Importance of Improved Communication between Stakeholders in Information Systems Implementation Projects

by

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A thesis presented to the University of Western Sydney in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Masters Commerce (Honours) – Management

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Dedications

I dedicate this thesis to my loving and supportive family, church family, and friends.
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

(Signature)
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Gregory Teal, my research supervisor, for his help and support through this process. I would also like to thank the many participants who contributed to the research, allowing me to better understand communication processes in the workplace, and in particular, during the implementation of information systems project.
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Glossary

1) **Information Systems**: “Thought of as the data-based networks needed to create, establish, maintain and control the organisation’s set of contracts” — *Checkland and Holwell (1998)*

2) **Organisations**: “An organised body of people with particular purpose especially a business, government department, or charity: a research organisation” — *Oxford Dictionary*

3) **Culture**: “The customs, arts, social institutions and achievements of particular people or other social groups” — *Oxford dictionary*

4) **Social Constructionism**: “Human interchange that gives languages its capacity to mean, and it must stand as the critical locus of concern” — *Gergen 1994, pp. 263-264*

5) **Context**: “The circumstances that form the setting of an event, statement or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood or assessed.” — *Oxford Dictionary*

6) **Communication**: “The imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing or by using some other medium” — *Oxford Dictionary*

7) **Project**: An individual or collaborative enterprise that is carefully planned and designed to achieve a particular aim” — *Oxford Dictionary*

8) **Management**: “The process of dealing with people or controlling tasks” — *Oxford Dictionary*

9) **Teams**: “Two or more people working together on a common task against competition” — *Oxford Dictionary*

10) **Soft System Methodology**: “Methodology that aims to bring about improvements in areas of social concern by activating in the people involved in the situation a learning cycle which is ideally never-ending.” — *Checkland and Holwell (1998)*

11) **Soft Systems**: “IS in its context serves people taking purposeful action, commonly in organisations; attention must first focus on the people and the action” [a.k.a. stakeholders of the system] — *Checkland and Holwell (1998)*
12) **Hard Systems**: “Organisations achieving requirements isolated from its’ social context and human elements” — *Checkland and Holwell (1998)*

13) **Root Definition**: “Careful, concise description of purposeful activity” — *Checkland and Holwell (1998)*
Abstract

Oral communication processes in organisations are complex. Verbal interactions, social contexts including cross-functional organisational culture, and emerging information systems projects, present staff with bewildering issues to deal with through communication processes. To explore communication in this rich setting, the research reported in this thesis applied a social perspective to the functions of oral communication processes, drawing on ideas from two appropriate systems for model development, to construct a generic interpretive methodological model for participatory soft systems methodology in action research. The model aims to examine organisational social contexts through the eyes of front line staff, and attempts to construct new perspectives through actively participating and communicating with stakeholders on various levels. The situated inquiry is concerned with communication practices and behaviours in the context of implementing information systems modules in public sector, higher education institutions.

The research closely examines the established communication processes and behaviours between stakeholders of the information systems enveloped within the organisation’s culture to ascertain certain issues, reasons and solutions to overcome current problems suffered by the ‘human element’ as a whole when attempting to implement a quality information systems module to meet both direct, and indirect stakeholders expectations.

Using Grounded Theory, an innovative methodological framework emerged as a result of conducting the research within the selected situated inquiry. The Progressive Learning Process model was implemented to further enhance stakeholder’s communicative behaviours and practices.

This multifaceted model is comprised of interlinked, and overlapping phases; those are: (a) co-operative inquiry methods, to determine social context and culture, which included purposeful recruitment of participants, and used an assortment of methods; (b) reflections and discourse analysis, which included various processes, and counselling approach to constructing new realities and jump starting change through collaboration and open dialogue; (c) purposeful action, which included putting ideas and theory into practice to create further ideas and theory.
Applying the selected methodology to the situated inquiry appears to preserve complexities of communication in organisational setting, and enhance individuals capabilities that are required when managing expectations of Senior Management.
Chapter 1

Introduction
Overview

This research offers a perspective on understanding communication in a bureaucratically governed organisation. Communication in the workplace is a complex process, and it is not less complex of a process to describe and analyse. Distinctions between verbal communication processes, audience and context, individual and culture tend to be a grey area that is prone to shift, and merge. Changes in organisation’s culture, context, structure, information systems, and shared or conflicting realities may baffle generalisations. Yet, it may still be possible to sort through such elements to reach desired outcomes.

To do so, this research weaved together various practical approaches from using diverse qualitative methods, and from this blend, offered a solution to front line staff, for communicative behaviours and practices in the situated inquiry to manage expectations of Senior Management, when implementing information systems module projects.

A new model for applying soft systems methodology in information systems field of application emerged as a result of utilising Grounded Theory in this research.

While this chapter contains an overview of the research, Chapter Two discusses the study in more detail. The study presented in this thesis is balanced with information gathered from conducting research in the situated inquiry. Qualitative methodology employed during the course of this research is described in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, the information is analysed to illustrate the validity of the model in the context of managing expectations when implementing information systems modules in public organisations, and outcomes. In the process, Chapter Four provides information of data extracts gathered through research work conducted in the situated inquiry.

However, it is appropriate to begin with discussing the reasons for choosing the topic area and for writing this thesis. On one level, it builds on works such as Checkland and Holwell’s Information Systems and Information Systems – Making Sense of the Field (1998).

On another level, it arises out of the author’s qualification in Engineering, Diploma of Engineering Practice, -- mainly concerned with the social practices in engineering-- and Masters of Engineering Management; as well as her experiences in the workplace for the past ten years as an operational (front line) staff, and management in the field of information systems; programmer, performance analyst, applications developer,
project management and applications consultant. Indeed, the author inhabits two intellectually separate spaces and surprisingly found little overlap between the world of academia and industry. Besides the fact that human beings with their associated idiosyncrasies inhabit both worlds, there is little commonality in values, mission, interest, or activity.

For the past three years as the author worked to complete their postgraduate research studies, part time, it has been by no means a small source of dissension. At heart the author is hopelessly a traveller on a journey, hence, her urge was to convert discord to research, to extract meaning from mystification. Thus, one might pronounce that the core of this work is a divergence in worldview, a clash of discourse.

And in many ways, we acknowledge the need to moving it beyond that core. As the author began to review business and organisational communication scholarly work in the field of information systems, it was troubling how much of such work treats the individual worker (front line staff) as an abstraction. Few individual voices appear in such articles; rather, coded responses and quantitative analyses support broad generalisations, often aimed solely at management. They describe a world that is scarcely recognised by the author, a world of systems, policies, efficiencies, and performance management. However, not a world of people, unique individuals who are comprised of not just physical manifestations, but also mental, emotional and spiritual plains that are rarely acknowledged or considered in literature – people with many valid opinions to share and valuable contributions to make.

To the author, these fields seem trapped by a quantitative paradigm, and as a result, loose the vitality, the conflict, and the character of workplace communication that has shaped author’s own experiences.

We found much comfort in undertaking qualitative research methodology, more specifically participatory soft systems methodology. Here an evolving social perspective permits a richer view of workplace communication, views that can focus on individuals, groups, or entire organisations, informed by social context, shared reality, and constructed culture.

Consequently, this view increasingly revealed a “dark side” of social constructionism, which is disclosed in the silencing of marginalised voices, for the sake of preserving the status quo.
The consequence of this perspective from a researcher’s point of view is a lack of closure. One can participate in, reflect, recommend plans for purposeful action, act on recommendations, observe, learn, and describe outcomes of plans designed for communicative behaviour in a dynamic system (but only imperfectly), package it for consumption by a disciplinary community, and perhaps, through an aggregative process involving many researchers over time, gain some insight and understanding into the importance of lateral communication for staff (front liners) in the workplace. An understanding into the importance of empowering staff to have their own voice, and not the voice of the collective group in an organisation, however, “truth” does not come easily. Nevertheless, this thesis is part of that aggregative process, as part of an emerging conversation about communication processes in the workplace. It is hoped that this thesis adds to the richness and complexity, to the essentially human side of research on communication in the workplace.

In general, however, qualitative researchers have not focused heavily on workplace communication (please refer to Chapter Two). Indeed, it is fair question to ask what is to be gained through this type of study. From a personal perspective, although qualitative research as a field ultimately focuses on providing academic or theoretical insight, the author also likes to consider it as an ancient oratorical tradition of commentary on communication. Yet contemporary scholarly work in the field of communication appears to be in the historically odd position of limiting its purview primarily to students and tertiary life.

We try to teach students the importance of communication. In contrast, classical rhetoric, as represented by the ancient philosophers such as Socrates, Aristotle, Plato and Cicero, focused on public life after education, on preparing individuals to become moral, responsible, and effective citizens. The same could probably be said about the traditions of the middle Ages, and throughout the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries (e.g., the published lectures of Hugh Blair and Church rhetoricians). Whether or not there is an agreement reached on their perspectives and definitions of “good citizenship”, as they might from our social perspective today, appear elitist or sexist, the connections between the world of thought and the world of action were close and vital. Similarly, to understand the processes of communication, we need to explore the worlds inside and outside academia. Further, since many of such explorations ultimately find their way into our teaching syllabuses, then we may need to consider being more critical, thoughtful and proactive researchers. We must extend
such proactive methodologies to many settings, to our governments, multicultural social contexts, and to where, for better or worse, we spend much of our adult lives – our workplaces.

This author does not focus on the workplace to help identify the “personality focus” skills necessary to succeed; instead it is to identify the habits (skills, knowledge, and desire) to be gained. Workplaces are, after all, only a single setting for communication and research here must be a cumulative process. Through critical and proactive approaches to research in many settings, we can begin to enhance our understanding of communication itself, to see its connections to a larger world and individual lives, to trace its rich relationship with culture, and to make our research relevant to diverse populations.

In this ambitious and challenging context, which is firmly believed to be the path that guarantees a vital field for qualitative research, the adapted participatory soft systems methodology model discussed in this thesis is a small, propositional contribution to opportunities that are yet to come.

However, it is the only contribution that the author knows how to make, and the only way the author knows how to enter the conversation. In this thesis, the author tried to connect workplace communication to larger social forces, to suggest critical stances towards organisational and communication processes, and finally, to convey the idea that any evaluation of communicative practices crosses multiple value and belief systems, which are therefore becoming more complex as the establishment of the “Global Village” continues.

**Introduction to the Progressive Learning Process Generic Model**

The model presented in this thesis is an adaptation of the generic ‘Learning Process’ model for soft systems methodology in action research discussed in Checkland and Holwell (1998), to better suit the context of the selected research area of communicative practices and behaviours when implementing information systems module project within a bureaucratic Higher Education organisational culture. Here, a brief outline of the model is presented and is later discussed in more detail in Chapter Three of this thesis. Chapter Four then uses data and information gathered through conducting research within the situated inquiry to assess the usefulness of this model.
In creating the model, we began with several basic assumptions, presented in more detail in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis. However, briefly the assumptions are as follows:

- To understand communication in a complex setting of implementing information systems module project in organisations like government organisations, theory must be grounded in a social perspective and along the lines of socio-technical concepts;
- Interrelatedness of communication processes, organisational culture and information systems must be thoroughly understood;
- Participants have the answers within them, they may just need prompting and encouragement to discover the answers they are looking for; and
- Focus cannot be solely limited to soft systems methodology in action research.

Co-operate Inquiry – Established Social Construct Condition through the Eyes of Selected Participants

In order for the researcher to discover the context of the information system and its organisational social environment, and in line with the research project’s philosophical stance, it was perceived as appropriate to observe and note down the “human element’s” perceptions of the organisation’s social context, and the information systems in the organisation. Hence, co-operate inquiries were conducted with purposefully recruited co-researchers and a cross-section of stakeholders/participants, to determine how the organisation is perceived by the stakeholders in light of implementing information systems projects, which in turn influences stakeholder’s perceptions of the information systems itself, to a point where the information system may even become the ‘scapegoat’ of the fundamental issues and problems at hand. This gave an insight into the information systems from a social perspective, as information systems are socio-technical systems that are expected to integrate, even if imperfectly with the organisational culture and ‘human elements’. Notwithstanding the above, it is also part of the selected methodology to avoid encouraging “blame”, and to empower the ‘human element’ to pro-actively seek change of the constructed reality by taking ownership of their thoughts and feelings to come to realisations as to when their perceptions are clearly their own reality, and not the “truth” of the matter. This is further discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.
**Reflections and Discourse Analysis**

Communication is a constructive process. That is, as people interact, express opinions, exchange ideas, they affect each other’s perceptions of reality. To discover such perceptions that are founded in the organisation and amongst information systems stakeholders; and to unveil the constructed realities and context surrounding the implemented information system, their realities of the system needed to be explored through internal dialectic and external communication processes; this is further explained in Chapter Three of this thesis. Collaboration and brainstorming sessions were held with co-researchers, where both the researcher and participants reflected on the perceived context to empower participants to “sort out” through the issues and produce plans for purposeful action to overcome constructed “norms” in search of new realities to pursue. The underlying philosophy behind taking this approach is that it is more likely for participants to put plans into action if they are empowered to formulate such plans themselves, as opposed to being handed a plan for change and expected to follow the imposition.

**Purposeful Action**

This category focused on prioritising the newly constructed ideas achieved from the Reflections and Discourse Analysis phase, where co-researchers choose to implement the newly constructed reality as they decide on the actions they perceive to be best to pursue within the situated inquiry.

**The Model**

The model comes from a perspective of following a journey of learning and discovery, where theory is put into practice to continue to produce more theory and constructed ideas, to use and practice in the workplace. It is cyclic in nature, in other words, it is a life process that is followed until such time when constructed realities cease to exist, and with it habits that are based on newly constructed principle centred core, constituted of knowledge, skills and desire.

It is the position of the thesis that the three phases previously (and briefly) outlined above – co-operate inquiries, reflections and discourse analysis, purposeful action; initiate, and contribute to the Progressive Learning Process. While the study of any of these phases in the context of communicative behaviour and practices can be enlightening, the real power of the model is in considering the complex
interrelationships of all these phases. For the researcher, then, the model provides an interpretive framework for understanding workplace research in the context of communication processes within organisations when implementing information systems module projects, or, for that matter, for understanding any single performance of action research in that setting.

**Overview of the Research**

The researcher undertook research work within the above mentioned situated inquiry, which resulted in the emergence of the interpretive participatory soft systems methodology framework outlined above; and reports the results of the study in Chapter Four. Chapter Two is a review of the literature, and Chapter Three contains a detailed description of the adapted methodology used to undertake research work. The study concerned the establishment of communication-bridges between stakeholders, in particular between front line staff and Management, of information systems in a public sector higher education institution, to manage expectations. The organisation has approximately two thousand and five hundred employees, and is geographically decentralised in nature, as it operates on five campuses, spread across the western suburbs of Sydney.

The information system is implemented to deal with student enrolment matters, and is the creation of an interstate Australian University that customised the system based on Government directives over five years ago. Eleven other Australian Universities “joined the boat” for the implementation of this system, as opposed to exploring off-the-shelf information systems options, this was mainly due to the Universities lack of financial independence as individual bodies. One of those Universities is the organisation where the situated inquiry was conducted.

Generally speaking, as is the case with information systems, the need for the system to be updated surfaced as Universities continued to follow new Government and legislative directives, and organisational processes continued to evolve and change within an evolving organisational culture. Hence, module implementation projects were required to customise the system in order for the system to meet the demands made on the organisation by the system’s stakeholders and to integrate the system to its evolving organisational structure and business processes.

The researcher was to work with a one person team, on a module implementation project, as part of a larger systems team, and the larger organisational context.
Co-operative inquiries, reflections and discourse analysis, and purposeful action sessions, were conducted with both the operational manager participant (the “one members” team, on weekly basis), section tactical-executive manager participants (at the time, through holding two interviews), three end users of the system (“once-off” interviews), and department tactical manager participant (at the time, conducted two interviews), for the period of three months during the first cycle of participatory soft systems methodology.

Such sessions included extensive semi-structured interviews, reflection and brainstorming sessions, and the collaborative process of devising and implementing purposeful action.

As demands continued to surface, and passed to front line staff from top-down, the need for direct communication lines between Management and front line staff in this hierarchical and bureaucratic organisation became more and more apparent.

A steering committee had already been established to monitor the implementation and evolution of the information system within the organisation, and the committee comprised of Strategic and Tactical Management memberships. There are approximately twenty members on the committee and meetings used to be held on quarter yearly basis prior to researcher joining the organisation. One steering committee meeting was attended by the researcher during the first cycle of action research, and was part of the purposeful action phase of the devised methodology, which is the final phase of the first cycle, on which research work for this thesis terminated.

In addition, the researcher studied the individuals in the organisation in much greater detail, logging nearly all of the organisation’s related acts of communication for the period of three months.

While the methods that were employed were qualitative, including document analysis, observations, interviews, and actively participating in discussion sessions, this was not an ethnographic study. The researcher was not collecting information from which they later impose order and extract generalisations; rather, the researcher was interested in understanding the project, and communication practices and behaviours within this particular organisation’s culture, in light of the adapted methodology model, and collected information accordingly. In general, it is believed that the researcher was able to provide a fairly rich portrait of the organisation’s communicative behaviours and practices, however, not without some reservations.
Conclusion

As discussed above, the research is concerned with examining communication practices and behaviours within the information systems field of application. In particular, the research project was conducted in a public sector higher education institution in the Western Suburbs of Sydney, to examine the issues in connection with the lack of direct communication lines between Strategic Management and front line staff during the course of information systems module implementation project.

Due to the nature of the research, and knowing that the research is concerned with the study of people’s behaviours and practices in the workplace and more narrowly on information systems module implementation project, the researcher had certain reservations as they approached the research work. There are many complexities involved in studying people’s behaviours and practices when implementing information systems in the organisation’s pre-established social and cultural constructs, hence; the researcher needed to ground the theory in social perspective and along the lines of socio-technical concepts. The researcher also needed to closely examine scholarly work that addressed the inter-relatedness of communication processes, organisational culture and information systems.

With the above reservations and limitations in mind, researcher resorted to utilising Grounded Theory, and a model of Participatory Soft Systems Methodology in action research emerged to help answer research question within the situated inquiry. The model takes a learning approach, as organisations shift and change in response to external changes that continuously occur in the surrounding “Global Village”. Hence, the model provides an interpretative framework, and uses better communication practices and behaviours as co-researchers work together through reflection and dialogue to participate in discourse analysis in the aim of undertaking purposeful action for change within the situated inquiry.
Chapter 2

Communication Behaviour and Practices in Organisations
Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding for the acts of communicative behaviours and practices in the workplace. This, at first, seemed to be a fairly straightforward goal to attempt to achieve. The author had a sense of areas that needed more development as researchers investigate workplace communication processes. These dealt chiefly with enlarging our perceptions of culture within organisations, and understanding the impact of information systems in organisations. What follows then is neither exhaustive nor comprehensive: indeed, in many ways it is conditional and exploratory. This chapter is mainly concerned with reviewing scholarly research on workplace communication processes.

The first section of this chapter grounds the theory of research in a social perspective of verbal communication processes in that, it lays the groundwork for an expanded view of oral communication; social interactions; social and cultural constructionism; and organisational barriers that may oppose the construction of new social organisational dynamics.

The second section presents the influence of individuals on oral expression, communicative behaviours, and practices in the workplace, and provides a challenge for researchers in this field of application to carefully consider various approaches while undertaking research in this area.

Third section of this chapter looks at organisations and information systems, and examines the notion of moving organisations away from traditional management theories to adopt open systems approach to change, as organisations consider undergoing controversial discourse for purposeful action.

While the challenge is deeply confronting, especially to researchers and also, to organisations and individual participants in the workplace, the critical stance presented in this chapter establishes the rationale behind the proposal made to researchers to carefully consider the options available to them while conducting their research work in the workplace.

It is the author’s position, as it will be shortly unveiled in this chapter, that actions speak louder than words, and that if researchers in this field of application build their work on their passionate stands in life, the author is convicted that the choice then becomes blatantly obvious.
Social Construction and Social Interactions

A Broadened Social Definition

Bakhtin (1929, 1973), in a series of works, articulated a theory of dialogue grounded in a social context. A speaker gives a voice to a thought, an utterance. The utterance, though representing the ideas of an individual, is shaped by the social environment:
The immediate social environment and broader social milieu wholly determines – and determine from within, so to speak – the structure of an utterance (1929, p.86).
Utterance as such is wholly a product of social interaction, both of the immediate sort as determined by the circumstances of the discourse, and of the more general kind, as determined by the whole aggregate of conditions under which any given community of speakers operates (p.92).
The listener interprets the utterance in a purposeful, conscious act, in terms of their own concept of the social context, in terms of what the words mean to her/him individually. Further, Bakhtin (1929) states that:

“Any true understanding is dialogic in nature. Understanding is to utterance as one line of dialogue is to the next” (p.102).

Thus, the second step, the understanding, completes the dialogic exchange: in other words, utterance and understanding comprise a single unit of communication.
For Bakhtin (1929), such a theory contains various types of implications. All dialogue, he believes, should have the goal of eliciting further dialogue, not shutting it off with pronouncements of truth or other forms of closure. Likewise, all dialogue flows from previous dialogue and no dialogue have meaning apart from its communicative context. In every utterance, the transmitter speaks from his/her context. In every utterance, the transmitter speaks from their background, education, and particular circumstances; since every individual is unique in these qualities every understanding is necessarily imperfect.
If the speaker and listener pursue the dialogue, they may have to exchange roles many times, subtly changing each other by each communicative interaction. In short, communication is not just a social construct, communication constructs us socially. Bakhtin (1929) states it in the following manner:
“It is not experience that organises expression, but the other way around – expression organises experience. Expression is what first gives experience its form and specificity of direction (p.85).

Bakhtin suggests that communication processes organise the experiences of individuals, however, it is our firm belief that human kind are not passive recipients, instead they are active participants who are created with free will, and enjoy the privilege of choice. The author believes that experiences and expressions are engaged in an interactive process, where the two processes, when appropriately nurtured, are capable of forming an undefeated co-dependent force that contributes to the progress of social constructionism. This is later discussed in the below sections of this chapter, as the author reviews literature relating to communication models within organisations, teams, and individuals.

**Influence of External Culture on Communicative Behaviours and Practices**

There are two levels of culture that relate to organisations: external and internal. The external deals with the identity of national culture and has been an area of great interest in the last two decades or so. The major focus of this interest initially was Japan. In trying to understand how Japanese businesses could produce such high quality goods with such efficiency, commentators turned to an examination of Japan’s culture, talking about matters relating to cooperative rice planting and the samurai.

The external view also reflects the realisation that national cultures are blurring into a complex global economy, where business practices are far from uniform (Clegg, 1990, pp. 107-152).

What is significant about the external view, for the purposes of this thesis at any rate, is a characterisation of Australian culture.

In Australian culture, the “ideology of the collective” (Knight, 1990, p.5) has been strong, hence accepting changes imposed by a global economy has meant questioning the value of canonical myths of our modern history – egalitarianism, “mateship” (solidarity), upward mobility, and “fair go” for all – along with the associated ethical images of pleasure, personal development, and social worth that still circulate in our society (Morris, 1998; Turner, 1994).
Despite appearances, the neoliberal critique of culture can not be neatly disentangled from “artistic and literal” concerns. By the end of the 1980’s it had prompted a media debate about the worth of various aspects of Australia’s traditional national identity (hedonism and “welfarism” were popular topics for criticism; see Robinson, 1989), and over the following ten years the economic and social arrangements that for century had sustained social democracy in Australia were dismantled or undermined. However, this debate was only a fraction of the coverage devoted to “cultural” dimensions of East Asia’s economic boom as stated in Garnaut (1989). Commentators promoted “Confucian Capitalism” as a new model of development with cultural lessons to teach the West, and civilisational theories of history came back into mainstream fashion after decades in disrepute (Huntington, 1996; see also Chen, 1998).

