From the Change Without

to

The Change Within

A group dynamic approach to Action Research

by

Ken Williams
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
Declaration

I Lowell Kendall Williams, hereby certify that the material contained in this thesis, and the research from which it is derived has not been submitted for a Higher Degree, at any other institution. Further I certify that this thesis contains the work of others, only where that work has been referenced as such. The research from which this thesis is derived, was carried out by using the resources provided by a research team, however it remains the original work of the author.
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Abstract

This thesis details an Action Research project conducted into the theme of “improving the functioning of a Faculty of Agriculture”. The Faculty had been changing to an experiential paradigm of learning over a period of ten years when the research began.

The initial impetus for the research was a feeling of concern by many members of the Faculty about the impacts of this change. A research team of six members was organised. This group met regularly for approximately twelve months.

The research began with the assumption “that an Action Research team can intervene in the life of an organisation for the benefit of that organisation, to bring about situation improvement”. There was an initial expectation that issues of accountability, responsibility and management within the Faculty, would be the focus of the research team. However, during the course of the research, the personal professional practice of the researchers became the focus.

Analysis of the data highlighted a link between the technical, practical and emancipatory modes of Action Research, and the four stages of group development - dependency, conflict, cohesion and interdependency. The role of facilitation in the conduct of Action Research was highlighted, and the nature of the “client” role was subjected to scrutiny.

The wider ramifications of this research are discussed, particularly as they relate to the role of Action Research in improving large organisations, and as a tool to improve farming communities. In both cases, the concept of the “critical community” was emphasised as an ideal to be aimed for in Action Research teams. To achieve such a group, the belief systems of members need to be brought out, to enable a group to develop in its interactions to a stage where issues can be properly dealt with, rather than only the assumed symptoms of underlying issues. A process of critique and reflection in an immediate and ongoing way has been shown to assist in this process of group development towards a critical community.
Preface

Author's note:

The writer of this project has a visual handicap which precludes his reading normal material and, in respect of this work, extensive literature. The production of audio tapes by the Royal Blind Society has been the source of reference material. Information has also been gathered from workshops and attending seminars over the preceding decade and, especially in the two years in preparing this document. Therefore the extent of the reference material used in this thesis, whilst restricted in quantity, is considered to be a good sample of the relevant work occurring in the fields of Action Research, group dynamics and organisational change.

Original writing of this material has been possible only with the use of a visual aid machine, and it has then been typed onto a computer for editing and correction. The visual handicap allows the writer a 5% peripheral vision which precludes any focusing power, with all objects blurred. Because of the above, once the written word has been typed, it is impossible for the author to re-read the document. Reliance on external help to edit and re-write has been essential.

The writer respectfully asks those reading the work to consider the above in appraising the project.
1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Problem

This thesis is about a research project, undertaken in a Faculty of Agriculture in a tertiary institution. This Faculty had been in the process of significant change in its educational philosophy and practice for some ten years, at the time this research took place. The author had been close to the Faculty for 8 years.

It was apparent to the author, that the process of change which the Faculty had been undergoing, led to difficulties for administrators, support staff, educators and learners within the Faculty. These difficulties were explored by the author in a 1986 survey of Faculty staff (see Appendix 14). The outcomes of this survey, together with the author’s continuing association with the Faculty, and the expressed concerns of various Faculty members, led to the conception of this project.

The concerns expressed by Faculty members, were about what they perceived to be a rapid and radical change of educational direction for the Faculty. Some faculty members felt, for instance, that they were being asked to involve themselves in areas which were outside their professional competence. Overwhelmingly there appeared to be, what the author called, a “perception of powerlessness” on the part of Faculty membership.

In mid-1988, the author (by now a Masters candidate), began to think of possible areas for Action Research. Initially he started with a rather global vision of improving “Agricultural Education in NSW”. By degrees this global vision was reduced to manageable proportions: First it became “looking at agricultural education, professional development of staff and man management within the Faculty of Agriculture at Hawkesbury Agricultural College” later, after discussions with the two Faculty staff development officers, the Associate Dean (Academic) and the Dean¹ it was agreed that a research team be formed, with the broad charter of investigating the concerns expressed by Faculty members and proposing strategies for improvement.

¹ The Faculty had a management structure which consisted of the Dean and two Associate Deans, one responsible for academic matters, the other responsible for matters of resource allocation and management.
The research team members were selected in order to cover a wide cross section of the Faculty. There were five members in addition to the author. The first team meeting took place in early September 1988.

1.2 Assumptions

The Masters degree programme, has as an explicit assumption the examination of the use of Action Research as a tool for situation improvement. “The Hawkesbury model of action research follows that of Lewin (1946) and Warmington (1980). The focus is action taken in collaboration with a client to solve a problem or improve a situation.” (Hawkesbury Agricultural College Calendar, 1988, p59). The author therefore designed his research to make use of this model and the methodological assumptions which attended it.

There was also an underlying assumption that an Action Research team could intervene in the life of an organisation in order to bring about improvement. It was expected by the research team that their work would lead to an improvement in the situation in the Faculty.

1.3 Organisation of This Thesis

The thesis begins by discussing the background to the current research. This is followed by an overview of relevant theoretical material and a discussion of the methodological approach adopted and the consequent methods used. A major section follows containing an analysis of each meeting of the research team. Finally this material is analysed and discussed in greater detail. The appendices to the document, contain all relevant documents, including the minutes taken at each research team meeting and the author’s reflections upon each meeting. Additionally the audio tapes of each meeting and a video of one presentation to the Faculty are available subject to agreement by members of the research team.
2. BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT STUDY

This Action Research project came out of a survey conducted, in 1986, of all academic staff within the Faculty of Agriculture at the then Hawkesbury Agricultural College (now University of Western Sydney - Hawkesbury).²

The Faculty had made a dramatic shift in its educational philosophy, beginning in 1979, with the adoption of experiential learning and systems paradigms as the basis for student education. (Packham et al., 1989). One of the results of this change was to centre the educational process on students working together in groups on tasks that were issue-based, with staff resourcing in their subject area and acting as learning consultants to small groups of students.

Faculty staff were required to act as facilitators in the learning groups and many found the change from traditional teaching very difficult. Ten years along this road there were still a number of staff who found difficulty with the implementation of this philosophy and with the changed management it implied.

The author had undertaken intensive training in group leadership and group training skills, based on the Tavistock model (Kemmis 1988), and the process of developing groups within the Faculty was of great interest. The same model interested Lewin in his Action Research and group activities (Lewin 1946).

Between 1980 and 1983, the necessity for improving skills in group facilitation became apparent within the Faculty and training of both staff and students was undertaken. After the initial excitement, there was a period of settling, as the full implications of the new educational paradigm were realised. Some staff, at this time chose to continue in their traditional teaching roles, while others chose to change their roles to fit the new paradigm; there was inevitably a dynamic tension within the Faculty as a result. The author, with a long-standing commitment to the College, had a deep personal interest in the Faculty and

² Hawkesbury Agricultural College was incorporated into the University of Western Sydney in January 1989, as part of the reorganisation of Tertiary Education in Australia (Dawkins 1988). The term Hawkesbury Agricultural College will be used throughout this document, as it was correct at the beginning of the project, and will lend consistency. The term of research in this project was from June 1988 to June 1989.
what it was trying to achieve. In 1986 he was asked by the then Associate Dean (Academic) to survey academic staff on a confidential basis to define the feelings of unease in the Faculty.

The charter given was to interview all academic staff. Survey respondents were assured of confidentiality. The questions were standardised and the responses collated and distributed to all academic staff. A half-day workshop was then facilitated by the author with the aim of discussing and working on the results. (see Appendix 14 for details on the survey and workshop methodology and detailed results of the survey)

2.1 Outcomes of the 1986 Exercise

1. Survey: Of greatest relevance to this thesis were the responses to the question ‘Would you like to see any changes in managing programmes and resources?’ Nil respondents answered ‘no’. Fifty six percent felt a strong need for change, twenty three percent a definite need and twenty percent some need for change. The key areas mentioned in describing the types of change needed were: overwhelming feelings of poor management, need for accountability and ownership of job roles, expressions of frustration, poor communication and dissatisfaction with resourcing. (The full survey responses are contained in Appendix 14) These responses began the process of defining the ‘sense of unease’ in the Faculty.

2. Workshop: In the workshop, staff members confirmed the outcomes of the survey responses. Small groups formed and worked on various issues arising from the responses, for instance staff needs. Plans to continue discussion of the issues were made, and staff agreed that the Faculty should follow the plans through.

2.2 Current Study

The author, as a result of his relationship with Faculty members and students, was aware of continuing concerns within the Faculty of Agriculture. This awareness had been quantified by the 1986 survey and it was clear, during the 18 months following that survey, that the issues continued to be of concern within the Faculty. The author therefore sought to meet with the Associate Dean (Academic) and the Faculty of Agriculture Staff Development officers (with the Dean present).
Following dialogue with the Associate Dean (Academic) and the Faculty of Agriculture staff development officers, agreement was reached to form an Action Research team to look at issues of concern in the Faculty. After a decade of working with the experiential learning model it was felt that a study of the activity and experiences of the Faculty, was appropriate. Because of the rapidly changing events, a study based on the Action Research model was considered to be appropriate. The rapid changes were continuing due to the change from a Faculty within a College of Advanced Education to one within a network member of the new University of Western Sydney. The unease being experienced within the Faculty was seen by the Associate Dean (Academic) and staff development officers and the author as being of concern to most staff. The unease felt by staff had been confirmed by the author in personal dialogue with staff members.

Action Research necessitates the formation of a research team, and it was seen as essential to select members of the research team to cover a broad spectrum of interests in the Faculty in order to achieve credibility and useful outcomes. The criteria for team selection included the following:

• interest in the project

• representative of a broad cross section of the Faculty

• educational experience in the Faculty.

The aims of the research were developed and changed throughout the course of the research, as is integral to the method of Action Research.
2.3 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The initial broad aim of the research was to improve the functioning of the Faculty of Agriculture at Hawkesbury Agricultural College.

A major influence on the way in which this broad aim was implemented was a set of working assumptions that each member of the research team brought to the study. These were:

1. That an Action Research team can intervene in the life of an organisation for the benefit of that organisation, to bring about situation improvement.

   1.1 That an Action Research team can identify problem areas and hence desired change within an organisation

   1.2 That an Action Research team can generate an intervention strategy aimed at bringing about desired change.

   1.3 That an Action Research team can implement that strategy in the organisation.

2. That a sub-group within an organisation can work collaboratively and act as an effective change agent to bring about desired change in the organisation.

3. That an Action Research team as a group, will have a dynamic of its own, reflecting the characteristics of the individuals within it, as well as the nature of their interactions with each other.
3. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

This section will present a discussion of the author's current conceptual/theoretical positions, drawn from an array of experiences. It is argued that this approach is appropriate, because of the visual disability of the author. He will work with theoretical positions drawn from experience, from discussions with knowledgable people, as well as a small selection of literature.

This section will be an overview of the author's conceptualisation in the areas of group dynamics, communicating for change, organisational development and Action Research. It is suggested that if the examiners have concerns remaining about the author's ability to link with current theories, the author be interviewed about his theoretical positions, and that this interview stand in the place of a more traditional written literature review.3

3.1 What is 'practice'?

An essential question that arises in Action Research, when it is seen as an activity where theory and practice critically inform each other, is that of "what is practice?" Practice can be seen in the narrow sense of something technical and relatively small and disengaged from broader social arenas. On the other hand practice can be defined in a way that requires a close examination of values inherent in the activity and where a careful examination of the structures within which these activities take place.

McIntyre (1981, p.175) defined practice rather globally as

"any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative activity through which goods internal to that activity are realised, in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity. Tic Tac To is not an example of practice in this sense but the game of football is, so is chess. Thus the range of practice is wide: arts, sciences, games, politics, in the Aristotelian sense, the making and sustaining of family life all fall under the concept."

3 The internal thesis panel required the candidate to participate in a viva voce following the preparation of an advanced draft of this thesis. This is reported upon in Chapter 11.
This definition has appeal because it enables Action Research to be painted with broad brush strokes, yet in the context of the great variety of what is seen as ‘legitimate’ practice.

Action Research may use historical data as a basis for current research but it should also deal with personal practice currently in use, and reflection on those practices by way of critique to plan future practices.

Action Research is a tool by which theory critically informs practice, and vice versa. Implicit in its use as such is the notion that practical action will be taken in an effort for this dialectic between theory and practice to occur. In reference to this, the following points, made by Grundy & Kemmis (1981b) are interesting:

a) Behaviour regarded as such [practice] might be retrospectively explained by reference to theoretical or empirical propositions but it cannot be justified by appeal to these propositions.

b) Theoretical principles can inform but cannot justify practical action and

c) Practical action must be justified by reference to the practical judgement of the practitioners as well as the circumstances and determinates which constrain action (Grundy & Kemmis, 1981b, p.323).

Practical action is born out of a special knowledge developed by researchers. It is a sort of ‘how do you know you know?’ which manifests itself in keen judgement. Action Research recognises this kind of personal knowledge; requiring its presence and promoting its rational development. This knowledge is gained through systematic reflection on action. It can be referred to as personal knowledge. Such knowledge cannot be deemed either subjective or objective. “Insofar as the personal submits to requirements acknowledged by itself as independent of itself, it is not subjective; but insofar as it is an action guided by individual passions, it is not objective either. It transcends the disjunction between subjective and objective.” (Polanyi, 1962, p 300).

Personal knowledge is gained by rational reflection on experience the criterion upon which this is judged is authenticity. When personal knowledge arises out of our own rational critical reflections it is authentic.
This is a crucial matter for Action Research as it implies that the researchers are the final judges of the interpretations, not rules or principles or theories. However the researchers must be open to the rational reflections of others, and their decisions need to be tested for authenticity against the politics of persuasion.

This may be contrasted with alternative views such as scientism:

...Scientism, which sees science as the one and only true form of knowledge, the only model of rational enquiry, and the index of civilisation. Scientism also gives a central place to scientific values such as objectivity, neutrality, rationality, so that other values - the subjective, the personal, the emotional, the intuitive and the imaginative - are correspondingly downgraded (Packham 1990 quoting Charlesworth 1982).

In Action Research we are not creating distinctions on the basis of a subjective-objective polarisation, nor making judgements of value on that basis. Rather we are accepting as valid the authentic knowledge of researchers. This is distinctly at odds with the view of scientism as expressed in Oliga (1988), quoting Keat (1981 p16):

...scientism...is the claim that science alone represents a genuine form of human knowledge, such that nonscience (eg religion, metaphysics, ideology, politics, ethics, etc.) represents pseudoknowledge or even cognitive meaninglessness or nonsense (Keat 1981 p16).

It is hard to imagine a greater contrast between two sets of values, and this contrast enables us to see the underlying assumptions which not only determine what is practice in action research but also what is valid and meaningful.

3.2 The Action Research team and group theories.

The effect of group behaviour on the group dynamics of the participative Action Research process is a vital dimension in the conduct of a project of this kind.

There is a vast quantity of reference material available in the area of group behaviour, and only certain references appropriate to the type of professional work undertaken in this project will be used here. The author has used the group definition and the model of four stages of group development presented below since 1980. They have been consistently
useful as a basic theoretical model from which to view subsequent group activity, with modifications to meet the ever changing nature of the work.

A group can be defined as:

Two or more people gathering together with a common purpose or like interests. Cognitive, affective and social interchanges in these encounters are sufficient for people to form impressions of one another, and for creating a set of norms for their functioning. Together they develop goals for their collective activity, evolving a sense of cohesion so they think of themselves and are thought of by others as an entity distinct from all other collectives. (Hartford, 1971)

This definition is a model upon which the groundwork for group work can begin to take shape and implies an ideal state to perhaps strive and work towards. To accept the definition as a normal outcome in a group’s activity would be denying the complexity of the ever changing issues arising from human activity, but the model is sound as a basic standard.

Yalom (1975) expresses his views of what works in groups in order of potency. They are:

1. Interpersonal input plus feedback

2. Catharsis - being able to say what bothers one.

3. Cohesiveness

4. Self understanding - discovering the previously unknown

5. Interpersonal output - trust in others and relating

6. Essential factors - ultimate responsibility for self

7. Universality - not only one

8. Instilling hope - seeing others improve
9 Altruism - giving part of self to others

10 Family re-enactment - like a family

11 Bonding

12 Identification - seeing others taking risks without coming to harm.

Yalom expresses here the process of group development in simple terms. It reinforces the notion that change in the human chain is a continuous process and not an event. The author, in group work, always begins with high structure and low intensity, with a very gradual removal of the structure and increase in intensity. This process itself is dependant upon and in response to the movement of the group process. The guide as to when to move the group forward depends upon the type of group and its activities, aims and goals.

The setting up of a group without a specific need precludes the ability of a group to become anything more than a collective of people (Hartford, 1971).

When a group is set up after a need has been identified and expressed, although the perspectives of the individuals may be different, the need is shared.

It is from such group theory that the idea of an Action Research team approach to a problem may be derived. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the research team over a sole researcher? The main one is seen to be that the research team is drawn from and is part of the problem or issue. In the case of an organisation or institution looking at itself, the research team may be constituted exclusively of members of that organisation. The team under these circumstances will be a selected group covering a broad spectrum of interest. A sole researcher would still have to work with people in the course of the research and even establish groups to help in the research process thus bringing different resource groups together and acting as a catalyst or facilitator. The potential limitations of such an approach are that the research project may carry with it much of the researcher's interpretation of the resulting information. The researchers in an Action Research team have the opportunity to explore their own individual values and beliefs in depth, during the process of the research.
3.2.1 Leader or Facilitator.

The roles of leader and facilitator can be very different, and the terms are often used with a wide range of meaning. Facilitation is a word used broadly in connection with groups. The author views facilitation in a very particular way. It refers to the activities of a person who pays attention to the interpersonal relationships and the process of the group. This role often requires training. Some characteristics of leadership are:

Caring

Attribution

Executive functions

Emotional stimulation. (Boas workshop, 1980)

Leaders must have followers. What then does a facilitator have if a leader has followers? The facilitator has a process. The leader is part of something; the facilitator, on the other hand, is outside that thing.

The terms are used in a loose way, particularly the term facilitator. Any activity concerned with a group or collection of people currently seems to have a ‘facilitator’.

If the facilitator’s role is to follow a process and to work by standing outside the content of the group, then a facilitator cannot work on her or his personal issues without affecting the whole tenor of the group. The facilitator can then act as the processor of the cognitive, affective and social exchanges which are important elements in group activity. The possibility then arises that if a ‘thing’ is involved as a specific task for a group then to produce, create or make that thing, does not or may not involve a facilitator but a leadership role. The facilitative role is also important if the three elements of group activity are present (Hartford, 1971): The three elements are input of a cognitive, affective and social nature to challenge group members in their group activities. The three elements need to be present for maintenance of the group (refer to group definition, page 13).
Table 1 presents a summary of these four stages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Personal Relations</th>
<th>Task Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dependency</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>Data Flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Stages in group development after Boas 1980, Reid 1965.

Stage 1. Dependency. The author’s experience over the last decade is that most groups seldom move past this stage unless a specific task has been initiated concerning organisational structure. This can be called the ‘chit-chat’ stage where the time of day or weekend activities are discussed. The highest level of interpersonal relationships are restricted to activities like ‘have a cup of coffee and you’ll feel better’, or ‘go away for a couple of weeks and all your worries will disappear’. The level of interpersonal relationships remain at this level. Attitudinal change is not on the agenda, rather a change in circumstances that will hopefully “change the pain”. This level of group activity may apply to many committees in which the leader has a very clear picture of the thing to be created, produced or made and the success of that project will be the production of the “thing”. In such collections of people interpersonal relations that may create conflict are to be regarded as inopportune and not desirable, and need to be discouraged in order that the job at hand may be carved out efficiently and effectively.

Stage 2. Conflict. This may be seen as the second stage in group development and according to Table 1 is the organisational stage of the development, with the word organisation being taken in its broadest sense. The conflict stage in groups may be centred around the “thing” called the organisation but will be more often concerned with interpersonal relationships within that organisation. The organisation has suddenly become alive in the form of people. Suddenly different values and beliefs become apparent and the dynamic takes on a
new life which in the dependency stage had not existed. The problem then arises as to how this new process can be resolved and used. The difficulty is such that many groups go back to the dependency stage and remain there, where the criteria has been set and not questioned; differences in belief and value systems are not encouraged in fact the opposite occurs. The group may then revert to a collection of people, who don’t undertake self critique of professional practices. However if the group is prepared or encouraged to investigate practices and be self critical of practices, then belief and value systems are challenged and conflict will occur. This process can be painful but it is the way that change in practices can begin.

Change can only be a process not an event. To have an expectation that change will occur in the way that a light is switched on and off is not realistic. The beginning of conflict resolution seems to be an acceptance of self critique as a way to change practice. ‘The inner attempt at synthesis always begins with conflict’ (Johnson, 1987,p.27) The technique of self critique is also a way of challenging personal criteria developed around beliefs and values. Real conflict occurs when education, cultural and personal knowledge is challenged.

It has been suggested that the five components of effective interpersonal communication are:

1. Self concept
2. Listening
3. Clarity of expression
4. Coping with angry feelings
   (a) Suppression (b) Expression.
5. Self disclosure. The ability to speak both fully and clearly about yourself.

(Chartier,1974,p.128)

These components are seen as essential features of this stage of group development.
Stage 3. Cohesion. The level of trust and goodwill may reach a stage where cohesion will take place and data flow will begin. A real sense of goodwill and co-operative collaboration for action will take place and the group will feel a sense of accomplishment. In this framework anything can be achieved. The cohesion stage of group development is important because it creates confidence in each other and the group. The data flow becomes evident and may lead to a return to the conflict stage when criteria are questioned and beliefs and values are again challenged.

The role of the facilitator is important in the conflict and cohesion stages in group development. A facilitator to process the events is helpful to ensure that challenges to beliefs and values occur at a level which is devoid of personal attacks on individuals. Personal attacks are non productive and can destroy a group. Therefore the role of the facilitator is to monitor, record and review the processes and the moving dynamic in group activities. This allows the group to gradually see the activities as beneficial. An extended period of movement between cohesion and conflict allows the development of trust and goodwill within the group. In turn this allows group members to take risks. It is important to remember that the group does not necessarily agree about issues; that would be unusual. However disagreements can be accepted, welcomed and celebrated.

Stage 4. Interdependency. This fourth stage in group development is centered around problem solving. The group has reached a state of acceptance and is willing to accept problems and proceed to resolution through dialogue and recognition of the worth of input provided by other members of the group. Groups at this level believe what is said by themselves and others as authentic; hidden agendas are not held and self disclosure and speaking fluently about yourself becomes evident. The group does not revert to previous inhibitions experienced in the conflict stage. This stage is not very often reached early in the groups life, but once reached the group will operate at a high level of achievement.

