysis, questionnaires, interviews, transect walks, auto-photographs and focus groups (Hartley, 2004; McMillan &

Schumacher, 2006) was adopted for the study in an attempt to increase its validity. I also took notes during certain methods to record data.

However, such explanations for validity (such as multi-method approach, member-checking) are general, theoretical and abstract and lack sufficient justification to rule out alternative explanations to conclusions that will be presented. Such explanations also do not consider validity threats of researcher bias and reactivity (Maxwell, 2005).

Researcher bias, also referred to as the subjectivity of the researcher, is responsible for two threats to the validity of qualitative conclusions, namely "the selection of data that fit the researcher's existing theory or preconceptions and the selection of data that 'stand out' to the researcher" (Maxwell, 2005, p108); that is the lens through which the researcher views the data and that influences her conclusions. It is impossible to eliminate this lens. It is therefore important that the researcher makes known her values and expectations and how these influence the conduct and conclusions of the study (Maxwell, 2005).

Reactivity, also referred to as reflexivity in some texts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006), refers to the influence that the researcher has on data collection (Maxwell, 2005). This influence cannot be eliminated and the goal in a qualitative study is to understand this influence and use it productively (Maxwell, 2005). Reactivity appears to be more of a validity threat in interviews rather than in observation studies as "what the informant says is always influenced by the interviewer and the interview situation" (Maxwell, 2005, p109). In conducting the study and writing conclusions, I had to attempt to understand how I was influencing what the informant said and how this affected the validity of the inferences I could draw from the interview (Maxwell, 2005). A strategy that I employed during data collection that assisted with this understanding was to consult different peer debriefers (or 'critical friends') at different points with whom I discussed my preliminary analysis and next strategies and this helped me understand my own position and role in the inquiry (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006)

As researcher, I have attempted to account for these validity threats by describing my role as researcher as instrument, including my philosophical assumptions towards education and research, at the beginning of this chapter. In conducting research and writing conclusions, I also considered tests for validity and the existence of potential threats to conclusions as suggested by Maxwell (2005).

Specific threats of the research was that I was the only field-worker and that data collection took place over two different periods with a long interval between them, phases 1 to 3 (in 2008), and then phase 6 (in 2012). I attempted to rule out these threats through employing various methods and procedures, namely intensive, long-term involvement in the site over the two periods, collecting "rich" data, respondent validation, intervention, searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases, triangulation, quasi-statistics and comparison (Maxwell, 2005, pp109-113).

I observed a variety of situations and events so as to collect data that was "more direct and less dependent on inference" (Maxwell, 2005, p110). Repeated observations and my sustained presence assisted with ruling out premature conclusions and allowed me to "develop and test alternative hypotheses" (Maxwell, 2005, p110). My presence assisted with informants being more open in interviews and candidly sharing their views and insights with me that challenged any conclusions that I may have developed.

I was able to collect "rich" data through my long-term involvement and intensive interviews, which provided "a full and revealing picture of what is going on" (Maxwell, 2005, p110). I had verbatim transcripts of interviews and detailed, descriptive notes of specific events I observed that assisted with the validity of the data I collected ((Maxwell, 2005).

Comments made by members in interviews, transect walks and focus groups were checked by members, a strategy referred to as member-checking or respondent validation (Maxwell, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Rule & John, 2011). This assisted me in "ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (Maxwell, 2005, p111) and helped me to identify my biases and any misunderstandings. This feedback helped me gain evidence regarding the validity of my account and the conclusions I drew from the data (Maxwell, 2005).

At times, informal interventions took place where I shared my observations and interpretation of events with the director of the site, while being cognisant that these disclosures could influence his behaviour. I could then trace any changes in behaviour back to these disclosures and the process of that change, which provided corroborating evidence of the disclosures (Maxwell, 2005).

I looked for discrepant evidence and negative cases that indicated a variance or contradiction to the emerging pattern of meanings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) and attempted to understand

if the data could be accounted for or if there were defects in such accounts (Maxwell, 2005). In difficult cases, I reported "the discrepant evidence and allow readers to evaluate this and draw their own conclusions" (Maxwell, 2005, p112).

Triangulation (referred to by Rule & John (2001, p109) as "crystallisation"), which is the collecting of information from a range of individuals and settings using a variety of methods to identify patterns in the data (Maxwell, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006), was used. However, using a variety of methods does not necessarily rule out validity threats as the methods that are used may be subject to the same vulnerability (Maxwell, 2005); for example, document analysis, interviews and questionnaires may all be subject to self-report bias. This is a real threat for my research as I am the sole researcher and could be blinded by my bias. An awareness of this bias is perhaps a caution for myself when interpreting data and a caution for the reader to be aware of the potential biases that may exist based on the lens through which I view my research. It is also a reminder to be constantly self-disclosing when writing up data.

Quasi-statistics, which refers to "the use of simple numerical results that can be readily derived from the data" (Maxwell, 2005, p113) were used to assess the amount of evidence in my data concerning a particular conclusion or threat. Various counts and numerical results were used for questionnaires and are reported on.

Participants who were employed over the entire research period were able to provide comparisons of the site at an earlier time (phase 6 as compared to phases 1 to 3) (Maxwell, 2005). Their insights were gauged through questionnaires and interviews and assisted in identifying "crucial factors and the effect that these have" (Maxwell, 2005, p113).

Reliability refers to the ability of the study being replicated in order to produce the same results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006); "when the state of what is being described is consistent, the answers are consistent as well" (Nunnally, in Bickman & Rog, 1998, p344). Rule & John (2011) view reliability as methodological rigour so that the research community can accept the findings and case accounts with confidence. As human subjects are not static, replication of the study should not produce the same results. However, the design of the study can be tested through being replicated. The reliability of this study was checked through an 'audit trail' (Rule & John, 2011, p108) where the data collection method and its purpose were referred to prior to and after use of the method (refer to Appendix H).



There is a story to tell here and as anyone who has been on a journey, I would like to share the tales of my travels with any willing audience. But how should I tell this story - how do I write it up?

5.11 Writing data as an ethnographic case study

"It is difficult to separate the activities of data collection, analysis and report writing in qualitative study" (Creswell, 2007, p198) and in order for the reader to make sense of these activities and in keeping with the ethnographic tradition, I have written up the study in narrative format (Creswell, 2007). This approach is apt as "how we write reflects who we are as researchers" (Creswell, 2007, p179), and the format enables readers to have a better understanding of me, the researcher, and the lens through which I view the data, events and settings. In writing up an ethnographic case study, there are a number of aspects that I need to be mindful of. These include considering who my audience is, the themes of the case study, writing a case study and writing it as ethnography and stylistic attributes (Creswell, 2007; Humphreys & Watson, 2009; Richardson, 1990; van Maanen, 1995).

The audience for this research includes academics, small business owners, workplace/adult learning and education practitioners and participants from the research site. In order to accommodate this spectrum of audiences, I have disclosed my position in this chapter and continue to do so in coming chapters. I provide rich descriptions of the data, events and settings and I use a writing style that is "personal, familiar, perhaps 'up-close', highly readable, friendly and applied for a broad audience" (Creswell, 2007, p182). These techniques as well as a thematic approach to writing assist with the readability of the study across a range of audiences.

I have taken a thematic approach to writing up the data based on the themes that emerge from the research questions. I have also presented the data and findings in a chronological order based on the two different periods that I spent at the research site (Creswell, 2007). These two periods are presented in Chapters Six and Seven. In both chapters, I am self-disclosing about my role in keeping with the ethnographic case study tradition (Creswell, 2007).

For the purposes of this study, a case study can be seen as a description of a case which presents themes, assertions or interpretations of the researcher and includes a thick description of the

case, a presentation of issues (or themes) and confirming and disconfirming evidence of these issues (Creswell, 2007).

In writing the case study as ethnography, a description of the culture is included to assist the reader, and researcher, to understand "what is going on here?" (Creswell, 2007, p192). Data is presented, analysed, evaluated and interpreted in order to arrive at findings "both within the context of the researcher's experiences and within the larger body of scholarly research on the topic" (Creswell, 2007, p193). Ethnographers are able to write "a good story" in which they are able to draw close to people and events, and write about what they learned in situ (Creswell, 2007; van Maanen, 1995).

The narrative is a feature of ethnography in which "we weigh and sift experiences, make choices regarding what is significant, what is trivial, what to include, what to exclude. We do not simply chronicle 'what happened next' but place the 'next' in a meaningful context" (Richardson, 1990, p10). I have employed enhanced ethnography which includes descriptive scene settings, dialogue, the author as a character in the narrative, including my and the participants' emotional responses and their perspectives in order to understand 'the story' (Humphreys & Watson, 2009).

Ethnography also allows for certain stylistic considerations. In order to protect the identification of individuals' identities and responses of various research transcripts, Humphreys & Watson (2009, p59) suggest that field notes and the researcher's impressions merge to construct a voice of what a fictional character might say. This approach allows for anonymity but also constructs a fictitious character as a container, or holder, of the voice of participants. I, however, have included individual responses as there are divergent voices. I protected identities by not including names of respondents, instead using pseudonyms. Truth claims are mainly in correspondence terms and describe more-or-less what happened (Humphreys & Watson, 2009), as opposed to a definite. This also allows for the researcher's lens to be viewed by the reader, understanding that the claim is as I, the researcher, saw it, or understood it to be.

In summary, in writing up this ethnographic case study, a single case has been examined and the data presented in narrative format based on themes in a chronological order. The story that unfolds is one in which the participants' voices can be heard and the settings understood as seen through my, the researcher's, lens, as I disclose it. The story follows…

5.12 Conclusion



Having completed a perusal of maps and navigation aids, and inspected the seaworthiness of the vessel, I am now ready to have the anchor raised and set sail. The methods I have planned should contribute to a fair and accurate assessment of the sustainability of the vessel and learning disciplines practised by the crew. However, I am mindful of a major influence on the assessment that I will make and that is of myself, the researcher, as instrument.

This chapter has outlined the design of the study and provided insight into my philosophical assumptions and the research paradigm adopted. An ethnographic case study approach was adopted that incorporates an interactive model in its design. Observations, documentation, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups were used to collect data and also enabled triangulation of data, contributing to the validity and trustworthiness of the study. Limitations and validity threats have been considered as well as how these can be minimised. Data analysis employs a process of examining, sorting, categorising and coding data in order to evaluate, compare, synthesize and review the data and the reporting of data is written up as an ethnographic case study.



I am now ready to employ my instruments and am curious about the results of the study and what the findings will be, all the while hopeful that the vessel is sustainable and will not sink, at least not while I'm on board!

CHAPTER 6:
CASE STUDY ONE – ODC AND THE LEARNING DISCIPLINES IN 2008

6.1 Our co-ordinates – locating ODC in time and space…



It was boarding day, 2008, and I stood on the dock waiting to board. The receptionist buzzed the door open for me and greeted me with a smile.

Me: Hi, I'm here to see Tim (managing director).
Mary (receptionist): Sure. Is he expecting you?
Me: I think so. I'm here to do research.
Mary: Oh. Your name is?
Me: Genevieve
Mary: Please wait a moment while I call him.

Tim emerged from the office area into reception after a few moments. He was a large-framed man with a firm handshake. I had met him about two years before when I spent a few months aboard, assisting him, the captain, to draft reports for a government department which had procured the vessel's services. We had had a previous conversation during which I requested permission to research his vessel. We exchanged pleasantries before discussing the purpose of my visit.

Tim: So, you're here to do your research. What do you need?
Me: I'll first be doing observations and just need to sit where I can see what's going on.
Tim: Okay. Then come into the office where the staff are. There's a couch in the corner if you want to sit there.
Me: Okay. Thanks.
Tim: Anything else you need?
Me: Company documentation.
Tim: Okay. You can get that from Angela…
Me. Great, thanks. I'll ask her for it.

Tim: Alright, then. If you have any questions, just let me know.

Me: Sure, thanks. Will do.

I entered the office area with anticipation and excitement. The crew greeted me, some with smiles and others with apprehension, not quite sure what I would be doing or looking for while on board. Some of the faces were familiar but there were also many new ones. The crew complement had grown since I was last aboard – it had more than doubled and the organisation had moved to a larger vessel to accommodate the new crew. I was eager to continue exploring the vessel and looked forward to the journey, considering the initial growth in staff numbers and premises I had observed.



My plan for exploring the vessel while on board was to firstly assess our co-ordinates, that is where we were at that point in time. I would then survey the layout of the vessel and the crew complement. Thereafter, I intended to identify the facets of a learning organisation reflected in the vessel through analysing its documentation, observing crew in various settings and forums, analysing questionnaires completed by the crew, and consulting with the crew individually through interviews.





When the vessel set sail with me aboard, the waters were calm and predictable. Little did we know that a short while into the journey the waters would become stormy and unpredictable, and the journey an uncertain one…

In early 2008 the commodities markets were doing well, with gold and platinum at highs (see Chapter 1). The vessel (ODC) had two capital projects lined up with mining houses for 2009 and a concern for them was whether they had sufficient staff resources to deal with the anticipated workload. However, this concern changed when the markets did an about-turn in September 2008, a stormy period when many international banks closed their doors permanently due to the global credit crisis. Mining houses placed new capital projects on hold and downgraded existing projects. ODC were placed in a position where contingencies were necessary, focussing on how they could stay afloat as the waters became turbulent with no indication of how long the storm would last. It was not the first time that ODC had been through a storm; they had experienced three similar ones in their ten year existence. This change in market made the study more exciting and interesting – it was a time when the true colours of ODC could be seen as the fluctuation in the market tested characteristics and disciplines of the organisation.

I boarded ODC in April 2008, with my research instruments and recording tools on hand. My timing for the study was apt – it was a good time to capture how this small vessel could ensure its sustainability and navigate through the global credit crisis that, unbeknown to us, lay before us. I was on course to collect data for the research questions, as can be seen in Table 6.1.

I first wanted to explore the layout of the vessel, meet the crew and understand their roles on the vessel. Once I had found my sea legs by spending some time on the vessel, felt comfortable with the crew and they with me, I proceeded to gather data for the research questions. The findings from the initial research period (phases 1 to 3 during 2008) are presented in this chapter.

After taking a break from the vessel and returning in 2012, I had acquired further insights into learning organisations and continued to gather data. Findings related to the first research question gathered during phase 6 in 2012 are discussed in Chapter Seven. Findings for the second and third research questions during both research periods (phases 1 to 3 and phase 6) are presented in Chapter Eight. Research questions and instruments for the two periods are presented in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1: Research questions and instruments used

Research question	**Phase 1-3 (2008) Research instrument/s**	**Phase 6 (2012) Research instrument/s**
1. What facets of a learning organisation are reflected in the organisation?	Document analysis Naturalistic observations Questionnaires Interviews	Document analysis Naturalistic observations Questionnaires Transect walks Auto-photographs Focus groups
2. What does sustainability mean in the context of the small organisation?	Document analysis Questionnaires Interviews	Naturalistic observations Document analysis Questionnaires Interviews
3. How can facets of a learning organisation be corrected or strengthened in the organisation in order to contribute to its sustainability?	Naturalistic observations Interviews	Naturalistic observations Interviews Focus groups

6.2 Layout and staffing of the research site

It did not take me too long to explore the vessel as the floor area was fairly small (approximately 200m^2) and was level. The office area was open plan, and the offices were separated from the open plan space by full length glass windows (a "fish bowl" as some staff would refer to the open plan office space). The walls between the offices were solid dry walls. There were some changes in the function of the offices during the study period, based on the changing needs of the organisation derived from staff feedback and staff changes. The layout of the office area of ODC is illustrated in Figure 6.1 (p163), with wording in red reflecting the layout at the beginning of the study in April 2008; wording in blue representing the layout in November 2008 and wording in black indicating areas that did not change.

There were three work consoles that could each accommodate four staff members. Spaces at these consoles were not allocated to staff – they chose where they preferred to sit, and sometimes would move from console to console. These movements were often based on the projects that staff were working on, for example staff working on the same project would choose to sit together at a console; sometimes staff would simply like "a change of view". Offices were occupied by managers and directors.

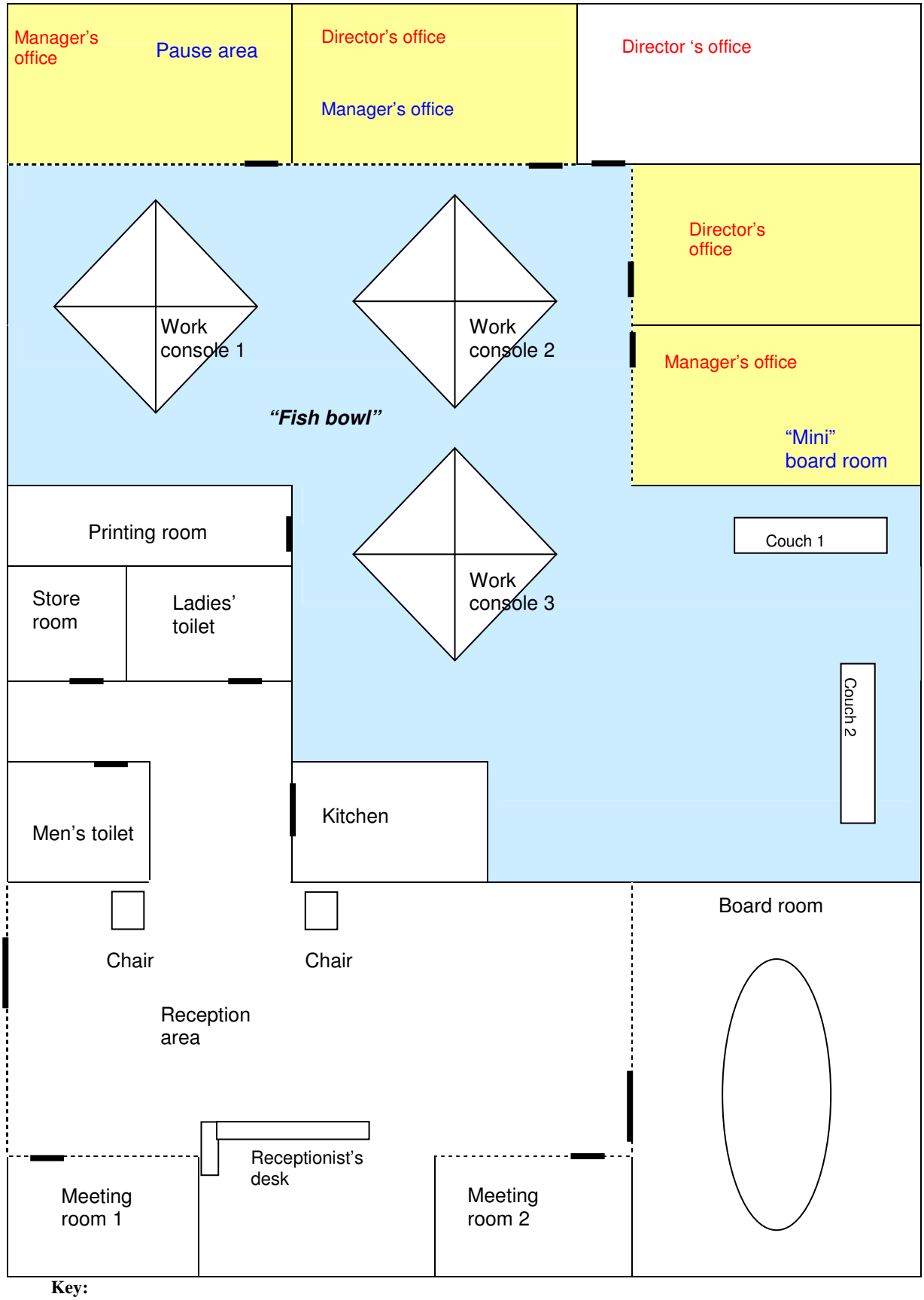


Figure 6.1.: Office layout of ODC - 2008

I was introduced to the crew during a staff meeting in April 2008. The captain introduced me and informed the staff that I was on board to do research for my Masters degree (at that point) "In…?" he asked. "Adult Education focusing on the learning organisation," I added. I was then given the opportunity to introduce myself and give an overview of what I would be doing. I informed the staff that I would be conducting observations, sending them a questionnaire to complete and interviewing some of them. I requested that they sign an informed consent protocol if they would like to participate in the study and also informed them that at any point they could withdraw from the study. I also invited them to ask questions at any point. By the end of the meeting all staff had signed and returned the protocol to me. I was relieved as I saw this as a gesture of the staff inviting me aboard to study their organisation – I interpreted it as a welcoming gesture.

The vessel (organisation) consisted of sixteen crew members when I first boarded in April 2008. There were three directors; two managers; eight consultants; an administrator and two interns, who were required to complete a year of service at an organisation as part of their industrial psychology degree.

When I disembarked in November 2008, four crew members had resigned. During this period, some new staff joined the crew with the result that the staff complement, in terms of numbers, remained the same throughout the study. The staff who resigned were a director, three consultants, and recruited staff were three consultants and an administrator. After the resignation of the director, a manager assumed her function and the managing director took on additional functions to cover gaps that were left by the director's resignation. During the research period, an administrator was recruited.

The demographic make-up of the staff at the beginning of Phase 1 (April 2008) and the end of Phase 3 (November 2008) was as follows in Tables 6.2 and 6.3 (p165) respectively:

Table 6.2: Demographics of staff in April 2008[5]

Race	Gender	No. of staff	Roles occupied
Black	Female	3	2 Directors 1 Administrator
White	Female	10	2 Managers 6 Consultants 2 Interns
White	Male	3	1 Director 2 Consultants
Total number of staff		16	

Table 6.3: Demographics of staff in November 2008

Race	Gender	No. of staff	Roles occupied
Black	Female	3	2 Administrators 1 Director
White	Female	10	2 Managers 6 Consultants 2 Interns
White	Male	3	1 Director 2 Consultants
Total number of staff		16	

With an awareness of the layout of the vessel and the crew, I began research using my instruments.

6.3 How data was collected

My first focus was to collect data that reflected the facets of a learning organisation. I looked for instances that specifically displayed data related to certain themes and then identified other themes that emerged through data collection, some of which I then explored in interviews. The specific themes were behaviours that were associated with the five learning disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. Other themes that were identified as being important were the role of leadership and organisational culture. Sub-themes emerged from the specific themes, for example related to organisational culture, trust and induction emerged as themes; in identifying learning taking place, the type of learning/theory was also identified. The research instruments that were used to gather data for this research question were naturalistic observations, document analysis, questionnaires, and interviews as discussed in Chapter Five.

[5] Race of staff members reflect terms used in BBB-EE Act: staff that are Indian, Coloured (Mixed Race) or Black are indicated as "Black".

6.3.1 Observations

I began data collection with observations in order to 'case the joint', allow staff to get used to my presence in the environment and for me as researcher to gain an understanding of the culture and how staff interacted and functioned together. These observations took place initially in the open office space and afterwards I observed various meetings. I started with the observations after the staff meeting during which the managing director introduced me to the staff. I collected company documentation while commencing observations.

I observed meetings which served various purposes. I noted behaviours that reflected the learning disciplines, as well as additional themes, in these meetings and in the open office area.

The different types of meetings that I observed were:

- Project meetings – these were held for a project team to plan the way forward for the project; determine and agree on next steps; and allocate work for the next meeting. These meetings took place frequently on an ad hoc basis determined by the project delivery date and the progress made. The project leader would lead these meetings. The nature of the meetings tended to be collaborative irrespective of the project and the leader. These meetings were held in the boardroom or in one of the meeting rooms.
- Operations meetings – the purpose of these meetings was for the project leader to give feedback to the managing director (who had a dual role of operations director) in terms of progress made towards project deliverables. The director would also provide input concerning the project and team issues. These meetings were generally an hour long and took place in the managing director's office.
- Staff training – these sessions were held when needed to update existing staff and train new/contract staff on the company methodology concerning the project that they were involved in. These sessions generally lasted two to three hours and were conducted in the boardroom.
- Staff meetings – these meetings were generally held on the second Friday of each month and included addressing office issues, financial updates on company performance, and an information/knowledge sharing session, followed by lunch. These meetings were scheduled in the boardroom from 10h00 to 13h00.

6.3.2 Document analysis

The documentation that I collected and analysed was the company profile, performance appraisals, business and marketing strategy, consulting methodology, and policy statements.

Each document served a different purpose: the company profile was a neatly presented marketing document that was sent to prospective clients; the performance appraisals were a one-page document with different fields used internally for directors/managers to conduct appraisals on a quarterly basis; the business and marketing strategy was an internal document drafted by the directors and shared with the rest of the staff; the consulting methodology was an internal document that was used for training staff, both new and contract staff as they joined the company; and the policy statement was a one-page document on knowledge harvesting and documentation. Each document had a different focus and intention and so it was to be expected that the emphasis placed in the documents would vary. However, in analysing the documentation, I identified phrases relating to the disciplines of a learning organisation, as well as other themes relevant to a learning organisation, such as leadership and sustainability.

6.3.3 Questionnaires

I emailed questionnaires to all staff and ten of the seventeen staff members completed them. The questionnaires were structured with categories related to the learning disciplines and included a general section that covered information concerning the organisational culture and leadership. The questionnaire consisted of closed and open questions.

Closed questions

The questionnaires included a count for the closed questions and the different categories in order to identify a correlation between the counts and the learning disciplines. Respondents were requested to select a count for the responses as follows:

1 = Strongly agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neither agree nor disagree
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly disagree

I counted the responses to the various categories and calculated the average of these categories for each respondent. Some statements in the questionnaire were worded in the negative voice (namely statements 11.1; 11.2; 12.1; 12.2; 12.3; 65; 91; 97; 113), that is, the way that these statements were worded indicated the opposite of what should take place in a learning organisation and as such, responses that reflect the appropriate practise of the discipline should

score a 'disagree' response, rather than an 'agree' response to these statements. The responses to these statements were noted in order to highlight any emerging issues.

Open questions

The open questions were structured according to categories of the learning disciplines and general questions relating to organisational culture and leadership. Themes emerged from the questions and I grouped responses according to these themes which were based on the members' perceptions of their behaviours and beliefs concerning their company as a learning organisation.

The demographics of the staff who completed the questionnaire are as follows:

Table 6.4: Demographics of questionnaire respondents

Questionnaire respondent	Age	Gender	Race	Length of time with company	Role
A	30-34	Female	White	7 years	Manager
B	40-44	Male	White	7 years +	Director
C	25-29	Female	White	2-3 years	Consultant
D	50+	Male	White	Less than 2 years	Consultant
E	25-29	Female	White	Less than 2 years	Consultant
F	25-29	Female	White	Less than 2 years	Consultant
G	25-29	Female	Black	6 months-1 year	Administrator
H	20-24	Female	White	6 mths-1 year	Intern
I	40-44	Female	White	Less than 6 months	Consultant
J	35-39	Female	White	Less than 6 months	Consultant

6.3.4 Interviews

Interviews with the crew were the next port-of-call for gathering data. This interaction with the crew assisted with providing further insights.

I conducted interviews after I had received the questionnaires and collated responses. I interviewed six staff – a director, two managers, two consultants and an intern. Three of the staff had completed the questionnaires while three had not (a manager, a consultant and the intern). I specifically selected the three staff members who had not completed the questionnaire in order to gain the views of more staff in the company.

Various themes emerged through the initial interviews and these were used as a guide for subsequent interviews in order to be systematic in data collection, as discussed in Chapter Five. The themes that guided the interview, related to the first research question included leadership; organisational culture; learning organisation and the sub-themes that emerged through observations, namely trust and induction.

6.4 What facets of a learning organisation are reflected in the company?

In collecting data to answer this question, I began with observations of the open office area to 'case the joint', while off-site I scrutinised ODC's document describing its consulting model. These initial observations took place over a series of mornings after my introduction to the crew. I initially sat on one of the couches in this area (couch 2 in Figure 6.1, p163), but then moved around to different consoles to gain different vantage points.

The open office area was an unusually quiet one with staff having little interaction or exchanges in the area. There were occasional whispers between staff sitting at the same console, but any discussions appeared to take place outside the open office space. For example Jean signalled to Sarah by whispering her name and pointing with her head to the door as she walked past Sarah. Sarah then got up and walked out of the office area. On another occasion, Adrian, sitting at console 1, attracted Sarah's attention, at console 3, by raising his arms high into the air, while seated, and waving his hands. He then gestured with his fingers for her to go to him. Sarah got up and went to Adrian's desk where he began the conversation in hushed tones, "Is this the right thing?" They had a brief discussion in whispers, and then Sarah returned to her work console. "Interesting and strange," I thought. "Staff do not speak to one another in the open office space; they whisper or they meet to speak in an area outside of this space." I wondered if this was an indication of respect for one another as the office area was a quiet working space or if team discussions were secret, or if there was another reason. In time, I concluded the former as I noticed that the office area was treated as a quiet working space for everyone and discussions could be disruptive to co-workers. All staff had discussions (inter-personal and cellphone calls) outside of the open office area, either in a meeting room, the kitchen or the reception area, and this seemed to be an unwritten rule and part of their culture. I also wondered if this was counter to the purpose of an open-plan office – weren't these types of spaces meant to encourage open communication between staff? "There's not even a radio to fill in the quiet," I thought to

myself. I did not realise at that point that it would be quite different on my return to the environment in phase 6 (in 2012).

Laughter could be heard at different times from the kitchen and the reception area. “This is healthy,” I thought. It appeared so quiet and serious in the open office area, but there were spaces where staff could engage on a lighter note.

There seemed to be a lack of orientation or induction into the organisation. When Julie joined ODC, she asked an intern who sat at the same console as her, to whom she should address her questions. The intern responded that Julie could ask her all project-related questions. “Oh,” I thought, “and what about her other questions? Who would be able to assist her with these?”

Staff seemed reluctant to move away from their desks, even to eat their lunch. Most would remain at their consoles to eat, whilst working in between bites. “Okay,” I thought, “this is like so many other organisations that I’ve visited or been part of. We (South Africans) just don’t seem to want to take time to eat and have a break while doing so. What is it with us?”

Although staff did not speak loudly and the office environment appeared a bit constrained, there did appear to be some free movement in the office area. Initially Mark sat at work console 3 with other consultants, but during the course of the study he moved to work console 1 where two interns were seated, for no particular reason other than a change of scenery and company.

I had heard the staff comment that the office area was a ‘fish bowl’ with the managers’/directors’ offices looking into the office area (as illustrated in Figure 6.1, p163). I wondered “Why the metaphor?” and turned my attention to those outside of the ‘fish bowl’ – the managers/directors in their offices. Some staff commented that they felt that they were always in and on view and that eyes from the offices were watching them. “Is this reality or is it staff perception?” I wondered, and came to no real conclusion. Nevertheless, I did turn my attention to what was taking place behind the glass walls.

One of the directors would often work in her office with her door closed. She would occasionally leave her office to go to the bathroom or kitchen, have a few brief exchanges with some staff and then return to her office, closing the door behind her. The other director would keep his door open, except when in a meeting, as would one of the managers. The other manager would occasionally have her door closed, but most often it was open. She would also

occasionally have brief exchanges with the staff in the open office area. It did not appear that the managers were peering into the 'fish bowl' – I most often viewed them with their heads behind their computers, or busily making notes on note pads.

Having 'cased the joint', I turned my attention to the company documentation which provided insight into the underpinning philosophy or approach of ODC. This approach was evident in the documentation related to their consulting model.

ODC's consulting model

ODC was started by the current Managing Director (MD) and a business partner in 1996. The focus of ODC at that time was organisational design and development and the founding partners viewed their offering as being at the forefront of redefining organisational design and development, something which is ever-changing. The founding partners of ODC saw a market for a framework for organisational design and development and they developed a model for consulting that is based on work complexity. ODC refined work complexity theories to their model to be more specific to a developing country context. It also adapted its model to suit the mining sector by including the sub-procedural levels (see Table 6.5, p172). This model of work complexity evolved and includes the following framework:

- Stratified Systems Theory which theorises the relationship between work complexity and human cognitive capability, developed by Elliot Jaques (of the USA), and
- The work of Dr. Gillian Stamp (of the United Kingdom) who developed the concept of Levels of Work Theory (LoW) and the Career Path Appreciation Test (CPA) to measure cognitive capability in terms of work (le Roux, 2008:8).

ODC's model considers human cognitive complexity and purports that this needs to be mapped to work complexity. "Elliot Jacques' theory, *Stratified Systems Theory*, is groundbreaking in that it classifies work complexity and recognises that from a cognitive ability perspective, individuals have natural affinity for different types of work" (ODC Work Complexity, 2006). In describing human cognitive complexity, the work of Jean Piaget and other cognitive psychologists is taken into account. The model commences with an understanding that experiences influence human cognitive development and defines related concepts as follows:

- Cognition: refers to how we acquire information about the world and turn it into personal knowledge that we can store and retrieve to direct our behaviour
- Cognitive development: is therefore the unfolding and refinement of these cognitive processes

- Cognitive complexity ability: is an individual's ability to deal with the complexities of modern life and work and has become a fundamental factor in dictating a person's potential competence in a job.

ODC's understanding of cognitive complexity ability relates to the context of a learning organisation as, based on the above definitions, an individual's ability to learn links to the level of work he/she is able to perform. In order to be a learning organisation, individuals within the organisation need to be learning (Senge, 1990). According to ODC's model, certain levels of work (work complexity themes) need more learning than others and as such the practises/disciplines of a learning organisation may only be viewed at certain levels in an organisation, that is levels of work that require "knowledge work" to be done to a lesser or greater degree, as can be seen in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5. Knowledge work required for Work Complexity themes

WORK COMPLEXITY THEMES/ LEVELS	WORKPLACE NAMING CONVENTION	KNOWLEDGE WORK REQUIRED
1. RURAL SUBPROCEDURAL	Labourer/General Hand/ Helper	• **Knowledge acquisition** • Need to learn simple skills • Repetitive, routine work performed
2. URBAN SUBPROCEDURAL	Operator/Assistant/Aides	• **Knowledge repetition** • Repetitive, routine work • Limited discretion required for alternative courses of action
3. TECHNOLOGY PROCEDURAL	Clerk Administrator Technician	• **Knowledge application** • Follow set work procedures • Apply skills and knowledge to procedures
4. SYSTEMS MAINTENANCE	Supervisor	• **Knowledge production** • Produce information from data • Need to understand theory and/or systems behind work required
5. SYSTEMS OPTIMISATION	Manager Department Head Coordinator	• **Knowledge optimisation** • Have internal organisational focus but pull specific knowledge relating to discipline from external sources • Question the functional system in order to identify if there is a better way of achieving the same results • Question old systems to implement new systems
6. OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT/ KNOWLEDGE INTEGRATORS	General Manager Senior Manager Group Consultant	• **Knowledge integration** • Integrate internal knowledge of the organisation or discipline with external knowledge from peers, or from the higher themes to form solutions applicable to the organisation

7. CORPORATE DIRECTION/ KNOWLEDGE CHALLENGERS	Group Manager Director Executive Manager	• **Knowledge challenging** • Take knowledge from a number of different disciplines and apply it to their own
8. PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT/ KNOWLEDGE CREATORS	CEO Chairman	• **Knowledge creation** • Naturally integrate theories from a range of disciplines to create new disciplines • Break down current paradigms of thinking and propose new paradigms

Adapted from 'ODC' Work Complexity (2006)

After viewing and understanding this information, my thoughts turned to the levels of work in ODC. If the knowledge work performed by various levels is indicative of the cognitive complexity level of workers, and cognition is the ability to acquire information, turned into personal knowledge which is stored and retrieved to direct behaviour (knowledge application, which may be included in the process of learning), knowledge work becomes more demanding from the Technology Procedural level upwards and becomes increasingly demanding with each level. If ODC practises the same model that they consult to, it is possible that they may only engage in learning at certain levels within their own organisation, that is from the Technology Procedural level upwards. As all staff at ODC are required to perform at levels above the Technology Procedural level, then ODC should be a learning organisation.

But being a learning organisation from a cognitive point of view does not necessarily mean that an organisation is learning from a 'Senge' point of view. Senge's (1990) learning organisation displays the five disciplines and has a particular organisational culture. Before commencing with understanding the occurrence of these disciplines, it is important to have a general understanding of the culture within which these disciplines occurred in ODC. This description is provided first from my viewpoint, followed by the viewpoint of staff.

6.4.1 Organisational culture and leadership

I provided a brief overview of the culture of the organisation when I 'cased the joint'. However, the organisational culture and leadership could also be observed in various contexts, such as meetings or modes of staff gatherings that took place, namely project meetings, operations meetings, staff training and staff meetings. As I was looking specifically for evidence of a learning culture in these settings, different types of learning/learning theories were noted in these settings. Staff perceptions of the organisation's culture and leadership were collected from questionnaires and interviews.

Project meetings

There were three project teams during the course of my study in 2008. I observed six project meetings of one of the project teams which were held in the boardroom or in a meeting room. In the boardroom, the team sat at the one end of the table, with two members on one side and one member on the other so that they could interact closely and look at each others' laptops when they needed to. Each team member had a note pad next to their laptop and would scribble notes as they saw fit. The meeting rooms had round tables with four chairs, and team members did not appear to be selective in where they sat. Team members would often get up to stand behind a member who was referring to something on her laptop and they would point on the screen and discuss what was being referred to. I sat slightly away from the team so that I did not form an obvious part of the meeting and so that I could assume the role of observer. In the boardroom, I sat towards the middle of the table while in the meeting rooms I sat away from the table, towards a corner that allowed me a good vantage point.



Figure 6.2: ODC's boardroom looking towards the screen



Figure 6.3: Meeting room 1 (similar in layout to meeting room 2)

The project at the time was a role-profiling and labour optimisation project and meetings were scheduled by the team on an ad hoc basis. The team consisted of three members, one of whom was the project leader, Tina. The meetings were generally loosely structured. As needs relating to the project were identified, these were addressed. Tina had a collaborative approach to the project meetings and gained input from the team members, Joyce and Charlene, before agreeing on the action to be taken. The team functioned well together and complimented one another when good ideas were shared with statements such as "Nice, that will work" and "Good idea, let's do that". The discussions were generally focussed on the task at hand, interjected with personal information or stories, such as what had happened over the weekend, sharing memories of past experiences on different projects, or past experiences of working together.

There seemed to be a culture of support and openness in the team and with Tim, the managing director. On one occasion, the team gave a presentation to Tim before they presented to the client. This session took place in the boardroom with the team gathered around the screen-end of the table, with the document projected from a laptop onto the screen. The team systematically worked through the document and explained to Tim what they had done and their reasons for doing so. Tim encouraged them with phrases such as "Well done"; "I like it"; "Very nice". At the end of the session Tim congratulated the team on their work and wished them well for their presentation. Joyce, who had been responsible for the final compilation of the document, then said to the team, "Please will you pick through the document, check the wording and make any changes you see fit", which I interpreted as her demonstrating openness to having her work criticized and changed.

Tina also displayed behaviours that helped to create a learning culture within the team environment. The team could raise suggestions or questions freely. In one of the meetings, Charlene noticed an aspect on a document and readily offered: "Guys, isn't this role wording across the board for all roles?" This led to a discussion between the team members where they clarified their understanding of the task in the context of their client:

Tina: I don't know. Is it?

Joyce: Let's just have a look at the wording on the other profiles. What do they say?

Charlene: Yes, look here… (Charlene read an extract of the role-profile wording for three profiles).

Tina: Yes, you're right – the responsibility is very similar.

Charlene: Shouldn't we just standardise the wording then – get a phrase that can be used throughout the roles that have a similar responsibility and include it in the template?

Tina: Before we do, let's just think about the roles in the context of the client. How many roles include this responsibility and is it the same across the board or are there slight variations?

Joyce: I think they're quite similar – if you look at these two roles (Joyce referred to two specific roles) the wording doesn't need to change much – they are basically doing the same thing in different roles.

Charlene: I agree. It's very similar.

Tina: Yes, you're right. Let's check how many roles do include this responsibility and then we can agree on how to word the phrase so that it becomes a standard. Well-spotted, Charlene. This will help to simplify our task and make the wording more understandable for the client.

After this discussion, the team looked at the role-profiles to identify similar responsibilities so that they could standardise the wording of the roles. It was evident that they were learning through this process.

The learning that occurred during this team interaction demonstrated aspects of critical reflection where the team members questioned a situation, or information, rather than accepted it at face value (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, in Mezirow & Associates, 1990). This team interaction, as well as others, also indicated that collaborative learning took place where the team would engage in discussions with the intent and outcome of arriving at shared understanding (Roschelle & Teasley, in Dillenbourg, 1999). Cultural-historical activity theory

(CHAT) was evident in that learning that took place in the team was mediated through artefacts and cultural means (the role-profiling template and the language of the industry) by participating in the common activity of drafting role-profiles in the team (Fenwick, 2010a; Miettinen, 1999; Miettinen, 2001). This learning could not have taken place without the influence of the leader.

Tina demonstrated that she was a "learning leader" in this and other project team meetings, that is a leader that demonstrates a willingness and openness to learn (Senge, 1990, p359) – she would question suggestions to encourage discussion; promote conversations about the project and proposed solutions; include all team members in designing solutions; remain quiet and allow the team to talk; and encourage the team in the contributions they made and work well done.

Operations meetings

I observed one operations meeting during the course of the study. The meeting took place between Tim, the managing/operations director of ODC and a project leader, Tina, in Tim's office. Tim sat behind his desk while Tina sat opposite him on the other side of the desk. I sat on the couch in the office where I could observe the meeting and listen to discussions.

The meeting was based on information captured in a spreadsheet, drafted by Tim, with topics to be dealt with. He and Tina both had a copy of the spreadsheet and worked through these topics. The discussion around a topic would come to a natural close when all relevant information had been shared, and Tim would prompt the next topic by stating, "Okay, what's next?" The discussion took the format of Tim asking questions, Tina answering these and then Tim asking more questions or offering suggestions.

Tim displayed leadership characteristics that allowed learning to take place in the meeting. For example, he suggested a way forward for Tina to free her time so that she could gain a stronger project focus. This suggestion displayed his recognition of her personal mastery. Tim also listened to Tina share her ideas on how to deal with the projects she was working on and offered suggestions if needed. He did not impose his suggestions but led and guided her by asking "How are you going to deal with this one?" Tim reinforced Tina's suggestions, and made further suggestions if he felt it necessary. With regard to learning, aspects of critical reflection could be seen in this interaction – Tim acted as a 'critical friend' (Brookfield, 2000; Sagor & Barnett, 1994) to Tina by asking Tina questions to encourage her to reflect critically.

This meeting also reflected a focus on quality and the profitability of the company. Tim and Tina had a discussion about one team member who was not delivering the quality of information that the client expected. The conversation between Tim and Tina went as follows:

Tina: The client is an A-type personality who is analytical and picks up on errors and quality.

Tim: This shouldn't be happening; she is no longer an intern so there shouldn't be these mistakes.

Tina: I'm not sure what it is – her energy levels are down and I'm not sure how to get them up.