After the Asian financial downfall in the period that lasted from 1997 to 1998, “crony capitalism” became for the very same commentators an object lesson in the need for “cultural reforms” as prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (Arndt and Hill, 1999).

Shorn of it’s subordination of all other goals to that of economic productivity, and without the moralism (and determinism) of neoliberal rhetoric, this usage turns out to be strikingly close to one dimension of the way world culture is used in cultural studies. In this context, too, culture is thought of as directly bound up with work and organisations; with relationships of power and gender in the workplace, the home, the neighbourhood, and the street; with the pleasures and the pressures of the consumption; with the complex relations of class and kin through which a sense of self and belongings formed; and with the fantasies and desires through which social relations are carried and actively shaped.

Considering the above outlined culture shift in the Australian social context, and reflecting on this type of newly constructed ethos, if it is accepted, supports a mechanistic, controlling view of organisations.

The external view of culture is equated with the concept of “organisational culture.” Deal and Kennedy (1982) describe several elements that affect or define organisational culture:

- Business Environment. All corporations exist in a particular commercial environment. One environment may be characterised by aggressive sales and cutthroat competition; another, by a need for constant product innovation;
another by delicate labour relations. Deal and Kennedy identify external culture as the “single greatest influence in shaping corporate culture” (p. 13).

- **Values.** These are beliefs shared and clearly understood (at least ideally) by employees within an organisation. They may be recorded as slogans or mission statements, but most often are not written down. They give employees a sense of community and common direction (p. 21).

- **Heroes.** Heroes in an organisation embody its’ values. Serving as role models, “the hero is the great motivator, the magician, the person everyone will count on when things get tough” (p. 37).

- **Rites and Rituals.** These are the events that order day-to-day activities in an organisation, events that establish its routine, its code for expected behaviour, its celebrations for success (pp. 14, 59-61).

- **The Cultural Network.** All of the above have to be communicated to have any significance, and this is most often through informal means: “spies, storytellers, priests, whisperers – these people from the hidden hierarchy (emphasis theirs) which looks considerably different from the organisation chart” (p.85).

Communication is central to the efficient functioning of an organisation, and this is where, as it is going to be demonstrated, the subdiscipline of business communication places its focus. However, communication is also central to developing, sustaining, and altering organisational culture. In a series of examples, Deal and Kennedy note that the actual time staff spend on communicating “cultural” topics greatly exceeds that spent on work related topics (pp. 98-100). Roles described for spies, storytellers, priests, and whisperers – perhaps better presented in less loaded terms – are an instructive representation of the workings of the informal hierarchy.

However, despite Deal and Kennedy’s appealing analysis, organisational culture is a slippery concept. Top-down organisations may in fact have an identifiable, official, management-endorsed culture – although it is the position of this thesis, based on the author’s previous experiences, and data collected through research work, that this approach may result in resistance and resentment.

Most organisations, as many commentators point out, have multiple cultures, cultures that reflect fundamental work-product or management style, cultures that reflect regional, external cultures. They may also reflect classicism, sexism, and racism. So
when the participation arm of organisation studies begins to treat organisational culture as another means to achieve organisational ends, this author protests. For it is the conviction of the author that re-arranging the seats on the sinking Titanic is not the solution required to stop the occupants from drowning (since the ships’ drowning was in itself inevitable at the time).

Morgan (1986) notes:

Persuaded by the ideas that there are good and bad cultures, that a strong organisation culture is essential for success, or that modifications to an existing culture will lead employees to work harder and feel more content, many managers and management consultants have begun to adopt new roles as corporate gurus attempting to create new forms of corporate consciousness. While many managers approach this task on the assumption that what is good for the organisation will inevitably be in the interests of its’ employees, critics feel that this trend is potentially dangerous one, developing the art of management into process of ideological control (p. 138)

This research’s responsibility is to propose the thought that for organisations to work more effectively, it is worth considering that what is good for the employees of the organisation will inevitably be good for the organisation as organisations are considered as open systems, living organisms, which are formulated through amalgamation of individuals who are to be empowered to engage in controversial discourse of the organisation. This is further elaborated on in Chapter Three of this thesis.

As was previously stated, it is important for researchers of communicative practices within specific organisations to attempt to understand the rich social environment that envelopes its employees in order for researchers in this field to adopt discourse analysis in research work. However, for active researchers in this field, their work does not stop there (as is discussed below in Organisations in the light of Information Systems section). It is this thesis’s purpose to not only use descriptive means to analyse the drowning of the Titanic, it is also it’s purpose to save the occupants from drowning with the ship, to give hope of building new sustainable realities for the human interface in organisations’ social context.

Characterising organisational culture is another means to accomplish the intended purpose of this thesis. Deal and Kennedy offer some colourful sample characterisations: the tough-guy, macho culture (highly individualistic), the work
hard, play hard culture (high level of low risk activities), and bet-your-company culture (high risk activities, minimal feedback), and the process culture (minimal feedback, highly bureaucratic) (pp. 107-123).

At a practical level, and for our purposes in this research project, organisational culture is kept strictly as a descriptive concept in the initial phase of the chosen participatory soft systems methodology: co-operate inquiry. With this limitation, Deal and Kennedy’s framework for organisation culture (s) is useful. The information required to apply Deal and Kennedy’s categories is not too difficult to collect. One can get a sense of the organisation’s environment for a particular industry through a quick review of its trade journals or conversations with those who are likely to have “the big picture” (e.g., marketing management). One can simply ask employees about values or heroes: since organisational culture is an amalgam of individual opinions, any individual responses are informative. Indeed, it is the personal understanding of the social environment that affects each individual’s behaviour. Not only is it therefore interesting to compare individual notions of organisational culture, supplemented with some basic research on the organisation itself, consequently, it is probably reasonable to ignore an over-arching concept of it if that seems difficult to collect and define.

Influence of Organisations Social Constructionism on Communicative Behaviour and Practices

In preparing this section, the author read, selectively, in a discipline that seems to be unfamiliar grounds, generally (but not always) called Organisation Studies. An assumption that ran deep in the literature review conducted by the author is that rise of large organisations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries enabled the “modern” period, a period characterised by specialisation and differentiation. Organisations in the post-modern period have been characterised by a movement towards “differentiation” (Clegg, 1990, p.11; see also Power, 1990). This is a resonant concept, and seems to be the very essence of postmodernism – Propositional or situated truth, the death of reason, polyvocalism, the breakdown of traditional hegemonies – one aspect stands out: things blend, mix, and somehow seem to run together. While the author did not set out to write “postmodern” comments in this thesis, part of the dissonance described in Chapter One of the thesis rises from
academic functionalities. Assumptions informed by the author’s experience led us to believe that workplace communication was affluent, complex, and full of human narrative stories. Research on the workplace spread among a number of academic disciplines, seemed unconnected, constrained, and progressive. What is attempted to be achieved in this section is the “differentiation”: piece together diverse perspectives from a number of disciplines so that they can blend, mix, and coherently run together.

**The Mechanistic Organisation**

Morgan (1986) suggests that the metaphor of machine for organisations has interesting qualifications. He traces its’ early foundations to the 18th century, specifically Frederick The Great of Prussia, who combined an inherited army with his love of automata (mechanical men) (pp. 23-4). He instituted an elaborate system of authority, precision drills, and other military blights. Surprisingly enough, his army was successful. As organisations subsequently grew to previously unimaginable sizes in late 19th century, such militaristic models seemed the logical place to look to organise the means of production. This in turn forms the foundations of “classical management theory” its’ basic idea is “that management is a process of planning, organisation, command, coordination, and control” (p. 25). The emphasis in the context of mechanistic organisations is clearly on command and control. Classical management theory has given us the organisation chart, “one man one boss,” customised work tasks (i.e. the assembly line), and elaborate bureaucracies (pp. 24-9).

This is linked with Taylors’ scientific management, the infamous time-and-motion efficiency studies that reshaped manufacturing processes, as discussed in Blau and Scott (1962).

Classical management has its contemporary critics, most notably Max Weber, who is widely cited in organisation studies, particularly his characterisation of bureaucracy as “the iron cage” (Clegg, 1990, p. 31). Classical management is currently viewed by scholars as extremely problematic. For example:

Mechanistic approaches to organisations often have severe limitations. In particular, they: (a) can create organisational forms that have great difficulty in adapting to changing circumstances; (b) can result in mindless and unquestioning bureaucracy; (c) can have unanticipated and undesirable consequences as the interests of those working in the organisation take
precedence over the goals the organisation was designed to achieve; and (d) can have dehumanising effects upon employees (Morgan, 1986, p. 35).

Indeed it is recognised that classical management gave way – at least in the academic context – beginning in the 60’s, to the “Organic” views of organisations.

**The Organic Organisation**

Although it seems peculiarly self-evident, the Organic model of organisations “was built on the idea that individuals and groups, like biological organisms, operate more effectively only when their needs are satisfied” (Morgan, 1986, p. 41). There is some type of variety implied here: the Mechanistic view treats workers like household servants in a machine (although some differences were cited, e.g., Golden, 1992); the Organic Organisation treats staff as though they are far more self-determining and in much less need of control. The Organic perspective often emphasises an organisation’s relationship with the outside environment. Notwithstanding this thought, Organic Organisation theory shares qualities with the Mechanistic view. Neither question the necessity of large organisations and both have a similar aim: how can the organisation best meet its goals at any cost and sacrifice?

The Organic perspective has taken three major forms, the organisation as an Open System, Contingency Theory, and Population Ecology perspective. The Open Systems view attempts to dissolve the boundaries that characterised the Mechanistic view. It sees organisations as reacting to inputs and outputs through interaction with the environment and self monitoring, just like a biological system (Clegg, 1990, pp. 51-2).

Contingency theory introduces flexibility into the idea of cooperate organisations. Since organisations interact with their environment, they must adapt to meet changing circumstances. It requires an observant management and the ability of the organisation in fact to change, which is by no means a given (Clegg, 1990, pp. 69-71). According to contingency theory, organisations should tolerate different styles – from mechanistic to organic – in different departments (or subsystems) within the same organisation. An order-filling department may perform best along mechanistic models: Research and Development may be most efficient under a considerably less structured organic model. Contingency theory seems currently to be the dominant metaphor for organisational settings.
The third Organic theory perspective is population ecology, which is really an offshoot of contingency theory. Given that the organisation is like an organism and must make changes in response to internal and external changes, it stands to reason that some organisations will adapt more successfully than others. In short, it is a pseudo Darwinian view, survival of the fittest, and has had great appeal to organisations (Wilmott, 1990, p. 46; Clegg, 1990, pp. 75-77).

Consequently, not all organisation studies perspectives are functionalist. Wilmott (1990) notes (and decries) a deepening rift in organisation studies that originated as early as 1970 between perspectives such as those mentioned above and those informed by ethnomethodology or Marxism (p. 46). The ethnomethodologists avoided grand theory, focusing on specific patterns in specific settings. The Marxists interpreted organisational behaviour along class lines. In addition, there seems to be an underlying tension between organisations as a subject of study and organisations as an object of improvement. The choice for scholars: criticism or complicity.

**Oppression of Communicative Behaviours and Practices in Organisations**

It is implicit in the above commentary that there is a silent acceptance of organisational cultures, as they may need or want to exist. However, this thesis takes a pro-active evaluative stance in the context of social constructionism. Since organisations are not neutral entities, as at one end of the spectrum they shape our culture through their employment practices, products, advertising, political and charitable contributions, which impact on the natural environment, and a host of other factors. At the other end of the spectrum, they define the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of individual people – sometimes in ways that are less than compassionate. Hence, it is the author’s position that this section needs to explore organisational culture from a critical stance to build the foundation of the researcher’s choice of methodology applied in research work. Sievers (1990) notes that, for many of its workers, the organisation has replaced church, family, and state as the centre of meaning. Yet the organisation is a particularly problematic source of meaning:

The meaning managed by our industrial enterprises has become a consumption product… Typically, employee and consumer are merely different interchangeable roles for one and the same person – employees are consumers.
Meaning then appears as a ‘paradoxical entity.’ It is produced in order to be destroyed to be reproduced and to be destroyed again (pp. 127-8).

This evokes T.S. Eliot’s “Waste Land” in its aimlessness and its unnatural disassociation from human emotional and spiritual life. One can identify a more active form of organisational malice as well, by turning around some positive associated with strong organisational cultures, or the qualities of excellence noted in Peters and Waterman (1982).

Max Weber as cited in (Clegg, 1990) identifies three types of organisational domination: a charismatic leader establishes the “ideological control”; traditional domination in an organisation reflects the values of external culture, and the possible institutionalisation of classicism, sexism, and racism; and rational-legal is rules-based, domination by bureaucracy.

Is communication the means of these abuses? Another approach to understanding communication in organisational settings is to look at how it helps perpetuate meaning-making that serves organisational purposes, not the purposes of its workers. (If the organisation seem to be treated as an independent intelligence it is because organisations seem to possess identities that seem to exceed the lifespan of its management). One might first start by evaluating how communication serves to initiate and support systems of domination, hence setting foundational grounds much needed to identify means for the destruction and reconstruction of such dominations to better sustain workers’ needs, and in turn serve organisations’ purposes. Communication can be a two-edged sword. If it is used to abuse, it can be used to expose abuse. If it is used to oppress, it can be used to emancipate. If it is used to construct a harsh reality of silent submission and acceptance of corruption, it can be used to construct new realities and meanings through peaceful, open and heartfelt genuine dialogues, protests, revolutions, evolutions and change.

This creates a dilemma for the researcher, and is another instance of a familiar refrain in this thesis. Can one take this critical stance and still be allowed in the doors of an organisation for further research? Can we assume to be evaluators when employees themselves offer no objection, to privilege our own value system over theirs? On the other hand, especially given the fact that pedagogy often mirrors research, can we ignore that which we see as apathy and maintain our descriptive stance?

However, there are more valuable questions that need to be closely examined, and are important to ask in such a context: why would taking an active approach to research
in this area cause the oppression of future active research work in the workplace? And most importantly is: why do employees in such organisational contexts offer no objection to oppression of the individual voices?

It is on this premise that the author implemented participatory soft systems methodology in action research. Discourse analysis, on which the author pondered about the core problems and associated consequences that may eventuate from taking certain strong direction and stand point.

However, the main issue the researcher found themselves confronted with, is a genuine attempt of discovering the core problem and identification of methods to construct new ‘truths’ that would over turn the life-long accumulated issues within the social context of the organisation.

The author aimed to conduct research work in the workplace on the premise that they are seeking solutions, resolutions through experimental approach; and on a more personal level, it was to seek some type of applicable understanding into theoretical hypotheticals, of “what ifs?”

Hence, as part of this research into communicative practices and behaviours in organisational settings, and it is the opinion of the author, that the most logical way to achieve some generic resolutions into the concept of achieving social constructionism within organisations, is by generating a dialogue amongst members in the organisation and jump starting social interactions, to construct new realities and meanings, as opposed to placing bandaid solutions on core problems by re-arranging furniture, while hiding the accumulated dust, which was built over many years of neglect, under the carpet.

While considering global demands that may impose organisational restructure (that sometimes may seem to be an inevitable “core elective”, and a probable solution that the author personally does not object to), it is the position of this thesis that social construction processes within organisations’ culture (s) are better achieved by the generation of constructive dialogue amongst individuals who are enveloped within a certain organisations’ social contexts, which in turn opens doors for more sustainable changing realities. In other words, change may come in the form of imposition, driven by Mechanistic view to organisational culture, and it may come in the form of empowering the human interface within a certain social context to choose constructing new realities through open dialogue, as explained above. The latter is achieved through phases two, and three of the selected participatory soft systems
methodology in action research discussed in Chapter Three. Outcomes and lessons learnt are observed and documented, as discussed in Chapters Three and Four below.

**Communicative Behaviours and Practices in Project Management Teams within Organisations**

In this section, the processes of communication practices and behaviours in project management teams within organisations are discussed in detail through the examination of scholarly work on the subject. The focus of this section is to establish the various stages of communication processes and their connection to individual cognition that is shaped primarily by their environment, and organisational social constructionism.

An organisation of practice is described as a work system about which individual members collectively share a common vision, goals and objectives pertaining to their tasks (Brown et al. 1989). Through extended and in-depth interactions as well as a shared vision, members of the same organisation of practice have similar experiences and interpret those experiences concurrently. These common experiences lead to constructing of a shared understanding over a period of time to achieve common goals and objectives. Thus, individual members in the context of diverse organisation of practice bring with them sundry experiences that may often be expressed and communicated in a distinct manner, which may be perceived differently by the recipients of those messages. In contemporary organisations we are more likely to find ourselves interacting with individuals from different disciplines than ours. This occurrence may encompass negative influences on communication processes and practices within organisations.

The development of effective communication behaviours, interactions, and practices is reliant on the constructed organisation reality and dynamics. These processes can be understood as stages through which ideas are formed, facilitated by the interactions and patterns of connections between members. Through their interactions, members acquire, interpret, transmit, manipulate and use information (Gibson 2001).

Numerous models have been developed to depict communication processes (Crossan 1999; Drach-Zahavy and Somech 2001; Gibson 2001; Jarvinen and Poikela 2001). When analysed, a number of unique stages emerge, which together portray the core processes demonstrated in communicative behaviours and practices. The first stage is
one during which experience is formed within a common context or focused within a single point from diverse organisational areas (Drach-Zahavy and Somech 2001; Gibson 2001). In the second stage information is shared through interactive processes (Drach-Zahavy and Somech 2001; Gibson 2001; Jarvinen and Poikela 2001; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1996). Third, individual staff work together, and individually to interpret, analyse and evaluate the available information, or shared realities (Crossan 1999; Drach-Zahavy and Somech 2001; Gibson 2001; Jarvinen and Poikela 2001; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1996). The final stage is one in which members integrate and construct the information they have communicated and developed into a new understanding or reality that aims to progress the organisation’s cognitive tasks (Gibson 2001; Jarvinen and Poikela 2001).

Hargadon (2002) presents the accumulation stage in teams of practice as ‘access’, which includes two philosophies of recombination and divergent thought worlds. Firstly, Hargadon (2002) notes that proficiency is derived in some way from the prior existence of its techniques. In organisations, new information often materialises from the recombination of existing incongruent ideas or is activated by applying a new standpoint to an existing expertise. Second, people in organisations develop divergent awareness bases or view points because they belong to parallel, segregated functional contexts (Dougherty 1992), which are infrequently connected through anything more than intermittent ad-hoc interactions. The connection of these segregated contexts provides an opportunity for exchange of expertise that is unique to each mode of practice. Likewise, (Granovetter 1973) emphasises the importance of casual associates or frailties as sources of unique information. Unlike sources within an individual’s governing social context, feeble ties have access to information and exclusive expertise that the individual and others in their established contexts do not.

Organisations, particularly those that are cross-functional and diverse in nature, may act as bridging mechanisms connecting the accumulated experience of otherwise unconnected culture. It should be noted that the accumulation of experience by individual members sharing a common context, is not only based on the understanding available from its members but also information available via members operating as conduits to non-member experts and other sources of information.

In the second process, interaction between cross-functional individuals within organisations is used to describe the use of language and other symbols to develop enriched and common understanding. The most effective language-based interaction
method has been identified as dialogue (Isaacs 1993). Dialogue differs from other forms of verbal interaction by integrating both the message and a deep unified meaning (Crossan 1999). It is described as a discipline of communal inquisition resolute on the view that underlies messages. The aim of dialogue incorporates a desire to evolve common understandings, which encompasses and is partly directed by the objective of boundary-spanning (Isaacs 1993). Boundary-spanning emphasises the consideration that members with diverse experiences have distinctive view points (Fong 2003). In order to establish effective working relationships within organisations, the borders between different disciplines and stakeholder areas must be crossed, for example, personal conversations or by making a commitment to eliminate narrow-mindedness by intentionally valuing the expertise of others (Fong 2003).

Crossing those borders enable individual members to contribute to knowledge, particularly knowledge that is unique and much needed by others in the organisation. Due to the inferred nature of much of the expertise held by members, the process of interaction may be burdened as there may not be applicable language to articulate many of the annotations and experiences presented by those diverse members (Carlile 2002). This difficulty may be explained with reference to the ideas of social constructionism. Social constructionist interpretations of message development focus on its social genesis, which have been recognized to have direct bearing on organisational performance (Cullen 1999). A key concept is that meaning is negotiated by the receiver based on their cognitive structures. Containing the crucial or broad elements of an organisation’s related experiences, cognitive structures, such as schemata or mental models, enable individuals to locate, interpret and measure substance and actions (Knight et al. 1999).

People understand things based on cognitive schemata that they have shaped through social interaction – their knowledge about the world is based on socially developed mental models (Bhatt 2000). Staff within organisations from different societies of practice develop different cognitive structures based on their different work-related interactions. The encoding and decoding of information in efforts to communicate rely on the application of a common understanding of language and meaning (Tsoukas 2002). Thus, members of cross-functional realities within organisations may find their efforts to communicate disenchanted by different interpretations of similar language.
The third stage is analysis during which members’ deliberate points of view, understandings, assumptions and the qualities of possible solutions and suggestions. Staff investigative dialogue influences and individual methodical processes by highlighting certain ideas, drawing attention to defective logic and presenting opinions in support of particular goals (Gibson 2001). (Hargadon 1999) reports that these staffs’ diagnostic processes demonstrate “analogic” reasoning that parallels individual problem-solving processes. Cognitive psychologists describe “analogic” reasoning as the process of identifying links between the current vision and previous exertions to lead to recognising appropriate resolutions. (Hargadon and Sutton 1997) argues that such reasoning impedes creative solutions because it allows members to associate their records of past experiences to the current state of affairs. While the source of information regarding a previous predicament or elucidation is the individual, the incantation, intercession and manoeuvring of this information occurs through the action of collective interactions (Hargadon 1999). By bringing together members from diverse backgrounds, such analogic reckoning has the potential to result in the application of a broader variety of experiences than would be available to individuals operating alone. In addition, analogic reasoning builds on itself as dialogue of one member’s experiences prompts the inauguration and voyaging of further experiences from other members – one suggested subsequent experience shifts the persons perspective in ways that make another seem pertinent (Hargadon 1999).

The fourth stage is amalgamation and conception. The objective of this stage is the articulation of an agreed position or solution, which integrates the most applicable of ideas available to members and assimilates new awareness shaped on the basis of the previous stages. Amalgamation and assimilation may be depicted as the externalised construction of predicament resolutions, involving the manoeuvring and integration of ideas through dialogue, negotiation and concurrence.

Find the Voice within to Understand the Voice without

*Individualism and Communicative Behaviours and Practices in Organisations*

This chapter aims at giving individuals an insight into their own communicative behaviours and practices within organisations. Scholarly work examined in this
section foregrounds the underlying philosophy for the emergent methodological interpretive framework discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis. Considering that organisations are formed of individuals working together to complete particular tasks, we need to examine inter-personal communications aspects of individuals in more detail. The model of *Exchanging Meaning—A Model Of Communication Process* shown in Figure 2.1 below is based on the influential work of Shannon and Weaver (1949).

Figure 2.1: *Exchanging Meaning: a model of communication process: Shannon & Weaver (1949)*

Context

Weaver writes:

The concept of information developed in [Shannon’s] theory at first seems disappointing and bizarre – disappointing because it has nothing to do with meaning, and bizarre because it deals not with a single message but with the statistical nature of a whole ensemble of messages (in Shannon and Weaver 1949)

The point is that we do not passively receive messages from other people. If we process incoming messages to interpret communication from others in the manner they intended and they in turn interpret our communication accurately, then we can claim that our communication is effective.

However, the communication process can either be further enhanced or complicated by perceptual filters, which affect transmitted messages and in turn affects clarity of message reception. The transmitter and the receiver of the message have motives, objectives, personality traits, values, biases and prejudices, which colour the content and expression of communicated and received message. We consciously or sub-consciously decide the information we desire to reveal and to what extent as well as our perceptions interpret received message from others. Therefore, perceptual filters,
which are positioned on both ends tend to affect the implementation of effective communication between both receiver and transmitter of messages. Further examinations of this model endorse three individual methods that are identified as central to the formation of effective interaction processes within an organisation. These practices occur in frequent patterns, with each process capable of invigorating another.