The model described is only one of many and reference phases in group development have colloquially been seen as:

1 Forming
2 Storming
3 Norming
4 Performing.

Note. The word conflict has been used extensively during this discussion. The term is used here in the sense that conflict is within; a feeling of conscious disquiet. It is an internal emotion not to be confused with confrontation which is the physical verbal action which may occur as a result of conflict.

Whilst in group dynamics there are four stages of group development which reflect both changes in personal awareness and changes in the nature of interpersonal relationships, Grundy (1982) has suggested there are three modes of Action Research, which seem to the author to reflect similar changes.

3.3 The Three Modes of Action Research

In the paper “Educational Action Research in Australia: The State Of The Art” (Grundy & Kemmis 1981b), three minimal requirements for Action Research are identified. These requirements include the goals of improvement and involvement which characterise many Action Research projects. The conditions which are set out which are seen as individually necessary and jointly sufficient for Action Research are:

(a) the project takes as its subject matter a social practice, regarding it as a strategic subject susceptible to improvement,

(b) The project proceeds through a spiral cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting with each of these activities being systematically and self critically implemented and interrelated and

(c) the project involves those responsible for the practice in each of the moments of the activity, widening the interest in the project to others affected by the practice maintaining collaborative control of the process.

And then even when applying these minimal requirements to activities to distinguish between what is and what is not Action Research, it becomes obvious that the researching activity which falls within the gamut of Action Research is still diverse. That diversity does not just arise out of a plethora of areas and issues that form the particular subject for investigation,
but also from the fact that Action Research may be applied in the service of a variety of world views. Grundy (1982) in her paper discuss three modes of Action Research.

1. technical

2. practical

3. emancipatory

(Grundy 1982)

Often a project appears to operate in one or other of these modes. Alternatively these modes may be phases of a project’s life. At best the different philosophical standards which underpin the various modes relate to the source and scope of the guiding idea of the project and the disposition which determines the type of strategic action (Grundy & Kemmis 1981a).

The intention of Action Research is to give persons power to act to bring about change (action) by generating knowledge through rational reflection on personal experiences (research). Each of the identified modes tries to achieve this in a different way:

1. **Technical Action Research.**

   In this mode the project would be instigated by a particular person or group of persons who by reason of their greater experience or qualification would be regarded as “experts” or “authority figures”. The research facilitator could be regarded as a research technician or engineer and the ultimate responsibility for the success of the project rests with this leader.

   The aim of this type of Action Research is to achieve more effective or efficient practice, but the “ideal” by which the outcome will be measured preexists in the mind of the leader. This type of action research is *product-centred* so action is designed to “produce”, “make” or “create” something. The products may, for example, be the creation of an efficient administrative system or an effective social studies program or a set of hypotheses which others can investigate (Grundy 1982 p.355).
2. **Practical Action Research.**

To Aristotle the source of human action was knowledge. The source of skilful action was “knowing how” (Techne), the source of scientific action was “knowing that” (Episteme) but the source of moral action was a different kind of knowledge: Phronesis. (Grundy 1982, p.35)

To paraphrase Grundy: Practical Action Research helps practitioners to articulate their own concerns, plan strategic action for change, monitor the problems and effects of change and reflect on the consequences of change actually achieved. This is sometimes called a process consultancy role. Practical Action Research develops the practical reasoning of practitioners. It is to be distinguished from Technical Action Research because it treats the criteria by which the action is to be judged as problematic, and open to development through self reflection rather than treating them as given. In practical Action Research participants monitor their own practices with the immediate aim of developing their practical judgment as individuals. Thus the facilitative role is more Socratic, to provide a sounding board against which practitioners may try out ideas and learn more about the reasons for their actions and learning more about the process of self reflection. (Grundy 1982)

The learning in this type of project has come from the doing: The knowledge gained from experience of past action, education, social norms, beliefs and values gained and accepted by the individual practitioner. The author has referred to this elsewhere as the authentic knowledge of the individual. It is gained through experience and has been taken into self and forms part of his/her belief and value system. Practical Action Research seems to look at improved practice through action derived from the wisdom and authentic knowledge of the participants. In this form of study, authentic knowledge can be seen as belief and value systems which produce a view of the world as it is at a given moment in the “eye” of the practitioner; the “eye” representing an individual’s way of operating in their world.

3. **Emancipatory Action Research.**

The form of Action Research which best embodies the values of a critical educational science is emancipatory action research. In emancipatory action research, the practitioner group takes joint responsibility for the development of practice, understandings and situations, and sees these as socially-constructed in the interactive processes of educational life. (Carr & Kemmis 1986, p.203). Grundy adds:
The dynamic relationship between theory and practice in emancipatory action research, however, entails the change and expansion of both during the course of the project. Thus theory may inform but not legitimate practice. (Grundy 1982 p358)

Emancipatory Action Research brings a change to the way practitioners are able to deal with reflection and review of their activities. In other modes of Action Research reflection is a process of backward looking. In emancipatory Action Research, practitioners are able to make a review of their activities and the implications of those activities, part of the immediate, ongoing activities of the group. Conscious reflection is therefore brought to the present. Thus learning becomes an immediate and highly relevant activity. The task, on which the group is working, can respond to the outcomes of this process of review, in an immediate way and the Action Research can proceed in a timely fashion. Finally the currency of the reflection process leads to a continuous clarification and redefinition of the boundaries of the task.

The material presented so far raises the following question for this thesis project:

a) What is the role of the facilitator in an Action Research team? and

b) Given the theoretical propositions about group behaviour, how might this knowledge be used to improve Action Research projects?

3.4 Experiential Learning

Throughout this thesis, reference will be made to Experiential Learning, and Action Research. The model of experiential learning used is that of Kolb (1984). An interesting linkage exists, between this model of Experiential Learning and the genesis of Action Research; Lewin the “father of Action Research” developed a model of Experiential Learning, from which the Kolb model is derived. This highlights the closeness of Action Research and Experiential Learning, and also the characterisation of Action Research as a tool for learning.

Kolb has developed a four stage learning cycle (Cycle 1), which emphasises that learning is a recursive process, which is grounded in experience: Indeed Kolb defines learning as “the transformation of experience into knowledge” (Kolb 1984)

The fact that learning is a continuous process grounded in experience, has important educational implications. Put simply, it implies that all learning is relearning. How easy and tempting it is in designing a course to think of the learner’s mind as being as blank as the paper on which we scratch our outline. Yet this is not the case. Everyone enters every learning situation with more or less articulate ideas about the topic at hand. We are all psychologists, historians, and atomic physicists. It is just that some of our theories are more crude and incorrect than others. But to focus solely on the refinement and validity of these theories misses the point. The important point is that the people we teach have held these beliefs whatever their quality and that until now they have used them whenever the situation called for them to be atomic physicists, historians, or whatever.

Thus, one’s job as an educator is not only to implant new ideas but also to dispose of or modify old ones. In many cases, resistance to new ideas stems from their conflict with old beliefs that are inconsistent with them. If the education process begins by bringing out the learner’s beliefs and theories, examining and testing them, and then
integrating the new, more refined ideas into the person’s belief systems, the learning process will be facilitated. (Kolb 1984, p28).

This has enormous import for this project. Belief and value systems were initially not approachable, when they became approachable the real learning started. This model of learning is therefore important for two reasons; firstly the environment in which the Action Research took place, used the Kolb model of learning. Secondly, the Action Research model has similarities to the Kolb model of learning. Both are concerned with the creation of knowledge from experience and this begs questions of the nature of knowledge and of how we come to know our world.

3.5 How We Know Our World

It is clear to the author, from personal experience, that there is little chance of him knowing what is “on another persons mind”, without them explicitly telling him. It follows from this that there can be agreement on the existence and form of concrete objects, yet the “mind thoughts” evoked by those concrete objects are likely to be extraordinarily different even between two observers, let alone amongst a larger group. In communicating, in language, we arrive at the same difficulty; even though one person may know what they mean by a particular word or phrase, other people may construe its meaning in a different way.

Many authors have approached this set of issues from different perspectives, but the author does not intend to create a thorough analysis of the subject, as this is the subject of philosophy which is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is however important that the philosophical approach adopted is made explicit as this influences the way in which the Action Research is conducted.

Maturana in his exploration of cognition, and his development of explanatory paths arising from this, makes clear his belief in what he calls “objectivity-in-parenthesis”.

I claim that the most central question that humanity faces today is the question of reality. And I claim that this is so, regardless of whether we are aware of it or not, because every thing that we do as modern human beings, either as individuals, as social entities, or as members of some non-social human community, entails an
explicit or implicit answer to this question as a foundation for the rational arguments that we use to justify our actions. (Maturana 1988)

Objectivity-in-parenthesis, involves the notion that we are biologically incapable of distinguishing perception from illusion, and therefore should behave in a way that puts the notion of objectivity into parentheses. If we cannot “tell” whether something is “real”, then we ought not behave as if we could tell. This was further strengthened in the experience of the author, by his loss of sight in 1978. This loss forced him to view his world in a far less clear and concrete way than previously. This distinction was made clearer for the author because of his lack of sight, however, the case is no different, according to Maturana, for the sensorily unimpaired. We are all, in the light of our assumed definition, sensorily impaired.

The implications of this view for the practice of Action Research are important. It means that Action Research practitioners need to express their individual world views in terms of their belief and value systems, and that these world views need to be constantly clarified and reviewed. Further it means that Action Research is unable to make statements of “universal truth” or “objective reality” regarding the subject and process of the research. However it is possible to bring forth a shared meaning, developed in language through the methods adopted in this project.

3.6 Critique & Critical Communities

The idea of critique, is fundamental to the conduct of Action Research. It needs to be understood that it is not criticism as we understand it, but rather a critical self and peer reflection. As Oliga (1988) suggests:

Critique (or critical hermeneutics), as developed, for instance, in the works of Apel (1967, 1971, 1980) and Habermas (1970a, b, 1971, 1972, 1979) (cf. Bleicher 1980), is an attempt to mediate the objectivity of historical processes with the motives of those acting within it, the aim being the freeing of emancipatory potential. The approach seeks to remove barriers to understanding that may be operative without the individuals or groups concerned being aware of them.... The task therefore is directed at rendering individual and social processes transparent to the actors concerned so that they can “pursue their further development with consciousness and will - rather than remaining the end product of a causal chain operative behind their backs”.

Because Action Research operates in neither an objective nor a subjective way, it is important that the process and views of the participants be subject to critical examination. Indeed the emancipatory mode of Action Research relies heavily on this idea of critique for its functioning. Grundy raises an important issue however, when she says:

There is a problem, however, in the act of solitary self-reflection: the person may be subject to self-deception. Habermas (1974) pinpoints the difficulties inherent in solitary reflection:

The self-reflection of a lone subject ... requires a quite paradoxical achievement: one part of the self must be split off from the other part in such a manner that the subject can be in a position to render aid to itself ... (Furthermore) in the act of self-reflection the subject can deceive itself. (p28).

To insure that the disposition which guides action is ‘true and reasoned’, therefore, the prudent professional would be aided by a facilitator who could perform the Socratic function of assisting in the process of self-reflection and reasoning. (Grundy 1982 pp157-358).

This therefore provides the basis of the notion of critical community. A community is formed from a group of professionals working together. Part of their role is to assist each other in the process of critique and self-reflection. This seems to the author to be of great importance in the conduct of any Action Research. Community cannot arise, in the author’s view, until self-reflection and critique become a normal part of the group’s activities. Thus it is probably inappropriate to talk about community alone, as it is necessarily a ‘critical community’.
4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Choice of the Action Research methodology for this project

Action Research was chosen as the methodology for this project, for a number of reasons. The author had a long standing interest in working with groups of people. This interest was similar to the importance which Lewin placed in group work for the social sciences and Action Research (Lewin 1946). Action Research allows practitioners to work in and with the complexity of their own worlds and allows for the fluid, dynamic nature of human systems and organisations. The author was drawn to this because of his belief in the importance of acknowledging this fluidity. Of similar importance was the iterative nature of Action Research and the clear links which it makes between theory and practice. (Price & Cherniss 1977)

4.2 Implementation of an Action Research methodology in this project:

The basic methodology of this project was that outlined in the Action Research Planner: It involved the four steps of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988). In this research project the research team was used to clarify shared experience through group interaction. The research team would then take action on planned steps arising from common experience. The action would be monitored through recording the group meetings, and relevant information arising from the group’s activities. The author, at the conclusion of each meeting, listened to the recordings and reflected upon the group activities. He made observations about the significance of these activities to the research process. Other members of the team also involved themselves in informal processes of observation and reflection.

Lewin in 1946, made a clear statement about the issue which arises here: “It is important to understand that social research concerns itself with two rather different types of questions, namely the study of general laws of group life and the diagnosis of a specific situation” (Lewin 1946, p 42). In this project, it appears to the author that there were two parallel pieces of research; the research team’s research into the Faculty and ultimately their own professional practice, and parallel to this, the author’s research into the process of Action Research and the role of group dynamics in this.
There are two essential aims in any Action Research:

*to improve

*to involve (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988)

Experiential learning (Kolb 1984) is also an integral part of the Action Research model, as is the concept of critical community and critical practitioners.

There were five levels of improvement aimed for in this Action Research:

i) the improvement of a practice

ii) the improvement of professional development, or the understanding of practice by its practitioners

iii) the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place.

iv) the improvement of the understanding of the situation in which the practice takes place.

v) the exposure of the research to critique by others to improve the understanding of the team and of others. (Bawden 1989)

Given this expectation therefore, during the initial planning it was anticipated that the Action Research would be used to:

i) generate a forum for debate about Faculty issues.

ii) set up groups to establish priorities for these issues. The action spiral would be applied in these groups and the activities of these groups would be monitored.

iii) expand these activities out of these research groups and, through repetition, generate self-motivating activities throughout the Faculty to bring the issues to a resolution.
4.3 Initial working assumptions:

A major influence on the way in which the project was implemented were the working assumptions that each team member brought to the group.

Section 1 (page 7) described the reasons for beginning the study. The members of the Action Research team had discussions with each other, and with the author prior to the first meeting of the whole team. There was a general belief held by this team that, in view of personal experience, positions held within the Faculty and experience in education, the group could come together in a way that would assist the Faculty to improve the areas identified as problem areas (1986 survey - see page 7).

Each member of the Action Research team brought to the group their own individual understanding of:

i) the research questions

ii) the method that would be used to approach the research questions
5. METHODS USED

5.1 Data Collection:

At the beginning of this project the team wrestled with a sense of ‘unease’ in the Faculty of Agriculture. The initial objective was to unearth, through discussion, a focus issue or issues which would then be discussed with the broader Faculty staff. The findings would then be evaluated and the next step taken, until a resolution or clear path emerged.

The data was collected with the aim of providing an accurate basis for reflection, with regard to the research questions and action being tested, and more specifically with the aim of enabling the action not only to be recollected, but also reconstructed (Grundy, 1988).

5.1.1 Primary Data

Taping

All the meetings of the research team were recorded on audio tape. This was discussed and agreed to prior to the beginning of the first meeting. (It is important to note the significance of the idea of “agreement”. The fundamental principle is that issues of significance should be “contracted” to by the group. The imposition of - in this instance tape recording, with its attendant concerns of privacy, or being reminded of what one has said - upon the group by one member or the facilitator, would have grave consequences for the functioning and dynamics of the group.) The main issue raised was that the material remain with the group and, if access was requested by external interests, then the group would need to give their assent to such a request. All tape recordings have been kept and are available provided this condition is met. (Meeting number three was not successfully taped due to human error.)

Minutes

Minutes of every meeting were written by individual team members on a loose rotating basis and subsequently handed to the author and were circulated to the research team. There were many informal discussions, between meetings, by sub-groups of the team, concerning issues raised in each meeting. Some of these were also minuted. The interest
in the issues remained high partly because of these sub-group meetings. The team meetings were held approximately every two weeks and sometimes weekly. They usually extended over a two hour period.

Other written material

1. Action steps: where documentation accompanied action steps this has been kept for reference.

2. External material: At times group members prepared material between meetings for presentation to the team. These materials were brought to group meetings without discussion prior to the meetings where they were introduced. This documentation has also been kept for reference.

All of the above data is appended to this document.

5.2. Data Analysis

“The analysis of data is represented by the reflective moment of the Action Research cycle. The purpose of reflection is to provide the practitioner with authentic insights which will further the process of enlightenment.” (Grundy & Kemmis, 1981b, p330).

In this project, the analysis focused on four main streams of data. These were:

1) reflections on recorded data, written by the author.

2) the discussions and giving and receiving of information at the research team meetings

3) the taped interviews with research team members

4) the ongoing, reflective conversations between team members.

Each of these will be discussed in detail:

1) Reflections on recorded data written by the author
This was vital as a way for the facilitator to listen to the tapes and reflect on the process of that day’s meeting. These reflections were written and proved to be extremely useful in making sense of the process.

2) The ongoing discussions at the research team meetings.

These discussions varied in intensity though each meeting was important in developing the project, the highpoint, in terms of group interaction, came during the final four hour meeting. In an effort to reach ‘authentic interpretation’ the team members looked carefully at the initial assumptions, what happened and what outcomes resulted from the research project. The opportunity which occurred during the final meeting to look at the assumptions combined with the sense of trust in the group, allowed an examination of existing attitudinal frameworks. The author listened to the tapes of this meeting and prepared detailed notes covering the discussion of issues and the nature of the inter-personal relationships in the meeting. These were then circulated to team members.

3) Taped interviews with research team members

The author’s reflections were circulated to team members after the final 4 hour meeting. The author then made appointments to interview each member. It was noted that each person had reflected on the circular and during the interviews they discussed their personal analysis of their experiences, learning and changes in practice.

4) The ongoing reflective conversations between team members.

There were, on many occasions, important deliberations between team members which focused on the complexity of the issues under discussion during the course of the project. See, for example, the conceptual model developed after meeting 9 (Appendix 9). The process of the team was constantly one of ‘triangulation’ which refers to the cross referencing of a number of participants’ perceptions of an event. (Grundy, 1982)

These four sources of data all contributed to the analysis and discussion in the sections which follow.
5.3 Choice of Analytical Tools

5.3.1 Action Research Spirals

The Action Research spirals are an integral part of the process of Action Research (see for instance Lewin 1946 & Kemmis & McTaggart 1988), and were seen as an important tool for understanding and structuring the data which was being collected. Initially the minutes of the meetings were used as the material to be “fitted” into the spirals. This had two implications: The material being dealt with was content based rather than reflecting the process occurring. Secondly, the material was organised into pieces which reflected the arbitrary division created by the project being organised into meetings. These meetings did not necessarily reflect a logical grouping of all or any of the elements of a spiral. Once these difficulties were recognised, the author and an outside researcher\(^4\), sought to apply the spirals, to the material generated from the author’s reflections as well as to the minutes. In this way, the vital element of process was introduced. At the same time, the arbitrary division between meetings was disposed of, and instead the author tried to fit the material into spirals as a continuing flow of process.

Out of this struggle to structure the data, it became apparent that a number of themes recurred continually.

5.3.2 Themes

Three major themes were to continually recur, throughout the process of analysis. These themes were in their turn seen as important indicators of the progress and outcomes of the Action Research project. It was decided therefore to structure the analysis in terms of those themes. The themes were: Group process - this was seen as a critical determinant of the dynamics and direction of the Action Research and was seen as the path to change in personal professional practice. Issues - this was a way of capturing any areas of concern, issues about beliefs and values and other material which arose. Implications for the

\(^4\) The outside researcher was enlisted as a participant in the Analysis for a number of reasons. The author felt the necessity for a "sounding board" against which to test ideas, and for a person to provide a fresh viewpoint on the material. This person’s role proved to be critical in freeing the author to move into alternative modes of analysis. In addition, the outside researcher played an important practical role, in typing and recording material, which the author was unable to do. The importance of an external researcher is covered in several places in the Action Research literature, including for instance Kemmis & McTaggart 1988.
Faculty - these were any particular issues which were seen to have particular relevance to the Faculty - the situation the research was focusing on.

The combination of the use of these themes, with the use of the spirals enabled the author to understand and structure the data.
6.0 Primary Data Analysis, meeting by meeting

The Action Research Spiral

In this project the Action Research spiral was used as a tool for first stage analysis. The spiral used was based on the model of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) which in turn was based on Lewin’s cycle (1946). Kemmis and McTaggart however add the dimension of conscious reflection which introduces the possibility of exploring interpersonal relationships should the task or issue involved move from the technical to the practical action research mode. The reflective section of the Kemmis and McTaggart spiral introduces and encourages discussion at a deeper level rather than at the “chit chat” stage of group development.

The spiral was useful as a tool for clarification and clearing blockages which occurred for the author during the analysis stage.

In order to add clarity to the description of the meetings, and to illustrate the use of the spirals, they have been inserted where they are relevant, amongst the description of the meetings.

MEETING 1 (8/9/88)

Group process and development:

In this first meeting there was discussion concerning the author’s role and a decision made that he would lead the group and facilitate the group process. Ground rules were set:

i) regular fortnightly meetings;

ii) confidentiality - that opinions and views expressed by individuals would be kept within the group and only group decisions communicated to the broader Faculty.

iii) one member only to speak at any one time to allow clarity and assist resolution.

iv) each issue raised to be resolved before moving on to the next item.
v) that each group member would, in turn, take responsibility for taking minutes of the meeting.

The group met with a strong sense of cooperation and well being towards the task ahead. (author's reflections).

At this stage the group was working at the dependency level of group development, as identified by the activity of giving and receiving of information and a sense of well being and cooperation.

Issues

i) Assumptions about the research question:

In earlier discussions concerning Faculty issues individual members of the Action Research team indicated that the following assumptions were held:

1. That an Action Research team can intervene in the life of an organisation for the benefit of that organisation, to bring about situation improvement.

   1.1 That an Action Research team can identify ‘problem areas’ and hence ‘desired change’ within an organisation.

   1.2 That an Action Research team can generate an intervention strategy aimed at bringing about desired change.

   1.3 That an Action Research team can implement the strategy in the organisation.

2. That a sub-group within an organisation can work collaboratively and act as an effective change agent to bring about desired change in the organisation.

These assumptions and perceptions became major issues in the group development at subsequent meetings. But because of the dependent stage of group development at this meeting these were not discussed overtly. It is typical of groups at this stage not to critically analyse issues raised “don’t rock the boat!” (Boas 1980)
ii) Client

Two important roles were discussed using the Checkland framework (Checkland, 1984). Applying the CATWOE. analysis the group decided that the ‘client’ (for any situation improvement) was the staff group within the Faculty and that similarly the ‘owner’ was the Dean of the Faculty. (These decisions were subsequently altered after critical review.)

Implications for Faculty:

The task was seen as improving the situation in the Faculty - that is the situation shown by the sense of unease and concern expressed initially in the 1986 survey. The facilitator posed the question ‘Why are we here?’ And in response the participants indicated that they wanted to bring about change within the Faculty. The minutes of the meeting, list the following areas for change:

- a difference existing between the espoused philosophy (systems agriculture), of the Faculty as an organisation and the understanding of that philosophy by staff.