Tim: Okay. Then think about it and let me know if I need to address her attitude or if you think she needs training or a warning letter. Perhaps we can allocate someone else to your team for the next phase of the project and move her onto another project? But think about it and let me know what you think we should do.

The meeting progressed according to the items on the spreadsheet and ended off with a discussion of potential business – leads to contact and appointments that were scheduled, after which Tina's project targets were reviewed in monetary terms – how much business she had brought in and whether she was on track to reach her target. She was.

"Wow!" I thought. "It's quite a responsibility to be a project leader in ODC. Not only are you responsible for project deliverables and quality, but also for attaining a target for business." It seemed that project leaders had to be continually on the look out for new opportunities for business and assist in converting these opportunities into more business. Although I initially thought it was a demanding expectation, this approach made sense – who else to look for and convert possibilities than the team working with the client, whom the client has learnt to trust and has developed a relationship with? Staff were compensated in the form of commission for any business they brought in.

Staff training

I observed and participated in one training session during the course of the study, which took place in the boardroom. The training session was for the purpose of external consultants who had been contracted to work on a project for ODC. The group consisted of six participants, who took up seating on either side of the table, towards the end of the table away from the screen. The training was led by Angela (a manager) who stood and presented from the screen-end of the

boardroom. She made use of slides projected onto the boardroom screen and participants were given handouts of these and additional notes on ODC's methodology.

The theme of the training was how to draft a role-profile according to ODC's methodology. The training was well-structured, covered theoretical aspects of role profiling and ODC's methodology and included a practical session where participants had to draft their own role-profile, based on the methodology they had just learnt. The consultants shared their profiles with the group and Angela reinforced aspects relating to ODC's methodology. There was an opportunity for participants to ask questions and clarify understanding. This approach reflected experiential learning as well as a consideration of the learning theories of Cognitivism and Constructivism.

The facilitation style was participative and inclusive – participants felt comfortable to ask questions at any stage during the training to clarify their understanding. I thought that this style demonstrated that Angela was a 'learning leader'. Participants were also given opportunities to share learning from their personal experience and this appeared to make the learning meaningful to the participants. Angela supported a community of practice, recognising that participants were practitioners in a community (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

Comments that participants made included:

> *"I have done role-profiling in the past, but this way just makes so much sense."*
>
> *"Putting profiling in the context of ODC's methodology just helps to put it into context of the bigger picture of the client's business".*
>
> *"The format, layout, method of doing profiles is really good. I can see how this works so well."*

I also drafted my role-profile in that session and received feedback on my efforts, so I had the opportunity to be more of a participant than observer in this instance, which allowed me to immerse myself in the organisation, even if for a short while. As this was a new skill I was practising amongst a group of seasoned practitioners, I felt a bit intimidated and overwhelmed. However, Angela, an old-timer and master of the skill, was patient and helpful and guided me, a newcomer to the community of role-profilers, through the steps of the task.

Staff meetings

I observed four staff meetings during the course of the study, all of which took place in the boardroom. The first meeting I observed was in July 2008 and the fourth in November 2008. The staff seemed to occupy any available seat – there did not appear to be a trend where staff

would routinely sit in the same seat in every meeting, except for the directors/managers. The directors/managers sat on the side of the boardroom with a screen with Patricia on one side of the table, towards the head of the table, Tim opposite her and Tracey next to him.

The meetings were based on an agenda that the directors drafted, and that staff were requested to contribute to. The meetings were chaired by Patricia and slides projected onto the screen were used to guide the agenda of the meetings. All members remained seated during the meeting, except when knowledge sharing sessions were conducted, when the members who were presenting tended to stand.

The first formal ODC staff meeting of that year took place on 11 July 2008. Patricia, chaired the meeting and shared the purpose of the meetings: "To share information and overcome the isolation that some people were working in; to share knowledge and get in touch with each other and also to be trained on the business". Patricia then asked everyone to "check-in" to the room by sharing what kind of space they were in. Each person shared both business and personal information and the general feeling was that all were "in a good space". This check-in became standard practice in the staff meetings that followed. In chairing the meetings, Patricia would generally introduce topics on the agenda and give a broad overview of the related information. Tim would then add to her information with Tracey occasionally contributing more information. The passing on of information was mostly done by Patricia and Tim in these meetings.

After the check-in, the leaders (Tim, Tracey and Patricia), with Tim leading the discussion, explained that the new focus of the business would be on mining only and that they would no longer actively pursue business in the government and private/commercial sectors. The decision was based on the historic experience of the business and ODC's main source of income. The meeting proceeded to address staff and operational issues such as the need for project plans and timesheets, the performance bonus scheme and information sharing by one of the directors concerning tax and the South African Revenue Service. During the meeting, staff were regularly asked for their feedback and input. The meeting closed on a positive note with a new staff member, Rose, who had recently joined the company after being at a large mining house, commenting: "This meeting was nice – I like that the company wants to reimburse staff for their efforts and that staff are given a chance to express themselves. You can feel that you're not just a number here but a person".

Lunch was served in the open office area where staff mingled and shared stories of their experiences with clients and their projects. Some stood while others sat on the couches and the arms of the couches in this area.

The second staff meeting took place on 22 August 2008. The meeting commenced with a check-in where staff shared "how things were going". There was generally a positive atmosphere, with staff joking and jovial. The meeting addressed operational and staff issues, such as upcoming conference dates that ODC was to participate in; and a branding exercise that was taking place with a request made to staff to participate in focus groups and interviews. Tracey discussed the financial position of the company at that point, which was positive, having exceeded their annual target by 27%. The meeting became quite sombre at a point when Tim addressed issues related to office neatness and security, and took a 'hard-line' approach on these issues ("Come on, now. I don't want to have to speak about these things again," he said in a stern voice). The meeting then addressed issues such as timesheets; printing, with an appeal to save paper; and a discussion on restraint of trade documentation, with Tracey explaining from the company's perspective the need for this restraint in order to prevent plagiarism of the company's products and services if staff should leave the company. She added that "As the company grows and we see a higher staff turnover, which accompanies growth, we are more at risk of our products and services being plagiarised". Thereafter, staff requested a permanent group work room fitted with projector and screen - a 'mini-boardroom' (refer to Figure 6.1, p163). This suggestion was agreed to by all and Tim said the suggestion would be implemented. Before proceeding into the knowledge sharing/information sharing part of the meeting, Tim thanked the staff for their contribution and efforts, stating that the company was doing well. I had observed the leaders take on the role of steward (Senge, 1990), taking care of the company with regard to office neatness and the protection of its products and services.

The knowledge sharing session consisted of two presentations, one done by an intern, Lee-Anne, who enthusiastically presented her learning from the project she had been working on and the other by Gertrude on MS Projects. Lee-Anne dressed up in PPE (Personal Protective Equipment - protective/safety gear, consisting of an overall, safety boots, earplugs and hard hat) and gave a slide presentation with much animation and passion while she stood at the screen-end of the boardroom. The second session was an overview of Microsoft (MS) Project presented by a consultant, Gertrude, while she remained seated. Gertrude navigated through the different screens of the package, which was projected onto the boardroom screen, and gave an overview of each screen's functionality. Staff made notes during the presentation and asked

questions. They appeared to enjoy the first presentation, which was humorous and fun. The second presentation appeared to be more difficult for most staff to follow, as it was a presentation on a topic that was technical and required hands-on practise, as most software packages do. Tim suggested a follow-up session where staff could sit with their laptops and 'play' with the software and Gertrude could continue to facilitate the learning. Gertrude was also named by Tim as the "learning point" (or subject matter expert) for the software package and he requested staff consult her should they have any questions. Getrude seemed a bit surprised by the request, but agreed to it after Tim explained that this was an approach he wanted to adopt going forward: "If we have certain champions in areas, it will help with knowledge sharing and we can get assistance from these champions, or learning points. It will also help with your (the learning points') development and the development of everyone else". Most of the staff nodded their heads and seemed to agree with the approach.

Lee-Anne's presentation demonstrated that self-directed learning took place in ODC – she shared information that she had learned specifically from a project, showing her openness to learning, initiative and independence in learning, acceptance of responsibility for learning and future orientation for applying her learning in the workplace (Guglielmino, in Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Gertrude's session employed Cognitivism in its approach to learning. However, there was recognition of a need to employ different learning approaches for different topics when Tim suggested that there be a subsequent session during which staff could interact with the software, an experiential approach to learning would be more apt for learning the software. Again, there was recognition of a community of practice with Gertrude as the old-timer, or master practitioner, and the other staff as newcomers to the community of using MS Projects.

The third staff meeting I observed was on 12 September 2008. This meeting consisted mainly of one-way communication with Tim, Patricia and Tracey giving information to the staff concerning the following: company performance to date; office neatness and security; an update of the progress of the 'mini-boardroom'; new employee contracts; dates of performance appraisals; dates of the year-end function and awards that would be given (Intern of the Year; Employee of the Year; and Income Generator of the Year). Staff were generally quiet during the meeting. Occasionally some questions were asked, but these were dealt with summarily.

I was again given the opportunity to immerse myself in the organisation's culture when I presented during the knowledge sharing session on an area of interest that I have. The topic I

presented was brain profiling and preferred sensory modalities (receiving and processing information preferences), which could assist in developing understanding of one's own and other staff members' preferences for processing information and functioning. I used slides to assist my presentation and stood while I presented from the screen-end of the boardroom. The knowledge sharing session was interactive and encouraged the staff to participate and interact. However, the information shared was new and perhaps overwhelming, and the length of the meeting appeared to add to the slump in energy that some staff seemed to experience.

Tim thanked me for the presentation. He said that it would be ongoing practice to have staff and guest speakers present 'knowledge' on aspects that the staff may want to find out more about – if they did not hold the information/knowledge internally, they would get someone external to present, and requested that staff inform the managers/directors of areas or information that they would like to know more about. Tim's words indicated that he assumed the role of leader as designer and teacher – he was responsible for designing the learning process and for teaching or helping others to see reality, to picture the system (Senge, 1990) through sourcing experts to assist with this.

The fourth staff meeting I observed was on 21 November 2008. The first item on the agenda was feedback concerning a conference that Tim and Patricia had attended. They then informed staff that ODC would not be participating in a conference as previously stated as they were in the midst of a branding exercise. Patricia and Tim gave feedback concerning the branding exercise and the progress made to date. They informed staff of the positioning statement and company values that were proposed by the branding company and that these were based on research and feedback gathered from clients and staff. The positioning statement and values were generally well received by the staff. Tim explained to the staff that the branding company would do a final presentation to the staff in December 2008 and that the directors would continue to meet with the branding company in the interim.

The current state of the market was discussed with commodity prices having dropped substantially since the beginning of the year. All capital projects in the mining sector had been stopped and the sentiment among the directors and managers was that they were anticipating a tough year. Patricia and Tim indicated that their marketing approach would be based on an optimisation perspective; that is how the mines could optimise the use of existing resources. Tim stated that they would focus on mining and would not actively seek business outside of mining. However, if there were other opportunities of business outside mining they would not

turn away from these; but it would be a case of the business coming to them rather than ODC going to look for private or public sector work. Tim requested staff to let him or Patricia know of any leads.

The meeting continued with a management-initiated discussion concerning the need to up-skill continually and for staff to ensure that their skills were relevant to the market. The meeting proceeded to address the financial performance of the company, looking to 2009. Tracey shared that the company was still on target and staff shared ideas on how to extend projects for 2009 in an effort to secure sales. Knowledge sharing topics for 2009 were then discussed.

The knowledge sharing session for the meeting was presented by a project team which had visited a potential new client, who could become a long-term client. The team, which consisted of three members – Rose, Nick and Adrian, sat on the end of the table opposite to the screen and remained seated while they spoke through their presentation. They shared their observations of the client and highlighted areas where they could assist the client, taking turns to share and clarify information. The staff actively participated in this session, asking questions, giving feedback, sharing with each other experiences that they had had with other clients. They touched on values that ODC's various clients held and spoke about how these impacted on clients' practices. For example, within the mining sector there had been a drive to include women in mining. However, women often had harsh and negative experiences, such as assault and rape when working underground. The affected women did not have an avenue to voice their experiences and the management of mines, although they were aware of the women's negative experiences, did not address the situation. Some ODC staff members expressed that mine management had women on their underground mining teams as an act of compliance for the women-in-mining initiative and thus turned a blind eye when they heard such negative reports. This discussion still seemed to have much energy when Tim cut it short:

Tim: Okay. The women-in-mining thing seems to be an issue and it's perhaps something we can assist with. Won't you guys link up with Lee-Anne and discuss with her some of her research into this area? Lee-Anne, will you make this available and then you guys can perhaps draft a report for the client.

"What a pity," I thought. "This seemed to be an opportunity for staff to gain a clear understanding of the issue and perhaps put their heads together for some solutions to this problem. Lee-Anne could have played a role in the discussion, referring to the research she has

done, but there are others who have experience from mining that could have contributed to the discussion. On the other hand, I suppose, Tim is recognising Lee-Anne's personal mastery through her passion and interest in this topic".

The team was engaging in collaborative learning where they were attempting "to construct and maintain a shared conception of a problem" (Roschelle & Teasley in Dillenbourg, 1999:17). They were possibly moving into double-loop learning and reflecting on their and ODC's governing variables (values and mental models) (Anderson, 1997; Argyris, 1980) and could have started a conversation on how to bring about profound and fundamental change (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Malhotra, 1996) concerning this issue, but that was not to be.

The meeting concluded with the staff thanking the directors/managers for the year-end function and three staff representatives gave Tim, Patricia and Tracey a gift each.

My perceptions of the organisational culture and leadership

I was enjoying being a participant-observer on site, sometimes assuming the role of participant more actively than that of observer, for example drafting a role-profile during staff training and 'sharing knowledge' during a staff meeting. Inclusion in these activities helped me to experience the culture of the organisation from the perspective of a participant rather than an observer. During these instances, I was able to experience the culture of the organisation as one of acceptance and interest in one another, where information was freely shared and there appeared to be no holding back of information related to business. Ideas were shared on how to improve on project delivery, on business operations and on the mining sector generally. To me, this free sharing of ideas and information demonstrated that all staff members were motivated to be part of the organisation, concerned with the 'bigger picture' and not just themselves and that management had concern for staff as well as for business operations. There were, however, a few individuals who remained quiet in larger forums and it was difficult to gauge what their perceptions or thoughts were. There were two or three such individuals and their lack of participation was difficult to interpret – it could have been that they were new and as such were reserved about contributing; they were naturally reserved people; the organisation was 'not their scene' and so they made a choice to not participate actively; they were used to larger organisations where it was easier to not participate; or a number of other reasons that I was unaware of and could only guess at. The company leaders (directors and managers) did not appear to make additional efforts to include them in discussions in these larger forums and I

could also only guess at reasons for this, too – perhaps it was their management style; that they respected different personality types and so did not focus on specific individuals; that they could have been concerned about the lack of these individuals' participation but were not sure how to address them; or a number of other reasons. It was interesting to notice though that one of these quiet members (Julie) soon left the organisation. The phrase that I had heard many times "You need to 'fit' the organisation" came to mind. In the context of ODC, I understood the phrase 'fit' to mean that staff needed to ascribe to ODC's values and way of conducting business – staff had to be self-starters and ask questions so that they could get the information they needed to do the work they were employed to do. Perhaps I had observed that this member did not 'fit' the organisational culture and so elected to move on.

The culture in these meetings demonstrated a learning one where there was generally a free flow and exchange of information; management supported learning and personal development and staff were committed to these initiatives by participating in and presenting knowledge sharing sessions; and learning from experience was encouraged and shared with others (Farago & Skyrme, 1995). An incident that provides evidence for a demonstration of this learning culture was when the managing director asked a consultant how she was managing with her Masters thesis and offered to sit with her and discuss her study. Having staff present knowledge-sharing sessions also contributed to the learning in the organisation and the personal mastery of members who presented. There was also a focus on quality and the profitability of the business, constantly searching for how to get more business with new and existing clients.

My experience of the culture in meetings was quite different to that which I gained from my observations of the open office area, where the quiet seemed almost abnormal and counter to a culture that encouraged shared learning. There was an air of restraint in the open office and it seemed that staff were not encouraged to share information and participate openly with one another in this space. However, where most of them were given permission to engage in information sharing and learning conversations in meetings, most of them were at ease doing so and seemed to enjoy these opportunities. "Perhaps they just need permission to interact in the same way in the open office space," I thought.

Concerning the leadership of ODC, I observed some instances where leaders acted as designers, stewards and teachers (Senge, 1990). Tim and Patricia appeared to take on the role of designer by setting and communicating the mission and vision of ODC, namely a focus on the mining sector. All three leaders (Tim, Patricia and Tracey) were stewards of the company in that, in

varying capacities, they took care of the quality of work that was produced, the methodology of the company and the financial position of the company. Tim largely took on the role of teacher – he eagerly gave guidance to staff when they required it and was willing to share his knowledge with them, or find a relevant source that could share knowledge with the staff.

Staff perceptions of the organisational culture and leadership

Staff perceptions were gained through questionnaires and interviews and covered themes of the leadership and culture of the company, and themes that had emerged from interviews, namely trust and the role of induction. I also asked respondents about the view that they held of the company as a learning organisation. The questionnaire was emailed to the participants and they could answer the questions at leisure and then return them to me by a deadline.

The descriptions that follow include questionnaire responses followed by comments made in interviews concerning various aspects.

Leadership and culture

Based on the questionnaires, most of the staff of ODC agreed that the leadership and culture of the organisation encouraged it to be a learning one – the closed questions averaged a score of 2 for this section (with 1 indicating strongly agree, 2 - agree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 - disagree and 5 - strongly disagree). However, there was one staff member who expressed a neutral response to the role of these aspects, rating it as a three (3). This staff member was only employed by the organisation for a short period – she resigned after three months. It was interesting to note that she was also one of the quiet ones in staff meetings. The closed questions of the questionnaire highlighted some aspects that ODC appeared to be doing particularly well, with eight to nine members indicating that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. These included that the company provided numerous learning opportunities (question 110); the leadership of the company regularly interacted with all teams/members (question 111) and the leadership in the organisation encouraged learning (question 112). Members also experienced that the leadership was proactive in planning for and meeting challenges (question 114); that the company worked together to achieve the results they truly desired (question 116) and that the leaders took care of the organisation (question 119). Furthermore, organisation members felt that the leadership took care of them (question 120) and that the company's brand, or reputation, was positive (question 125).

However, some statements elicited responses indicating that the practices did not support or were contrary to those that encouraged an organisation to be a learning one. Members had mixed responses concerning forums specifically for creating new ideas (question 106), with five agreeing or strongly agreeing and five disagreeing or neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement. In response to question 109, two members strongly agreed and four members agreed that members were encouraged to challenge aspects of the organisational culture that inhibited learning and the achievement of organisational goals. Two members neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. With regard to question 113, four members agreed while three neither agreed nor disagreed that ODC reacted to situations that occurred (as opposed to anticipating and planning responses to anticipated situations). Question 121 also had mixed responses, with six members either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the leaders were responsible for the attainment of the organisation's vision, values, and mission, while four members neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Three members neither agreed nor disagreed and one disagreed that the leaders were role models (question 124), while six members either agreed or strongly agreed that they were.

The interviews provided further insight into the leadership of ODC. Respondents identified the leaders within ODC to be the managing director, one of the managers and project leaders. What was interesting to note was that only one respondent referred to both directors as leaders, while the others omitted the one director. According to interview responses, leaders led by example and the leadership style within ODC was generally experienced as being participative, although Tim and Patricia had different approaches: Tim focused on projects and individuals; allowed staff freedom to explore, create, be innovative; had much knowledge and his style naturally encouraged learning; while Patricia was more focused on the company, managing client deliverables and revenue. She was also more focused on details with regard to compliance and quality checks.

Tina commented as follows on the different leadership styles that were evident in ODC:

> *Tim is participative, energetic, allows us freedom to explore and design. He manages by deliverables. Patricia manages by time and doesn't allow much room for learning, creativity or innovation. It's her way and no other way. I find their two different leadership styles confusing. Patricia's style is that she manages and checks on a daily basis and in-between meetings. I feel mistrusted. Tim's style is that he expects you to meet deliverables irrespective of time spent. His approach is 'meet the deadline and dazzle me; be creative'.*

Charlene commented that:

> *As a whole leaders are consultative. Tim is a knowledge hub and gives knowledge and project leadership. Patricia gives company leadership and gives information on where the company is headed towards and what is expected from the team.*

Mark had different views of the leadership style:

> *The leadership style of ODC is difficult to describe. The leaders lead by example and they come down to staff's level to explain. There is a fine line between management and employees and management tries to foster a team mentality. It's not management-by-consensus but they do have a participative leadership style.*

Tim stated that "growth requires change, especially in leadership" and tellingly continued that "no one has been earmarked to take over" from him. He also indicated that he would like to appoint another partner/director, but that although current leaders were "all passionate and protective about the company, no-one is mature enough yet to take over the leadership". It seemed that Patricia was stepping into the role of leading the company, but Tim still had his reservations about her as company leader.

Patricia disclosed her role as leader and how she perceived the staff's view of her as a leader:

> *I am detail-focused for a reason: I manage the staff and the client indirectly so that they stick to the scope and manage their delivery dates so that they deliver to the client as promised. The staff think I am hard because I drive hard.*

The leaders interviewed raised communication as an issue, while staff interviewed did not. The leaders' comments concerning communication were that "not all staff understand the decisions made" and staff indicated in an internal appraisal of the directors that they would like information on why some decisions are made so that they could understand them. When I raised the subject of communication with Mark, his comment was:

> *I understand that some decisions are made by the directors but perhaps the reasons for the decisions could be communicated to help staff understand the decisions, feel communicated to, develop trust and provide the opportunity to increase their understanding of how the business operates.*

Concerning project leaders and decision-making, respondents stated that this decision-making tended to be collaborative and so reasons for decisions were communicated and understood by the project team at the time that these were made. Charlene commented:

> *The one project leader that I work with is a role model – she shows us what is wanted and invites participation. Another project leader gives direction but is not directive in her style. She gives a line to follow and lets us take it from there.*

It was interesting to note the different experiences that the respondents had of leadership in ODC. I was anticipating that comments would be similar but it seemed that individuals were led

differently, based on who assumed the leadership role and who was being led. I thought that Patricia would take her lead from Tim, as managing director, but her style was different to Tim's based on the role she was in and also, seemingly, her personality. Patricia was a detail-focused person and so led or, rather, managed, staff more closely than Tim did.

I also found the comments concerning the different leadership styles intriguing. It seemed that staff were aware that there was a change in leadership authority taking place, with Patricia taking more responsibility for leading the company, but they were not sure why. Tina thought it was because of a change in focus while Charlene thought it could be an organic/natural change based on the interests and tendencies of the leaders. The respondents who were staff members (and not company leaders) also appeared to have different experiences of the leaders.

Although the leadership style at all levels (project and company) was described as participative and consultative, the leaders were not 'hand-holders' – the team was expected to get on with the task at hand and if necessary, ask questions.

Patricia's comments resonated with Mark's concerning how decisions were made – leaders made decisions but did not always explain them. Perhaps the leaders were missing a learning opportunity for their staff by not explaining their decisions?

It is a widely accepted view that the leadership of an organisation sets the tone for the culture of the organisation (Dess & Picken, 2000; Mason, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; Senge, 1990). I turned to this feature (culture) with anticipation. Having a general understanding of the leadership of ODC as participative, consultative, giving direction or input when required without hand-holding, somewhat lacking in communication, with divergent approaches, I wondered how this translated into the culture of ODC.

Information concerning the culture of ODC was gained from the open questions in the questionnaire and interviews. From the open questions in the questionnaire, ODC could be seen as a company that encouraged learning (question 3.16). Comments included:

> *They are constantly giving opportunities to learn new skills, etc. to be able to adapt to a changing environment. (Lee-Anne)*
>
> *We are encouraged to complete our degrees and can go on courses if we believe that they are necessary to achieving project success. (Gertrude)*
>
> *Employees are encouraged to attend training courses, which they then in turn present to the rest of the staff during staff meetings on Fridays. (Rose)*

There was one comment that was contrary to the others:

> *I'm not really sure. It seems like it but they're not very eager to spend money on training. (Julie)*

Again, it is interesting to note that this comment was made by the staff member (Julie) who resigned after three months.

Questions 3.18 and 3.19 asked respondents what they enjoyed most and least about working at ODC, respectively. The answer to these questions provided insight into the culture of ODC. What respondents enjoyed most about working at ODC included:

> *The way I am treated - as an adult with experience. This allows me to make decisions, and makes me accountable but also responsible. (Rose)*
>
> *The people and the ability to solve problems; it's not a corporate culture. I can be myself. (Tim)*
>
> *The flexibility in terms of working hours. (Julie)*
>
> *Being part of a team and achieving results. (Mark)*
>
> *The company culture, learning exposure or opportunity, room for growth. (Mary)*

What respondents enjoyed least about working at ODC included:

> *There is a lack of communication and an underlying something. (Lee-Anne and Gertrude)*
>
> *No one talks. There are negative undercurrents. Everything is top secret which breeds insecurity or "unsureness". People are not open or honest at all times. (Julie)*
>
> *Unnecessary emotional outbursts, people not pulling their weight. (Tim)*

Regular phrases or features that the statements revealed were a culture of exposure to learning, diversity of work, flexible working conditions and hours and autonomy of staff. However, the culture also could be described as one in which there was a lack of communication, while hierarchical structures, politics and undertones disturbed some staff members.

From the questionnaire responses, it would appear that the culture of ODC was one that was conducive to learning as well as one that could potentially hamper learning – although learning and growth were encouraged, there tended to be a lack of communication, which could be exacerbated by hierarchical structures, politics and undertones. The lack of communication could discourage learning from taking place, particularly between staff members. The lack of communication could also cause members to perceive the organisation to be more reactive (as

opposed to having plans) as information concerning planned actions might not be communicated.

Interview discussions concerning organisational culture were centred on the nature of the culture in ODC, if the culture encouraged learning and, if so, how the learning culture was encouraged.

Tina, who was an organisational psychologist, was concerned that ODC's new strategic focus on the mining sector was creating division and a change in the company culture. She commented that:

> *There seems to be two cultures existing in the company since the company changed its strategy to concentrate on the mining sector. There's a change in focus and on what ODC wants to sell and different competencies are needed. There seems to be a split between the organisational psychologists and the labour planning experts. The labour planners seem happy with the new focus.*
>
> *Otherwise, the culture can be described as creative and innovative. It is also dynamic. But with the focus now on the mining sector, there is little innovation and creativity and more structure, with independence being taken away and a move to fixed working hours. The leadership is also becoming more directive and less participative.*

Charlene said:

> *The culture is action- and achievement-oriented – there always seems to be something going on and there is a general understanding that things happen as soon as possible, not just before due date. It's also a culture of continuous improvement, one that is dynamic – non-stagnant, alive, questioning. Different leaders are drivers of different aspects of the culture. Also the type of people that are invited into the company support the culture. They tend to have high energy, are action-oriented, have passion and drive.*

Mark said of the culture that:

> *It is focused, driven but easy-going. The company is very results-driven, but the leadership do not communicate regularly to staff. But there isn't really time to sit and chat about realities and those sorts of things. There is generally a sharing of information and working together and we are also told by our leaders to ask questions.*

Common descriptors of the culture that emerged from the interviews included:

- A learning culture (all six respondents stated this as a feature)
- A culture of enquiring and questioning (five respondents)
- Knowledge sharing and open access to information (four respondents)
- Dedicated, positive, passionate and driven (four respondents)
- Achievement/service orientated – focus on customer satisfaction (four respondents)
- Excellence and continuous improvement (three respondents)
- Not regular/frequent communication from directors (three respondents)

From these responses and other comments made by respondents, it is evident that ODC had a learning culture that was encouraged through a culture of enquiring and questioning, knowledge sharing and open access to information. The mechanisms that ODC had in place to facilitate a learning culture were:

- A subject matter expert approach, where staff were sent on courses and then returned to ODC to share what they had learnt with the staff during knowledge sharing sessions in monthly staff meetings; or staff were identified as being "containers of knowledge" which others could access when they needed to, that is, ask questions or assistance from these individuals as and when needed and these individuals were willing to share their knowledge.
- Support, direction and guidance was provided on an ongoing basis from directors and leaders – if staff needed assistance, they were able to approach leaders for this (open-door policy).
- General conversation in the passageways, in the open plan office, kitchen and so forth. It often happened that a discussion took place in the office and if an individual "got stuck" others "chipped in" with a suggested solution.
- Regular internal training sessions in addition to knowledge sharing sessions in staff meetings – when a training need was identified, training was often scheduled on a Saturday morning and all staff were required to attend, in order to equip them with the knowledge and skills required to operate in their industry.

Trust

Generally, staff and leadership of ODC experienced trust in one another and the company. This trust was encouraged through the participative leadership style, although some staff commented that the lack of communication and the tendency for leadership to become more directive undermined trust within the company.

Comments made by different respondents concerning trust were:

> *There are pockets of trust, but this is not filtering through the organisation and it's difficult to say why. (Angela)*
>
> *The company did have high levels of trust but with the change in leadership style the company is becoming mistrusting. (Tina)*
>
> *There is a feeling that you are not completely trusted and so will be managed by time [on task] and time in the office. (Charlene)*
>
> *There is a lot of trust and loyalty due to the management style. (Mark)*

Induction

I raised the theme of induction in the interviews based on my observations – while I was 'casing the joint' I had observed a new staff member (Julie) being unsure of whom to ask and where to get assistance, which raised my curiosity concerning induction.

ODC employed interns (usually two or three each year) who were completing their Industrial Psychology degrees and were required to have a year's practical workplace experience as part of the requirements of their degree. Respondents commented that the induction of interns was "done well" and was "thorough". The induction was facilitated by a manager and themes that were covered were the company methodology, their products, clients, project case studies and a background to mining. Comments were made that although the induction was thorough, there were some aspects that could be improved on as highlighted by different respondents:

> *Company leadership could have more regular feedback sessions with the interns to assist with tying the loose ends and to help them reflect on their learning. (Angela)*
>
> *Induction could include more information on how the company operates and what the reporting structures are. (Charlene)*

Unlike the interns, new staff did not have a formal induction into the company, and the reason given for this by the company leaders was that there were not many new appointments in the company. The leaders were aware that new staff could be introduced into the company more formally. When an existing staff member took the initiative to orientate new staff, the directors were pleased at the initiative and the efforts made by the respective staff member.

> *I took the initiative to have induction for new staff. The company leaders weren't aware of it but gave the thumbs up when they heard about it. (Mark)*

New staff were currently allocated to projects and, in the words of a company leader, the staff needed to

> *learn to swim quickly and develop the consulting mindset – they need to ask questions but not all staff are comfortable with this approach. (Tim)*

I wondered if this "sink or swim" approach may have been a contributing factor to Julie's resignation after three months. She may have felt that she was sinking and may have needed someone to swim alongside her more closely.

Learning organisation

There were varied responses concerning ODC being a learning organisation – all but one participant agreed that ODC was a learning organisation.

Tina stated that

> *We are not a learning organisation – the organisation itself is not set up as one, for example there is no overall plan of learning. There is no structure set up for learning experiences so learning tends to be incidental rather than planned.*

Charlene said

> *ODC is a learning organisation. We are free to talk and tap into staff identified as 'containers of knowledge'. We are also given the opportunity to learn and become a source of knowledge ourselves. We are given opportunities to excel, make mistakes and share with others. Through open communication in the open plan office you can start a discussion. If you get stuck on how to resolve an issue being discussed, someone usually chips in to help.*

"It is interesting that this respondent referred to the open office area as being a place of talking and communication," I thought to myself. When I observed the open office area when 'casing the joint' at the outset of research in 2008, it was abnormally quiet. I wondered if this was because of my presence or whether something had changed in the office area that encouraged discussions to take place. There had been a change in directors during 2008 – one had resigned; and there was a change in the company focus. Perhaps one or both of these changes encouraged staff to engage in discussions more frequently?

Mark viewed ODC as a learning organisation and stated that:

> *ODC is an excellent example of a learning organisation - people are there to do a job but they are given the opportunity to learn about other jobs of those around them. We are also given opportunities to learn both formally and informally. We have knowledge sharing sessions in staff meetings and if necessary, we have Saturday morning training sessions – which are not so 'lekker' (Afrikaans for 'nice'), you know… having to get up on a Saturday to come into the office … but it works well.*

Angela said:

> *We have the values of learning in the company and a desire to learn which can be seen in the attitude of individuals. But this needs to move into the organisation – we need processes, practices, governance and systems to promote knowledge creation, sharing and harvesting. Learning, knowledge and sharing will result in higher financial benefit to the company and management needs to appreciate this. I think that whether an organisation is a learning one depends on its maturity – if they are struggling financially, they are not ready to be learning.*

I found this last comment particularly interesting and thought, "Is it not more important to be learning then – when the organisation is struggling financially? How else can you ensure that you survive the experience if you are not learning in it?" It is perhaps easier to learn when the company is in a good financial state, as they are less likely to be in a survival mode, but is a

financial state linked to a readiness to learn? My research and experience in adult learning was that readiness to learn is dependent on factors other than, and possibly in addition to, a financial state.

In summary, the most common reasons given by respondents for ODC being a learning organisation included:

- Learning and knowledge sharing was encouraged in the company
- Attendance at conferences and training was encouraged
- Staff were given exposure to different environments
- Individuals learnt by attending training sessions and then brought the learning to the company through knowledge sharing sessions in staff meetings
- Staff were encouraged to discuss their studies with the managing director
- Learning was viewed as being important
- An initiative had been launched where after the closure of a project, the project leader would draw up a summary of the learning points and present this to the company (case study)
- Staff were able to make mistakes and not be punished for them, but were encouraged to learn from them
- Staff were willing to share knowledge
- Questioning was encouraged – the managing director set the example by asking questions first
- Staff were encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and find information
- There were meetings that were open to all staff where there was free information sharing
- Most staff had the understanding that knowledge was not owned but shared
- There were mechanisms in place to encourage or nurture learning, namely:
    - Knowledge sharing sessions in staff meetings
    - The focus of having subject matter experts to assist with certain areas of knowledge
    - Saturday morning training sessions
    - Company methodology training prior to projects
- Time was set aside monthly specifically for learning/training interventions (one and a half days out of 21 days)
- Staff commented that they were continuously learning on the job

Reasons given for ODC not being a learning organisation included:

- The values of learning and knowledge sharing were not necessarily appreciated by all senior staff, for example one director did not attend the Saturday training sessions
- The values of learning were not seen in the business strategy and performance management of staff
- Teams did not share information or learning sufficiently
- Knowledge harvesting was done poorly owing to time pressures
- Some staff found it difficult to share knowledge, enquire who holds information or where information was held
- The company was not set up as a learning organisation:
    - There was no overall plan for learning – learning was not included at all levels of the company or in the business strategy
    - There were learning experiences in projects but staff generally took what they needed out of these experiences and learning tended to be incidental and individual
    - Time was needed to consolidate learning and the correct use of the company's methodology in projects
    - Interns did not have reflective feedback sessions where they could consolidate what they had learnt
- The company had learning plans and practices that they were trying to drive, but these were not necessarily being implemented
- When the company was less busy, the focus on sharing learning did not take place.

The culture and leadership of ODC appeared to, for the most part, encourage learning. Interview respondents mostly viewed ODC as a learning organisation but with room for improvement. I was personally concerned that one leader (in title) was not viewed by staff as showing much leadership and that this same individual did not attend the Saturday morning training sessions. Despite the efforts of the other two leaders, staff could be confused by her lack of participation in learning initiatives and this leader could be sending a message to staff that learning was not that important.



Having a general understanding of the culture and leadership of this vessel, I turned my attention to Senge's (1990) learning disciplines, namely personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. I

considered whether specific instances I had observed while aboard reflected these. I also pondered if these were reflected in the vessel's documentation and the crews' responses to the questionnaire.

6.4.2 Personal mastery

I noticed the discipline of personal mastery displayed in various settings and contexts. In identifying this discipline, I looked specifically for instances that displayed members within the organisation clarifying and deepening personal vision, focussing energies, developing patience, seeing reality objectively, encouraging and supporting learning and personal development of staff members, and demonstrating care or concern for each other (Senge, 1990).

Various company documents made reference to the concept of personal mastery, for example the company profile included the phrases "ODC has focused on … providing people with optimisation solutions that focus on enhancing and developing people's skills" and "Providing people with the knowledge and expertise to harness their own potential is the greatest gift we can give to our future!" (ODC Company profile, 2007, p2) which reflected a high value on developing people. As these statements were reflected in ODC's documentation, I assumed that this focus would also be evident internally. The performance appraisal form (2008) included a field for "Willingness to learn" while the consulting methodology recognised that "Individuals have natural affinity to different types of work" (ODC Work Complexity, 2006, p4). The business and marketing strategy (2008, p2) stated that ODC was "a company … filled with purpose, inspirational ideas and solutions" which I interpreted as a reflection of an espoused theory of personal mastery.

While 'casing the joint' and observing the open office area I noticed Lee-Anne displaying concern for her colleague, Julie, when she asked Julie if she could assist with her laptop. This act may not appear to reflect personal mastery, but Senge (1990) includes demonstrations of care or concern for each other as indications of personal mastery. Acts of care or concern are likely to create an environment wherein colleagues feel accepted and this could encourage them to make the environment more conducive to learning and so contribute to the development of personal mastery.

In project meetings, the discipline of personal mastery was practised. Angela, a manager, who was leading a project, referred to 'human capital' while developing role-profiles for a client and explained that "business value is in people and what their needs are". This statement reflected

an understanding of personal mastery. She also stated that the team should be asking themselves "What is your value-add today?" indicating that the team should clarify and deepen their personal visions.

In a different project meeting with the same team members, the team was trying to develop a particular solution for their client. The members each explained their understanding of the problem and the solution in an effort to see reality objectively. This approach was carried over to designing a document for the client where the team brainstormed ideas, discussed these and designed the document, all the while giving input and changing the document.

The team seemed able to encourage their client's staff to engage with the discipline of personal mastery. Charlene, who was part of a project team, gave feedback to the team concerning her progress on developing a career management solution for the client. She was busy with the initial stages of the solution and had done psychometric testing and a career path for a staff member of the client. The staff member commented on how the solution had assisted him in mapping his career path as he had options other than pursuing a management position. The team's solution appeared to assist the staff member to see reality objectively as well as clarify his personal vision, which could lead to him focusing his energy. Charlene commented, "He seemed relieved because he didn't want to follow a management route; he could see the alternative and felt happier."

During the operations meeting I observed, personal mastery was also displayed. The project leader, Tina, was encouraged to develop her personal mastery when she shared her ideas with the director, Tim, on how to encourage their client to buy into the project and Tim agreed to her idea and supported her in taking it forward by making comments such as "Good, good, agreed". Tim also showed concern for Tina when she discussed her limitations in managing the client as she was quite 'hands-on' in the project. They discussed how Tina could free her time so that she could have a stronger project focus.

The staff training session assisted the participants to recognise their own and others' personal mastery. When the session started, the facilitator, Angela (a manager) gave participants the opportunity to share what their abilities were, where they were from, and what they enjoyed about the work they did. This introduction displayed that individual abilities were recognised and assisted participants to clarify and deepen their personal visions.

From the various staff meetings I had attended, there was evidence of acknowledging personal mastery. In one of the meetings, Tim, the managing director, said to the staff

> *Guys, please complete the timesheets. These are not for me and Patricia to micro-manage and check up on you, but for us to see what work you are busy with so that we can allocate more interesting work to you. Then you will be able to learn more about the business, its products and services.*

The knowledge sharing sessions in staff meetings assisted in developing personal mastery as staff were able to present what they had learned or experienced from a project or training that they had attended. Lee-Anne, an intern, displayed some passion about a topic discussed in a staff meeting, namely women-in-mining. The discussion focused on the conditions and challenges that women faced, often being abused and raped. Mine management employed these women as an act of compliance and although they knew about the difficulties of the women, there were no support structures in place. Lee-Anne became outraged, "That's just wrong! Something should be done about this!" were among her comments. Tim, in the meeting, suggested to Patricia, a manager, that Lee-Anne do some research and investigate the topic in the context of a client, to which all three agreed. Lee-Anne's passion and personal vision were recognised and she was given the opportunity to develop them.

In another of the meetings, Tim stated that staff would be recognised as "pockets of learning" or subject matter experts based on training they had attended, interest they displayed in a certain subject matter or expertise they had in a product or service that the company offered. This statement came after Gertrude, who had attended training on how to use MS Projects, had demonstrated the package in a knowledge sharing session. Tim asked her if she would be the "pocket" that staff turned to if they were using the package and needed assistance. "It's also still a bit new to me," she replied, "but I don't mind. Sure." This was also training that Gertrude had specifically requested to attend, so her learning and personal development had been supported by the management of ODC. Tim further used the example of Lee-Anne becoming the expert for women-in-mining. Heads nodded around the table and staff seemed pleased at this suggestion and the opportunity to develop their personal mastery.

From the closed questions posed in the questionnaire, the ten respondents agreed that personal mastery is practised frequently in ODC, with an average score for this category of 1.6 (lying between the scores for strongly agree and agree). However, there were a few statements that had responses indicating that the practises were contrary to those that reflected personal mastery being practised. In response to question 10 concerning whether all members were able and empowered to participate in decision-making, four respondents neither agreed nor disagreed,

while two respondents disagreed with the statement. Half of the respondents stated that a fear of failure motivated them to achieve goals, with one person strongly agreeing and four agreeing with the statement (statement 11.1 of the questionnaire). Six respondents were motivated to achieve goals through the unpleasant consequences of not achieving these, with two strongly agreeing and four agreeing with the statement (11.2). The responses to statement 12.3 indicated that three respondents bulldozed through obstacles to overcome them when they did not attain their goals. Six respondents indicated that they did not have a balance between work life and non-work life, with two strongly agreeing and four agreeing with the statement (16). These responses serve to temper, but not overturn, the previous perception of personal mastery in ODC.