The first individual process is transmission, which encompasses Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1996) process of externalisation. However, this process is understood not as the materialisation of inferred experience in a codified form, instead it is claimed to be the expanded depiction of individual’s inner thoughts, ideas and understandings. As noted by Tsoukas (Tsoukas 2002) an individual’s experiences are more than erudition that has not yet been codified. (Polyani and Prosch 1975), implied experiences are completely available to the individual only in accomplishing tasks and partial depiction is available through codification.

The sender can use verbal communication to moderately express what has been interiorised during their experiences through, analogy and metaphor. Personal expertise cannot be entirely transformed in this approach (Tsoukas 2002).

Furthermore, the transmission process includes interpretation through the application of receiver’s perceptions based on their experiences, social construct and social interactions. Tsoukas (2002), implied that experiences can be envisioned as the interpretive tool enabling comprehension of messages – hence, much of the codified language has some unspoken components that maybe utilised by individuals. Without the vital application of inferred skills, materialised words may not be recognised as meaningful by individuals. Even if certain facts are communicated in an unambiguous manner, such as a scientific equation, it may still be considered meaningless unless it is understood by the receiver, at applying applicable sense making skills. In addition, a document cannot interpret itself, nor can a diagram elucidate itself – hence it can be claimed that most codified language requires personal and applicable judgment to comprehend these depictions (Polyani 1966; Tsoukas 1996; Tsoukas 2002). As codified messages are decoded, the receiver deciphers the sender’s message. In a multi-disciplinary organisational culture, this interpretation can be described as a process of elucidation in which the meaning of words and phrases is investigated with the aim of converting the decoded message into meaningful information. Thus, a member’s ability to accurately interpret other member’s messages is dependent on
their ability to successfully apply their own mental models to message content. This process can be compared to Tsoukas’s (Tsoukas 2002) notion of interiorisation in which facts are assimilated in the service of a purpose – in this case the solution of a certain predicament. If an individual with inferred expertise that are distinctly different to the sender is asked to interpret codified message by the transmitter, the process of interpretation may lead to generation of a narrative understanding (Brown and Duguid 2001).

The second process is cognition encompassing accommodation and assimilation. Assimilation occurs as new information is integrated into existing schemata, and accommodation takes place when schemata are transformed to a more comprehensive message (Piaget 1969). The process of cognition also incorporates perception of patterns founded on the individual member’s discipline (Crossan 1999). Intuiting occurs during the process of applying individual’s area of expertise to newly communicated concepts, and is related to the level and depth of individual’s expertise.

The third process is task-focused positioning. This involves individual thought processes aimed at deciding strategies and tactics. As their understanding of issues related to tasks and other’s perspectives develops, members prioritise, search for possible alliances, agreements, and opportunities to collaborate and/or compromise.

Hence it is important when attempting to implement more effective inter-personal communication processes within inter-disciplinary and cross-functional workplace settings, to take into consideration the need to ensure the understanding of the meaning of the word as opposed to the delivery of semantics and jargon clouded by “professional” noise. It is also worth noting that effective communication processes that could potentially result in strong and new social construction, while beneficial and essential to improve organisation’s performance, it is a process that largely depends on individual’s dedication to learning and open-mindedness that would enable individuals to accept other viewpoints despite any personal prejudices or uncompromising subjectivity.

The author feels that it is appropriate to take this opportunity to further explain to the reader their own critical stance on the concept of perception filters. It is our belief that perception filters are not necessarily a “bad ” tool to have existing in communication practices and behaviour. It is somewhat beneficial for individuals involved in social interactions and dialogue, to be able to use perception filters in a constructive manner, to filter any “noise” made by the transmitter of the message,
while keeping in mind that it is essential not to make assumptions. Often when the receiver makes assumptions in the communication process, their assumptions are about the transmitter of the message, which in turn colours the meaning of the message sent by the transmitter, or in a deeper sense, assumptions made by the receiver are based on their own opinions of themselves as they evaluate the world through their own beliefs and value systems. Hence, it is essential in communication processes that the receiver seeks clarification from the transmitter in relation to the meaning of the message. This can be achieved through developing an assertive approach and adopting empathetic listening skills, this is further explained in Chapter Three of this thesis.

It is therefore the author’s critical stance that the placement of perception filters in the communication process does not immediately carry negative implications in social constructionism through social interactions. Instead, the core issue with perception filters is not in their existence but rather in the essence of their usage. For example; individuals who decide to be open minded to the extreme of accepting, tolerating, or participating in a social construct that promotes terrorism and social instability, may need to closely examine the functionality of their perception filters to further ascertain reasons behind accepting to -- either actively or passively -- participate in constructing such social realities.

Hence, it is not the author’s purpose to down play the importance of positioning perception filters at each end of the receiver and the transmitter elements involved in communication practices; instead, it is their meaning to discern the importance of individual choice as they accurately exercise their power to select the appropriateness of the use of perception filters in communication practices and behaviours.

To use more technical terms, we wish to highlight the difference between an individual’s wisdom as they use perception filters, and the subconscious activation of perception defences within individuals as they communicate and interact. The earlier is a skill, when nurtured by the individual’s updated knowledge and wilful desire that revolves around a solid centre, would prove to be beneficial in building habits of effectiveness that would further enhance the social construction process through social interactions. The activation of perception defences, on the other hand, would prove to be counter productive in the communication processes that take place. It is also worth noting that when using perception filters in the correct manner, individuals
commit to adopting and open mind to reach compromises, or in some instances “agree to disagree”.

**Organisations and Information Systems**

**Broadened Definition**

As the author set out on this journey of active discovery with the notion of analysing, and experimenting with, constructed “truths”, there was a need to explore foundational scholarly research into the area of organisational culture for information systems. One of the most prominent works in this field is Checkland and Holwell, *Information Systems and Information Systems – Making Sense of the Field* (1998).

In their work, Checkland and Holwell note that in developing a more appropriate concept of organisation than that on which most information systems work and most of its literature are based, the main aim is to capture the tension between rationally and collectively organising, to achieve declared goals and the ultimate defiance of human beings as members of organisations. It is therefore the opinion of the works of Checkland and Holwell, that organisations are ‘open systems’ that are impacted on and upon by their external social surroundings, and equally impact on and upon their internal and external environments.

If human beings were automata then the conventional rational model of mechanistic organisation would suffice; however, taking into consideration that the ‘human element’ is composed of not only physical manifestations, but also mental, emotional, and spiritual realms, there is a need for a model, which incorporates the sheer subjectivity and desires of human beings as well as their readiness to conform.

As Fletcher (1971) highlights, the very emergence of sociology in the late 19th century can be seen as a response to the disruption of a more stable society as an outcome to the rise of industrial capitalism and a new commercialism. In attempt to understand the transition from agrarian to industrial social contexts, Loomis (1955) highlights two ‘types’ of constructed models of society or organisation. These were on the one hand the natural living community (the tribe), the group which individuals had a sense of belonging to, and on the other the formally created associations, which men and women join in some complicated contractual sense – as when we choose to become employees of an organisation. This then forms the basis of a topology for analysis rather than *description* of actual organisations. However, it is worth noting that for the
purposes of this research, the initial phase of the emerged interpretive methodology framework discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis adopts a descriptive approach to set the foundations for analysis and discourse that takes place in the second phase of the cyclic methodological framework proposed in Chapter Three and tested in Chapter Four of this thesis.

The underlying principle is that actual organisations in the world, although artificially designed and created, also continue to have some of the natural characteristics of the family or the tribe, this is largely contributed to the ultimate autonomy and unpredictability of human beings: no associations are ever simply a rational machine whose members willingly combine together to pursue organisational goals. It is suggested that a test of a general model of organisation is its ability to include the idea of the person who is genuinely a member of the organisation; however, is probably the same nonconformist member who may bring the already established traditional methods in the organisation to destruction and then in turn substantially contribute to the reconstruction of a better social organism.

In trying to build a picture of ‘organisation’ capable of better supporting information systems work, it is preferable to first assume that the word always refers to a social living being, comprised of collective living organisms. Adam in his deserted Garden of Eden can not be considered as an ‘organisation’, though once he has amalgamated his existence with Eve (or Steve for that matter); both can then create an organisation of which they were the members. This would then involve discourse between the members. Out of the discourse, number of elements can emerge: some measure of declared agreement on purposes which might be actual agreement; social processes to pursue those purposes (which may entail boundaries that may be considered by individuals as constraints or control); and criteria by which they would know whether or not the purposes are being achieved (benchmarks and established evaluative accountability measures.)

This could then result to defining organisational roles, as it certainly would in organisations of any size undertaking certain responsibilities beyond those which individuals could do on their own.

There would be expectations of behaviour in the defined roles and responsibilities, so called “norms” and values by which such observed behaviour was judged to be ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in the organisation. These roles, norms and values would not be fixed, consequently would be continuously refined in the organisational discourse about its’
experience. (Exploration of roles, responsibilities, norms and value is part of the ‘cultural’ strand of analysis in participatory soft systems methodology.) The real issue for organisations becomes more critical, when such “norms” become irrevocable and in many ways are perceived by individuals or the amalgam individuals to, not be subject of discussion. Here we are faced with the tension between the narrative and written/stipulated norms of any collective entity or organisation.

It may appear that written/stipulated norms are more difficult to challenge than narrated values and/or norms of certain collective bodies or entities. On the other hand, one argues that narrated norms are more difficult to break through, as they become habits engraved in the subconscious minds of individuals that are then manifested through behaviours and practices.

Hence, in the proposed analysis, an organisation is clearly an abstraction: it is a social collectivism concerned with some collective action, and there are associated social practices, which relate to this. However, what causes it, as an entity to exist? The answer could be: the readiness of some people, usually large numbers of people, members and non-members alike, to talk and act as if there were a collective entity which would behave like a conscious being, with the ability to decide to do things and then make them happen.

In using more generic terms, an organisation is a collective social entity; it exists as an entity in that act of unification; and the unification enables both members and non-members of the organisation to make sense of part of what they observe in the day-to-day world. Their sense making includes their assuming the existence of person-like unified social entity called ‘organisations’.

In this way organisations appear to be rather abstract, however it is necessary to make sense of what we all know from observation and experience, namely that members of an organisation are not necessarily simply inactive contributors to the achievements of organisational goals, as the conventional model suggests. It is on this basis that Participatory Soft Systems Methodology emerged for the use of research work in the situated inquiry, as will be discussed in Chapter Three below. The main aim of using this model is to involve co-researchers, and participants in controversial discourse through open dialogue and communication. As will be discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis, the organisation operated mainly on Mechanistic view or approach, and it was determined that due to the surrounding global environmental context, the organisation needed to consider a shift from Mechanistic approach to Open Systems
approach to be able to better deal with meeting external and internal demands associated with implementing information system module projects within the organisation.

To be a member of an organisation is to have a contractual relationship with it, most common is the legally binding contract, and more complex are the implied social contracts of; ethical, psychological, emotional and mental, formed attachments. Most people would probably not feel comfortable taking part in the social practices of an organisation whose core purposes they strongly reject, and they would in such case cease to be members. However, a rich model has to leave room for the nonconformist member who remains to be a genuine and true member of the organisation.

For example, during the days of student revolt in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s some members of universities who were, in the comprehensive sense of the term, institutionalised members of their organisation, appeared at the ‘teach-ins’ fashionable at the time and urged their fellow students to destroy the institution – usually in order to create a Utopian ‘free University’ in its’ place. These types of acts are considered as real phenomenon of organisational life, even though it is not as commonly as unashamed as this situation. It is a phenomenon excluded from the conventional model and the wisdom it supposedly provides. It stems from the constructed truth that the carefully designed logic of organisational activity, carried out in pursuit of organisational ends through a role structure, can never completely dominate and coerce organisational members – which is something for which we should feel grateful if we value the idea that both individuals and collectivists can learn.

If organisations are indeed living social organisms capable of performing certain functionalities and being impacted on and upon by their external surroundings and are able to have an impact on and upon their internal and external environments, then they are subject to change, development and evolution; the newly constructed reality of ‘Learning Organisations’. Hence the notion of discourse analysis and active research in such a social context should not be frowned upon or opposed.

In light of such a challenging philosophy, the author’s intention was to discover not only the descriptive context of the organisation through documents, and co-operate inquiry into the Mechanistic/conventional amalgam individuals, enveloped within an organisation’s social context, we approached the research into communicative behaviours and practices within the organisation with an active loom to social interactions and constructionism. As the researcher set out to discover the ‘change
agents’ within the workplace by purposeful selection of participants, the author generated an active environment of reflections and collaboration, in the hope of opening dialogue channels that targeted core issues suffered by front line staffs, when employed to meet Senior Management expectations, as they work on implementing information systems module projects, to evolve the systems to further cater for stakeholders needs and wants. The researcher’s desire was to encourage and empower front liners in the organisation to unashamedly communicate with executives, collaborate together, and collectively construct new realities that targeted the implementation of plans for purposeful action through social interactions and open dialogues overflowing with honesty, and short of bureaucratic responses.

**Conclusion**

This chapter examined scholarly work that related to communication behaviours and practices within the workplace to ground such theories in a social perspective. Firstly, the inter-relatedness of social interactions and social constructionism were defined and identified. Then further examination of literature into the influence of external culture on communication behaviours and practices was conducted to establish the surrounding context of modern organisations, which may indirectly influence internal organisational social constructionism to impact on and upon communication behaviours and practices of the amalgam of individuals within the organisation. Various organisational cultures were then discussed in detail to be able to use as support for the descriptive phase of the selected methodology applied in research work presented in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Communication processes models were scrutinised in the context of project management teams within organisations, to establish the basis for social interactions as utilised by individuals based on their cognitive abilities to interpret and understand meaning of messages within cross-functional groups. This section aimed at establishing the theory used to devise phases two and three of the emerged interpretive methodological framework discussed in Chapter Three.

To further understand the inter-dependant relationship between organisational culture and communication practices and behaviours in the workplace, scholarly work was reviewed to institute the complexities associated with combining established power systems in the workplace with employees’ well being and quality work conditions that in turn influence organisations productivity and effectiveness.
In addition, the complexities associated with communicative behaviours and practices on individual levels were ascertained through the literature review to assist with understanding individuals’ responsibility in communication processes and foregrounding the theory for the need for internal dialogue amongst individuals, as will be discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Finally, scholarly work was inspected to establish organisational culture in the age of technology and information systems. This examination of literature further confirmed the need for conventional organisations to adopt Open Systems theory to be able to better deal with change, become more capable to focus on learning, and in turn be more equipped to successfully deal with introducing and implementing information systems in the organisation as global demands increase on this front. This work is then used in Chapters Three and Four of this thesis, to elucidate the methodological model used in research work, and test the data collected through conducting the situated inquiry, respectively.
Chapter 3

Participatory Soft Systems Methodology

Progressive Learning Process Model
Vision of Participatory Soft Systems Methodology Research

In Chapter Four, we evaluate the model based on research conducted on communicative activities that take place between front line staff and Management within an organisation, during the implementation of information systems module project, to manage expectations.

This chapter discusses in more detail the participatory soft systems methodology model used in conducting this research and provides analysis of some complexities of the model. The author was permitted to conduct the research with a division within the organisation in which she was also an employee in the academic stream. The advantage and disadvantages associated with conducting research work in the researcher’s workplace is later discussed as part of this chapter. After conferring with management in the Higher Education Institution Western Suburbs (HEIWS), within Systems Department of the Office of Academic Registrar, and with agreement of participants; research work was conducted with the operational manager of the Module Implementation Project for a Student Administration System that was to be implemented, to further improve the functionalities of the system; and processes of the organisation when attending to student’s requirements.

This chapter begins by briefly considering a few questions that surround soft systems methodology in action research, as researchers address communication practices and behaviours in the workplace. First, we consider the issue of objectivity/subjectivity. Second, we develop in more detail the issue introduced in Chapter One, concerned with participatory soft systems methodology in action research.

Subjectivity/Objectivity in Participatory Soft Systems Methodology in Action Research in the Workplace

At the core of the issue of the “validity” of any research that attempts to understand human behaviour is ways of knowing, and involved with this, is subject/object dualism. A basic assumption behind traditional social science research, including qualitative research methodology employed in research work, is that there is something that is known to be a certain “reality” or “truth that is out there.”
Out there is data, fixed in space and time that can be observed, recorded, and analysed. In a Cartesian sense, the data itself is value-neutral. Qualitative research seems more complex in comparison to empirical social science methodologies by foregrounding the subjective. In case studies, in ethnography, you feel the presence of the researcher: you feel the presence of the story teller. You question: how does the story teller affect the “data”? Of course, the story teller is just as present in empirical research, however there, convention masks personality.

In searching for what the researcher brings to the research, the subjective to the objective, we can search for pre-existing values, institutional biases (see; Herndl, 1991). We can start with the researcher as a citizen of, say, the Western hemisphere and end with whatever “quarks” of personality ultimately differentiate one human being from another. We can examine studies and look at professional and theoretical agendas shape inquiry and interpretation. The subjectivity (what the researcher brings) seems to overwhelm the objective (the observed behaviour). In the end, this is much like peeling an infinite onion: no research on human behaviour can be “value-less.”

This line of criticism can be paralysing, and further, author feels that it misses an important point.

The problem with the basic assumption that there is an objective “truth” to be described, and that by the act of watching it, thinking about it, writing about it, we co-opt it, change it, and reinterpret it. However, from a constructivist view, objectivity is, in essence, a meaningless concept, because all knowledge is conditional, and propositional. Plato stated:

"The learning and knowledge that we have, is, at the most, but little compared with that of which we are ignorant."

The knowledge one may possess at any given point in time in their life span, is enveloped within a unique social construct to which an individual, or a collective group of people may have formed a sense of belonging and attachment to – comfort zone. That knowledge is constructed at one instant in time, and bounded by localised culture, which in itself is limited when compared with the diverse “Global Village” that is rich with an assortment of different habits, ‘rites and rituals’, rules, ways of reasoning, social construct and existence. Thus, in considering the opportunity of enhancing the learning process and knowledge that is had by one or all, one considers moving outside their comfort zone, sheltered environment and the social construct to
which they grew to be accustomed to (irrespective of whether they believe it to be good or bad social construct), and sets out in seeking to learn about diverse cultures and social constructs, in order for them to enhance their knowledge. Such a process of learning and accumulating knowledge needs to exercise individuals’ discernment, as not all knowledge and new learning experiences are considered as beneficial. Also, what may work for a certain population is not necessarily applicable for another. It all appears relative and dependent on individual’s choice, ability of being critical, and hunger for discovery and learning.

Hence the implied closure associated with objectivity in the field of studying human behaviour and practices seems as unrealistic as the notion of bringing closure to development, change, and evolution of living organisms.

It is author’s position (from her background in engineering, and studying signal theories, physics, and related scientific areas,) that even in the quantitative scientific arena, the concept of closure associated with objectivity, as prompted by scientific positivist researchers, is problematic. Many of results observed when conducting laboratory experiments are analysed in relation to marginal errors caused by the surrounding environment such as, the accuracy of laboratory equipments, leaving marginal error rate for human imperfections when conducting experiments, and other relative associations that may contribute to results or data collected, not being suited to expected outcomes. Hence, measured quantitative data produced in laboratories, are analysed in relation to its’ social environment, in order for the scientist, to employ “meaning-making” mechanisms to analyse results. Such mechanisms are in many ways considered by the author to be parallel to discourse analysis in the context of social sciences. Lest we forget that the greatest mind in physics field of application the world encountered; namely Albert Einstein, was the one who proposed the theory of Relativity, which we do not take any credit for even coming close to understanding the summative gist of it.

As for author’s contemplation of quantitative research in the field of communication behaviours and practices in information systems field of application; it is our position that such a notion in itself is deemed acceptable, as long as it is understood that it is our mental view that data collected from quantitative methods applied in the social sciences context, are merely used as indicators of a social state at a given point in time, which gives certain parameters and boundaries that may add more light to the meaning-making approach in discourse analysis. It is the author’s view that such data
collected in the social context are varying by imposition of an environment that continues to evolve and change.
Such an array of dynamic variables such as; population of males and females, age, status, and other erratics may aid in further understanding the influence of such elements on the social context. In turn they may provide some clarity when approaching discourse and planning for specific purposeful actions on strategic levels, such as policies and legislation.
Philosophically speaking on the notion of policies and legislation, author shares Plato’s’ point of view that;

"Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws."
Meaning, as well as occupying one’s time in an attempt to manufacture theoretical mechanisms to ensure ‘justice’; it is also worth contemplating an active approach to developing moral and social conscious, and educating individuals on beliefs founded on ageless principles to replace the centre. Sievers (1990) noted and the author discussed above in Chapter Two of this thesis.

It is on this stance, the author constructed the interpretive methodological framework used in research work in the situated inquiry, and this will be further discussed in the below section of this chapter.
Consequently, any time we think about the behaviour we observe, the activities of “the other,” we are doing it in a way that no one else can really understand, based on our individually-localised meanings, which in turn are based on an expanding horizon of shared experiences and constructed realities. None of which are fixed constants of manifested general truth. There is no language, and no thought that can be considered to be value-neutral. Every act of communication from one person to another, from the author to you, is “valued” – coloured by a mix of internalised experiences and external social forces (such as power relationships). It is situated in Sharolt's “web”, however, incomprehensibly complex and virtually impossible for us to describe. We as researchers do not have any control over the web, as we cannot completely comprehend what shapes our own thoughts and discourse, let alone that of others. However, it is a liberating experience when we come to finally acknowledge that we do not necessarily have to. The overall process of meaning-making is one of interactions, sharing, arguing, tearing down and then building up. This process is the only certainty, if it is in a very real sense among unequals. Knowing that we will
never know the “ultimate” truth should not prevent us from participating in the perpetual dialogue, on the contrary, it needs to empower us to persist with fulfilling our purpose, and pursuing our internal convictions and desires, to continue to contribute to the never ending story of the infinitely powerful learning journey of our physical manifestations. If we know that we read, participate, learn and document from some particular point in the web, we are therefore not paralysed. Others would follow, read, reflect, interpret, understand, participate from another spot or perhaps the same spot at a different point in time, and then, conceivably respond. Hence, the cyclic notion proposed by Checkland and Holwell (1998), of putting knowledge into practice to generate more knowledge for future applications. In this sense, we are not passive in our approach; instead we are active contributors to the continuation of this timeless conversation.

This however leads us to another important question that we feel the need to address; that is being: How do we know that any research on communication behaviour and practices is “valid”? Here, we can only offer a personal solution, that is being, reconciliation of research with constructionism through, oddly enough, the idea of the “ethical ideology.” It is not meant to be an ideology that is ethical for persuasive convenience; nor is it implied that it is an ideology whose ethics are constructed from an institutional overlay. Rather, it is the ethical ideology stemming from Aristotelian terms, an ideology that arrives at a position through self-exploration and internal dialectic. Author is completely aware that they cannot presume to tell the truth about other people – or more specifically about how their communicative behaviour and practices are constructed, destroyed and reconstructed in the workplace. Hence, through efforts made in good faith, the author, through developing a model for participatory soft systems methodology allowed for participants including the researcher themselves, to tell the story as was lived by all. In other words, the story told in this thesis, is not only the researcher’s story nor is it participants story told by the researcher. Instead, it is participants’ story (including the researcher), as all were empowered to be the story tellers and change agents in the workplace through the model adopted to conduct research work. Consequently, the story shared in this thesis about communication behaviours and practices in that community, is shared with the reader, while asking the reader to maintain an awareness of how the story is told, and who are the story tellers, in this thesis.
To do so, the author followed processes outlined in **Figure 3.1**, Checkland and Holwell’s Soft Systems Methodology Learning Process Model, and first explored the perceived problem of; ‘top-down’ communication approach in the organisation that hindered the progress of information systems module implementation project, as frontline staff rarely received any feedback or support from Senior Management, and continuously struggled to meet Strategic Management’s expectations. The researcher also investigated organisation’s social and political contexts, as recommended in Chapter Two of this thesis. The author then, using Grounded Theory, selected two relevant systems of purposeful activity and model building, and integrated many ideas from two action research constituents basing such model on communication practices and behaviours as discussed above in Chapter Two of this thesis. The two main ingredients used by the author to construct this model are; (a) Co-operate Inquiry – Research into the Human Condition (Heron, 1996); and (b) Soft Systems Methodology in Action Research (Checkland and Holwell, 1998). The first was used because of its applicability to the researcher’s social constructionism and social interaction position discussed in Chapter Two, and the latter was adapted considering the information systems filed of application where research work was conducted. This resulted in formulation of a generic model that integrates co-operate inquiry into workplace condition through the eyes of selected participants, reflections and discourse analysis, and purposeful action. All three mentioned phases have certain overlapping qualities that result in Progressive Learning Process. In an attempt to simplify the complexities of the overlapping associations between the phases of this model, the author first foregrounds theories of the separate action research approaches used to develop the model’s formalised processes, provides a graphical representation of the model, and explains how the integrated phases of the participatory soft systems methodology model, work together in action research. The model is also grounded on communication behaviour and practices scholarly work as discussed above in Chapter Two, this is discussed below in detail. In Chapter Four of this thesis the author tests the model by discussing how the model was applied in the workplace.