- a generally positive sense of the Faculty as a whole but some doubt about staff direction and organisation.

- realignment of organisation to promote smooth running of Faculty.

- producing a document covering organisational change in the Faculty to be used by other organisations, educational, agricultural or other.

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5 CATWOE is mnemonic which is used as an aid to analysis, particularly by Checkland in his Soft Systems methodology. The letters signify the following ideas:

C - Customers (the victims or beneficiaries of a notional system).
A - Actors. (those playing roles in the system).
T - Transformation (the transformation processes present in the system).
W - Weltanschauung (the perspective or ‘worldview’ adopted).
O - Owners (those who could destroy it).
E - Environment (the constraints which the system is subject to). (Checkland, 1984).
to establish a means of assessment and accountability within the Faculty. (from minutes of meeting#1, Appendix 1)

MEETING 2 (21/9/88)

Group process and development:

The author was angry because only two out of five other team members were in attendance. One of the ground rules which had been set in place at the previous meeting was already not being observed. This seemed to be in contrast to the excitement experienced at the end of the previous meeting, but the significance of the attendance issue was unclear. This reflects the 'real world' dilemmas that face Action Researchers where prior commitments can intervene in the process.

The group continued in the dependency stage and then moved into the second stage of conflict with the discussion between two members concerning the difference in their philosophies - that is there was a discussion of the difference between Social Ecology and Systems Agriculture. The facilitator's role, as established in the first meeting, was important in allowing these differences to be expressed and clarified and for common ground to be explored. There was recognition of this as a possibility for developing unity and diversity within the Faculty. The group saw that "some staff were being seen as outside the mainstream of Faculty staff, and this activity caused management problems and feelings of resentment. Maybe if some transformation could be achieved by using shared common ground and that staff saw themselves as leaders, then some situation improvement may occur." (minutes, meeting 2, Appendix 2)

It can be seen from this that the group was still working under the assumption that they would be able to bring about change in the broader Faculty.

At the close of this meeting there was a strong sense of optimism about the project. In his reflections the facilitator wrote:

6 The Faculty of Agriculture offers undergraduate courses in Applied Science (Systems Agriculture) and Postgraduate courses in both Systems Agriculture and Social Ecology. Thus within the Faculty there are seen to be two overlapping areas of learning. They would probably not be seen as "disciplines" however they each have their own proponents and adopt differing approaches to issues.
"The establishment of the ground rules at the first meeting and the facilitator’s role were beginning to show value during the second meeting. Members raised issues in a clear and open way which seemed to already indicate a group development process taking place."

**Issues**

i) Language

An important part of arriving at the concept of unity and diversity was the acknowledgement that there needs to be common understanding of the language used by practitioners. This change in the individuals’ use of language is an expected outcome of involvement in Action Research and may include changes in the way participants describe their ever changing work and ‘world’ (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988)

**Implications for Faculty:**

Institutionalised Terms:

“The use of ‘jargon’ terms explaining activities within the Faculty has developed over the years. They are legitimate and are useful, but perhaps are not understood but have been accepted by most as ‘the word’” (Minutes meeting 2, Appendix 2)

**MEETING 3 (6/10/88).**

**Group process and development:**

The group began with members expressing a sense of wanting to belong and the cohesion from the previous meeting seemed to have been brought forward to this meeting. Discussions were held around the issues of common ground, commitment to the Action Research project, and re-iterating material for absent members. It was acknowledged that there was potential for conflict in dealing with these issues, both within the research team and at a Faculty level.
‘It would possibly be a painful process - even the research team may have to experience pain in looking at itself to explore what common ground was available.’
(author’s reflections, meeting 3, Appendix 3)

On reflection it can be seen that the group was still operating at the dependency level. Although it acknowledged the potential for conflict, the group was walking around the “edges of the real pond”. It wasn’t time to jump in yet!

**Issues**

i) Assumptions and perceptions of the research question:

The issue was centred around the assumptions and perceptions of the research question, with the group adhering to the belief that it could change the Faculty or improve the situation. There was a sense that once the perceived problems were clarified and defined, then definite action steps would be feasible and attainable.

**Implications for Faculty:**

In looking for an appropriate action plan, there was discussion around other successful sub-groups operating in the Faculty. In particular there was a search for and discussion of the characteristics of a group that engendered commitment and a sense of belonging in its members. This was an aspect of Faculty life that was seen as critical background to any improvement.

There was, at the time, one such sub-group in the Faculty which was affectionately known as the ‘number-crunchers’.

**Between meeting 3 and 4:**

Between meetings three and four two group members met to reflect on the process of the Action Research to this point using the tape of meeting 3 as background material. As a result of that study they reached the conclusion that:
"The focus of the Action Research project has moved from... becoming systems agriculturalists' as the desired transformation to establishing 'common ground' between systems agriculture and social ecology as the transformation to

The building of Faculty ‘belonging’ by generating discrete groups of staff (to include everyone; academic and non-academic staff) for:

(i) professional development

(ii) facilitating student project work.

These groups to be facilitated by members of the project team based on the successful 'number crunchers' group.

As the groups progress over time, the facilitators will reflect on how better to develop the original themes of:

(i) what constitutes a systems agriculturalist, and

(ii) what is the requisite ‘common ground’ for staff (the ‘unity’ which would allow for ‘diversity’) that the Faculty should insist on.” (Addition to minutes, meeting 3, Appendix 3)

The outcome was the establishment of a tentative action plan:

“To generate a number of student project-based groups modelled on the ‘number crunchers’ group.” (addition to minutes, meeting 3, Appendix 3)

7 This arose in the first session, when one group member stated that if all Faculty members became systems agriculturalists many of the problems of the Faculty would be resolved.
MEETING 4 (20/10/88)

Group process and development:

Right from the beginning of this meeting the group was in the second stage of group development - conflict. The conflict centred around a number of issues:

(i) the new material (described above) which had been generated by two of the group members was ignored causing great frustration and anger in the two people concerned;

(ii) one other member of the group reflected upon a Faculty meeting held the day before and brought with him this anger about that meeting and in particular anger towards some of the other Action Research team members;

(iii) a leadership struggle developed between two of the members triggered by conflicting approaches to the methodology to be used by this team.

As a result of these conflicts the facilitator felt isolated and excluded and unable to fulfil his role of guiding the group towards clarification of the issues underlying the conflict.

Another development in the group was that the group started to ask some critical questions about themselves.

“What are we doing?”

“What do we want to do?”

“How are we going to do it?”

“How should we be going about it?”

“Are we attempting to create a perfect Faculty?”

“Do we want to take action in some area, around some theme, that would lead to an improvement?”
(minutes, meeting 4, Appendix 4)

Issues

i) Commitment

From the facilitator’s point of view there was a sense of loss of commitment by the group to the forward movement of the project.

ii) New Material

This was the first of a number of occasions when new material prepared by members outside the team meetings was rejected. This is raised as a separate issue because of the uncompromising way in which the group ignored and/or rejected new material on a number of occasions. It is suggested that this is an important aspect of the group dynamic.

iii) Power

This issue can be seen operating at a number of different levels within the group. It centred around the struggle for leadership of the group, the intervention of one member from a felt position of powerlessness with the intention of becoming powerful in the group, and a sense of powerlessness in the facilitator. The question also arose as to whether this research team would be allowed any real responsibility in instigating processes of change in the Faculty. The facilitator in his reflections on the meeting noted that:

"the group fragment(ed) without a clear picture of working on its agenda, but dealing only with that of the individual. I was at fault allowing this to happen." (author’s reflections meeting 4, Appendix 4).

Implications for Faculty

It is possible that the amount of anxiety, anger and frustration expressed in this group can be partly attributed to the unease existing in the Faculty increased by what seemed, at the time, to be the likely inclusion of the Faculty in a new University of Western Sydney.
Between meetings four and five:

Between meetings 4 and 5 a letter from the author was circulated to all members of the Action Research team. It expressed concern about the apparent lack of commitment to the project and its expressed aim of taking steps to bring about change in the Faculty. (see Appendix 4) It is interesting to note that not a single member of the group responded to this letter in any way.

MEETING 5: (3/11/88)

"It seems almost like a Wild Goose flying through

storms, seeking, to find the right nest. But the

wild goose flight goes on - not out there but

within us."

(author's reflections, see Appendix 5).

Group process and development:

The group moved between the stages of conflict and cohesion throughout this meeting. Members experienced confusion, frustration and anxiety while discussing the issues around management of the Faculty, perceived low morale and anger of Faculty staff. Resolution of these issues (frustration, anxiety and confusion) could well have involved personal conflict and as a result the issues were not dealt with.

"There seemed to be fear that the team would indulge in a personal stone-throwing contest if some of the issues were discussed." (author's reflections, meeting 5, Appendix 5).

Interspersed with these periods of conflict were periods of cohesion with members agreeing that commitment to the project was difficult unless a task was involved. Three indications of group cohesion were:
• The issues which had been talked about at the previous meetings were at last heard and agreed to be considered and listed.

• the importance of a time frame (was recognized)

• the recognition that the group (would) meet without a facilitator (the author went to New Zealand for a fortnight, and it appeared significant to him that the group was committed to working on in his absence). A major step forward in the ownership of the group by the group members (author’s reflections, meeting 5, Appendix 5)

**Issues**

i) Research team.

There was confusion about what role the research team would play in the Faculty.

ii) Action

The group expressed anxiety about its apparent inactivity (lack of ‘action’) and decided to meet weekly for the next two meetings with the express purpose of developing an action step.

**Implications for Faculty:**

The group members, after much discussion in this and the previous meeting, agreed that there was a need for a code of practice for Faculty staff. The staff development section was suggested as an appropriate vehicle for action following the development of this code of practice.
MEETING 6: (10/11/88)

Group process and development

The group moved to a safe, cohesive stage (dependency). There was a re-visiting of the same issues discussed in meeting #1. For example, CATWOE and praxis\(^4\) were discussed as a means to further develop the plan of action.

Issues

i) What is action?:

The intention of Action Research is to allow practitioners the power to bring about change in their practice. This change, then, constitutes the action. (Grundy, 1982, p.354) The group, at this stage, is seeing the action step as being ‘out there’ in the Faculty. Individuals within the group were beginning a process of critical self-reflection, but were not seeing this as action.

There was a sense of urgency about taking the first action step and this led the group to a resolution to communicate with the Faculty the suggested plan for a code of practice. By this means the research team would get feedback about its decision that the Faculty ‘needed’ a code of practice in order to bring about an ‘improved’ situation.

Implications for Faculty:

Members of the research team were experiencing external pressure from some Faculty staff concerning the activities of the research team and the perceived lack of action. This contributed to the sense of urgency that the group felt about taking a first action step.

\(^4\) In contrast to uninformed action or untested theory; praxis embodies the notion of theory in action. (Grundy 1982).
MEETING 7 (17/11/88).

Group process and development:

In this meeting the group again moved between cohesion, and a high level of energy; and conflict with a corresponding low level of energy.

This was the first meeting since the beginning of the project, that all members were present. At the beginning of the session, individuals expressed potentially positive outcomes resulting from the activities of the group.

‘When six people stand as one then something really good will occur.’ etc. (author’s reflections)

At this point a quantity of new material was introduced to the group. This material was relevant to meeting 6 and was a development of the idea of a code of practice, but nevertheless it was new. This material was rejected and there was a great deal of conflict arising from this process. The group was in a state of confusion, anxiety and frustration; noted in the minutes as “tension, backtracking and debate “ (minutes, meeting 7, Appendix 7).

“Many hidden agenda came forward during this time and many ideas and assumptions were discussed and discarded or accepted. All group members agreed that they had had their own ideas as to what should come next.” (author’s reflections)

The facilitator intervened and asked individual group members to express their view on what should be the next step. “The group felt the key issues around the code of practice had been sufficiently debated to have a clear context for (the ) next step. (It) was now ready to take it.” (minutes, meeting 7, Appendix 7). The group aided one of its members in drawing a cartoon to present to the Faculty as the group’s way of explaining the need for a code of practice. There was a feeling of high energy and cohesion around this creative task and the meeting closed with a sense of optimism and purpose (see cartoon 1).
APPENDIX B

OUR PICTURE OF THE FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE

(Ken, Stephen, Bob, Olga, David & Dennis)

- Feeling powerless
- Mic'ing off
- Stressed
- Overloaded
- Hiding from students

- Too many opportunities
- Kid in candy shop
- Action / Research
- In industry, our ideas really work!
- Freedom
- Student growth
- Personal growth

- Bomb going off
- Balance between unity & diversity
- We want both!

But - increasing diversity & independent behaviour evident.

We behave as a team of champions,

where we:

- Have confidence in the coach / captain
- Feel the support of the team
- Play the same game
- Have confidence in each other's ability

but, we have been changing

Do we need to define a new game all can play

with clearly rules & positions

Rugby

OR

Aust. Rules

Don't want a:

Soccer
Issues

i) New material:

This was the second occasion in the life of this group that new material became an important aspect of the group dynamic. In both cases new material was rejected by the group. The rejection occurred because introduction of new material to a group changed the dynamic within the group; and the group had not had the opportunity to consider the content of the new material beforehand. The material itself had often been well prepared and documented for presentation to the group, but was not considered for the above reasons. (It was clear that the material was not considered; when it was handed out, it was immediately put on the floor, and when the introducer suggested it be discussed he was refused.)

ii) Power:

The power issue is not 'dead' and continues to be one of the struggles throughout the life of the group. At this stage, the issue of power may have resulted from a rejection by the group, of the idea that leadership be identified with any one person.

Implications for Faculty

Agreement was reached for individual members of the research team to present

“a picture of how the group perceives the Faculty and the need for action in the areas of ‘a code of practice’; and the clarifications of our paradigm.” (minutes, meeting 7, Appendix 7)

This picture (cartoon) was to form the basis for sharing with small groups across the Faculty, and team members were allocated groups.

Between meeting 7 and meeting 8:

The decision to meet with groups of the Faculty was implemented by individuals in the research team.
MEETING 8 (30/11/88)

Group process and development

The meeting began with the presentation of two written reports and two verbal reports about the presentation of the cartoon to various groups within the Faculty. The most powerful aspect of the Faculty response was the strong anger and frustration expressed about existing structural problems in the organisation. There was no doubt that the cartoon accurately portrayed the reasons for staff unease and confusion. The response from Faculty staff, in general, was one of frustration and anger concerning the present structure and organisation of the Faculty. Staff were not prepared to invest more energy in a "new vision". Most team members came back reeling from the experience.

Following the presentation to the group of these reports, conflict arose when one member put forward possible explanations for the responses received e.g. that the presentations had been made in a negative framework. There was a feeling within the group, that members' professional integrity was being questioned. "Once again the group became bogged down and on this occasion made no real progress that was identifiable as such." (minutes, meeting 8, Appendix 8)

The meeting closed with the research team being in a high state of anxiety, frustration and unresolved conflict. The feeling of the group seemed to be 'What are we doing here?'

Issues

i) Research team. Assumptions and perceptions of the research question:

The main issue for this meeting was research team survival which was integrally connected with a re-evaluation of the assumptions and perceptions of the research question.

The complexity of the project had suddenly engulfed the research team. Some of the main issues in this complexity were:

a) the research team, up to this point, had assumed that it was in a position to define the needed changes in the Faculty and thereby create a situation improvement. After reflection
it now seems that such an assumption was fallacious in as much as the need had not been expressed by all Faculty staff.

b) the group was still unable to look at conflict around issues such as:

• the different interpretations of the Faculty feedback on action step 1, and the resultant lack of assimilation of this feedback.

• the differing levels of commitment to the work load of the group.

• the group being blocked in its reflection process by difficult inter-personal relationships which were unresolved.

c) the group was starting to be aware of the need to re-evaluate the criteria by which it would assess the value of its activities.

d) the group was starting to assess and question its own power to initiate and implement changes in the broader Faculty.

Implications for Faculty

The key responses from members of the Faculty were that their needs were not being met in the current climate of the Faculty (even though neither the Faculty members nor the research team clearly knew or stated what these needs were), and that they seriously questioned whether the research team had the power to change anything.

Between meeting 8 and 9:

Most group members felt the need to meet in small groups, the following day, in order to debrief. This reflected the crisis stage, reached, in the group’s development.

The facilitator also perceived a need to individually consult with the team members with the following outcomes:

---9---

For contrast please compare this with the initial assumptions, page 36.
i) that no group member wanted 'to quit'.

ii) that the group development had become a higher priority than the perceived needs of the Faculty, at this point in the project.
**ACTION SPIRAL 1:**

**REFLECTION:**
Antagonism was common to all groups and the experience was contrary to expectation that the faculty groups would be appreciative of the intention and the cartoon.

**OBSERVATION:**
Team members came back reeling from the experience. The groups had been willing to listen but were very critical and it was difficult not to take the criticisms personally.

**ACTION:** Five out of six members of the research team presented the cartoon to designated small groups in the faculty.

**REVISED PLAN:**
Present cartoon to faculty

**REVISED PLAN:**
To re-evaluate the way in which team worked
ACTION SPIRAL 1:

**Plan:** present cartoon to Faculty

**Action:** 5 out of 6 did the presentations

**Observation:** reeling from the experience

antagonism
willingness to listen - good attendance at groups
very difficult not to take the criticisms personally.

**Reflection:** antagonism was common to all groups
difficult experience

experience was contrary to expectation that the Faculty groups would acknowledge the appropriateness of the cartoon and appreciate the 'good' energy behind it.

**Revised plan:** to re-evaluate the way in which the group was working and the criteria by which action would be taken and assessed.)
MEETING 9 (15/12/88)

Group process and development

The time of reflection between meetings 8 & 9 was very important and this meeting began, for the first time, with group members having moved toward commitment to the group’s development as an integral part of the task. This had been expressed individually and in small sub-groups. For the first time there was acknowledgement that the blockage in the group was due to non-resolution of conflict issues.

This acknowledgement allowed the facilitator to assume the role of guiding the group to:

‘share their insight and understanding at where the group was at and how they were feeling. This was followed by further interaction, sharing and insights on;

•how we saw ourselves operating as individuals

•how we saw each other operating in the group

•how we viewed Action Research and soft systems methodology in relation to how we have operated’ (minutes, meeting 9, Appendix 9)

A sense of cohesion prevailed.

Some of the comments made during these interactions are quoted below:

‘We have to reach a point where we can accept and give criticism to each other. We must develop competence in this area to grow as individuals, as a group and as a Faculty.’

‘We must openly debate the process. We need to be clear/explicit about our process and agendas. I have assumed you were all on a similar wavelength.’

‘In terms of our group learning process there are all sorts of things this group has not addressed. eg the clients do not see themselves as clients.’
‘At the end of the meeting we felt we had clarified a number of important issues, we had reached a deeper understanding of each other, we had cleared a few blockages, we had passed through our conflict stage, we had set up a few ground rules and now we were ready to get on with our Action Research project as a group committed to each other and to the task.’

(minutes, meeting 9, Appendix 9).

Issues

i) Research team development:

The research team had reached the point where it was able to acknowledge some of the contentious issues which had arisen during the life of the project.

For instance:

• lack of clarity of terms and language used

• assumptions of commonality of approach to and understanding of the situation

• and assumptions about who was the ‘client’.

The initial assumption was that the Dean would be the owner and the Faculty group the client. There was now growing concern that the Faculty (the supposed client) had rejected the first action step (see meeting 8, page 49) and questioned the ability of the research team to do anything. The research team, as a result, began to review the need for a client and to question whether that role was being fulfilled and if so, by whom.

Implications for Faculty

The research team was self-reflective in this meeting rather than being focused on the broader Faculty issues. Plans were made for each individual to formalise and write their own reflections on the project to date and to return to the task in the new year.
ACTION SPIRAL 2:

REFLECTION:
This was successful action which achieved the aim and produced sense of relief. Team progressed a long way toward action researching itself.

OBSERVATION:
This was appropriate and timely action. Group accepted facilitation and was able to look at internal conflict.

ACTION: At meeting #9, all participated in facilitated discussion of groups' functioning and purpose of action. Moved focus from task to group.

REVISED PLAN:
To re-evaluate the way in which the team worked.

REVISED PLAN:
Write reflections, collate & share with outside world.
Revised plan from spiral 1: to re-evaluate the way in which the group had been working and the criteria by which action would be planned and assessed.

Action: meeting 9 - all attended and participated in facilitated discussion and evaluation of group’s functioning and purpose of action. Moved from task to group.

Observation: appropriate and timely action
facilitation worked well /group responded to facilitator’s input
it was OK to look at conflict
tendency for group process to stay in diverging part of learning cycle (see discussion on Kolb’s work in Theoretical Overview p22).

Reflection: successful action / achieved aims
sense of relief - come a long way in practising being Action Researchers on ourselves.

Revised plan: write reflections, collate, and sum up and share with the outside world.

Between Meetings 9 and 10

The author and one other team member spent a few days at the beach. During this time they discussed the project, reflected on the process and outcomes to date; they tried to
"make sense" of the first nine meetings. It became apparent that the group would set a task and during the course of the discussion on that task, conflict would start to emerge between members of the research team, about personal professional practice. The group - in order to avoid this conflict - would then set itself another task. The initial task would be abandoned.

From this process of "making sense" a conceptual model was developed (see Appendix 9). The author and the other team member believed that what was occurring was a swing between a "rational self" and an "emotional self". The rational self, wanted to explore and carry out tasks, whilst the emotional self was saying "no I don't want to do that because I don't want to get into conflict with X about his personal professional practice". The author and his collaborator, decided to stage a performance which featured two characters: Emotional Ken and Rational Ken. The performance showed the swings between these two characters, and the conflicts which this caused. The performance was staged for the whole Faculty membership. There was no apparent response. (A video and tapes of this performance are available.)
**ACTION SPIRAL 3:**

**REFLECTION:**
Well received as judged by comments on the accuracy of the portrayal of faculty situation. Team reflection that resolving 'client' role was important issue. Question of whether team would be given real responsibility for change in faculty.

**OBSERVATION:**
High degree of interest on the part of the faculty members as shown by good attendance.

**ACTION:**
A dramatic presentation was made to the rest of the faculty, based on two team members' interpretation of the research meetings.

**REVISED PLAN:**
Write reflections, collate and share with outside world.

**REVISED PLAN:**
Arrange meeting with 3 Deans to discuss issues.
Revised plan: sum up and share with the world.

Action: Dramatic presentation (22.2.89) to Faculty members -video- based on two team member’s interpretation of the experiences of the nine group meetings.

Observation: high degree of interest on part of Faculty members as shown by good attendance

Reflections: well received as judged by comments on the accuracy of the portrayal of Faculty situation, informal reflection that ‘resolving client’ role was still an important issue for the group - group realised they didn’t have a client, and that a possibility was that the Deans were the groups' client, no-one came forward with suggestions about where to go from here.