In the open question section of the questionnaire, learning as a concept was valued in ODC and featured frequently in importance to staff. In response to question 3.1 on what mattered most in the company, six of the responses included opportunities to learn, for growth, development, to show potential. Three responses included high quality/standard of work produced; two responses stated values are respected such as honesty, fairness, integrity, respect, time for people and consistency; while three responses had different statements, inclusive of ability to become business partners with clients, ability to make money, and job satisfaction and recognition. Aside from the last three responses, the statements indicated a strong focus on personal mastery. Some of the responses included:

> *That I am seen as a valuable part of the company and that I am given the opportunity to learn and grow and to show my full potential. I am respected. (Lee-Anne)*
>
> *Learning and growth as well as exceptional service delivery to clients - Ability to create capacity to be able to strategically guide and become business partners with clients. (Angela)*

In response to question 3.2 concerning what staff were currently learning, seven of the responses stated that they were consciously engaged in on-the-job learning of company products, systems, business processes and projects; four responses stated they were engaged in formal learning while one respondent did not answer the question. With the exception of one respondent, staff were actively and consciously learning. This can be seen from the following responses taken from different questionnaires:

> *I am currently doing my Industrial Psychology internship at 'ODC' and therefore every day is a learning opportunity. I am currently learning how the organisation does things. (Lee-Anne)*
>
> *To manage a total OD (organisational development) and labour planning project on my own as project lead (informal). Finishing my D Litt et Phil in Sustained Policy Implementation. (Rose)*

Formal - University post graduate research, as well as informal - communities of practice, conferences and professional bodies. (Angela)

On-the-job learning. (Mark, Rachel, Gertrude, Julie and Tim)

The responses to question 3.3 indicated that staff intended to continue learning and had learning plans for the future, with the exception of two respondents, one who was unsure and one who did not answer the question. These plans included formal short courses (three respondents), learning more about the business and systems on-the-job (three respondents) and formal degrees (two respondents). Staff stated:

Because I am new to the company and to the working world I plan to learn as much as I possibly can; specifically with regards to consultancy and industrial psychology. (Lee-Anne)

To update my MS Project skills, formal Project Management Qualification. (Rose)

On the job learning continuously. (Mark and Rachel)

The responses to question 3.4 were interesting to note as there was a discrepancy between these responses and closed question 16. Where question 16 showed that two respondents did not have a balance between work life and non-work life, four other respondents to question 3.4 stated that they occasionally experienced conflict between work and family, of which two neither agreed nor disagreed with question 16. It would seem that the respondents had different understandings of what constituted 'balance' and 'conflict' in terms of work life and non-work life/family. It could be that the wording of the question was confusing and so elicited these discrepant responses. From my observations of conversations, it seemed that the balance between work/non-work life was occasionally difficult to manage, for example when deadlines were looming, staff would work late either at the office or, more frequently, at home. Questionnaire responses included:

At times when the project(s) are at their peak then I work in the evenings. (Gertrude)

Yes, sometimes workload is high and time needs to be taken from personal life to complete assignments. (Rachel)

Sometimes due to pressure of work and long hours caused by deadlines. (Mark)

No - I believe I structure my work according to client priorities, without compromising family life. (Angela)

The discipline of personal mastery was evident in ODC with certain aspects requiring attention to enhance the development of this discipline. This discipline is considered to be the (spiritual) foundation of the learning organisation and with personal mastery evident in ODC, the company had a foundation on which to build and develop the other disciplines. The next discipline I

turned my attention to was that of mental models and the instances where this discipline was displayed.

6.4.3 Mental models

Mental models "are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalisations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (Senge, 1990, p8). This discipline also involves members questioning a situation, or information, rather than accepting it at face value (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, in Mezirow & Associates, 1990), giving attention to the "root of the problem" and examining "the grounds of one's beliefs and feelings as they contribute to the validity of one's thinking" (O'Neil & Marsick, 1994, p22-23). This is a relatively difficult discipline to identify and observe as mental models are essentially the thinking behind understanding and acting. Actions can be identified and observed, but the thinking that caused the action or understanding is less observable. To identify this discipline, I had to identify the thinking of the organisation and its members. I did this on two levels: firstly, I considered the mental models that ODC espoused in its documentation and I looked for situations that reflected that staff were conducting themselves according to these espoused mental models (that is, if what ODC said was what its members did). Secondly, I observed staff interactions and looked for 'learningful' conversations during which members exposed their thinking effectively and were open to the influence of others (Senge, 1990) and where they questioned, rather than accepted information or a situation at face value.

I identified two company documents that revealed the mental models of ODC, namely the company profile and the business and marketing strategy. ODC's company profile (2007) included:

> "The following behavioural codes guide our interaction amongst ourselves and our clients:
> - Entrepreneurial and innovative by always looking for solutions from another angle
> - Open-minded: look at the world without blinkers
> - Self-starter: set the pace, individually, in what we do
> - Commitment to the course of action
> - Respect for each other, our diversity and that of our clients
> - Fun to be with and passionate about what we do
> - Ethical and humble in our interpersonal relations
> - Encourage our clients to value the experiences and potential of their own people."

ODC's business and marketing strategy (2008, p3) stated:

> "In our efforts to achieve our vision we embrace the following behaviours:
> – Seen by others as a company of passionate people who are filled with purpose, inspirational ideas and solutions.
> – Constantly seek opportunities to share knowledge and wisdom with all around us, whilst learning from each other at the same time.
> – Regarded as a value adding team member and partner in all our endeavours."

I looked for instances in my observations that reflected these mental models.

There were often learningful conversations that took place in the project meetings that I observed that reflected the espoused mental models of ODC. While a project team was developing a solution for a client, Angela, asked the project leader, Tina, why she was approaching the solution in a particular way. The ensuing discussion helped to uncover Tina's mental models as well as provide clarity for the team. Tina offered a detailed explanation and reasons for her suggested solution, which helped to expose her thinking and assumptions. This interaction could also be interpreted as reflecting the mental model included in the company profile that ODC is entrepreneurial and innovative, looking for solutions from another angle – the discussion that took place reflected that Tina's solution was innovative and "from another angle" from the comments that Angela and the team members made, such as "Yes, that is different but it should work".

The same project team, while they were developing this solution, would often ask each other questions so as to clarify understanding and mental models. Questions such as "Why?" and "What do you think?" were regular features of conversations. These types of interactions also reflect another ODC espoused mental model that the team sought "opportunities to share knowledge … whilst learning from each other".

During staff training, participants shared their mental models of role-profiling based on previous experiences and shared how ODC's methodology was different. They explained their insights of ODC's model, which also contributed to team learning and building shared vision. This interaction showed the facilitator, Angela, displaying ODC's mental models of "seeking opportunities to share knowledge … whilst learning from each other"; "respect for each other, … diversity …"; being "open-minded: look(ing) at the world without blinkers" and demonstrating that participants are "regarded as a value adding team member" by being able to share their insights.

Staff meetings also provided organisation members with the opportunity to explore mental models, where, for example, a staff member would share information about a particular aspect and others in the meeting would ask questions to gain clarity of certain views, or assumptions, that the staff member held. An example of this is when the directors/managers disclosed their decision not to exhibit at an expo. Some staff members asked why the decision had been taken

and there was a discussion that followed, where directors/managers revealed their thinking behind the decision.

Nick: Isn't this a risky decision (not to display at an expo), considering the economic climate?

Tina: Shouldn't we rather be marketing more than less during these (financial) times?

Tim and Patricia openly explained the reasons for their decision.

Tim: The demographic that attends these expos is not really our market in any case, hey, Patricia?

Patricia nodded.

Patricia: Yes. There are very few visitors from mining houses.

Tim: And when there's a recession hitting, the best is to focus, not to run and look for business all over the place. People often want to diversify when there's a recession. They think that they have to go and look all over the place to get business. But the best strategy is to focus. If someone comes knocking on our door, we won't turn them away. We'll do business with them. But we're not going to actively look for business outside of mining. I've been through this before in other recessions. There are too many players out there. Our niche is in mining – it's what we know and do best. Trust me, guys. We'll be fine if we focus on what we're good at, and that's mining.

However, learningful conversations were sometimes inhibited. One such occasion was when staff participated in a discussion concerning women in mining. The discussion revolved around how the value that a client held was not reflected in the client's practise. The discussion encouraged a conversation where staff examined their values concerning women in mining. The conversation, whilst it still had energy and enthusiasm, was cut short by the managing director, Tim, who ended the discussion with "Draft a report for the client". As previously mentioned, I found Tim's interruption quite curious – it was an opportunity to address mental models and unearth the assumptions that staff had around the subject. My observation was that staff were on the path to revealing their assumptions, and had not quite completed sharing these. This could have been a moment to also practise the discipline of building shared vision. Through revealing their mental models on the subject of women in mining, the team could have reached an understanding of each others' views and then moved to collectively build a shared vision concerning this. This shared vision could inform ODC's methodology further concerning women in mining and the potential solutions it could offer concerning the subject, not only to

this client, but to others. From the conversation in the meeting, it was clear that the issue of women in mining was not only a concern for the current client, but for other mining houses, too.

There were instances that reflect that mental models held by ODC were not held by all staff. Examples of these instances include problems related to office and kitchen neatness and office security. These topics were regularly raised and addressed by Tim and Patricia in staff meetings where they offered rationales as to why the office and kitchen should be kept neat and clean, and why it was important to ensure that the office was locked. Concerning office neatness, in the one meeting Tim said, "I don't want to discuss this again. We are professional and we need to show it." In the same meeting concerning kitchen neatness, he told staff, "The dishwasher will be used for big functions, otherwise you are to rinse your own stuff'. He continued that the issue was not about the dishes but that "It shows lack of respect to your colleagues, and that's the issue". In a subsequent staff meeting, Tim even communicated that they (directors/managers) would be taking the "hard-line approach" and that office neatness would form part of staff's annual performance appraisals, with a weighting of 15% to their overall appraisal.

Concerning office security, Tim made an appeal for staff to lock the office: "Consider our office security in the larger context of South Africa – we live in a dangerous country and I would hate for anything to happen to anyone because they are working late at the office". In a subsequent meeting, Patricia named staff members who had left the office unlocked one evening. Tim again offered the same rationale concerning the importance of locking the office. Patricia had explained how the office should be locked in the previous meeting and repeated her explanation in this meeting, stating where the door access button was located and how it functioned.

These problems may appear minor, but could reflect that not all staff of ODC shared the same mental models that ODC held. The problems related to office and kitchen neatness and office security could be interpreted as a lack respect for each other. If this was the case, this lack of respect could spill over into other interactions and contribute to an unpleasant working environment. The attribute of trust is an important one for a learning organisation, and could be seen to be dependent on respect – if there is little respect for colleagues, there could be little chance of developing trust between them.

From the closed questions asked in the questionnaire, the ten respondents agreed that the discipline of addressing mental models is practised frequently in ODC, with an average score

for this category of 2.1 (reflecting 'agree' on the scoring scale). However, there were a few statements containing responses indicating that the practises were contrary to those that reflected a learning organisation. In response to question 22 concerning whether members talked about why they thought about certain things the way they did, six respondents agreed and one strongly agreed that these conversations did not take place in ODC. Four respondents agreed and two strongly agreed with question 25, that when differences of opinion surfaced, members did not look for reasons why they had those differences. These scores reflected what I had observed in staff meetings - learningful conversations were often cut short by the managing director and staff lacked the opportunity, courage or experience to explore their own and others' assumptions underpinning their understanding of the world and actions they took.

The open question section of the questionnaire was designed to unearth the assumptions that the members of ODC held of it – the pictures and images that influenced how members understood ODC and resultant actions. In response to question 3.6, seven respondents thought of ODC as a large, wild cat, which included a lion (three respondents), a cheetah, a tiger, a leopard and a meerkat. Other responses included an elephant, a buffalo, an eagle and a fox. Reasons for selecting these animals included associations of ODC with strength, group support, intelligence and cunning, being ahead of the pack/at the forefront, looking for new approaches, and being secretive and not upfront. The latter response was made by the newest member of the team, who also had a short tenure at ODC, resigning after three months (Julie). Among the responses were:

> *We are strong and yet there are various risks that can affect us if not handled in the correct way. (Lee-Anne)*
>
> *Always on the lookout for new approaches, strong team cohesion, strong leadership, very adaptive. Agile. (Rose)*
>
> *Lean and mean. Eager to achieve results and prove ourselves as market leaders. (Mark)*

It was interesting that most members associated ODC with being a large wild cat, thus reflecting a common assumption, or mental model, of the organisation. The words that were associated with the animals and thus the organisation were also mostly positive, affirming words with the exception of one response of the organisation being secretive and not upfront. I found the exception concerning and wondered why this staff member, Julie, had a negative association with the organisation – why was her mental model of the organisation so different to that of the others? Was it because she had a lack of orientation to the organisation and was expected to perform without understanding the culture and methodology of ODC sufficiently? Could it be that she was in a negative frame and the questionnaire was an opportunity to reflect that frame? Or perhaps she did not 'fit' the culture of the organisation (as previously discussed) and this was

reflected in the different image that she held of ODC. I was unable to gain clarity on these questions as Julie resigned early in my data collection stage.

The mental models described by members in the open questions demonstrate an association with the mental models of ODC's documents. Group support could reflect that staff also held the mental model of "seeking opportunities to share knowledge and wisdom with all around…" and regarding each "as a value adding team member and partner in all … endeavours". Being ahead of the pack/at the forefront, looking for new approaches, could be associated with ODC being "entrepreneurial and innovative by always looking for solutions from another angle", "look(ing) at the world without blinkers" and being "filled with purpose, inspirational ideas and solutions". These associations demonstrated that ODC did not only espouse certain mental models, but that staff could associate with mental models and recognise that these were practised. However, one staff member had a different experience of ODC and this should not be overlooked.

The mental models that ODC held appeared to be consistent throughout the organisation and so it could be assumed that members viewed situations similarly and this impacted on how they acted. This could be both a negative and a positive aspect. If most members held similar mental models of the organisation, then they may have exercised 'groupthink', permitting the organisation to continue with the status quo. Similar mental models could be a positive aspect for reasons of finding common ground or team-building and could be based on the common picture that most members held of ODC, namely a large wild cat.

I also found that the responses to the open questions for mental models provided insight into the respondents' views of the culture of ODC. The phrases 'supportive' and 'team' appeared frequently indicating that the culture was possibly one of cohesion and working together.

Despite these commonalities, responses to the questionnaire indicated that ODC could engage in learningful conversations more frequently so that members could talk about why they thought about certain things the way they did and explore reasons for differences of opinion. If they engaged in such conversations, members could be able to challenge their own thinking concerning assumptions of how they thought the world worked. This could lead them into implementing new insights and developing new solutions to problems as they could go beyond the bounds of familiar ways of thinking and acting (Senge, 1990).

6.4.4 Building shared vision

Building shared vision is a discipline that involves creating a genuine vision that members want to commit to rather than comply with (Senge, 1990). This shared vision also reflects members' personal visions. This discipline "involves the skills of unearthing shared 'pictures of the future'" (Senge, 1990, p9) and encourages members to excel and learn. In identifying this discipline, I looked for incidences that reflected where the development of a shared vision was encouraged. As there appears to be a link between the discipline of building shared vision and that of mental models, some of the incidences that reflected addressing mental models in the ODC also reflected incidences in which shared vision was built.

ODC's business and marketing strategy (2008) reflected that ODC valued building shared vision by stating that "organisation members are regarded as value adding team members and partners in all … endeavours". As with mental models, this espoused value could also be observed in ODC's practice through the way that members interacted with each other.

At a project team level, there were often instances where the project team stated and clarified visions and were given the opportunity to build a shared vision for the project. In an initial project meeting, the project leader, Tina, shared her thoughts on how to approach the project and gave reasons for her approach. She shared with the team, which consisted of two other members, what the purpose of the project was, invited questions and asked team members how they saw the project panning out and what the end result would be. This discussion helped the team members to clarify their own visions as well as develop a shared vision for the project. During project team meetings, while members were working on developing a solution for their client, Tina would often say "This is what we're doing here" and the team members would comment, clarify what had been said and add their views either supporting or providing alternatives to Tina's ideas. Statements that were often made included "This is what I was thinking …" and "What I had in mind was this …" When alternatives were presented, the team would discuss these to decide on the best option with the available information. Before meetings adjourned, the team would discuss the way forward and agree on deliverables and responsibilities for the next meeting. It appeared that the team consistently checked in with each other concerning what the vision for the project was as well as their personal visions to ensure that they were providing an optimal solution for the client. From my perspective, when team members had new information to share, they did so freely and this contributed to the team working together, the shared vision they developed and the solution they were working on for the client.

During staff meetings, there were instances where members were invited to contribute to building a shared vision. An example of this is when staff were requested by Tim to develop a competency framework that would be used for performance appraisals and would contribute to the performance bonuses staff could earn. This exercise gave staff the opportunity to express their personal vision and then participate in developing a shared vision concerning the business - the competencies that staff selected could be seen to be aspects of the business that staff identified as being important to them individually, with the opportunity in a subsequent staff meeting, to identify those aspects collectively.

Knowledge sharing sessions in staff meetings also contributed to developing shared vision as staff could express their vision for the company through their presentation. An example of this is when Lee-Anne during her presentation said:

> *We are and can be the Usain Bolts (Olympic 100m gold medallist) by going in to the client, spending time with them, working alongside the client because this shows our commitment to the client and sets us apart from the rest.*

She was able to share her personal vision for the company and after her presentation there was a brief discussion amongst staff concerning what Lee-Anne had presented. However, I felt that the opportunity to develop a shared vision was missed and Lee-Anne's presentation could have been a catalyst to unearth the shared pictures that staff held of ODC. The chair of the meeting, Patricia, or the managing director, Tim, could have asked staff if they held similar visions to Lee-Anne and members could have spoken about what their personal visions for ODC were – if they were the same or different to Lee-Anne's, what they were and why they had such visions for ODC.

The closed questions in the questionnaire indicated that the respondents tended to agree that building shared vision was a discipline that was practised in ODC, with an average score for this category of 2.3. As with the disciplines of personal mastery and mental models, there were a few statements that had responses indicating that the practices were contrary to those that reflected a learning organisation. In response to question 37 concerning the sharing of a common destiny, three respondents disagreed and two neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Two respondents strongly agreed, three agreed and three neither agreed nor disagreed with question 39, that members were not given the opportunity to share their visions of the future for the company. For question 44, which related to all staff having input into company

strategies, responses reflected that not all staff had input, with only three responses agreeing that staff did have input into strategies, three disagreeing and four neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

The open questions in the questionnaire focused on the mission statement of ODC. Five of the ten respondents knew and were able to recite the mission statement ("to be the leading OD (organisational development) and HR (human resources) planning partner of choice in the mining sector") while the others did not know ODC's mission statement. The mission statement had been developed in a strategy session with senior staff. Two of the respondents had been involved in this session and thus in developing the mission statement. Only one other respondent, besides the two senior staff, knew how the mission statement had been developed.

The discipline of building shared vision was evident in ODC with certain aspects requiring attention to enhance the development of this discipline. There appeared to be a lack of opportunities for staff to share their personal visions and contribute to a shared vision of ODC. If staff were given more opportunities to share their personal visions with each other, they could develop a shared picture of the future together and they could become more motivated to excel and learn as they could become committed to achieving their shared vision.

6.4.5 Team learning

In identifying the discipline of team learning, I looked for instances where the organisation was focussed on aligning and developing its members' capacity to create the results they truly desired (Senge, 1990). I consulted ODC's documents to gauge what their espoused beliefs concerning this discipline were. Since team learning involves sharing information through conversation, I listened to and observed conversations in different contexts to understand if and how team learning occurred. This discipline, according to Senge, involves a dialogic approach rather than a discussion focus and I attempted to identify conversations that were dialogues and those that were discussions. If conversations were discussions, then they tended to reflect that single-loop and adaptive learning was taking place, which did not challenge the core principles from which an individual or organisation operated. The purpose of these discussions was to generally gain understanding of another's point of view (Senge, 1990). Dialogues, on the other hand, reflected double-loop and generative learning and challenged core principles with the outcome of creating shared meaning and fundamental change (Anderson, 1997; Argyris, 1980; Hattingh & Smit, 2004).

In various company documents I identified values that underpinned the discipline of team learning such as "integrity: honesty and openness" and "knowledge sharing" as criteria in ODC's performance appraisal forms (2008). These values were important for team learning to take place and inclusion in the performance appraisal indicated that these values received emphasis in the organisation. ODC's business and marketing strategy (2008) incorporated the phrase that organisation members "constantly seek opportunities to share knowledge and wisdom with all around …, whilst learning from each other at the same time". The knowledge harvesting policy (2006) included a statement that ODC's "competitive advantage lies in our ability to capture, share and harvest knowledge amongst ourselves". These phrases indicated that sharing knowledge and information was important to ODC and I interpreted this as placing value on team learning.

While 'casing the joint' and observing the open office area I observed Rachel experiencing a problem performing a certain function on her laptop. Charlene noticed that Rachel was having difficulty.

Charlene: What's wrong?

Rachel: I don't know how to do this thing here…

Charlene: What do you need to do?

Rachel explained the issue to Charlene and Charlene talked her through how to perform the function, rather than doing it for her. This interaction reflected team learning, but I am unable to indicate to what degree. What I observed appeared to be a mere discussion, but for Rachel and Charlene the interaction could have represented dialogue as they created shared meaning concerning the task at hand.

Team learning was evident in project meetings. For example, in the initial project meeting (kick-off meeting of a two-hour duration) the team shared briefly what they saw as the potential problems they could encounter on the project and their experiences of projects of a similar nature. This interaction contributed to shared understanding of the nature of the project and how ODC's methodology was implemented in these projects. Based on this shared understanding, the team suggested an approach to finalise a solution with the client. They agreed on a different approach to what they had used previously on other projects and explored the pros and cons of the approach. This interaction included dialogue as the team challenged the core principles of their usual approach and changed their approach, reflecting double-loop, generative learning.

In another project meeting with the same team, two members of the team came across a potential stumbling block concerning an aspect of the project. There were two other staff members who were part of the meeting, although one was not involved in the project. When they came across the stumbling block, they had a lengthy and energetic exchange concerning how to overcome the obstacle. All team members offered solutions, questioned each other and listened to responses. The questions asked helped to uncover mental models and led to the team developing an innovative solution, according to the managing director, based on changed mental models. This was an example of dialogue with double-loop, generative learning taking place. Examples of contributions from the team included:

Tina: If we do this (she explained what 'this' was), what will the consequence be?
Charlene: But surely we can't do that.
Rachel: I think we can. What is stopping us from trying that?

The team then explored what the obstacles in their thinking were that hindered them from trying the solution, such as "What if it doesn't work? I don't think that ODC has tried this before".

The project leader, Tina, allowed the conversation to continue on its course. Team members shared their concerns and Tina concluded the session. "Well, let's try it. If it doesn't work, we can revisit the solution," she said.

A similar exchange took place in another project meeting while the team was developing a solution for their client. Each member shared their understanding of the client's needs while other team members asked questions, they reflected on the information shared and clarified their understanding of what was shared. In this and other project meetings, the project leader, Tina, would often play the role of facilitator and ask questions to initiate interaction. Sometimes the exchanges between the team would be discussions that served to share information and gain understanding of others' viewpoints, for example "What do you think we should do?" and "How should we do it?", while at other times the teams would dialogue and ask questions such as "What makes you say that?" and "Why should we do that?" These questions would then stimulate further dialogue with the outcome of shared meaning between the team – they would reach a common understanding and purpose concerning the issue at hand and then explore suggestions and whether these should be pursued and implemented.

The staff training session encouraged the participants to share from their experience and reflect on what they had learned. Although the session focused on sharing information of ODC's methodology and the application of this to the task of role-profiling, participants were able to give feedback and input concerning the content of the training based on their experience. Aspects of dialogue were included as the session contributed to developing a shared understanding of how to perform the task and provided participants with a new mental model on which to base this activity. Participants shared how the methodology challenged their existing mental models and what this meant for them. Comments that were made included, "Role-profiling is role-profiling, but the methodology gives it a nice framework and puts it into context" and "ODC's methodology really makes sense and helps to simplify the process, making it more understandable". My experience, as a participant on this training, was that the session helped to include me in the larger team and gave me a better understanding of ODC's purpose. The session contributed to participants partaking in team learning as well as building shared vision, where personal visions of completing a task (such as role-profiling) were incorporated into ODC's methodology and underpinning vision.

From what I observed in staff meetings, team learning as a concept was valued, but not often practised as a discipline. Opportunities for staff to learn were provided through knowledge sharing sessions incorporated into staff meetings and company leaders would emphasise in these meetings the importance of learning so that the performance of staff and the organisation could improve, which showed that the concept of team learning was acknowledged. During knowledge sharing sessions, staff members were given the opportunity to present their knowledge, experiences or new information they had learned to the team. Staff could ask the presenter questions and gain meaning and understanding of the information presented, but these were mainly discussions rather than dialogues. There were some instances when staff were discussing issues and the discussion was leading to a deeper dialogue, such as the women in mining issue described under mental models. However, the dialogue was cut short by the managing director, Tim. My observation was that the team did not reach a place of shared meaning on this issue.

From the closed questions asked in the questionnaire, the respondents agreed that team learning is practised in ODC, with an average score for this category of 1.9. However, there were a few statements that had responses indicating that the practices were contrary to those that reflect a learning organisation. In response to question 52 concerning whether staff were able to openly question why things were done in the organisation, two members neither agreed nor disagreed

while four disagreed with the statement. Four members neither agreed nor disagreed and three disagreed that they were able to volunteer to be part of a team (question 80). Concerning the regularity with which ODC reviewed and changed organisational norms, policies and objectives (question 84), three members neither agreed nor disagreed, while two disagreed that this activity took place regularly. The responses to questions 52 and 84 could indicate that ODC did not encourage the examining of mental models, which related to double-loop, generative learning and dialogue. They appeared to be more likely to engage in single-loop, adaptive learning, which could cause them to maintain the status quo and not consider approaches outside the organisational framework. The threat of single-loop, adaptive learning is that the organisation could become 'stuck' and not be able to adapt to a changing environment. Having stated that, though, ODC demonstrated adaptability between the two research periods in 2008 and 2012, displaying its propensity for team learning. This will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

In the open question section of the questionnaire, respondents completed statements concerning their experiences of working in a team in ODC. For the statement "The team worked together by…" (question 3.12a) five respondents included in their responses sharing information, knowledge, objectives, solutions, tasks and ideas. Three responses included clear allocation and understanding of deliverables and tasks while another three included assisting and supporting one another in the team. Some of these responses indicated that the team worked together by:

> *Having open communication and constant assistance/guidance when needed. (Julie)*
>
> *Allocating project specific deliverables to individuals to ensure accountability, but the team as a whole worked together on the deliverable with the assigned accountable individual leading the team on that task. We met regularly but were flexible in order to enable each member to maintain a focus on the assigned project deliverables. (Gertrude)*
>
> *Sharing knowledge for improvement and delivering on target within quality standards. (Angela)*

For question 3.12b, concerning what respondents learned by being part of the team, answers varied with some reflecting "valuing of the other", such as

> *To listen to all team members and reflect on how to empower and build their capacity more. (Angela)*
>
> *That each person has a strength and you should focus on that to make the team effective. (Rachel)*
>
> *To do my share and offer support. (Julie)*

I found Julie's responses worth noting. Despite her seemingly negative impressions of ODC, her experience of working in a team at ODC was different to the 'secretiveness' that she had experienced sometime during her tenure. Her team experience was one of open communication

and assistance or guidance when needed, which is the opposite of a secretive environment that she had commented on. I wondered at which level or interaction in the organisation she had experienced the secretiveness, as it did not appear to be at a team level.

Julie's comments were, however, congruent with my observations of team learning in ODC. Team learning in ODC tended to occur around sharing information, objectives, solutions and ideas. Teams tended to work together through the allocation of responsibilities and roles, and support from team members to achieve objectives. The result of working in teams was that some members learned to listen, realised that they were able to learn in a team and that working in teams could be more effective and add more value to a task or project. However, team learning tended to take place around discussions rather than dialogue and this could inhibit ODC from being a learning organisation.

6.4.6 Systems thinking

In identifying the discipline of systems thinking, I looked for instances where organisation members recognised interdependency of different aspects and the impact of these dependencies on the entire system (Senge, 1990). These dependencies influence the sustainability of a system – what happens in one part of a system, influences another. For example, in the system of a business organisation, if there are no sales, there are no salaries. Although the word 'thinking' reflects what tends to be an intrapersonal process, members would often reveal their thinking through their conversations and their actions. I could then identify when they picked up on patterns, the impact of these on the system and how members attempted to change these patterns.

Once again, the organisation revealed its espoused theory concerning systems thinking in its documents. The company profile stated that ODC's services "focus on an entire organisation" (ODC company profile, 2007, p3), recognising that parts of a system impact on one another and to accommodate this interdependency, its services reflected that recognition. In the same document, ODC asserted that its solutions focused on a broader system, namely the South African economy by stating that ODC provides "people optimisation solutions that focus on enhancing and developing peoples' skills so as to contribute positively to the South African economy and ensure a sustainable livelihood" (ODC company profile, 2007, p3). In its business and marketing strategy, ODC recognised the impact of legislation on its services and organisations by stating that it ensures "alignment with all relevant legislation" (ODC business and marketing strategy, 2008, p1). ODC's consulting methodology included the "integration of

work complexity methodology in the company's products and service offerings" (ODC work complexity, 2008, p3) thus recognising the interdependency of its methodology in the products and services it sold to clients.

In its practice, during the project meetings I observed, ODC reflected an understanding of systems thinking and the interdependency of aspects involved in a system. In terms of bringing about change in the system through recognising patterns, this took place generally through consultants identifying patterns or tendencies in their clients and then adapting their solution to accommodate clients' needs and bring about the necessary change in the client organisation. The changes that the project team brought about were not within ODC itself, but within the environment of the client, so my observation was that the project team practiced systems thinking on an external (to ODC) level, rather than recognising patterns within their own organisation that they could change. Examples of instances reflecting systems thinking include when the project team was designing a solution for a client, the team considered the solution in terms of the client's business processes and strategy and identified how their solution would impact on the strategy. They also considered what needed to be changed in the solution to assist the client to implement its processes and strategy. The proposed solution was continuously considered in the client's context – if the solution worked, what would be the impact of the solution on operational processes; if the changes brought about by the solution were feasible, if the solution would lead to improvements in processing and staff performance – these were discussions that took place throughout the design of the solution. A specific solution was proposed for roles that a client's staff held. In arriving at the solution, the team shared their understanding of how the roles linked to each other, the succession of the roles, their knowledge and understanding of the various roles as they followed on from each other, reflecting an understanding of 'roles' not in isolation, but within the context of the client and the impact on the client's system. On one occasion, the project leader, Tina, commented on how the project and solution was constantly evolving: "Each time the team meets or we meet with the client, new ideas emerge that are relevant to the context of the client". This is also an example of how the discipline of team learning was practised.

The operations meeting I observed also reflected systems thinking taking place. Tim and Tina both demonstrated systems thinking for the client as well as the impact of the project on ODC. They considered what resources could be drawn on, where information was available, who and what could assist with the project. In this meeting, Tina discussed her concerns with Tim about the impact of various stakeholders on one of the projects she was working on. The client had not

appointed a project custodian to ensure the implementation of the project. Tim and Tina discussed the risk to the client of not implementing the solution. Another concern Tina raised about stakeholders was that the project included a team from a different organisation consulting to the same client. Tina's team was dependent on the other team's output to design ODC's solution, but that team, in a meeting between themselves, ODC and the client, stated that they would not have their part of the project completed by the due date. This late submission would impact on the ODC team's delivery and they would not be able to meet their deadline. Tim suggested that Tina flag this, as well as the project custodian issue, as a risk to the client.

Tina and Tim also discussed the 'silo mentality' that existed in the client's organisation: "They just don't know what they're doing and how what they do impacts on the rest of the organisation," Tim commented. Tina added:

> *It is quite frustrating to give them a solution and you know it can benefit the larger organisation, only to hear them say that it's just for their department. They don't seem to be interested in taking something that works and sharing it with the rest of the company.*

Tim and Tina continued to discuss how the ODC model could be adapted to suit a client's needs, demonstrating an understanding of the client's and their own systems in order to do this exercise. Tina also told Tim that the client had displayed interest in another project and they discussed how Tina could approach the client to follow-up on this interest. I interpreted this discussion as a reflection of systems thinking as Tina was aware that if she could sell more services to the client, this would contribute to ODC's sustainability.

The staff training session demonstrated systems thinking in the way the session was conducted – there was a constant emphasis on the need for staff to think systemically when consulting to clients and to link roles to business processes. Angela (the facilitator) highlighted that roles were not something that existed on their own, but that they existed in the context of the client's organisation and so had an impact on other roles and the larger organisation.

A number of discussions/conversations took place in staff meetings that indicated that staff of ODC engaged in systems thinking. A concern for ODC was the influence of precious metal commodity prices on its business. This concern was raised in different staff meetings by managers, and staff would initiate discussions on how to minimise the impact of commodity prices on ODC's business. Patricia and Tim would then highlight how ODC's business offering accommodated attaining business through price fluctuations. ODC had two specific services to offer based on these price fluctuations – they could assist clients to increase operations and

mining production when commodity prices were high; and they could assist clients to optimise their operations and lower their costs when commodity prices were low.

In a staff meeting where the knowledge sharing session dealt with how to use the MS Projects package, Gertrude's presentation was followed by a general discussion on the importance of being able to use the package. Tina commented that the package would help with managing scope creep (catering for elements of a project that were not agreed upon with the client) and the rest of the staff nodded their heads in agreement. Charlene and Rose both commented on the importance of accurately capturing the scope of a project from a costing perspective and that by using MS Projects, teams would be able to better track their projects and the costing thereof.

The company's financial performance to date was presented by one of the directors in each staff meeting. This practice helped staff to understand how the business was performing and how their individual and collective efforts impacted on the organisation. These presentations consisted of Tracey giving an overview of how much the company had invoiced, what the expenditure was, the profit attained to date and the profit that had been attained as a percentage of the target. The target was one that had been set by the company leadership. In one of the meetings Tracey gave feedback on a presentation she had attended concerning Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). She explained the impact of the legislation on ODC's business, that ODC had to comply with the legislation and the action ODC would be required to take. As ODC fell into the Small Qualifying Enterprises category, they were required to comply with four of the seven bands stipulated in the BEE legislation and Tracey explained that ODC could select those bands they would comply with. Tim briefly pointed out four possible bands, commented to the staff that, "These seem to be the most obvious choices – we already meet most of the requirements of these four bands" and then told the staff that Tracey would take care of ensuring that ODC was BEE-compliant.

During the knowledge sharing session in one of the staff meetings, Tim initiated a discussion on the importance of keeping staff skills relevant. "What are other companies doing to make sure that their staff's skills are relevant?" he asked, to which staff gave feedback concerning what they were aware of. Rose commented that she knew of a company that would source the skills externally by hiring people with the required skills and retaining them for the period that they required the skills. A dialogue followed:

Tim: So they hire them while they need the skills and then let them go?

Rose: That's basically what they do.

Tim: I suppose on one level that makes sense. They keep the people for a period and then get them to develop the skills internally without having to pay extra.

Rose: Yes, but is that good practice?

This opened up the discussion to the rest of the staff where they commented on whether they agreed with such a practice. Tim concluded the discussion by stating that it was one way of developing skills, but that he would not pursue it as the method encouraged using people and then discarding them. "No, we're about people development, people. I don't think that's a good way of developing people." There seemed to be an audible sigh of relief in the room after Tim made that statement, as if people were thinking, "If Tim agrees with this practise, what if I am here only for a short space of time to develop others, and then I'll be discarded…" The discussion thereafter did not last long – the general response was that companies train their staff to develop the skills they need, or they employ staff with the skills the company requires. However, the discussion indicated that systems thinking took place – staff skills needed to be relevant in order for the company to remain relevant so that it could provide a service to its clients, and remain sustainable. It also reflected an understanding of personal mastery with the focus on the need for ongoing learning.

The closed questions of the questionnaire indicated that the respondents agreed that systems thinking was practised in ODC, with an average score of 1.8. The statements that indicated that ODC had practices contrary to those of a learning organisation were question 91 and 100. Question 91: "We mostly approach problems with the same familiar solutions" had one strongly agree, two agree and four neither agree nor disagree responses. Question 100 concerning there being conflict between organisational members had six respondents agree with the statement. These questions did not provide a context for the responses. For question 91, it could be that some respondents considered their consulting practise in answering this question – Tim and some other consultants had commented in discussions that the solutions that they gave clients were the same, "The only thing that changed was the person sitting in front of them (the client)." ODC's solutions were based on its consulting methodology and clients generally presented similar problems to them that required similar solutions. Alternatively, the implication could be that ODC sold a similar solution to clients irrespective of the problem that was to be solved. Question 100 did not include the context of the conflict either and so I am unable to infer if the outcome of conflict experiences were positive or negative, whether or not these contributed to systems thinking and being a learning organisation.

In the open question section of the questionnaire, half of the respondents viewed their role as influencing other areas or functions in the company (question 3.13). Four respondents who did not respond to this question or did not see themselves as having influence were interns and the receptionist. Respondents saw themselves influencing other areas or functions …

> *Through product development, research and development and best practice implementation regarding the organisational development value chain. (Angela)*
>
> *By sharing knowledge and expertise with younger members. (Mark)*
>
> *By sharing knowledge, information and ideas with other individuals and teams within the company. (Nolene)*

Questions 3.14 and 3.15 were included to assess respondents' awareness of systems thinking and whether they saw themselves and ODC as part of a system that had interdependencies. Eight of the respondents reflected this thinking, while two respondents left the questions blank (an intern and the receptionist). Responses to the questions indicated awareness among the staff of a variety of factors that influenced ODC's ability to perform. Internally (question 3.14), these factors included competence, knowledge, skills and willingness of staff, motivation of staff and personal politics. Comments from respondents for this aspect included:

> *Competent resources delivering against set targets plus sound methodology basis.* (Angela)
>
> *Uniqueness and quality of work … reputation.* (Julie and Nolene)
>
> *People and their knowledge of what is expected.* (Rose and Tim)

Factors external to ODC that influenced its ability to perform (question 3.15) included clients' needs and expectations, industry trends and delivery standards, ODC's competitive edge, market niche and reputation in the market. Staff comments concerning external factors influencing ODC's ability to perform included:

> *The appalling poor delivery standards in our industry.* (Tim)
>
> *Client behaviour and demands*. (Mark, Gertrude and Julie)
>
> *Changes in mining houses ways of doing business.* (Rose)

What was interesting concerning these responses is that a similar group of respondents did not answer the questions, namely the interns and receptionist. This may be because they did not view their role as impacting the organisation (did not display systems thinking) or did not feel part of the system of the organisation (for example the receptionist's function and location was outside of the main working area and focus, while interns may not have felt 'part of the team'). Alternatively they may not have understood the question.

ODC appeared to practise systems thinking. However, some interns and the receptionist seemed to lack the ability to practise this discipline and this could impact on their capacity to participate in identifying and changing patterns in the organisation. Systems thinking also integrates the other four disciplines (Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Senge, 1990) and the data collected indicated that the five disciplines were indeed practised in ODC. However, in order for ODC to be better able to meet the demands of the environment in which it operated and so further contribute to its sustainability, it could look at ways to integrate all staff into the business, interns and the receptionist alike, as the level of participation of all staff could impact on the level of systems thinking that was practised in the organisation.

6.5 Conclusion

Senge's view of a learning organisation is one

> where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. (Senge, 1990, p3)

This type of learning organisation requires a particular leadership, culture and environment that encourages the five disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking to be practised. The ethnographic case study approach that I adopted assisted me to be a participant-observer, at times immersing myself in the organisation and at other times being able to stand back and observe what was taking place. By using an ethnographic approach, I looked for displays of the characteristics of a learning organisation by observing settings and interactions, document analysis, questionnaires and interviews. It seemed that ODC was a learning organisation and was attempting to strengthen its identity as a learning organisation.

The leadership of ODC encouraged a learning culture and displayed characteristics that promoted a learning organisation (as discussed in Chapter Four). Most staff experienced ODC leaders (directors and managers) as encouraging learning. Leaders acted as designers, stewards and teachers in varying capacities. They shared information with staff, empowered staff through encouraging and recognising them as 'containers of knowledge' and generally made it safe to learn from mistakes. Project leaders displayed the characteristics of 'learning leaders' through having a willingness and openness to learn. There were some concerns about the consistency

and commitment of company leadership, including the different leadership styles of two leaders and the absence of the third at Saturday learning/training sessions.

The culture of ODC was experienced by many staff as being a learning one. Other descriptions of the culture included passionate, excellent, driven and supportive. Questionnaire respondents stated that there was a lack of communication between the leaders and staff, which was acknowledged by company leaders interviewed.

The leadership and culture of ODC encouraged the five disciplines of a learning organisation to be practised. I noticed that ODC espoused certain theories concerning the learning disciplines in their documentation and its practises generally indicated that its theories were not only espoused, but in use. Questionnaire responses indicated that the respondents agreed that all the disciplines were practised and interview comments supported this agreement. For example, with regard to personal mastery, individuals learnt by attending training sessions and then brought the learning to the company through knowledge sharing sessions in staff meetings; staff were able to make mistakes and not be punished for them; staff were encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and find information; and there were subject matter experts to assist with certain areas of knowledge. Questioning was encouraged, but more time was needed to consolidate learning and engage in exposing mental models. Building shared vision was encouraged through drafting and presenting case studies of projects and through having open meetings, but could be enhanced through having an overall plan for learning for all levels in the company and through implementing learning plans and practises. Team learning occurred through sharing knowledge and learning, but this could be done more frequently. Systems thinking was promoted by giving staff exposure to different environments, having open meetings and knowledge sharing, but, from questionnaire responses, all staff at all levels did not display a capacity for systems thinking.

ODC demonstrated that it was able to engage with a variety of learning theories (as discussed in Chapter Three) in different forums and this assisted in developing the five disciplines within these forums. For example, experiential learning in staff training helped to address mental models. Mental models were also addressed in project and operations meetings through engaging in critical reflection. Recognising and employing cognitivism in knowledge sharing sessions and communities of practice in staff training encouraged the development of all disciplines. There was a strong focus on self-directed learning which contributed to the frequent practise of personal mastery, for example staff were recognised as ‘containers of knowledge’.

Collaborative learning assisted in building shared vision and team learning in project meetings. Culturo-historical activity theory (CHAT) was displayed in project teams and contributed to systems thinking. Single-loop learning often took place within teams and the organisation in order to gain understanding of another member's point of view and devise action strategies (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Malhotra, 1996). Double-loop learning sometimes occurred at project team level, such as questioning the format of a template as being optimal for a client's needs, but occurred less frequently than single-loop learning.

From this summary, it is evident that much of the learning that took place in ODC occurred at the level of project teams, which underpin a learning organisation – if teams are not learning, then the organisation cannot be learning (Senge, 1990).



ODC appeared to be on a course of strengthening its identity as a learning organisation. Further conclusions and recommendations are included in Chapter Eight, which consolidates the findings from the two research periods in Chapters Six and Seven. However, it would appear that ODC's biggest challenge on their journey to a learning organisation would be time. In the words of an interview respondent, Mark, "There isn't time to chat about realities and those sorts of things." Would ODC have more time to dedicate to the disciplines of a learning organisation in 2012? Would this vessel be able to navigate through the uncertain waters that it was beginning to experience due to the global credit crisis? ODC as a learning organisation in 2012 is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7:
CASE STUDY TWO – ODC IN 2012

7.1 Re-locating ODC in time and space…

It was boarding day, early in 2012, and I stood on the dock. There was no receptionist to buzz the door open for me – that desk was empty and I was puzzled. "What happened to the receptionist? Maybe she's off ill," I thought. Just then, a crew member emerged from what I knew to be the open office area. She buzzed the door open for me and greeted me with a smile. I had a conversation with her which resonated with the one I had had with the receptionist four years previously.