**Co-operative Inquiry with People in Action Research**

The work of John Heron into Co-operative Inquiry – Research into the Human Condition, (1996) presents a framework for conducting participatory action research in the workplace that stems from a pro-active stance to change. Heron (1996),
suggests that Co-operative inquiry is a way of working with people in the workplace who share similar concerns and interests as the researcher, in order to: (a) understand the context, make sense of our realities and construct new realities; and (b) learn how to act to change elements that the human interface may want to change, and discover how individuals can work better when in pursuit of quality conditions and realities in the social context of the workplace setting.

Traditionally, organisational research is usually perceived as an act undertaken by academics on people in institutions. Researchers are usually perceived as the ‘human element’ in a certain workplace setting, and then in turn studies people by observing them, asking them questions, or by designing experiments. The issue with following such a traditional approach to research is the lack of connection between the researcher’s thinking and the concerns and experiences of the participants in research projects. This potential lack of connection may generate a view of organisational culture where participant’s feelings, thoughts, ideas and capabilities are overshadowed by imposition of researchers’ biased and subjective knowledge. Hence; participants are treated by researchers who follow such a traditional approach to research as automata; the concept of human interface in the conventional model of organisations as described above in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Yet the consequences of such a traditional research approach on participants may seem to be even greater than confound that they are confronted with in their own comfort zone, their closed organisation’s context and culture. This may in turn lead to subconsciously planting seeds of fear in participants about the story that will be told by the researcher of the participants and their workplace settings, which in turn may cause “consenting” participants to modify their behaviour in the workplace, to ensure that the story told by the researcher is one that they can be proud of. After all, no one would willingly want to hang their “dirty washing” out, and to subject themselves to be under the scrutiny of the public eye, in front of an international audience that is constituted of both industry and academia population, to examine, evaluate and critically analyse the participants’ own reality. It leaves one feeling totally open and vulnerable to strangers’ un-aware projections and biased criticisms, which is a perfectly understandable response to the associations of mystical unknown consequences of consenting to being subjects to research work.

When people are treated as passive subjects for research and discovery, as opposed to active change agents, the fear and resistance of research work in organisation settings
grows, so does the gap and isolation between research works’ effectiveness in workplace settings. This is largely attributed to lack of common understanding and shared realities between participants and researchers, which in turn may further hinder the progress of academic research in the workplace and progressive learning process that can be used to contribute to strong social construction process of new realities, achieved through open and honest social interactions of diverse human interfaces that come from all walks of life.

Hence, it is the author’s standpoint that “best practice research” in the context of social entities, is one that is achieved with and through people as opposed to being conducted on people. People do not need to be told answers or have solutions imposed on them, they are more than capable of constructing ideas that best suit their own social contexts, and organisational culture. In a way, the traditional means of conducting research – whether under the quantitative or qualitative methodologies -- in pursuit of new knowledge, may be perceived by many potential research participants to be complete arrogance that stems from pure academic ignorance of the capabilities and potential of the research participants that can enhance research project’s meaning-making exercise.

By sharing in the process of open and co-operative communicative behaviour and practices with research participants, there is an equal exchange of impact and contribution-making mechanisms between both stakeholders of academic and practice based individuals, hence researchers can be perceived by industry practitioners to be living contributors of change and development in their workplace settings, and visa versa.

Consequently, considering the unfamiliarity of this constructed research approach amongst many individuals in workplace settings, the author acknowledges that there may remain discomfort by participants to openly engage in the process.

Notwithstanding such refrains, the researcher persisted with applying the above discussed methodology in information systems workplace setting, because the discovery responsibility under-taken by the researcher in this research project was not only motivated by the endeavour to unveil future theoretical research opportunities and conceptual frameworks, to be further tested on research subjects. Instead, it was driven by the desire of the researcher to learn from the creative actions of industry practitioners, and to assist in addressing, in a practical manner, matters that are important to them on personal and professional levels.
Hence, in traditional research on people, often the roles of researcher and subjects are mutually exclusive. However, in co-operative inquiry such exclusive roles are replaced with a co-operative relationship, so that all those involved work together, as co-researchers and as co-subjects. Heron and Reason (Handbook of Action Research, Chapter 16, 2001; pp. 179-80) summarise the formalised processes of cooperate inquiry as follows:

- All active subjects are completely involved as co-researchers in all research related decisions – about both content and method—taken in the reflection phases.
  - There is intentional interplay between reflection and making sense on the one hand, and experience and action on the other.
  - There is explicit attention, through agreed procedures, to the validity of the inquiry and its’ findings. The primary procedure is to use inquiry cycles, moving several times between reflection and action.
  - There is radical epistemology for a wide-ranging inquiry method that integrates experientially knowing through meeting and encounter, presentational knowing through the use of aesthetics, expressive forms, propositional knowing through words and concepts, and practical knowing-how in the exercise of diverse skills – intrapsychic, interpersonal, political, transpersonal, and so on. These forms of knowing are brought to bear upon each other, through the use of inquiry cycles, to enhance their mutual congruence within the collective inquiry group as a whole (inclusive of inquirer and inquiry group members.)
  - There are, as well as validity procedures, a range of special skills suited to such all-purpose experiential inquiry. They include fine tuned discrimination in perceiving, in acting and in remembering both of these; bracketing off and reframing launching concepts; and emotional competence, including the ability to manage effectively anxiety stirred up by the inquiry process.
  - The inquiry method can be both informative about, and transformative of, any aspect of the human condition that is accessible to a transparent body mind, that is, one that has an open, unbounded awareness.
• Primacy is given to transformative inquiries that involve action, where people change their way of being and doing and relating in their world – in direction of greater flourishing. This is on the grounds that practical knowing-how consummates the other three forms of knowing – propositional, presentational and experiential – on which it is founded.
• The full range of human capacities and sensibilities is available as an instrument of inquiry.

Co-operative inquiry targets a continuous process of reflection and action by a group of co-researchers who collectively decide to come together on the premise of exploring a common area of interest for inquiry. Hence, the approach, while presented in a structured and formalised manner, gives the impression of following an ad-hoc approach to implementing action into workplace settings; in more technical words, the approach seems to take a dynamic direction for the purpose of satisfying the needs of a particular area of situated inquiry.

**Soft Systems Methodology in Action Research**

One way of distinguishing systems thinking from systemic thinking is that the former takes an objective stance, while the latter assumes a subjective position. Systems thinking is objective in believing that there are systems in the world that can be identified and improved. Systemic thinking is different. Soft systems thinking is a form of systemic thinking that understand reality and the creative construction of human beings (Jackson, 1987). It sees social reality as the construction of people’s interpretation of their experiences, in this way it is firmly linked to interpretive theory. Soft systems thinking therefore generates and works with an evolving appreciation of peoples’ point of view and intentions. Systems concepts are employed in the process of meaning construction, reflecting an intuitive assumption that the world is indeed systemic.

Soft systems thinking is concerned with situations as they are defined through action concepts (Checkland 1981; Checkland and Scholes, 1990). Its intellectual framework of ideas might be described in the following manner: People have intentions that constitute each action that they perform, where neither observation nor theory provides sufficient comprehension to be certain of those intentions. For example, a high level of excitement observed in a person’s action might be theorised as
threatening or conversely joyous behaviour. It is therefore essential to progress beyond observation and theory to establish an ‘authentic’ exploration about what is taking place in the minds of involved participants and hence meaningful action can be taken. Soft systems thinking argues that a specific action concept becomes transparent only in the deeper context of a certain set of social rules. It is in these terms that an actor can be said to be conducting some type of purposeful action. Social rules lead to social practice, that is, ways in which people live and work together. Lying behind social practice is constitutive meaning; ‘putting in’ meaning to the social practice. This is a fundamental assumption that underlies occurrences taking place within a certain social context, and what makes such occurrences meaningful to certain involved participants. An ‘authentic’ understanding of peoples’ actions may be constructed in this way. For researchers to therefore reach an ‘authentic’ comprehension, it would involve a constructive understanding in terms of constitutive meaning, social practices and actions taken. A Systems model may then be employed in heuristic fashion to explore if they generate insight and assist in the construction process. With soft systems thinking, however, models must not be taken as representation of realities. Each model is employed like a ‘pair of glasses’ through which we can ‘look at and interpret reality’.

Checkland and Holwell (1998, p. 157) describe the underlying principles of Soft Systems Methodology in action research, and its’ formalised process as follows.

- SSM is not concerned with well-defined technical problems in organisations, it is more concerned with the ill-structured problem situations with which managers of all levels and kinds have to cope with.

- In the 1970s it was very much accepted for organisations to ignore their environmental contexts and address technical development problems isolated from their social relations. However, with this very competitive IS driven era in which we live in today, it is very difficult to ignore the term ‘socio-technical systems’ and only adopt ‘hard system’ approach in our organisations. The connection of social elements to technology presents the challenge of continual change as social reality in human groups is continuously socially created in a never-ending social process, and hence it is not absolute but will change through time, sometimes
slowly, sometimes very rapidly. Hence the persistence of human institutions and their change has to be explained.

- SSM assumes a more fluid social world, one that both persists and changes rapidly with the dynamic introduction of technology. Hence SSM provides a basis for research interpretation and learning as opposed to optimisation. The questions to be answered are of the kind: how do these particular people, with their particular history, currently construe their world? How did they construe it in the past? What leads to some situations being seen as problematical? What would constitute improvements? What accommodations are possible, leading to what actions? How would they be judged?

Checkland and Holwell (1998) note the fact that the SSM approach may be considered as a radical way of conducting research since the work of Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) discussed the approaches and underlying assumptions in research papers in IS and found that 95 percent of the papers studied were in fact based on a positivist epistemology. The Formalised process, ‘novice’ SSM, as presented in Checkland and Holwell (1998, p.160) is as follows:

- SSM’s focus of concern is a human situation which at least one person considers problematic. The development of the approach stemmed from the realisation that all such situations had at least one element in common: they contained people, and people were trying to take purposeful action. Hence methods of building such models were developed. The ‘human activity system’ consists of two sub-systems: a set of activities linked together according to their dependent relationships so that the whole system would be purposeful; and a monitoring and control sub-system so that the whole system could in principle survive in a changing environment. In order to build such models there needs to be a careful consideration of the ‘root definition’ also referred to as RD; and guidelines of well formulated RD have stood the test of time as demonstrated in (Smyth and Checkland 1976) work;

- Purposeful action can always be interpreted in multiple ways. This interpretation depends on all stakeholders’ perceptions that are involved in the event. Hence the need for acknowledging ‘soft systems’ in defining
purposeful action for particular events or development of ‘hard systems’ is necessary to be able to identify relevant action required for the task;

- SSM as a methodology is a set of principles of method as opposed to a precise method—it is adapted by its’ users both to the demands of the situation they face and to their own mental modes and casts of mind. Users of SSM have to learn their way to versions of the approach to which they are comfortable;

- Hence these considerations lead to seeing SSM as a learning process whose idealised formal structure can be expressed in Figure 3.1.

From the above model, one can ascertain that the main focus of soft systems methodology is implementing action to improve the problem situation. This process, adopted to develop applicable purposeful action for each social context, in turn results
in a learning process at the completion of step five of the model (Action to improve the problem situation.)

**The Model**

**Participatory Soft Systems Methodology Model**

As previously briefly mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis, this model aims at allowing stakeholders of the situated inquiry to discover their own value system, as opposed to being passive recipients of the researcher’s value system. The Participatory Soft Systems Methodology generic model is developed using Grounded Theory and motivated by the researcher’s learning and discovery stance into constructed human condition when situated in certain organisation’s social context and external culture. The model is also founded on the Marxists interpretive approach to organisational behaviour, and views organisations as an object of improvement. The main emphasis of this model is for individuals and collective entities alike to embrace the progressive learning process concept, integrated with inquiry and search for purposeful action. This, as explained in Chapter Two of this thesis, stems from the author’s constructivist point of view, which focuses on individuals’ impact on collective social construct, while considering the impact of social context and external culture on the individual and living collective entities. It is believed by the author that both entities are interrelated, because while it is possible to be victims or products of certain environments and/or cultures (certain construct, impact on individuals behaviours and practices), it is also possible for individuals and collective entities to exercise the power of choice to construct new realities by petitioning meaning-making mechanisms through reflections and discourse analysis. Furthermore, as previously stated above in Chapter Two of this thesis, the author also used the numerous models that have been developed to depict communication processes (Crossan 1999; Drach-Zahavy and Somech 2001; Gibson 2001; Jarvinen and Poikela 2001), to construct certain phases of the emerged model, this is further discussed in the coming sections of this chapter.

With this stance in mind, the author identified the area for inquiry, to be bounded within social construction through social interactions, with individuals enveloped within a certain perceived organisation’s social context and working on an information systems module implementation project, approach. Hence, the PSSM
Progressive Learning Generic Model shown below in Figure 3.2 emerged, as a result. The model is cyclic in nature and complex in the overlapping interrelationships existing between its’ phases’.

Figure 3.2 PSSM Progressive Learning Process Generic Model

Prior to explaining in further detail the phases of PSSM Progressive Learning Process Generic Model, it is important to emphasise the underlying philosophy of the concept. Every encounter of human interaction encompassed within each phase of the model, and enveloped within a specific situated inquiry, contributes to a progressive learning process experience, which may be considered as weak social construction at that particular instant, yet when lessons learnt progress over an accumulated period of time or completed cycles of the generic model, they would eventually lead to strong social construction. It is in many ways considered to be an evolutionary change of socially constructed old habits, to develop new habits of excellence, based on acquiring unsullied knowledge, driven by the desire to learn that results in individuals developing new working skills over time. The nature of construction encapsulated in the learning process, depends on the style of human interfaces involved in the process, as this would determine if it is a negative or positive progressive learning process. Participants in this progressive learning process do not only have the power to influence others either positively or negatively; individuals involved also have the power of choice to allow a negative learning experience to badly affect the process (or visa versa,) depending on their outlook and world view. Participants in this generic progressive learning process are not passive in the sense that they have a say into
constructing the learning experience. Participants need to come to an understanding that they are not victims of a particular instant of the experience as they are not research subjects; instead they are active participants who are in control of the level and nature of the impact that comes with being involved in this progressive learning process. Researchers undergoing this type of methodology in their research work need to also understand that they too are involved in the progressive learning process, hence; to be aware that experiences at all instants of the process will also impact on their outlook and world view, and therefore there is a need for all those involved to exercise shrewdness and wisdom as they filter negative vigour from the progressive learning process and persevere in pursuit of constructing positive realities.

**Co-operative Inquiry -- Established Social Construct Conditions Through the Eyes of Selected Participants**

This methodology is not concerned with providing or imposing theoretical answers to participants involved. Instead, it is aimed at empowering selected participants to discover the answers themselves. This as previously mentioned, holds more value with selected participants and hence leads to activating the desire within participants to put their own ideas into practice, experiment with social constructionism and evaluate outcomes to resume with changing participants world view from ‘products of environments’ to ‘engineers of their realities’. This phase is mainly aimed at exploring the social context encapsulating co-operate inquiry not just based on theoretical scholarly research, but, also through the eyes of the participants. Its’ core purpose is for the researcher to discover the “what?” element of the inquiry, and by exercising active listening skills, also enable participants to better articulate the situated inquiry. In developing a picture through, and by the eyes of the participants in relation to the actual area of inquiry enveloped with this specific organisation’s context, within a particular field of application, and impacted on by an external social

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1 The term “selected participants”, implies that research participation invitation is sent to all, yet only a few may consent to participating in the research. This methodology, unlike SSM, does not require the immediate involvement of all stakeholders, as it is individual focused. However, some participants may be selected by co-researchers to aid in further establishing the context, as the author found to be the case when following this methodology in the workplace. No participation selection was implemented by the author themselves at any point of undertaking this research. Consequently, they are selected in the sense of, researcher exercising their power of choice, as far as who from consenting participants genuinely share in the vision, mission, and objectives of the inquiry, to ensure that all involved have common grounds and matters of concern.
construct, the researcher and co-researchers can accurately ascertain the reality of the situation as they know it. Hence, a deeper understanding is gained, and one that is not imposed by academic focus, instead one that exists ‘in the eyes of the beholders’. Because this methodology targets the individuals, in hope of transforming selected individuals into ‘change agents’, and in turn creating an ‘evolutionary change’ chain reaction movement within a specific social context, the process is actively involved with only but a few stakeholders choosing to participate in the progressive learning process. A rotating approach between sub-phases of the generic first phase of the progressive learning process model is followed to further solidify the context as perceived by selected participants and to allow for concentrated efforts to lead to the second generic phase of the methodology. Sub-phases or methods that may fall under the umbrella of this initial phase of this generic methodology are left up to individuals’ or groups’ choice of what best aids in the progress of the learning process. Assorted methods from general qualitative and quantitative methodologies can be used, such as; observations, semi-structured interviews, prompting questions, generic questions, silent listening, active listening, surveys, document analysis, and so on. This is due to the generic nature of the model and its associated phases. Once the purpose of the first generic phase is achieved, the second phase of the model can resume. Because this phase incorporates minimum social interaction activities, it therefore contributes to the slow initiation of constructing new realities, and jump-starting the progressive learning process, overlapping phase, of the model.

**Reflections and Discourse Analysis**

Coming from a social constructionist approach, this phase is mainly concerned with empowering participants to be engaged in interpretive procedures that are mainly concerned with knowledge that is situated within their local culture, and embedded in organisation’s and interactions sites. It aims at initiating thinking and reflective processes focused on the system of power, which plays a large part in communicative behaviour and practices in the workplace. By allowing participants the room to reflectively answer “the ‘why?’” aspect of the evaluative sub-phase of the Progressive Learning Process, participants are sanctioned to examine their own desires that drive certain behaviours and practices, which they may have followed for a number of years, without really understanding as to why they act in this particular manner. As discussed above in Chapter Two of this thesis, Hargadon (2002) presents the
accumulation stage in teams of practice as ‘access’, which includes two philosophies of recombination and divergent thought worlds. Firstly, Hargadon (2002) notes that proficiency is derived in some way from the prior existence of its techniques. In organisations, new information often materialises from the recombination of existing incongruent ideas or is activated by applying a new standpoint to an existing expertise. Thus, this phase is about finding reasons through communicative interactions, to further contribute to the construction of new realities, and progress of the learning process. For example, if on discovery, the researcher or co-researchers identify that there is an issue of silence when dealing with an oppressing organisation’s social context. Processes (outlined below) are followed to discover reasons behind this course of action. Reasons for their silence could vary from one individual to the next. Some just do not care, some genuinely do not get impacted by such oppressive behaviours enveloped within the power system as they may possess high tolerance threshold for such actions; yet, some may choose silence out of fear. They do not necessarily want to be silent about oppression experienced within the power system, however, they may be afraid to speak up and challenge the status quo. This choice could potentially be attributed to many factors that may have established themselves within the individual as a result of either being employed in this particular organisation or because of previous experiences the individual may have suffered outside the organisation. Nevertheless, the reason behind their silence when examined by the individual through reflection may result in participants choosing a different course of action to deal with their choice to maintain silence in the face of oppressors in the organisation. This course of action does not necessarily imply that the individual may suddenly decide to speak-up; the course of action could simply be to discover further the roots of this fear, deal with it and then make an educated choice on what other courses of action they may choose to follow next. That, to the author, is considered as a break through in the progressive learning process because it indicates that new social constructs are being formed; issues relating to the old social construct are not statically residing in the individual concerned, and continuing to control their behaviour and practices, nor are they moving the individual backwards; instead, it is a step forward in the right direction, for progress. The aim is not achieving dramatic and fast results; rather it is the purpose of this methodology to achieve sustainable change for the researcher and co-researchers alike. Most of the population reaches certain milestones in their lives at different times and speed rates, some may be faster than
others, and some may be slower than others, in doing so. The essence of the process does not lie in the speed of which we achieve milestones; it is in the value of what we achieve. The value of what individuals achieve cannot be quantified, for it is subjective in its core, and its’ reality can only be recognised by the individuals themselves.

Keeping this in mind, in this phase of the methodology, a more structured active approach based on the four stages model for communication processes and behaviours outlined above in Chapter Two of this thesis, is followed. The first stage is one during which experience is formed within a common context or focused within a single point from diverse organisational areas (Drach-Zahavy and Somech 2001; Gibson 2001). In the second stage information is shared through interactive processes (Drach-Zahavy and Somech 2001; Gibson 2001; Jarvinen and Poikela 2001; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1996). Third, individual staff work together, and individually to interpret, analyse and evaluate the available information, or shared realities (Crossan 1999; Drach-Zahavy and Somech 2001; Gibson 2001; Jarvinen and Poikela 2001; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1996). The final stage is one in which members integrate and construct the information they have communicated and developed into a new understanding or reality that aims to progress the organisations’ cognitive task (Gibson 2001; Jarvinen and Poikela 2001).

Mapping this knowledge across to the emerged model, researcher and co-researchers use social interaction processes\footnote{Such processes, or rather, skills, are learnt and not implied. Hence, they are of a dynamic nature and incorporate internal processes of reflection and evaluation regularly exercised by the individual researcher and co-researchers. This further enhances the progressive learning process for participants in the situated inquiry.} of: (a) Internal, i) Reflection & Evaluation; (b) External, i) Collaboration; ii) Empathetic Listening; and iii) Planning and Decision Making.

Figure 3.3 below, provides a diagrammatical representation of the processes involved in the second phase of the model, and their interdependencies with the generic progressive learning process model shown in Figure 3.2:
As stated above, this is a complex infinite process of change, development, progress, and growth. The unbounded nature of this model, as previously considered, is mainly due to the multi-directional nature of impact made on, and by participants and their social construct, and multifaceted nature of surroundings, as well as subjectivity and “valued” contribution of: (a) individual; (b) group; (c) inquiry setting; (d) external environment; and (e) the “Global Village”. As this “valued” contribution continues to evolve with discovery and learning, so would the “valued” knowledge associated with these dynamic elements that contribute to the Progressive Learning Process model. As mentioned above, the underlying theory and philosophy of processes included in the second phase of the generic Progressive Learning Process model is foregrounded in the scholarly work researched above in Chapter Two of this thesis, and are (if not yet) discussed through the interwoven chapters of this thesis.