Question of whether the group was in fact going to be given any responsibility (power) in changing Faculty structures.

Revised plan: to arrange meeting with the three Deans to discuss their relationship to the research team, and specifically to clarify ‘client’ role.

MEETING 10 (13/4/89)

(Note: The time lapse between the last meeting and this one, was due to the following factors: end of year assessment period, arranging the academic calendar for the following year, vacation, a postgraduate residential workshop, orientation of new undergraduate students and the heavy workload in the early part of the year.)
This meeting differed from the others. It was between the Action Research team and the two associate Deans (Academic and Resources) and the Dean (collectively referred to as the three Deans). It was seen as important, by the research team, to clarify:

1) Client role.

2) Implications for the Faculty of entry into the new University of Western Sydney.

3) The relevance of statements made, by the Deans, to a University planning symposium, concerning future objectives for the Faculty of Agriculture. These objectives were:

- Design the measures for staff accountability.

- Set in motion higher degree programs in Social Ecology and Rural Development (+ PhD Agriculture).

- Do a “function audit” - what each of us does - and compare the aggregate set with new demands. (see Appendix 15 re Leura conference).

Outcomes:

The Dean, after much discussion (see appendix 15), made the following statements:

1) That the research team takes as its brief, the development of the model to help the Faculty facilitate a process whereby the Faculty develop a process of managing change over the next three years and which will meet with the process of critically reviewing our praxis.

1) The role of the research group is to develop a process of managing change by helping the Faculty to create its own Action Researching system.

Statement one was seen, by the Dean, as urgent. This again carried the implication of the Faculty members as client and the Dean as owner.
ACTION SPIRAL 4:

REFLECTION: Research team happy with outcomes and optimistic that some action would take place.

OBSERVATION: The Deans and the research team were approaching the faculty situation from totally different perspectives.

ACTION: Meeting with the 3 Deans

REVISED PLAN:
Arrange meeting with 3 Deans to discuss issues of client and responsibility of team for faculty change.

REVISED PLAN:
Research team give brief (see footnote)

Footnote: Research team given brief to develop a model for the process of managing change within the faculty over the next three years, including processes of critical review.
Revised plan: arrange meeting with the three Deans.

Action: meeting with the three Deans (14.4.89) which covered the following areas:

a) report on the activities of the research team.

b) to receive information on the “Leura Workshop” and

c) to explore the idea that the team could work with the Faculty on these issues.

Observation: the Deans and the Research Team coming from two totally different spaces.

Reflection: Research Team pleased with outcome and optimistic that some action would take place.

Revised action plan:

i) the brief given to Research Team to develop a model to help the Faculty facilitate a process whereby the Faculty develop a process of managing change over the next three years and which will meet with the process of critically reviewing our praxis

ii) process for managing change by helping the Faculty to create its’ own Action Researching system.
MEETING 11 20th April, 1989

Group process and development

There was an air of expectancy/optimism when the group came together combined with a sense of urgency. This sense was a result of the climate of crisis - 'do or die' in the Faculty at the time (this appeared in the form of apparent pressure being bought to bear on the Faculty through the change to being a part of a new University); and the need to produce an action plan for the Faculty meeting that afternoon.

A three year plan was presented, by two members, for discussion in the research team (and possibly for debate at the Faculty meeting that afternoon.) The material was rejected by the remaining members of the research team. The meeting ended with anger being expressed and a lot of unresolved tension between group members - limited time prevented facilitative activity. The group had returned to the conflict stage of development.

Issues

i) Power

It was unclear whether the research team had any real power (responsibility) to act with authority in the process of change.

ii) Client

The client role was still unclear. The Deans had chosen to define themselves as a part of the broader Faculty body in the previous meeting, rather than as the “owners” of the situation.

This may have added to the confusion around this issue.

iii) Research team development

The proposed plan was seen by individuals within the group as a process of change, which would lead to increased pressure and workload. This view was enhanced by the sense of urgency expressed by the Dean in Meeting 10.
Implications for Faculty:

If we accept the proposition, expressed by Maturana (Efran & Lukins 1985), that we each construct our own world, then the research team was faced with dealing with 28 “Faculties of Agriculture”. This was clearly not possible.

The following conversation occurred some time after this meeting, between two members of the research team:

TUESDAY 2nd MAY 1989

‘A CONVERSATION’

A  “Glad to see you back in the building.”

B  “Yes but the feeling is a tenuous one.”

A  “Let’s get a cup of tea, sit down and talk. I’ve had 2 fears after that terrible meeting (meeting 11). One is that I would lose your friendship, and the other is a sense of failure.”

B  “Well, on the day I guess the first was a possibility in anger and pain, but not now, it would have been a shallow thing. On the second I wonder whether it’s a failure for you or me or the project. No matter - perhaps we can turn the sense of failure into possibilities.”

A  “How much does the project mean to you? Say we ended it next Friday.”

B  “I think the end would be messy with loose ends all over the place. No sense of any completion.”

A  “What else does it mean to you?”

B  “Well I want the degree badly. I guess to have a Masters from Hawkesbury is very important to me. The people here are great. I was very disappointed about that plan that David and I put forward. I mean it followed the important points of the meeting
with the Deans and the approved model. It clearly said ‘over 3 years’, only a plan to begin debate.”

A  “Well I think it was approved, the model I mean, but no one owned it, particularly the Deans or the Faculty.”

B  “I know, I had spoken to many of the Faculty members in the weeks prior to that meeting. All were complaining of stress; can’t take any more; when are we going to do something about organisation? And yet at the Faculty meeting no-one spoke. I felt hopeless and powerless, completely stripped of my facilitator interpersonal skills; bare and very very vulnerable. Seems like a sort of paralysis was present about any decision making.”

A  “I have no energy to look at the Deans’ problems. I have no energy to deal with the Faculty problems. Especially over 3 years; that is beyond me.”

B  “I think the sample (Faculty) is too big and cannot be handled.”

A  “I think to we have had 3 groups operating in the team D & K, D & S. B & R (in absentia) and O as the ‘wild card’.”

B  “Yes, I think that is true. Also we are very good at successes out there and critiquing out there, but it’s very different looking at ourselves and critiquing.”

“My project is really about Action Researching. There is no doubt that doing it internally brings out the wrinkles.”

“You know it’s normal group behaviour in my experience to be in and out of cohesion and conflict, but not quite that strong. You know I got right out of my tree, and then cut the bloody thing down. A long time since I’ve been so angry, if ever. It’s good, actually great, to have had the support and time to reflect.”

A  “This notice of meeting and the attachment what’s that about?”
B  "Well I guess we have a Client. A research team to look at a research team, not the project. There is some concern about research teams not being seen as doing the right thing back here at base."

A  "Do you mean we may look at how the Faculty views or what philosophy is involved, and so on?"

B  "Well I suspect it's a pretty big issue right now. Who knows how many Action Research projects are going on right now and how they are affecting staff and others?"

A  "Yeah well maybe I could get some energy for that."

B  "I'm prepared to do the leg work and report back to the research team for analysis and another look."

A  "Well I'll float the idea at the meeting on Friday. I think it's worthwhile and a small enough bite to digest. But I won't take ownership for it."

B  "That's OK, I'll do the leg work and the follow up etc. Report back to the research team on findings."

A  "What then do you see as change?"

B  "It's an imponderable word and I believe it's used in a fashionable way on many occasions. Change is always going on no matter how we behave. On the other hand bringing about change as a deliberate act is another very, very large issue. I wonder about commitment - whatever that means. Process, what does it mean. Six people will give you different answers, and all are right or wrong, depending who's looking at it. The same with methodologies. Everybody seems to have the right one. Use them as a tool for your purpose or my purpose and only then if they are useful. Constant modelling is unhelpful in my mind, but that's my view today; tomorrow who knows."

A  "Thanks for your time and friendship."
“OK. See you Friday, sounds like we may have a goer.”

Comments on the Conversation

This conversation was significant for a number of reasons. It was the first time that there was a realisation that the client might be the research team. Prior to this there had been a range of “clients” but it will be clear to the reader that the issue of client was far from resolved, and that many of the “clients” were not clients. The issue of critique also arose. There was a realisation that it is easy to critique “out there” but perhaps we should be looking at a critique of ourselves as a research team and as individuals. This was the beginning of the issue of personal professional practice. There was also a realisation that the “needs” of Faculty members, which we had been trying to meet, could not be seen as the needs of Faculty members collectively. Rather we were dealing with 28 Faculties of Agriculture and 28 personal sets of needs.
MEETING 12 11/5/89.

Background

Following the previous meeting, which concluded with research team members in a very high state of anger, anxiety and frustration, this meeting was called by the project facilitator to try to clarify some of the issues which had not come to consciousness at that previous meeting. At the beginning of the meeting the facilitator expressed his wish not to operate in that role (facilitator) at this meeting. The role was then taken up by one of the other Action Research team members, who then asked each member individually, what their reflections were concerning the events of the previous meeting. Each member of the team then expressed their views of the events. Some individual views expressed were:

- lack of understanding about the rejection of the proposed plan on the grounds that it ‘would turn the Faculty upside down’, when what it contained seemed to be completely in tune with ongoing Faculty organisation and philosophy.

- an acknowledged commitment to a methodology which was felt to be superior to Action Research.

- a frustration that the power hats or hierarchical structures from outside the group had not been let go so that the members of the group could equally share input and output.

- an acknowledgement that, whilst anger and frustration had been felt at the last meeting, there was now a great feeling of release. That feeling was related to a new understanding that an Action Research project could not operate without a ‘need’ being expressed explicitly by a client or client group.

- that the Action Research methodology was not clearly understood by some members of the research team.

- that the ownership and commitment to the project was not equally shared across the research team.
Group process and development:

There was an acknowledgement that there was ‘unfinished business’ to do with unresolved difficulties in the inter-personal relationships of the group. This unfinished business blocked movement on issues within the group. There was clarification of personal issues and values. There was a strong sense of cohesion in the group with members expressing, without rancour, their individual position, and understanding, in relation to the project.

Issues

The main issue was that the leadership/power struggle, between two members in particular, was acknowledged but not resolved.

Implications for Faculty:

There was widespread anxiety within the Faculty about the growing number of staff committing themselves to Action Research projects and the implications this had on the resourcing of undergraduate student programmes.
ACTION SPIRAL 5:

REFLECTION: Uncertain why process of rejection occurred. Research team inoperative for time being.

OBSERVATION: The plan for managing change drawn up by two team members was rejected by the rest of the research team. No presentation to faculty meeting.

ACTION: Two parts:
i) two members of the research team prepared a plan which they felt was in accordance with the brief  ii) stalemate in team meeting over this plan - nothing presented to faculty meeting.

REVISED PLAN:
Research team given brief from meeting with three Deans (see footnote, spiral #4) to be presented to faculty

REVISED PLAN:
Nil.
Revised plan:

i) the brief given to Research Team to develop a model to help the Faculty facilitate a process whereby the Faculty develop a process of managing change over the next three years and which will meet with the process of critically reviewing our praxis.

ii) process for managing change by helping the Faculty to create its' own Action Researching system.

Action: Two parts:

i) two members of the research team prepared a plan which they felt was in accordance with the brief given to the team at the meeting with the three Deans

ii) nothing presented to Faculty meeting as planned as a result of stalemate in the Research Team meeting 11.

Observation:

the plan was rejected

Reflection:

introduction of new material? Three groups operating in the Research Team?

Revised plan:

Nil
MEETING 13 9/6/89.

Background

This final meeting of the research team was based on an acknowledgement that there was still ‘unfinished business’ within the group, and it was set up to reflect upon the total processes of the project, including group dynamics, clarification of issues within the research team and discussion of issues thought (by the team) to be of relevance to the Faculty. Four hours were set aside for this ‘final flutter’ to celebrate the end of the project. There was a high degree of commitment to meet and analyse what had transpired. Motivation to resolve the issues was also a result of the need to reaffirm strong personal ties and a recognition that the conflict itself was significant at some deep level. There was a strong need to make sense of what had often been a difficult experience through this process of reflection, and especially a need to bring to consciousness an understanding of what the conflicts had been about.

What happened

The group, at the outset of the meeting, adopted a structure to work through the unfinished business. This structure divided the meeting into three separate activities, with time at the end to discuss the conclusions arising from them. The three activities were:

i) a description, by each individual, of what had been the initial assumptions and expectations of the task of the research team.

ii) a description by each individual of their perception of ‘what happened?’

iii) a description of what each individual saw as the outcomes.

As a result of these individual activities, the group moved to a deeper level of understanding of themselves and of each other, acknowledging the different attributes they each brought to the research team and celebrating these differences.

“Would you please tell me which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to”, said the cat.
"I don't much care where, so long as I get somewhere", said Alice.

"Oh! You're sure to do that", said the cat, "if you only walk long enough." (Alice in Wonderland. Lewis Carroll.)

The map of the journey at the start, had established the route to be taken, but not the complex and unexplained nature of the terrain to be traversed along the way. There was a sense that the members of the group had indeed walked long enough and had completed a journey.

Finally, at this meeting, the group experienced the interdependent stage of group activity. It is a stage where the group members believe in each other and believe in what they are doing as a group. From the beginning the phrase 'critical community' was used occasionally and with reference to the fact that self-critique may become an essential part of the process and may be painful. The long, slow process that began in this first meeting ended with the development of a self-critical community in this final session.

**Why the Meetings Ended**

The meetings were ended at this point, for a number of reasons, and it is worth exploring these reasons, for the insight they offer to the nature of Action research.

Meetings 1 to five were largely information giving and receiving concerning methodologies to be explored during the course of the research project. The action research mode used at this stage was largely technical where criteria were set and not seriously questioned. The group activities were largely confined to the dependency stage of group development.

Meetings 6 to 12 became involved in questioning criteria an the methodology; belief and value systems of group members were constantly challenged. The leadership issue became an important element together with action steps taken. These action steps reflected the pressure for action from the faculty membership operating from outside the group, together with a feeling inside the group that something ought to be done. These pressures for action plus the challenges to belief and value systems which questioned current practices of group members moved the group into a phase of questioning criteria. This led to conflict struggles
and the practical mode of action research. The group moved from conflict to cohesion and back to conflict many times during this process. Tasks were set by the group and action taken (see cartoon and group action in meeting no 7).

Pursuance of tasks continued until meeting No 11, with the three Deans. Although there had been instances of the group looking at themselves and their practices up to this stage in the project, the real insight that the process concerned research into the professional practice of the practitioners became very clear at this point. The final meetings were concerned with the exploration of the needs of the group in detail. This was the beginning of the emancipatory mode of action research and the interdependent stage in group development. Meeting 14 was called by group members to explore the feeling of unfinished business and finalise the interpersonal relationship struggle which had been in action for, in particular the meetings following meeting 5.

It is difficult to describe the feeling at the conclusion of that meeting. It was a sense of complete trust and good will, acceptance of each other as worthwhile contributors and respect for that contribution, an ability to celebrate differences without feeling the need for individuals to be adamant about a personal point of view.

Why did the research group stop meeting at this point, when emancipation had been achieved? The answer may be complex and difficult to answer in a black and white analytical way. The nature of Action Research is such that such evidence is difficult to assess or produce. However the research group had reached its own conclusions, they felt that the final task had been completed. Had a specific need now been expressed for group action, then because of the freedom of expression available on difficult issues, that task would probably have been approached in a vigorous and effective way.

Major changes occurred within the Faculty of Agriculture structure soon after the project had finished, and the learning of the research team and the influence of research team members in contacts with the broader faculty membership could be seen as influences operating for change within the faculty.

Action Research is centred around the exploration of the personal professional practice of practitioners: that learning can be expanded to other practitioners and groups by contact in their professional practice. In light of this the author interviewed research team members and asked the following question:
What was your learning from the research team and the work we did?

The following excerpts have been taken verbatim from the taped interviews.

1. The growth of the group.

"I have used the ideas a number of times in other groups. The group needs to reach a stage where you can say responsibly where you are coming from and express concerns and openly air things. I have also learned there is some discipline needed about that. I am more conscious of the hats I am wearing, and I have learned more control over myself, and more freedom, both control and freedom together. The group needs to grow to a stage to work together not just play games, when things are not going well, just sitting and not saying that things are not going well. It happened to me last week. It was clear the group was not going well and not meeting the needs of the group. So we took stock and talked about what were the issues and how we could go about clarifying. This project has been very different in that we were our own clients even though we pretended it was someone else. We were a microcosm of the faculty which gave the project its unique nature. We had to clear the relationships before we could do anything. In this project the relationships had to be cleared in other projects they don’t and I wouldn’t waste time doing it, but maybe it becomes necessary to do that at the right time. We were a group of practitioners with strong agendas and we were not going to conform to anything or anyone. None of us could facilitate easily although we tried. If we did it again would anyone take a different role or having been through that learning now and stick us into another group or with six other members in the faculty would we do it again differently, that will be test of our learning.

The client for me is a very important concept, the client gives context, boundary, focus and meaning in a world of unknowns, but it doesn’t have to be sorted out immediately. If the client is clear from day one it gives an immediate focus and is a great advantage. I see all projects as different, this project was a sea of possible clients, and because of this was much more complex. We need in the faculty now an Action Research workshop with an agenda about who it is for, what its purpose is, what we want to achieve and how we might get there.
As a result of this project I tend to look at the human activity system first, rather than the hard fact system, encouraging people to look at their own situations. I believe what we have experienced will change the relationships in the faculty."

2. Learning.

"I have come to believe my learning comes from people rather than causes, but rather being involved and reflecting on that involvement. I need to be more up front about the way I communicate and how I learn. I operate at different layers, mostly superficial. I need to look at the way I operate with others."

3. The ability to facilitate change.

"I was very clear about what I’d learnt before the last meeting, so I used that meeting to express what I’d learned. My learning was centred around my expectations in the first place which were impossible to achieve. Namely us being a group to facilitate change in “the faculty” an impossible task."

“During the course of the meetings I realised what the benefits and learning were for me and those learning benefits as a list would be: What it meant to work with a client and what it meant to establish a client and when do you know you can put that label on someone. If that person is the client then what am I, and then that whole relationship became very clear. We believed we could turn the faculty into being the client, that we could pinpoint an underlying need even if it hadn’t been expressed clearly. That we could turn it into an overt need and then satisfy that need. It was very clear when we took the code of practice to the faculty they didn’t want to be a client on that task they had all sorts of other things which were paramount. You can’t create a client. I would be very careful about putting that label on anyone, I have a very clear criteria now about what constitutes a client and clear about my role. I can only ever help that person meet their needs. You can’t impose (either subtly or overtly) change on anyone. The other person needs to know what they want to get beforehand. The insights have affected me in talking to students. I have to be very clear what their needs are. Sometimes help them be clearer about their needs and then I can make a very clear decision as to whether I want to be part of the facilitation of fulfilling those needs for them. I see now the faculty has no needs at all only the individuals within the faculty have the needs. Intervening to help the
faculty - I don’t subscribe to that idea in the same way as I did. The first loop of the action research spiral is helping people express their needs and say what’s on their mind.”

4. Relationships.

“The thing that really struck me was the issue of relationships. It has become clear that this is what we are on about in this faculty. In the past the emphasis it’s been on specifics, specific modes and situation components. Agriculture has been centred on the crop, stock, pastures. Whereas now I believe the emphasis needs to be on relationships between the farmers and crop and pasture and animal, a wholeness. We need to concentrate on the link between rather than the components. This project really brought home to me the issue of power and authority, and the significance of my role in the faculty as seen by members of the research group. I acknowledge that learning systems are important, but behind that seems to be a system to be developed to learn about the importance of power together with relationships and perhaps that is the next step for the faculty.”

5. The human aspect.

“I have learned a great deal about Action Research and the soft systems approach which because of my position I haven’t had the opportunity to learn before. I have learnt a great deal about interpersonal relationships from people who I thought were experts. I didn’t expect the experience to be so painful and how important real relationships are. I thought we would develop a plan to keep the faculty going ahead and put that plan to faculty for debate and that didn’t happen. The reason I think was that members of the group had different needs. The two pathways developed in the one to do something constructive the other to explore hindrances in human relationships which were stopping progress. I didn’t know which way to turn. We can tell people forever to pull together and it won’t happen from the outside influence it must happen from within people when they feel informed. When management involve the membership in planning and they feel involved and part of the planning through information giving. We talk about biological science being important here, I ask who is the client, who is the owner in fact who wants it.”
“I have learned technically about the methodologies, and I have learned the human aspect that comes into any organisation in any action and the complexity of the human interactions. I used to think we are here to work and produce but now I think the human aspect of work is far more important than I ever thought.”

The above excerpts are from taped interviews with the research team four weeks after the final meeting. Reflections from the final meeting were sent to group members prior to the interviews. It is important to note that each individual member experienced different learning.
7. DISCUSSION OF THEMES AND OUTCOMES

7.1 Activities of an Action Research Team: Group Process as an Integral Part of Action Research

7.1.1 Introduction

The data which was collected in this project, was qualitative. This necessitated treating it in a way that was sympathetic to its style and form. To make definitive statements about this data would be out of context with the data and in conflict with the author’s view of the Action Research methodology (and human systems) as dynamic and indefinite. The nature of Action Research is that whilst you can understand it as a set of theoretical ideas, and even as a set of conceptual “action” steps, you cannot know how you should act in any given project, nor what the outcomes might be.

The themes and outcomes detailed in this section are the product of this project. They are meanings ascribed by the author. They represent his view of the world. The themes mentioned below, may arise for others, in other projects. The meanings they would bring to them however would undoubtedly be different.

7.1.2 The Stages of Group Development and Their Relationship to the Three Modes of Action Research

Section 3 discusses both the four stages of group development (dependency, conflict, cohesion, interdependency) and the three modes of Action Research (Technical, Practical, Emancipatory). One of the clear outcomes of this project was the development of an understanding of the link between the two (ie the stages of group development and the modes of Action Research).

The Dependency stage of group development is often referred to as “information giving”. Group members share information at a surface level; they are concerned about technicalities. Similarly Technical Action Research is concerned with a set of criteria, a specific task. It is clearly involved with the sharing of information. Thus the two areas are similar and
suited to each other. Technical Action Research has little need of the issues associated with group process. Likewise in the dependency stage, a group has not yet openly addressed the issues of process. The concern is with the task at hand, with the function of the group, with substance.

In this project the group came together with a set of criteria, to look at the unease in the Faculty. These criteria and the task were not questioned in the early stage; the Dependency stage. Information was traded concerning methodologies, and a willingness to cooperate was present (see appendices 1 & 2 for Meetings 1&2). When the group had run to the end of information trading (dependency), it was faced with the options of either ceasing to exist at the social and cognitive interaction stage or of addressing the affective issues which began to emerge. The emergence of these issues was a sign of the beginning of the conflict stage and marked the shift to Practical Action Research. Criteria began to be questioned and conflict arose. From conflict it was natural for the group to move to the cohesion stage, as agreement was reached, and thence back to conflict as further questioning took place. This stage was the most protracted. Emphasis shifted from substance (what) to process (how). The emotional area of group interaction came into focus. Through this process group members developed a deepening awareness and acceptance of the differing views held by other group members and others in general. They developed an awareness that the authentic knowledge of the individual and the contribution of that knowledge was an important part of the group process. Difference was accepted, validated and even celebrated. This marked the shift to the interdependency stage of group development. It also denoted a shift to Emancipatory Action Research, where the focus moved beyond the direct concerns of the project to embrace the self critique of personal professional practice and belief and value systems. The personal became paramount, rather than the practical or concrete.