Me: Hi, I'm here to see Tim.
Shirley: Sure. Your name is?
Me: Genevieve.
Shirley: Please wait a moment. He's busy in a meeting in the boardroom. Would you mind waiting?
Me: Not at all. I'll just sit here.

I sat on one of the large comfortable chairs in the reception area. Tim emerged a few minutes later from the boardroom and asked me to join him there for our discussion. He apologised for being late and explained that he had just been in a meeting with external communication consultants who had been hired to conduct a communication audit of ODC - they were giving him feedback on the audit. He continued to share its purpose with me, which was to conduct an internal and external communication audit as part of ODC's strategy to improve communication with internal, potential and current clients. He gave an overview of its results and commented, "Some of it was hard to take, but we'll look at it and see what we can do."

Tim then continued, "So you want to continue with your research?" I then explained that I had upgraded to a Ph.D, with a broader scope. I gave him an overview of what I intended to do and an estimate of when I would complete, to which he agreed. We then had a discussion on how business had been in ODC, what changes the company had experienced, how they not only managed to weather the stormy seas when I last was on board, but they had had three more successful and profitable years, significantly increasing turnover during the period. I was

encouraged and wondered what the company had done to sustain itself in this period. I was eager to find out.

I started with data collection in March 2012 and continued through the year. Final data collection was interrupted towards the end of 2012. ODC moved premises and requested a three-week break from research to pack/unpack and settle in to the new premises. The managing director, Tim, also experienced a serious bicycle accident in mid-November and spent two weeks recovering in hospital. He was booked off work for three months, from the start of December, although he still visited the office. When I returned to ODC I was able to readily pick up the data collection process and conduct the final activities of a focus group and interviews. I had planned to include Tim in the process, but had to amend my plans.

7.2 Layout and staffing of ODC, the research site

When I entered the office area on boarding day in March 2012, I noticed a few small changes in the layout from the previous research phase (refer to Figure 7.1, p228). There were more artefacts in the environment such as a colourful notice board and trophies, and in the boardroom there were other artefacts that referred to the company values. In the office area there were now four work consoles, which could each still accommodate four staff members. Staff members no longer appeared to "float" between seats but occupied or "belonged to" seats as indicated by "xxx" in Figure 7.1 (p228). Managers occupied offices. The one director would often set up his laptop in the boardroom as he worked with ODC on a part-time basis and did not have an office allocated to him.

The premises I had last researched in 2008 were now referred to as "Head Office" as ODC had changed its operating model – the Midrand office was the central office and staff were allocated to different sites and reported to them for their daily work for the duration of projects they were employed on. These sites were located on the clients' premises. This change in model presented some challenges in terms of how I would proceed with my research for this phase – I considered whether I should visit all sites and research them or focus on the original site that I had researched previously. I chose to do the latter as I wanted to compare existing data from the site to new data and research the environment I had focused on previously. I also considered that researching across various sites would only allow me to have a superficial view of the different environments in the research period, whereas focussing on the head office would allow me to

gain a deeper insight into its environment. My first point of attention at the head office was the staff.

The crew had changed significantly since I was last on board, both in terms of faces I recognised and in number. The previous complement of seventeen had grown to 23, fifteen of whom were based in the head office at the beginning of Phase 6 (2012) and the balance "on site". There were only three familiar faces among the original sixteen: the managing director; a manager; and a consultant.

The fifteen head office crew members at the start of Phase 6 can be seen in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Demographics of Head Office staff at the beginning of 2012 (Phase 6)[6]

Race	Gender	No. of staff	Roles occupied
Black	Female	6	2 Administrators 3 Interns 1 Director
White	Female	5	1 Manager 4 Consultants
Black	Male	1	1 Manager
White	Male	3	2 Directors 1 Consultant
Total number of staff		15	

[6] Race of staff members reflect terms used in BBB-EE Act: staff that are Indian, Coloured (Mixed Race) or Black are indicated as "Black".

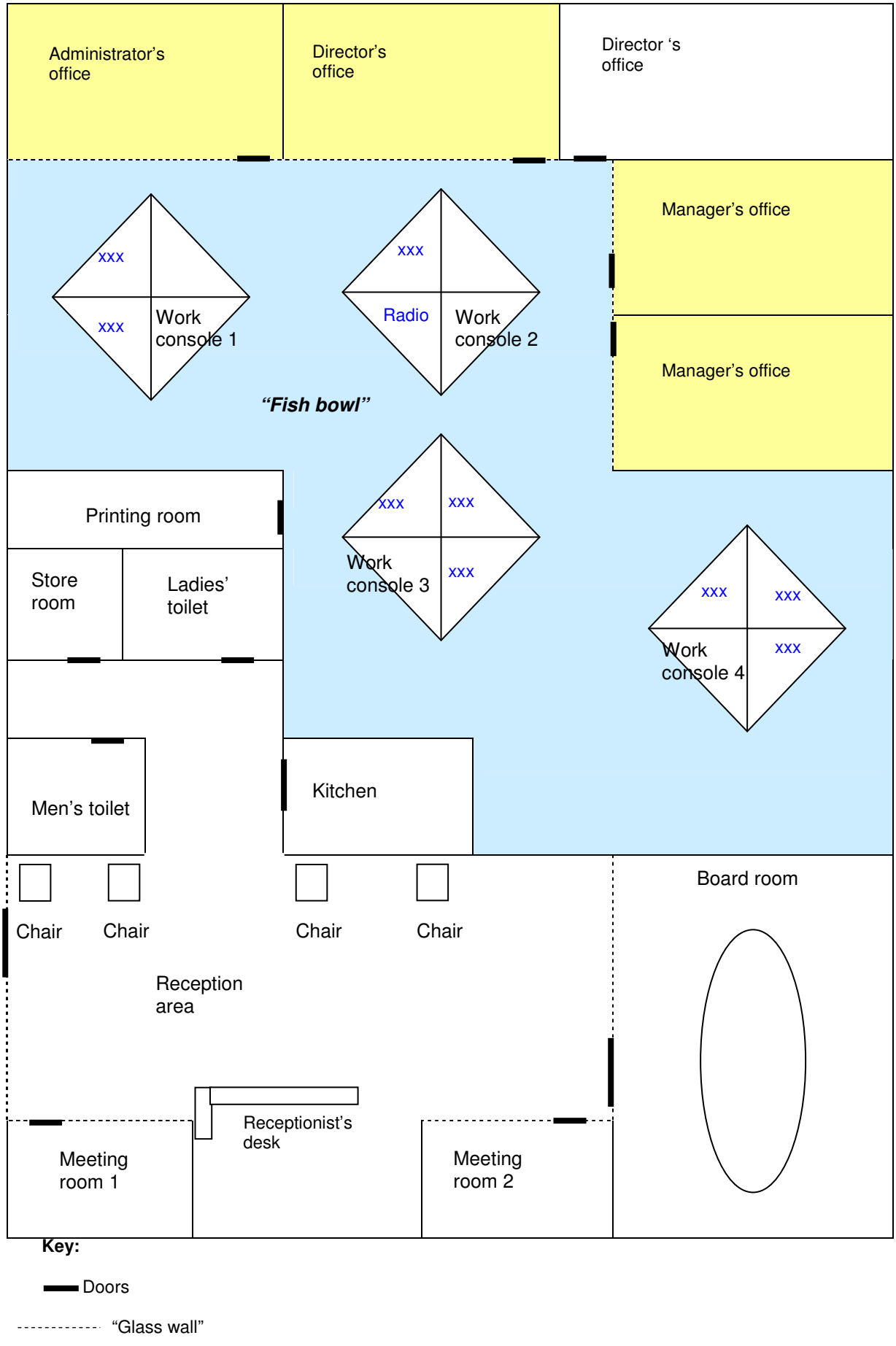


Figure 7.1.: Office layout of ODC - 2012

The tenure of the three interns who were assisting a consultant expired during the research period, two at the end of June and one at the end of July 2012. It was part of ODC practice to offer permanent employment to interns if management was sufficiently impressed by them and there was employment available, but the area that the interns had been assisting in (recruitment) had become 'quiet' and there would not be sufficient work to keep them occupied. They were not offered permanent employment and left the company. A director resigned in May and was no longer involved operationally, although she remained a shareholder. Her shareholding was strategically beneficial for ODC in terms of their Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) rating as she was 'black' according to the Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003. An administrator also resigned in October. These resignations and tenures brought the total head office headcount to ten at the end of Phase 6, as can be seen in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Demographics of Head Office staff at the end of 2012 (Phase 6)

Race	Gender	No. of staff	Roles occupied
Black	Female	1	1 Administrator
White	Female	5	1 Manager 4 Consultants
Black	Male	1	1 Manager
White	Male	3	2 Directors 1 Consultant
Total number of staff		10	

All of the staff in Table 7.2 participated in data collection activities, with some participating in more activities than others, depending on their availability.

7.3 How data was collected for this phase of the research

Having established that ODC lent itself to being a learning organisation four years previously, I was curious to gauge if new staff also experienced ODC as being such and what in fact had enabled ODC to sustain a difficult financial period, experienced locally and globally from 2008 to 2012. I chose to use the same instruments as my previous research phase and included other instruments so as to gain a deeper ethnographic view from the participants' perspective. The physical environment of the office had changed from the previous research period – there were more artefacts in the office and I was curious to understand what these artefacts meant for the staff of ODC. For this reason, to answer the research question of "What facets of a learning organisation are reflected in the organisation?" I conducted transect walks, autophotography and

focus groups, in addition to observing meetings, analysing documents, participant questionnaires and interviews, as discussed in Chapter Five.

Once again, I collected data that reflected the facets of a learning organisation by looking for instances that specifically displayed data related to certain themes and then identified other themes that emerged through data collection. The themes of leadership and organisational culture again emerged as being of importance, with sub-themes of ODC's values, communication and relationships, and ODC's way of working. The specific themes that I looked for were behaviours that were associated with the five learning disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. Learning as a theme was also noted together with the type of learning/theory.

Findings for the second and third research questions in both research periods (2008 and 2012) are also presented in this chapter. The research instruments that were used to gather data for the research question of "What does sustainability mean in the context of the organisation?" for both research periods were document analysis, questionnaires and interviews, as well as observations made in 2012. Data from interviews, focus groups and observations was used to answer the question of "How can facets of a learning organisation be corrected or strengthened in the organisation in order to contribute to its sustainability?"

7.3.1 Observations

I observed the open office space, a project meeting and management meetings at ODC as well as a staff meeting which took place with all head office and site staff at a venue out of the office. In these settings, I noted behaviours that reflected the learning disciplines, as well as additional themes that emerged.

Open office area

In the open office area I moved around between consoles to gain different viewpoints of participants and listen to discussions that were taking place. I was also able to engage in informal discussions with staff during this time, which were of a personal nature (such as regarding a participant's ailing dog) as well as a research nature (for example, resignations of some key staff members earlier in the year).

Project meeting

I sat in on a meeting with Rachel and Tim during which they reviewed policies that were drafted by Rachel and Avril for a new product that ODC had designed, namely a policies and procedures manual. Rachel headed up the project while Tim acted as the final reviewer. Their expressed intention was to get the manual ISO (International Organisation for Standardisation) accredited and their templates were based on ISO documents. The meeting focused on reviewing the housing policy. During the meeting, Tim and Rachel would play around with wording to ensure that it made sense. Tim also acted as a teacher as he drew pictures and explained concepts to Rachel.

I sat close to Tim and Rachel, who sat opposite each other at the boardroom table, with the document projected onto the boardroom screen. During this meeting, I was able to take on the role of participant-observer as it appeared that Tim was also teaching me the information and he asked my opinion on wording that could be used in the policy. I enjoyed the experience as it reminded me of 2008 when I was able to participate in some meetings and events and experience the culture and leadership more intimately than from a pure observer's stance.

Management meetings

There were two management meetings during the 2012 research period (one in June, the other in July) which were held in ODC's boardroom. Each was approximately four hours long, with snacks and soft drinks provided for lunch halfway through at noon. On both occasions, Tim welcomed all present to the meeting, stated the purpose of the meeting, and gave an overview of the agenda which was projected onto the boardroom screen. The discussions in these meetings were business-focused with the manager of each department providing information concerning what was taking place in their area. Tim took minutes of the meeting in both cases as he had not requested a minute-taker to be present and stated, "I usually make notes in any case, so I'll just circulate these". Managers shared information and readily gave feedback to questions that were asked by others. They all appeared eager to participate and comfortable to ask and answer questions.

Snacks were served at noon for lunch over discussions between pairs or trios. Some discussions were informal and personal while others included business. These discussions would sometimes continue after the close of the meeting.

The meetings continued after lunch with Tim guiding the agenda. He closed the meetings by reviewing the action steps that had been noted and 'checking-out' of the meeting by asking participants if they were happy.

During these meetings, I sat at the far end of the table (opposite the screen end) so that I was able to see all participants and the screen onto which the agenda and related information was projected. Tim also gave me the opportunity to comment or ask questions at the end of the meeting. I then asked the attendants, "What was your experience of the meeting?" and at the end of the second meeting I added, "Did this meeting differ from the previous one and how/not?" Their responses are included as part of the discussion of results to follow.

Staff meeting

The staff meeting took place off-site on the first Saturday in September 2012 at a venue on the banks of a dam in Gauteng. ODC had previously used this venue for other staff meetings, one of which I had attended in 2007 before commencing my research. Morning tea with scones and muffins was provided before the meeting started, which was scheduled at 08:00 for 08:30. Tim started the meeting by welcoming staff, stating apologies and congratulating staff who had celebrated birthdays in August and would be celebrating in September. Staff then introduced themselves to the group by stating their names and roles. An ice-breaker was scheduled next, but the two staff members, Shirley and Lynn, who were responsible for presenting it were late as they got lost en-route to the venue. Tim proceeded onto the scheduled items on the agenda until they arrived. When Shirley and Lynn arrived and entered the venue, Lynn said, "Hi, I'm Lynn and I'm late" followed by Shirley with "Hi, I'm Shirley and…" to which Tim added "the reason she's late", which led many staff to laugh. Tim concluded his presentation after which Shirley and Lynn presented the ice-breaker.

The ice-breaker was focused on staff getting to know each other. They had to draw another person's name out of a hat and then guess responses to ten questions about the person on a worksheet, such as where the person was born, if the person had a tattoo, how many sugars the person took in his/her hot drink and other 'light' questions. The worksheet was then given to the person it was about for marking and scoring out of ten. Staff then shared the answers to two or three questions that were "really wrong or very funny". Staff seemed to enjoy the exercise, ad-libbing and adding quirky comments as they went along.

The ice-breaker was followed by a mid-morning tea break at 10:00. The meeting continued after tea and ended at 12:30, after which staff went on a cruise on the dam which included lunch and drinks. Topics that were covered after tea included developments such as the new telephone system that was to be implemented, relocation of the office, contractual changes to include group life cover and projects that ODC was busy with. Kevin, a manager, gave a finance update, followed by Tim sharing the marketing update, which Andrew, a director, compiled but was unable to be present – he had apologised for his absence.

The managing director, Tim, did most of the presenting during the meeting, using a projector to guide discussion points, with head office staff interjecting if he missed any information; for example an administrator provided information on the telephone system.

Tim then presented a training session on values. At first I thought he would provide information on the value pillars of ODC (fresh, smart, personal, trusted – to be discussed later), but he presented a model that explained what value sets people held and why. The rationale he provided for the training was that staff dealt with different clients all the time and no two clients were the same – they exhibited different behaviours that were driven by their values. By having an understanding of a values model, staff would be able to better engage with clients as they could then identify the value set that drove the clients' behaviour. Tim experienced some difficulty accessing the technology in order to display the slides for his presentation. Nolene assisted him. There was a ten minute delay in the programme while they tried to access technology. Tim appeared to get a bit flustered and irritated while staff seemed hardly perturbed – they appeared happy to have discussions with the person/s seated next to them. After the training session, Tim brought the meeting to a close by thanking staff for their work efforts and for giving up their Saturday morning to attend the meeting.

The informal and social part of the meeting then took place – staff were treated to a cruise on the dam in a large cruiser with a finger-lunch and drinks (soft and alcoholic) served on board.

During the formal part of the meeting I sat at a lesser populated end of the u-shaped seating arrangement so that I could view all staff and the presentations that took place, while on board the cruiser I moved around and chatted to staff and asked them what their perceptions of the meeting were. They all responded favourably and said that they enjoyed the morning, getting to meet and spend time with everyone (site and head office staff) and that they had "learnt a lot".

7.3.2 Document analysis

ODC's documentation had changed since the previous research period. During 2008 I had analysed the company profile, performance appraisals, business and marketing strategy, consulting methodology, and policy statements. The company profile had changed, as will be discussed later. ODC changed their performance appraisal system and no longer based this on prescribed criteria, but had ongoing informal performance discussions between the managing director and staff members. I received a copy of the company's draft strategy review, which I was able to analyse. ODC's consulting methodology had not changed since 2008 and still formed an integral part of its business.

During 2012, ODC was reviewing policies they had previously drafted for clients so that they could compile these into a consolidated policies and procedures manual. The intention was to have the manual ISO (International Organisation for Standardisation) accredited. ODC had recognised that there was a gap in their clients' people management systems and so drafted this manual to sell to their clients – it would become part of ODC's product offering. ODC's plan was to identify the policies and procedures that were relevant to them and incorporate in their own policies and procedures manual. They had not identified them yet and so I was unable to conduct an analysis of this documentation.

The documentation that I collected and analysed was the company profile, the company's website, a communication audit conducted by an external company, and the draft strategy review. The company profile was included in gift packs with a flash disk that had ODC's marketing video on it. This video is analysed later in this chapter. I also analysed the documents where I identified phrases relating to the disciplines of a learning organisation, as well as other themes relevant to a learning organisation, such as leadership, culture and sustainability, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

ODC's company profile had changed since 2008 and I analysed the changes in this document. The company had also revamped its website and it contained much of the same information as the company profile. As part of its branding exercise which had taken place during 2008, ODC developed a flash video on a flash disk, labelled with the company's name. This flash disk was included in an attractive gift pack, consisting of ODC's corporate colours (black and orange) that they gave to new clients or clients that were celebrating their birthdays. These packs, in the figures that follow, were also given to new staff members.



Figure 7.2: ODC gift pack in company colours (Orange and black. Company profile document included.)



Figure 7.3: Contents of gift pack (Pen in black case, flash drive in grey box on top of company brochure; orange business card in bottom right side).



Figure 7.4: Company-branded pen and flash drive

Company profile

The 2012 version of ODC's company profile was different from the 2008 version in 'look and feel' and content compared to its 2008 version. In terms of 'look and feel', the new version of the company profile was more eye-catching, corporate, succinct and inviting to read. The company colours of black and orange were used throughout the document, with main headings in brown, sub-headings in orange and text in black. The previous version only had brown headings with black text. The document was more business-like, stylish and eye-catching in that the theme colours were used throughout and the front cover included the company logo, name, address and catch phrase: "People, Business. Ready". The previous version had only the company name and the name of the document "Company Profile" on the front cover. The document was also more inviting to read as the font was larger (Arial 11) as opposed to the previous Arial 9, and the line spacing was one and a half and not single.

With regard to content, the new company profile highlighted the mining focus of ODC with phrases such as ODC is "a mining specialist" and "specialise in making mining businesses operationally ready" (ODC Company profile, 2012, p2). The new profile consisted of six main sections: company history; the mining industry in the developing world; the team; products and services; track record; and contact information of the directors, local and United Kingdom office. The information presented was succinct and gave a sufficient overview of the company to encourage interest. The previous version included information that may not have been relevant, such as an explanation of the company's methodology, which this version did not have. The previous profile had the following sections: company history; BEE profile; company credentials; company background; mission; company offering; strategic partners; and services track record.

An additional section was attached to the 2012 company profile which provided a detailed list of services, and was preceded by the company's passion, vision, mission and values statements. These statements were as follows:

> Passion: We guarantee your readiness.
> Vision: To become the human resource operational readiness partner of choice for operations and capital projects in the global mining sector.
> Mission: We aim to craft mining organisations that embody effectiveness and wellness by delivering on the following critical issues: requisite staffing models and budgets; effective human resource strategies and plans; legislative compliance; stakeholder management; operational excellence.
> Value: We are helping businesses realise their strategies by revolutionising the way people function and perform, in a **fresh, smart, personal and trusted** manner. (ODC List of services, 2012, p3).

The current company profile, in my opinion, was an improvement from the previous version and emphasised ODC's vision. The above statements could also be seen to be lived within the organisation – staff members' discussions focused on achieving readiness and effectiveness. The values were emphasised in the company, which impacted on its culture (to be discussed later).

Company website

ODC revamped their website after their branding exercise in 2008. The URL for its previous website was "www.odconsulting.co.za", which, as can be seen in the extension "co.za" indicated a local focus. The URL of the revamped website was "www.odc-sa.com", which could be seen to indicate a global focus, as stated in its vision statement. ODC was no longer looking to partner mines only in South Africa, and its website indicated that ODC was extending its reach globally by including a global (.com) extension to its name.

The 'look and feel' and the content on the website were similar to the company profile, with a few differences apparent. The corporate colours were used with tabs in orange font and content in white font on a dark grey/black background. The website was easy to navigate across its six pages (tabs) of Home; About; Products and Services; Experience; Knowledge; and Contact Us. The content on the website was the same as in the company profile with the website including some additional features: a quotation from a client on the "Home" page endorsing ODC; Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) compliance information under "About"; and a "Knowledge" page, which included brief articles written by past and current employees related to people management, performance management, business management and accommodation trends in the South African mining industry. Book extracts were also included on this page. Clicking on one of the five available extracts would open up the extract in a separate page. The contact information on the website did not include the United Kingdom office details.

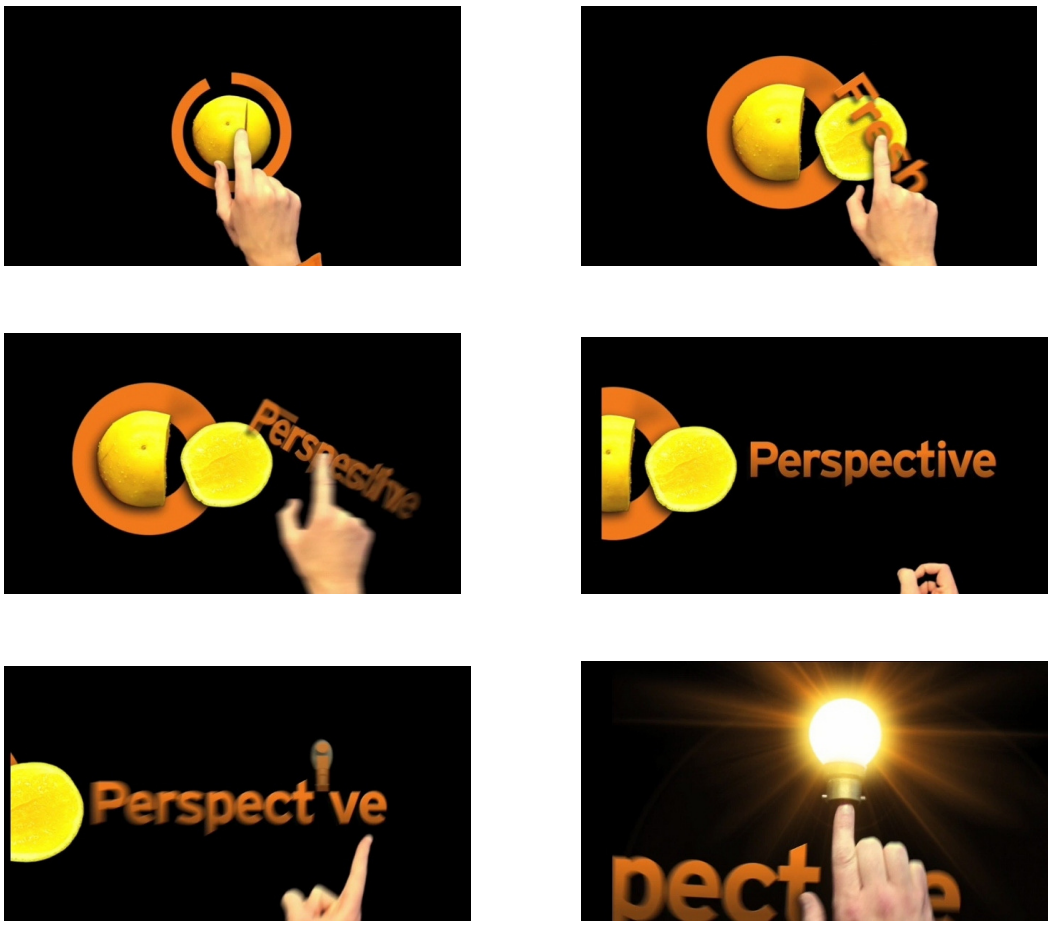
I found the "Knowledge" page interesting with employee-written articles and book extracts. The articles and book extracts included references to sustainability and some reflected Senge's thinking for learning organisations. These findings will be discussed under the relevant sections. However, the dates that these articles were written and/or published on the website were not included, which may impact a viewer's/reader's perception of how up-to-date and relevant the information is. With regard to the book extracts, the title of the book/s and the author/s were not referenced, which could impact the perceived credibility of the text.

I was also curious why the United Kingdom office details were not included on the website, but noticed that there was other information that needed to be changed, such as directors, who had resigned in the first half of 2012, but were still on the webpage at the end of 2012. ODC moved premises at the end of 2012 and needed to update its contact information.

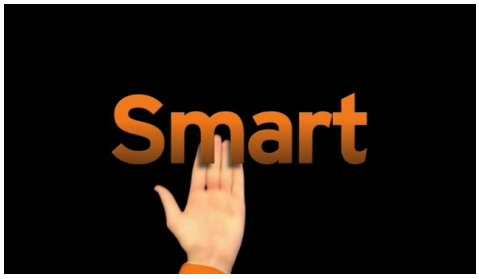
Marketing video on flash disk

The flash video was a 26-second mp4 video that a flash-disk user was able to click on to watch – it did not launch automatically when the flash disk was inserted into a computer's USB port. I found the video to be simple yet effective. The video had faint background music and a male voice-over which spoke the viewer through the screens. ODC's colours of black and orange were used throughout the video. The 'pillars' of the value statement (fresh, smart, personal, trusted) were also referred to visually and/or verbally in the video. The following information was given during the video to the images displayed below (Figure 7.5):

> *We have always believed a fresh perspective creates the best environment to make things work. And remaining smart in the way we care for our people results in both company and personnel gaining full potential.* (Emphasis on the underlined words)





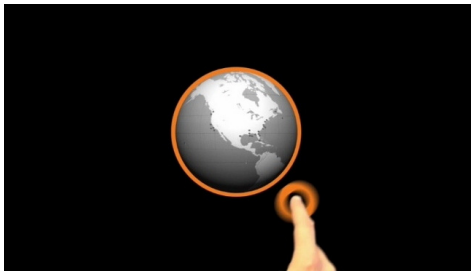

Smart

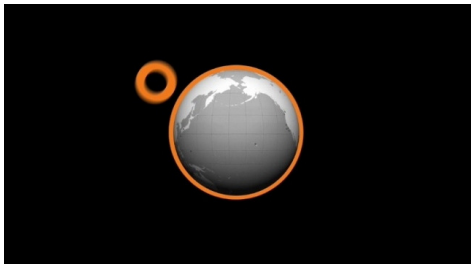



People


People










TRUSTED

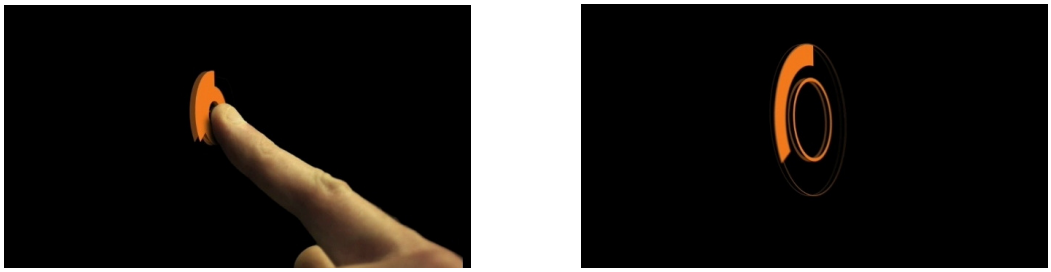


Figure 7.5: Series of images captured from ODC's flash video

The circle in the last image then morphed into the company's logo.

The video focused on ODC's value pillars, which were often referred to in meetings and influenced the culture of ODC. The value pillars are discussed in a section on culture in more detail.

Communication audit conducted by an external company

ODC procured the services of a communication solutions company to conduct a communication audit in early 2012. The purpose of the audit was to provide input into ODC's strategy to improve communication with internal, potential and current clients. The audit report provided an overview of the research methodology, and included findings and recommendations of how ODC could improve its communication with its clients. The findings of the audit were that internally ODC could improve communication with staff, especially with regard to understanding the goals of the company and what work ODC was doing. Employees also expressed a need for systems and processes for status meetings, reporting and performance evaluation on a weekly, monthly or quarterly basis (governance issues). Externally, clients experienced ODC's communication as personal and trustworthy but required additional information from ODC in the form of ODC-generated newsletters and increased accessibility to consultants.

The leadership of ODC can be commended for recognising a potential issue with communication and the role that it played in enhancing customer relationships, which could translate into more sales and the sustainability of the business. The question that came to mind was if these audit findings were considered for ODC's strategy and the steps that ODC intended to take based on this audit.

Draft strategy review

ODC's draft strategy review was dated May 2012 and entitled "Business Development Strategy Review – Road to 2015" (ODC Business Development Strategy Review, 2012). This date (2015) reflected a view of the company into the future and thus a focus on its sustainability. The main goal of the company was to increase its consulting revenue to R100 million by 2015, with objectives to reach that goal. Six key strategic focus areas (SFAs) were considered to enable this goal and would require attention: sales, pricing strategy, business development structure, client communication, client relationship management system, and corporate governance. A new business development structure was proposed that increased the number of people committed to this function – from one business development executive to a team consisting of the executive and four reporting staff. Client communication also featured, indicating that the communication audit had not been a fruitless exercise, and included some of the recommendations from the audit report, such as producing information (newsletters) for clients. The document continued with giving each strategic focus area attention and concluded with translating the objectives into specific sales targets for ODC's products and services.



Using observations and document analysis assisted me to gauge the environment of ODC in 2012 as if looking through a telescope. I now wanted to move closer to the crew and collect data directly from them. Questionnaires, transect walks, auto-photography, focus groups and interviews provided the instruments to do that.

7.3.3 Questionnaires

I emailed questionnaires to the three staff members who remained with ODC over the two research periods. The questionnaires were the same that were sent in the earlier research phase, with two additional questions: "Do you view your company as being a learning organisation? Please explain your answer" and "What has changed in your company since you last completed this questionnaire that has made it more or less of a learning organisation?"

I used the data to compare what these three staff members had experienced in the interim and if their views of the organisation had changed over the period.

The demographics of the staff who completed the questionnaire were as follows (indicated in Table 7.3, p242):

Table 7.3: Demographics of questionnaire respondents

Questionnaire respondent	Age	Gender	Race	Length of time with company	Role
A	40-44	Male	White	7 years +	Director
B	25-29	Female	White	4-6 years	Manager
C	25-29	Female	White	4-6 years	Consultant

7.3.4 Transect walks

I conducted transect walks with seven staff members, two of whom were on the management team. The walks were done individually and began in meeting room 2 where I briefed the participant and requested that they identify anything in the environment that they thought was significant (Rule & John, 2011). These walks ranged from four minutes to 30 minutes. I asked the participants' permission to audio record the walk and noted the aspects in the environment that they pointed out. After the walk, I took photographs of these to note the frequency of the aspect being identified as significant. It was interesting to note the "various issues of importance … and the history and impact of various landmarks and developments in their [participants'] lives and their immediate context" (Rule & John, 2011, p69).

Although I requested that the participants walk me through the environment, some chose to remain seated in the meeting room and explain what they thought was significant about the environment. I attributed this choice to the small size of the office and my familiarity with the environment – when they mentioned aspects, I knew immediately what they were referring to.

7.3.5 Auto-photography

I gave disposable cameras to ten participants and requested them to capture any image or instance that they saw as significant to the area of study, with the theme of "We are a learning organisation". I placed stickers on the back of their cameras to remind them of this theme. I numbered the cameras alphabetically for tracking purposes, allocating and collecting a specific letter from a participant.



Figure 7.6: Disposable cameras used for auto-photography

Two weeks after issuing the cameras, I collected them and discovered that most of the participants had taken photos frequently, using approximately ten to fifteen of the 24 exposures. There were only two participants who took fewer photographs. Some participants apologised for not taking more photos stating that they forgot because they got too involved in work. They all seemed to enjoy participating in the exercise and being given the opportunity to collect data from their perspectives.

The staff meeting, consisting of both head office and site staff, took place during this two-week period and some participants remembered their cameras and took photos during this session. I thought that the auto-photography exercise was well-timed to include this meeting as staff were able to interpret how ODC was a learning organisation in a larger organisational context, and not only the working environment that they were exposed to on a daily basis.

7.3.6 Focus groups

There was a gap in time and space between the transect walks, auto-photography and focus groups. ODC moved premises prior to the focus groups taking place, so although the data was collected in the old premises, it was interpreted by the staff in the new premises. I had not prepared for such a transition and was curious to see how the change in environment would impact on the staff's interpretation of their data. The change in environment did not appear to impact data interpretation as themes that emerged could be applied to the new environment.

The focus group consisted of three participants and was held in one of the staff member's offices in the new premises. The transect walks and auto-photographs were used as the basis of discussion. Although the intention was to have two focus groups, one with the management team and the other with staff members, only the focus group with staff members took place. The timing of the focus group was difficult for the management team to participate in. Although I intended to have the focus group on the old premises before ODC moved, it was scheduled for the week of the close of business in 2012, shortly after the company's move to its new premises and after the managing director's accident, which left the team with many commitments to manage to ensure that the company continued to sail. I did not consider the lack of management participation as having an impact on my data collection as the participants in the focus group were staff members who had been actively involved in auto-photography and also participated in the transect walks. I was able to collect data from members of the management team and a staff member who was not able to participate in the focus group during interviews. It was

interesting to note that many of the aspects regarded as significant in the transect walks also emerged in the auto-photographs, such as the Wall of Fame, the values artefacts, meeting rooms, the open office area and the boardroom and so I did not have to consciously introduce these aspects into the focus group discussion - these came out, based on the photographs.

I asked participants' permission at the outset of the focus group to record the session (video and audio), to which they agreed. I also took notes of salient points of discussion. I began the session by explaining the purpose of the focus group to the participants, namely to identify how the concept of a learning organisation was taken up in their company; the facets of a learning organisation that were reflected as seen by them, the participants; to identify practices that promoted and/or hindered the disciplines of a learning organisation; to gather new data to inform a strategy for the site to develop as a learning organisation; and to identify additional mechanisms to put in place to encourage learning in the company.

I handed the photographs to the participants and asked that they group them according to themes to answer the question: "Describe how your photographs illustrate that your company is a learning organisation". The participants grouped the photographs into seven themes, namely research (and learning); recognition; projects and project meetings; day-to-day operations; social; internal communication and meetings; and random. For the purposes of discussing this data, I grouped these themes with other emergent themes, for example the categories of internal communication and meetings, projects and project meetings, recognition and social are discussed under the theme of communication and relationships. The theme of ODC's way of working included day-to-day operations. The photographs were numbered so that these could be referred to during discussion. After this categorising and discussion of the photographs, I referred to an additional set of questions to initiate and prompt further discussion, which included the points I had explained as the purpose of the focus group. As part of this questioning, I asked participants to try to detect a theme in the 'random' group of photos and they agreed among themselves that the photographs reflected a different representation of the themes of day-to-day operations and communication.

Some of the photographs are included in this chapter where they relate to themes that emerged. Some of the remaining photos can be seen in Appendix I.

7.3.7 Interviews

During phase 6 (in 2012), directors, managers and staff were interviewed on themes that had emerged from additional literature researched during phase 5 (2010 to 2011), and issues or themes that emerged from the transect walks, auto-photographs and focus groups. The themes that guided the interview related to owner-manager leadership; organisational culture; learning in the organisation; the practise of the learning disciplines; ODC's Black Economic Empowerment rating and ODC's sustainability.

A director and two staff who had been working with the company during the entire research period and had completed the questionnaires were included in the cohort, as well as the director and a consultant. I was unable to interview the managing director as he was recovering from a bicycle accident, but I was able to capture expressions of his thoughts and ideas through conversations that we had during the 2012 research period.

Although I had intended to conduct the interviews before ODC moved, the interviews took place on their new premises at the request of the managing director. Tim expressed concern that staff would have too much to focus on in preparation for the move and I had unknowingly scheduled the interviews and focus groups in the week before the move. The new setting did not seem to impact the data I collected in the interviews. Two of the interviews were with a consultant and manager who shared an office in ODC's new premises. I was able to interview them individually in their office on separate days while the other was working from home. In this setting I was mindful of sticking to the time scheduled and the interview was professional in its approach in that I was focused and regularly checked the interview schedule to ensure that I was appropriately guiding the interview. The other two interviews with a director and a consultant took place at different times in a coffee shop in the office park. It was before Christmas and seasonal music was playing in the background. Fortunately the coffee shop was quiet so the music and the environment did not detract from the participant's and my ability to maintain focus. The informal setting lent to a discussion in which participants interjected personal information and provided extended conversations and information about ODC over a cup of coffee. The personal information that respondents shared provided more of a context to the individuals' answers and I felt I understood their responses more clearly. All interviews were audio-recorded.



My research instruments were in place and I had used them to collect data. I wondered what this data meant in the context of this study. I gazed out on to the

ocean and pondered for a while, considering how ODC had changed in some aspects over the two research periods. It was time to move to analysing and interpreting to better understand the data I had collected and the changes that were evident.

7.4 What facets of a learning organisation are reflected in the company?

In collecting data to answer this question, I began with observations of the open office area, which was the same approach I had taken in 2008. I sat at various consoles during my visits and moved between consoles 1, 2 and 3. I did not sit at console 4 as the intern who sat at this station left the organisation soon after data collection began.

I was surprised at the change in the atmosphere from my last data collection period (in 2008) to this one – it was not as quiet and often the radio would be playing in the background. The staff appeared free and it was apparent that they did not feel as constrained as I had observed in 2008. They would chat amongst themselves quite openly, sometimes in softer tones, openly ask each other questions and give suggestions or interject when a discussion was taking place between colleagues. "Wow!" I thought. "This is different and quite refreshing – people seem free to express themselves, not like in 2008 when it seemed that if you spoke you were interrupting the quiet". One occasion was quite humorous when Shirley heard a song playing on the radio to which she knew the words. She then sang along vibrantly while seated, performing some arm movements. The rest of the staff in the office enjoyed her performance and all laughed with her when the song was finished. On another occasion, Kevin took a toy hard hat from Lynn's workstation and put it on his head while he worked at his desk. Steve commented "Are things that hard in finances?" at which they both laughed.

Managers and staff who occupied private offices also moved freely in the open office area and spoke to individuals at normal volumes. Tim would often stand at his office door and call across the office to one of the staff members, asking them to remind him to do something with regard to a project, or reminding them of next steps that needed to be done. During these times, some staff who were interested in the exchange would stop working, listen and ask questions or make suggestions, while others would continue with their work.

Helen had her office door closed most of the time, as she worked with confidential documents and contracts. Nolene was working with one of the consultants on a project and they would

often meet in Nolene's office and close the door while they were working. Nolene's door was open most of the time. Tim's door also remained open, unless he was meeting with someone. Kevin's door was also mostly open, unless he was working with confidential documents.

Most staff still ate at their desks, as they had done in 2008, working in between bites. "So this is still the same," I thought, "but quite the norm in South African workplaces."

In my previous data collection period, some staff had commented that the open office area was a 'fish bowl' with the managers'/directors' offices looking into the office area (as illustrated in Figure 7.1, p228). I turned my attention to the layout of the premises and wondered why the offices had glass fronts rather than walls. I noticed that the offices all had windows and if they did not have glass fronts, there would be little natural light coming into the open office area. "It makes sense to have glass fronts for offices," I thought. "Perhaps the staff in 2008 did not notice this aspect and were sensitive about the issue." Unfortunately the staff who had made these comments had resigned from ODC and so I was unable to gauge their thoughts on the matter.

The 'energy' in the office was different to 2008 – it was relaxed and friendly, and staff had freedom of expression; for example, Shirley's singing and Kevin wearing the hard hat. I wondered why and how the atmosphere had become lighter and considered whether the organisational culture had changed since two of the leaders (Patricia and Tracey) had resigned.

7.4.1 Organisational leadership and culture

The data to gain insight into the organisation's leadership and culture was gathered through observations, questionnaires, transect walks, auto-photographs, focus groups and interviews. In collecting data for the organisation's culture, I looked for aspects that indicated "the values, norms, beliefs and assumptions embraced by participants" (Nystrom, in King & Anderson, 2002, p133). Themes that emerged for this aspect were ODC's leadership, its values, its approach to communication and relationships and its way of working.

Leadership

Many of the same themes emerged from data concerning leadership that were apparent in 2008. For example, questionnaire, transect walk and interview respondents still described the leadership style as participative, collaborative and consultative. They described Tim, the managing director, as being knowledgeable and someone who encouraged learning. From my observations, he readily took on the roles of steward, teacher and designer as and when required.

Tim still expressed the 'founders-trap' as an issue and was looking for ways to overcome it. What was absent from respondents' comments in the last quarter of 2012 was the communication issue that was prevalent in 2008, although the communication audit echoed 2008 sentiments, as will be discussed later.

Comments made by respondents supporting the above themes included that Tim led, rather than managed his staff. He expected staff to deliver and work independently and sometimes allowed staff to have input on decisions, such as how to structure leave when ODC was closed for two weeks in December and staff had twenty days due to them. Tim was described as displaying personal power, rather than positional power. He moved between the roles of steward, teacher and designer readily by, for example, designing new products to meet client and market needs. He valued knowledge by exhibiting a willingness to teach, learn and mentor (being a 'learning leader'), which was noticed by all respondents. At the staff meeting, he taught about values with great enthusiasm and energy and stated that:

> *I love to learn. I love to teach and I love to learn. I love to look for new innovative ways of doing things because the world is changing around us all the time.*

In terms of stewarding the company, this seemed to be something that at times fell off Tim's radar. For example, although he took minutes in the first management meeting, he did not distribute these prior to the second meeting and a request was then made by Andrew to provide structured minutes so that the team would be able to track items. Tim seemed to have difficulty guarding his time - he was not able to deliver items required by him to the second management meeting and he would sometimes be late for scheduled meetings with staff. ODC found itself with a tax liability as he had trusted a director to perform her duties, with the result that shareholders would not be paid dividends as he would "not put the company and the people who work in it in jeopardy". Tim would implement structures, but did not seem to carry through on these, for example only two monthly management meetings were held in June and July for the year. The demands on a leader as owner-manager are many (as discussed in Chapter Four), so when one considers this, it seems inevitable that something will receive less attention. In Tim's case, it seemed to be acting as a steward, which could impact ODC's sustainability, especially with regard to stewarding finances. However, Tim did admit in the first management meeting that he had neglected overseeing the company's finances and apologised for doing so, stating that he would not make the same mistake again.