The author desires to make a few comments on the internal dialect process. This process takes place on an individual level, by all participants (including the researcher), and is not at any point of the inquiry requested to be disclosed (unless it is disclosed under the consenting free will of the individual), as information collected in the process of conducting this inquiry/research, while maintains anonymity, does not promise confidentiality. Hence, it is essential that participants, when consenting to co-search in the inquiry, are aware that this process is important to be undertaken by them, on an individual level – all participants do so in trust – and outcomes of internal
dialect do not have to be shared in co-researchers external communication processes meetings, as meetings are focused on the inquiry and not individuals personal self-discovery journey. The affects of this internal process on external communications undertaken by co-researchers, and the progression of individuals in externalised communication behaviours and practices during inquiry sessions, would be the indicator on the effectiveness of following the recommended internal individual dialect processes. As such, internal processes as demonstrated in the above diagram, impact on participants’ external processes when collaboratively working towards planning for purposeful action (and visa versa), for the shared situated workplace inquiry. In more technical terms, individuals participating in the inquiry agree to take ownership of their own personal development process in this area at the start of the inquiry, and in this way, being active participants means exactly that. It is not only that co-researchers participate to solve the perceived problems in the social context of the organisation; it also means that participants are active in inward looking, followed by outward practice approach to resolving problems.

This method, when accurately implemented, in a way, ‘hits two birds with the one stone,’ for researchers in the communicative behaviour and practices in the field. It acts as training for participants on individual and group levels to develop habits of excellence in communicative behaviours and practices, as well as contributes to impacting on the wider social construct in the workplace over time, as it does not only aim at identifying and implementing solutions for the problem area in the field, it also targets the establishment of effective communicative behaviours and practices amongst co-inquirers participating in the research.

The author also feels that close attention needs to be given to clarifying “Empathetic Listening” process, briefly introduced in Chapter Two of this thesis. Empathetic listening process is admittedly the hardest skill to acquire during the course of this learning journey. In a way, it makes silent, and active listening processes, of social interaction practices, seem much more appealing in their practicality and attainability. Nevertheless, this skill is invaluable, once mastered and put into action. The reasons behind the choice of empathetic listening process in this phase of the Progressive Learning Process model, stems from the need to build empathy with participants because their feelings are valid contributors to the progressive learning process. Since they are valid feelings to the individual, their feelings need to be recognised and acknowledged by their audience, to also be valid.
It is part of the implied psychological, emotional, mental, and spiritually binding contract between the researcher and co-researchers in a situated inquiry. Empathetic listening is not concerned with the immediate reaction of human beings to provide the individual with what they consider to be a needed answer, nor is it concerned with playing back one’s statement to them, to allow them to listen to themselves, through the mouth of another (such as that practiced in active listening), nor is it as passive as silent listening, where the speaker is left wondering as to what is taking place in the minds of the participating audience (such as silent listening). Empathetic listening is concerned with the display of the listener’s empathy towards the speaker’s feelings, while maintaining their desire for the speaker to reach the answer they are looking for on their own as the listener is aware that the answer to one’s concerns, lies within the individual themselves. Listeners need to distinguish between empathy and sympathy as they engage in these purposeful social interactions exercises. Sympathy may add to the ‘victim’ centred outlook, which in turn would slow down the progressive learning process. The listener’s aim is to empower the speaker to obtain a resolution in relation to the situated inquiry matter being discussed, as they are prompted to search deeper within themselves for the answers, and subsequently move to the final process of the second phase, planning and decision making through reflections and discourse analysis. As previously mentioned in Chapter Two above, as individual’s understanding of issues related to tasks and other’s perspectives develops, members prioritise, search for possible alliances, agreements, and opportunities to collaborate and/or compromise.

**Purposeful Action**

The purpose of this phase is to address the scope of the inquiry; “the ‘how?’” element of the inquiry. It is concerned with doing, implementing, acting, and executing the collective decisions made in the previous phase, to obtain, certain agreed upon outcomes, results and resolutions concerned with the inquiry of constructing better communication behaviours and practices within the workplace, when working on information systems module implementation project. This phase, embedded in progressive learning process, then seeks for the (a) Researcher to; i) Observe; ii) Obtain Feedback; and for (b) Researcher & Co-Researchers to; iii) Evaluate; and iv) Establish Lessons Learnt, in the final phase, and the over all cycle, of the progressive
learning process. **Figure 3.4** further illustrates the processes incorporated within this phase.

**Figure 3.4** Purposeful Action Processes

The dotted spheres and arrows in the above diagram demonstrate the generic nature of the model and suggests that the model can be used in alternate ways as customised to various situated inquiries, or the same situated inquiry as discussed in this thesis, depending on the changes implemented in the surrounding environment, willingness, abilities, perceptions, and level of experience of researchers and co-researchers of the phases that are needed to be followed during the course of the progressive learning process. Processes included in this final phase, while if taken at surface value may give an impression that the academic researcher and participants are working as two separate entities, it is not the case. What takes place in this phase is more of role and responsibilities definition amongst researchers, co-researchers, and selected participants for various contexts. For example, if formal work meetings take place that include members of the organisation who are not directly involved with the inquiry, then with agreement between researcher and co-researchers, the academic is to observe practices in the meetings, document the observations, and share the study with selected group of participants to obtain their feedback on the accuracy of their observations, any additional comments co-researchers would like to make in relation to observations, or any other issues that they may have felt were not adequately addressed by the researcher. The inquiry group can then provide reasons and explanations of the observation within the context of events, evaluate the solutions...
implemented in relation to the area of inquiry to accurately ascertain lessons learnt, and areas for improvement. This is a collective phase of participation and social interactions, with identified roles and responsibilities, for the researcher and co-researchers to work collectively, and either directly or indirectly, impact on the creation of new social construction within the smaller culture of information systems implementation project meetings, and larger context of the organisation. This in turn concludes the first cycle of the progressive learning process, where ‘weak’ construction of new realities is taking place on both individual and collective levels, and new opportunities for learning are gradually unveiled through the phases of the process, as social interactions lead to new discoveries of potential areas for improvement, which are enveloped within their unique social context and culture. The process also: (a) raises awareness amongst stakeholders to build on, and/or replace old knowledge; and (b) encourages individuals and collectives to grow an inner desire to develop new skills associated with their newly acquired knowledge for the purpose of empowering the individual and/or collectives, to develop new habits of excellence over a period of time.

**Selecting a Setting**

Since both the interest of the author and the research methodology, centre on communication practices and behaviours during the implementation of information systems module projects, within organisations’ social constructs, the author needed to conduct the inquiry in this workplace setting. The chosen setting was one that the author is relatively familiar with, as the author worked in a division of comparatively large Australian organisation for three years since resuming their postgraduate studies. It was in this organisation, after the author their ethics clearance from the institution that the author was permitted to conduct the research with a division within the organisation. After conferring with Management in the Higher Education Institution Western Suburbs (HEIWS), within Systems Department of the Office of Academic Registrar, and with agreement of participants; research work was conducted with the operational manager of the Module Implementation Project for a Student Administration System that was to be implemented, to further improve the functionalities of the system; and processes of the organisation when attending student’s requirements.
While the author was recently employed by the organisation in the academic division, the department and project setting where the researcher conducted the research, was in unfamiliar grounds, taking into consideration the geographically decentralised structure of the organisation, and diversity of departments, ranging from academics to non-academics (general staff), whose functionality, in many ways, do not overlap in structure or operations. Initially, the researcher found such diversity surprising, considering that both appear on the surface to be ‘one of oneness.’ However, what was even more astonishing to the researcher is, while objectives and goals appear to be rather incongruent between divisions, and so are their different operational mechanisms set in place (both Office of Academic Registrars Division and Academic Division), the social construct, as was later discovered, across the organisation appeared the same, as expressed by the human interface. However, the human interface concerned with OAR office dealt with the organisational culture and context in a different manner than that practiced by many employees in the academic division. Such a complex culture and diversity negated the reservations that the author had initially, about conducting the research in their workplace. Firstly, the researcher was not acquainted with OAR staff, and did not have any dealings with them; secondly, because of research question and field of application the researcher did not perceive an issue with conducting the research with the systems group as it was very applicable to the inquiry; and thirdly, the researcher thought it important to construct houses of full brick prior to attempting to ‘throw others with stones.’

Furthermore, the researcher commenced the research work after being employed by the organisation for three months as a full time employee on a one year fixed term contract, while in the previous year the researcher was casual staff of the organisation. The researcher at starting the research work did not have much knowledge of the organisation, its system, its management, and its “rites and rituals”, such elements unfolded themselves during the course of research work and continuation of the researcher’s employment with the organisation. However, the researcher’s employment and research involvement with the organisation, in a way, fast tracked the understanding of, and familiarity with, the organisation on both fronts. Also, this dual role provided the researcher with an office within the organisation (on a different campus to systems division under OAR), work computer, work e-mail, intranet access to organisations staff online, phone, and voicemail, which in turn made it very convenient for the researcher to obtain both technical and other related information,
and documents about the organisation, conduct sessions with participants, attend meetings, and closely monitor change resulting form recommendations made, through organisations e-mail announcements and news updates.

Having some familiarity with the organisation (from personal experience) would aid in the participation with other co-researchers in the inquiry, as they already have common grounds for inquiry, which is one of the ingredients for undertaking co-operate inquiry into the human condition, as discussed in Heron (1996). From the researcher’s perspective, who was following the methodology discussed above, it was a great opportunity to implement the generic model for the progressive learning process in their workplace, as not only participants and the researcher shared common objectives, matters of concern, and situated inquiry, they also were conducting the inquiry in an adult learning based environment; namely academia.

This, presents an important challenge to Academia; that is being, to consider the use of their internal experts to further contribute to enhancing their performance and the new construction of their social context and culture, as well as the discovery of future research opportunities. In many corporate organisations, this appears to be a common practice, as staff regularly update their knowledge by obtaining higher postgraduate degrees, and in some instances, organisations pay for their staff education, and professional knowledge-based progress, to then use this newly acquired knowledge to enhance the performance of the organisation. However, in the case of academia this appears to be different. Universities broadly tend to hire consultants to assist with their management and organisation’s practices, rather than involve the educators of the hired consultants. Also on the flip side of the coin, academics seem to be somewhat preoccupied with the fashionable notion that for research work to carry more value and for research to be considered more applicable, it must be conducted in the corporate environment. However, the impact achieved by conducting research work in any workplace setting, is of equal value, if the researchers themselves maintain the integrity in keeping with the research purpose and ethical obligations that the researchers have towards their readers and audiences when publishing the outcomes of their research work. It is also the researcher’s newly formed opinion that reasons behind academia’s’ preference to conduct research in corporate workplace settings, stems more from economics and marketing perspective rather than, the ‘carry more weight,’ and ‘value’ stance. Meaning, that when academics conduct research work within corporate organisations, there are more chances for promoting the
University, establishing partnership grants, and being integrated into the workplace to re-instate their community value, influence, and worth. While the author does not object to the speculated motives behind academics preferences, it is the author’s position that as far as research setting selection process is concerned, research value and influence in any setting is mainly reliant on the researcher’s personal stance on integrity and social accountability, and should not at any point be influenced by other external elements that may hinder the true reporting of inquiry’s outcomes. The author has provided a section later in this chapter that reflects in detail on their dual role as researcher and worker.

To supplement the author’s informal knowledge of the HEIWS, the author undertook various investigations into the organisation’s established social construction through adopting various methods, both to gain a comprehensive picture of the organisation, and to enhance our understanding of the cultural context.

Data collected in Chapter Four of this thesis was achieved through document analysis, unstructured, semi-structured interviews, and recorded reflective sessions with co-researchers and selected participants. Interviews, and reflective session times varied between forty five (45) minutes to an hour and a half (1.5 hours). Interview questions were of open nature and allowed co-researchers and selected participants to share without constraints their opinions and views. Observations were also noted at meetings, interviews, and reflective sessions by the researcher.

Interviews, reflective sessions, and observations were then used to devise a change plan. This plan was discussed and collaboratively implemented to improve organisation’s performance in the information systems module implementation project, and to establish lessons learnt for the organisation. Established lessons learnt, as observed by the researcher at attending one SISC meeting, which lasted for one hour and forty five minutes (1.75 hours) at the termination of the third phase of the Progressive Learning Process Model, are used as an input into the second cycle of the Progressive Learning Process Model, and so forth, as this learning journey is based on continuous slow evolutionary process ideals.

Only one cycle of the Progressive Learning Process model was implemented during the researcher’s work in the situated inquiry for the Masters (Honours) Commerce purposes, and the cycle’s duration with the organisation was for the period of three (3) months; from 4th April 2004 to 7th July 2004. A historical sketch that is offered below was painted through document analysis as provided by the organisation, and a
discussion of the cultural implications have been reserved for Chapter Four of this thesis.

**Employees as Assets, Employees as Liabilities: Historical Background on Higher Education Institution Western Sydney (HEIWS)**

HEIWS was established in 1989 by the Australian Government, and its main intention was to ‘bring knowledge to life’ for occupants of the Western suburbs of Sydney. The ideology of the then Labour Government when constituting HEIWS, was to provide education equity to the relatively less advantaged region of Sydney, as the Western suburbs of Sydney are considered in many ways to be disadvantaged.

The institution is a public University, where the Government contributes to approximately 40% of it’s’ cash flow, as well as research grants, DEST funds, and other research related payments. The remainder of monetary contributions heavily rely on student fees, which are also paid by the Government on behalf of enrolled students in the form of Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) for undergraduate courses and Postgraduate Education Loan Scheme (PELS) for graduate courses, until such time when enrolled students who may leave prior to completion, or those who complete their university courses secure a job in the workplace.

As the university is a public institution its management and employees are considered in some sense to be ‘Public Servants’ and hence are accountable to: a Board of Trustees, which includes members of Australian Senate, Academic Management Staff, Elected Secretary, Students Representatives, and local Members of Parliament. They are also bound by the Federal Government, Industrial Relations Commission, NSW Ombudsman, Independent Commission Against Corruption, and National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU). The University is also subject to legislative boundaries that shape its policies and procedures. It is a bureaucratic organisation, with a hierarchical perspective on management. Most of its Executive Management ensemble are elected academics that have mainly reached Professor status, and their contracts are subject to discussion by the Board of Trustees on three to five years basis, pending perceived performance evaluation, and judgement. The organisation is multifaceted in nature on division and departmental fronts, and operates on five different campuses that spread over the Western suburbs of Sydney; Parramatta, Blacktown, Penrith, Bankstown, and Campbelltown.
HEIWS employs approximately 2000 permanent staff, classified as academic and general staff, and the University offers fixed term contracts and casual work. Casual employment opportunities slowly diminished at the start of 2004 to be a minimal occurrence at the start of 2005. Staff are employed under two Enterprise Agreements that set out their working conditions as required “By-Law”. Staff working conditions are defined in, HEIWS Enterprise Agreement (Academic) and HEIWS Enterprise Agreement (General). Both agreements are negotiated between the Secretary of the National Tertiary Union (NTEU) and the Vice-Chancellor, and must be approved by Federal Government appointed representative in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

There are approximately 35,000 students that currently undertake studies at the HEIWS in undergraduate and postgraduate courses including course work and research.

In the restructure implemented in 2003 positions were made redundant, and staff were given the option of accepting voluntarily redundancy or being demoted and transferred to other disciplines, divisions and departments. Hence, many workers remain feeling vulnerable, unstable, insecure, uncertain, and confused as management communicates through a top-down approach decisions of redundancies to staff. Many staff that survived the 2003 restructure were left with feelings of resentment and fear. In this sense staff resorted to believing that they are perceived as a liability by management as opposed to assets that deserve to be kept, trained and promoted in recognition of their efforts that they invested into the institution over the years. In 2006 the organisation is to implement yet another restructure. As discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, where the author examined the scholarly work on the influence of external culture on communicative behaviour and practices within organisations; it appears to be the case in this organisation that due to the external demands made by the Government as Australia strives to “keep up” with the “Global Village” economical and environmental changes, the Australian social context resumed a shift from “mateship” and “fare go” for all, to a newly constructed ethos, which in turn supported the mechanistic, controlling view of organisations.

As previously mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis, Morgan (1986) notes:

Persuaded by the ideas that there are good and bad cultures, that a strong organisation culture is essential for success, or that modifications to an existing culture will lead employees to work harder and feel more content,
many managers and management consultants have begun to adopt new roles as corporate gurus attempting to create new forms of corporate consciousness. While many managers approach this task on the assumption that what is good for the organisation will inevitably be in the interests of its employees, critics feel that this trend is potentially dangerous one, developing the art of management into process of ideological control (p. 138)

Conversely, this thesis proposes that for organisations to work more effectively it may be significant to consider that what is good for the employees of the organisation may inevitably be good for the organisation, as an organisation is in essence, a body of amalgamated individuals who partner together and involve in discourse, as discussed in Chapter Two above. Checkland and Holwell (1998) present effective and modern organisations as open systems and living organisms, which are formulated through the amalgamation of individuals who are empowered to engage in controversial discourse.

Recruits: Co-Researchers, Selected Participants and Observees

In 1989 HEIWS was comprised of three “sub-universities” that operated under the one banner. The three stand-alone sub-universities at the time were called; HEIWS (Nepean), HEIWS (Hawkesbury), and HEIWS (Macarthur). Each section of the University used its own “in-house” customised student information system for everyday operational requirements and processes. The University was then amalgamated in the fourth quarter of 1992; however the amalgamation of the “sub-universities” caused a problem, because the University had to report to the Commonwealth as the one institution.

Hence, as a short term arrangement, the Office of Academic Registrar put together a data warehouse system, where data from two out of three systems was uploaded into the interim database, to subsequently provide the Commonwealth Government with the HEIWS data as required by Federal Legislation.

However, while the temporary Data Warehouse system was perceived as a beneficial step for the short term to cope with immediate government demands, it was resolved thereafter by the University’s Executive Management that there needs to be a long term solution that would cater for the amalgamated University and its operations.

At about that time there was a Federal initiative called the Core Australian Specification for Management and Computing (CASMAC). This initiative was aimed
at developing some systems that many National Universities in Australia could use, and although the system is generic in nature and could be customised to cater for particular business operations and processes of Universities, there would still be some basic similarities in the functionalities of the system, meaning that some of the data elements would be defined in the same way.

Furthermore in or around the same time, the then HEIWS Board of Trustees had established an Information Technology committee and sub committees that decided that all of the University’s administrative systems, such as Student Records, personnel, finance and other operations, should run on the one database created from the same software. Hence, the decision was made to put the University on to an Oracle platform for all of its administrative processes and operations. Subsequently, when the CASMAC work started in earnest across the Australian Higher Education sector, the Universities formed two groups. Not all the Universities joined one of those groups, some decided to implement their own “in-house” student system, however, on a general level there were two groups, a group that decided to use Oracle and another group decided to use a database called “Power House”.

Because the University’s Executive Management communicated a directive to use the Oracle platform, the University joined other Universities using the same platform, thus, the group was known as ‘UNION”.

“UNION” then resumed its own research into available systems that run on Oracle and would suit the various needs of Universities. “UNION” established its lack of desire to build a new system as a basic premise; instead, UNION wanted to buy an existing commercial system that ran on Oracle to then adapt the system for University’s use. Subsequently UNION approached Oracle Financials, which was perceived to be a scalable system, which can be easily customised to suit University’s purposes. At discovering that Oracle Financials was not fundamentally designed to manipulate and process University’s administrative operations, UNION eventually resorted to consider Concept; Human Resources System, which is currently in use and runs on the Oracle platform. However, during the course of UNION’s endeavour to locate a generic system that is capable of dealing with all administrative tasks (including but not limited to student administration processes), it was established that such a system did not exist, hence the need to design and implement a system to deal with student needs, which also ran on Oracle platform became evident.
While at the time it was acknowledged that “People Soft” is available as an “off the shelf” system, which runs on Oracle platforms, the fact that its fundamental functionalities were designed to cater for North American Higher Educational Institutions as opposed to Australian Universities posed difficulties for UNION members. Thus, UNION decided to develop its own Student System, and there was a collaborative effort, following Joint Application Design (JAD) processes to devise the parameters of what the Universities in UNION thought should comprise a good Student System.

However, because the HEIWS recognised that its previous three diverging systems would not last the distance; members at the University undertook that they would internally participate in JAD exercises to formulate comprehensive system specifications to provide to UNION, which in turn formed the early basis for discussions about SISC.

As a result, UNION members were confronted with the complexity of the system and its required functionalities; consequently, an assessment was conducted to establish the size of the system from the specifications provided to only discover that development and implementation costs were proving to be of colossal nature.

Companies from United Kingdom and some from Australia examined the specification with the view to giving a quote and subsequently decided that they could not take on board the development and implementation of the SISC system due to the size of the project.

At the end of 1997 and beginning of 1998, UODV, a member of UNION decided to develop and implement the SISC student system, and part of the requirements was to ensure that they are to create interfaces between the main systems, such as Human Resources and Finance systems, and the Student system, to have a seamless and integrated administrative system where exchange of information is effortlessly achieved, and all systems are to work cohesively.

Subsequently, UODV set up a company called ‘Initiative UODV software Services’ to distance the development of the Student System from the University itself, however, the company is completely owned by UODV.

The system finally went live in second half of 2002, and the company’s name changed to ‘SISC Software Services’, although the company remains to be owned by UODV.
SISC is an evolving system that caters for many business operations. While the core functionalities exist, some are yet to be implemented and deployed. Those include, but are not limited to ‘Online Enrolments’, which are currently in the implementation phase of the Systems Development Life Cycle; and Course SISCR functionalities that assist students with their enrolment processes as student’s are provided with information pertaining to their enrolment in the correct subjects each semester, and whether they have successfully completed all the pre-requisites for the subjects they are seeking to enrol in every semester. Also, Course SISCR Module enables staff to give accurate guidance and advice to students in relation to the subjects students need to complete prior to their successful completion of the course and graduation.

The researcher approached the Office of Academic Registrar via e-mail, attaching an information sheet that outlines the research vision, objectives, methodology and benefits of research. The overall idea was that the researcher would be an active participant in an information systems implementation project team, to work collaboratively with practice based co-researchers and selected participants to apply theoretical ideas to their work practices to initiate and continue with the cyclic nature of the learning process. The main focus of the research was communication practices. The author then contacted the Academic Registrar, and it was then decided that the researcher would meet with potential co-researchers to discuss her hypothesis and determine as to whether or not the potential participants or co-researchers share in the common situated inquiry proposed in the research. In addition, because the researcher’s involvement implied that some of the co-researchers time would be consumed in conducting the research with the researcher, it was essential that a collaborative decision is made to further ascertain as to whether or not this research would be of benefit to the organisation, first and foremost. A meeting was held with Academic Registrar and Assistant Academic Registrar of the Systems Department, the author’s research supervisor and the researcher, early April 2004. There was a detailed discussion of the research, questions and answers where all parties made an effort to be as transformative and transparent as possible. Although the author’s main goal was not only to observe, but to be actively involved in the communication practices and provision of ideas and suggestions to all stakeholders of the information systems implementation project including, but not limited to management on operational, tactical and strategic levels, it was recommended that on a wider scale the researcher was to attend steering committee meetings as an observer, and on a narrow
level the author was to be an active participant and engage with the SISCR Module implementation project team, which was at the time in its genesis.

The steering committee membership was composed of approximately twenty (20) members from academic and business unit streams, who held tactical and strategic management positions in the organisation. It is for this reason that the researcher was in a better sense of the word “instructed” to observe only and not to actively participate in the meetings. Ironic as this may be, at the end of the day the author was stereotyped as a relatively young female “student”. The reasons as to why the researcher accepted to compromise on the foundations of her research methodology is later discussed in this thesis.

On the flip side of the coin, the SISCR Module implementation team was a one person’s team, that being the Project Manager. It was later revealed to the researcher that there were plans to advertise for four fixed term contract positions for the SISCR Module implementation project in July 2004 and it was projected that new recruits are to resume work in or around September 2004. However, the author was to first meet with the Project Manager to discuss her proposal, and involvement.

Subsequently, the researcher held a meeting with the SISCR Module implementation project Project Manager in Mid-April. The meeting was informal in nature and it eventually led to a brainstorming session where Project Manager not only provided chronological history of the project, outlining problem areas and gaps between theoretical intentions and eventual practices, but also welcomed the opportunity to contribute many ideas for the improvement of the operations of implementing and deploying information systems in the organisation.