What became clear in this project was that there is a clear link between particular modes of Action Research and particular stages of group development. The author would like to go further and stress the importance of an understanding of group dynamics, to the conduct of Action Research. This was clearly demonstrated in this project. Interestingly Lewin in his 1946 paper on Action Research describes just this link in his triangle model as research, action, and training in interpersonal relationship skills. (Lewin 1946).
7.1.3 Beginning the Research

Because of the perceived “unease or messy” situation that existed in the Faculty at the beginning of the research enquiry, the research group activities were very difficult. There were questions like:

1. Where do we start?

2. What is the purpose of the enquiry?

3. Do we need a facilitator?

4. How do we operate within the research team?

Whether a specific issue is on the agenda or whether just a feeling of unease exists, there is the same requirement to spend time trying to clarify the agenda of the group. On the one hand a specific issue may not, upon research, be the real issue at all. On the other, where the issue only bears the feeling of unease, the real issue is also unknown. Either way the research group may meet with a set agenda but group members should retain an open mind. This is in line with the philosophy of Action Research and systems thinking which holds that it is important to remain divergent, at least in the early stages of the research.

However prior to the first meeting of this project the individual members had engaged in some way and had some individual conceptual insight into what the issue was. Therefore:

- A group of researchers were meeting as a group with an issue which was unknown. (The team were aware that unease existed, but did not know what the underlying issues were.)

- Each member was bringing with him or her a conceptual model of what that issue might be.

For example, the individuals that constituted the research team in the current study were:

- Associate Dean Academic
The complexity of the group, in retrospect is obvious. All were highly skilled very intelligent people who were there because of their drive and sense of purpose in their own professional direction and for the Faculty - all were leaders in their particular activity. They brought with them their own power, their own beliefs and conceptual models of the perceived issues for action and the method to be used to approach the research question. In regard to this, some of the team members were used to working with Checkland’s soft-systems approach (Checkland 1984). Other team members were familiar with the approach to Action Research developed by the School of Education at Deakin University, Melbourne.

This was a cross section of the Faculty bringing to the research group the “hats” they wear at Faculty level and their own belief systems at an individual level. The events were already in train for a complex human activity.

The research group in this project had great difficulty dealing with issues which involved conflict - internally, as individuals, and confrontation externally, within the group. The early meetings were fraught with anxiety, frustration, and a sense of non-achievement. This in turn meant that the issues which the group would work on, remained unclear and ill defined. Adding to the complexity was the different operating modes (in terms of the Kolb model of learning) within the group.

### 7.1.4 Individual versus group consciousness

The facilitator was very much an accommodator a doer wanting decisive action. Others tended to be conceptualisers; they saw a task as presenting another conceptual model. All the different approaches were valid but also added to the significance of the complexity within which the researchers worked. Decisions were taken that the researching group needed to work on the hidden agendas, freeing up the minds, before open discussion could take place. At times the group was on the verge of collapse and many meetings were left
with feelings of useless time-wasting effort. Upon reflection there were three sub groups operating within the research group. These stemmed from prior social and professional groupings. This meant that factions existed within the group, and these factions were preexistent; their existence had little to do with the tasks or dynamics of the group. They did however, have an enormous impact on the dynamics of the group.

A one hour role play by two of the group showing the alternating emotional and rational sides of the group’s activities was presented to the whole Faculty. One person acted as the “emotional” part of the groups activities and the other as the “rational” part of the groups activities.

The reason for this activity was to show what the researchers had been doing. Expectations of Faculty members seemed to hinge around the researchers presenting a magic formula for their problems. These problems were never clearly stated by the Faculty, but the researchers were asked when they were going to do something? The results were non conclusive even after an impassioned address from the project owner/facilitator, suggesting the Faculty members were the ones who were aware of an issue or issues but somehow could not express these. There was a sort of paralysis about decision making and this was in a Faculty whose learning philosophy was experientially based. Somehow the freedom to express the issues was not present. The author believes that experiential learning, must have as its first step an experience or experiences (Kolb 1989 pers comm.). Learning cannot happen without experience. It seems strange therefore that Faculty members, do not always act to experience. They do not seem to always be actively seeking out experiences and therefore seem to, at times, act at odds with their philosophy.

7.1.5 Power:

The issue of power has been a critical part of this research project. Defining where the decision making power lay and when the power ‘hats’ could be discarded in favour of the welfare of the community was a difficult issue. In Action Research, the author would argue that the power issue needs to be recognised and worked with to reach an understanding of where the power lies and what influence that power may exert on the Action Research outcomes. Unless this issue is clarified as the study progresses then the research team instead of being empowered may find itself powerless.
Many Action Research projects are centred around organisations, institutions and communities and in all instances the issue of power is endemic to those institutions. The soft systems methodology espoused by Checkland (1984) hinges on the seat of power. The client with whom that methodology deals is often the boss who may stipulate the area in which to work. The issue of the power base is clearly defined and recognised. Indeed Jackson believes that far from being a model for radical change, soft systems methodology maintains and enhances the status quo:

The methodology therefore merely facilitates a social process in which the essential elements of the status quo are reproduced - perhaps on a firmer footing since “differences of opinion” will have been eradicated. In doing so it supports the interests of the dominant group or groups in the social system. (Jackson 1982).

Lewin also espouses the importance of recognising where the power lies (Lewin 1946). The giving away of power is seen as appropriate (as a reward) in certain circumstances by those who hold it. It may also be taken back when that action is seen as appropriate by those who have the power (by status). The recognition by the Research Team of where the power lay was important. The recognition allowed the issue to be clarified as the research progressed.

The act of empowerment of individuals in a “community”, by those in power, is an ingredient which can allow changes in practice to occur. Empowerment comes from a feeling of being able to act. In this project, feelings of empowerment altered during the course of the research. In meeting one there was an overwhelming feeling of power and personal empowerment, shown in statements made by group members, about the group’s ability to act. By meeting five it had become clear that there were serious difficulties for the group in taking action, particularly in terms of the initial terms of reference. Statements of group members expressed frustration and anxiety and feelings of being powerless to act. By meeting thirteen group members again felt empowered, however this time the feeling of empowerment came from “within” rather than as a result of external “giving” of power. This resulted from altered awareness of themselves, their roles and the nature of their institutional power. They had had the freedom to review and explore their personal professional practice, and to reassess where they stood in terms of the institution and the “power hats” within it.
If we see an essential part of the underlying nature of Action Research, as being the review and alteration of personal professional practice, then power is inherent to the practice of Action Research. People do not make changes because they are told to (by an external power); people change, because of their internal feelings of empowerment (or otherwise) and how this relates to the way they see their world and themselves in it. All individuals have a power base and change will only occur if they feel empowered by change and not disempowered.

7.2 Issues arising from the methodology

7.2.1 Complexity of human systems in Action Research

The steps of the Action Research spiral can be misleading in their apparent simplicity. There are complex human systems which evolve around Action Research activities. The method of Action Research could well subside under the pressure of the human systems which come forward. The method requires effective communication between the members of the research team, and in studies such as this one, with the broader organisation as well. The practitioner needs to be experienced in the social sciences if the research undertaken is to produce ‘situation improvement’. Even when the issues seem to be attainable and reasonable at this point, there needs to be great interpersonal skill in handling the hard bargaining and hard decision making that are necessary if there is to be follow through to situation change.

The improvement of practice at the three levels - practice itself, understanding of the practice and improvement of the situation- (section 4.2 page 27) is an incredibly complex achievement, especially when combined with involvement. There are many ethical questions raised in such activities.

What does ‘improve’ mean? For whom will the improvement be and for what purpose? These issues are often clarified only in the process of the research, rather than at the outset.

Enlightenments and insights are not a state of mind. They are part of the incremental continuous struggle with the complexity of human systems. Action Research seems to immediately contribute to the struggle to overcome inequality and irrationality (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988, p.5)
In addition it is important to realise that the complexity of human systems precludes the possibility of an Action Researcher making statements of “universal truth”. This has benefits for users of Action Research. Far from being a drawback it characterises Action Research as part of a continuing exploration.

The themes and outcomes, in this section, arose for the author, through patterns of recurring action and meaning in the project. They can best be seen as a combination of questioning and challenge, by the author, to accepted wisdom (both implicit and explicit) in Action Research. Some of the themes raise new issues for consideration by Action Researchers.

7.2.2. Short term versus long term

The struggles through the dynamics of Action Research are worthwhile if the real issues are to surface. The “real” issues are the ones which just keep surfacing, the ones which just won’t go away and indeed the ones which prove most difficult to deal with. They seem to be present in the subconscious, and the struggles of Action Research bring them forcibly to the surface (conscious). Many false trails can be explored which may seem productive superficially but not reach real issues for further action. Action Research seems a more appropriate tool for achieving long-term objectives, rather than for pursuing quick-fire action. This view is integrally linked to the author’s view of the importance of group dynamics in the Action Research process. The development of a fully functional group is an extended and iterative process. It is a necessary process if the issues being faced by the Action Research team are to be successfully addressed.

The hypothesis evolving here then, is that Action Research is a long term rather than a short term activity. The theory of Action Research presented by Kemmis and McTaggart (op cit) in the Action Research Planner tends to look to future practices in education rather than a quick run through the methodology. Perhaps with a group already constituted as such, and having experienced the steps of group development, Action Research could be gone through quickly.

7.2.3. The role of the facilitator

The facilitator may be the person who has moved to make the intervention or has been invited by others to assist in the change process. Irrespective of the way the facilitator
becomes involved in an Action Research project, this role of catalyst/facilitator is an important one.

The facilitator in this role needs to have ‘people skills’ (Bolton 1979) developed to a high degree. The facilitator must be a person who can stand back and view the process going on without becoming too involved in the content of the dialogue. This is particularly important in the early stages of the research; the practical mode (conflict), which can be the phase in which changes are made to the area of research. It is in this conflict stage that the “task at hand” is subjected to scrutiny and in which the task at hand may alter.

The facilitator may act as the group leader and develop a research team around the situation to be improved. The value of the research team having a high stake in, or ownership of, the outcome of the research is very important in obtaining commitment to the research. Many are unfamiliar with small group process, often being more familiar with hierarchical committee-type structures. A gentle approach to group work may be necessary.

The facilitator may develop the research team within a community and may eventually leave the project before its completion. In this case it is important to set up a nucleus organisation which can carry on when the researcher leaves. Much research is directed at gathering information about a community and then leaving the community uninvolved and unchanged when it departs. The community may then become justifiably cynical and possibly in a worse situation than before the research. The ethical questions here are extremely important. In this case the majority of the Research Team were members of the “community”, the author was only a part of the Research Team, which had a life and impetus of its own. The wider community were kept informed and given the opportunity to participate and collaborate. It was not a situation of “gather information and then leave”, rather the research was an integral part of the activities of the community.

The author has had personal experience of such a situation. During the early stages of the author’s Masters studies, he visited an aboriginal community in north western NSW. Speaking with elders of the community, he was told that many university researchers, studying for higher degrees, came to the community. They asked for information and access to the community, saying that the outcome of the research would be beneficial for the community. However, the elders felt that they never received any benefit from such research and viewed the whole process with a high level of cynicism.
7.2.4 The client role

In the early stages of this project the issue of client as viewed in the soft systems methodology and in Action Research was clouded. Whilst sometimes the client role is clear in Action Research on other occasions the role is very complex and a very flexible approach is necessary. An immediate determination of ‘client’ may not be apparent at the start of a project and may only become clear as the study proceeds. There can be genuine difficulties that arise from people seeing the same situation in genuinely different ways.

Each of us looks at, and interprets, the world through a kind of personal prism which refracts the light of experience and gives us a unique picture of ‘reality’. This prism is clearly very complex, but it includes two kinds of beliefs: beliefs about what is and beliefs about what ought to be. The first sort are really about facts and what we take to be true. The second sort of beliefs are often called ‘values’ and are really beliefs about what is ‘right and proper’, good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate, and so on. (Naughton, 1986, p.11)

These beliefs are always present and can lead the project down many false trails in the process and progress of the study. This can be applied to the client role and this project was sometimes embedded in the murky waters of determination in trying to find the client, taking much time and effort and causing anxiety and frustration. Diversion from the task at hand was experienced in trying to fit a label, called ‘the client’. Where the client is not clear at the outset, then flexibility in the thinking of the research team is important to allow the client to emerge and even for the role to change during the study in the light of knowledge gained during that time. Changes occur rapidly and so may the client role.

In the soft systems approach, developed by Checkland:

The analyst researcher needs to be clear about three roles and a clear distinction between them. They are:-

• The Client

• The problem solver

• The problem owner.
In “hard” systems, analysis seldom present problems. But in soft systems analysis they may be separated in the following way. The client is the person who causes the study to happen in the first place. Without the client there would be no systems study. The problem solver is someone who hopes to do something about the situation which is perceived to be problematical. This could be the client but may not necessarily be. The problem owner could be a variety of different people in the situation. In many soft systems studies one should at some stage experiment by allocating this role to a number of different people or groups. (Naughton 1986 p19)

There are two distinct kinds of client being discussed here. This was an area of concern for the Research Team. Firstly there is the “client” represented in Checkland’s CATWOE (1984). This client is a notional or conceptual client; if the underlying Weltanschauung alters, then the client role will alter. Thus the client and indeed the whole CATWOE analysis, are simply a way of developing a vehicle, which in turn is the thing which carries the process - the real thing which we want to create. The other “client” is the concrete one; the one who you can do something for or sell something to. This is not so much a conceptual role as the person or group who a Research Team see themselves working for. They could be called the beneficiary(ies). The Research Team in this project made a clear decision, in the early stages of the project, to reject the conceptual client as exemplified by Checkland, and to strive to contract a concrete client. This client was variously the Faculty membership, the Deans and finally the Research Team itself.

Whilst on the one hand the methodology suggests that the three roles of client, problem solver, owner should be clear, on the other, some experimentation should be made at stages through the study. There appears to be a paradox here which shows a difficulty in operating with soft systems methodology. The project under consideration found this apparent paradox very real in action. During the research, a client was deemed to have been found on several occasions. For instance the Deans of the Faculty, the membership of the Faculty, and the true clients who turned out to be the members of the research team themselves!

To clarify the client dilemma the project leader interviewed all members of the research team to get an understanding of their personal views from their experience both inside and outside the research team. The following excerpts from these researchers will help clarify some of the problems associated with the client role in Action Research and with soft systems methodology.
"We were our own clients although we were pretending it was someone else, we were researching on ourselves, a real microcosm of the Faculty which gave the project a unique nature" (Gamble, pers. comm., 1989)

"The client for me is a very important concept. The client gives context, boundary focus, from a world of unknowns, but it doesn’t have to be sorted out immediately or at the beginning" (Gamble, pers. comm., 1989)

The recognition that the research team became its own client and the individuals within the team became individual clients of each other, reinforces the theory that the client issue is an important one. It needs to be constantly kept in mind when operating the research project, even though the role of client may have been made clear in the first instance. The changing moods and trails the project takes need a flexible base to accommodate the possibility of the client changing.

Another member of the research team commented that his own personal learning from the research project was in this area of ‘client’:

• what it meant to work with a client

• what it meant to establish a client

• when do you know you can put that label on someone

• what is my role as an outsider.

The relationship became very clear, partly through the mistake in the first place that the Faculty could be turned into the client, that the research team could pinpoint an underlying need, even if it hadn’t been expressed clearly. We could turn it into an overt need and satisfy that need.

At the moment that the Faculty was presented with the Code of Practice notion (see appendix 8) it became very clear that the Faculty didn’t want to be the client on that task.
They had other things which were paramount, so that reinforced the notion that you can’t just create a client. The only way to help someone is if they say I’m in need and you seem to be the person who can help me fulfil my need. The ambivalence about the client role is now very clear. Great care needs to be exercised putting that label on anyone. “ (Russell, pers. comm., 1989)

He went on to say:

“The other person needs to know what they want to get beforehand. The role of the outsider or researcher or facilitator is clear because you are helping that person meet their needs, not the researchers needs, unless the activity for that person is to get a research project completed, or if my need matches the other persons need. If the client role is clear at the start, then any need to change the client becomes a new project. It is not a movement of client change but a movement in project change.” (Russell, pers. comm., 1989)

7.2.5. Setting boundaries around Action Research:

In the experience of this project the sample used for study needed to be small enough for the issues which emerged to be explored without those issues becoming engulfed by the breadth, size and diversity of the visions held by the sample. Yet the sample needed to be broad enough to explore the issues that become obvious through the research project. Action Research provides the vehicle for issues (the issues of the practitioners centred on the task) to be explored, revised and perhaps resolved in a cyclical fashion. In selecting the Action Research project and in selecting the research team attention needs to be paid to ensuring that the sample is in fact digestible, in terms of purpose, clarity, resources, time, and the possible complexity of human systems. It is sometimes not possible to arrive at decisions about these issues, except through the experiences of the project. This project contains examples of just such difficulties. The problem can however be minimised by careful attention to this area of concern, early in the life of the project.

If the needs of a group are clear and have a common focus then Action Research can be used as an effective measure to undertake projects. When it is used to look at a huge situation with the expectation and assumption that such a large situation can be improved
as a whole, then the outcomes may become clouded with difficulties of client and ownership issues. It is not impossible to work through these difficulties, but the issues for improvement may take longer to become clear.

The initial title of this project was “looking at agricultural education, professional development of staff and man management within the Faculty of Agriculture at Hawkesbury Agricultural College”. This developed after consideration was given to “Agricultural Education in NSW”, a global concept. The issues which have now become clear are confined to researching the activities of the research team and the values and issues which surround that. The brief given was reduced to a manageable sample. The vision of somehow conquering the world is an unreal view of the world but a very difficult concept to dispense with. The boundaries can only be set through experiencing the struggle with the complexity of the issues, and moving toward a digestible sample. The researchers having clarified the issues can go out, for instance as agricultural and rural development practitioners, with the hope that their insights will, through shared experience, become part of others’ practice.

7.2.6. What is action in Action Research?

Action is an integral part of Action Research. Action is a concept which is culturally embedded. It most often means some sort of physical movement. It involves the notion of doing as opposed to being a passive receiver.

In the context of this project we need to break with this cultural definition of action. The original assumptions and perceptions (see page 36) of the Action Research team were based on the ability of the team to bring about change within the Faculty. This stemmed from the definition of action as doing. This concept was tightly held within the Research team until at least meeting 8 (see particularly page 49 ff). This was evident from the way language was used to describe methodology, goals and possible outcomes.

Action needs to be consistent with the issues raised. Again, culturally, the issues Western society has believed, have tended to be concrete and thus our definition of action as doing. This project came finally to define the issues as ones of the Research Team’s attitudes, beliefs and value systems. For instance the Research Team made an initial assumption that accountability and responsibility of Faculty members were key issues. The assumption which accompanied this was that the team would act to change the management and organisational structures of the Faculty. As the project developed, attention was focused
on the interpersonal relationships and group dynamics of the team. The three elements of group dynamics - social, cognitive and affective - were explored. As this happened, issues, such as accountability, were explored and resolved at a personal level. Team members could explore their personal professional practice, in relation to their needs. These needs included a resolution of the issues of accountability. To be accountable met team members personal needs.

Thus action becomes synonymous with an exploration of personal, interpersonal and group issues.

7.2.7. Communication within the Action Research team

Communication does not exist as an entity for itself. We communicate for something. Thus communication in this project is linked with and is fundamental to the stages in group development (see Section 7 particularly Page 86). During each stage in group development you can trace a corresponding style of communication. In the latter part of this project communication reached a point where it was often non-verbal, non-threatening, statements of feeling. This is consistent with the proposition (see page 93) that beliefs, value systems and attitudes became the real focus of the group.

There was a shift from the communication, of individual’s strongly held value systems, to the communication of and acceptance of the varying value systems of individual researchers. This needs to be understood as an acceptance of the validity though not necessarily the personal desirability of a certain value system or set of beliefs. It appears impossible to separate communication from Action Research.
8.0 Wider Ramifications For Action Research

8.1 Challenges facing Action Research Teams

The challenges and issues facing social scientists as they move into the so-called ‘fourth generation’ of Action Research (McTaggart and Garbutcheon-Singh, 1988) bear great similarity to those faced by Action Research teams who are working in a way that maintains Action Research’s essential epistemological nature. That is that work with ‘the formation and extension of critical theorems and the development of theoretically informed practice through personal but shared engagement in the struggle to change.’ (ibid., p.410)

In the struggle to change many challenges will present themselves to the members of any Action Research team. In the current study, many of these struggles can be seen to run parallel with current issues from the ‘fourth generation’ (op cit). They arise from inherent characteristics of Action Research (for example, the use of a research tool that problematises values; the likelihood that a group meeting with shared commitment and concern for ‘improvement’ will be identified as an ‘out group’ within an organisation). These issues were very real to the Action Research team in the current study and it is worth discussing some of them in detail in this context.

8.1.1 Mature autonomy

In Action Research where the substance of enquiry is personal practice in the context of collaborative action (ibid., p.413), then one of the key issues for the research team will be the development of ‘mature autonomy’ (Habermas, 1972). Autonomy has been an important concept in some Action Research studies, particularly in the education field, where individual practitioners are seen to explore and transform their own practice, sometimes in hostile social environments. Yet autonomy must be balanced by a sense of responsibility to the broader context and, more specifically, by a commitment to extend the influence and understanding of the Action Research group as it develops.

The phrase ‘unity with diversity’ is one that was raised many times within the current Action Research team, and in this context bears a close relationship to the notion of mature autonomy. The implementation of professional practice in a way that reflected this idea was seen by team members as being very important to growth of both the Faculty and staff
within the Faculty. In the effort to develop plans for the broader Faculty which were in line with mature autonomy the research team itself had to first grapple with what this meant to each individual and what it meant to the team collectively.

### 8.1.2 Liberal discourse

In our ‘naming’ of the world, we inevitably express something to do with the ‘concrete facts’ of a situation and something of our perception of these facts. In Freire’s view, the concrete reality consists not only of concrete facts and (physical) things, but also includes the ways in which the people involved with these facts perceive them. It’s the connection between subjectivity and objectivity. (Freire, 1972) It is important to realise that another’s similar naming has the potential to embody a completely different world view. Further to this is the notion that the new ‘naming of the world’ may in fact constitute personal or collective liberation. In Action Research activities, it is important to recognise this potential for language to both transform consciousness and to prevent such a transformation.