New themes that emerged from data concerning leadership were Tim's old-school (traditional) leadership tendencies; his focus on the leadership role in the company going forward and the

impact of the leader on the organisation's culture. Tim displayed some traditional leadership tendencies in that he tended to control information and used stereotypical language. An example of Tim controlling information was when he chaired the management meetings and stated that he would also take minutes, whereas someone could have volunteered or been nominated or asked to do so. In the first management meeting he presented a slide of the meeting principles that would be used to guide the meetings and quickly explained the principles. He ended his explanation with, "I'm not going to discuss these points again". I thought that the way he went about determining these principles was contrary to what he stated at the outset of the meeting, that the people around the table would be the people to run the company if anything should happen to him; they were the management team and his vision for them was to grow and develop into a strong team. Perhaps, as a first step in developing the team, he could have discussed the concept of meeting principles with them and let them have input on what principles they wanted to include. Relating to a different context, Rachel said that when staff presented training on ODC products internally, such as to interns, although Tim did it in a way that staff did not feel disempowered, he would sometimes take over the training from the staff member acting as the trainer. "I don't mind," she continued, "he has so much experience and explains so well that I just enjoy learning from him."

I found Tim's language interesting in the way he addressed his female staff. Before he married in 2008, I noticed during this research period that he would often address the women in the office as 'babes', for example he would say, "How is the project going, babes?" During 2012, he referred to them as 'girls' or 'chicks'; for example, "Did you bring the document, girl?" and "Chicks work better, they are more committed". What was more interesting is that the women did not seem to mind – they did not take offence or correct him.

In as much as Tim displayed some traditional leadership tendencies, respondents' descriptors of Tim included many of the servant-leadership tendencies such as collaboration, encouraging staff to develop, listening, valuing, trusting and respecting staff (McGee-Cooper & Trammel, 2002).

Tim appeared to want to change the leadership role in ODC going forward. Tim stated at the first management meeting that he was "implementing a management team to run the company" and it was possible to do so since ODC "had lost some difficult personalities and was more of a team now". Tim had mentioned in conversation that he wanted to bring in a board of directors to provide a level of strategic thinking in ODC. Andrew expressed the same view when I interviewed him, and this also appeared in the draft business development strategy review

document as a focus area - to improve corporate governance. Andrew saw part of his role as challenging Tim strategically as Andrew's view was that "no-one else in the team challenges Tim; they all do what he says". Andrew also added that he thought that ODC should bring in a general manager so that Tim could become more strategically and less operationally focused. In the staff meeting, Tim stated that he did not want to see his name all over the agenda again and did not want to talk so much, perhaps expressing that he was willing to hand over leadership. Tim had previously expressed, both in 2008 and 2012, that he could be a stumbling block to ODC's growth and that another leader could possibly provide what was required to develop the company further. "Perhaps ODC needs a change in leadership to develop the culture and growth of the company?" seemed to be Tim's rhetorical question.

Tim's ideas on leadership's impact on the culture of an organisation were contrary to what I had read in literature: the leadership of an organisation sets the tone for the culture of the organisation (Dess & Picken, 2000; Mason, 2007; Maxwell, 2003; Senge, 1990), while Tim said, "I am not the only one to set the tone in this company". ODC respondents said that Tim's leadership definitely did set the tone for ODC's culture, especially since the company was small. Avril, a permanent employee who was contracted to the company on a freelance/ independent basis before Tracey and Pamela (two other leaders) resigned, said that she noticed how the different leaders influenced the culture of ODC with it having changed over time. She described that the culture had changed since the resignation of Tracey and Pamela, with Tim now influencing the culture in a positive way, which she did not experience when the other leaders were present:

> *The culture is different somehow. Tim works hard and knows how to have fun when it's time to have fun. The culture is professional but relaxed, trusting that work gets done and you put 100% into work.*

Tim's leadership of ODC did seem to impact the culture of the organisation. The conversations that I had with him during the research periods also reflected the themes that emerged from data collection concerning ODC's culture, which included ODC's values, communication and relationships, and the ODC way of working.

ODC's values

I observed that ODC's values played a pivotal role in the way they operated. During my previous data collection period, ODC was going through a branding exercise. They completed this exercise towards the end of 2008 and thereafter introduced artefacts into the work environment that displayed and reinforced its new value statement of 'fresh, smart, personal and

trusted'. These four values were referred to by the managing director as 'the brand pillars'. Examples of the artefacts were the glass display cabinet in the boardroom in which there were symbols of these values, and the value statement board on the one wall of the boardroom that included the values, definitions of the values and synonyms for the values. These artefacts are displayed in the figures that follow.



Figure 7.7: Boardroom with artefacts in glass cabinet at far end

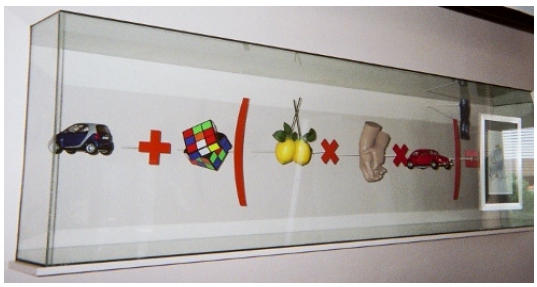




Figure 7.8: Glass cabinet with artefacts of values statement (represented as an equation from two different angles)



Smart car and rubic's cube represent "smart"



Lemons represent “fresh”



Hands entwined represent “personal”



Old Beetle represents “trusted”



Denim jeans represents “personal”.
Framed picture is the end result of the values – that everyone loves ODC

Figure 7.9: Artefacts and representation in glass cabinet



Figure 7.10: Board with values on boardroom wall



Figure 7.11: Value of "fresh"

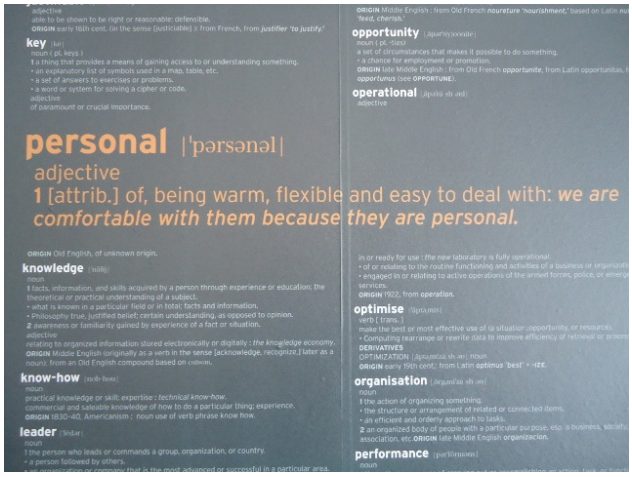


Figure 7.12: Value of "personal"



Figure 7.13 'ODC' banner with part of passion statement (missing part of the statement after 'people…': *'in a fresh, smart, personal and trusted manner')*



Figure 7.14: ODC Wall of Fame (notice board)

I found it interesting that there was such an emphasis on artefacts within the organisation, which participants also revealed through the transect walks. Six of the seven participants referred to these artefacts as being significant in the workplace. In 2008, the managing director, Tim, said:

> *We live our values rather than display them as artefacts. We recently did a branding exercise where our clients were asked to describe what they thought our values were. They came back with similar feedback and I wondered how this was possible. We don't have sessions with staff or clients to drill in our values – they've always been there.*

The display of the artefacts was an interesting representation of the values. The artefacts were introduced into the environment in early 2011. After Tim's comments in the previous research

phase (2008), I had not expected such a display, but participants found the artefacts meaningful and could readily associate with them. For example, Helen said that the values represented in the glass cabinet reflected everything that ODC was.

Kevin said:

> *I like these (the values board and glass cabinet with artefacts); they're cool. It's like me – I could fit myself in there. You won't find someone who is this completely, but it's us; it's who we are at ODC. We should get small ones for our desks as a reminder.*

Lynn said:

> *Tim told us it's the values that the clients saw in us. It's not something we made up. The values all came from the clients and I think it says something about us and the people working here as well.*

Rachel said that the artefacts, particularly the glass cabinet, visually represented a brain teaser and that it stuck in people heads.

Most of the participants were able to state what most of the artefacts in the glass cabinet represented, with the exception of Avril, who commented that:

> *I'm not in the office a lot of the time and I haven't taken in the detail of what is here, the symbols… I've never asked anybody what they stand for – I guess I just have to ask.*

Lynn joked and said "Everyday they stand for something different". However, the meanings that the participants associated with the artefacts in the cabinet included:

> *Smart car: smart*
> *Rubics cube: smart / solutions / I can't remember…*
> *Lemons: fresh*
> *Hands: personal / together*
> *Beetle: trusted / not that old but still reliable*
> *Denim jeans: personal / can never remember – don't think it's casual / a snug fit; comfortable - clients keep coming back to us*
> *Framed picture: Everyone loves us (ODC)*

Michelle was the only participant who did not find these artefacts significant, although she was able to state their meanings. She found the video on the flash disk more significant to her than the boardroom artefacts. She said:

> *I love it. I can't tell you the order of the equation in the glass cabinet, but I can tell you about the video. In the cabinet there should be a cube, lemon, jeans, there should be a car, a little thing with a man in a cloud – but I'm fuzzy there.*

Tim emphasised the values in the first management meeting I observed, which was the first management meeting that they held as a team. The management team consisted of Nolene,

Andrew, Helen, Kevin, Natalie (she had excused herself from the meeting) and Tim. Tim commented:

> *Concerning our (human) resources profile, our staff needs to reflect the demographics of society but they must also reflect our values. We must first recruit the person that matches the values; we can always develop the skills.*

He later commented on a financial issue that ODC was experiencing and referred back to the values. Tracey, who had resigned, had been completing provisional tax returns for the South African Revenue Services (SARS) but through an audit, Tim and Kevin had discovered that not all tax had been paid up-to-date. Of this, Tim commented that:

> *Turnover of key staff can be a good thing. For example, Tracey resigned when we identified that not all tax was being paid when we were auditing the finances. She did not display all our values, which are fresh, smart, personal and trusted.* (Tim emphasized the word 'trusted').

In the same meeting, Tim's language reflected that he held the values in high regard and considered that these impacted on the organisation's culture:

> *Concerning our brand pillars (of fresh, smart, personal and trusted), I am not the only one to set the tone in this company. People create the culture and I contribute to it. What people do and say creates the culture. We need to consider this both in and outside of the office, even when we're with our clients. We need to constantly push our brand according to these pillars and be consciously aware of and drive these pillars. … Our actions need to reflect our values. … We need to consider these in how we treat everyone – ask ourselves "am I reflecting the values?" I would like to spend more time in strategy and developing the pillars if I wasn't so busy in operations.*

Transect walk participants also commented that the boardroom/meeting rooms and décor of ODC reflected the value of "professional". Avril summed this up aptly when she said:

> *The décor is professional. I also like the fact that we are professional and if you look at the marketing you can see that it's what ODC stands for. Professional appeals to me – the fact that we go out of our way to give clients quality.*

ODC's values could be seen to influence its culture. Other themes that emerged from data collection were communication and relationships and the ODC way of working.

Communication and relationships

The communication audit of ODC conducted early in 2012 revealed some findings at that point in time. Organisation members experienced a lack of understanding of the company, its goals and what ODC was doing in terms of projects and the progress on these. Members suggested that there be frequent departmental communication to ensure that a message was communicated throughout and that integrated systems also be used for this. Organisation members also expressed that both downward communication from management and upward communication from stakeholders to leaders was problematic. There also appeared to be a negative atmosphere

in the office with a lack of respect between employees and this affected communication in the office adversely. Audit participants also expressed positive aspects concerning communication, namely good interpersonal communication within ODC, strong and trusting relationships between internal stakeholders, an acceptance of the other, supportive teamwork with all staff co-operating to achieve goals as a group, and professionalism and flexibility in the work space that contributed to a productive office environment.

Some of these comments appeared contradictory – I wondered how the environment and team could be supportive and trusting when members expressed a lack of respect between themselves. During my observations, I had not observed disrespectful interactions or picked up on undertones that are common in a negative atmosphere. I had observed people willingly assisting one another. For example, Nolene phoned Shirley for some information. Shirley responded, "No, I don't know, but I can google it for you". Kevin's comments during a discussion led me to think that this dichotomy was caused by staff who had left before I began data collection in 2012. He said that the director, who had resigned, had isolated and sidelined him when he was brought on board earlier that year and that she did not want to work with him. After her resignation, Kevin said his thoughts were reinforced by Tim during a discussion – Tim expressed that the director may have felt threatened by Kevin as he was involved in the audit when the tax liability to the South African Revenue Services became apparent. Staff present in 2012 also mentioned that the stronger personalities who had left the company had a condescending and demeaning manner of interacting with colleagues. Tim also commented on the attrition of stronger personalities in the first management meeting:

> *There have been changes in the last six to twelve months – we now have fewer large personalities to manage. There are now more pliable personalities to work with and we now have people who are able to work as a team.*

Tim took a 'hard line' stance on acrimony in the office. In the second management meeting he said that they needed to include certain principles in the revised employment contracts that would clearly state that acrimony would not be tolerated. He jokingly said, "If someone is found guilty of acrimony, we will fire their arse" and continued, "but seriously, I'm not having that again. I don't want nonsense and undertones in the office. We had it before and not again".

The finding in the communication audit that there were strong and trusting relationships between organisation members was repeated by staff members regularly in the various forums. In the staff meeting, Tim encouraged these relationships when he said that one of the purposes of the day was "to get to meet and know each other. If you get to know each other, it makes it

easier to work with each other". He later said to the staff, "Don't jump to conclusions – that leads to the downfall of teams". Staff interviewed commented that ODC relationships had a family feel:

> *We know what's generally happening in each other's lives, but we also know that we're here to work. There isn't a race issue or apartheid legacy – the family feel helps to overcome that because we know each other and so trust one another.* (Rachel)

> *We're a strong team that works well together. We understand one another and help each other and people offer to help. Our relationships tend to be casual and not as formal as you would find in big companies.* (Nolene)

Avril said that she experienced a sense of belonging in the organisation and that the relationship between site and head office had a good dynamic with no animosity, which she had experienced when working at the head office of a large corporation. Andrew commented that he and Tim had a personal relationship beyond business and that they had become good friends, so much so that Andrew and his wife were godparents to Tim and his wife's children.

The parking lot was a significant area to Michelle in developing relationships and was a place where many conversations, informal and business-related, took place:

> *We sometimes have lots of discussions on the way out and continue in the parking area for about half an hour and say, "Well I have to go". We chat about what we're doing over the week-end … Sometimes we chat about business and catch up on emails that we've sent, the ones that we sent but may have forgotten to reply to or follow up on, so we catch up on those before we go.*

My observations of staff interactions were that staff were friendly, greeted each other and outsiders with a smile, were helpful, interacted and spoke freely with one another, offered assistance to each other (as well as food) and enjoyed humorous exchanges.

There were comments that demonstrated that although relationships were strong, members could experience some difficulty with relationships and these comments could provide insight into the negative atmosphere referred to in the communication audit. Andrew stated that, "Everyone has good relationships but they sometimes respond emotionally to crap". Two transect walk participants commented that the lack of a receptionist created tension as staff had to stop what they were doing to allow people access to the building. No-one really wanted to do this function as it interrupted their work. Michelle commented that the lack of respect that members displayed concerning the upkeep of the kitchen, women's toilets and store-rooms contributed to negative undertones in ODC. Some members did not clean their eating and drinking utensils, replace water in the kettle or milk in the fridge, or keep the toilets clean after using them, with the store-room also "being in a bit of a shambles".

During my previous research period in 2008, the kitchen appeared on the staff meeting agenda on a number of occasions. I later found out that the management team allocated a mug to each staff member with their name inked on it. If the mug was left in the kitchen sink, the culprit could be identified. In early 2012 a similar action was taken to control the issue of dirty toilets – female staff had to sign a roster for the toilet key so that culprits could be identified.

Concerning tension in the office, Rachel commented that

> *The nature of the company is such that you cannot hold a grudge – the company is small and we have to work together, so if you've got a problem, you need to sort it out and move on.*

ODC had enablers in place to facilitate communication and build relationships. These included meetings, the ability to create a light atmosphere in different forums by using humour, the open office space, the notice board ("Wall of Fame"), social events and leadership valuing employees.

The focus group reinforced that staff meetings promoted internal wellness, communication and training. During these meetings, staff were reminded what ODC stood for and what the company was about. The meetings also promoted how staff approached business as the meetings provided an opportunity for staff to be trained and skilled in the same information or knowledge. Among the photographs the focus group selected to support their comments were those below.











Figure 7.15: Images representing communication and relationship building

Project meetings also enabled communication and relationships to develop. ODC was a project-based company so these meetings were not only important for communication but also for the success of the company. The focus group indicated that these meetings served the purpose of assigning roles and responsibilities to team members, and then acted as a touch-point where team members would report back on progress, brainstorm and learn from each other. Teamwork was an important feature.

The atmosphere in ODC could generally be described as light, with members joking with or playfully teasing one another. For example, when Tim called Rachel for a meeting, she responded "Ja, pa" (yes, dad) and laughed. In the second management meeting, Tim had not completed a deliverable (policy and procedures manual) and apologised, after providing reasons for his delay: "I'll take it on the chin, I haven't delivered" to which the team jokingly responded that they would need to issue a consequence. Tim's suggestion was a group beating. Tim also had a reputation for not sticking to scheduled meeting times with staff. For example, he was a half hour late for his meeting with Rachel, and when he called her, she reminded him that Helen had been waiting to meet with him for an appointment that had been scheduled three hours earlier. This reputation was the brunt of a joke when he said in a management meeting, "I'll

lock time in my diary to focus on the pricing and commission model" at which the management team laughed. Tim had a sheepish look on his face in response and laughed when he said, "Okay, shut up, all of you". The ice-breaker at the staff meeting (where staff had to complete a worksheet where they guessed responses to questions on colleagues) also indicated a generally light atmosphere when staff shared answers that were wrong or particularly funny.

The open office space was seen by participants as a vibrant area in which information and ideas were freely exchanged. The communication audit found that the layout of the environment enabled the easy performance of tasks. Comments concerning the open office area from transect walks included:

> *We have the freedom to chat – the open area facilitates the communication process.* (Rachel)

> *I like the fact that you can just put your head over and ask and get ideas from others. I like working like that.* (Avril)

> *I like the open plan – it's a very vibrant area. We joke around a lot with each other.* (Michelle)



Figure 7.16: Open office area

The notice board was called the ODC 'Wall of Fame' (Figure 7.14, p254). Lynn and Nolene initiated the idea, which was given the go-ahead by Tim. Transect walk participants who commented on its significance seemed to appreciate the intent of the notice board but were uncertain concerning its effectiveness.

> *It's not working as it should be yet. If we can use it a bit more and get everyone involved in it, it could be significant as well. It can create a friendlier environment if we are all involved in it.* (Lynn)

> *It helps with staff morale and to get information on some aspects and people; ideas, jokes. We try to update it often but it's not one person's responsibility. Sometimes we get busy and forget to update it.* (Rachel)

Social events, according to the focus group, provided opportunities for teambuilding on a different level in a relaxing environment. These events took place in or outside the office, as can

be seen in the following images, and allowed staff to "get to know each other and build relationships so that they could work well together". It also showed that ODC made time to have fun and relax and "weren't formal and uptight all the time".



Figure 7.17: Social events

The leadership of ODC appeared to value employees. This was done informally as well as formally. An example of a display of valuing employees informally was when Tim brought cake for staff at head office "just because". Avril commented on how she felt valued when I interviewed her:

> *I feel valued. I think Tim values us and our contributions. Once when I met with him, he brought up things that he had noticed about me that I didn't know he was aware of. He notices things.*

Rachel said that she felt her opinions were valued and that when staff expressed opinions in meetings, they were considered and had an impact if it made a valuable contribution to the company.

In management meetings, Tim thanked the management team before closing the meetings. He summed up what had been discussed for individual departments and then thanked the responsible manager followed by a "keep up the good work" worded differently for the different managers.

Formally, ODC displayed they valued staff by awarding trophies at year-end functions. Trophies were awarded for the intern and employee of the year. For employee of the year, staff usually nominated and voted for recipients. However, in 2012, Tim selected the recipient of the award, Lynn. Shirley, the award recipient in 2011, commented that she thought the award acted as a motivator for her. There were no interns to award as their tenures came to an end in the middle of the year. I asked Rachel if awards were competed for and she responded that there was a team spirit and so there was no competition. Fun awards were also issued at the year-end function and related to a characteristic of the recipient. Furthermore, staff received bonuses, which were based on Tim's discretion and linked to the company's performance.



Figure 7.18: Employee of the Year Award

ODC's culture was influenced by communication and relationships between staff members as well as its values. The company also had a particular way of working.

The ODC way of working

ODC had flexible working conditions with some staff working from home, teams varying in their make-up and head office staff sometimes being redeployed to site. Consultants did not keep regular office hours; they managed their own time and were allowed to work from home. Junior consultants were expected to be in the office so that they could learn from the available resources (staff and technology). Finance staff were also office-bound but arrangements were flexible if they needed to leave the office early for an appointment, as an example. Teams were generally made up based on the focus areas of staff, but staff were sometimes required to work

in other areas. Some head office staff were redeployed to site until site staff had been employed and trained.

This way of working required a certain type of 'organisational fit' for staff. The arrangements required that staff had a sense of responsibility, were able to work independently as well as in a team, they delivered to deadline, demonstrated initiative, were creative, curious and wanted to learn, and had a strong internal drive. If not, they would let the team down. According to questionnaire responses, staff also needed to be adept at managing 'people issues' related to both internal and external clients, for example, externally staff had to be able to "manage difficult clients" and internally "manage people issues". The focus group explained how some staff resigned as they did not 'fit' ODC (as discussed in Chapter Six) and could not cope with the way of working.

The questionnaires requested respondents to select a count for responses as follows:
1 = Strongly agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neither agree nor disagree
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly disagree
The questionnaires indicated that there was a nominal decrease in score for organisational leadership and culture – in 2008, the three respondents scored this aspect at an average of 1.6, whereas in 2012 they scored it at 1.9, indicating a tendency towards 'agree'. Two of the respondents' scores also had a small decreased during the period: Rachel's score moved from 2 to 2.1 and Nolene's from 1.7 to 2.4, while Tim's remained unchanged at 1.2.

The scores to only four questions changed between the research periods for the aspect of organisational leadership and culture. Nolene had previously agreed with question 105 that members who change the way things are done to improve organisational performance are recognised and rewarded, but she now disagreed, while Rachel and Tim agreed and strongly agreed, respectively. Nolene had previously strongly agreed that leaders took care of the organisation's members (question 120) and that leaders were strong role models (question 124), whereas she now neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements. Rachel and Tim's scores indicated that they agreed and strongly agreed with these statements, respectively. Nolene's view of ODC's leadership changed over the two research periods and I wondered what contributed to this change.

Questions that scored low by all respondents in the previous research period (2008) were question 109 and 113. Question 109 (all members are encouraged to challenge aspects of the organisational culture that inhibit learning and the achievement of organisational goals) had scored high in 2008. The 2012 respondents had agreed with the statement and still did. Concerning question 113, they now all disagreed that ODC reacted to situations as they occurred, whereas they had previously agreed (Rachel and Tim) or neither agreed nor disagreed (Nolene).

To summarise this section, the additional ethnographic research instruments of transect walks and auto-photographs assisted in revealing insights into ODC's culture. ODC's values were important and influenced how they worked and interacted with clients and each other. Communication and relationships were a prominent feature of ODC, although still needed attention in some areas. ODC's way of working required a certain type of person to 'fit' the organisation. The findings concerning ODC's culture in 2012 were much the same as in 2008. Communication was still an issue, but ODC had taken steps to address this.



Having considered the environment and culture of ODC that enable it to sail, I turned my attention to how this environment catered for the disciplines of a learning organisation to be practiced.

7.4.2 Disciplines of a learning organisation in ODC

In collecting data for the five disciplines, I looked for data that specifically related to personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. I had found that ODC lent itself to being a learning organisation in 2008, and my findings in 2012 confirmed that the disciplines were still being practised, but that new issues had emerged.

Personal mastery

It was still evident that ODC espoused the discipline of personal mastery in some of its documentation and as noted in observations. ODC also had systems in place to encourage personal development, learning and personal vision, which are themes related to this discipline.

In an article concerning performance management written by a consultant and placed on ODC's website on the 'Knowledge' page, the consultant included the following, indicating that ODC

acknowledges that recognising what individuals are able to contribute to a company is important and should be considered in context of the organisation's goals:

> Jack Welch [former CEO of General Electric, business commentator and author] stated that **"Any company that aims to be part of the future has got to find a way to engage the mind of every single employee".** It is imperative that organisations design their performance management system in such a way that it harnesses the unique capabilities of each employee in a manner that ensures that all employees are working in unison towards the tactical objectives of their teams. (ODC website, 2012).

The rationale behind a book published by ODC and referred to on its website includes a spiritual or philosophical explanation for the purpose of the book, and ODC's consultants:

> There is also a philosophical underpinning to the role of a consultant. In Peter Block's [a well-known international organisational development consultant and author] words (2001, p. xvii):
> "The philosophy of consulting brings a stronger foundation to our understanding of our work. If we wish to be clear about purpose, then we cannot be limited by thinking only of our particular, personal purpose or of the goals of an individual project or institution. It calls for us to see the universal drama that is unfolding and speaking to us and our clients through the particulars of our own situation".
>
> "Just because we begin to think philosophically does not mean that we veer away from the concrete and the practical. It means that the concrete and practical become luminescent and more profound. It is the experience of deepening and taking our work more seriously and assigning it greater consequence than simply solving today's problem. Work is not just one darn thing after another; it is one darn thing threading its way through all others." (ODC website, 2012).

The wording on the flash disk video also included a reference to personal mastery, indicating a focus on personal development:

> *"…and remaining smart in the way we care for our people results in both company and personnel gaining full potential…"*

The training session in the staff meeting showed that ODC is interested in the personal development of all staff by exposing them to the same learning content. The content of the training session could be seen to contribute to the personal vision of each staff member as they were able to consider and reflect how they could incorporate the information into their work and personal life.

ODC had a knowledge folder on its computer network's shared drive that all staff were able to access and use for their personal development. If they wanted to find information about products or projects, they could look in this folder. ODC was also looking to improve this system by making it web-based ("in the cloud") so that all staff, irrespective of where they were, could access the system easily without being hampered by the server's performance, which could be slow at times.

The closed questions of the questionnaires completed by Rachel, Nolene and Tim indicated that there had been a minor decrease in score for personal mastery from an average of 1.7 to 1.9 for these three respondents. Rachel's scores for this aspect remained basically the same, while Nolene and Tim rated some questions differently to the 2008 research period. Nolene experienced a difference with questions 11.1, 11.2 and 11.4, while Tim changed his ratings for questions 5, 12.3, 14 and 15.

Concerning what motivated Nolene to achieve goals, for questions 11.1 and 11.2 (fear of failure and unpleasant consequences of not achieving goals, respectively), she now disagreed with the statements whereas she had previously agreed with them. Concerning recognising her current reality and a desire to attain a new reality (question 11.4) as a motivator, Nolene had previously strongly agreed with this statement but now neither agreed nor disagreed with it. It was clear that Nolene's motivators had changed over the research period.

Tim had previously strongly agreed with question 5, but now disagreed that he was able to focus his energy within the company on that which mattered most to him. He also changed his approach when he did not attain his goals: he had previously disagreed that he bulldozed through obstacles to overcome them (question 12.3) but now agreed that he did. Concerning questions 14 and 15, Tim had previously strongly agreed with these statements but now disagreed with them: he was not able to share his experiences with his colleagues (question 14) and he did not receive feedback on projects/tasks/performance constantly (question 15). It seemed that the resignation of Pamela and Tracey had added to Tim's challenges of leader as owner-manager – he was not able to focus on what he wanted to, perhaps through frustration bulldozed through obstacles and did not have a confidante in the workplace, which may have been in the roles that Pamela and Tracey played.

Question 16 concerning staff having a balance between work and non-work life had been an area of concern in 2008 with many respondents scoring this aspect low, stating they did not have balance. There was little to no change with these three respondents concerning this statement: Rachel still agreed that she had balance, Nolene neither agreed nor disagreed, where she previously disagreed, and Tim still disagreed.

The open questions of the questionnaire indicated that personal development and on-the-job/ informal learning were features of ODC that contributed to the development of personal mastery. Comments included:

> *Being provided the opportunity to develop yourself with the work you do, as well as knowing your opinion is valued and considered.* (Rachel)
>
> *I am learning to manage numerous projects and meet deadlines.* (Nolene)

Furthermore, Nolene experienced conflict between work and family as a result of long hours and the stressful nature of the job. They all had learning plans for the future; Rachel and Nolene wanted to attended formal courses that would contribute to their development and that of the company, while Tim intended to continue learning from each project.

The discipline of personal mastery was still evident in ODC with certain aspects needing attention to enhance the development of this discipline. This discipline is considered to be the (spiritual) foundation of the learning organisation and with personal mastery again evident in ODC, the company still had a foundation on which to build and develop the other disciplines. The next discipline I turned my attention to was that of mental models and the instances where this discipline was displayed.

Mental models

In identifying this discipline, I took a similar approach in 2012 as I had in 2008. I identified the thinking of the organisation and its members on the level of espoused theories evident in ODC's documentation and theories-in-use as observed in staff interactions. That ODC's documentation had changed over the research period is indicative of a change in their mental models, which could impact staff member's practise and interactions. I was eager to see if there had been such a change – from theories to practise.

ODC underwent a branding exercise in the latter half of 2008. This resulted in a change in their corporate identity with more emphasis on the value pillars of "fresh, smart, personal and trusted". These values were identified through researching customers, an exercise conducted by an external branding company. The values were evident in various aspects of ODC – from documentation, to artefacts, to the way that staff interacted with each other, and the language they used. ODC was also more focused on serving the mining industry, which was communicated in their documentation (website, company profile).

ODC's website reflected its corporate identity with the colour orange prominent, together with grey and black. I thought that the website was "fresh" and "smart" – the layout was easy to navigate and the website had interesting and relevant information, with additional insights in articles on the "Knowledge" page.

In the same performance management article referred to in personal mastery, the consultant wrote that it was important for teams to "to achieve the strategic goals and vision of the organisation whilst operating within a common belief and value system that is acceptable to their stakeholders". The reference to a common belief and value system acknowledges that mental models have a role to play in teams being successful, and it can be inferred that the same needs to take place within the organisation in order for it to be successful, as organisations are made up of teams. ODC placed an emphasis on a common value system: in both management meetings, Tim, the managing director, referred to the value/brand pillars as being essential characteristics to be considered when employing new staff. Focus group and interview participants also indicated that these characteristics were important in new staff in order for them to 'fit' in the organisation. ODC placed emphasis, not only in documentation but in practise, that it was imperative for staff to work from similar mental models. Visual reminders of the values were present in the environment in the form of artefacts, as previously discussed. I wondered if this emphasis on a common belief and value system/mental models would contribute to 'groupthink' where members would tend to all think the same and so not challenge each other, which could then hamper learning. It appeared that it did not.

It was evident that staff were able to question mental models held by others. For example, in the second management meeting, the team discussed the products and services that ODC offered. While Tim was explaining these to the team, Andrew commented:

Andrew: I think we need to unpack our products and services in a spreadsheet format.
Tim: Why do you think so?
Andrew: I've just seen it that when I sit with clients and they ask for more services, and I explain to them what we do, they don't see the consequences of the extra services, where it can enhance their business. I think that a spreadsheet will help them to understand our business better. I use one for selling purposes, but if we can include one in the company profile, I think that would work well.
Tim: Sounds like a good idea. Can we build on yours instead of starting from scratch?
Andrew: Yes, sure. No problem.

I also observed two consultants discussing a policy document they were developing for a project where they shared and clarified their mental models.

Avril: Shall I include this information in this document? It's … (she explained the content).

Rachel: I'm not sure. Why would the client want to know that?

Avril: I was thinking about that myself. Haven't we included this section in another policy for this client? Then it's silly to include it here, too.

Rachel: Yes, we have. What we can do is just refer to it instead of including it. We don't need to duplicate.

Avril: Okay. Thanks.

These interactions also showed how staff lived the ODC values – their approach was smart as there was no duplication of effort, they trusted each other with the information they shared and the interactions were personal. I also interpreted these interactions as displaying a fresh approach to how ODC conducted their business – looking for ways to help clients understand ODC's business offerings and having policy documentation that was not repetitive in nature.

Interviews with staff also revealed how ODC practised the discipline of challenging mental models. Rachel explained that for every project, teams would base their solutions on previous projects but introduce new information based on research to change the solution to meet clients' needs. Avril said that people were able to contribute ideas easily to projects during project meetings and Rachel added that during these sessions the members would question and clarify ideas, irrespective of who was present, Tim included. Rachel also explained that as ODC was not always busy, she had time to critically reflect and review her past efforts. She would use this time to think about how she could improve what she did and was able to share her reflections informally with others. Time was not scheduled formally for critical reflection, but it was something she practised. Avril was uncertain concerning members practising critical reflection in ODC as she had not seen it take place formally, confirming Rachel's response. Avril stated that:

> *I haven't seen debrief sessions being done where teams talk about what worked and what didn't work. I expect that these take place. I'm sure there's some kind of project wrap-up document – I would expect there to be.*

The closed questions of the questionnaires completed by Rachel, Nolene and Tim indicated that there had been a decrease in score for mental models from an average of 1.7 to 2.2 for these three respondents. Rachel's and Nolene's scores for this aspect remained consistent over the two research periods, while Tim's scores remained similar except for questions 29, 30, 31, 32 and 33. Tim's ratings for these questions had an extreme change – in 2008 he had strongly agreed with these questions, whereas in 2012 he strongly disagreed with them. Tim stated that he did

not have a mentor/coach/ supervisor/friend in the workplace (question 29) and (so) did not have someone who assisted him to examine the way he did things (question 30); to change the way he thought about things (question 31); to consider alternatives to routine ways of doing things (question 32); or to change the way he did things (question 32). It was again evident that the resignation of Pamela and Tracey had added to Tim's challenges of leader as owner-manager. In his interview, Andrew stated that he saw his role as challenging Tim's thinking about where he was taking the business, but Andrew worked at ODC part-time and was not always in the office. Perhaps their thoughts of introducing a board of directors would assist Tim in acquiring a mentor/coach/supervisor/critical friend who could challenge his mental models sufficiently.

Question 25 had previously (in 2008) been rated low with three of the seven respondents disagreeing that when differences of opinion surfaced, members could look for reasons why they had differences. However, the three 2012 respondents agreed that they could engage in discussions to unearth their differences; they had also agreed with the question in 2008.

The open question section of the questionnaire indicated similar assumptions to those held by the same members in 2008. Rachel and Tim still viewed ODC as a lion and an eagle, respectively, for the same reasons as in 2008: supportive teamwork and being able to see far ahead, respectively. Nolene's image of ODC had changed from being a buffalo to a tiger – ODC had changed from being "cunning, calculated and knowing what to do in difficult situations" to being "relatively high in the food chain". Perhaps she viewed ODC as having matured?

As in 2008, there were incidences in 2012 where mental models could have been addressed differently to encourage trust and respect to be developed. For example, the incident with the ladies toilets and the ensuing roster for the toilet key, could have been addressed in a more 'adult' manner – Michelle had commented that she felt she was back at school. Another example was in the first management meeting where Tim stated meeting principles rather than encouraging managers to contribute to the principles.

The value pillars formed an important part of ODC's mental models and this could be seen in their documentation and through the introduction of artefacts into the environment. Staff members' language and interactions with each other that I observed also reflected these values – "fresh, smart, personal and trusted" were evident. However, I had seen these values in 2008

before they were deliberately communicated, which resonates with the findings of the branding exercise – I could see the same values as clients who participated in the branding exercise.

There were still elements of this discipline that could be improved, but I wondered if these were perhaps more on the part of the leader's mental models that needed shifting in the way that he dealt with his staff. When incidences occurred that displayed a lack of respect between staff members, such as dirty toilets in 2012, and the kitchen and security issues in 2008, Tim's (or the leaderships' at the time) response could be seen as disrespectful to adults and could even be interpreted as being dogmatic. He could have perhaps modelled the behaviour that he was intending to achieve by adopting a facilitative role to resolving these issues, showing staff the respect that he hoped they would show each other.

Building shared vision

The communication audit revealed that staff members needed to understand the vision and goals of ODC as well as have opportunities to contribute to these. For example, a finding was that an aspect that needed attention was "a compelling vision where everyone understands and shares the picture of what the organisation wants to achieve in the future" (ODC Communication audit, 2012, p9). Another finding was that employees wanted to engage in and provide input to ODC's marketing efforts (ODC Communication audit, 2012). My data collection focused on these aspects – how ODC measured against improving these areas as they spoke directly to building shared vision.

ODC appeared to be paying attention to ensuring that staff members understood its vision and goals by allowing them opportunities to contribute to these. During management meetings, each operational area gave feedback of what they were working on and shared information, activities and targets. This helped the management team to create a shared vision. I noticed that the management team was motivated and energised after meetings, but was not able to observe if they acted on the energy. Comments about the management meetings from the team included:

> *The meetings help with cross-functional integration*. (Andrew)
>
> *It's good to hear what's happening across the business and for the head office guys to hear what's happening on site.* (Natalie)
>
> *The meetings help to develop the team. We work independently but around the table we are a team.* (Nolene)

During the second management meeting, Tim stated that he wanted to have a staff meeting off site with site and head office staff "to pull everything together" and share the marketing

strategy, which is part of what took place at the staff meeting. During the staff meeting, the different project areas shared information about what was taking place to get everyone "on the same page" (expressed by Nolene). Tim, in Andrew's absence, explained the marketing strategy, followed by a question and answer time during which staff could ask questions about the strategy.

Staff did not contribute to ODC's vision formally; Tim and Andrew were caretakers of designing and developing ODC's vision. However, staff were given opportunities to contribute to the attainment of the vision and goals. For example, Rachel said that she was able to contribute ideas during meetings and discussions with Tim which influenced ODC's vision. The staff meeting was also an example of how staff were given an opportunity to share in the vision – they could ask questions, express ideas and Tim would respond on whether the ideas would help the attainment of the vision and if they would be considered further. Another example of providing staff with opportunities to contribute to the vision and strategies of ODC is when Tim stated in the second management meeting that ODC's website needed to be updated and that he would like to include the ideas of staff (head office and site) in this exercise.

The closed questions of the questionnaires completed by Rachel, Nolene and Tim indicated that there had been a small decrease in score for building shared vision from an average of 1.6 to 2.2 for these three respondents. Rachel's scores for this aspect remained mostly consistent, as did Nolene's, with the exception of questions 44 and 46. Tim's average for this discipline had dropped from 1.1 (strongly agree) to 1.9 (rounded to 'agree'), and his scores for three questions changed, namely questions 42, 43 and 44. Concerning all staff having input into company strategies (question 44), both Nolene and Tim had previously agreed with this statement, but they now both disagreed. Nolene had previously agreed that ODC leaders honestly shared their view of reality with staff (question 46), but now neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. I wondered if her change in marital status had had an influence on her score – perhaps she and Tim were able to have honest discussions at home, but she did not witness such honest discussions in the office?

Tim's ratings of question 42 (leadership of the company has dictated the vision of the company that we are required to work towards) and 43 (I feel like an associate of the company more than an employee) had changed from strong agreement with the statements to strong disagreement over the two research periods. He felt that leadership no longer dictated the vision of the company, and he felt that he was more of an employee than an associate.

I thought that the responses to questions 42 and 44 were odd – if leadership was not dictating the vision and all staff did not have input into company strategies, I wondered where the vision and strategies were coming from? Rachel and Nolene both agreed that leadership dictated the vision of ODC, but Tim felt differently. If Tim was not dictating the vision, who was? Perhaps Andrew had more input than staff realised, or perhaps staff recognised Andrew as a company leader, where Tim did not. Irrespective of this, staff were not all able to provide input into company strategies, according to questionnaire responses.

Questions that had low scores in 2008 were 37, 39 and 44. Question 44 was still a concern, whereas company members sharing a common destiny (question 37) and being given the opportunity to share their visions of the future for the company (question 39) had not been and still were not rated low – the three respondents had mostly agreed with the statements during both research periods.

The open questions focused on the mission statement of ODC. Rachel included the wording of the mission statement correctly as stated in the company profile. Nolene wrote the value statement while Tim wrote the vision statement. Rachel and Nolene had not been involved in developing the statements whereas Tim had, but they were all present during the branding exercise which led to the designing of the statements. I found it interesting that all three responses were discrepant. In most organisations employees generally do not know what their company's vision, mission and values statements are. These three respondents each wrote what one of these statements was. "At least they know one of them" I thought. Tim wrote the vision statement (where the company was heading) instead of the mission statement (the company's reason for existing), perhaps indicating where his focus was.

Building shared vision was a discipline that in 2008 needed more attention in order to develop. ODC appeared to have put some steps in place to develop this discipline, but staff still did not have sufficient opportunities to have input into company strategies. I thought that the idea of all staff being able to contribute to changes to ODC's website could be a fruitful exercise in developing this discipline.

Team learning

My approach to gathering data for this discipline was similar to that undertaken in 2008: I looked for discussions and dialogues that demonstrated that the organisation was focussed on

aligning and developing its members' capacity to create the results they truly desired (Senge, 1990).

During open office and management meetings, there were many discussions that took place between staff members, with the purpose of gaining understanding of participants' viewpoints (Senge, 1990) and the action strategies that would lead to an intended consequence (Anderson, 1997; Argyris, 1980). These discussions indicated single-loop, adaptive learning (Argyris, 1980). For example, Rachel and Avril had a discussion concerning a policy document that Avril was designing. Avril wanted to include wording concerning automating a system and discussed this idea with Rachel. When members shared information concerning their operational areas in management and staff meetings, single-loop learning took place.

There were also incidences where double-loop, generative learning took place. For example, Andrew's suggestion to include a products and services spreadsheet in the company profile showed that the team was examining the governing variables concerning how they conducted sales meetings and the marketing of ODC. Tim and Andrew questioned their actions of how they sell to clients, which led them to question what influenced their actions, that is their governing variables, which caused a change in the way they intended to conduct sales meetings and ODC's marketing. The outcome of this dialogue was shared meaning and fundamental change (Anderson, 1997; Argyris, 1980; Hattingh & Smit, 2004).