At completing this stage informally, consent forms were then sent and signed by co-researchers and other research participants. While there were many who expressed willingness to be involved, interviewed and be members of focus groups; it would have been very difficult for the researcher to track all participants regularly, and maintain such involvement on acceptable time intervals. Hence author’s team of co-researchers for the first cycle of the learning process was limited to the Assistant Academic Registrar, Systems Department and SISCR Module Implementation Project, Project Manager. It then followed that co-researchers recommended the involvement of other selected participants on temporary basis, and in particular for the cooperative inquiry phase of the learning cycle as we progressed with our research.
The two main participants who collectively agreed to co-research the common situated inquiry with me were purposefully selected because they also distinguished the need for the research. They shared the same sentiments in relation to the importance of improved communication between stakeholders in information systems implementation projects. Their backgrounds were business focused as opposed to the technically obliged participants. However, other members and stakeholders who were selected for interviews, yet were not directly co-researching the situated inquiry, had diverse backgrounds such as technical, managerial, academic, administrative, marketing and communication localities.

In addition to involving direct and indirect co-researchers who shared in a common situated inquiry and research passions, the author also looked for a balance in other demographical elements such as gender, status, age, ethnicity, inter-disciplinarity, and personality types.

**Description of Co-Researchers, Selected Participants and Observees**

**Co-Researchers**

- **AARS**
  
  AARS is an Assistant Academic Registrar in the Information Systems Department. AARS is in the age group of 45-50; and has a Bachelor in Business on the academic level; however, he is not formally qualified in the technical stream. AARS worked in the organisation for over 10 years and has a diverse work experience ranging from working as project manager, business analyst, team leader, and finally managing the tactical and operational aspects of the department, including projects related to enhancing the SISC system to include additional customised modules that would assist end-users in their daily business processes and operations.

- **PMMN**
  
  PMMN is the SISCR Module Implementation project manager. PMMN is in the age group of 40-45; and does not possess formal qualifications in project management or information technology. PMMN is formally qualified in business administration and has worked with the organisation for over ten years also. During her employment with the organisation, PMMN worked as general staff and was responsible for diverse
responsibilities including; course officer, course requirements and related administrative areas.

**Selected Participants**

- **AARG**
  AARG held the position of Academic Registrar and at the time the researcher joined the team, and he is in the age group of 65-75. AARG was Acting Academic Registrar preparing for an overdue retirement. AARG assumed the role of Acting Academic Registrar until such time the organisation was to replace him. AARG was not asked about his academic qualifications, as he often referred to his experience with the HEIWS, which then led one to speculate that his experience was perceived by AARG to be equivalent to formal qualifications.

- **ESLD**
  ESLD is an Academic staff with PhD qualifications in the Education stream (both primary and high school). ESLD is within the age group of 45 – 50 and has been in the organisation for over five years. ESLD has vast experience in academia as lecturer, unit coordinator, course coordinator, and programme head. ESLD seemed to enjoy the academic side of her work along with research, however, was not very much interested in systems implementation, and the technological related aspects to the organisation. While ESLD had great suggestions relating to improved communication processes, ESLD was not very enthusiastic about being involved as a direct stakeholder in the SISCR Module information systems implementation project. The lack of enthusiasm was noted by the project manager during the pilot training that was prepared by the OAR for the SISCR Module.

- **NAPC**
  NAPC is an Associate Professor in one of the Schools (Nursing) and she is in the age group of 50 – 55. NAPC has been with the organisation for 14 years and had lived through the decentralised campuses to the amalgamation stages of the organisations life. NAPC’s experiences also varied from lecturer, to unit coordinator, course coordinator, programme head, head of school, and various other managerial roles with the HEIWS. NAPC was very enthusiastic about technology and came across to know much about the importance of stakeholder involvement in the systems life cycle. NAPC shred much insight and was very well knowledgeable about issues concerning
communication and stakeholders’ participation in information systems implementation projects.

**Observees**

- **SISC Steering Committee Members**

The committee was formed by Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) to manage issues that are related to the SISC system, including but limited to the SISCR Module implementation project. The number of committee members as documented in theory is fifteen (15) members. Members of the committee were from both academic and general, staff on tactical and strategic management levels. Other managerial staff of the organisation outside the middle to high management range were not involved in the committee. The researcher, being a student of the organisation, was therefore not allowed to actively participate in the discussions taking place during committee meetings, and was instructed to only observe. In this context, sub-committees needed to be constructed in keeping with the hierarchical organisation’s social construction and in order for a system to be developed to maintain communication flow between stakeholders of the information system.

The age groups of the participants ranged from 45 to 60. There appeared to be an even division between male and female memberships of the committee in practice, however, this was difficult to ascertain as not all committee members would attend meetings regularly. Meetings gave the impression of practicing “rites and rituals” in that they were either to report up to authority or to receive authoritative instructions from Senior Management.

**Conclusion**

Participatory Soft Systems Methodology as used in this research is an interpretive methodological framework that emerged as a result of researching communication behaviours and practices within the workplace, in the context of implementing information systems module projects within public sector higher education institution.

The model focuses on using effective communicative behaviours and practices within researcher, co-researcher and selected participants’ group to jump start the progressive learning process within the organisation and in turn slowly shift organisation’s culture from Mechanistic organisation to Open Systems organisation to
better deal with changes in the surrounding milieu, the introduction, and implementation of information systems within the organisation.

The model was constructed to deal with complexities involved in the interrelatedness of external culture, the organisation’s social constructionism, individuals’ communicative behaviour and practices within the situated inquiry as the amalgam individuals attempt to meet both external and internal demands, to become more effective and efficient through the use of technology and information systems, and hence, be able to better compete with current and potential rivals as global and regional economy changes and shifts.

The model has three overlapping phases, those are: (a) co-operate inquiry – established social construct through the eyes of participants; (b) reflection and discourse analysis; and (c) purposeful action. Those three overlapping phases start the Progressive Learning Process within the organisation. The model is cyclic and generic in nature. Hence; the model is flexible to be customised to various situated inquiries, is subject to falsification and is aimed to aid in the continuous contribution of scholarly work and research into communication behaviours and practices within the workplace in the information systems field of application.

The selected setting or research work was conducted in a public sector higher education institution located in the Western Suburbs of Sydney. Two co-researchers were recruited to participate in the situated inquiry, three selected participants were interviewed through the process, and about twenty observees participated in the final phase of the model.

Various methods were used throughout the phases of the model, such as unstructured, semi-structured interviews, and recorded reflective sessions with co-researchers and selected participants. Interview and reflective session times varied between forty five (45) minutes to an hour and a half (1.5 hours). Interview questions were of an open nature and allowed co-researchers and selected participants to share without constraints on their opinions and views. Observations were also noted at meetings, interviews, and reflective sessions by the researcher.

Interviews, reflective sessions, and observations were then used to devise a change the plan. This plan was discussed and collaboratively implemented to improve organisation’s performance in information systems module implementation projects, and establish lessons learnt for the organisation. Established lessons learnt, as observed by researcher at attending one SISC steering committee meeting, which
lasted for one hour and forty five minutes (1.75 hours) at the termination of the third phase of the Progressive Learning Process Model, are used as an input into the second cycle of the Progressive Learning Process Model, and so forth, as this learning journey is based on continuos slow evolutionary process ideals. The researcher attended one SISC steering committee meeting at the final phase of the model.
Only one cycle of the Progressive Learning Process model was implemented during researcher’s work in the situated inquiry for the Masters (Honours) Commerce purposes, and the cycle duration with the organisation was for a period of three (3) months, from 4\textsuperscript{th} April 2004 to 7\textsuperscript{th} July 2004.
Chapter 4

Participatory Soft Systems

Methodology: Discussion of the Model
Introduction

In this chapter, the author presents and uses the results of the research described above to provide discussion on how the model emerged and why it was necessary to develop this generic model for this particular situated inquiry.

This chapter contains discussion on how the model presented in Chapter Three is able to facilitate a direct impact on learning processes and behavioural changes through the mastering of improved oral communication practices and behaviours. In addition, the chapter discusses the inter-relationship between individual’s learning process through individual choices to undergo perception and paradigm shifts, and the initiation of new social and cultural construction through communicative practices and behavioural changes of the individuals enveloped within the organisation; to motivate the collective to develop controversial discourse by continuous reflection and feedback from individual staff of the organisation.

The author did not choose to apply the model to a single act of communication, or to the communicative acts of one individual, nor was the focus of the author to evaluate the model itself. Consequently, what is discussed in this chapter is a model that emerged as a result of the participation of the researcher in the situated inquiry, and this model is recommended to be used as a generic concept that can be utilised by researchers and co-researchers who share in a common situated inquiry related to communication practices and behaviours in organisations, and in particular within project management teams of information systems implementation projects.

Hence, like any generic concept the model is interpretive, and therefore is subject to falsification. However, by approaching these communicative acts and behaviours from different angles and perspectives as suggested by the model, the author believes that the complexity and richness of the original model is thus preserved. The foundational element of this model that needs to be carefully considered when the model is applied in varied contexts, in that communication in business settings that is hoped to lead to open discourse in the organisation, begins with examining the diverse responses, reactions, opinions, and utterances of individuals enveloped within the situated inquiry.
This chapter is organised by the phases of the model discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, and not by individual case studies for each co-researcher and selected participant. The data collected is grouped into the phases of the model that seemed most appropriate.

To re-iterate, this chapter is envisioned to be a test of the model’s validity, as the model in itself does not offer “answers” that may be perceived as valid or invalid. Instead, it focuses on the type of data collected through the situated inquiry and various ways of interpreting this data – that the author believes are required to understand communicative acts in certain situated inquiries. Thus, the reader is asked to consider this chapter as the beginning of an iterative process that the author and perhaps others are able to continue to, examine closely and improve.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the following data was collected by using unstructured, semi-structured interviews, and recorded reflective sessions with co-researchers and selected participants. Interview and reflective session times varied between forty five (45) minutes to an hour and a half (1.5 hours). Interview questions were of open nature and allowed co-researchers and selected participants to share without constraints their opinions and views. Observations were also noted at meetings, interviews, and reflective sessions by the researcher.

Only one cycle of the Progressive Learning Process model was implemented during researcher’s work in the situated inquiry for the Masters (Honours) Commerce purposes, and the cycle duration with the organisation was for the period of three (3) months, from 4th April 2004 to 7th July 2004.

Interviews, reflective sessions, and observations were then used to devise a change plan. This plan was discussed and collaboratively implemented to improve the organisation’s performance in information systems module implementation projects, and establish lessons learnt for the organisation. Established lessons learnt are used as an input into the second cycle of the Progressive Learning Process Model, and so forth, as this learning journey is based on continuous slow evolutionary process ideals as discussed above in Chapter Three.
Co-operative Inquiry -- Established Social Construct Conditions Through the Eyes of Selected Participants

In this section, the context of communication practices and behaviours in the implementation of information systems Module project, as perceived by the individual staff, recruited co-researchers and selected participants, is established. Through the utterances, opinions, responses, reactions, acts, and behaviours of the individual staff working in the organisation, the researcher aimed to closely examine the social and cultural construction of the situated inquiry.

There were varied responses, opinions, and observations made in relation to the above mentioned, however, the method of delivery of communicative practices and behaviours of the recruited individuals was observed to be mostly similar and consistent.

While the ‘human elements’ were diverse and complex, indeed their behaviours carried certain commonalities. Nevertheless, it was noted that their communicative behaviours changed and varied depending on whether the communicative practices took place in a group context or on a one-to-one basis, the recording was turned on or off, and whether or not the individual was familiar with research practices and implications. As previously stated in Chapter Two above, what is attempted to be achieved in the below section is the “differentiation”: piece together diverse perspectives from a number of disciplines so that they can blend, mix, and coherently run together.

Established Social and Cultural Construction of the Organisation

As above mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis, characterising organisational culture is another means to accomplishing the intended purpose of this thesis, and is considered to assist in the accurate implementation of the interpretative methodological framework presented in Chapter Three. In addition, Checkland and Holwell (1998) state that since research is concerned with the ‘human element’, it is important to understand the perceived situation through their description and mental views in order for researchers and co-researchers to be able to plan for purposeful action for information systems implementation projects.

The purpose of this section therefore, is to share with the reader some common and habitual communicative behaviours and practices that resulted from the surrounding
organisation’s social construct as influenced by external culture. Deal and Kennedy offer some colourful sample characterisations: the tough-guy, macho culture (highly individualistic), the work culture (high risk activities, minimal feedback), and the process culture (minimal feedback, highly bureaucratic) (pp. 107 – 123).

The characterisations below were obtained through observations and shared experiences as uttered by employees of the organisation, and noted by the researcher. It is essential to recall what was stated in Chapter Two of this thesis, that is being, since organisation’s culture is an amalgam of individual opinions any individual responses are informative. Subsequently, it is also essential to evoke that in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, it was stated that for the purposes of this research project, organisation’s culture is kept strictly a descriptive concept in the initial phase of the chosen methodology, co-operate inquiry. Hence, below are some of the characteristics of the organisation as were noted in a general sense:

1. Process Culture (minimal feedback, highly bureaucratic);
2. Fear and apprehension of authority and judgement;
3. Lack of trust in authority;
4. Feeling dispensable and replaceable, i.e. lack of feeling appreciated and lack of recognition;
5. Individuals lack confidence in their own abilities and talents;
6. Finding comfort and security in ganging-up;
7. Placing high expectations and taking advantage of the talented, sensitive, and creative (usually those are individuals who are considered to be of relatively lower status);
8. Bullying the vulnerable and punishing those who are relatively more proactive;
9. Promoting the non-participants and the passive;
10. Cynicism and criticism;
11. Volatile tempers and arrogance to mask deeper insecurities and ignorance;
12. Confusion created and manifested in the usage of professional jargon;
13. Conducting inquisitions (similar to those conducted by the Catholic Church in the 15th, 16th and part of the 17th centuries) to isolate and punish;
14. Politics and reliance on “Who you know as opposed to what you know” (this is not similar to “networking”);
15. Trained bureaucratic utterances;
16. Apathy followed by anger (this anger usually initiated by the Union);
17. Lack of willingness to admit mistakes;
18. The use of power, money and influence to bargain, and in a sense “buy their way out of trouble”;

The organisation was identified as rational-legal, and therefore rules-based and highly bureaucratic as cited in Clegg (1990). It was noted that the collective public sector academic organisation fears the legislative system, yet does not respect it. Furthermore, it was noted that there is no clear and defined direction by Strategic Leadership in the organisation in relation to employees’ satisfaction, well being, and the quality of working conditions.

Such characteristics outlined above demonstrate that the organisation’s social construct is in line with the Mechanistic view. This in turn, as discussed in Chapter Two has the following shortcomings,

Mechanistic approaches to organisations often have severe limitations. In particular, they: (a) can create organisational forms that have great difficulty in adapting to changing circumstances; (b) can result in mindless and unquestioning bureaucracy; (c) can have unanticipated and undesirable consequences as the interests of those working in the organisation take precedence over the goals the organisation was designed to achieve; and (d) can have dehumanising effects upon employees (Morgan, 1986, p. 35).

Conversely, there is a clear and defined direction by Strategic Leadership in the organisation in relation to the satisfaction and well being of, and quality of learning environment provided to, students (a.k.a. “consumers”) of the organisation.

Such a segregated approach to “service-provider/client” mentality was outlined in Chapter Two above, as it was stated that typically, employee and consumer are merely different interchangeable roles for one and the same person – employees are consumers. Meaning then appears as a ‘paradoxical entity.’ It is produced in order to be destroyed to be reproduced and to be destroyed again (Sievers, 1990, pp. 127-8).

As mentioned in preceding chapters, Checkland and Holwell (1998) discuss the need for organisations to consider a shift from the conventional model of organisations to an open systems view. They also propose that modern organisations may need to consider empowering individuals to engage in open discourse, in order for the
organisation to be better equipped to deal with change as information systems and technologies continue to be introduced and implemented into organisations.

**Initial meeting with Co-researchers**

- **AARG and AARS**

Initially, the researcher was invited by the Acting Academic Registrar G, AARG, to meet with the Assistant Academic Registrar S (Systems Department), AARS, to discuss the proposed situated inquiry and determine the researcher’s place in the organisation in order for the approached potential participants to ascertain whether or not they would like to share in the proposed research area. This meeting was not recorded as consent had not yet been obtained and it was merely a first step for a decision to be reached. Various questions were asked and clarifications were offered to establish the situated inquiry clearly for the potential participants. The main emphasis was placed on anonymity and confidentiality of the organisation, participants, and information in the research publication rather than the importance of the research and the situated inquiry. It was stated to both the AARG and the AARS that while anonymity is guaranteed, confidentiality is not assured as the setting of the situated inquiry needs to be established, which may in turn lead the readers to the identification of the organisation and the situated inquiry.

Another main determining factor that encouraged AARS (Co-researcher) to agree to participate was as he stated to the researcher enthusiastically;

> “Good, having your involvement would make sure that we are working consciously and hard on the project”

However, with cautiousness it was decided that the situated inquiry would take place in Project Manager MN’s, PMMN’s, team with AARS’s involvement, as at the time implementing the SISCR module in SISC was a priority for the Executives. It was also decided that the researcher could observe steering committee meetings; however, the researcher was not to directly actively participate in the discussions that take place during the steering committee meetings. The PMMN’s team was a one person team; however, it was stated that in July 2004, four staff in addition to the PMMN would be recruited on fixed term contracts to assist with the module implementation project as soon as the Systems Department obtained budget approval from Senior Management. This however did not occur in the anticipated timeframe.
The decision and limitations of the researcher’s involvement in the organisation stated above were initially reached by only two representatives of the organisation and then these decisions, in a way, were transferred to the remainder of stakeholders involved in the situated inquiry, save for interviewed selected participants and co-researchers. Subsequently, and in line with the researcher’s request and Ethics Committee guidelines, information sheets, and consent forms related to research project were sent to stakeholders via e-mail. The consent forms were signed by observed stakeholders at receiving the notification from the Office of Academic Registrar.

It is worth noting that the decision reached by AARG and AARS to involve the researcher with the organisation was motivated by a genuine desire to primarily benefit the researcher and the HEIWS’s research contribution to scholarly work; and secondarily, the organisation as a whole, as the organisation works on improving communication practices and behaviours between stakeholders in the information systems module implementation projects.

- **PMMN**

   The initial meeting with the PMMN mainly revolved around discussing the situated inquiry and brainstorming some ideas in relation to the perceived constraints and limitations related to implementing the SISCR module project in the organisation.

   The PMMN appeared motivated and enthusiastic in relation to her involvement in the situated inquiry; she also presented herself well and demonstrated much knowledge in her area, as she articulated the issues related to the situated inquiry. In addition, the PMMN adopted a pro-active approach to addressing the issues in the brainstorming session held between the researcher and the PMMN.

   The PMMN highlighted the diverse implications associated with oral versus written communication. One of the main issues discussed during the meeting was the isolation of the operational level management and staff from strategic and tactical levels management steering committee meetings. The PMMN’s concern was centred around the fact that operational level management and staff communicated to Senior Management of the organisation through written means, in particular, the reading of the Executive Summary of the reports prepared by the PMMN to the Chair of the committee. The issue as presented by PMMN was firstly; written reports, while prepared extensively by PMMN, remained an ineffective approach to communications as they only present a “snap shot” of the main concerns surrounding the module implementation project. Presenting Executive Summary to Senior Management in the
steering committee meetings does not comprehensively explain the core problem areas perceived by PMMN in her attempts to complete the module implementation project. It was also discussed that the PMMN, at times, may not receive a response to the concerns she raised in her reports to Senior Management, as she has to rely on the AARS to communicate down the instructions and feedback of Senior Management on her reports. This at times caused further delays to the project’s timeline. Secondly, the PMMN expressed concerns that reading Executive Summaries of her reports in the steering committee meetings does not accurately reflect her continuous efforts to meet Senior Management’s expectations within the boundaries of the project such as the budget and the schedule. Hence, the PMMN felt that she was not always accurately perceived by Strategic Management, and this was mainly attributed to the isolating gap resulting from the authoritative and hierarchical culture of the organisation.

Further, the PMMN raised issues concerned with a perceived lack of enthusiasm amongst academics to be involved in the module implementation project. The PMMN stated that generally speaking, across the organisation, academics appear to be disinterested in being involved in the implementation of the SISCR module. She explained that despite her efforts and repeated invitations for academic involvement in the pilot testing of the module, only the School of Nursing demonstrated a willingness and motivation to be included in the testing of the module and continuously gave feedback for continuous improvement of the module. The PMMN highlighted the fact that there needs to be some type of “a carrot” to attract the “gap fillers” to participate the testing of the module, as the SISCR module implementation project was not perceived as an important element to be attended to, particularly amongst academics. Such perceptions, which led to a lack of involvement of end-users of the module, were attributed to the geographically decentralised structure of the organisation. It was explained that some staff (especially academics) did not hold the project of high level of importance to spend travel time to attend pilot testing of the module, as it may take some staff forty five minutes to an hour to reach the testing location from their home campus. The PMMN felt that academic staff involvement was necessary as course advisors and coordinators, and programme heads, would need to learn how to operate the module appropriately to advise students in relation to their course completion requirements and to save time. However, this perception was not welcomed by all academic staff in the organisation. Conversely, it was pointed out by the PMMN that this was not the case amongst administration staff in the
organisation, as general staff realised the importance of the module and the time saving qualities that the implementation of this module would achieve for all stakeholders of the system.

Through the discussion, it appeared that front line staff and Senior Management of the organisation had different priorities when it came to information systems implementation projects. It also became apparent that operational management and front line staff of the information systems module implementation project felt “sandwiched” between information system stakeholders’ expectations on extreme ends of the spectrum. This issue was not aided by the isolation caused due to organisation’s geographically decentralised structure, and authoritative and hierarchical social construction.

**Interviews with Selected Participants**

To further aid in the co-operative inquiry phase of this model, the PMMN suggested that the researcher approach a few selected participants, mainly end-users, to assist with the formulation of a more comprehensive picture of the culture and social construction of the organisation.

The researcher conducted the interviews with the selected participants without the presence of co-researchers; however, both the researcher and co-researchers used this feedback for the second phase of the progressive leaning process methodology, reflections and discourse analysis.

The first selected participant was AARG (Academic Registrar), and AARG was asked to establish the context of SISC information systems implementation project from communication stance. The AARG’s comments in relation to the context of SISC from communication perspective and stakeholder involvement in the decision making process of information systems implementation project, were as follows;

“[I’m just going on memory from a fare while back] but also about that time, the then Board of Governors had a IT committee – sub committee, and that committee decided that all of the university’s administrative systems, things like Student Records, personnel, finance everything else you could think of should run on one data base created from the same software in other words, because at that stage they were all – it was just a dogs breakfast basically, all of our systems had different platforms. And the decision was made to put the University on to an Oracle platform for all of its administrative systems.”
The AARG then clarifies that the decision to use SISC as HEIWS's student system was made by the Board of Trustees;

“so the decision was made that we would adopt the UODV System – subsequently known as SISC and so that was made at the Board of Trustees I think probably about 97, 98.”

End user and Academic Associate Professor NAPC in the School of Nursing confirmed that the decision was ‘imposed’ on end-users by Executive management, and states the following;

“In terms of making decisions about SISC I have no input what so ever, I think that is a decision which was really made by others and basically, and I use the word ‘imposed’ in little bit, bits, I don’t know that would’ve been... it would’ve been nice to have been consulted about what do you need, so that people could design a system which didn’t just meet a particular organisations, but they could actually as an end user, what I consider as an end user, I could extract stuff from. And in that context we were not consulted at all.”

This in turn forms the foundations of “classical management theory” its’ basic idea is “that management is a process of planning, organisation, command, coordination, and control” (Morgan, 1986, p. 25). The emphasis in the context of mechanistic organisations is clearly on command and control. Classical management theory has given us the organisation chart, “one man one boss,” customised work tasks (i.e. the assembly line), and elaborate bureaucracies (Morgan, 1986, pp. 24-9).