Establishing shared meaning around the language and concepts used within the context of Action Research was an important process in the current study. Terms used needed to be explained and understood at the outset of the research study and continually clarified as the study progressed so that clarity remained.

Underlying this statement is the potential, very strongly realised in this study, that the ‘very elasticity of liberal discourse may be powerful in opening issues within groups, and (may) create opportunities for critique, raising the possibility for transformation of consciousness.’ (McTaggart and Garbutcheon-Singh, 1988 p411)

This transformation occurs within each individual and many different concepts may develop. It is important that these transformations are monitored, along with a commitment to mature autonomy. Only then can clarity in the purpose of the research activity be maintained and explored throughout the study.

In this study, the importance of liberal discourse was apparent when a conceptual model of the first eight meetings was presented by two members of the team, and issues raised therein remained unresolved. This led to a pendulum-like swinging from one concept to another, which at the time seemed counter productive. It is possible to interpret this experience in different ways. It may be that it inhibited the group from forward movement.
On the other hand, the research group may not have been ready to move forward in growth (transformation) and perhaps the struggle with the dilemmas may have promoted transformation in the long run.

8.1.3 Defining the research question

This project (as previously explained) began by looking at agricultural education, professional development of staff, and human resource management within the Faculty of Agriculture at the Hawkesbury Agricultural College. This initial charter was a global concept. One of the critical issues which has since been teased out of this global concept is that of researching the research team, and examining the values and issues that arise in that process.

“Action Researchers must conduct Action Research into the practice of Action Research just as they conduct Action Research into their educational (and social) practice” (McTaggart and Garbutcheon Singh, 1988, p.414).

8.1.4 Belief systems or ‘problematising values’.

Belief systems are constantly under challenge in the real world of the individual and in the world of researchers working within or outside the group. When a belief is challenged the defence mechanisms leap forward. This phenomenon very often complicates the original issue and can divert the group from the critical review of its activities and from the researchers’ business.

An emancipatory freedom can be evolved if the belief systems could be transcribed to a point of view which could lead to collaborative action within the researcher’s activities. The desperate hanging on to belief systems seems to preclude the movement toward another way of thinking. The road can become very bumpy and rough, causing much backtracking and resurfacing of the new highway. To bring these unconscious barriers to consciousness and then to act upon this new consciousness is a big action step in itself and it is worth pursuing the extreme discipline needed to help achieve this self critical reflection.

The belief system can be seen in the conceptual model described in appendix 9. Belief systems caused the constant movement of the researchers from one issue to another without resolution. Establishing points of view may have allowed freer movement in the deliberations.
8.2 Institutions and Action Research.

This project is concerned with the development of community within the Faculty of Agriculture and follows McIntyre’s (1981) definition which broadly discusses the areas with which Action Research deals; social systems which involve human beings, communities, and institutions. He has expressed certain limitations for Action Research as it applies to institutions, and yet the world is full of institutions and organisations. Therefore it is appropriate and important that discussion and dialogue take place to evaluate the possibilities of Action Research within institutions and organisations.

Bureaucratic systems are endemic in institutions; routines are the institutional norm, both in structure and organisation. Hierarchical systems prevail, and working groups are often formed and maintained around the preservation of the existing social relationships. These social relationships may serve many different purposes, such as upholding and maintaining the power structure (McTaggart & Garbutcheon-Singh 1988).

Potential community groups, within an institution, are often frustrated by sheer size, current organisation and social distance. A feature of institutional life is that the human social responsibility is replaced by technical structures, computers, word processors etc. for the implementation of procedures. This allows institutions to fulfil their roles. This reliance on procedure eliminates the need to work from first principles. In doing this first principles and the attendant assumptions on which procedures are based are sometimes obscured (op cit). In other words, the reason for acting, becomes the procedure rather than the underlying principle(s). Indeed the very existence of those underlying principles may be forgotten or even never known.

The obscuring of principles is particularly relevant in education at present. If we accept that the nature of education, is a process of learning for the individual, then a reliance on procedure, may cloud this underlying principle. Present practice and the principles which drive it, may have very little to do with education in this sense.

The public and education professionals often, have differing views of what education is. Thus practice as it occurs may be out of step with educational principals, which may in turn be out of step with theory. Indeed the link between theory and practice, given such importance by Lewin (1946), may not be present in a meaningful way.
An Action Research team looking at issues in an organisation or institution needs to be derived from an interest group from within that place. Material for consideration and education from outside that group needs to be introduced by a member of the group. The timing of such an event is crucial. The timing is concerned with:-

• group/team development

• the clarifying of values and issues of the group/team

• a request by and a perceived need for such material

• a commitment to pursue the new course of research

• the capacity for the new material to enhance the already discussed and evaluated issues.

Action Research then highlights the conflict between principles and practice within institutions and may bring to the fore the difficulties in living up to the principles espoused. Issues are raised in regard to the context available for the construction and reconstruction of practices.

Genuine understanding about practice cannot occur without threat to the institution unless the institution has been unusually skilful in nurturing, and supportive of the purpose and principles for which it was constituted in the first place. Given that Action Research involves collaborative action there is a need to develop social contact within the institution which can bring people with shared concerns together.

We must accept “...large scale organisation is here to stay. Therefore it is all the more necessary to think about it and to theorise about it. The stronger the current, the greater the need for skilful navigation. The fundamental task is to achieve smallness WITHIN large organisations.” (Shumacher, 1973, p202). Or as McIntyre (1981 page 245) notes there is urgent need for “Construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained”.
Responses to Action Research groups within an Institution

From this research it would seem that setting up small community groups in institutions is no mean task. Resistance can be met at many levels. For example the thoughts and actions, of the group, aimed at improving practice can raise feelings of resentment within the membership of the remainder of the institution. Feelings that the research team are “in” and the others are “out”, can arise and this can create friction between the groups. This is particularly so where communication between the group and the remainder of the institution is not clear. It appears to be important to make clear, the role and charter of any group, to the members of the wider institution. The shared language of researchers may be interpreted by others as being an “in” group.

The remainder of the institution may project an expectation of problem solving “magic” on to the research team. This happened in this project. The Faculty membership had expectations that the research team would in some way provide “solutions” to their “problems”. The difficulty for the research team was that they had never made an explicit undertaking to the Faculty membership to provide these solutions, and the Faculty membership had never made a clear statement about their “problems” to the research team. Even though no expressed or implied solution to issues was ever undertaken the credibility of the Action Research team could have been harmed by the disruption caused by both the real and imagined changes, which the wider Faculty membership perceived and expected. (See appendix 9)

Interesting others in Action Research may become more difficult over time as Action Researchers may be seen as leading toward change and be resented by those who are appointed to lead. Groups learn, in the struggle to improve practice, and individuals - insecure in this knowledge - may not always be supportive of those engaged in Action Research teams. The agenda for Action Researchers is always demanding and difficult, but the reflective process of self critique learned when working in such groups is a very valuable tool, for self critique, and is a very difficult skill to acquire outside such groups. An Action Research team may develop as a small critical community within the institution, and as such feel individually empowered within the institution. One of the changes apparent in this project was expressed in the final meeting. As a result of the process of struggling through issues and a developing level of critique throughout the project, there developed a feeling of change acted upon and learned from. At the final meeting there was a high level of very effective critique within the group. This was a significant development. The
implications, for the Faculty, of this learning are, difficult to quantify. What is clear, is that the altered personal professional practice of some members of the Faculty must have an impact on the wider Faculty membership, through shared experience in the course of daily activities. Examples of this are present in the conclusion to section 5.3.

What is critical community?

Following on from the discussion of critical community in the theoretical overview (page 25) we need to explore the notion further in the context of this project. Taylor 1982 identified 3 typical attributes:

1. The persons who composed the community have beliefs and values in common but not necessarily ideologies, myths and religion (which would be too restrictive).

2. The relations between members are direct and many sided not mediated by representatives leaders or bureaucrats. Individual members are not isolated from each other, they are positioned to interact directly and relations are diverse rather than role specialised and narrow.

3. Relationships are balanced by reciprocity and a direct exchange of action. Members may perceive that this may make members better off in the long term. There is a sense of solidarity, fraternity and mutual concern.

The above three statements are an ideal situation which doesn’t fit in the real world of human systems. To obtain such a group would be like trying to pick the perfect jury for a trial. No one in the group of Action Researchers knows what they’ve got until they’ve got it. Buying a horse with the greatest pedigree and breeding history in the world doesn’t mean the horse will win the Melbourne Cup.

There is a need to work with those individuals chosen and to allow the group to struggle with the values and historical beliefs in the positive hope that some change might emerge leading to the development of the critical community.

A seminar at Deakin University took the view that a research team became critical when participants regard their values as historically determined and as objects for examination,
interpretation, critique and reconstruction through dialogue, and where dialogue requires action. Values are seen as problematised through practice (McTaggart & Garbutcheon-Singh 1988 p419).

The belief and value systems have been discussed in the section dealing with the Action Research Team/Researchers. The critical team (community) can only be reached by the hard grind of group dynamics led by a facilitator skilled in operating in the process/observer mode. The belief that researchers upon their first meeting can start immediate dialogue about reconstruction of their individual value and belief systems is a myth. The complexity of human systems doesn’t allow for quantum leaps by individuals into a changed world view. Cultures are developed historically and over time, as are our beliefs and values. Each of us is different, particularly in our beliefs and values. Being critical involves not only the group/community, but self. Self criticism of individual practices by reflection upon those individual practices develops historically over time. The critical community is one which can critically review current practices at an individual level and then at a community group level. A social norm at present is to be critical of someone else rather than be critical of self in practices or behaviour. For example some current television interviewers are critical of others’ practices but not critical of self, nor do they offer constructive change to practices currently followed. This is negativity at its worst and it doesn’t offer any scope for situation improvement; it doesn’t look at the possibilities. This negativity can only engender feelings of powerlessness and inaction; fear of the unknown. Investigative questioning without construction is a disease in the social framework at this time and can only fail if used to try to build a critical community. This is largely brought about because it is non constructive and non critical of self. The question for self must be, what is the purpose of the questioning; the answer needs to be to learn from the experience.

In this project the critical group was reached after 10 two hour meetings. The 13th meeting was for 4 hours and at that meeting self critique became a reality (see appendix 13). Though Action Research is a tough struggle, those involved can be empowered by the process. This empowerment arises from the knowledge that self critique of an individual’s personal professional practice is a fundamental feature of Action Research and can be the path to personal and professional emancipation. After the development of self critique, concepts and constructs may be ready for change with many of the constraints removed or reduced in intensity.
The basis for this strong statement is the experience of this project. The research team ended the project by viewing each other interactively as wholistic interpreters and constructors of their world. All the members have a biography and bring to the research group historical evidence of their world, to help create a transformation of that world and the practice which follows.

The keeping of recordings of that history both in tape form and the written summaries shared by members and reflections on each meeting gives an historical as well as a concurrent context for the research group activities, all interrelated and interactive. The research group developed into a critical research group being critical of self and each other. The development seemed to be made with will and conscious effort. The collaborative mode of operation moves at this point to emancipatory mode, a feeling of freedom and new movement. The development of this mode of self critique, has implications for the wider Faculty. If people are able to engage in active self critique, they then become empowered to act. This empowerment means that a dynamic system is created, where alternative courses of action can emerge. Practitioners who operate in a mode of self critique, will probably continue to do so. It is not inconceivable, that this mode of operation will lead to a “self managing” system, where traditional models of power are not applicable. Self critique may be a far more effective model for management, than external authority.

The establishment of critical communities seems to the author to be an excellent concept for a community or organisation to adopt, but in practice may be difficult. The difficulty doesn’t mean that the concept need not be experimented with. As David Kolb stated at the Experiential Learning Conference in July 1989 at Hawkesbury Agricultural College “the real issue of Experiential Learning is that you need the experience first and the learning comes later, not the other way around”. The word critical may seem harsh but meets the need for basic research into self practice.

For some the ability to leap toward and into an experience is by nature and personality easy. For others the need for investigation of the possibilities and outcomes of action are more important. The need to feel safe and know what will happen, or be the outcome is a very powerful force in restricting experience.

The development of such thoughts leads to the complexity of the possibilities of groups working together as “critical” researchers.
The author believes that the obsessive 1980s have focused upon the concept that we need to focus upon how bad or lacking we are in human attributes. If we go to a workshop we will be healthy, slim, have better thoughts, change habits. In many cases we develop a need to sustain ourselves through a regular “fix” of nourishment from these activities. These activities are not to be dispensed with. However a self critical review of what happened and how daily practice was affected may be worthwhile. The determining factors include the ability to critique self practice; this against a background of culture including social norms and educational frameworks.

9.0 Action Research as a tool in farming communities:

This thesis has so far been concerned with a core Action Research Project conducted within the Faculty of Agriculture at Hawkesbury Agricultural College. However, many of the projects conducted by staff and students of the Faculty are focused on issues from outside the Faculty, centred on rural communities or located within rural contexts. It is the purpose of this chapter to draw out principles, from the core project of the thesis, that may prove useful in the conduct of Action Research in these wider settings.

The position of the researcher, within farming communities, may be seen as one who has either moved to make the intervention or has actually been invited in by those concerned. Irrespective of the way the intervention is made the role of someone being seen as a catalyst/facilitator is an important one. On the one hand there may be a group of concerned farmers seeking help and on the other, someone seen as an independent person to help in the agricultural problem situation.

Because the researcher is often seen as having particular skills and knowledge he or she can have technical/professional skills at hand to introduce should the group feel that that is necessary. The researcher in this type of research needs to have people skills developed to a high degree; a person who can stand back and view the process going on without becoming too involved in the content of the dialogue. This is particularly important in the early stages of the research, the participatory stage, which can be the change phase of the situation under study.

The researcher may act as the group leader and develop a research team around the situation to be improved. The value of the research team having a high stake or ownership of the outcome of the research is very important in obtaining commitment to the Action
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The researcher may act as the group leader and develop a research team around the situation to be improved. The value of the research team having a high stake or ownership of the outcome of the research is very important in obtaining commitment to the Action
Research project. Many rural communities are unfamiliar with and can have reservations about group action in the group dynamic model. The committee style is more the norm, and a gentle approach toward the group activity may be necessary.

An example can be found in the story of a research project concerning wheat farmers. (Woog, et al, 1988) The project was concerned with arresting declining crop returns. The reduction was occurring notwithstanding the use of all fertilizers, sprays and so on. After long discussions about seasonal trends, varieties of seed and cost effective measures the agronomist started talking about fallowing some of the land. The resistance was immediate. The farmers could see the value in the suggestion but weren’t going to do it.

Ultimately the issues had nothing to do with farming practice, machinery, seed or anything else to do with the farm. Most of the issues were of a social nature, concerned with family. One example was that the farmer wouldn’t be able to send his son to boarding school if he fallowed the suggested part of his property. He had to keep farming irrespective of falling yield in order to maintain cashflow to meet his commitment. Many of the issues raised in the group were of a social nature. People working in a committee seldom reach the level of the “real” issues.

Because the researcher develops a research team within the community and may leave the project it is very important to set up a nucleus organisation which will carry on when the researcher leaves. Many researchers, following academic careers, move into a community with promise of improvement, research their needs and then leave. The community then becomes justifiably cynical and in a worse situation than before the intervention. The ethics are of a high order because of the involvement with the complexity of the human activity system.

At Hawkesbury students are expected to become involved with farmers as Action Researchers. These students often don’t go out on an invited basis, nor are they clear about who is the client. The students are expected to have access to conversations with the farming

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\[\text{10} - \text{This part of the programme is called the Off Campus Enterprise Task (OCE). It has the dual aims of immersing the student in the rural community in order that they may develop an understanding of rural life and values, whilst also aiming to allow the student to develop a close relationship with the farming family and to then proceed through a process of situation analysis, option generation and the implementation of strategies for improvement. It proves to be a pivotal time in the student's development.}\]
family, and to their records and gain an understanding as to how the enterprise operates. Through this understanding it is expected that there might be an occasion in which they could work with the farmer on a particular task to meet the farmers needs. The students may never know what that job might be unless they can establish a working relationship with the farming family to meet their (the farming family’s) needs. The relationship established between the farmer and the student based on mutual acceptance of each other is the first task. If this doesn’t happen then very little else will happen. The skill needed by the student is to be able to establish a working relationship, then other tasks will follow. The farmer could well ask for a job to be done, then the client role is established. This is an invitation based on mutual acceptance through the working relationship.

The first task of facilitators is a skilful task and is the beginning of establishing the needs and expressing the needs. This may be seen as the first loop of the Action Research spiral.

In establishing the client relationship much will depend upon the setting up of the working relationship of the farmer and family. If the researchers come in with the idea that they can already read the needs of the farmer or come in thinking that they know something the farmer doesn’t know, then the situation becomes very messy. The client role becomes very much harder to determine if an action is precipitated by the researchers or researcher. Some of the problems can be attributed to a lack of basic ground rules which would allow the needs of the farmer/family to be expressed. This could happen by using the first loop of the Action Research spiral to establish the needs of the farmer and family in the establishment of the client relationship. The researchers need to leave their needs and their perceptions of the farmer’s needs aside for the moment and concentrate on the needs which will emerge by using the first loop of the spiral for this purpose. The clarity which arises from this activity will serve to establish the basic working relationship and the needs. The maintenance of this clarity will then depend upon and be related to the skill of the facilitator/researcher in maintaining the clarity as opposed to the introduction of personal agendas to the group for reasons other than the project at hand.

The facilitator/researcher role is very important to establishing needs and ultimate clarity concerning the client role. This activity cannot be undertaken within five minutes of the researcher’s entry into the farmer/family arena. A confidence needs to develop between the researcher and the farmer/family. The researcher is entering their world, a new place with different culture, beliefs and values developed over a long time. The customs, labels and daily activities need to be learned and absorbed to establish a working relationship.
It is inevitable that the researcher and the farmer family will have different world views and a celebration and validation of these differences is fundamental to Action Research.

10.0 CONCLUSION

Change is a word frequently used in individual, group and institutional situations. The word and projected meaning may be clear in the mind of the originator of the spoken word. The receivers of the word may create a very different meaning for the word and therefore they may react differently to it. In this project themes have arisen which revolve around change and the complex issues involved in change.

This conclusion will attempt to clarify the issues in the context of this project. The key areas are seen to be:

*Activities of Action Research team and

*Group process as an integral part of Action Research.

The activities of the research team began in an information giving mode and moved from this mode to the group process mode when criteria was questioned. This movement reflected the change from Technical Action Research to Practical Action Research, which involved interpersonal relationships and involved questions of professional practice. Lewin (1946) founded his triangle around, action, research and training. It is at this point in this project where facilitation skills and the training in these skills became very important; when the team became involved in the practical mode and practice was being questioned. A vital stage was reached when the action research team moved from being a collection of people to a dynamic group exploring in depth broad issues of practice. The question then arises as to what training in group process needs to be present in Action Research practitioners. Lewin regarded it as a vital step in the Action Research model.

The author believes, as a result of this project, that facilitation skills are a prerequisite for the Action Research practitioner. Without them the Action Research team cannot proceed effectively with its task.

The following conclusions focus on key aspects of the research project, the activities of the research team and the group process of the team, seen as an integrated part of the project.
It is inevitable that the researcher and the farmer family will have different world views and a celebration and validation of these differences is fundamental to Action Research.

10.0 CONCLUSION

Change is a word frequently used in individual, group and institutional situations. The word and projected meaning may be clear in the mind of the originator of the spoken word. The receivers of the word may create a very different meaning for the word and therefore they may react differently to it. In this project themes have arisen which revolve around change and the complex issues involved in change.

This conclusion will attempt to clarify the issues in the context of this project. The key areas are seen to be:

• Activities of Action Research team and

• Group process as an integral part of Action Research.

The activities of the research team began in an information giving mode and moved from this mode to the group process mode when criteria was questioned. This movement reflected the change from Technical Action Research to Practical Action Research, which involved interpersonal relationships and involved questions of professional practice. Lewin (1946) founded his triangle around, action, research and training. It is at this point in this project where facilitation skills and the training in these skills became very important; when the team became involved in the practical mode and practice was being questioned. A vital stage was reached when the action research team moved from being a collection of people to a dynamic group exploring in depth broad issues of practice. The question then arises as to what training in group process needs to be present in Action Research practitioners. Lewin regarded it as a vital step in the Action Research model.

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The following conclusions focus on key aspects of the research project, the activities of the research team and the group process of the team, seen as an integrated part of the project.
10.1 The Starting Point

Each member brought to the project his or her own view of what the issue or problem was. These assumptions and perceptions were clear to each individual within the Action Research team, though not necessarily to the whole group collectively. Each member brought a power hat to the group and perceptions concerning the problem and a picture of what the Faculty of Agriculture at Hawkesbury was. These views of the world were all valid and valuable from the experience of work, education, culture and authentic knowledge.

The research team was in fact dealing with six different “Faculties”, not one. This insight began a process of research in the ramifications of such multiple worlds.

A critical omission in the Action Research project was the failure to share and explore personally held world views, early in the life of the project (the worldview which concerned the “problem”).

10.2 Power and empowerment in Action Research

The word has connotations of instructions and directions being made without much choice being given to the victims or beneficiaries of such directives or instructions. The question for the author remains that after an Action Research project has been completed, who has the power for continuing implementation or rejection of the ongoing actions?

One of the issues which arose in this project was that of the giving of power. On one occasion, power was apparently delegated to the team. Yet this power was not accompanied by the authority necessary for it to be “real power”. This led to a feeling of powerlessness within the team. Equally the delegation or giving of power carries with it ethical concerns. Not the least of these concerns is to do with the reverse situation, where power is held, by the giver of power, because of her or his ability to withdraw that power! Additionally one can ponder the position one might be in regarding the use of power - especially power over others - as an Action Researcher.

The act of empowerment is related to the act of giving responsibility and authority to perform a task, and having the result acknowledged and recognised. All parties to the research are then empowered to move forward having felt part of the process concerning change. Change is a process not an event. Whether the action research is within an
organisation or among a farmer group, or a community, the power/empowerment issue is one very important to change or situation improvement. Without the specific knowledge concerning power being available the result of the research may be clouded.

In the setting up of an Action Research team, power issues should be taken into account to ensure a broad range of interests are covered, at the same time the team must remain compact enough to allow a review of practice to be made.

10.3 The analysis of the activities, outcomes and group process of Action Research

The collection of raw data was relatively simple once an effective recording system had been set up. The analysis of the raw data became difficult when trying to make sense of information which was both dynamic and complex. Nothing stood still long enough to be grabbed hold of, nothing appeared solid and yet the very solid material of human interaction was there in abundance. The author at times wanted to produce a neatly wrapped package analysed accurately to the last detail. How can anything be totally accurate? It is only in the eye of the beholder and then only for a short period? The dynamic movement in the practice of the Action Research methodology doesn’t encourage definitive answers. The steps of the Action Research spiral - plan, act, observe and reflect seem simple enough in print, but each of these seemed to become intermingled and entwined as this study progressed. This project’s method of analysis was reached after much searching for a common thread which ran through the project. Lewin in his example of World War II concerning a bombing raid on Germany spoke of the four steps in his Action Research spiral.