The branding exercise that ODC underwent indicates its ability to engage in triple-loop learning. The branding exercise came about after ODC decided to focus on the mining sector, which led to members questioning key principles on which the organisation was based, inquiring into and challenging the underlying "why's" of the organisation's mission, vision, market position and culture (Altman & Iles, 1998; Isaacs, 1993). Internal and external stakeholders were involved in the exercise, encouraging ODC to examine the purpose of its existence. The branding exercise assisted ODC to not only examine its governing variables (practices, norms and policies) but its rationale and contexts. The consequence of triple-loop learning is profound change (Torbert, 1994), which may be resisted by organisation members. It is perhaps this change that led to only a few of the original 2008 staff cohort remaining in ODC in 2012.

The closed questions of the questionnaires completed by Rachel, Nolene and Tim indicated that there had been a minor decrease in score for team learning from an average of 1.7 to 1.8 for

these three respondents. As with the other disciplines, Rachel's scores for this aspect remained mostly consistent, as did Nolene's, except for question 84 (we review and change organisational norms, policies and objectives on a regular basis). She now neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement whereas in 2008 she had strongly agreed. Rachel and Tim agreed and strongly agreed with question 84, respectively. Tim's ratings were also consistent except for questions 65 and 80. Tim now agreed that some team dialogues undermined learning and were negative (question 65) whereas he had previously disagreed with the statement. Rachel and Nolene disagreed and neither agreed nor disagreed, respectively (rating the question as a 3 and 4, respectively). Tim now strongly agreed that staff were able to volunteer to be part of a team (question 80), whereas in 2008 he neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Rachel and Nolene neither agreed nor disagreed with this question. It was interesting to note how Tim's experiences of these aspects were different to those of staff respondents.

In 2008, questions that were rated low were 52, 65, 80, 84 and 87. The three respondents did not rate questions 52 and 87 low in either research period and still generally agreed they were able to question the way things were done in the organisation openly (question 52) and that teams often negotiated/interrelated with each other by doing something together (question 87). Although Tim had changed his ratings for questions 65 and 80 and Nolene for 84, these aspects were also not experienced by the three respondents to be areas of concern for either research period.

In the open questions, sharing information and ideas and supporting and assisting one another were still strong features of how ODC teams worked together. Learning from each other featured in response to what respondents learned by being part of a team. These responses demonstrated that a community of practice was adopted by ODC. I had also observed this in the open office, where staff would ask each other questions, sourcing information from those that they thought held more knowledge in a specific area than they did (a master).

In 2008, I was concerned about the low ratings of questions 52 and 84 as the ratings could have indicated that ODC did not encourage the examining of mental models, which related to double-loop, generative learning and dialogue. Members appeared to be more likely to engage in single-loop, adaptive learning. My findings in 2012 indicated that ODC was able to participate in double-loop, generative learning *and* triple-loop learning. It appeared that dialogue, and not only discussion, had taken place in ODC between 2008 and 2012, which encouraged members to challenge the status quo and consider approaches outside the organisational framework. By

encouraging dialogue to continue, ODC could ensure that they would not become 'stuck' and would be able to adapt to a changing environment.

Systems thinking

There were many instances where organisation members demonstrated that they recognised the interdependency of different aspects of their work and their roles and the impact of these dependencies on the entire system (Senge, 1990). Documentation and discussions showed that ODC looked externally and internally to the company to identify how the system in which they operated impacted on the business.

Documentation such as the company profile and website stated that ODC engaged in systems thinking. For example, both of these 'documents' included the wording:

> *We apply an integrated approach in designing people solutions, with the holistic context of our mining clients' businesses.*

An extract from an unnamed book on ODC's website (seemingly published by ODC) included the following wording that demonstrated its focus on systems thinking:

> *(If) we approach Organisational Development from a holistic, systems perspective, we would be dealing with all the elements touching a typical OD value chain.*

The flash disk video gave a sense of ODC's focus on systems thinking in the use of circles and the flow of one aspect into another throughout the video – I thought that the video illustrated the interconnectedness of themes in the video, people, the world and ODC through the visuals that were used. The draft business development strategy included strategic focus areas that looked externally and internally to the company, demonstrating systems thinking and consideration of ODC in a larger 'whole'. Internal factors included a customer relationship management system, corporate governance and a business development staffing structure. External factors were pricing, sales and client communication.

The communication audit found that ODC was deliberately sensitive to the external environment and sought and used information from outside its community. I had observed this sensitivity in management and staff meetings where members commented on external and internal factors affecting ODC. In the management meetings, Tim and Andrew shared information about trends in the mining market, which commodity prices were performing well, how the global market was impacting mining, and what mining publications were saying about which commodities/precious metals to invest in, while Natalie added strike action at local mines

and how this negatively impacted international perception of mining in South Africa. Tim also shared this information at the staff meeting.

Information concerning what was taking place on different projects was also shared by the different project heads at the management and staff meetings, which helped to develop the systems thinking of all staff present. To further develop systems thinking of staff, the focus group commented that all staff were trained on different aspects of what ODC did at staff meetings and on-the-job; there was a knowledge folder on ODC's server that all staff could access to gain information on ODC's offering – its services and products; and that members, although they tended to be specialists in certain ODC products and services, were able to work in other areas. For example, Avril was an organisational development specialist but was working on an organisational readiness project.

Some of the areas that ODC wanted to improve, as discussed in management meetings, that could positively impact the systems thinking of its members, were improved communication between the projects, finance and marketing departments so that ODC would be better able to respond to clients appropriately: a discussion in a management meeting revealed that Nolene, Kevin and Andrew would often speak to the same or different people about the same project and this could lead to confusion for the client and ODC. Tim and Andrew suggested that infrastructure in the form of computer systems or programmes was needed so that ODC could track and manage projects and marketing activities and then all staff could be aware of what was taking place, where and when in the company.

The closed questions of the questionnaires completed by the three 2012 respondents indicated that there had been a small decrease in score for systems thinking from an average of 1.6 to 1.8. Nolene's scores for this discipline remained mostly the same over the two research periods. Rachel's scores were also mostly unchanged, except for question 91, while Tim only changed his scoring for questions 98 and 100. Rachel had previously agreed that ODC mostly approached problems with the same familiar solutions, but she now disagreed with the statement. Tim strongly disagreed while Nolene agreed with the statement. Tim had previously agreed, but now disagreed that ODC members tended to blame themselves as being part of the problem (question 98). Rachel agreed while Nolene disagreed with this statement. Tim had previously disagreed but now agreed that there was little conflict between organisation members (question 100), as did the two women.

It was again interesting to note discrepant responses to the questions – the respondents did not have the same experience of different aspects relating to systems thinking, except that there was now little conflict between organisation members. This question (100) was one that had previously (in 2008) had many respondents stating that there was conflict between organisation members, so a change in the environment had been noticed by the three respondents.

The open questions indicated that all respondents were aware of and practised systems thinking as they viewed their roles as influencing other areas or functions in the company. They considered that aspects that influenced ODC's ability to perform were staff knowledge, as an internal factor, and clients' lack of understanding of ODC's products and the economy as external factors.

ODC appeared to practise systems thinking and efforts were in place to develop the systems thinking of staff, such as ongoing sharing of information across projects and departments, with tools/computer systems to support this. There appeared to be less conflict in the working environment which could also further contribute to members' systems thinking – if there was less conflict, the environment was likely to be more conducive for information sharing and participating in discussions that lead to systems thinking. An area that required attention was the knowledge of ODC consultants. Although systems were in place for staff to share and harness knowledge, the team was young in age, with half the members under 30, and there had been a high turnover of staff between 2011 to 2012 when seven staff resigned, taking their knowledge, experience and systems thinking ability with them. ODC would need to ensure staff retention, something that had been mentioned by Tim in a management meeting, so as to retain knowledge, experience and systems thinking of consultants as this could impact on the quality of the solutions they would develop.

As in 2008, systems thinking, which integrates the other four disciplines (Hattingh & Smit, 2004; Senge, 1990), was evident and the data collected indicated that the five disciplines had continued in ODC.



The learning disciplines were still practised in ODC and I wondered how the incorporation of different learning theories contributed to this practise. It was as if I needed to look down on the vessel from the top of the mast as I focused on identifying learning theories, looking at how ODC operated and staff interacted from a bird's eye view while linking the data I had collected to theory.

7.4.3 Learning as a practice in ODC

It was evident that learning took place in and was a focus of ODC. Question 3.16 concerning whether ODC encouraged learning yielded positive responses from all three respondents, stating that there was continuous informal (on-the-job) learning as well as the opportunity to learn formally.

Various research instruments (such as documentation) and settings (such as meetings) also indicated different approaches to learning and learning theories. In addition to the learning theories of critical reflection, single-loop, double-loop and triple-loop learning discussed under the five disciplines, I collected the following data, summarised in Table 7.4 (p281). Some instruments and settings could reflect more than one learning theory, but descriptions focus on a single learning theory for ease of reference. The data included in the table was collected in 2012, but many of the settings resonated with data collection from 2008.

Table 7.4: Research instrument/settings and related learning theories

Learning theory evident	Instrument/ Setting	Interpretation of instrument or setting/ Comment	Learning discipline related to
Cognitivism	During management and staff meetings, many attendants commented that they had "learnt a lot" from the meetings through the information that was shared.	The information that attendants received built on existing knowledge. This could change their knowledge structures and understanding of ODC and how it operated.	Personal mastery Mental models Building shared vision Team learning Systems thinking
Constructivism	The values presentation in the staff meeting provided an opportunity for participants to build new knowledge on their experience. Staff were encouraged to share their personal experiences with the group.	Staff were given the opportunity to consider how the information that was presented related to their personal experiences and the interactions that they had with people. This could contribute to a change in their understanding of how to interact with others.	Personal mastery Mental models Building shared vision Team learning Systems thinking
Experiential learning	The focus group described the process of developing solutions for clients – previous projects and team members' experiences were considered.	In project meetings, the team would contribute ideas, share their learning, reflect on their experience and devise a solution based on research and team members' input.	Mental models
Transformative learning	ODC's branding exercise	This exercise encouraged ODC to consider the assumptions from which it operated with a change in its focus solely on mining. The brand/values pillars were an outcome of this exercise, which led to an enhanced level of awareness of who/what ODC was and how it conducted its business.	Mental models Building shared vision

Self-directed learning	Staff were requested to identify their training needs and the training they wanted to attend. Various research participants also stated that learning was an inherent part of working at ODC and that employees had to have the characteristic of wanting to learn.	Staff were encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and show initiative and openness to learning.	Personal mastery
Collaborative learning	The focus group explained that projects were a collaborative effort where all team members had to make sure that they understood the client's requirements before devising a solution. Team members would adapt products for clients and challenge one another on ideas and solutions.	Shared understanding of the client's problem and solution was important to ensure that ODC provided the correct service or product to the client.	Team learning
Action learning	Project teams, according to the focus group and interviews, had as their focus working together to solve a real problem (for clients), committing to an action plan and monitoring results of implementing the plan.	This interaction shows elements of action learning. However, reflecting on the process and the team's experiences for continuous improvement tended to occur more on an individual than group level – Rachel commented that she, for one, would take time when they were not busy to reflect on how previous projects could have been done differently and/or improved.	Personal mastery
Activity Theory/ Cultural-Historical Activity Theory	Project meetings were often focused on performing an activity which led to learning, such as developing a policy document, or planning the composition of a labour force for a mine.	The learning would be mediated through artefacts and cultural means, such as documents of previous projects, a computer, language and ODC's consulting methodology.	Systems thinking

Actor Network Theory	Different teams worked on various projects and team members were allocated to projects based on the skills they were able to contribute to the project. Team membership did not remain consistent – staff could expect to work with different people on different projects.	The variety of project team membership facilitated learning, or knowledge building, across networks in ODC over time and space. Some head office staff were seconded to clients' sites for a period and so a variety of learning networks could be established.	Systems thinking
Communities of practice	ODC was a community of practice and naturally seemed to adopt this theory in most of their dealings. In the staff meeting, staff were requested to complete a form indicating what training they needed and what training they could give. In the office, staff would often request information from another that they knew to be a 'master' in the area.	ODC encouraged a free-flow of information and many staff commented that they viewed knowledge as being shared and not owned. There was recognition of masters (experts) who could be accessed to share their knowledge.	Personal mastery Mental models Building shared vision Team learning Systems thinking
Complexity theory	This theory was incorporated into ODC's consulting methodology and as a result impacted the way its business was conducted, in the office as well as with clients.	Consultants recognised that context and person were inseparable when representing systems – they considered their solutions in terms of clients' settings, and these were developed in project teams.	Mental models Team learning Systems thinking

It is evident that ODC drew on various learning theories as it went about conducting business. Practising these learning theories showed a propensity to developing the learning disciplines in a variety of ways. This variety of learning theories available also catered for the individual learning preferences of staff. For example, to develop systems thinking, one staff member may prefer to be engaged in activity and so Activity Theory/Cultural Historical Activity Theory could be used; whereas another may prefer to be taught by having an expert (or master) share their experiences and knowledge, and so a community of practice approach could be adopted.

7.5 What does sustainability mean in the context of the small organisation?

For both research periods in 2008 and 2012, the general perception among ODC staff participating in the research was that the company was sustainable. They thought that ODC would continue into the future. Two participants, one in 2008 and another in 2012, said that they thought that ODC was sustainable and could remain so while staying small but that ODC had the potential to grow and expand beyond the area in which it operated:

> *A focus on mining contributes to ODC's sustainability for now. We have expertise in mining and so are sustainable in mining. ODC will continue to be sustainable and small if it focuses on mining. I think, though, that ODC is able to grow into other centres and other industries, but the directors are focused on mining so the company focus is not readily going to change with the current directors. ODC is able to function in any industry – we have the skills and expertise to cope.* (Charlene – 2008)

> *ODC is sustainable because of its model – the model is sellable and there are enough clients who need our services. But it's not sustainable in terms of its structure. We need management structures and capability, better infrastructure, technology and processes, many of which require growth capital. It's something we have to look at if we want to take this company to where it has the potential to go.* (Andrew – 2012)

ODC had remained small and sustainable over the research period. Staff numbers had fluctuated with the number of projects ODC had, with 53 being the highest complement in 2011. The turnover figures for ODC from 2008 to 2012 were as indicated in Table 7.5 (p285).

Table 7.5: Turnover figures for research site during research period (2008-2012)

Year	Turnover
2008	R11 579 006
2009	R16 617 565
2010	R14 099 302
2011	R32 837 562
2012	R41 460 558

This growth had been largely 'organic' without much sustained attention to promoting growth on the part of leaders' (according to Andrew). However, it seemed that staff at ODC had sustainability as a focus, evidence of which was seen in data collected using various research instruments in 2008 and 2012. The company documentation could be seen as contributing to this focus.

Documentation in 2008 made references and inferences to sustainability, which is likely to have influenced ODC's practise – its products and services were aimed at the sustainability of its clients, and this mindset is likely to have been adopted by consultants internally. The following phrases indicated this focus on sustainability:

> [Our mission is] to empower our clients and their stakeholders, through the provision of sustainable value-adding solutions, enhancing their economic well-being. (ODC Company profile, 2007, p2).

> To enhance market awareness of the company brand and product and service offerings, to ensure and sustain business growth. (ODC Business and marketing strategy, 2008, p7).

In 2012, the 'Knowledge' page on ODC's website included phrases demonstrating sustainability as a focus area in its consulting practise. An article written by a consultant included the following phrase:

> Mining companies that wish to stay true to their transformational value of "People First" must address these issues and challenges, whilst not jeopardising the attraction and retention of skilled and competent employees, and hence productivity and long term sustainability.

From the extracts of a book on ODC's website, reference was made to organisational development (ODC's business) playing a role in repositioning organisations in an ever-changing environment "so as to ensure optimal competitiveness and well-being", that is, sustainability. On its website, ODC positioned itself as a sustainable and knowledgeable entity by including the phrases:

> multitude of clients over the past 15 years
>
> and

> We have been involved with more than 50 capital mining project studies, including implementation support.

Data from other research instruments demonstrated that ODC's staff were aware of external and internal factors that impacted on its sustainability. Their comments related to external economic, market, infrastructure and labour, social and regulatory factors while internally finance and management/leadership played a role.

7.5.1 External factors

During management and staff meetings, Tim, in 2008, and both he and Andrew in 2012, displayed cognisance or awareness of what was taking place in the economic environment and how this impacted on ODC's business. In 2008, Tim explained that the global credit crisis and resultant recession that was taking place would be one he was certain ODC could navigate through as it had done so twice previously. In 2012, South Africa's economy was experiencing a slow recovery, which both Tim and Andrew shared their views on in the first management meeting of that year. Discussions included commodity price fluctuations, labour unrest on mines and which precious metals were expected to perform, according to various media sources. Tim stated that in times of economic uncertainty, clients tended to postpone projects, which then impacted ODC's sustainability. He stressed the importance of having a variety of product and service offerings to cater for this. Tim shared this information with staff at the staff meeting, as well as how ODC's market offering (its products and services) catered for different economic climates.

As ODC's business was focused on mining, the implementation of its projects on clients' mines was directly related to activity on mines and commodity prices. Mines would open and close shafts, depending on the economic dictators at a point in time. To cater for this, ODC developed its market offering focused on mining in 2008 - they catered for 'Greenfields' (shafts opening/new shafts) and 'Brownfields' (shafts closing). These offerings evolved and in 2012, ODC concentrated on two areas: capital projects and operational readiness, which included labour planning. Organisational development, according to Tim, was "still looking for a home" but was another ODC offering. The variety of offerings that ODC had, helped to ensure that there were few quiet periods for business transactions, even over December and January, during which consulting was generally 'slow'.

ODC staff were aware that they operated in a niche market and this positively contributed to ODC's sustainability – they had few competitors and in 2012 Nolene explained in her research interview that ODC was one in three companies in South Africa that provided its particular offering to mines. Tim explained in both the management and staff meetings that 2012 had been a 'slow year' with commodity consumption and demand having decreased, but that they had opportunities in the market with smaller mining houses as the large mining companies were cutting back on production as a result of the decreased demand. Smaller mines would be quicker to respond when demand returned and so opportunities rested with these mines. ODC's market was mostly short-term clients but there were often opportunities to 'sell-on' products and services to clients. In the absence of long-term projects, ODC preferred to sell-on to existing clients as it was easier to do so than sell to new clients.

In response to external market factors, ODC had concentrated internally on marketing management, with Tim stating in a management meeting in 2012 that they would "focus on marketing as the spearhead of the company". Many discussions in meetings were focused on marketing and staff interviewed in this research knew and readily expressed what ODC's marketing strategy was. In both 2008 and 2012, staff commented that ODC was responsive to its clients' needs and would develop products and services where they saw gaps in the market, such as the labour planning offering and the newly developed policies and procedures manual.

In 2008, some staff had expressed concern over ODC focusing solely on the mining industry during staff meetings and research interviews. They commented that it could be risky for ODC to 'keep all its eggs in one basket'. Tim responded to such comments made in staff meetings by stating that ODC had a positive reputation in mining and that by focusing on that industry, they could develop an intuition about the environment and their ability to consult to it. In 2012, Andrew commented in a management meeting that his experience had been that if a company diversified into other markets and sectors, it slowed down its growth curve. By focusing on an industry/sector, a company was more readily placed to continue steadily on a growth curve.

In 2009, ODC acquired the services of a business development executive who assisted ODC with its marketing strategy in a part-time capacity (50% of his time). Andrew, like Tim, had experience in the mining industry and was able to 'speak the (mining) language'. Prior to that, Tim and Patricia had been responsible for marketing, and in 2008, Patricia had moved to the role of operations

executive. In 2012, Andrew increased his contribution to 90% and with that, efforts to increase ODC's presence in the market.

Although ODC did not have many competitors, it competed against large companies, even though they did not offer all that ODC did. Andrew commented that he recently almost 'landed a client' but they chose to go with a larger well-known consulting house, 'because of the name and the perception of the quality associated with the name'. He was in discussions with another large international consulting group for ODC to supplement their offering and to be associated with their large name. Prior to that he had engaged with a large local consulting group, but they turned down the opportunity to work with ODC as they viewed ODC as competitors. I found this interesting as it reflected what I had read in research literature – that in South Africa, small companies compete with large companies in the same markets (Rogerson, in Smit & Watkins, 2012).

Despite having to compete with large companies, ODC had a positive reputation in the mining sector. In the second management meeting, Natalie commented that a client she had been in discussion with wanted to move all human resource (HR) management of their shaft to ODC as the client was not happy with their current contractor. She explained that at a board meeting that she attended on a client's site, ODC's name was mentioned favourably, followed by a board member asking, "Why is this site having problems but not yours (Natalie's)?" Tim also shared how clients, often mine managers, would phone him to ask HR-related questions as they could not get an answer from their own HR departments. To further its reputation, ODC participated in community initiatives. In 2012, staff contributed and assisted at a soup kitchen close to where they were based at a client's site, and this could contribute to developing a positive perception/brand of ODC in the community. In 2008, ODC contributed financially to a children's home.

ODC also ensured that it networked and communicated with the market and clients regularly. Tim would often present at conferences. Andrew attended conferences and presentations locally and internationally as networking opportunities. Through these he became aware of opportunities for ODC to do business across Africa and in Turkey, Thailand, Russia and Indonesia. He would regularly contact clients, taking a day out of his schedule to give clients a phone call and establish if there were business opportunities available. ODC used clients' birthdays as an opportunity to communicate with them and refresh the name of ODC in their minds. In 2008, a client birthday list was circulated in staff meetings and staff members were identified to contact clients they knew. In

2012, clients were sent a gift pack (shown earlier in this chapter). Andrew's comment was that of all the marketing efforts he had observed, the gift idea was "the most powerful form of marketing" as it helped keep ODC top-of-mind for clients and contributed to developing good relationships with them. ODC also had a branded car, a Chevvy Spark. Of this car, Michelle commented:

> *The Spark symbolises an effective marketing tool – a lot of people stare at you when you drive that car. Maybe they'll log in when they see our website. To me it means that cute spunky little thing – effective branding and* ***marketing*** *– it really works. I get asked questions when I drive that car. Even petrol attendants ask me questions when I fill up with petrol. They want to know where we're based and how long we've been around.*

Marketing efforts that were noted as requiring attention in 2012 were discussed in management meetings and included in documentation. One of these was the development of a pricing model so that there could be consistency in what was being provided to clients. Andrew commented that "The client is going to pick up on pricing inconsistencies and is not going to be happy. It could cause us problems." The devising of a sales pipeline tool to track and monitor client visits, proposals, follow-ups and sales was also raised and discussed in management meetings. As a result of the findings of a communication audit in 2012, ODC also expressed plans to develop and send a newsletter to clients and to update its website. Furthermore, the draft business development strategy review document included an increase in marketing efforts by incorporating a business development team in ODC, with the business development executive heading the team.

With regard to infrastructure and labour, ODC had infrastructure in place in the form of a wireless office, internet accessibility and equipment that provided the resources that staff needed to do their jobs efficiently. ODC had procured an automated labour planning tool that Nolene commented on in a management meeting: "I am now able to do something in a few hours that used to take me two to three days to do." At the staff meeting, Tim explained that ODC were also looking at developing more systems to simplify work processes that both head office and site staff could access and use. This infrastructure all contributed to ODC's ability to produce quicker, which would mean that it could take on more work and increase its profitability, contributing to its sustainability. However, Andrew stated that ODC lacked growth capital which could fund further development of infrastructure. He explained that he was setting up a company that could provide for the development of ODC's infrastructure through sourcing capital for ODC's growth.

ODC had experienced issues with sourcing the 'right' labour for their business. In 2008, independent consultants were used to assist on projects, but ODC limited this practise – Tim

commented that consultants "need to convey the flavour of the business, which is done better through internal staff". In 2012, all staff were permanent employees. ODC required a particular 'brand' of employee, as was disclosed in interviews with staff in 2008 and 2012 and explained by Tim in management and staff meetings in 2012. Comments included that when ODC recruits staff, the interview panel, which consisted of managers, looked for people who had similar values to those held by the company. The panel would try and identify these shared values and qualities in the interview process. Such values and qualities made it easier for staff to stay in the organisation. ODC had found that if a staff member was appointed and did not share ODC's values and qualities, the staff member usually determined that they should leave the company within the first few months of appointment – there was a "natural attrition". ODC experienced a high turnover of staff from 2011 to 2012 – Rachel commented that there had been seven resignations. Tracey's comment in 2008 rang true: she had stated in a staff meeting that as ODC grew (which it had in the period of 2008 to 2011), they could expect a higher staff turnover. This staff turnover impacted on the skills and knowledge that could be retained in the company and was a concern to Tim – he commented in a management meeting that ODC needed to "try [to] curb the loss of head office staff in the future" as they were responsible for designing solutions for clients.

With regard to legislation, the BEE Act included stipulations regarding employment equity. Most ODC head office staff were white. ODC had recruited black interns in 2012, in an effort to develop the skills it required in staff as well as have these appointments contribute to its BEE score. However, interns were not offered permanent employment as the area they functioned in was 'quiet' but also perhaps because the interns were not able to perform as required by ODC, which was an issue the company had experienced previously and Tim and other interview respondents commented on in 2008. When ODC did appoint black interns who performed well, they were often made offers by well-known, larger organisations and they would leave ODC.

Not only did ODC have to compete with larger companies in the market, they also had to compete with large companies for staff. Some staff who had resigned during 2009 to 2011 had been recruited by large mining clients. These companies were able to offer them better packages than ODC could. In 2012, two staff, who had previously been employed by large companies, commented that they would move to larger companies if the opportunity arose as their perception was that larger companies were 'safer'. One staff member commented that she knew her thinking was flawed as the size of a company did not determine how 'safe' a job was but added that in a large company staff

were less aware of the issues that impacted its sustainability. She added that in a smaller company "you are closer to the ground and more aware of what's happening, so you hear things and wonder how it's going to impact your job".

The social environment as a contributor to ODC's business sustainability was raised in management and staff meetings. The Marikana strike (which occurred in the latter part of 2012) was the focus of the discussion and staff voiced concerns at how the strike could spill over to other mines (which it later did). Apprehension was expressed by most staff about the violence of the strike and how this could impact the mining sector and investor confidence in South Africa, ultimately impacting on ODC's ability to conduct its business and thus its sustainability. Tim attempted to allay staff fears by stating that that was the reason ODC had multiple offerings – ODC were able to assist with 'ramp-ups' to shafts opening and retrenchments with shafts closing to accommodate investor sentiments.

Concerning the regulatory environment, ODC needed to consider two major impacts: the BEE Act and tax. ODC was BEE-complaint and had a level one rating in 2012 as a qualifying small enterprise. ODC's BEE Verification Certificate (which formed part of the company profile) stated that the four elements ODC was compliant in were ownership, management control, employment equity and socio-economic development. However, the BEE Act (discussed in Chapter Four) was under review in the last quarter of 2012 and amendments could impact ODC's BEE status. Amendments to the BEE Act proposed that companies earning between R10 and R50 million be classified as qualifying small enterprises and would need to comply with all five elements on the revised scorecard: ownership, management control, skills development, enterprise and supplier development, and socio-economic development. The criteria for these elements had also been amended. ODC would need to give attention to two elements it had not previously included on its scorecard: skills development, and enterprise and supplier development. If it did not, its level one BEE rating could be at risk. However, staff interviews in 2012 indicated that ODC's BEE status did not seem to be of concern to clients because of their niched offering and clients' need for this offering. It would be interesting to see how the amendments would contribute to supply-chain pressure and ODC's business in future.

ODC had a tax liability that it owed to the South African Revenue Service in 2012. Tim explained in the first management meeting of 2012 that the liability came about because only provisional tax

payments had been made for 2010 to 2011 and there was a shortfall in these payments. As a result, penalties and interest were charged on the outstanding amount. Tim was annoyed that ODC was in this position as he had trusted a director (who had resigned) to do the correct payments. She had not, and he had not kept a keen eye on the company's tax and payments. He commented in the meeting that, "You pay Uncle Pravin (Pravin Gordhan, the Minster of Finance) first, then God and then you take care of your family". If ODC had not been in a cash positive state, this tax liability could have been detrimental to its sustainability.

In addition to these external factors that impacted ODC's sustainability, there were internal factors of finance and management/leadership.

7.5.2 Internal factors

ODC's finances were generally prudently managed (with the exception of the tax liability) and conservatively run. Over both research periods, leaders explained that the business was run on a cash-positive basis with no debt or bad debts. In a management meeting and discussion with me in 2012, Tim scoffed at the idea of debt: "We keep our business cash positive. You don't want to run a business on debt – that's dangerous and you're asking for trouble". ODC had prior to its mining focus in 2008 worked with government departments, and experienced delays in payment and non-payment of invoices. The type of clients that ODC since dealt with contributed to them having good cash flow: mining clients had a reputation for paying in a timely manner, and invoices were managed to 45 days, that is, the finance department followed up on all invoices so that they were paid within 45 days. Some mining clients were international and paid in US dollars. ODC had an exchange rate write-off account to accommodate fluctuations in the Rand-Dollar exchange. With ODC wanting to expand its business operations globally, I thought that this account may need careful monitoring to ensure that written-off amounts would not negatively affect ODC's finances. In 2012, these amounts were negligible.

The nature of ODC's work was project-based and project management directly impacted its profitability. In 2008, ODC often raised the issue of 'scope creep' in staff and operational meetings as consultants would do more work than was proposed and invoiced for, and projects would over-run without a concomitant financial benefit to the company. In an attempt to prevent scope creep from taking place, Pamela commented on her role in 2008:

> *I manage staff from a business management point of view to ensure compliance and check the impact of going out of the boundaries so that we can make adjustments. Indirectly, I manage the client and staff so that they stick to the scope and delivery dates to deliver to the client as promised.*

In 2012, Tim, in the first management meeting, commented that scope creep still tended to be a problem, but "it's not as big a problem as it was previously". Nolene added that the pricing model they were developing would also help with managing scope creep as clients and consultants would be able to see exactly what clients were paying for and what would be delivered. The pricing model, Andrew added, would also assist in calculating what ODC's profit margins were as at that moment, ODC could determine turnover, but did not have a clear indication of what their profit per project was. In the same meeting, during the discussion on finances, managers discussed how projects tended to be extended but the extended scope of work would not be invoiced or would be incorrectly invoiced. This form of scope-creep also impacted ODC's finances, and so Tim appealed to the project, finance and business development managers to ensure that they communicated with each other concerning changes to the scope of work, offerings that were 'sold-on' to clients and which person at the client was responsible for signing-off purchase orders and invoices. "This is where we ran into problems previously, people", Tim continued. "It's when our departments aren't speaking to each other and so things fall through the cracks and affect our invoicing. We have to make sure that we are constantly speaking to each other about these things."

When ODC experienced financial turmoil, it "pulled back" in how the business operated. Tim explained that in one of the earlier recessions that ODC experienced, he reduced staff to four key people (three of whom were leaders in 2008), they let out ODC premises and they worked from their homes, ensuring they were available on phones. The other staff ODC had at that time were independent consultants who then looked for work elsewhere. When finances 'were tight' in 2010, Tim requested that if staff could afford to, that they take a cut in pay. Staff that could afford to do so stayed, while others looked for employment elsewhere. (This is likely to explain why I only recognised three people from 2008 when I referred to ODC in 2012). Concerning the tax liability that ODC had to pay in 2012, Tim stated that he would not pay dividends to shareholders as he was "not going to jeopardise the company and its staff".

The tax liability could have had a serious impact on ODC had it not been in a cash-positive position and possibly could have led to its downfall. To ensure that ODC did not repeat this experience, Tim ensured that he was more 'hands-on' in the financial affairs of the company. In addition, he and

Kevin investigated opening a separate interest-bearing bank account to keep tax money in, from which ODC would pay the South African Revenue Services.

Concerning management and leadership in ODC, apart from finances and projects, there were a number of internal practices that needed to be considered and/or managed, with their associated risks, for ODC to be sustainable. These practices included the management of people, knowledge, marketing, quality and governance. In addition, leadership of the company needed to be considered to ensure that ODC would continue in the event that Tim was absent.

In both 2008 and 2012, staff who participated in interviews (both periods) and focus groups (2012) commented that ODC required a particular type of person who 'fitted' the organisation. If new recruits did not fit, they would resign, resulting in a high staff turnover and the costs associated with replacing staff. Moreover, if these staff were trained in ODC's product and service offering and had experience consulting to clients, the knowledge and skills that they took with them negatively impacted the organisation's knowledge. ODC introduced group life cover in the latter part of 2012, which could be a benefit that would encourage staff to remain with the company. In 2012, Tim also stated that ODC would increase efforts to retain head office staff, but there was no discussion on how to do so.

In 2012, Tim commented that ODC would use "younger girls and systems to consult rather than older, expensive men". Although the "younger girls" were less expensive to employ, they would not hold the knowledge and skills that "older men" did, which could also negatively impact ODC's ability to deliver quality on its projects. Rachel also stated in her interview that sometimes clients would not receive "younger girls" well, but if they were introduced to the client by Tim, then the client would display more confidence in the "younger girls" as they trusted Tim.

Staff numbers fluctuated with the number of projects ODC had to deliver. This was a challenge to manage, Andrew explained in 2012, as ODC did not have sufficient people management structures and mechanisms in place. Rachel commented that because of this lack, staff could find loopholes. ODC had experiences where staff attempted to sabotage the company, but she did not feel comfortable disclosing the details of this. Although ODC required a certain type of person to 'fit' the organisation, it appeared that this was not always possible – not all staff, it seemed, held the

values of "fresh, smart, personal and **trusted**" and so people management structures and mechanisms were necessary.

The BEE Act was under review in the latter part of 2012 and changes to the Act could impact ODC's people management practices in that they could be required to employ more black staff. This is an aspect that ODC had historically had limited success with. Although Tracey contributed largely to ODC's compliance through her directorship and shareholding, she was no longer an employee of ODC and the risk existed that she could resign as a director and shareholder, negatively impacting ODC's level one status. ODC would need to review its BEE compliance both from the perspective of the amendments to the Act and contingency planning for Tracey's resignation.

With regard to knowledge management, ODC had systems in place such as the knowledge folder (discussed in Chapter Six). In order to retain staff and their knowledge, ODC proposed in a management meeting that if ODC sent staff on training and they resigned within one year of the training, they would need to repay ODC the cost of the training.

There was no evidence in 2012 that review sessions after project completion were implemented. In 2008, this practise had been initiated, but I wondered what happened to it. Avril commented that she "wasn't sure if these review sessions took place" while Rachel said that she would reflect on and review projects on her own during quiet periods, but this did not take place in the project teams. A collective or project team review session could contribute to knowledge of ODC. Teams could share their learning and experiences, review mistakes made and discuss how the project could be enhanced. Opportunities for 'sell-ons' could also be identified.

Relating both to knowledge and marketing, Tim commented in the staff meeting in 2012 that ODC's offering was so niched that they often had to educate clients before they were able to sell to them. This sharing of their knowledge could be a risk and clients could take the information to another consulting house and negotiate the provision of the offering from them, instead of ODC. Nolene suggested that ODC ask prospective clients to sign non-disclosure agreements when Tim or Andrew met with them for sales presentations. In a project meeting, Tim expressed his attitude to ODC sharing knowledge with clients as something that was needed:

> *There isn't enough of organisational development information out there – clients need this information. I don't consider sharing our knowledge as giving away our competitive advantage. What we need to discern is what our products are, and what knowledge is, so that we don't give away our products and our competitive advantage with that.*

In 2012 ODC was looking to expand into Africa, so that, as Andrew explained, "we can earn dollars and spread the risk of providing local services only. We'll expand geographically but stay in mining". In 2008, some staff expressed that they thought ODC should remain active in other industries and not focus solely on mining, but Tim responded to this and gave reasons for the focus on mining. ODC were looking actively to increase their marketing efforts by increasing the size of this team to support its expansion. Andrew was investigating ventures with a large, well-known consulting group as part of the expansion efforts. The risk of this could be that ODC would share its knowledge with the larger company, the partner would harness and incorporate this knowledge and ODC would become redundant. If ODC entered into such a venture, the relationship would have to be carefully monitored.

Quality was carefully managed in ODC through Tim being involved in project meetings. In both 2008 and 2012 I observed that Tim would sit in on project meetings with teams before they presented to clients. They would sometimes do a 'dummy run' and Tim would give his input and feedback and at other times they would work through a proposed solution with Tim. Tim was a hands-on manager. In 2012, ODC was designing a policies and procedures manual that was ISO-aligned. It was evident that ODC valued a quality offering, as in the words of Tim: "These are small things, but they all contribute to our sustainability".

Because ODC had been sustainable in the difficult years of recession between 2008 and 2012, ODC leaders were now looking to expand and grow the company. To do this, Tim and Andrew had started to implement corporate governance in 2012. Their first action was to implement a financial audit in early 2012 as, explained by Andrew: "it encourages investor confidence which is needed if ODC is to expand internationally". The result of this audit was the realisation of the tax liability and the subsequent resignation of Tracey, a director. "Oops!" I thought. "I would be hesitant to continue on this growth path. What else may pop out the woodwork?" I often wondered if my thoughts were shared by Tim.

Although he stated that he wanted to introduce corporate governance, Tim seemed to be self-sabotaging in his efforts. The communication audit had found that ODC needed systems and processes that encompassed status meetings, reporting and performance evaluation (ODC Communication audit, 2012) and Andrew commented that better management practises and structures were needed. Tim seemed to initiate such practises and structures, but did not carry through with them. For example, monthly management meetings were initiated in June 2012 and held in that month and July; there were no other management meetings for the rest of the year. Minutes of meetings were not distributed. In 2008, project review meetings were implemented, but these petered out. In 2008, performance appraisal interviews took place, but these were replaced with ongoing, informal performance discussions by the time the second research period started in 2012. Was Tim's self-disclosure at the staff meeting a contributing factor to this self-sabotage? During this meeting he said:

> *ODC is an off-shoot of me. We are never really going to change. I'm not going anywhere – I think I've proved that.*

Tim was stuck in the 'founder's trap'. He had shared that with me in conversations and with his staff and managers in meetings. His questionnaire responses disclosed that he was not focused on what he wanted to focus on in ODC. He commented that he was too operationally involved and Andrew noticed that this impacted negatively on his ability to think strategically about the future of ODC. In 2008, Tim noted that the founder's trap was likely to influence the growth of the company and he had mentioned then that he was looking for someone else to lead the company. Andrew explained in his research interview in 2012 that implementing a board of directors could encourage corporate governance, strategic thinking and enable the growth of the company on a high level, simultaneously assisting Tim to overcome the founder's trap. Tim had tried to hand over some responsibility to his management team and stated in the first management meeting that it was a proud moment for him. He saw the people around the table as his management team who could help ODC overcome the founder's trap and take the company forward in the event that anything should happen to him ("In case I get hit by the proverbial bus", he said). But he seemed to have difficulty letting go. Andrew had noticed it and I noticed it in some of Tim's language and actions. For example, Tim wanted the team to act as managers, but at many points instructed rather than guided them to solutions. I empathised with what Tim might be experiencing – it seemed that ODC was Tim's "baby". The "baby" had grown, but now needed to "walk on its own" - the time had come to let it go so that it could grow and develop independently. As with any parent, this "baby" was such

an intrinsic part of Tim that it was difficult to let go. Relating back to the metaphor of this study, it was time for the yacht to leave the harbour and set sail on the open sea, but the captain was reluctant to hand over the wheel.



As in sailing where a crew makes adjustments so that it can continue to sail upon different waters, turbulent or smooth, ODC was aware of the waters upon which it sailed and consciously attempted to accommodate these waters by making adjustments to its internal environment.

ODC was sustainable in its current form, largely owing to its niched offering. Staff members were aware of external and internal factors that impacted on ODC's sustainability and in some instances, Tim consciously attempted to address these, such as better financial management, increased marketing efforts, new product/service development and staff retention. However, ODC was at a point where it needed to commit to a growth strategy – Tim had been toiling with the idea for five years, and both he and Andrew had expressed the need to "up ODC's game". My question was now (which also related to the final research question), how could ODC grow in a sustainable manner and how could the facets of a learning organisation be corrected or strengthened to contribute to this?

7.6 How can facets of a learning organisation be corrected or strengthened in the organisation in order to contribute to its sustainability?

> Due to the nature and degree of client participation and interface required of the new era consulting organisation, ODC is a typical blueprint of Peter Senge's learning organisation, in particular as observed with the relationships that we form with our clients. ODC website (2012) – book extract on Knowledge page.

ODC viewed itself as a learning organisation and this sentiment was expressed by most staff in 2008 and 2012 – all but one in both research periods agreed that ODC was a learning organisation. For both research periods, the questionnaire scores for the various disciplines (Table 7.6, p299) indicated that staff agreed that ODC practised the learning disciplines and so was a learning organisation. Although scores dropped between the periods, these are negligible – all scores can be rounded to a value of 2, indicating that respondents 'agreed' that the disciplines were practised.

Table 7.6: Average scores for learning disciplines practised in ODC

Discipline	2008	2012
Personal mastery	1.7	1.9
Mental models	1.7	2.2
Building shared vision	1.6	2.2
Team learning	1.7	1.8
Systems thinking	1.6	1.8

Despite the lower scores for the five disciplines in 2012 (as indicated in Table 7.6 above), two of the three respondents who remained at ODC in 2012 commented that they experienced ODC as being more of a learning organisation, while Rachel stated ODC had stayed the same in terms of learning. Comments were:

> *Management has made it more of a learning organisation as they do not restrict ideas.* (Nolene)
> *The culture has made it more of a learning organisation because certain people have left.* (Tim)

Although this data indicates that staff agreed that ODC was a learning organisation and that all disciplines were practised, I observed that there was a stronger practice of personal mastery, and that building shared vision featured less frequently. Comments made in different forums in both research periods indicated a focus on personal mastery – staff were responsible for their own learning; they had to research and find information for themselves; they needed to take the initiative to ask questions to source information; and they had to identify their own learning needs. Personal mastery is the cornerstone of the learning organisation, which meant that this strong occurrence set ODC in good stead as a learning organisation.

Comments made frequently by various staff included a desire to build a shared vision. In both research periods, staff expressed that they wanted to know what was taking place in other areas of the business; what teams were working on and what they were learning; and in 2012 they wanted to contribute to the website and communication initiatives with clients. In 2008, meetings were open and all staff could attend these, irrespective of the nature of the project. In 2012, this practise seemed to have dwindled and was likely to contribute to an expression of the need to engage in building shared vision.

Table 7.7, adapted from Table 2.2 (p36), summarises data discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Six, providing an overview of the characteristics that ODC practised and the related learning disciplines. However, some staff had ideas on how to improve these characteristics. Their ideas, presented in Table 7.8 (p301), could assist with strengthening the learning disciplines and contribute to ODC being a learning organisation, and thus its sustainability.