The AARG also commented on Senior Management’s expectations in relation to the completion of the implementation of the information systems within the established budget and schedule. The AARG perceived Senior Management’s expectations in this regards as unrealistic;

“I think in probably 2000 [I’m thinking here], I got involved in at that stage, it was probably in 2000, we put together a new budget for a budget proposal rather, for an accelerated implementation. And we were hoping that the budget was approved, we could live in second half in 2001. Unfortunately, that budget request was knocked back. So the thing kept chugging along for another 12 months at a very slow rate and when the – it was knocked back for the time we wanted it, they said, “you could do it in 12 months time”.

The AARG then comments with guided caution;
“I guess the funds just weren’t available at the time.”

In support of management decision to implement SISC in the organisation, AARG states;

“And SISC is an evolving system, it’s not for staffing finished, there is lots of other things that are online. All the core functionalities are there, that the really critical important stuff is there and there’s some functionality that we haven’t implemented yet, that’s there also like ‘Online Enrolments’, which we are going to implement between now and 12 months time..”

The NAPC had some common views in relation to SISC’s capabilities, and varying perception of the system, this being;

“So in terms of actual SISC, all I heard about was this u-beaute program and that was coming, and had all bells and whistles and it could do everything, plus cook Sunday roast lunch or something. So I was quite happy to see that. The other system that I’ve learnt how to negotiate that and manage it and I did go to like the introduction to SISC – enquiry module, which was helpful. And I guess I use it mostly for the same reason. But in the beginning I found that it probably wasn’t as helpful to me as it was supposed to be. Part of that might be teething problems and part of it because some of the modules weren’t ready, built or whatever.”

The researcher asked NAPC whether the in-house customised information system that one of the Campuses originally possessed was more capable of performing other functionalities than that offered by SISC and whether the introduction of centralised SISC information systems varied the day-to-day business operations of front-line staff. Her response was;

“There were reports that we could run for instance and an example might be on fail grade students which we could just pull out of the previous system. Now we can’t do that anymore in this system. Can’t run the same sort of discoverer thing, because the results for a group in a particular semester are not updated. You can get individual results, but you can’t get a group profile. So I can’t go and say, “I want all the fails for 2004 in this particular unit, so I can predict how many continuing students I might have in that unit the following year. Because all of the fails mightn’t be in at the time that you upload, so in other words, we’ve got two different systems still operating for results processing, which is the thing that I’m fundamentally most interested
in, apart from like generic student base-database, and that does interfere with business, because you basically really going to hand calculate that now.”

The AARG accepts changing business processes to fit with information systems functionalities as a given and he comments that as part of the analysis phase, staff involved in the information system implementation project would need to consider;

“What are we got to do to change our practices to fit with that”

The AARG as line management in the organisation, is aware of other aspects that end-users may not be completely familiar with that may interfere with quality implementation of information systems in the organisation, one of which is meeting Government and legislative directives;

I think the system that is implemented is much more complex than those people comprehend. Commercial people who come from outside to the university would say, accounting in an invoicing system in a commercial enterprise, can’t sort of comprehend the extra layer of reporting that we have to do to the Commonwealth and it’s going to get worse after the new legislation.”

The AARG also stated;

“Added to that you probably heard that the Commonwealth Government brought in a whole raft of new legislation that changes about everything we do next year, which meant that the other implementations are going to go slow for a while until we can implement the changes that are going to have to be done to meet the new funding arrangements and new data elements arrangements and all that, which is going to occupy us almost completely for the second half of the year, SISC themselves are – the amount of rewriting they have to do to the system is enormous. So some modules offered virtually completely changed in order to comply with the new legislation. So it’s the sort of thing that we needed, like a hole in the head frankly, but it’s there, it’s the Law, we got to do, so you can’t say, “no I don’t think we’ll do this, thank you very much””, you almost ceased to exist as an organisation if you did that.”

The researcher then asked AARG to share his feelings:

“About all of this in a systems context in implementing a system in an organisation like a university that is accountable to Government legislation, accountable to students and accountable to huge range of stakeholders?”
The AARG’s response seemed to be common amongst management in the organisation, yet the less preferred response amongst end-users of the system and Senior Management of the organisation, that is being;

“I think my own view is, we hadn’t been able to allocate enough resources to it. It’s been done in large part, by lot of people doing this on top of their normal day-to-day work. Particularly in the functional areas, because everything we do to implement SISC has to have a lot of input from the people saying, Admissions or Exams or Enrolments or whatever; they will have to take large chunks of their time out to review what’s in the system, see whether it’s going to work for us, if it isn’t what we’ve got to do to change our practices to fit with that, how do we set the system up.”

When ESLD was questioned in relation to stakeholder involvement in the information systems implementation project, she as an Academic staff agreed with AARG about stakeholders involvement and was more in favour of involving administrative staff as opposed to academics, and stated;

“I think it in our level here; we have an exceptionally fantastic wonderful manager of the School. In our school we have a really brilliant Manager of the School, if she gets an email from in this instance been PMMN, - “she’s right, she’s dealing with it, and she come back to us”. In the greater scheme of things, probably for me there is not level of priority, I’ve got ‘bigger things’. Yes it’s viably important, but it’s one of 300 things I’ve got to do where as one of the major things my admin manager is trying to fine tune because it’s needs to happen so the enrolments are accurate etc., we don’t get students, we don’t need units, and other people can go and do it …”

NAPC’s perceptions of stakeholder involvement was different to both AARG’s and ESLD’s, NAPC stated;

“Yes, I think it is important, because at the end of the day, we had to service that, we feed the beast, and we also take information out from the beast, so I think that it is fairly important that people a. know how to use it; b. I think everyone should know how to get into it, look up particular information, but I don’t necessarily think everyone should write to it, I think I would like to see a real trial with that one. Because too many people can hack in and corrupt it and do wonderful things like that at UOT where for a very small fee you could get a distinction.”
Both the AARG and ESLD did not perceive academic involvement in the implementation process to be necessary. Such involvement would require travel time between campuses as well as participation time, and academics couldn’t afford to set aside the hours required for this particular purpose especially when the general staff of the organisation are perceived to be well suited to represent the University for the job. However, NAPC perceived academic involvement in the process as a worthwhile investment in the short term. She believed it would save time in the long term as academics become familiar with the system, and more importantly as academics participate in the design of the system through establishing the requirements and functionalities they perceive to be important for them, to perform their daily business operations and processes.

AARG was asked in relation to Senior Management’s perceptions of the need to consider the possibility of customising the information system to suit end-user business operations as opposed to end-users customising their daily business processes to fit within systems functionalities. His response stemmed from management emphasis on budget and schedule as opposed to quality implementation of information systems in the organisation;

“There is a couple of aspects to that question. We don’t own the core code for the system; we can’t make changes to it. If we want to change the system to fit our needs better, we had to pay SISC software services to do it. It’s extremely expensive, and needs to be very well justified in order to spend that sort of money. There was one issue of that about 18 months or so a go we really did think the customisation was warranted, but it was a 1/4 of a million dollar bill, and so I think we changed our minds at that stage, it wasn’t that warranted, the issue wasn’t as big enough to warrant to spending a 1/4 million dollars on it.”

At terminating the recordings, AARG commented;

“My bureaucratic responses do not help your research, however, I am indoctrinated with bureaucracy that it is a habit.”

At examining the above quote, author refers to what is mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis. Bakhtin (1929, 1973) comments on the influence of social constructionism on social interactions and states that the immediate social environment and broader social milieu wholly determines – and determines from within, so speak – the structure of an utterance (p.86). Utterance as such is wholly a product of social
interaction, both of the immediate sort as determined by the circumstances of the
discourse, and of the more general kind, as determined by the whole aggregate of
conditions under which any community of speakers operates (p. 92).
Are individuals’ established communicative acts and behaviour the result of working
in this context for a considerably long period of time, or does the culture of the
organisation exist as thus due to the nature of established perceptions and
cultural/social construct of individuals working within the organisation?
While the researcher set out to investigate the impact of utterances and social
interactions on social construction, and visa versa; the author faced what could be
considered as a common occurrence, that being, shared acts of communicative
practices and behaviours amongst the individual staff in the collective organisation’s
body. One may call it conformity, or even the construction of harmonious and ordered
work environment. The irony was that in the creation of order, governed by an
authoritative approach and bureaucratic practices in the organisation there lay
resentment, dissatisfaction and indeed disharmony. Nevertheless, there appeared to be
some common ground shared by the staff, which compelled them to silence, or maybe
even sacrifice their individuality and uniqueness to preserve the status quo of the
organisation as a whole, despite whether or not the nature of the status quo is
preferred by the individuals.
To empower individual co-researchers to closely examine reasons behind the desire to
preserve the collective context, reflections and discourse analysis phase of the
methodology followed.

Reflections and Discourse Analysis

In establishing the context enveloping the situated inquiry through the eyes of selected
participants and co-researchers, the second phase of the model required reflections on
both individual and collective levels. Individual reflections are not shared; however,
the researchers collaboratively reflected and evaluated the established social and
cultural construction through the use of empathetic listening skills to be able to make
informed and educated decisions for purposeful actions.

Reflections with Co-Researchers

- PMMN
When later the researcher reflected with PMMN about the influence of the organisational culture on her involvement in the SISCR module implementation project, PMMN stated;

“*And the decision was made at that time when I joined the Project that no SISCR from the old system would be migrated across to the new system*”

PMMN continues to add;

“*Well, it was decided that the integrity of the SISCR data on the legacy system was such that it was not good enough to bring across. So we went live with our new Student System with no SISCR in place, on the understanding that once the system was settled in, then we would start working on implementing SISCR.*”

Checkland and Holwell (1998) emphasise the need for stakeholders involvement. Further research documented in case studies and scholarly work in the information systems field, support the view of involving stakeholders in decision making processes in order to guarantee quality of the system and minimise resentment of the system amongst stakeholders, in particular, end users of the system.

PMMN also stated;

“I was instructed that these were going to be the courses that were offered by two colleges; now, why two colleges rather than four, I don’t know, but only two colleges were asked to nominate courses which they wish to have SISCR implemented in I suspect these colleges were chosen because they had courses that needed SISCR to help minimise administrative loads.”

PMMN reflects from her experiences on the decisions made and offers reasons as to why she believes a different approach should’ve been taken if she was involved in the decision making processes related to the module implementation project;

“I think it would’ve been better to have more than one person learning how to implement SISCR and having a team right away to do the job, because as it’s turned out the University now has one person with the knowledge on how to implement SISCR and there’s nobody else. So subsequent implementations are limited to what I can manage by myself at this point in time.”

PMMN further comments on the continuous restructuring processes that take place within the organisation and how such changes impact on stakeholders expectations, specifically students (or end users) of the system;
“Who needs to know the SISCR are coming on, obviously students and the Student Centres, we had to look at making sure that there was information available on the web. The students have to actually check what these unit enrolment restrictions were, what course restrictions were. We had to look at developing new business processes because there was always going to be a need to wave SISCR. There will always be students in particularly for HEIWS who has 3 different cultures merging together and students moving from old courses to new courses, they are not always going to be an exact fit so, there will be circumstances where SISCR do need to be waved, so we didn’t have a process to do that. We had to talk about changing the culture at HEIWS that the people actually had to meet deadlines so, the processing deadlines for special requirements was really important. Processing deadlines for advance standing are really important because if they are not done by the appropriate time, students will getting validated inappropriately.”

In the above comments, it could be interpreted that the authoritative and hierarchical culture enforces demands on individuals that then need to be explained. Decisions are made by Senior Management based on their perceptions and expectations, and the rest is expected to just “slot or fit in”. There are no questions asked, or a dialogue taking place or reasons given, just authority instructing and the individuals are expected to accept, deal with the demands, and move on. There was no room for choice, as PMMN states that after receiving the instructions they “had” to then explain them to the rest of the population concerned.

Such approach could build resentment overtime; however, it was evident that in this case the scapegoat to such resentment was the information system itself as opposed to the organisation’s social and cultural construction. This was manifested in some stakeholder’s criticism of the system, its quality and abilities. The main issues associated with the organisational culture were not addressed nor discussed through open dialogue. Instead, in the author’s interpretation it was easier for those concerned to select a “victim” (in this case, the information system), and point the finger outwardly at the information system and those individuals who are perceived to be directly responsible for the implementation project of this system.

PMMN further reflects on the steps that were followed and shares her thoughts in relation to the project and her responsibilities;
“It didn’t end up my only brief. It grew in to development of new business processes, it grew in to training so, part what I had to do was develop guidelines and deliver training sessions according to the SISCR. We had to seek legal advise, or I subsequently found out I needed some legal advise about what could be waved in terms of SISCR and developed information association with that. So, there were a lot of things that came on board with this role that weren’t ever articulated and I think that’s probably quite typical of any newly established position. Actually this is not an established position, it’s only meant to be a project position, for the life of the project, and that actually ceases at the end of February next year. So I don’t think that there was enough background work done on what would be required to do this and how big the job was going to be. I did an analysis fairly early on that if without any help, and at the pace I was going within the pilot, that would take me 5 years to implement the SISCR of current HEIWS courses and that was on the proviso that HEIWS made absolutely no changes to it’s the way delivers it’s courses between now and at that time.”

During the reflective session, the researcher could not help but wonder about the irony of the situation; how could a bureaucratic organisation, which on the surface appears to be quite ordered and structured, also appear to be fundamentally chaotic. Checkland and Holwell (1998) state that in order for organisations to guarantee quality implementation of information systems, red tape and bureaucracy need to be eliminated from the process.

The PMMN believes that all stakeholders of the information systems module implementation project including academics need to be involved. This perception as discussed in the above section (co-operate inquiry) is not shared amongst all stakeholders of the information systems module implementation project due to time restrictions and academic job demands. The PMMN stated;

“I think there is a real need for academic coordinators, or program heads, who take on these administrative roles, sometimes they don’t really have a clue what they are doing, they don’t understand HEIWS policies, or business processes and often avertedly create problems because they give poor advise to students. They tell them this is possible when in fact it isn’t possible, they have to go through different processes, so to me, there is an ongoing need for
training sessions to be run continually for program coordinators or program heads.”

The PMMN highlighted that it is her view that stakeholders involvement in the project is relevant in terms of success of the module implementation project. She states;

“Lack of communication to stakeholders is probably really relevant in terms of successes implementing the SISCR properly is making sure that everybody knows that the general student population that the pilot students, that the academic staff, or just the general HEIWS community know that we are now slowly implementing SISCR. And we tried to every type of communication possible.”

The PMMN also noted that she has been asked twice to provide feedback to Senior Management on project’s progress, and she so obliged. She comments;

“whilst I’ve been asked twice to provide feedback to SISC Steering Committee about where I’m up to, I have written a report at the beginning of this year about what I felt, made recommendations about what things needed to be changed, what I thought could be improved upon.”

The PMMN noted that communication in the organisation is often one sided and not ‘real time’ interactive process. Communication between stakeholders was either “top-down” or “bottom-up”, as the one message is passed through many transmitters and receivers before it reaches its intended destination. Hence, the meaning of the message was often distorted and incomplete. She states;

“SISC Steering Committee has never asked me for anything other than a brief one pager of about where it’s at, what’s my progress? I’ve certainly had to keep a diary of events, so that when a questions asked what possibly why is it so slow; an example is the Science, Technology and Environment I had to chase them for 2 months to get them to tell me which course they wanted piloted, not piloted for them for implemented for 2005. So probably had I not chased them, I still be waiting for a response from them. So those types of things I need to document, so that I don’t ever get... I’m able to answer if someone says why is it taking so long?”

PMMN felt the need to document her steps during the project in the event she is questioned and/or criticised by ‘someone’.

In addition, the PMMN comments;
“But I do feel fairly isolated as I am, I don’t sit on any of the committees that are associated with SISCR implementation – there are none. So my voice is diluted through AARS. I give him bits of paper, now what happens to it, it might get presented at SISC Steering Committee, but I don’t know, unless I actually go and specifically ask AARS what happen with it, I don’t ever get any specific feedback, I don’t get any copies of minutes, I don’t get any.. I’ve never had any feedback from that steering committee. Not even in terms of saying what did they think of the pilot, which are the sorts of things I probably hadn’t really thought about until I was speaking to you, and I thought, ‘yes, it’s true I’ve never had any feedback from them; good or bad about how the project is going. So it’s sort of a one way communication, that’s how I feel it is at the moment.”

The below utterance by PMMN highlights the influence of cultural and social construction on some of the declarations and expressions made by individuals. The PMMN states;

“Lack of communication to stakeholders.”

Communication practices and behaviour emphasise the necessity to communicate collaboratively “with” individuals, as opposed to communicate “to” individuals. However, the PMMN in the below quote states;

“I probably hadn’t really thought about it until I was speaking to you.”

Consequently, the reality of the situated inquiry is that individuals are more accustomed to being communicated “to” rather than “with”. Nevertheless, it was becoming apparent that due to our reflective and collaborative session, many realisations were unveiled by both researcher and co-researcher alike. This in turn, as previously discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, could be largely attributed to the suggestion that people in organisations develop divergent awareness bases or viewpoints because they belong to parallel segregated functional contexts (Dougherty, 1992), which are infrequently connected through anything more than intermittent ad-hoc interactions. The connection of these segregated contexts provides an opportunity for exchange of expertise that is unique to each mode of practice. Likewise, (Granovetter, 1973) emphasises the importance of casual associates or frailties as sources of unique information.
Planning and Decision Making through Discourse Analysis

- PMMN and AARS

This step took place with the two co-researchers in the situated inquiry, the AARS, the “boss” and PMMN, the “subordinate”. The dynamics were notably different in this meeting, as PMMN willingly left the floor for AARS to speak, while she remained silent adding only but a few comments, unless prompted by researcher to analyse. In addition, it was also observed that communicative behaviours of the individual (PMMN) changed in the comfort of being present in the collective team of co-researchers (PMMN and AARS), to reflect the security, and in a way the strength, found in being present amongst “likeminded” collective body, consequently conforming and belonging to the collective, despite the fact that it may require the sacrifice of the “self”, as opposed to choosing the openness of the “self” and acknowledging the opportunities that possessing individual views grants, even if the implied risks involve feeling isolated. Subsequently, it appears that individuals while different when they are alone than when they are part of the “pack”, or the “tribe”, they may feel more complete when they are supported by the presence of another, or others. This is not to suggest that AARS intentionally suppresses the views of his subordinates; in fact, the AARS’s leadership skills were noted to be quite the opposite.

The AARS’s behaviour was noted to be of a cautious nature of the ‘rites and rituals’ of the status quo in the situated inquiry. Many justifications or explanations were made/given on behalf of the organisation as far as the processes followed during the analysis; decision making and implementation phases of SISC systems development life cycle (SDLC) in the organisation were concerned. AARS stated;

“Partly to do with the member structure. It was very difficult to get good decisions from 3 member organisation…”

The PMMN follows suit;

“I suppose each of them have risks, again like what we were using was in-house developed system, then you become relying on the people actually built those systems. Unless you are very, very good at implementing succession plans, in terms of making sure they are more than just one or two people that know how to fix it if it gets broken. You do leave yourself fairly vulnerable where as in moving in consortium you actually get to share the expenses, you
do get a good say in what the ultimate product would be because you in at the
ground floor, you are saying, “must have this, this and these elements” and
you are not alone, so that it’s less risk, you are sharing cost and you are
spreading the risk and if there is a group if you are using it then it has to keep
going. So he’s sitting in a limb in your own little product, and if something
goes wrong, you need two best programmers decide you hate you, you had a
falling out and they are going to go and take all their knowledge with them,
then it leaves you in a very vulnerable position I suppose, but...”

As the meeting progressed it appeared that the main driver behind the decision
making processes, in relation to the direction of the information systems
implementation project in the organisation, that was followed by Senior Management
was costs. The consensus was that if the University had “the dollars”, they would’ve
basically opted to the same conclusions other Universities, which are considered to be
more wealthy Universities, selected. That is being, going solo in their choice of in-
house or customised off-the-shelf information systems that would better suit their
business processes and end-users needs. This was evident in the following statements;

AARS: “Some choose that decided that the working together with other
universities was not effective from their point of view. They wanted a decision
soon enough and so they decided to go their own way.”

PMMN: “They might also have the dollars too, to spend to actually tailor
made especially for them.”

As such, the boundaries of information systems implementation project could also
influence communication practices and processes in the organisation within the
context of this situated inquiry. This is purely speculative; however, the researcher
could not help but think of the possibilities associated with improving communication
practices and processes had the organisation been as wealthy as others in the industry.
This seemed to be the message that the author of this thesis was receiving from co-
researchers in the meeting. Hence, the question remains as to whether or not
stakeholders would’ve been efficiently and effectively communicated with during the
analysis, decision making, and implementation phases of the systems development
life cycle had the organisation possessed a larger budget and was allowed more time
to undertake the project from a quality perspective.
AARS had a different perception in relation to the questions raised by the researcher in connection with adopting a quality perspective to implementing information systems in the organisation, as he stated:

“Because from the executive down, there was a view that you should now change your business processes to suite a particular system. There’s actually been a quite a change now, executive say the opposite now. They say, “no we shouldn’t trying to maintain a business process impractical, unworkable if the system won’t support it, so the good example was the ‘progression SISCR’. We had Progression SISCR back in 2001 that was quite horrible. It was a bad system – with any system, let alone with SISC. And to implement it for in SISC, we got a quote from SISC software services who develop product, what enhancement would cost, it was quarter of a million dollars to change SISC to match our problematic Progression SISCR. So the University took a very sound decision I believe in saying, “hang on there must be a better way of doing things”. They re-examined the process, they recognised it had flaws anyway, and they came up with a completely different progression rule or set of SISCR, that were both simple and easy for students to understand and fare and at the same time could be implemented in an automatic way in SISC. And so it was a wise decision to change the business process to actually do something the system could support.”

Hence, it was discussed through the dialogue, which took place in the meeting that in this situated inquiry there were some reasons behind changing business processes to be supported by the information system as opposed to the traditional quality perspective that information systems need to be built in support of business processes, irrespective of the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing daily operations of the organisation. Whether or not this is a valid view, it is not the aim of this thesis to determine, as the author is aware that amongst the diverse utterances and perceptions of all stakeholders the researcher approached and met with, who are enveloped within the same organisation, there were various opinions on the topic. Nevertheless, despite the fact that there are various views and opinions on the topic, a dialogue was not initiated amongst all stakeholders to converse about this particular issue. The PMMN comments on this issue and states:

“I think earlier on you were saying, like the actual implementation took place at probably ‘the worst possible moment’ trying do something like that where
you had 3 very disparate cultures coming together, the shot gun marriage, people there were winners and losers in the amalgamation, some people did very well at it, some people didn’t do very well at it, but some people were placed in to positions they probably weren’t skilled but were there because of their level. Everybody not willing… they were just barely coping with the change of the amalgamation. And then all of a sudden the system that they were all familiar with is gone; you got this brand new system on board. So it was just at a really bad time, but it had to be done. We couldn’t wait for it any longer, but it’s quite interesting how well the organisation survived.”

It is in this opinion that many elements discussed above were concisely revisited by researcher and co-researchers. The influence of an authoritatively constructed culture, over choice; in this situation it is the influence of Economy, Government, and Mechanistic view of organisations, over choices of individuals in the organisation. This statement also addresses the issue of human elements’ instinctive desire for survival; as it was stated that despite the structural changes that “needed/had” to occur, many individuals coped well enough to survive the storm despite their individual likes and dislikes of the situation. The common ground was that many opposed the change; however, the difference lay in individual abilities, willingness and choices to be part of the collective body as many drew on their adaptability skills. It was during this time of organisation’s restructure that the information system was introduced, and some people used the information system as the “scapegoat” of the issues that individuals were encountering, being part of this organisation. Hence; it was unclear as to whether or not the information system in itself was at all an issue for stakeholders, or was the information system an outlet that people used to avoid confronting issues related to the social and cultural construction of the organisation.