1. Plan the raid.

2. Act - make the raid.

3. Observe the results.

4. Revise the plan.

This course of action seems relatively simple when spiralling with such a definite task as above (technical Action Research). The analysis of such data would have been relatively simple. On the other hand if the criteria had been questioned and a question asked such as:
“Why bomb Germany?” there would have been a drastic change in interpersonal relationships at that moment, and the group dynamic would emerge (practical action research).

Lewin recognised this in his large group workshops when group supervisors stated that they knew something was going on between people but didn’t know what or how to go about finding out about it. Nor did they have the skills to handle the implications if they did find out the issues.

The analysis of qualitative data is a difficult issue in Action Research and the need to establish a common thread running through the emergent themes is very important. In the case of this project the learning centred around the changes in professional practice by individual members of the research team, and their subsequent passing on to others that learning in their day to day activities.

10.4 The Complexity Arising From the Group Process of Action Research

What we deal with today will not be the same as that with which we deal tomorrow. In some way the views of the world held by each of us will be different. In action research this complexity often seems greater during the course of a study because of the involvement of interpersonal relationships. Whilst complexity will undoubtedly remain, the aim must be to celebrate differences thus permitting unity with diversity to exist within the group through that celebration. Simultaneously we must allow and encourage complexity as part of the Action Research project. However it must be required that the group will set the boundaries of such diversity, which if exceeded could result in either a change in the task or of the group.

10.5 The time frame for change arises from Action Research activities

In talking about the term of an Action Research project a clear distinction needs to be made between the “project” proper and the continuing changes born from it. The results of situation improvement may evolve over a period following the conclusion of the project particularly where changes in personal practice are involved. The results of that change may begin a new Action Research project. The process is a continuing one in which practitioners constantly apply the principles in their activities. In this context Action
Research is long term, and by using the methodology practitioners may refine it as a tool for greater professional understanding of their practices and the practice of others.

As one example, a conversation, reported to the author, showed that a member of the team had developed a very clear picture of the whole issue of clients and needs. This picture served to inform the team member's practice. This conversation took place some months after the team last met.

It needs to be said however that there may be a place for short term Action Research in the technical mode and perhaps even in the practical mode.

**10.6 The Role of the Facilitator of Group Process in Action Research**

Lewin (1946) recognised the need for the training of personnel in order that they be able to understand and work with groups and to assist in the solution of issues arising within these groups. Facilitation in this context does not refer to collections of people gathered together to work through a predetermined agenda led by a facilitator. Facilitation in this context as Lewin (op cit 1946) suggests allows a group to discuss issues which are important to them as a group and as individuals - the group would be operating within the boundaries set around the task, and would involve the three essential elements in group activity - cognitive, affective and social interactions. Then the practitioners need training in the basic group dynamic techniques if Action Research in the practical mode is to be successful. It is difficult to see how interpersonal relationships can be excluded from Action Research projects.

The words used when referring to groups, are content and process. The content is the medium carrying the word. This word begins the process of thinking - an internal action. The role of the facilitator in this model is to remain at the process level clarifying and allowing distillation of issues until resolution of those issues is reached. Resolution does not necessarily mean agreement; the issue of right or wrong is not part of the process. Rather it means the coming together of different views. The facilitator in this context needs to stand back from the content and witness the effect (process) that the words (content) have on group members. Basic skills in facilitation of groups can be learned, and practitioners in Action Research may need to consider such training as an additional tool in their work as professional practitioners.
10.7 Identifying the Client as an Action Research Activity

In this project time was spent trying to establish the client role. It was a confusing task. Finally the research team came to the understanding that rather than trying to establish the client role, they needed to work at clarifying who was expressing a need. The client became clear when this concept was established. Many projects are centred around projected needs rather than an understanding that the practitioner or project owner has the need. In either case the project doesn’t stop or have any need to change as long as it is clear who is expressing the need. The client role is then established and can be analysed on that basis. If the client role changes then the possibility that a new project is emerging could be examined. However in many cases in Action Research, the client role is clear by invitation to the practitioner to action research a specific research project. Then the roles of client and the power base are clearly established. They could however be subject to revision should the research question change during the course of the project.

10.8 Belief Systems as an Action Research Activity

Much has been said elsewhere in this document concerning belief and value systems. Care needs to be exercised in dealing with these issues, as they may inhibit or obstruct Action Research. Being conscious of possible problems and clarifying assumptions and perceptions of the research team at an early stage will assist in positive and fruitful outcomes during the course of the Action Research project. The author believes that this can be achieved by an action step being taken. As soon as action is taken then the how of the issues will begin to emerge, thereby enabling belief systems to be clarified. When belief and value systems are discussed early in a study it will allow the research team to begin to look at how those belief and value systems can be dealt with.

10.9 Finally

The author makes no claim to having reached an end point in Action Research. The dynamic and complex nature of human systems precludes this possibility. What has arisen from this thesis is the potential for improvement of Action Researchers’ personal professional practice and improvement in Action Research in general, through a greater emphasis on
interpersonal relationships in Action Research. This is achieved through the conscious reflection on their immediate activities by individual group members, on a continuous basis during the activities of the group. This enables the Action Research group to become a critical learning community. However, this can only be achieved by the members becoming aware of and practising group process skills and competencies. Such activities enable an Action Research group to move from technical through practical to emancipatory Action Research.
11.0 Postscript

Because of the visual disability of the author, his Master's panel recommended that a *viva voce* be held as part of the thesis write-up process. This would take the form of a learning conversation to ensure that the candidate had an adequate awareness of the connections of this thesis to the ideas from the wider literature. This would normally be expected in the literature review and the discussion of research findings. To a limited extent, this has been done, but because the candidate is reliant on the spoken rather than the written word, it has been difficult for him to present this is the usual way.

The learning conversation was held between the candidate and the following:

Professor R. Bawden, Dean,

Associate Professor R. Packham, Director, post-graduate programmes

Dr N Srisandanarajah, Director, undergraduate programmes.

Professor Packham was chair of the candidate's thesis panel, and professor Bawden the other member of that panel.

The conversation lasted two hours, and clearly demonstrated the candidates grasp of a broad scope of important ideas from the literature, in terms of Moses (1985) criteria for a research master's. The candidate was able to debate the ramifications of his findings, their importance, and how they advanced knowledge of the area. Plans for the writing of a paper to be submitted to a refereed journal were also drawn up.

At the end of the conversation, the group agreed that the thesis, subject to minor amendments, was ready for examination. The *viva voce* was recorded, and the candidate was asked to document the main conclusions that arose in the conversation, and to add this as a postscript to the thesis to model the ongoing nature of the learning process. The following are the key points that arose:

1. Group process needs to enable people to deal with issues in a critiquing mode, but to avoid those group processes that lead to them feeling pressured to deal with emotional
issues, with which they may be uncomfortable. The bringing out of emotional issues, common to many aims of group process, may inhibit fruitful interaction and dialogue by some group members. Such issues should be left to groups deliberately set up and resourced to tackle such emotional issues. In Action Research groups, this is not the prime aim, the goal being to focus on the improvement of a common issue of professional practice. It may be that as the group matures it may choose to deal with such emotional issues, however this would be done purposely and with the acceptance of all group members. It is considered that early in the life of a group, people are not able to make such choices in an empowered way.

2. A good way to start an Action Research group is to explore the following questions, preferably notified to individual members in advance:

- Why are you here?

- What are your needs?

- What are your expectations?

- What do you see as the possible outcomes of the project?

3. Three things need to be taken into account by a person wishing to act in the role of facilitator to an Action Research group.

a. Does the group accept the person in the role of facilitator?

b. There will be a plurality of methodologies held by members of the group relating to how the group should tackle the issue(s) it is considering. These need to be brought out and discussed in an overt way before the group can make significant progress.

c. The group needs a task to act as a vehicle to begin the exploration of the needs of the group members, i.e. why they have chosen to join the Action Research team.

4. At the start of an Action Research project, the belief systems of individuals or organisation need to be brought out. For a large bureaucratic organisation this can be done by establishing
a small “crucible” group of the organisation, who need to come to explore how they act in a professional capacity, and the beliefs and values underpinning these practices.

5. Emancipation of research team members will occur through the continuous critique and reflection which goes on in an immediate way on immediate activities by the individual group members. This is different to the way reflection has been viewed to date in Action Research, where it is described as an episodic event, following planning and action. Instead, it is suggested here that reflection going on continuously is a more powerful, emancipatory tool. Such continuing reflection will aim at the incorporation of theory into action in an ongoing and integrated way.

Reflection on the outcomes of actions as depicted in the “Action Research spiral” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) are of a different logical type to reflection on reflection as occurs in double-loop learning (Argyris, Putnam & Smith 1985), or reflection on immediate unplanned activities, which is seen to correspond with Bateson’s level II learning (Bateson, 1972). The benefit of this form of reflection for an Action Research group is the continuous seeking of better ways of operating, not just the improvement of the issue of concern. This type of reflection is questioning epistemological assumptions in an ongoing way - how do I know what I know? What criteria do I use to judge the validity of that knowledge?

6. Concept of the core and thesis research projects.

During the write-up phase of this thesis, discussion occurred about how there was a project going on within a wider project: the Action Research activities with the inquiry group as described in chapter six; and the issues arising out of this that had more general implications for the methodology of Action Research itself.

Just prior to the viva, a research paper was received that supported this view, based on the experiences of a group using Action Research in MSc and PhD management programmes (Perry and Zuber-Skerritt, 1990). Their ideas are encapsulated in diagram 1, and it can be seen that the thesis documentation broadly follows this schema.
Diagram 1. Relationship between core and action research projects (after Perry & Zuber-Skerrit 1990).

It is considered, however, that this does not convey the full richness and complexity of what actually occurs in Action Research. It is a useful way to order reflection, but the reality of the project activities are quite messy, and there is considerable iteration between planning, acting observing and reflecting in a recursive way. It is only at the conclusion that apparent order can emerge.
The paper also started to address issues of group facilitation in the three modes of Action Research (technical, practical and emancipatory). This is illustrated in table 1 from that paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF ACTION RESEARCH</th>
<th>AIMS</th>
<th>FACILITATOR’S ROLE</th>
<th>RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FACILITATOR AND PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Technical            | •effectiveness/efficiency of educational practice  
•professional development | outside “expert” | co-option (of practitioners who depend on facilitator) |
| 2. Practical            | •as (1) above  
•practitioner’s understanding  
•transformation of their consciousness | Socratic role, encouraging participation and self-reflection | co-operation (process consultancy) |
| 3. Emancipatory         | •as (2) above  
•participant’s emancipation from dictates of tradition, self-deception, coercion  
•their critique of bureaucratic systematisation  
•transformation of the organisation and of the educational system | process moderator (responsibility shared equally by participants) | collaboration |

Types of Action research and Their Main Characteristics (after Carr and Kemmis 1986 as cited by Perry and Zuber-Skerrit 1990).

This table highlights the varying nature of the relationship between the facilitator and participants in different Action Research modes, but it does not discuss how this is to be achieved; propositions are put forward about WHAT the relationship should be without saying HOW it is to be achieved. A key question for the current thesis was how to use propositions relating to group theory to achieve the desired relationships in each of the three modes of Action Research.
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PACKHAM Roger, 1990, What contribution can the history and philosophy of science make to university agricultural science teaching?, unpublished manuscript.


PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning the following pages. The best possible results have been obtained.
Appendix 1
MEMO TO: Research Team, Richard Bawden and Robert Woog.
FROM: Ken Williams
SUBJECT: Minutes and Reflections Concerning Ken William's Action Research Project.

The project is coming to a conclusion and to fulfill the story I wish to use the Minutes and Reflections of our meetings, in the Appendices of my Thesis. The minutes of the meetings have been circulated to most of you during the course of the project. I would like your individual feelings about using the minutes and reflections in their original form in my Thesis. I would be grateful if you could give this matter your urgent consideration and should you require a copy of the minutes to refresh your memory please let me know. If you can see your way clear to the Minutes and Reflections being used, could you please return this letter with a note outlining your agreement.

Many thanks,

Ken Williams

I agree with your use of any of the material you wish.
MEMO TO: Research Team, Richard Bawden and Robert Woog.

FROM: Ken Williams

SUBJECT: Minutes and Reflections Concerning Ken William's Action Research Project.

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Many

KEN

PLEASE USE WHATEVER YOU LIKE

CHEERS

[Signature]

[Redacted Name]
MEMO TO: Research Team, Richard Bawden and Robert Woog.
FROM: Ken Williams
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Many thanks,

Ken

[Signature]

[Signature]
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Many thanks.

Ken Williams

*Dear Ken,*

There is no problem at all as I now concur to use the Minutes and Reflections in their original form.

Best wishes my good luck with your Thesis.

With regards
MEMO TO: Research Team, Richard Bawden and Robert Woog.
FROM: Ken Williams
SUBJECT: Minutes and Reflections Concerning Ken William’s Action Research Project.

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Many thanks,

Ken Williams

This is fine by me, Ken.
Use the

4/5/90
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Many thanks,

[Signature"

Ken Williams

I am happy for the

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Many thanks.

Ken Williams

Fine — go ahead.

all the best
Current Reflections

It seems a long time since the end of Phase I - the subsequent result of that work being okay - and beginning of Phase II. It has been hard to pump myself up again with all those internal questions being asked like why am I doing this? Oh well, I suppose it will be worthwhile in the long run.

I had written out my project name and that had received an okay from Roger Packham. It read something like "The Faculty of Agriculture to understand man management in the context of improving personal and professional skills of staff - to develop and further the growth of Agricultural Education at H.A.C.". That was written in May 1988, and now in August seems pretty "trite and neat".

Now when asked "What is the name?" I respond by saying, I don't know. At first that sounded pretty strange accompanied by a feeling that perhaps I should know.

Upon reflecting about systems thinking and systems analysis, I remember that solutions are not of any consequence - that I am looking for a situation improvement.

Difficult kerbing my accommodating desire to get on with it; so my learning was going on at a pace and the reflecting I was doing about the step was important. I was remembering my Action Research outline in my Phase I work and saw that I needed to go slowly and gently into the arena. I had a very strong sense that whatever I was going to do within the Faculty of Agriculture the whole staff somehow needed to be involved either actively or by communication. The results otherwise would be superficial and action would be restricted at best.

The feeling was that somehow the staff of the Faculty, both academic and non-academic, had to be involved. What does involved mean in the context of change? Seems like involved in the process from the beginning both at an organisational and individual level. With a deep understanding of each step before the next step is taken. If this principle will stand up then detail sub systems to talk about "understandings' would need to be developed, in general terms and revised after each step. Two processes are going on at one time.

- The people process
- The revision process of the plan

Both elements are completely dynamics, allowing movement and access to new ideas and activities which if, used often enough might bring about a
continuing state of dynamism which could continue after the project is completed.

So if the staff are to be "involved" how do I meet that aim? This is an essential element of change by non-crisis. That to be confused with circumstantial change which has very little to do with attitudinal change. I had been invited in to look at the Faculty, somewhere in the staff area. A definite feeling of unease was apparent to me by both observation and coffee break conversations. Two things stood out:

1. We do so much management planning we never do any managing.
2. There's no accountability even among senior management staff.

It is clear there is a problem but no clarity as to what the problem may be.

My interest in the Faculty of Agriculture at Hawkesbury Agricultural College dates back to 1962 when my eldest son was a student. The interest was, in the main, a parental one interested in his welfare both socially and academically.

My serious connection began when I joined the Council and in that role as Deputy Chairman became involved in many aspects of the Faculty of Agriculture, which began to undergo vast changes some nine years ago.

The Systems approach to problem solving has been developed over that time span and I believe because of its radical nature in the realms of agricultural education has had its "radical" proponents and "radical" opponents not only at Hawkesbury.

I had been on the periphery of the Faculty of Agriculture, with students and staff with whom I developed a deep rapport and friendship. They were my kind of people. They seemed to be struggling with something which was good but difficult. I always had the feeling I would like to know more.

I joined the Masters program with this in mind. Now having completed the first section and having been exposed to the SSM and Action Research methodologies I have an outline understanding of both. My project could, at this moment be called "NO NAME" because giving a name may limit the area of research I don't want that to be a restriction. And a title may put the thought of a solution into my mind and that also is not helpful.

The Invitation

I spoke to the Academic Dean and he suggested I see the staff development team and that I might come to a meeting to be held by them with the Deans of the faculty the following week.

The subject matter for that meeting was indeed staff development. Some urgency was indicated because of new Government legislation at Federal level, with changed education philosophy. The highlight of that meeting for me was that the academic dean said he was prepared to join a group to look into the staff dilemma. This was very important. I need his contribution from the educational viewpoint and keeping the group up to date on the
political climate. I believe it would be a waste of time to work hard on a project to discover the wrong roads had been travelled.

The group was formed with six persons:

   Academic Dean
   Senior Lecturer Economist (Staff Development)
   Senior Technical Officer (Staff Development)
   Head, Post Graduate Unit (Social Ecology)
   Lecturer in Faculty (Beef Cattle)
   Myself (Facilitator of Process)

I had some time before made a tentative list of staff I thought would be suitable for the "task" when I thought I knew what the task might be. I believe this action stemmed from previously looking at a problem and selecting a team to solve that problem.

This was a reserve situation where there is no defined problem, only a feeling of unease. The staff almost selected themselves because this was the base from which they were comfortable.

The learning gained and experienced from this approach will be shown in evidence in the documents relating to the meetings held by the Action Research Group.

As I have been walking around the campus in these early days of my work, Faculty Staff have said how glad they are that I am doing my project, because 'something might happen'. Two ideas suggest themselves to me.

1. That they are making an assumption that I am going to solve their "problem", a "quick fix"!
2. Some notion that I am going to take the Faculty by the proverbial neck, shake it and all will fall into place.

These events tell me quite clearly that something is going on which shows an unease.

The comments may have come to mind because of a staff survey that I conducted some two years previously. It was a personal confidential survey in which all academic staff were personally interviewed and asked six questions in confidence. The answers were subsequently collated and distributed to each staff member, a workshop was set up and material presented.

I pointed out that this was their material and what would they like to do with it? How would they like to take action?

Nothing happened despite all efforts to obtain any action. My belief is that:

- They were not involved or committed to the project.
- That I would produce a solution to the problem.
Nothing happened despite all efforts to obtain any action. My belief is that:

- They were not involved or committed to the project.
- That I would produce a solution to the problem.

**EARLY DAYS IN THE PROCESS**

**The First Meeting of the Research Team.**

The notes are attached and follow my experience with group activity led me to be clear about the "ground rules" which any group need to accept before proceeding. The ground rules are dynamic and undergo change as the group sess fit.

Once the group saw themselves as an Action Research team the energy level rose and there was excitement in the room. The thought that the group maybe just a helpful rescue one within the faculty was not acceptable.

The notes show the progression of the team development at that first meeting in some detail. The process maybe summarised as follows:

- Setting ground rules for meetings.
- Team members expressing some thoughts about why they were there.
- The establishment of the facilitator's role.
- The use of Soft Systems Methodology to establishing
  
  The Client
  Analyst (s)
  Owner.

- Looking at Action Research Steps as a basis for a working model.

- We started with a vague idea about "something" and have perhaps finished up with a relevant system and the possibility of setting up a conceptual model.

The suggestion was made that the transformation might be that if all the staff saw themselves as Systems Agriculturists that many of the problems would disappear.

Action Research and Soft Systems Methodology both seem to expound the theory that defining the solution is not the way and that only feelings of unease need to exist for there to be a messy situation where then does the feelings of unease come from? I believe it comes from our sub-conscious as an idea and the thinking about that idea leads to a feeling of unease if a "messy" situation exists.
Transformation Leadership Group

Ken Williams began by talking with the group about the need for ground rules to be set at this meeting; these can be varied from time to time at the group's request. The rules put forward and accepted were:

* **Meeting time:** Thursday at fortnightly intervals beginning at 8.30 a.m. for a maximum of 2 hours.

* **Secretarial:** That each group member would take responsibility for a meeting in turn. That an enquiry be made regarding some funding for typing.

* Each issue raised be resolved before moving on to next item.

* Avoid all members talking at once to allow clarity and assist resolution.

* **Confidentiality:** That some matters may be considered private by the group. In general communication, the group would be referred to in general terms not at individual level.

"What are we doing here?" was a question asked of each member.

Some of the matters raised were:

* A difference existing between the espoused philosophy and the beliefs of staff in the concept of Systems Agriculture.

* A positive sense of most aspects of academic direction but some doubt about staff direction and organisation.

* Realignment of organisation to promote smooth running of faculty.

* Ken saw his vision as producing a document covering organisational change in the faculty to be used by other organisations, educational, agricultural or other.

* To establish a means of assessment and accountability within the faculty.

The group discussed Ken's role and agreed to his leading and facilitating the group process. The role was not seen as being "helpful" at individual staff level. To assist the group work through change within itself.

The facilitator raised the issue of the possibility of change within the group then using that new position in working with faculty.

Discussed with the group who was the Client Analyst(s) Owner
It was agreed that these positions could change during the course of the study but for the moment, The Client = Faculty Staff, academic and non academic; Analyst(s) = The leadership group working as an Action Research Team; Owner = Richard Bawden.

These 3 positions were cleared following the Soft Systems Approach so that in future discussions these references can be made.

At this stage the group had processed the following:
* Clarified ground rules.
* Stated reasons for being with the group disclosing possible tasks.
* Clarified Ken's role.
* Agreed to work as an Action Research team.
* Clarified the roles of:
  Client
  Analysts
  Owner within the Action Research Project.

Steps of Action Research.

* The invitation is made.
* Who is client?
* Form a research team with client.
* Research team to formulate a general plan.
* Research team takes first step.
* Does general plan need to be modified as a result of action step?
* Take second action step ..... modify etc.

N.B. Stay away from solutions especially the "hows". Stay with "whats".

* Action Research outcomes.
  * Improvement in day to day situation.
  * Has the client learned to take action in other situations?

The need for some inward looking at our own world view in the sense of needs, values and belief systems; to free up. I liked a cartoon in which the figure expands a great revelation. Rushes up to his boss and says, "I have come face to face with the enemy and it is us". To develop our own vision and model, then we will really believe in what we do.

Two major outcomes were envisaged:
* That the staff stumbling block situation may be improved.
* That a document be published in a journal showing
  * The problem of staff stumbling block
  * This group took up the challenge through all techniques of documenting, reflecting, soft systems, action research.
  * What then was the next step?

Upon reflecting on the Action Research model having set up the action research team the next step was to formulate a general plan.
The C.A.T.W.O.E. model was suggested as a starting point. (see attachment). Some comments made during this discussion are listed below.