Table 7.7: Characteristics of ODC reflecting disciplines of a learning organisation

Discipline	Characteristics reflecting the discipline demonstrated in the organisation
Personal mastery	• Positive reinforcement from role models/managers • Emphasis on feedback – through ongoing informal performance discussions • Balance between work and non-work life • Commitment to organisation and work • Able to deal with change • Able to face reality • Taking responsibility
Mental models	• Time for learning • Inquiry (a culture that encouraged questioning) • Flexibility/adaptability of people and the system • Little, if any, blaming of others • Looking for better ways of doing things • Dealing with difficult situations
Shared vision	• Participative openness • Trust • Empathy towards others • Co-operation is emphasized • A common language • Commitment to vision • Group trust
Team learning	• Participative openness • Building consensus • Creative thinking • Cohesiveness • Learning throughout the organisation • Engaging in dialogue
Systems thinking	• Little organisational conflict • Long-term improvement or change • Continuous learning

Table 7.8: Staff ideas to develop learning organisation characteristics and disciplines

Idea	Characteristic idea develops	Discipline that will be corrected or strengthened
• Leaders should encourage employees and teams to share their learning, information and experiences with others by setting up structures and processes, such as information-sharing sessions for staff to share these and formal learning plans for all staff. • Invite guest speakers to share their learning and experiences with the company. • Vary the responsibilities of staff on projects to broaden their learning and experience.	• Sharing experiences and information	• Personal mastery • Building shared vision
• There should be project review sessions after the completion of projects where teams share their learning and what could have been done differently/ improved.	• Reflective openness • Heightened collective learning	• Mental models • Team learning
• There should be communication sessions and touch-point meetings where staff can explain what they are working on, information they have come across, such as in the news, and where to find relevant information related to their work. • Staff should be encouraged to take lunch breaks together in a common pause area where they can share information informally.	• Effective communication flow throughout organisation – top-down, bottom-up	• Building shared vision • Team learning
• Two management meetings had taken place in 2012, but this practice needed to be sustained so that the meetings take place more regularly/monthly.	• Interaction time between supervisory levels	• Personal mastery

The two staff who disagreed that ODC was a learning organisation, one in 2008 and another in 2012, had similar explanations for their views. The reasons provided was that ODC did not have the formal structures and processes in place that would encourage a learning organisation to be practised, such as formal learning plans for all employees, and the incorporation of learning as a focus area in all aspects of the business, including in strategy documents and policies. In 2012, the comment was made that Tim was the variable that contributed to ODC being a learning organisation – he encouraged learning by setting the example of finding information and bringing it back to the company and he would focus on teaching everyone the skills that were needed in the

company. The comment made in 2008 was that learning was incidental and that individuals would take what they could in terms of learning from their experiences on projects: "There's no overall plan of learning and design and no structure set up for learning experiences", Tina said.

It appeared that these two staff had a view of a learning organisation that included formal structures and processes, whereas other staff experienced ODC as a learning organisation in an informal, "organic" way – comments were that ODC was a learning organisation because of the way that teams worked; learning was an inherent characteristic of their jobs and one could not help but learn. As one interviewee said, "We have to learn to be part of the company; it's the nature of what we do".

7.7 Conclusion



My journey aboard the ODC had come to an end. With the yacht tied to the harbour dock, I sat on the deck and looked out at the stillness of the water, which looked like glass. I looked down and saw my reflection and the reflection of the boat and considered if the reflections had changed over the two research periods of 2008 and 2012. The yacht's reflection had changed, but not much…

This chapter presented the findings related to the first research question of the facets of a learning organisation reflected in ODC in 2012. Findings for the second and third research questions in both 2008 and 2012 were also presented, namely what sustainability meant in the context of ODC and how the facets of a learning organisation could be corrected or strengthened in ODC to contribute to its sustainability.

The leader, Tim, and ODC's culture still encouraged learning. However, there were more demands on Tim as leader and owner-manager and he had less support with the resignations of Pamela and Tracey, his co-leaders in 2008.

ODC was a sustainable entity and its members in both 2008 and 2012 viewed it as thriving into the future. However, some changes were needed in terms of its structures and processes in order for it

to grow and expand internationally. Enablers for this growth had been identified by ODC, but these would need attention to ensure the intended growth.

Staff had suggestions on how to correct or strengthen facets of ODC to contribute to it as a learning organisation and to its sustainability. These suggestions related to the learning disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision and team learning. Additional suggestions are discussed in Chapter Eight.

ODC demonstrated the ability to incorporate the learning theories which contributed to the development of the learning disciplines in its practise. By implementing various learning theories, ODC demonstrated they were able to develop the learning disciplines in a variety of ways.

ODC demonstrated a strong ability to engage in systems thinking in both 2008 and 2012 – staff were knowledgeable about ODC's system and were responsive to it. This assisted ODC to be sustainable. It became evident to me why Senge stated that systems thinking was the umbrella for the learning disciplines (1990) – systems thinking needs to practised in order for all disciplines to be practised; they are interrelated; and without systems thinking, organisations are less likely to be sustainable as an awareness of and responsiveness to all aspects of the system encourages the disciplines to be practised and the sustainability of organisations.

The comment made in 2008 that "there isn't time to chat about realities and those sorts of things" still rang true - project review meetings did not appear to take place frequently and there was limited, or little, communication across the company. The lack of these aspects could impact the learning that could take place in ODC and was something that needed attention. Another factor that could impact ODC as a learning organisation was the move to the new premises – the layout of the premises was different to the Midrand premises, with most staff having offices, some shared by two people, and an open-plan space that was largely uninhabited. Spaces and shapes have the potential to influence learning (Fenwick, 2010a) and it would be interesting to see the influence that the spaces and shapes in the new premises could have on ODC as a learning organisation. (Refer to Appendix J for images of the new office).



The final chapter, Chapter Eight, will bring my journey to a conclusion, with one final examination of the yacht and the journey before disembarking, looking at conclusions of the study and recommendations for ODC, while answering the research question of how the concept of a learning organisation is taken up in a small company. How my reflection had changed in the water (my thinking) is also discussed.

CHAPTER 8:
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – *HOW TO SAIL WITH EASE…*

My voyage aboard ODC had come to an end. We were docking in the harbour and I was about to disembark. It was time to make sense of what I had discovered concerning the vessel, its crew and its sustainability. My role moved from being a participant on board the vessel back to harbour-master. In order to make a comprehensive assessment, I looked back at the different stages of my journey and overviewed the course we charted. There had been some changes in crew and the expedition had navigated rough and varied waters, with the vessel continuing to sail. Although the vessel was small, it had been able to manoeuvre through the waters, all the while gauging what was taking place in the environment. ODC had managed to navigate the waters of uncertainty. The question to be answered now was: Did ODC's learning contribute to its sustainability?



This chapter commences with a summary of the study, in the form of an overview of the previous chapters. This is followed by a discussion of the findings of the research with conclusions related to data analysis (from Chapters Six and Seven) and recommendations drawn from these conclusions. Reflection is a key part of research and is included in this chapter with regard to the theory of a learning organisation and sustainability; what the theory meant for ODC; and the research design and methods that were used. The chapter ends with conclusions and recommendations for further study.

8.1 Summary and overview of chapters

Chapter One was an introduction to the study and introduced the research problem, which posed the issue of whether by being a learning organisation a small organisation could sustain itself in a rapidly changing environment. The aim of the research was to establish whether a small company in South Africa practiced the learning disciplines of Senge's learning organisation model (1990) and how these practices contributed to the sustainability of the company. The main research

question was: How can a small company ensure its sustainability? The research questions that contributed to answering this question were:

1. What facets of a learning organisation are reflected in the company?
2. What does sustainability mean in the context of the small company?
3. How can facets of a learning organisation be corrected or strengthened in the company?

The rationale and significance of the study was included in Chapter One, highlighting that the study considered a business notion of sustainability and linked it to a focus on learning in the context of a small organisation. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa experience one of the highest failure rates in the world yet they employ a large portion of the population and contribute significantly to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product. There is a need for SMEs to be sustainable entities, which they appear not to be. The study focused on concepts of sustainability, the learning organisation, adult learning and how these were interlinked to ensure organisations were sustainable.

The context of the study was provided in Chapter One and the chapter briefly discussed the small organisation, ODC, the research focus. This company consisted of seventeen staff at the outset of the study in 2008 and at the end of the study in 2012, there were ten head office employees. ODC operated from offices in Midrand, Gauteng. It was an organisational design and development consultancy and consulted to the mining industry. When the study commenced, the commodities stock markets were performing well, but during the study the global credit crisis occurred with markets crashing and businesses experiencing the negative impact of this on their ability to trade. On my return to the company in 2012, ODC, with the rest of South Africa, was navigating a recession.

The theoretical framework of the study included the five disciplines of Senge's learning organisation – personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. These disciplines have learning theories embedded in them. These were explored in depth in Chapter Three.

Chapter Two provided a conceptual framework of the study that expanded on Senge's view of a learning organisation as well as others' concepts of a learning organisation. The chapter considered

how the concept of a learning organisation could be taken up in a small organisation (or company) and examined the concepts of 'learning' and 'the learning organisation' within a South African context. Senge's (1990) disciplines of the learning organisation were reviewed as well as other factors that contribute to organisations being learning ones. Senge's model was critiqued and the evolution of his model was tracked.

Chapter Three provided a critical review of the theoretical framework of the learning organisation, related to the various adult learning theories inherent in the learning disciplines. This discussion included the theories of cognitivism; constructivism; self-directed learning; experiential learning; single-, double- and triple-loop learning and communities of practice. Workplace learning theories were also discussed, which included Activity Theory/Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Complexity Theory. It was evident that Senge's (1990) learning disciplines are grounded in a strong theoretical base. This chapter discussed whether by applying the learning theories, organisations could ensure that the disciplines of a learning organisation were practised.

Chapter Four reviewed literature related to the sustainability of small companies in South Africa and considered the impact of external and internal factors, such as economic, market, infrastructure and labour, social, regulatory, financial, and leadership and management. Developing the sustainability of a small company in the face of the challenges presented by these factors was discussed, including the development of the company as a learning organisation. Obstacles to developing the learning organisation were presented with a discussion of enablers to overcome the obstacles.

Chapter Five presented the research design. This chapter began with reflection on the "researcher as instrument" and the influence that the researcher had on the research process, with regard to philosophical assumptions about education and research. It included a discussion of the research paradigm and the ethnographic case study approach used, with a description of the methodology, data collection and data analysis methods. The scope, limitations and assumptions made concerning the research design were covered in this chapter. Ethical considerations and issues of validity and reliability are important matters in any research and were included in this chapter. As the study was an ethnographic case study, attention was also given to how to write data using this approach.

Chapters Six and Seven presented the research findings in the two research periods in 2008 and 2012, respectively. These chapters included descriptions of how data was collected and what was apparent in ODC during the research periods. Chapter Six examined the learning disciplines that were evident in ODC in 2008. Chapter Seven presented findings on the learning disciplines in 2012 and continued with findings concerning the sustainability of ODC and how the facets of a learning organisation could be strengthened over both research periods.

8.2 Discussion of findings



My time aboard the ODC had revealed some interesting data. I now needed to look at the data related to the research questions in order to answer them. My findings, based on data collection, analysis and interpretation of Chapters Six and Seven, were interesting…

8.2.1 What facets of a learning organisation are reflected in the company?

The data gathered indicated that ODC practised the facets of a learning organisation – there was evidence of the disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking being practised in both research periods of 2008 and 2012. In addition, ODC displayed leadership and a culture that encouraged learning.

The culture of ODC could be described as being a learning one and staff viewed learning as being intrinsic to their work. The Managing Director displayed servant-leadership qualities and this may have contributed to a strong focus on learning in the organisation.

ODC used an eclectic range of learning methods and strategies that were consistent with various learning theories, as discussed in Chapter Three. The use of these methods and strategies could be a contributing factor to its ability to practice the learning disciplines. ODC did not require the expertise of a consultant to implement these theories. Staff appeared to employ these theories unconsciously during their daily course of work and activities.

ODC naturally employed the theory of communities of practice in most of their dealings, as discussed in Chapter Seven. The theory discussed in Chapter Three demonstrated that a community of practice contributes to the development of all the learning disciplines of Senge's model. A naturally strong use of this theory is likely to have contributed to ODC's ability to implement the learning disciplines.

ODC did not place itself as a learning organisation in its documentation, except for the book extract on its website 'Knowledge' page (discussed in Chapter Seven). However, it appeared to be successful in implementing and managing the learning disciplines reinforcing that "organisations may not even use the terms learning organisation (and knowledge management) for one reason or another but they may still be very successful in implementing and managing the principles on which these disciplines are based" (Loermans, 2002, p285). ODC appeared to implement these principles organically as there was no set focus on practising the disciplines.

8.2.2 What does sustainability mean in the context of the small company?

ODC was acutely aware of the factors that impacted its sustainability. Sustainability, in the context of ODC, meant the ability of the company to survive into the future, through adapting to the environment in which it operated. As such, ODC viewed itself as being adaptive to the environment and regularly surveyed the environment to ensure that it responded appropriately. This ability to be adaptive could be understood as the ability to learn and could be seen in ODC's ability to employ double- and triple-loop learning. ODC engaged in double-loop learning when they challenged the status quo and considered alternatives outside of the organisational framework (as discussed in Chapters Three and Seven). Triple-loop learning was evident when ODC analysed the core values from which it operated and changed the way it operated when it went through its branding exercise, displaying the capacity to 'reinvent' itself in order to remain relevant and sustainable (discussed in Chapter Seven).

ODC viewed the two factors of marketing and managing finances as major contributors to its sustainability. ODC was able to sustain operations through the recession that followed the global credit crisis in 2008 owing largely to the role of marketing. The directors were mostly responsible for surveying the environment, with the capital projects manager, continually looking for opportunities for more business on clients' sites, where she was based. She would feed this information back to Andrew, who would pursue new business. ODC emphasised the role of

marketing above all other factors as the main driver (or "spearhead") of gaining new business in 2012. They were aware of external factors of economic, market, infrastructure and labour, social, and regulatory factors and internal factors of finance and leadership and management, but viewed marketing as key to sustainability. That ODC continued to function as a learning organisation over the period is likely also to be a contributing factor to sustainability.

The managing director, Tim, was able to move between the roles of leader as teacher, designer and steward, which also assisted with ODC's sustainability. Although ODC experienced a large tax liability to the South African Revenue Services in 2012, it was in a position to resolve this liability because of its cash positive position. As owner-manager with many demands placed on him, Tim may not have been able to give all aspects of the business sufficient attention, but his stewardship over finances and operating the business "cash positive", without debt, contributed to it being sustainable through the recession and the tax liability.

Between 2008 and 2012, some people had left the organisation (whom the managing director referred to as having 'large personalities' that needed to be managed, as described in Chapter Seven) and this appeared to have had a bearing on ODC's culture. The environment appeared friendlier with more communication taking place in the open office area and staff participating actively in conversations and learning from them. This free information-sharing most likely assisted with the systems thinking of staff, making them aware of elements in their environment and how to deal with them, thus encouraging a proactive and planned approach to dealing with issues.

Other factors that are likely to have contributed to ODC's sustainability are its focus on quality assurance, where products and solutions were internally reviewed by the managing director before they were presented to clients; consultants being able to access information and learning through the 'knowledge' folder on ODC's computer server; the marketing tactic of greeting clients on their birthdays and giving them gifts, which helped to keep the ODC brand in the minds of clients; and ODC's ability to develop innovative ways of doing business through developing automated systems to speed up the delivery and standardisation of quality of its products.

Although ODC was a sustainable entity, there were threats to its sustainability. These threats were related to ODC's market, governance, staffing and the South African legislative environment.

ODC operated in the volatile South African climate that often experienced labour unrest on mines, which impacted the need for ODC's product and service offering. ODC's offering was niched but required that clients were educated to understand how specialised ODC's offering was. ODC needed to increase its opportunities to educate clients and make them aware of its offering so that it could be called upon by clients when needed. In 2012, ODC was investigating drafting a newsletter to clients in order to inform and educate them about ODC's offering and other relevant human resource issues in mining.

ODC intended to expand internationally and needed capital to do so. An avenue identified as supplying the capital was investors. However, in order to secure investor funding, ODC would need to implement corporate governance. The managing director, Tim, seemed tentative in implementing governance structures and this could be interpreted as self-sabotaging. For example, he started initiatives but would not always carry them through as he intended, such as monthly management meetings, and developing a pricing model within a stated period of time (as discussed in Chapter Seven).

With regard to staffing, ODC's staff complement had changed over the two research periods. In 2008, there was a mixture of mature and younger staff, but in 2012 staff tended to be young with little experience in mining. ODC experienced a high turnover of staff. Staffing presented a threat to ODC's sustainability. Tim, the managing director, stated that the retention of head office staff was important and that ODC needed to look at ways to ensure this. ODC perhaps needed to look at employing more mature staff with experience in mining to add credibility to ODC's offering. If the latter type of staff member presented to a client, the client may have more confidence in ODC's offering. Alternatively, more mature staff could be employed to work together with younger staff who were well-schooled in ODC's methodology. In this way there could be a coupling of abilities and the one could learn from the other. This shared learning could contribute to ODC's offerings and its sustainability.

In 2008, ODC had a 'women-in-mining' champion in Lee-Anne. However, Lee-Anne resigned and the 'women-in-mining' project dwindled. This was a potential offering for ODC as, according to the managing director, very little was being done in this area in South Africa. In order to ensure the continuity of projects, ODC could vest these in teams rather than in individuals so as to ensure that if a member resigned, the knowledge of the project would not leave with them, too.

ODC was a small company that was founder-managed. This presented a challenge for succession planning as the managing director, Tim, was intrinsically entwined in the business and it would be difficult to replace him. It could be a difficult task to find the 'right person' to succeed Tim. There was also a challenge to Tim to let go of control when this happened. Tim was still relatively young and had a number of years ahead of him at the helm. However, when the time came for him to retire or step aside, ODC would need a new captain or leadership team, as knowledgeable about the business as Tim in order for it to be sustainable.

In addition, Tim lacked a critical friend in ODC which could hamper his strategic thinking ability as he and Andrew observed (discussed in Chapter Seven). As owner-manager, it was easy to become too involved operationally in the business (discussed in Chapter Four) and the lack of a 'critical friend' could lead to lessening Tim's strategic thinking ability, which, in turn, could have an impact on ODC's sustainability.

8.2.3 How can facets of a learning organisation be corrected or strengthened in the company?

As ODC practised the facets of a learning organisation, they did not need to be corrected, but could be strengthened. Chapter Seven included staff views on strengthening ODC as a learning organisation, which included staff sharing information and experiences, having project review sessions after each project, having lunch together to facilitate the sharing of information, and monthly management meetings taking place as planned (that is, on a monthly basis). Furthermore, forums for creating new ideas could be set up and staff could also be given opportunities to give input into company strategies. Including their contributions for updating ODC's website was a good starting point. These ideas could contribute to the strengthening of the five disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking (due to their interconnectedness and dependencies).

Some staff stated that formal structures and processes could be put in place that would encourage a learning organisation to be practised, such as formal learning plans for all employees, and the incorporation of learning as a focus area in all aspects of the business, including in strategy documents and policies.



I sighed and sat back on the deck and gave the vessel a final 'once-over'. The research questions had been answered – I had completed what I had set out to do. ODC was a learning organisation that practised the disciplines in a natural, 'organic' manner. ODC viewed learning as important, but not as the main factor contributing to its sustainability. These factors were marketing and managing finances.

ODC could strengthen some facets of being a learning organisation, which could improve its practise of the five disciplines. Systems thinking is the umbrella of the five disciplines. This aspect is closely related to sustainability. ODC was aware of the internal and external factors impacting its system. By continuing its systems thinking focus and strengthening certain facets, ODC could ensure its sustainability.

I turned my gaze towards the ocean and looked at where we were now docked. I saw the reflection of the vessel in the water and then my own reflection. It was time to consider what I had learnt on this journey.



8.3 Reflections

The study provided much "wind for the sails". As I reflected, I uncovered insights from my journey related to three aspects. These were reflections on the theory of a learning organisation; reflections on what the theory meant for the organisation's (ODC) practice; and reflections on the research design and methods.

8.3.1 Reflections on theory

Different organisations, entities or individuals may hold varying definitions of what a learning organisation is, which are likely to differ from Senge's (1990). Senge's view of a learning organisation is

> where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. (Senge, 1990, p3)

ODC did not hold the same understanding of a learning organisation that Senge (1990) did. ODC viewed learning as something that was ongoing and occurred on a daily basis during the course of

work. Staff saw themselves as "learning all the time". This view of learning contributed to a different understanding of the term "learning organisation". This does not mean that ODC was any less of a learning organisation, just that they were a learning organisation with a different understanding of the term to Senge. However, ODC practised the learning disciplines and so could be seen to be a learning organisation as described by Senge.

How staff view their organisation also impacts on whether they perceive it to be a learning organisation. If staff view their organisation as a site of learning (Rogers, 2003) as discussed in Chapter Two, then they are also likely to view it as a learning organisation. Staff referred to ODC as being an (informal) site of learning where formalised learning (in the form of workshops or presentations) and acquisition (task-oriented) learning took place, and thus most viewed it as being a learning organisation.

The concept of Senge's (1990) learning organisation could be seen to be reverential, utopian and idealistic as there are no real measures included in this model – organisations do not know when they have become, or are a learning organisation. Senge's model calls for a different way of thinking, one that supersedes traditional thinking with its focus on the bottom line. Many organisations may be challenged by this thinking and have difficulty with the approach taken to develop a learning organisation – there is no chart and the learning organisation is a continuous journey, rather than a destination or the attainment of a goal; like sailing on the ocean and using the environment (wind and waves) to assist in directing the course, with Senge's model acting as a compass.

Organisations are likely to have difficulty with Senge's model and possibly think of the disciplines as a noble ideal, and may not spend time on developing these. Organisations are more likely to follow a model that has definite measures in place as indicators: "When you are doing this, you are a learning organisation". My study attempted to provide a measure through the questionnaire. I am uncertain if I did Senge's model justice in so doing, but I used the measures to indicate the disciplines that were being used by ODC in an attempt to assist ODC with its journey and provide insight into how it might develop sustainability. I experienced a similar challenge as do most researchers, I am sure, in trying to assess whether the research site was on the journey of a learning organisation, and if so, how I would know.

Senge's model is, in itself, challenging, encouraging people to go to places they may not traditionally go, even as individuals, making it more difficult to do so in groups, teams or organisations. In order to 'go to these places', the model needs three aspects: critical reflection, trust and time. Organisation members need to develop critical reflection (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, in Mezirow & Associates, 1990). Trust between organisation members is also needed, and this impacts the development of critical thinking – if members are not able to trust each other, there is little chance of them exposing their thinking to one another so that it may be examined. Both of these aspects need time in order for them to be developed. Time is something that organisations are hard pressed for. The saying "slow down to go fast" is one that comes to mind – if organisations take time to develop trust and reflect critically, they may find that their business operates more efficiently as a result, contributing to the bottom line.

The role of leadership and culture is emphasised in Senge's model. Leaders have a large role to play in determining organisational culture. If the leadership does not encourage learning, then learning efforts will fail. It is important to have "learning leaders" to pursue the development of a learning organisation. ODC had Tim, the managing director, as a learning leader, which also contributed to the staff's views of ODC as a learning organisation.

The five disciplines of a learning organisation are distinct yet interlinked, meaning that if one discipline is practised it should lead to the development of the other disciplines. In 2008, I observed that some disciplines were practised and emphasised more frequently than others. For example, personal mastery was evident in many instances. However, in 2012, I found that the disciplines were fluid and interlinked and it was often difficult to identify which discipline was being practised, due to their mergence. I am not sure if this was about me or ODC. Perhaps I was better able to see how the disciplines were related in an instance that I was observing in 2012, whereas in 2008, I was more focused on pinpointing a certain discipline. Or perhaps it could be that ODC was indeed more focused on practising a certain discipline in 2008, but in 2012, staff practised the disciplines more holistically and did not refer to a single discipline.

Chapter Three emphasises the role of the facilitator in designing a learning organisation and implementing the learning theories that could develop a learning organisation. However, I did not see the role of the facilitator as being important in ODC – staff were able to employ learning theories in various contexts and the related learning disciplines were evident. What is perhaps more

important than a facilitator is having a "learning leader" that encourages staff to learn and who is able to create a learning culture.

Being a small business owner-manager in the volatile South African mining industry places many demands on this person as leader. There are many factors to be aware of and contend with, and the response of many small businesses is to focus on surviving rather than growing. South African legislation is also experienced by many owner-managers as restrictive rather than enabling, as discussed in Chapter Four. With SMEs contributing vastly to the South African economy, legislation could possibly be reviewed to assist these companies to have an increased chance of being sustainable.

8.3.2 Reflections on implications of theory for the organisation's practice

The learning organisation concept employs various learning theories, as discussed in Chapter Three. Cognitivism is a learning theory that seemed to be embedded in ODC as it features in the company's methodology. Cognitivism has the focus of learning as an individual meaning-making process. Senge's model of a learning organisation makes use of the social constructivist view of learning, where meaning-making is considered to be shaped by the context, culture and tools in the learning situation (Gravett, 2005). My view in 2008 was that ODC's understanding of learning from the viewpoint of cognitivism largely influenced their practice of the disciplines – the discipline of personal mastery was practised frequently, and this discipline relies on individual meaning-making. The disciplines of mental models, building shared vision and team learning require a social constructivist perspective of learning for the disciplines to be practised and these were practised less frequently in 2008.

However, in 2012, this focus on personal mastery was less apparent and all disciplines were equally evident. This could be because the culture of ODC was described by some staff as being different. Some staff members had resigned and this influenced the culture of ODC. Staff may have become more team-focused, and so the disciplines of mental models, building shared vision and team learning were more apparent.

Critical reflection is a skill that should be developed in all ODC organisation members as this skill underpins all the disciplines. If this skill is developed, ODC may be inclined to participate in reflective sessions as teams, where they can review projects and identify learning and improvement

points. The development of this skill can be encouraged by matching organisation members with critical friends, for example mentors or coaches. Through having critical friends, organisation members can be encouraged to engage in self-directed, collaborative, transformative, action and generative learning, and so all learning disciplines could be strengthened.

Self-directed learning contributes to the discipline of personal mastery. In 2008, ODC had the practise of appointing subject matter experts as learning points, or containers of knowledge. In 2012, staff recognised who 'containers of knowledge' were if they needed information on certain aspects. If each organisation member is recognised as a subject matter expert, this can contribute to their personal mastery and encourage them to engage in self-directed learning, in an effort to become "more of an expert". However, if only certain staff members are recognised as subject matter experts, this can lead to a breakdown in teamwork and trust, as this practice may be misconstrued as a measure for competition.

Experiential learning and action learning were seen in the context of teams in ODC and teams were designed according to the learning needs and strengths of team members. ODC could ensure that the teams were comprised of activists, reflectors, theorists and pragmatists (Honey & Mumford, 1982) so that the action learning cycle could be completed through the roles that team members played. In order to develop the practice of critical reflection, the reflectors in the teams could be given more voice in forums so that they could lead others to develop skills they have and to ensure that the action learning cycle is completed.

In order to give more attention to all stages of action learning (an approach that Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross and Smith (1994) attribute to developing a learning organisation – discussed in Chapter Three), ODC may need to employ more staff who are reflectors and theorists in their learning styles. ODC seemed to have many pragmatists, who were able to plan, and activists, who were able to implement the plans. Reflectors, who considered past experiences and new ideas, and theorists, who were able to understand reflectors and make connections between experience and reflection would ensure that all stages of the action learning cycle were visited.

In 2008, I was concerned at how infrequently ODC practised double-loop/generative learning as this approach helps to identify mental models at play. However, in 2012 ODC demonstrated its ability to engage in double- and triple-loop learning. For example, when Andrew questioned the

way ODC conducted sales meetings and the documentation that was used (discussed in Chapter Seven), double-loop learning took place. The branding exercise that ODC went through in 2008 indicated that they were capable of triple-loop learning. With ODC indicating that they wanted to expand internationally and include corporate governance, they may need to employ triple-loop learning again.

ODC's documentation and artefacts included its espoused theories. ODC's practice reflected these theories, indicating that they were "in-use". For example, the 2008 documentation discussed in Chapter Six and the values cabinet discussed in Chapter Seven. By including references to all disciplines in their documentation and artefacts, ODC could strengthen the practise of the disciplines.

With regard to sustainability, ODC had a similar understanding of the term as the definition used in this study, that is, corporate, or business, sustainability refers to a company's ability to generate long-term value through mutually beneficial relationships with its stakeholders, that is, sustainability may be viewed as the longevity, or survival, of an organisation (adapted from Zegarowski, 2006).

In order to ensure their longevity, the theory in the literature included the following points. These points are commented on in relation to ODC's practice, with comments in red highlighting aspects that needed attention in ODC and if practised, could contribute to its sustainability.

Table 8.1: Strategies for sustainability

Practise	Comments in relation to ODC's practice
An awareness of external and internal environmental factors and their influence on the organisation.	All staff reflected this awareness, especially Tim (managing director) and Andrew (director).
Have a market offering (products and services) that allows for various economic climates and a culture that is able to adapt to the demands of a changing environment in order to secure its long-term competitive advantage.	ODC had different offerings for 'Brownfields' and 'Greenfields'.

An awareness of competition and their offering.	Staff were aware of who their competition was and Andrew regularly surveyed the environment for competitors.
Give sufficient attention to marketing.	ODC employed a business development executive particularly for this function who met frequently with the managing director.
Have consistency in the quality and pricing of products and services.	ODC had a strong quality focus but were working on a pricing model in 2012 to eradicate inconsistencies in this.
Have access to resources through forming partnerships with large companies.	ODC had not been successful in these efforts as small businesses in South Africa compete in the same markets with large businesses. The business development executive was investigating a partnership with a large international company at the time of this study.
Be aware of partnerships with large companies – ensure that both parties (large and small companies) are sufficiently protected by the partnership agreement and that the relationship is monitored.	Not applicable in ODC at this point, but an alert in the event of such a partnership.
Look for opportunities to communicate with clients and network in the market.	ODC planned a client newsletter in 2012. The business development executive looked for opportunities to network with clients through conferences, meetings and seminars.
Source and retain the correct level of staff with the required skills, knowledge and attitudes.	ODC experienced a high staff turnover and was investigating methods to retain head office staff. Staff tended to be young and inexperienced in mining, impacting negatively on their skill and knowledge level. More mature staff with experience in the mining sector should be recruited to develop young staff.
Operate in the confines of regulations, ensuring that, for example, tax is paid as due.	ODC became aware of a tax liability in 2012. Fortunately, it was able to resolve the liability and still remain afloat.
Ensure BEE-compliance (compliance with the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act) to alleviate supply-chain pressure.	This Act had been amended. ODC would need to revisit its compliance measures in order to retain its BEE Level 1 rating.
Manage finances prudently, ensuring there is sufficient cash flow.	ODC operated its business ‘cash positive’.

Employ staff or management team to alleviate some business management pressure from the owner-manager with regard to people, risk, marketing, quality, knowledge, finances and projects.	ODC identified a senior management team in 2012 to assist with these aspects. Management meetings with this team to develop skills and awareness of these issues needed to continue on a monthly basis as planned.
Ensure that sufficient time is given to strategic discussion, be it with the senior management team or board of directors.	ODC needed to ensure that strategic meetings took place and that these did not become operationally focused.
Implement a board of directors/corporate governance to assist with the growth and development of the organisation.	ODC was investigating this approach at the time of research in 2012.
Develop a culture of relationships of trust in the organisation and with stakeholders.	ODC had such relationships and lived their value of 'trust'.
Develop a culture of environmental awareness where all staff are in touch with the environment.	ODC largely left this responsibility to Tim, the managing director, and Andrew. If this culture was developed, more staff could assist in identifying opportunities in the market for Andrew to pursue.
Nurture the principles that underpin the concept of a learning organisation.	ODC naturally seemed to do this. They needed to continue with their current practices.
Ensure that the company's brand or reputation is positive so that the company is viewed as a favourable business partner.	ODC underwent a branding exercise during 2008 and found that its reputation was positive.

Although the managing director, Tim, displayed many servant-leader characteristics, which possibly assisted in ODC being a learning organisation, he sometimes displayed an autocratic approach (the hard line taken with kitchen and toilet cleanliness as described in Chapter Seven). Tim also found himself in the "founders-trap", which he was trying to escape. If he was mindful of his autocratic tendencies and his desire to develop the management team (as discussed in Chapter Seven), by adjusting his approach, he should be able to move out the "founders-trap" and allow ODC to continue to sail with someone else at the helm.

In order to strengthen the facets of a learning organisation, ODC could continue to encourage its learning culture. Aspects of a learning culture with examples from ODC are displayed in Table 8.2.

Once again, comments in red highlight aspects that need attention in ODC, and if practised, could contribute to enhancing its learning culture.

Table 8.2: Practises that encourage a learning culture in ODC

Practise	Where/How observed
There is a future, external orientation concerning the organisation's environment in which senior teams take time to think about the future (strategic), and external sources and advisors are used, for example customers may be included in planning teams.	A branding exercise, conducted by an independent branding company, took place during 2008, where external sources were consulted. In 2012, a senior management team was identified, but discussions in these meetings needed to be more strategic than operationally-focused.
There is a free exchange and flow of information – systems are in place to encourage the flow of information and individuals are able to network across organisational boundaries to develop their knowledge and expertise.	ODC included knowledge sharing sessions in staff meetings; had project meetings open to all staff in 2008; a knowledge folder on its computer server. However, some staff expressed that there was a need for information sharing across the organisation in 2008 and 2012.
There is commitment to learning and personal development with support from top management, rewards for learning and where time is set aside for thinking and learning (understanding, exploring, reflecting, developing) (Mason, 2007).	Time is set aside for training; subject matter experts were identified in 2008 and referred to in 2012. There was less emphasis on reflection as a team activity – most staff did this individually. Team reflection can lead to enhanced learning.
People are valued and their ideas, creativity and experimentation are encouraged, used and developed.	Observed in project meetings when feedback was given by the managing director to the team. Staff commented that they felt valued.
There is a climate of openness and trust - diversity is recognised and views are challenged.	Observed in team and management meetings. Staff commented that they experienced the climate as being open and one of trust.
Learning from experience is encouraged and recognised; mistakes and failure are not punished but tolerated because of the lessons learnt from them.	Staff commented that this was their experience in ODC.

To further develop the learning disciplines in ODC, suggested strategies discussed in Chapter Four can be consulted. Within the context of ODC, organisation members could collectively decide which strategies are most suited to them, but my recommendation would be the following:

Table 8.3: Suggested strategies to strengthen the disciplines of a learning organisation in ODC

Learning discipline	Suggested strategies to strengthen discipline
Systems thinking	• Engage in simulations of real-world problems to determine the impact of actions on the system
Building shared vision	• Hold organisation-wide meetings with all members present on an ongoing basis • Allow members to share what really matters to them and be heard – by leaders and other members • Allow mentoring to take place – formal and informal • Include and vary check-ins and check-outs at meetings
Mental models	• Engage in scenario planning – members describe plausible futures of the organisation and reveal their views of the world • Engage in learning labs – where members share their attitudes and beliefs, to allow others to point out these attitudes and beliefs, causing members to examine their mental models • Encourage job rotation to reveal mental models
Personal mastery	• Allow members to share and clarify their personal visions • Relate learning to members' visions
Team learning	• Provide conditions for dialogue to take place • Have a skilled facilitator to guide dialogue, ensuring that the focus is kept

As ODC is a learning organisation, there does not appear to be an explicit need for it to engage a change process to strengthen the disciplines it is practising. However, the stages of change and corresponding disciplines from Chapter Four can be used as a guide to assist ODC in further transitioning, as indicated in Table 8.4.

Table 8.4: The change process at an organisational and learning discipline level

Stage	Organisational change	Learning discipline to be introduced
1	Awareness of change process	Systems thinking
2	Creating a shared mindset	Building shared vision
3	Changing behaviour	Mental models
4	Building competencies, practices, attitudes	Personal mastery
5	Improving business performance	Team learning

Adapted from Kets De Vries (2001).

In addition, ODC leaders (directors and managers) could:

- Motivate the reason/s for pursuing the disciplines of a learning organisation, and this reason should touch the head and the heart (appeal to logic and emotion)
- Ensure that the change process is facilitated and be aware of resistors to change, the change process and how to overcome individual and organisational resistance
- Be led by organisation members in the change process and be aware that the disciplines take time to develop
- Include mechanisms for support and systems that allow for change.

As ODC was a learning organisation, the obstacles that are associated with developing a learning organisation seem to have little application. However, if ODC becomes aware that there is diminishing evidence of the disciplines being practised, they can refer to the obstacles discussed in Chapter Four to identify the root of the diminished practice, such as diverse understandings of what a learning organisation is; leadership's view of staff; and people and power dynamics. The steps of the change process may then assist ODC to continue on its journey of being a learning organisation.

The complex and diverse cultural context of South Africa did not seem to have a major impact on ODC as a learning organisation. Through the study, I expected to identify how the cultural background and race of various staff impacted their understanding of ODC as a learning organisation. I did not observe discrepancies in their understanding and this may be because, although ODC has a BEE Level 1 rating, the staff consisted mainly of middle class, white people, educated at tertiary level. I did not observe Coldwell, Williamson and Cameron's (2007) assertion that management theories of industrialised countries did not have a bearing outside of that context. Perhaps this statement could be observed in an organisation that was more culturally diverse.



My reflections thus far have focused on theory and implications of theory for ODC's practise. My reflection now turns to the research design and methods and how these impacted the research. I considered that if I had taken different instruments with me on board and if I had selected a different approach to the study, how would the results that the study yielded be different?

8.3.3 Reflections on research design and methods

If I had to do it all again, what would I have done differently? This section reflects on the research design and methods and explores the impact of my philosophical assumptions and beliefs, my position as researcher and the methodology adopted for the study. I continue with thoughts concerning the selection of my site, the research instruments used and data analysis.

My immediate thoughts are that I enjoyed the research process, but on reflection there are some aspects I would have done differently. The first aspect I would have changed was to increase the amount of time I spent at the research site to improve the thoroughness of my data collection. Another aspect is that I would have preferred to have the research site as an organisation with which I was working, which would help overcome the obstacle presented by the first aspect. I was the only researcher on site and I may have missed some aspects when collecting data. For this reason, I would have preferred to have a colleague or research assistant to assist me and to act as 'critical friend' in grappling with data.

It was a valuable and worthwhile exercise to understand myself as "researcher as instrument" and to state what my philosophical assumptions and beliefs were concerning education and research as I became aware of the tinted lens through which I would look (the sunglasses that shielded my eyes while sailing aboard ODC). My philosophy of education is one of a social constructivist and this assisted me to identify with the theme of a learning organisation. My interest in people as subjects of research, their culture and behaviour assisted me to maintain curiosity throughout the research. An ethnographic case study was an apt choice of approach as it resonated with my philosophical assumptions. This approach also allowed me the opportunity to understand the community's (organisation's) culture and how members thought, behaved and interpreted their reality. Although an ethnographic case study approach gave me the opportunity of being immersed in the organisation's culture, I experienced a sense of loss after leaving the site. I felt that I had become part of the company and when my research concluded, I felt as if I had been divorced.

While on site, what I found challenging concerning an ethnographic approach was the "organisational boundary position" (Hartley, 2004, p223). I experienced difficulty transitioning between the emic and the etic perspective – I found that I would become immersed emically and then find it difficult to analyse the data etically. This challenge was one that needed to be overcome

in order to proceed with the study, which I managed to do by consciously making myself aware of the two different positions that I needed to hold.

I perhaps would have been able to better maintain the "organisational boundary position" (Hartley, 2004, p223) if I had not used purposive and convenience sampling. My research site was selected because of an existing relationship I had with ODC, and I found it difficult to have an unbiased viewpoint – I liked the company and the people and in some cases this caused me to be empathetic and subjective, while in other instances I was more critical in my data collection and analysis.

I also experienced the 'observer as participant' position a challenging role to hold. I was sometimes invited by staff to be a participant in the setting, for example when my opinions were asked in different instances relating to ODC's products and services. However, this position helped to give me a sense of how ODC worked from a personal, first-hand perspective. I was nervous, though, that this position impacted data collection and my ability to remain or be neutral in the process. I considered that participants could be attempting to create a favourable impression, displaying reactivity to my presence, or that I had succeeded in becoming 'part of the furniture' and participants were comfortable with my presence and considered me a participant in the setting, rather than an observer (Merriam & Simpson, 1984; Rummel, 1964).

Maxwell's (1996) interactive model allowed for flexibility in the design which assisted me in accommodating new developments or unforeseen circumstances, such as additional literature that was included for research in 2010 to 2011, the managing director's bicycle accident, and ODC's move to new premises in 2012.

The research instruments used yielded appropriate data, and the inclusion of additional ethnographic approaches, such as the transect walks and auto-photography, also assisted in drawing in participants to the data collection process. It was evident that they enjoyed being instruments of research and the data collected provided deeper insights into participants and the organisation. I perhaps should not have made use of pseudonyms for the participants as ODC is a small organisation and participants could have been identified. However, I felt that giving the participants' names helped infuse life into the write-up of the study. There was also a substantial staff turnover during the two research periods, and so there is little chance of participants recognising pseudonyms, with the exception of the managing director. Disclosing the race of the

participants using terms from BBB-EE legislation (black and white) also assisted in disguising their identities.

There are some aspects that I would have done differently with regard to observations, questionnaires, auto-photographs and the ensuing focus groups, and interviews.

Observations

When observing meetings, I could have used a video-recording device or had another observer present in the room. I made notes during observations and while I was writing, I may have missed something that could have contributed to the study. A recording device or another observer would assist in ensuring more data was observed.

With regard to 'casing the joint', I could have spent more time at the research site, ODC, initially to do this and to accommodate staff movements – the office would sometimes have few members present as they were working off-site. By having more 'casing the joint' observations during both research periods in 2008 and 2012, at least three to five observation days for each, the staff could have become more relaxed with my presence, which could contribute to them behaving more naturally, minimise reactivity and I could have been able to capture more accurate data as a result.

I could have observed more and various meetings to assess how the director/manager involved conducted these meetings with staff members as well as capture if and how these meetings promoted the disciplines of a learning organisation, "learning" leadership and a learning culture.

Questionnaires

Although the response rate for the questionnaires was good (ten out of seventeen respondents) in 2008, it would have been preferable to have 100% response rate as the views of the other staff could have provided further insights. I could have requested an organisation member on site to encourage the completion and return of questionnaires. Alternatively, I could have scheduled a week for the questionnaires to be completed during which time I could have been on site to clarify any questions.

I could have also included more of the characteristics in Table 2.2 (p36) in the questionnaire as this table provides much relevant information. Furthermore, there were some questions that participants

left unanswered. If I had been present on site as suggested previously, I could have assisted with clarifying any uncertainty concerning the questions.