As the researcher sought clarification on the concept of, “it had to be done” that was uttered by the PMMN in her above statement, the AARS comments:

“I think it was a political decision. We had this, what I call the ‘False Start’ back in 98. There was an expectation that SISC was coming, throughout 98, 99, so there’s been an expectation built-up in the university community, especially amongst the academic staff that the SISC was coming, not only it was coming it was going to solve a lot of problems.”

Immediately following the PMMN states:
“And for quite some time the legacy system any enhancements to that weren’t happening, because the SISC is coming, so we are not investing anymore dollars in to the old system so that SISC will do that when it comes, SISC will still do that when it comes, but it was just there in maintenance mode really, wasn’t it?”

The AARS agrees;

“Quite right, and so when we realised we couldn’t because of lack of progress because lack of dollars invest in the product in the project to implement the project, it was felt by the executives we must implement as soon as possible. There was credibility issues and they couldn’t then say we made mistake, we shouldn’t have tried to implement by shoe string budget back when we did, they want it implement quickly, and they actually thought that somehow, that the new HEIWS would actually be better served by having a new system in place quickly. So although maybe with further consideration it may’ve been wise to put the implementation on hold for couple of years until the new HEIWS had settled down, then instead they said, “lets go full speed ahead and implement the new system and get it in by it was actually mid 2002 was the original plan, we actually postponed it just to minimise the risks when we came to mid 2002. As I said before we had a very good risk managing process and when it was seen, that some of the things weren’t ready in time. Again a good decision of the executive was to postpone implementation to October until some extra training put in place until some fee configuration work been done, and more testing being done to make sure when we went live it would be successful. And so again that was a good decision. They provided us some extra funds so that could happen, so that was the way it went in eventually in 2002. So main lesson learned there was that it’s not good time to implement a new system when you are implementing new organisation structure, you did one or the other.”

The above quoted discussion demonstrates the beginning of the progressive learning journey amongst co-researchers; this is articulated and unequivocally stated in the utterance made by AARS:

“ So main lesson learned there was that it’s not good time to implement a new system when you are implementing new organisation structure, you did one or the other.”
The statement that then followed from PMMN, contained quite different expressions than those which were previously used, this is demonstrated in the following word choices made by PMMN:

“It’s also course document tracking feature its in SISC, which we are choosing at the moment not to use it.”

It is granted that PMMN remains to speak in the collective sense as she states “we”; however, it is noted that there are now conscious efforts being made by the individual co-researchers to differentiate between the ability to choose and the feeling of being obliged to follow a certain line of operation.

A discussion then followed, which was centred around building communication bridges and focusing on implementing a lateral communication approach into the organisation to successfully manage Senior Management’s expectations and reduce pressure and stress on front line staff.

AARS: “That’s right unless these people communicate to their own people, then yes, there is no formal communication mechanism in place.”
Researcher: “What’s wrong with this picture? I’m just trying to understand. So it’s basically formed for accountability purposes. The process that are in there are accountability ...
AARS: “Yes, we’ll dig that out for you the terms of the reference. It was set up by EMRC and I noticed the heading of the previous minutes of this meeting, the heading on the document was that “Quality of Service” and so it’s been set up – I didn’t realised it at the time, but I just noticed on the minutes as part of the Quality of Service project that they see this as providing some improved quality control mechanism.”

PMMN: “What happens when sitting out there in isolation with no tentacles going out, it’s interesting!”

The PMMN now states how she feels about the isolated position she is placed into, and the AARS responds.

AARS: “Doesn’t report to anybody and there is no formal communication mechanism from this committee to any of the constituents may be represented by these people. So there is no requirement on the... for example, ARGs at Graduate School to communicate with anybody in Graduate School about the decisions that requirement from LSRB to communicate with the library staff.”

The AARS and the PMMN then continue with the dialogue.
As the dialogue evolved, the PMMN and the AARS both decided that the most efficient and effective plan of action was for the PMMN to attend the next SISC Steering Committee meeting. This purposeful action was designed to address PMMN’s concerns in relation to meeting Senior Management’s expectations. The AARS and the PMMN saw this decision as suitable because it would enable the PMMN to communicate her position and concerns directly with members of the committee as well as the PMMN would be able to get immediate feedback from Senior Management.

At initiating an open dialogue amongst co-researchers, they in turn were able to shape new experiences through their expressions. As discussed above in Chapter Two of this thesis, Bakhtin (1929, 1973) states:

“It is not experience that organises expression, but the other way around – expression organises experience. Expression is what first gives experience form and specificity of direction” (p. 85)

**Purposeful Action**

Following the above discussion between the PMMN and the AARS as their individual opinions are exchanged through continuous dialogue; a plan was devised and certain decisions were reached. The main plan of action is stated below in this thesis, however, other decisions made by the researcher and co-researchers are not included in this thesis due to the research project’s scope limitations. The PMMN was to attend the next SISC Steering Committee meeting to directly communicate with members of the committee and present her point of views, and the researcher was to attend the meeting for observation and note taking purposes only. The actions decided upon are discussed below, along with the outcomes resulting from acting on the plans and decisions made during the previous processes and phases.

**Observations of Steering Committee Meetings**

During the first cycle of the Progressive Learning Process Model, the researcher had the opportunity to observe and note down events and discussions, yet not to participate nor record, in one SISC Steering Committee Meeting. This allowance was decided on by Deputy Vice-President (DVC Academic) and Chairman of the committee just minutes prior to the meeting resuming. There was certain level of hesitation on behalf of DVC (Academic) in relation to allowing the researcher to
observation the meeting, understandably so, as there was no clear communication and collaborative approach to the decision making process that permitted the researcher to be present at the Tactical and Strategic Management level steering committee meetings. The Chairman of the committee commented during the meeting that the committee was established as SISC is a “risky” project, and the need surfaced for a committee to form in order to monitor and appropriately manage the information systems improvements.

The meeting’s ‘rites and rituals’ as performed by members of the committee were founded on a reporting approach for most of the time, in spite of the Chairman’s efforts to involve members in a dialogue. It became apparent as the meeting progressed that the communication barriers that existed in the meeting were mainly based on member’s perceptions and assumptions that they made on Senior Management’s expectations of how they are to be communicated with, without attempting to seek clarification from Management in regards to this issue.

In addition, it appeared that there is a lack of skills amongst individuals in the area of defining and setting boundaries. In the previous section, it is noted that the AARS was uncertain as to the purpose of the committee and he stated that he would need to refer back to the terms of reference in order to refresh his memory as to why they hold such meetings on regular intervals. The AARS then commented that as far as his recollection, the meetings were held to guarantee quality of service; however, the Chairman clearly stated that the meetings are designed to monitor and effectively manage the implementation of the information system and its modules. There appeared to be some uncertainty on the vision, objectives and scope of the meetings, as the purpose of holding the meetings appeared to be varied. The conflict in perceptions was noted to be between members and Senior Management perceptions of the reasons behind holding the meetings. Also, there appeared to be lack of communication in regards to: (a) the definition of quality, and (b) Senior Management perceptions on monitoring and managing information systems module implementation projects.

One can presume that monitoring and managing information systems module implementation projects would involve reporting to Senior Management, as opposed to collaboratively working together to produce quality information systems. It is based on this assumption that the ‘rites and rituals’ of the meetings were founded; that is largely being bottom-up reporting, and top-down instructions delivery.
Tactical level management was to report up to DVC (Academic) on the SISC information systems module implementation projects (all module implementation projects), and DVC (Academic) to provide them with instructions and expectations of Senior Management. The main emphasis of the reporting was put on the Assistant Academic Registrar (Systems Department), AARS, as his team was perceived to be the sole department dealing with the management of the implementation of information systems modules projects. Although other department representatives were also members of the Steering Committee, most of the expectations of Senior Management were focused on the Systems Department’s performance and output.

Females in the meeting felt free to speak and communicate, however, there was tension noted between SAOS (College Administrative Officer) and ITKD (ITD manager) as discussions took place in relation to resourcing issues suffered by the ITD department, which ITKD perceived to be a main issue that interfered with the ITD Department’s involvement in systems implementation projects progress, and SAOS did not agree with ITKD’s point of view.

During the meeting it was also discussed that newly announced government requirements would cause Australian Universities to struggle to meet legislative expectations as SISC and various student information systems used by other Universities were not originally designed to meet this recent government directive, this therefore implies that SISC information system design was not generic, scalable, adaptable nor able to be integrated into diverse and changing contexts.

ITKD again posed the request for extra resources to the Chairman of the committee, to which he responded that this request was not going to be granted due to budget cuts.

The AARS then proceeded to ask for feedback on his proposal as put forward to the committee, to build communication bridges between all stakeholders in the organisation by initiating sub-committees to improve quality of service for all those concerned. Members of the Steering Committee and Chairman did not offer support for the idea, and the Chairman stated:

“If there is no feedback from members in the committee then do it! Let’s not muck around and do it AARS, just do it and tell us if it works.”

AARS then responded:

“Shall do.”
The Chairman then directed the attention to the AARS to report on the progress of the SISCR module implementation project. The AARS stated that the paper he sent prior to the meeting in that regard is self-explanatory; however, PMMN attended the meeting to answer any questions. The Chairman then stated;

“PMMN, do you have anything to add?”

The PMMN resumed by explaining that because she is a one person team it makes it virtually impossible for her to meet all the demands in the project’s set timeframe. The PMMN also continued to express her concerns in relation to the unrealistic expectations, without consideration to the circumstances surrounding the situation.

The Chairman was encouraging towards PMMN and supported her in her suggestion to communicate with UODV, as he stated;

“they have good knowledge”.

It became apparent that members of the committee were interested to hear and assist the PMMN through her expressed predicaments. Members were actively listening and participating in the discussion by empathising with PMMN’s situation and at some times offering ideas to help the SISCR module implementation project to progress within the boundaries of budget and schedule.

SAOS stated that taking the circumstances expressed by the PMMN into account, then maybe the committee should consider leniency with the timeframe expected for project completion, especially that the PMMN is a one person team. SAOS also added that there needs to be additional staff in PMMN’s team, to assist with the project. The Chairman asked the AARS if there is budget for this step, and the AARS stated that there is. Chairman then stated;

“If there is budget, then we’ll do it.”

The Chairman also supported the view of additional staff to be recruited in the PMMN’s team, he stated;

“There needs to be a business plan in place to recruit staff. While PMMN’s efforts are impressive, there needs to be a team to re-affirm the important role of the SISCR module and SISCSC implementation projects as they run in parallel.”

Generally the revelations made by the PMMN were well received by members of the Committee. The Researcher, not having attended previous steering committee meetings, silently wondered as to what was reported by the AARS in previous steering committee meetings with respect to the progress of the SISCR module
implementation project if the committee was genuinely astonished at hearing the PMMN’s direct report. The Chairman appeared to be pleased with the outcomes of the discussions that took place as he used humour while summarising the meeting.

As discussed in the above chapters, facilitating effective dialogue amongst members of cross-functional backgrounds in the one project team within the same organisation, should aim to incorporate a desire to evolve common understandings, which encompasses and is partly directed by the objective of boundary-spanning (Isaacs, 1993). Boundary-spanning emphasises the consideration that members with diverse experiences have distinctive viewpoints (Fong, 2003). In order to establish effective working relationships within organisations, the boarders between different disciplines and stakeholder areas must be crossed, for example, personal conversations or by making a commitment to eliminate narrow-mindedness by intentionally valuing the expertise of others (Fong, 2003).

Following the meeting, the researcher spoke briefly with the PMMN in relation to her views about the events that took place in the meeting. The PMMN expressed satisfaction and a sigh of relief as she stated:

“At least they know the situation now, and they have the full picture.”

As for the support she received from the Committee, the PMMN stated:

“All what we can do now is sit tight and watch if circumstances would improve and if commitments made would be delivered or actioned. In the meantime, I am going to continue with my work feeling less pressured and misunderstood”

The above phases of the Progressive learning Process model, highlight the need for the organisation to undergo a culture shift from a Mechanistic view to an Open System organisation that empowers individuals to engage in controversial discourse, to further assist the organisation to better deal with change, meet external demands and internal expectations of all stakeholders concerned in the information systems module implementation project, through improving communicative behaviours and practices of the collective body and individuals alike.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, the researcher tested the validity of the model within the chosen situated inquiry, while maintaining reservations in relation to the model being perceived as offering an answer or a solution to research into communicative
behaviour and practices within the information systems field of application. The model’s aim is to offer an interpretive framework for researchers in the workplace. In the first phase, co-operate inquiry, a description of organisational culture and social contexts, was established through document analysis of e-mail correspondences and exchanges, and communication of a cross section of staff of the organisation. Through the opinions and perceptions of staff, it was established that the organisation’s culture is in line with the Mechanistic view. The organisation’s culture was described by many staff as rational-legal, process culture (minimal feedback, highly bureaucratic). The existing culture was noted to have dehumanising effects on staff and in turn appeared to influence communication behaviours and practices within the organisations, which had a direct impact on the quality of the information systems module implementation project. It was also discussed that in order for the organisation to better adapt to change, and more specifically change related to the introduction and implementation of information systems and technologies in the organisation, it is better for the organisation to consider a shift from the conventional view to an open systems view.

Through the second phase of the inquiry, reflections and discourse analysis, it was established that organisational culture interfered with effective communication processes in numerous areas. However, the focus for the purposes of the research project was limited to the case of the project manager of the information systems module implementation project meeting Senior Management’s expectations. This was perceived as an issue, as the project manager felt isolated in the workplace, and the organisation’s top-down bureaucracy and low feedback culture delayed the progress of the project.

Through initiating a dialogue between the researcher and co-researchers using a collaborative approach, co-researchers reached a decision for a purposeful action to deal with the pressing and main issue of concern for the project manager. It was decided by co-researchers that it is important for the project manager of the information systems module implementation project to directly communicate with Senior Management of the organisation to provide and obtain immediate feedback in relation to the project.

The project manager of the information systems module implementation project attended the steering committee meeting, and she was able to directly communicate
with tactical and strategic management in relation to the project. In addition, she was able to receive feedback and support from management on all levels. This resulted in jump-starting the progressive learning process amongst individuals in the organisation. However, there remains a need for the organisation to consider a shift from the conventional view to an open systems view in order for the organisation to be better equipped to deal with change associated with the introduction and implementation of information systems and technologies in the organisation.
Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications
Summary

The research presented in this thesis is concerned with examining communication practices and behaviours within the information systems field of application. In particular, the research project was conducted in a public sector higher education institution in the Western Suburbs of Sydney, to examine the issues in connection with the conditions of direct communication lines between Strategic Management and front line staff during the course of information systems module implementation project.

Due to the nature of the research, and knowing that the research is concerned with the study of people’s behaviours and practices in the workplace and more narrowly on an information systems module implementation project, the researcher had certain reservations as they approached the research work. There are many complexities involved in studying people’s behaviours and practices when implementing information systems in an organisation’s pre-established social and cultural constructs. Hence, the researcher needed to ground the theory in a social perspective and along the lines of socio-technical concepts. The researcher also needed to closely examine scholarly work that addressed the inter-relatedness of communication processes, organisational culture and information systems.

With the above reservations and limitations in mind, the researcher resorted to utilising Grounded Theory, and a model of Participatory Soft Systems Methodology in action research emerged to help answer research question within the situated inquiry. The model takes a learning approach, as organisations shift and change in response to external changes that continuously occur in the surrounding “Global Village”. Hence, the model provides an interpretative framework, and uses better communication practices and behaviours as co-researchers work together through reflection and dialogue to participate in discourse analysis with the aim of undertaking purposeful action for change within the situated inquiry.

Scholarly work that related to communication behaviours and practices within the workplace was examined to ground such theories in a social perspective. Firstly, the inter-relatedness of social interactions and social constructionism were defined and identified. Then, further examination of literature into the influence of external culture on communication behaviours and practices was conducted to establish the surrounding context of modern organisations, which may indirectly influence internal
organisational social constructionism to impact on and upon communication behaviours and practices of the amalgam of individuals within the organisations. Various types of organisational cultures were then discussed in detail through literature review to be able to use as support for the descriptive phase of the selected methodology applied in research work tested in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Communication processes models were scrutinised in the context of project management teams within organisations, to establish the basis for social interactions as utilised by individuals based on their cognitive abilities to interpret and understand meaning of messages within cross-functional groups. This section aimed at establishing the theory used to devise phases two and three of the emerged interpretive methodological framework discussed in Chapter Three.

To further understand the inter-dependant relationship between organisational culture and communication practices and behaviours in the workplace, scholarly work was reviewed to institute the complexities associated with combining established power systems in the workplace with employees’ well being and quality work conditions that in turn influence organisations productivity and effectiveness.

In addition, the complexities associated with communicative behaviours and practices on individual levels were ascertained through literature review to assist with understanding individuals’ responsibility in communication processes and foregrounding the theory for the need for internal dialogue amongst individuals, as discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Finally, scholarly work was inspected to establish the characterisation of organisational culture in the age of technology and information systems. This examination of literature further confirmed the need for conventional organisations to adopt an Open Systems view to be able to better deal with change, become more capable to focus on learning, and in turn to be more equipped to successfully deal with introducing and implementing information systems in the organisation as global demands increase on this front. This work is used in Chapters Three and Four of this thesis, to elucidate the methodological model used in research work, and test the data collected through conducting the situated inquiry, respectively.

Participatory Soft Systems Methodology is an interpretive methodological framework that emerged as a result of researching communication behaviours and practices within the workplace, in the context of implementing information systems module projects within the public sector higher education institution. The model focuses on
using effective communicative behaviours and practices within researcher, co-researcher and the selected participant’s group to jump start the progressive learning process within the organisation and in turn slowly shift organisation’s culture from a Mechanistic organisation to an Open Systems organisation to better deal with changes in the surrounding milieu, the introduction, and implementation of information systems within the organisation.

The model was constructed to deal with complexities involved in the interrelatedness of external culture, the organisation’s social constructionism, individuals’ communicative behaviour and practices within the situated inquiry as the amalgam individuals attempt to meet both external and internal demands, to become more effective and efficient through the use of technology and information systems, and hence, to be able to better compete with current and potential rivals as global and regional economy changes and shifts.

The model has three overlapping phases, those are: (a) co-operate inquiry – established social construct through the eyes of participants; (b) reflection and discourse analysis; and (c) purposeful action. Those three overlapping phases start the Progressive Learning Process within the organisation. The model is cyclic and generic in nature. Hence; the model is flexible to be customised to various situated inquiries, is subject to falsification and is aimed to aid in the continuos contribution of scholarly work and research into communication behaviours and practices within the workplace in the information systems field of application.

The selected setting or research work was conducted in a public sector higher education institution located in the Western Suburbs of Sydney. Two co-researchers were recruited to participate in the situated inquiry, three selected participants were interviewed through the process, and about twenty observees participated in the final phase of the model.

Various methods were used throughout the phases of the model, such as unstructured, semi-structured interviews, and recorded reflective sessions with co-researchers and selected participants. Interview questions were of open nature and allowed co-researchers and selected participants to share without constraints their opinions and views. Observations were also noted at meetings, interviews, and reflective sessions by the researcher.

Interviews, reflective sessions, and observations were then used to devise a change plan. This plan was discussed and collaboratively implemented to improve the
organisation’s performance in information systems module implementation projects, and to attempt to establish lessons learnt for the organisation. Established lessons learnt, as observed by the researcher at attending one SISC steering committee meeting, which lasted for one hour and forty five minutes (1.75 hours) at the termination of the third phase of the Progressive Learning Process Model, would be used as an input into the second cycle of the Progressive Learning Process Model, and so forth, as this learning journey is based on continuos slow evolutionary process ideals. Researcher attended one SISC steering committee meeting at the final phase of the model.

Only one cycle of the Progressive Learning Process model was implemented during the researcher’s work in the situated inquiry for the Masters (Honours) Commerce thesis, and the cycle duration with the organisation was for the period of three (3) months, from 4th April 2004 to 7th July 2004.

The researcher then tested the validity of the model within the chosen situated inquiry, while maintaining reservations in relation to the model being perceived as offering an answer or a solution to research into communicative behaviour and practices within the information systems field of application. The model’s aim is to offer an interpretive framework for researchers in the workplace.

In the first phase, co-operate inquiry, a description of organisational culture and social contexts, was established through document analysis of e-mail correspondences and exchanges, and communication of a cross section of staff of the organisation. Through the opinions and perceptions of staff, it was established that the organisation’s culture is in line with the Mechanistic view. The organisation’s culture was described by many staff as rational-legal, process culture (minimal feedback, highly bureaucratic). The existing culture was noted to have dehumanising effects on staff and in turn appeared to influence communication behaviours and practices within the organisation, which had a direct impact on the quality of the information systems module implementation project. It was also discussed that in order for the organisation to better adapt to change, and more specifically change related to the introduction and implementation of information systems and technologies in the organisation, it is better for the organisation to consider a shift from the conventional view to an open systems view.

Through the second phase of the inquiry, reflections and discourse analysis, it was established that organisational culture interfered with effective communication
processes in numerous areas. However, the focus for the purposes of the research project was limited to the case of the project manager of the information systems module implementation project meeting Senior Management’s expectations. This was perceived as an issue, as the project manager felt isolated in the workplace, and the organisation’s top-down bureaucracy and low feedback culture delayed the progress of the project.

Through initiating a dialogue between the researcher and co-researchers using a collaborative approach, co-researchers reached a decision for a purposeful action to deal with the pressing and main issue of concern for the project manager.

It was decided by co-researchers that it is important for the project manager of the information systems module implementation project to directly communicate with Senior Management of the organisation to provide and obtain immediate feedback in relation to the project. The project manager of the information systems module implementation project attended the steering committee meeting, and she was able to directly communicate with tactical and strategic management in relation to the project. In addition, she was able to receive feedback and support from management on all levels. This resulted in jump-starting the progressive learning process amongst individuals in the organisation. However, there remains a need for the organisation to consider a shift from the conventional view to an open systems view in order for the organisation to be better equipped to deal with change associated with the introduction and implementation of information systems and technologies in the organisation.

**Implications and Areas for Further Research**

Organisations continuously endeavour to evolve their organisational culture and information systems to cope with the surrounding dynamic global environment, hence, the need for determining appropriate methods and processes to achieve desirable outcomes and favourable results for organisations are becoming more evident. Accordingly, it is recommended that further research is to focus on targeting the core issues associated with the human interface or soft systems in organisations as they are challenged by global organisational and technological changes. This thesis dealt with a specific area related to the influence of organisational culture and social construct on communication practices and behaviour within an information systems module implementation project, as summarised above. The research did so
through implementing one cycle of participatory soft systems methodology in action research that terminated at the purposeful action phase of the model. It is therefore recommended that two more iterations of reflections and discourse analysis and purposeful action, followed by one iteration of co-operate inquiry are to be further conducted. This is suggested for the purpose of enabling the researcher to better ascertain or measure the impact of the progressive learning process on the social construction across the organisation and not only limited to the opinions of co-researchers.

During the research work discussed through this thesis, it was discovered that the organisation is faced with the challenge of managing change in a dynamic and evolving environment. As a result this thesis pays attention not only to the management of technological change, but also addresses issues of social interactions as impacted by and upon information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Therefore, it is recommended that further investigations that examine relationships between organisational social construct and culture, social interactions and communication processes through various mediums, and the human interface or soft systems, be conducted.

As mentioned above, it is suggested that PSSM is to be implemented to examine the controversial discourse that could be achieved through social interactions and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to encourage both individuals and the collective to find their voice (s) and engage in the decision making processes in information systems implementation projects; and change management and policy making processes in organisational culture.

In addition, it is also suggested that further research into the interrelatedness of organisational social construct, social interactions of the ‘human elements’, and the introduction and usage of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), is required for the purposes of accurately ascertaining the affects of the co-dependant relationships and qualities of these diverse fields of applications, on learning organisations.
References