For the 2012 research period, I could have circulated the questionnaires to all staff members (as I did in 2008) and used the responses of the three participants who were present during both periods as a baseline measurement. I was unable to generalise the data that I received from these three respondents. If more staff had completed the questionnaire, I could have gained further insight into how ODC was a learning organisation.

Auto-photographs and focus groups

This study was the first time that I had used auto-photography as a research instrument and the images captured by participants were used as data for the focus group discussion. I was uncertain if the focus group would be successful and so to settle my apprehension, I would have liked to have a 'practice' round using this approach. I could have then developed my skills on how to guide a focus group based on auto-photographs and would have felt more at ease in guiding the process.

Not all auto-photography participants were present in the focus group, due to various factors contributing to their absence (as discussed in Chapter Seven). Their absence impacted on the quality of the data generated – as not all photographers participated in the focus group, their voices and interpretation of the images were not heard. The focus group participants present were able to describe, or add meaning to the pictures they had taken, but could not do the same for others' pictures. With hindsight, I could have changed my approach by ensuring that all photographers were present for focus group discussions.

Interviews

The "organisational boundary position" (Hartley, 2004, p223) worked well when it came to collecting data through interviews as I was not viewed as being staff, but I knew the staff. Responses were honest. The recording of the interviews (video or audio) assisted in capturing accurate data as I was able to replay these and catch any detail I may have missed in the interview. I would have liked to interview more staff - as the organisation is small, this would have been possible.

I could have used a more structured interview guide – although discussing themes did work, I could have collected more data about certain topics that could have provided more insight into aspects of the organisation being researched.

I would have also held interviews during both periods in a less formal setting, such as a coffee shop (as in 2012). This setting seemed to encourage staff to reveal more and richer data than an office setting did. The participants seemed more relaxed and willing to talk in the coffee shop setting.

Data analysis

The coding process for data analysis worked well but could have been improved if there was another observer present or if all observations were video-recorded so that I could check the accuracy of my initial notes during observations. Concerning the questionnaires, it would be a worthwhile exercise to validate this tool to identify if it is accurate in indicating the learning disciplines practised by an organisation. Having findings from previous research instruments inform the instruments that followed also worked well and contributed to providing insights into the organisation. Using multiple methods of data collection assisted in consistent data analysis through triangulation – data collected were verified through the different methods used.

In terms of sustainability, the tools of documentation, questionnaires and interviews indicated similar understandings and practices concerning ODC. Furthermore, having an audit trail assisted me in keeping track and checking which data was being collected, assisting with the study's validity and reliability.

8.4 Conclusions

To summarise the research findings, ODC reflected all the facets of a learning organisation, that is, it practised all the learning disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking in varying degrees during the two research periods of 2008 and 2012. However, it did not hold the same understanding of a learning organisation that Senge (1990) did. The leadership and culture of ODC encouraged it to be a learning one and ODC appeared to naturally practice the disciplines.

In the context of ODC, sustainability meant the ability of the company to survive into the future, through adapting to the environment in which it operated. ODC surveyed the environment through the roles that the directors played, and their surveillance contributed to ODC adapting to its environment.

The facets of a learning organisation could be strengthened by employing certain strategies to encourage the practice of the learning disciplines, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

In response to the main research question, a small company can ensure its sustainability by being a learning organisation. The company needs to consider itself in its context, be environmentally aware, and responsive to changes in the environment, all of which link to the discipline of systems thinking, the umbrella of the disciplines of a learning organisation.

It would appear that in order for organisations to be learning ones according to Senge's model (1990), they need not deliberately look for ways to implement the learning disciplines. They may be practising these naturally, as ODC did. Before an organisation attempts to implement the learning disciplines, it should take a moment and observe – the organisation may already be practising the disciplines and this merely needs to be recognised. What does this have to do with the sustainability of the organisation? If it is naturally practising the disciplines, then it is likely to be a sustainable entity. However, the role of other factors discussed in this study should not be negated when considering the sustainability of a small organisation.



My journey now ends and I look to how this study can be expanded – what I would recommend as potential areas of research for another journey aboard ODC or another small vessel. These recommendations for further study are:

- Researching a small company as a learning organisation in a different sector
- Researching a culturally diverse small company as a learning organisation
- The role of communication in a learning organisation
- Validation of the questionnaire used in this study
- Researching a small company as a learning organisation using different research design/ methodology/instruments.

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APPENDICES

A: Observation notes and coding

B: Cover letter and completed copy of questionnaire (2008)

C: Interview guide – Phase 3 (2008)

D: Interview guide – Phase 6 (2012)

E: Focus group questions – Phase 6 (2012)

F: Permission letter from research site

G: Ethics Clearance Letter of Approval

H: Data collection instruments and purpose

I: Auto-photographs from 2012

J: New office of ODC

Appendix A

Observation notes and coding – 17 June 2008

June 17 Tues

Team review of documentation for client
- Discussion of doc
- Suggestions for aspects to include
~~Tg~~ Tidying up role profiles doc - wording - making changes - suggestions + agreeing on suggestions
Y working/making suggestions on how to make wording more specific - U including comments
Team shared appreciation for being able to share input on doc - bounce off someone - get feedback
U expressed appreciation for comments.
Competency doc - discussing placement of information in diff docs - relating to career mgmt job, manager + incumbent - ST
Looking at skills, knowledge + behaviours - weighting of competences
Discussion on how to allocate weightings - suggestion made but implication/impact of method not discussed (active learning - not generative).
Considering beh. attributes - grouping attributes together - revealed MM - what can + can't be grouped together.
U made thinking known - revealed her assumptions concerning weighting. Remaining team listened - open to dialogue → generative learning
Discussion on how to link competency ratings to competence/performance ~~rating~~ matrix - all involved in discussion + free flow of ideas, thinking + assumptions
Shared final idea of how to plot matrix - BSV.
Looked at how client views competency ratings + matrix + how to use from clients perspective - ST

- Discussed changing number ratings to symbols / colours to prevent confusion for client and prevent skewed use of doc. - TL + ST
- Mar spoke of external team member who can do conditional formatting - shows knowledge of external team members.
- Participant observer role - gave input in to how I interpret doc - sparked discussion above - influence on study?
- Discussed way forward - roles + responsibilities for next meeting
- PM (Mar) assigned tasks + needed to be done for next meeting

- Informal discussion with Mar + Yol after meeting - re how Anna-Rosa + Martin deal with staff - sometimes feel they are thrown into projects but A-R + Martin tell them that only they need to believe they can do what is required, A-R + Martin express to them that they believe they have ability & to do job + lead project. eg. A-R said to Mar: "the only thing that needs to happen now is that you need to believe ~~in yourself~~ that you can do it". Martin said to Mar. that his name is associated with the business and he won't give her something to do / project to manage if he doesn't think she is capable - his name is affected. Indicates leadership + culture of believing in capable staff.

Asked Mar if all teams she works with have same dynamic. Commented that this team has far more learning taking place - a lot more generative + coming up with ideas. Project is evolving - keeps changing/developing each time team meets.

Typed, coded notes

Date: 17 June

Venue: RBS Boardroom

Project team meeting

- Team review of documentation for client
- Suggestions made for aspects to include
- Tidying up role profiles doc – wording – making changes – suggestions and agreeing on suggestions – *indicates collaborative/ team learning*
- Y working/ making suggestions on how to make wording more specific – U including comments
- Team shared appreciation for being able to share input on document – bounce off someone and get feedback - *indicates team learning*
- U expressed appreciation for comments - *indicates culture – concern for others*
- Competency document – discussing placement of information in different documents – relating to career management, job, manager and incumbent – *indicates systems thinking*
- Looking at skills, knowledge, behaviours – weighting of competencies. Discussion on how to allocate weightings – suggestions made but impact/ implications of suggestions/ method not discussed – *indicates team learning*
- Considering behavioural attributes – grouping attributes together – discussions around what can and can't be grouped together – *revealing mental models*
- U made thinking known – revealed her assumptions concerning weighting - *revealing mental models*.
- Remaining team listened – open to dialogue - *indicates generative learning*
- Discussion on how to link competency ratings to competence/ performance matrix – all involved in discussion and free flow of ideas, thinking and assumptions - *indicates team learning and revealing mental models*
- Shared final idea on how to plot matrix - *indicates building shared vision*
- Looked at how client views competency ratings and matrix and how to use matrix from client's perspective – *indicates systems thinking*

- Discussed changing number ratings to symbols/ colours to prevent confusion for client and prevent incorrect use of document – *indicates systems thinking and team learning*
- M spoke of external team member who can do conditional formatting – shows knowledge of external team members and their competencies - *indicates culture of team awareness and competencies – personal mastery*
- Adopted participant-observer role – gave input into how I interpreted the document – sparked off discussion above. (How does this influence my study)
- Discussed way forward – roles and responsibilities for next meeting - *indicates building shared vision*
- M assigned tasks that needed to be done for next meeting

Notes:
General tone of meeting displayed team members able to share openly and display personal mastery – positive approach, all able to participate in decision-making, considering what they can do differently, able to share experiences with team, receiving feedback often, being committed to the project.

Informal discussion with M & Y after meeting – concerning how A-R and MD deal with staff – sometimes feel they are thrown into projects but A-R and MD tell them that only they need to believe they can do what is required, A-R and MD express to them that they believe team/individual has the ability to do the job and lead the project, e.g. A-R said to M "the only thing that needs to happen now is that you need to believe that you can do it". MD said to M that his name is associated with the business and he won't give her something to do/ project to manage if he doesn't think she is capable – his name is affected. *Indicates leadership style and culture – belief in ability of staff and capability/ capacity to deliver*

Asked M if all teams she works with have the same dynamic. Commented that this team has far more learning taking place – a lot more generative and coming up with ideas. Project is evolving – keeps changing/ developing each time the team meets. *Indicates team learning, personal mastery, systems thinking, building shared vision*

Appendix B

Cover letter and completed questionnaire - 2008

INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Participant

I am Genevieve Hundermark, a student studying towards the Masters Degree of Education (Adult Education) at the University of the Witwatersrand.

As part of my degree, I am researching small companies as learning organisations. As you may be aware, we operate and work in an ever-changing environment. The experts in the field of business state that the only way for companies to cope with these ever-present changes and so ensure their sustainability is to be a learning organisation. A focus of the research and this questionnaire is to identify what aspects of a learning organisation are displayed by your company.

As an employee/ sub-contractor of the company, your views and insights into the company would be very helpful in this research and your assistance greatly appreciated.

The questionnaire consists of three parts - please complete all three parts. Sub-headings have been provided in Part 2 and 3 to indicate the discipline or practise that is being researched.

The completion of this questionnaire should take approximately 30-45 minutes.

Please note the following:

- You are invited to participate in this study and your participation is completely voluntary.
- You have the right to withdraw from this study at any point with no consequence to your or your employment.
- All information obtained from this questionnaire will be treated in strict confidence and your identity will not be disclosed or revealed in the research report.
- The findings of this questionnaire will be used to inform how practices within the company can be enhanced to reflect those of a learning organisation, thus contributing to the company's sustainability.
- The findings of this study will be included in a research report to be submitted by myself to the University of Witwatersrand as a requirement for the completion of Masters Degree in Education (Adult Education).

Once you have completed the questionnaire, please return mail it to me by 31 August 2008.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire and for accepting the invitation to participate in this study.

ARE YOU A LEARNING ORGANISATION?

PART 1

Please select the appropriate radio button:

Age

○ 20-24 ○ 25-29 ◉ 30-34 ○ 35-39 ○ 40-44 ○ 45-49 ○ 50+

Gender

○ Male ◉ Female

Race

○ Black ◉ White ○ Coloured ○ Indian

Number of years with the company

○ Less than 6 months ○ 6 months to 1 year ○ Less than 2 years ○ 2 - 3 years

○ 4 - 6 years ◉ 7 years

Designation (your position in the company):

Senior/ Principal Consultant

PART 2

Select the appropriate radio button that best describes the situation in your organisation.

Personal Mastery

1. I know what matters to me most
(●) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

2. I am given opportunities in the company to work on things
(●) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

3. I am committed to my own lifelong learning
(●) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

4. I am able to continually clarify and deepen my personal vision
( ) Strongly agree (●) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

5. I am able to focus my energy within the company on that which matters most to me
( ) Strongly agree (●) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

6. I am patient so that I can achieve that which matters most to me
( ) Strongly agree (●) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

7. I think that am able to see reality objectively
( ) Strongly agree (●) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

8. I have a positive approach to life
(●) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

9. The company encourages the growth and learning of its members/ staff
( ) Strongly agree (●) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

10. All members are able and empowered to participate in decision-making

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ◉ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

Please relate 11.1 to 11.4 to the following statement:

11. The following motivates me to achieve goals:

11.1 Fear of failure

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ◉ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

11.2 Unpleasant consequences of not achieving goals

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ◉ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

11.3 Sheer willpower to overcome any obstacle

◉ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

11.4 Recognising my current reality and a desire to attain a new reality

◉ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

Please relate 12.1 to 12.4 to the following statement:

12. When I don't attain my goals:

12.1 I blame my current circumstances

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ◉ Strongly disagree

12.2 I blame others for holding me back or letting me down

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ◉ Strongly disagree

12.3 I bulldoze through obstacles in order to overcome these

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

12.4 I blame myself and consider honestly what I can do differently

◉ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

13. I receive positive reinforcement from my mentors/ managers

(●) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

14. I am able to share my experiences with my colleagues

( ) Strongly agree (●) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

15. I receive feedback on projects/ tasks/ performance constantly

( ) Strongly agree (●) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

16. I have a balance between work and non-work life

(●) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

17. I am committed to my organisation and my work

( ) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree (●) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

18. I am able to deal with change

( ) Strongly agree (●) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

19. My organisation is able to deal with change

( ) Strongly agree (●) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

20. My organisation is able to face reality

( ) Strongly agree (●) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

21. My organisation places emphasis on learning and/or provides opportunities for learning

( ) Strongly agree (●) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

Please relate the following statements to your company:
Mental models

22. We talk about why we think about certain things the way we do
○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

23. Our conversations help to expose our thinking
○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

24. Our conversations help to make our thinking open to the influence of others
○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

25. When differences of opinion surface, we look for reasons why we have these differences
○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ◉ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

Please relate 26.1 to 26.3 to the following statement:
26. When differences of opinion surface:

26.1 I reflect about what has happened
○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

26.2 I think about alternatives
○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

26.3 I talk about what has happened
○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

27. After we have conversations about our thinking, I attempt to change the way I think and act based on these conversations
○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

28. We take time to get to know each other – our backgrounds, personalities, values, upbringing, etc.

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

29. I have a mentor/ coach/ supervisor/ friend in the workplace

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

30. My mentor/ coach/ supervisor/ friend assists me to examine the way I do things

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

31. My mentor/ coach/ supervisor/ friend assists me to change the way I think about things

◉ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

32. My mentor/ coach/ supervisor/ friend assists me to consider alternatives to routine ways of doing things

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

33. My mentor/ coach/ supervisor/ friend assists me to change the way I do things

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

Building shared vision

34. We hold a shared picture (vision) of the future we want to create

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

35. Company goals, values and missions are deeply shared throughout the company

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ◉ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

36. We share a common identity

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

37. We share a common destiny

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

38. The leadership of the company has shared their vision with all members of the company

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

39. We are given the opportunity to share our visions of the future for the company

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

40. I know what the company mission/ vision/ value statement is

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

41. I am committed to the company mission/ vision/ value statement

◉ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

42. Leadership of the company has dictated the vision of the company that we are required to work towards

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

43. I feel like an associate of the company more than an employee

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

44. All staff have input into our company strategies

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ◉ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

45. Our leader/s help us to understand what causes change in our environment

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ◉ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

46. Our leaders honestly share their views of reality with us

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

Team learning

47. I am open and responsive to different points of view
(●) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

48. I care about the way others think and feel
(●) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

49.I think carefully about the suggestions others make and the consequences of these suggestions
(●) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

50. In my company, I learn more when I am part of a team than I do on my own
( ) Strongly agree ( ) Agree (●) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

51. I feel empowered to act in my organisation
(●) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

52. I am able to question the way things are done in the organisation openly
( ) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree (●) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

53. I trust the members in my team/ organisation
( ) Strongly agree ( ) Agree (●) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

54. I am committed to my team
( ) Strongly agree (●) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

55. I am open to learning
(●) Strongly agree ( ) Agree ( ) Neither agree nor disagree ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

56. I display initiative and independence in learning

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

57. I accept responsibility for learning

◉ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

58. I learn things that I know will assist me in the future

◉ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

59. We all have an equal opportunity to participate in team meetings/ discussions/ dialogues

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

60. Teamwork is encouraged

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

61. Our teams produce extraordinary results

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

62. Our teams engage in dialogue where we all participate in thinking together

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

63. Our dialogue is open and honest

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

64. Our dialogues lead to action that all team members have contributed to and agreed with

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

65. Some team dialogues undermine learning and are negative

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

66. These negative dialogues are recognised and used to accelerate learning

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ◉ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

67. Team learning occurs on a consistent basis

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

68. Teams are self-managed

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

69. Self-managed teams are allowed to take responsibility for their own learning

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

70. The input of all team members is valued

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

71. Opportunities exist for members to communicate across projects/ functions

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

72. Our teams work together to solve real problems

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

73. Our teams commit to an action plan

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

74. Our teams monitor their results

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

75. Our teams reflect on actions taken so that we can continuously improve

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

76. Individuals in teams determine the actions that they take

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

77. Team members openly discuss and challenge actions that individuals in the team plan to take

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

78. Team members support the actions taken by individuals to achieve the plan/ solution

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

79. Our teams are made up of members who all think differently

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ◉ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

80. We are able to volunteer to be part of a team

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

81. We display respect to each team member

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

82. Each individual is viewed as having expertise

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ◉ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

83. We display empathy for others

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ◉ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

84. We review and change organisational norms, policies and objectives on a regular basis

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

85. We adjust the status quo (existing way of doing things) to meet new challenges

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

86. We experiment with how to solve problems

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

87. Our teams often negotiate/interrelate with each other by doing something together,eg.talking,building,etc

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

88. Teams across projects/ functions continuously share information

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

Systems thinking

89. I understand how I impact the whole of the company

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

90. I know the importance of my function for the rest of the company

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

91. We mostly approach problems with the same familiar solutions

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ◉ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

92. We mostly approach problems with fresh approaches to provide creative and innovative solutions

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

93. We have come up with small well-focussed actions that have produced significant, lasting improvements

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

94. We are able to see interrelationships of various aspects of a problem

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

95.We think in terms of processes rather than isolated events

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

96. We can identify how to deal with various issues based on the nature of the issue – either looking at the whole company or a function or part of the company

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

97. We tend to blame outside circumstances for our problems

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ◉ Strongly disagree

98. We tend to blame ourselves as being part of the problem

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

99. We see everything that we work with as part of a whole

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

100. We have little conflict between organisational members

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

General

101. Learning is integrated into work to a large extent

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

102. Learning is actively promoted within the company

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ◉ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

103. The company recognises that 'learning is a way of being'

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ◉ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

104. Mistakes are utilised as valuable learning opportunities

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

105. Members who change the way things are done to improve organisational performance are recognised and/or rewarded

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

106. Forums exist specifically for creating new ideas

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ◉ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

107. The exploration of alternative methods or options is encouraged

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

108. Change is welcomed as an opportunity for growth and renewal

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

109. All members are encouraged to challenge aspects of the organisational culture that inhibit learning and the achievement of organisational goals

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ◉ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

110. The company encourages learning by providing numerous learning opportunities – both on-the-job and through formal courses

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

111. The leadership of the company regularly interacts with all teams/ members

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

112.The leadership in the organisation encourages learning

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

113. We react to situations as they occur

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

114. Our leadership is proactive in planning for and meeting challenges

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

115. Our leaders are continually learning

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

116. In our company, we work together to achieve the results we truly desire

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

117. Our leaders share what they have learned with us

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ◉ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

118. Our leaders listen to and appreciate our ideas

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

119. Our leaders take care of the organisation

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

120. Our leaders take care of the organisation's members

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

121. Our leaders are responsible for the attainment of the organisation's vision, value and mission

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

122. Our leaders teach and help us to see the organisation as a system

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

123. Our leaders teach and help us to see the organisation in a system

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

124. Our leaders are role models

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ◉ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

125. Our company's reputation, or brand, is positive

○ Strongly agree ◉ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

PART 3

Please provide complete answers to the following questions.

Personal mastery

3.1 What matters to you most in your company?

Learning and growth as well as exceptional service delivery to clients - Ability to create capacity to be able to strategically guide and become business partners with clients.

3.2 What are you currently learning at the moment? This may be formal (at a learning institution) or informal learning (for example, on-the-job).

Formal - University post gradualte research, as well as informal - communities of practice, conferences and professional bodies

3.3 What are your learning plans for the future?

short targeted courses with a combination of experiential as well as theory training

3.4 Do you experience conflict between work and family? If yes, please explain what contributes to this conflict.

No - I believe I structure my work according to client priorities, without compromising family life.

Mental models

3.5 Think of your company as an animal. Write down what animal comes to mind.

Leopard

3.6 Why do you think of your company as this animal?

Swift to move - space for individuals, but also group support

3.7 Would you like to think of your company as a different animal to the one you originally suggested?

no

3.8 If your answer was yes to 3.6, write down this animal and why you would like to change this picture.

If your answer was no, explain why you don't want to change this picture of your company.

It illustrates the strength of individual members and quality of competency and skill at the individual level/

Building shared vision

3.9 Do you know that the mission statement of your company is? If so, please write it down.

To be come the reputable OD partner of choice

3.10 Were you involved in developing the mission statement?

Yes

3.11 Do you know how your company developed their mission statement? If so, please explain the process.

Strategy session with senior staff

Team learning

3.12 Consider a team you have worked with in the company. Describe how the team worked together and what you learned by completing the following statements with a few sentences.

The team worked together by …

Scheduling project meetings, sharing knowledge for improvement and delivering on target within quality standards.

By being part of the team, I learned …

to listen to all team members and reflect on how to empower and build their capacity more

Systems thinking

3.13 Do you view your role as influencing other areas or functions in the company? If so, how?

Yes - product development, R&D and best practice implementation regarding the OD value chain

3.14 What aspects within your company influence your company's ability to perform?

Competent resources delivering against set targets plus sound methodology basis

3.15 What aspects outside of your company influence your company's ability to perform?

Clients requesting our services

3.16 Does your company encourage learning? If so, how?

Yes - majority of employees are studying or working towards finalisation of post graduate degrees

General

3.17 Do you see your company existing into the future? Please write down the reasons for why you state this.

Yes - with the new strategy of Mining Industry focus, we have positioned ourselves as a specialist OD service provider specifically w.r.t. Capital Projects

3.18 What do you do enjoy most about working at your company?

Freedom to act and support to enhance quality of product delivery

3.19 What do you do enjoy least about working at your company?

Still hierarchical structures, which does not reflect a true learning organisation of knowledge people.

End of questions - Thank you for your time and participation in this study

Appendix C

Interview guide – Phase 3 (2008)

Background/ Understanding

1. Could you please provide me with background information about your company:
    - When did the company start?
    - Who started the company?
    - Why did it start?
    - Who is the staff?
    - How has RBS grown/ evolved/ changed since inception?

2. What keeps your company going, i.e. what is the purpose for the organisation? Whose purpose is it?

3. What does the concept of a learning organisation mean to you?

4. Do you think it is important for small companies to be learning organisations? Please explain why you say so.

Personal mastery

5. How much time do you set aside each day for learning/ reflecting/ conceptualising or examining strategies?

Mental models

Questions for Ops Director (also Managing Director):

6. OD does not have a PA. Reason for this? Does not having a PA open access to him and he is seen as more approachable/ accessible as there is no gatekeeper? Does the small size of the company not warrant a PA?

7. Would you say that RBS operates from the mental model that "the world is changing and complex. People are the key to keeping up and meeting change and complexity"? Do all staff share this mental model? How do you know?

Building shared vision

8. Respondents to questionnaire had the least favourable to say about building shared vision. Why do you think this is?

Team learning

9. How do teams share their learning with the rest of the organisation? How is the learning captured? What is the forum for sharing learning? Do they refer back to past experiences/ learning when engaged in new projects? How well implemented is the policy on knowledge harvesting and documentation?

10. Staff meetings – opportunities for staff to share their learning. Has RBS always engaged in this practice?

11. How does RBS encourage learning?

Systems thinking and…

Sustainability

12. RBS business focus – who is their market? Changed to specifically mining industry focus… how did change come about and what are the repercussions of the change? Impact on business? Is narrowing the field harmful or helpful? Why narrow the field?

13. Does the commodity price in the mining industry influence their ability to provide services to the mining industry? Discuss. Volatility of price – impact of this?

14. What changes in the external environment specifically have an impact on RBS business?

15. What do you understand by the term "sustainability"? Do you view your company as being sustainable? Why? What practices contribute to you being sustainable?
    Is there a link of the term to economic well being?

For Marketing Director:

16. Is Project management scheduler used to cost projects? Do you project schedule before costing?

17. Just gone through a big branding exercise. Discuss – why the need, change in corporate colours, etc. (Culture)

18. What is your BEE status? Are you compliant and how does this affect you dealing with the mining industry?

19. What is the shareholding of RBS? (BEE & sustainability)

20. From the documentation – **Company Profile** - there is a strong focus on business optimisation and the delivery of financial benefits – a focus on the sustainability of other organisations. Is there the same internal focus? How?
    - Where was the document produced? The location and by whom?
    - When was it written? What was the time gap between the date it was written and when it was published?
    - Is this document valid, i.e. in its complete form?
    - Who authored the document? What influenced the way it was written, e.g. the background of the writer, occurrences in the industry/ country?
    - How is your company mission/ vision statement communicated to company members?

21. RBS has strong systems thinking approach to services in co. profile. Do people in the organisation reflect the same systems thinking as required? Is systems thinking part of the required traits of the incumbents?

22. RBS makes use of external resources in the form of contractors. How, besides the restraint of trade clause in the contract, does RBS prevent contractors from using their IP elsewhere? (Sustainability)

23. Questionnaire response was that the client base is limited because you're too far ahead of the competition. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Culture/ Leadership

24. Interns undergo an induction process.
    - How does the intern process work?

- What is included in the induction process?

25. Do new staff members go through a similar induction? OR
    - Is there an induction that new staff go through?
    - What is included in this process?
    - Who is responsible for inducting new staff and interns?

26. Selection process for new staff:
    - Who hires staff?
    - What qualities do you look for in prospective candidates? Is learning a particular quality? (Speaks to organisational culture)

27. Organogram of RBS in marketing profile…
    - Are all staff aware of whom they relate and how?
    - Describe the management structure/ organogram of RBS – flat/ hierarchical?
    - Why this structure? (Slide 11 of business & marketing strategy)

28. How is the agenda for meetings drawn up?

29. Do all staff use MS Project? Why/ why not?

30. You have quite a comprehensive bonus scheme. Do you see this scheme as a mechanism to build shared vision? Does it contribute to team learning or encourage competition? How does appraisal link to the bonus scheme – explain.

31. Vision & Mission statement – how was this decided?
    - What was the process involved?
    - What value do you place on your mission/ vision statement?
    - Is awareness of these statements important to all staff members?
    - Do you expect them to know and live by these?

32. Marketing Ppt has a different mission statement to the company profile. How has the mission/ vision statement evolved/ developed into the new June 2008 version?

33. KM slides:
    - In documentation there appears to be a strong focus on Knowledge Management. Why the focus? How does KM benefit their business? Is it a service offering to clients?
    - What is a war room?
    - Do you see KM as link to the learning organisation? How much of a focus does RBS have on KM? Explain how this focus is displayed – practices, etc.
    - Explain documentation sent through (Ppt slides)

34. Certain strategic partners are listed in profile. Why these partners? What qualifies a provider to be a strategic partner? (Sustainability)

35. Describe your organisational culture.
    - Please describe how decisions are made in your company – who makes what decisions?

36. Describe your leadership style and the leadership style of others – project managers, Directors.
    - How do you see your role as a leader in this company?

37. Is learning included in your strategy – explicitly or implicitly? At every level in the organisation? i.e. are you looking for opportunities to learn and share learning acquired at all levels? Why or why not?

38. Do you think that companies need to be learning organisations in order to be sustainable?

39. Would you say that a company needs to be at a certain point in it's lifespan in order to be a learning organisation? Please explain why you say so.

Appendix D

Interview guide – Phase 6 (2012)

Additional research questions:

Questions in pink – interview questions for MD/ Business Development Exec (or info to gather)
Questions in yellow – interview questions for staff
Questions in blue – both (pink & yellow). For MD, questions relate to himself and/or his ability to encourage aspects in others.

- What is the staff make-up of RBS over 2008 – 2011 (staff movements, changes)?
- What was the financial turnover during this period?
  (Graphs of the above with figures)
- How does RBS practise knowledge management?
- Does RBS encourage learning? How? (e.g. stipulated/ included in policies and procedures, time allotted to learning)
- Does RBS see themselves as a family? If so, in what way?
- Do the original values and culture of the founder member still exist? Has it changed? If so, how?
- Who controls the vision and goals of learning in RBS?
- Is the MD a learning leader (does he encourage learning and does he share his learning)? Explain how/not?
- Do all team members critically reflect regularly as part of their practise? Are they given the opportunity to do so at work? How frequently do they reflect?
- Describe the environment of RBS in terms of being open and honest.
- Are assumptions that are held by team members explored? Are the beliefs and values of individuals that impact on working together and the business exposed?
- Do organisation members view RBS as a learning organisation? Why/not?
- Does the owner-manager have an open management approach where he encourages his authority, information and knowledge to be challenged? Explain.
- Does the owner-manager demonstrate readiness to implement learning acquired outside of the organisation?
- How would you rate the quality and level of staff in terms of experience and commitment?
- How adaptable are staff and willing to move into new roles?
- How are mistakes treated? (As opportunities to learn, or punished?)
- Is learning integrated in day-to-day operations? How?
- Does ‘groupthink’ exist? Explain.
- Is there evidence of the apartheid legacy in RBS, i.e. feelings of distrust?

- Do organisation members feel valued?
- Are they able to contribute to RBS' vision?
- Do they feel in control of their lives?
- Do they collaborate?
- Are they able to view their impact in the organisation and on the system?
- Is there internal competition between organisation members? If so, is it healthy or unhealthy?
- How does the organisation deal with change – is capacity developed to deal with ongoing change? How?
- How are teams made up – are preferred learning styles considered (activist, reflector, theorist, pragmatist)?
- How is individual learning integrated into organisational learning (knowledge management structures and processes)? What do staff think and feel about using their individual knowledge or learning for organisational purposes? E.g. going on a course/ reading independently and using information gained for organisation to profit from.
- BEE rating information:
    - What is your current BEE rating?
    - When did you get this rating?
    - Did you ever experience supply chain pressure when you did not have a BEE rating?
    - How were you measured – what type of enterprise?
    - If a Qualifying Small Enterprise, which four elements were you measured against?
    - For what period of time is the rating valid?
- It is widely asserted in business management/ leadership literature that the leadership of an organisation sets the tone for the culture of the organisation. Do you agree/ disagree that this is the case for your organisation? Why/ why not?
- How would you describe the leadership of your organisation?
- Who does the leadership consist of?
- How would you describe the culture (the way things are done) in your organisation?
- What does your organisation do to ensure that it is sustainable (will exist into the future)?
- What are the qualities of your leader/s that benefit the organisation and contribute to its sustainability?
- What are the qualities of your leader/s that are obstacles to the future of the organisation?
- How would you describe the environment (atmosphere) of the organisation?
- Who is able to bring about significant changes in the organisation?

- Are you encouraged in the organisation to critically reflect (challenge your own thinking)? Explain your response.
- Do organisation members freely participate in knowledge and information sharing? Why/not? How?
- How do you perceive organisation members' ability to respond to change?
- What do you understand by the term 'learning organisation'?
- Would you describe your organisation as a democratic one? Explain.
- Describe the power relations and dynamics in your organisation. Who holds the power and how do others respond?
- Are you encouraged in the organisation to learn? What/ how/ why?
- Does the organisation set aside time for planning and direction-setting? What receives more attention?
- What aspects/ issues receive attention in the organisation?
- Does the organisation tend to repeat some actions despite the outcome of those actions? Can you give examples?

Appendix E

Focus group questions – Phase 6 (2012)

- What is happening in the image? What story does it tell?
- Why do certain people, symbols or landmarks feature in the image?
- What is the significance of features or landmarks of the photograph?
- What are the relationships between the different parts represented in photographs?
- What is missing from images – what is not there but perhaps should be there?
- What sense of history does the image convey? Has the map changed over time?
- What are the trends and patterns in different photos?
- Do the images vary across gender, age groups, employment status?

Ref: Rule & John (2011, p83)

Appendix F

Permission letter from research site

"ODC" letterhead information

3rd July 2007

Dear Genevieve Hundermark,

As you well know RBS is a company that stands for learning, as it forms the basic building block to capacity development. So you should not be surprised to hear that our company is only too glad to participate in a research topic of this nature.

It therefore gives me great pleasure to inform you that the board of RBS has unanimously approved that you could conduct your research in our company. All efforts will be made by our company to satisfy your research methodology protocol related to your research report. In this regards, it would be prudent to provide us with a project plan so that resources will be available to support your various milestones associated with your study.

Again thank you for choosing our company and all the best for you studies that lie ahead.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Lewis
Managing Director

Appendix G

Ethics Clearance Letter of Approval

Wits School of Education

27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 • Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa
Tel: +27 11 717-3007 • Fax: +27 11 717-3009 • E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za • Website: www.wits.ac.za

STUDENT NUMBER: 0516765G
Protocol: 2007ECE112
Mrs G Hundermark
140 Kastaiing Street
WELTEVREDEN PARK
1790

24-Oct-07

Dear Ms G Hundermark

Application for Ethics Clearance: Masters in Education

The Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the senate has considered your application for ethics clearance for your proposal entitled:

Can an Elephant become an ant? Learning for sustainability

Recommendation:

Ethics clearance is granted

Yours sincerely

Matsie Mabeta
Wits School of Education

Cc Supervisor: Prof J Castle

Appendix H

Data collection instruments and purpose

Research instrument	Why this instrument?	To get what data?	Why this data?
Analysis of company documentation: • company profile • performance appraisals • business and marketing strategy • consulting methodology	• Identify if learning is highlighted as a characteristic of the company	• The characteristics of the organisation (in terms of learning organisations) (Research Question (RQ) 1)	• Identify what facets of a learning organisation are reflected in the company
		• Mechanisms in place to encourage learning in the company (RQ 1)	• Identify if learning is encouraged
Naturalistic observations	• Gauge the culture of the company – 'case the joint' • Observe if and how the company encourages learning	• Assess organisational culture (RQ 1)	• Identify if the company has a culture/climate that encourages learning
		• What the characteristics of the companies are (in terms of learning organisations) (RQ 1)	• Identify what facets of a learning organisation are reflected in small companies
		• Mechanisms in place to encourage learning in the company (RQ 1)	• Identify if learning is encouraged

Research instrument	Why this instrument?	To get what data?	Why this data?
Analysis of company documentation: • company profile • performance appraisals • business and marketing strategy • consulting methodology • policy statements	• Identify if learning is highlighted as a characteristic of the company	• What the characteristics of the companies are (in terms of learning organisations) (RQ 1)	• Identify what facets of a learning organisation are reflected in a small company
		• Mechanisms in place to encourage learning in the company (RQ 1)	• Identify if learning is encouraged
	• Identify what sustainability means in the context of the organisation	• Stated views on sustainability and the organisation's sustainability (RQ 2)	• Identify if the small company perceives learning as a contributing factor to sustainability

Research instrument	Why this instrument?	To get what data?	Why this data?
Questionnaires for staff	• Understand how staff perceive the characteristics of the companies in terms of learning	• What the characteristics of the companies are (in terms of learning organisations) (RQ 1)	• Identify what facets of a learning organisation are reflected in a small company
		• Organisational culture (RQ1)	• Identify if the company has a culture/climate that encourages learning
		• How mission, vision statement was determined (RQ1)	• Determine if members contributed to statements
		• Mechanisms in place to encourage learning in the company (RQ 1)	• Identify if learning is encouraged
	• Understand what staff perceive sustainability to be in the context of small companies	• What the aspects are that contribute to the sustainability of a small company (RQ2) (Questionnaire 3.17)	• Identify if the company perceives learning as a contributing factor to sustainability

Research instrument	Why this instrument?	To get what data?	Why this data?
Semi-structured interviews with management	• Understand how managers perceive the characteristics of their companies in terms of learning	• What the characteristics of the company is (in terms of learning organisations) (RQ 1)	• Identify the organisation's characteristics to match with Senge's five disciplines
		• Organisational culture (RQ1)	• Identify if the organisation has a climate that encourages learning
		• How mission, vision statement was determined (RQ1)	• Determine how these were formed – member buy-in?
		• Mechanisms in place to encourage learning in the company (RQ 1)	• Identify if learning is encouraged
	• Understand what managers perceive sustainability to be in the context of small companies	• What the aspects are that contribute to the sustainability of the small company (RQ2)	• Identify if the company perceives learning as a contributing factor to sustainability

Research instrument	Why this instrument?	To get what data?	Why this data?
Interviews and naturalistic observations	• Determine which facets of the company hinders and/or promotes the disciplines of a learning organisation	• Practices that hinder and/or promote the disciplines of a learning organisation (RQ 3)	• Develop the organisation's learning characteristics according to Senge's five disciplines
	• Identify how to strengthen or develop the disciplines of a learning organisations within the small company	• Strategy to proceed as a learning organisation (RQ 3)	• Identify how to encourage practices/ disciplines of a learning organisation
	• Determine actions/ steps to be taken that can contribute to the company's sustainability	• Mechanisms to put in place to encourage learning in and sustainability of the company (RQ 3)	• Identify how to contribute to the sustainability of the company

Research instrument	Why this instrument?	To get what data?	Why this data?
Focus groups (based on transect walks and auto-photography)	• Determine how the concept of a learning organisation is taken up in the company	• Descriptions of how the organisation is a learning one	• To provide insight into data gained from other research methods
	• Determine which facets of the company hinders and/or promotes the disciplines of a learning organisation	• Practices that hinder and/or promote the disciplines of a learning organisation (RQ 3)	• Develop the organisation's learning characteristics according to Senge's five disciplines
	• Identify how to strengthen or develop the disciplines of a learning organisations within the small company	• Strategy to proceed as a learning organisation (RQ 3)	• Identify how to encourage practices/ disciplines of a learning organisation
	• Determine actions/ steps to be taken that can contribute to the company's sustainability	• Mechanisms to put in place to encourage learning in and sustainability of the company (RQ 3)	• Identify how to contribute to the sustainability of the company

Appendix I

Auto-photographs from 2012

Research

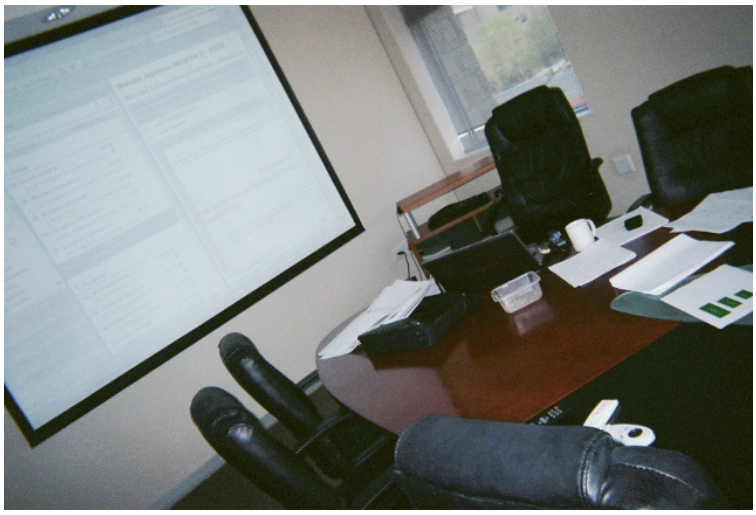




Recognition



Project meetings



Day-to-day operations





Random





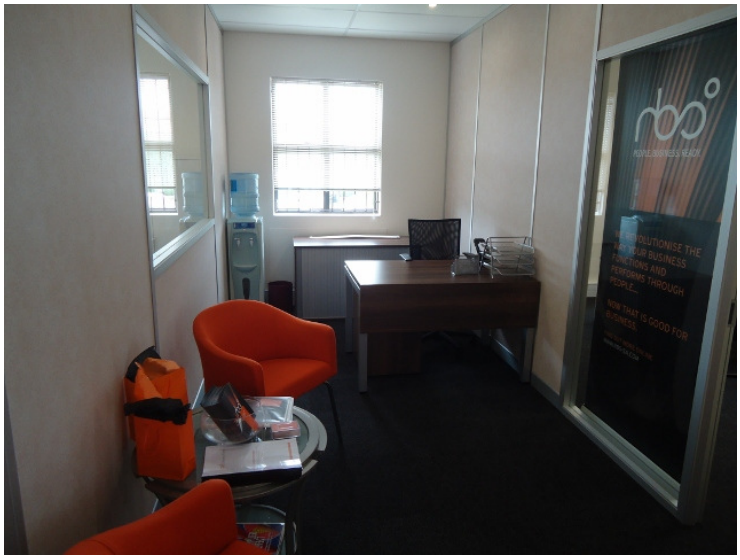


Random



Appendix J

New office of ODC



Reception area



Managing Director's office (to the right of the reception area)



View down the passage to the left of the reception area



Consultants' office (A) – on the right of the passage



Consultants' office (B)

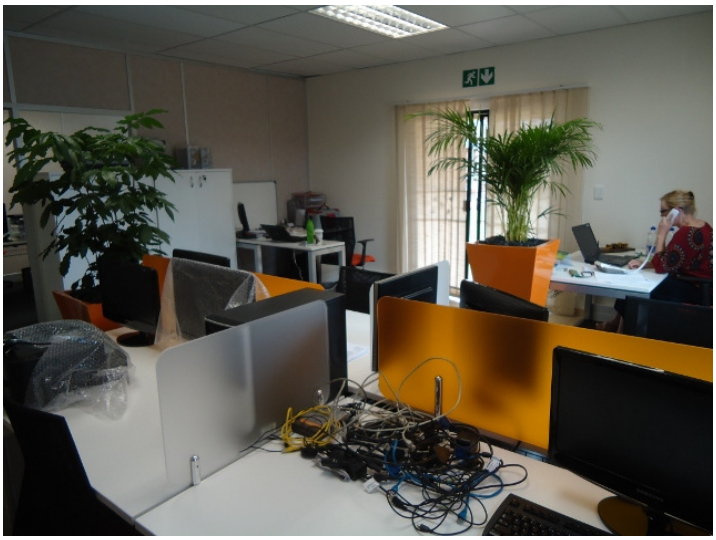


Kitchen – on the left of the passage



Printing/ store room – next to the kitchen





Open office area – at the end of the passage



Open office area – at the end of the passage



Finance office – leading off the open office area