* Be good if the system ran more smoothly.
* If Staff became Systems Agriculturalists maybe many of the problems may disappear.
* We need much more discussion on these matters; this is only the bare bones.
* Look at the Transformational Model.
* This group may be able to work at change. What about that group out there?
* Staff to see themselves as Systems Agriculturalists.
* Does there come a day when we have to measure up?
* There is a shared view of Systems Agriculturalists in this research team.
* You can't start with objectives - go further back.
* Should senior staff be asked to reflect on where we go; desired change?
* That may be seen as a management quick fix.
* Once this was seen as an Action Research project, the energy flowed.
* I only use the principles as techniques - not chapter and verse.
* We came here today with some vague idea about something and have finished up with, a relevant system maybe, and the possibility of developing a conceptual model.

In the interviewing fortnight we could think about the conceptual model possibility, or is this in fact what we are on about?

**CATWOE**

\[
\begin{align*}
C & = \text{The Staff of the Faculty} \\
A & = \text{This team.} \\
T & = \text{To develop Staff as S. A's.} \\
W & = \text{Systems Agriculture Paradigm/Transformational Leadership model.} \\
O & = \text{Richard} \\
E & = \text{Lack of concensus about the need of desirability of staff seeing themselves as systems agriculturalists.}
\end{align*}
\]
There were three participants - David Russell, Steve Blunden and Ken Williams. Apologies from Olga and Dennis Gamble.

After stressing the importance of taping meetings and collecting new tapes and a tape box to store the information Ken pushed the wrong button and recorded nothing. This seemed the end to a bad week for Ken. So these notes are from memory and I will have them checked by David and Steve - Ken.

The meeting opened with each member raising issues each saw as important arising from meeting No. 1.

The issues were:

- Use of C.A.T.N.O.E. at this stage
- The term "Systems Agriculturists"
- Ken's time table
- Agriculture v Ecology
- Restrictions on discussion imposed by use of "terms"
- Find neutral ground

C.A.T.N.O.E. - The use of this tool seemed to go too fast, too far too quickly. Some time on rich picturing could be well spent. Making a conceptual model at this stage posed the question; a conceptual model of what? The value of conceptual models being used at all was also raised, and opinion was reached that for practical purposes their use was very restricted.

The meeting agreed that in general terms the students were going pretty well in the course; there were individual problems but students were doing well. The group also agreed that the staff within the faculty had the unease in the situation. There was no quick "fix" and that the question needed a lot of time.

Systems Agriculturist. This term was used at the first meeting and enquiry by Ken through some staff produced confused answers. A clear definition seems unavailable at this stage. The group felt to pursue the term at a transformation level of the C.A.T.N.O.E. model was inappropriate for two reasons:

* The meaning of the term is unclear

* Difficult to transform the staff if the term is unclear. That more work needed to be done to clarify the environmental constraint (see C.A.T.N.O.E. model prepared at meeting No. 1).
However the group had agreement that the

Client = Staff
Analysts = Research team
Owner = Richard

This was a good start but that the roles may change as the Action Research project progresses.

Agriculture and Social Ecology. Inevitably these two issues came up and were discussed very freely particularly between David Russell and Steve Blunden. The changed position of David's latest paper was raised by Steve. This had become evident from the faculty workshop concerning Social Ecology the previous Wednesday. Ken expressed the view that he was confused about the clear difference, but felt that he came from a committed position of people problems. It was agreed that many students were also moving in the area of social situations in their major projects.

David drew two over-lapping circles

* The overlap is common ground for how we deal with students.

* Perhaps "the problem" is how the staff relate to each other, not "how they deal with students".

The Institutionalised Terms. The use of "jargon" terms explaining activities within the faculty has developed over the years. They are legitimate and are useful, but perhaps are not understood but have been accepted by most as "the word". It seems these values need to be challenged in some way so that the institutionalised phrases may be changed.
Refer to Action Research Planner – by Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart.

Three changes in individual work (Action Research):

1. Changes in the use of language:
   - a description of our "world"
   - a description of our work.

2. Changes in activities and practices:
   - what people are doing in their work and learning.

3. Changes in Social relationship and organisation:
   - The way people inter-relate – existing structures in education and the institution.

It seems that these three steps for changes cover the institution, organisation and social inter-relationships.

Neutral Ground. The discussions concerning the above and those between Systems Agriculturists and Social Ecology led to the search for neutral ground. A suggestion that perhaps the name transformational leadership may be a term used as a neutral "playing field" to explore common ground for discussion. The group saw that some staff were seen as being outside the mainstream of faculty staff, and this activity caused management problems and feelings of resentment. Maybe if some form of transformation could be achieved by using shared common ground and that staff saw themselves as leaders, then some situation improvement may occur.

* Ken's Timetable. The constraints of Ken's masters program were discussed. Ken raised the following points:

  o Data collection needed to be finished by the end of Autumn Semester 1989.

  o The need to continue meetings through semester breaks, including end of year break.

  o That the meetings with research team be continued fortnightly at present. A need to check to time and day of the meetings to maintain maximum attendance.

.../4
Ken feels commitment is important, reading notes is not, the same because you aren't there to make input.

That publishing would take place after December 1989.

Some Important Comments to Consider:

- A need for unity and diversity among staff
- What is the common ground?
- What would make the transformational leader?
- Is part of common ground a strength in experiential educators?
- Can the faculty been seen, foremost as educators?
- What is an educator?

Next meeting to be held on Thursday, 6th October at 8.30 am. Venue is T4. Please come.
REFLECTIONS ON MEETING NO. 2

Following the meeting some reflection on that outcome seemed important. True, we had moved from a position of not knowing why we were there to a position of acknowledgement, that a feeling of unease existed at Faculty level. Also that the group was prepared to work at the unease and clarify the feeling and find out through Action Research methodology a path to follow.

Part of the reflecting process focused upon the possibility that if all staff became Systems Agriculturalists then many of the problems would disappear. The question then arose what is a Systems Agriculturalist? The question was put to staff as well as staff members of the action research team and no definition or description was clear.

Many terms in education seem to become part of a language used. In doing so they are then assumed to be understood. To ask may seem to be an act of ignorance particularly in context of a questioning toward someone seen as a person in a position of power eg a relationship between academic and student. As Action Research suggests, contestation of language used becomes an important part of the process of change. Perhaps contesting all language used is part of the learning and self knowledge process.

This will be enlarged upon during the discussion conceiving the second meeting. The establishment of the ground rules at the first meeting and the facilitator's role were beginning to show value during the second meeting. Members raised issues in a clear and open way which seemed to already indicate a group development process taking place. In fact a structure was in place which allowed free access to all the research team.

The attached notes list the queries raised by the team at this meeting. Ken raised the question of the absence of three members out of the six. The missing three had all very good reason for not being there and that the absence of someone from the team was to be expected. Probably each meeting, which was held fortnightly, would experience a vacancy. The taping of meetings seemed to grow in importance especially for those who were absent and wanted to listen to the words. Notes don't supply the same relevance.

In discussing Systems Agriculturalist, the next issue which was raised was Social Ecology. This is the next proposed undergraduate program to come into the Faculty of Agriculture. Some discussion had been held the previous week to clarify the differences between the two studies and their philosophies.

The interesting emergence of the term "common ground" turned thinking away from Systems Agriculture and Social Ecology. Somehow the group became open in thought and language. It was as the Action Research says (see page 3) of the notes concerning changes in individual work. The freeing up of words and phrases used was marked by the new exploration of new spaces for the mind to travel. A new "playing field" was emerging. The words "common
ground" and "neutral territory" came out of the overlapping of circles, one representing Systems Agriculture and one representing Social Ecology. The overlapping segment had opened up instead of closing down a new playing field.

Let's talk about that process. Some factors might include the facilitator role - watching, monitoring, tracking and tracing the movement in personal experiences and interactions. Mirroring back words used by each participant, pursuing that interaction until it was finished. Then leading off a word or phrase to the next interacting. The facilitator role, keeping away from context. I believe it is impossible for the monitoring role to be carried out by participants in the group. Only the facilitator can do this. Important that, that person doesn't at any stage impinge his own agenda on the team.

As the research team builds the feelings of trust and moves deeper into the work, the team will begin work immediately they meet. There will be no need for preliminaries or retaping previous meetings. That stage hasn't been reached yet but it will come. One of the difficulties to be encountered will be the entry of the facilitator into the team. At that stage the facilitator role may be dispensed with or must be used as a reference point when difficulties arise. It is very important to review the process of the team development as it proceeds, for future referral. This is another monitoring procedure of the Research Action project.

The group, when discussing common or neutral ground between Systems Agriculture and Social Ecology, whilst agreeing that definition of these terms was not necessarily clear, looking for common interests seemed like a very good idea. The language had now changed and whilst the S.A. and S.E. hadn't been abandoned, but put to the back of our minds, the human element of the faculty started to emerge (see page 3 of notes).

Some of the staff seemed to be "outside" the norm and this was seen to be causing difficulties within the staff group. The picture emerged that the students relationship to the faculty and staff was, in main, at a good level of understanding, with some individual student problems. On the other hand the relationship of the staff to the faculty (organisation) and to each other collectively and at an individual level had difficulties. The use of the words neutral ground had changed the words used in the team (eg 3 playing field) and the relationship between the team seemed to become deeper - that here was something to share at an interpersonal level. If in some way all the staff could see themselves as leaders, and working from an experiential educator framework there would be a "base" for unity and diversity.
SESSION 3   OCT. 6

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT
KEN WILLIAMS

Summary of Session

Pulling together of threads from the previous meetings:
* Definition of "systems agriculture"… an ongoing concern.
* Overlapping circles… what is the common ground between systems agriculture and social ecology?

Ken checked out the commitment of the research team. What did the currently felt commitment mean?

The group explored the implications of Action Research as distinct from traditional research.

The team reflected on the general well-being of the faculty and concluded:
- a) that there was a serious sense of vulnerability being felt by staff and
- b) that there was a good depth of ability and diversity across staff.

WHAT DID WE WANT FOR THE FACULTY?

* A place for everyone.
* A sense of belonging.
* Establishment of a minimum "common ground"… to do with faculty expectations.
* Establishment of staff groups “for survival”.
2.

What are the characteristics of the "number crunchers's" group that is currently working so well?

- very strong commitment
- explicit structure
- support and a sense of belonging
- face to face contact with students
- professional development
- a sense of being useful
- it is student project based
- it is based on a concern for people
- has a diversity of membership.

POSSIBLE ACTION PLAN

The following tentative plan was put together by Ken and David as they worked through the tape recordings of the session.

ACTION: To generate a number of student project based groups modeled on the "number crunchers's group.

IMPLICATIONS:
  a) The members of the Action Research group would facilitate these groups, and
  b) The groups would replace current resourcing on a one-to-one basis.

SUMMARY: The focus of the Action Research project has moved from... becoming systems agriculturalists as the desired transformation
to

establishing "common ground" between systems agriculture and social ecology as the transformation
3.

The building of Faculty "belonging" by generating discrete groups of staff (to include everyone; academic and non academic staff) for:

(1) professional development, and

(2) facilitating student project work.

These groups to be facilitated by members of the project team based on the successful characteristics of the "number crunchers's" group.

As the groups progress over time, the facilitators will reflect on how better to develop the original themes of:
(i) what constitutes a systems agriculturalist, and
(ii) what is the requisite "common ground" for staff (the "unity" which would allow for "diversity") that the faculty should insist on.

Toward the conclusion of the research team meeting, there was a clear expression of the developing commitment of the team members to the research project.
ACTION RESEARCH REFLECTIONS TO DATE AFTER THREE MEETINGS

The action research model (Kemmis & McTaggart - Action Research Planner) refers to the eight steps initially taken in an action research project, they are:

- The Invitation
- The Client
- Setting up Action Research Team with the Client
- The Research Team to form a general plan.
- Research Team takes the first step
- Review the outcome of first step
- Does general plan need to be modified as a result?
- Take second action step.

The statements seen boldly in print seem simple enough. When action is to be taken on any one of the steps then a different step emerges. In this paper the process into this project will be discussed as the steps have been taken. The project is concerned with the Faculty of Agriculture and deals with an unease at staff level.

The Invitation. The invitation came from the Academic Dean of the faculty following a meeting with him, the Dean and the staff development officers. I had shown interest in the faculty for some years, and had surveyed the staff two years earlier at a personal level (see appendix A). This is also mentioned in the introduction. The unease seemed to have many facets and had been accentuated by the emerging changes to tertiary education philosophy at Federal Government level (white paper 1988), and action was imminent. Details of the political inferences was beyond and not part of my brief. The ramifications certainly affected the staff and faculty alike as an entity and certainly at a personal level. There seemed to be a strong case for unity and strength of purpose at this moment. The problems were not clear.

In my years in industry the usual plan for solving problems was to:

1. Call a meeting of persons concerned in the area of the problem.
2. Ask what the problem was seemed to be.
3. Appoint a team to solve it.
4. Report back when solution was reached.

Action Research and Soft Systems Methodology come from a very different perspective. The techniques are revised by:

* The situation has a feeling of unease, among staff, and that is all I know. The unease may have something to with educational change and many other factors. Nobody knows at this stage. Resistance to looking for solutions at this point is very important.

* Client. At this stage seen as the staff of the faculty that may change as the study progresses.

* Research Team. Form a Research Team. A very difficult task because the team is looking at a problem which may not exist. There are no statistics, no historic data of past meetings, no history; just a feeling that something is not okay.

The Action Research team does the research, not the analyst alone. He brings back his impressions and subsequent ideas and shares these with the team. The whole team is involved from the beginning. The value in this involvement is that in future discussions which may be made on a broad
front, there is a committed nucleus of persons who has followed the action research from the beginning. This team can be of undoubted assistance in any change affecting their peers or the organisation.

Easy to say but difficult to do. Change is difficult and slow. The monitoring of the project is important and taping, notes, journals, language, behaviour patterns and energy levels. This is all part of the awareness process, important for the next rounds of unease and/or messy situations.

Research Team to form a general plan: This project has experienced three meetings of almost two hours and if the notes are considered, the movement and research of the team is quite remarkable. Now after the final round a general plan may be formed at the next meeting. The diagram shows the steps taken in the three meetings and the eventual thoughts on a plan for action.

Questions I am asking myself:

- Are we moving too fast for the sake of taking the first step?
- I suspect the answer may be "take the step and see: do more than just talk".

Thinking on the plan to develop it further is an important ingredient. This could be the vision.

**Third Meeting**

Issues raised, but not resolved, were mainly around the terms 'Systems Agriculture and Social Ecology'. Hovering around were the words "common ground", "neutral ground" and the thought of a new playing field. Because of the absence of some members David offered to reiterate the main events of the last meeting. The need for this was expressed by those who were not here at the second meeting and felt that they had missed the flavour of that meeting.

Common ground for exploration was discussed in the framework of using it as means to bring staff together in some way and developing a sense of unity and diversity at faculty level. One common ground base was a strong feeling that the commitment to help students learn was a very strong one within the staff of the faculty.

Discussion covered other areas of concern:

- Commitment to faculty matters.
Responsibility for some jobs, which everyone knows have to be done, is not clearly designated. Problems arising out of this were seen as a lack of unity and purpose. Look for the development of common ground:

* "There's plenty of diversity and very little unity"
* "How do we bring people together on common ground?"
* "Why do they need to be converted?"
* "Are they outside the club?"

It would possibly be a painful process – even the research team may have to experience pain in looking at itself to explore what common ground was available. Pain was expressed in various forms, but the most important statement was real pain was the feeling of being excluded from a group on the outside and not knowing how to get to "belong".

If a person feel they belong then many other things will follow including commitment. Ken raised the issue of commitment and expressed his own dilemma about the commitment of the group to this Action Research project. He expressed the feeling that he was a one man research unit, preparing notes, distributing, making contact, and attending meetings. Full attendance had not been reached at any meeting. The rules agreed to by the group, see Meeting No. 1, were not being kept, or being asked to be altered. Ken expressed his commitment to the group and the project, feeling it was important to the faculty and himself.

Various expressions of commitment were made which at least clarified to the group each member's feelings about the project.

Informal groups operating within the faculty were mentioned and two members belonged to one which they said they wouldn't miss for anything. In fact they were totally committed to that group. Ken explored their commitment to that group and asked the members to explain what were the ingredients of the commitment.

It was a group formed as a survival mechanism, to keep both professionally and personally. But that alone doesn't bring commitment. Many groups have formed with these ingredients and not lasted. So what's the commitment? The membership is very diverse; the interests don't seem to be common. What pulls it so well together? Week by week it happens and members turn up.

The group is project (student) based but at the same time they use it as a professional training sounding board. The items below are some features mentioned which give the group its commitment:

- There is a place for "everyone" in it. That is that each member has a job to do and has competencies to match.
- A strong sense of belonging and support.
- Set up for survival both personally and professionally.
- A strong commitment to one another.
o Structure is "explicit"

o Face to face with students in groups (project based).

o Professional development focus.

o Week activities planned in advance.

o A sense of being useful.

o Concern for people.

From this information a common ground and unity could be fostered and developed throughout the faculty. Perhaps this could be the general plan for taking the first step of this Action Research project ie based on the explicit structure of the staff group.

FOCUS OF OUR PROJECT HAS MOVED FROM

SYSTEMS AGRICULTURISTS

To

PROJECT TFAM

COMMON GROUND

To

DEVELOPING

FACULTY BELONGING

AS A TEAM

BUILDING SPECIAL TEAMS

For

(1) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

(2) LEADING STUDENT PROJECT WORK.
Action Research Project

To Action Research Team,

Dear Member,

Following yesterday's meeting of the team, I have listened to the tapes and made copious notes of the meeting. The notes have reminded me of something I had done before. I noticed notes of the interviews I did with the staff 2 years ago. Very little has changed with the exception that there are perhaps more groups or committees.

One of the things that interested me when I talked with the senior staff about this project was how important the urgency of steps needed to see unity and cohesion as an important element. Particularly in view of the changes to federal education policy. Perhaps the crisis is not big enough yet within the faculty.

We have not had 4 meetings and at no meeting has there been a full attendance. This tells me the commitment is not there and that other things are more important. So here yesterday that there are 23 groups or committees operating among 28 staff is ludicrous.

If we are serious, and I am serious, then arrangements need to be made at top level to give up the group to meet more often and work on the problem seriously. I am serious and spend much of my working life thinking and writing on the project. I do not expect the same of others. However, I want to avoid wasting my energy and skills on a Research project that requires the serious attention of the team and is not getting that.

The group needs to get itself into gear before moving on. The next meeting may be the first or the last.

Yours very sincerely,
AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

SESSION 4, 20TH OCTOBER 1988

Ken Williams, Bob Macadam, David Russell & Dennis Gamble

**An Overview:**

The group chose to ignore the summary and proposed actions developed by Ken and David at our last meeting.

The agenda focused on some frustration arising from a faculty meeting the previous day, catching Bob up from the last meeting and focusing on Bob's needs and agenda for the faculty.

It took us most of the time to arrive at the same point that we finished up at the last meeting. A reflection on this suggests that we reach agreement at the next session when all of us can be present for future meeting.

**Some Issues Raised:**

- too many management seers in the faculty
- too much fragmentation of management structures and groups
- too small a group running with and committed to the system
- insufficient power available to people in management
- not enough accountability of individuals
- insufficient reward for people with management responsibility
- need to better help people find a part to play in the system
- reluctance of management to take some very hard decisions because of perceived outcomes.

**Why are we here?**

The group started to ask some critical questions about themselves such as:

What are we doing?
What do we want to do?
How are we going about it?
How should we be going about it?
Are we attempting to create a perfect faculty? Do we want to take action in some area, around some theme, that would lead to an improvement in the faculty.

The group has spent a great deal of time oscillating between the diverging and assimilating stages of the learning cycle. A theme arises then we go back again to the diverging stage or focus on a theme of one member of the group (based on their assimilation of the whole).

We also tend to oscillate between a plan and a specific plan without reaching any group commitment to a specific plan or strategy around one of the themes we have identified. Until we do this no action will arise.

---

A need felt by the group to take Action

At the end of the session there was agreement on going back to the theme arising out of Session 3, which involves:

1. exploring a system or a model to get commitment and a sense of belonging in any organisation.

2. applying this model to our faculty on what we have been doing and what we need to do to get commitment and a sense of belonging by staff.

That is, start following a theme through into the converging and accommodating stages. Too much time can be spent in the diverging and assimilating stage before some action is taken.
The group felt it was important to go through the conceptual stage of converging (eg looking at a model to create a sense of belonging and commitment in any \( \_\_\_ \) before we look at specific how's to achieve this (eg create similar support groups in the faculty to the economics/systems group (previously known as the "numbers players").

**Some Models we played with:**

A. Support/Challenge/Voluntary groups focusing around meeting individual staff needing, resourcing students and facilitating student action research projects.

B. Program Structures

C. Peer Review Structures.

It was felt that session 3 focused around A structures. This session focused around B structures and hedged around C structures.
In looking at program structures the following structure was outlined as what is:

Faculty of Agriculture

DEAN

Assoc DEAN (A)  Assoc DEAN (R)

PG
S. Ec.  Ag

Strategic  UG1  UG3  Technical  Outreach  Farms
Planning  Manager  Manager  Manager  Manager
Group (4)  (1)  (1)  (1)

Phase:  I  II  III  I  II
Managers:  (1)  (1)  (1)
Support:  (2)  (2)  (2)
Others:  (12)  (8)

The proposal from the Faculty was to replace the left hand side of the above diagram with the following management structure.
Assoc DEAN (A)
PG UG1 Manager
PG UG3 Manager
2 PG Managers
2 Phase Managers in PG UG1

The above group be responsible for the co-ordination of all the Faculty programs.

Notes taken by
Dennis Gamble
for the Group

20 October 1988
I had a strong need to write the letter (attached) to all team members. It was borne out of frustration, anger and anxiety. I hope the message in the letter is clear. The non-commitment to the research project is reflected in other faculty activities. These assumptions are borne out by the tapes and reinforced by the overview notes produced after the meeting. It is important to note that the letter was written before the notes were received. It is also interesting that many of the thoughts coincide.

The meeting was not a good one but perhaps needed to happen as it did. The group had moved itself in a messy direction and had not yet cleared its own agenda.

Introduction of new agenda diverted the group away from the decisions of Meeting No. 3. The anger expressed concerning the faculty meeting the previous Wednesday afternoon led the group to discuss the frustrations of that meeting. And although the agenda was new perhaps it needed discussion at that moment as it was foremost in the group's mind.

I feel the group dynamics game called "Get the Leader" was played by one of the group. The role is to lead the group to present that person's agenda rather than work on the group's agenda. This becomes a very powerful tool particularly when the challenge is coming from an individual who normally holds a position of power. The group tends to fragment without a clear picture of working on its agenda, but dealing only with that of the individual. I was at fault allowing this to happen.

The group got off the rails and discussed:

- Program Management
- Peer Assessment
- and finally got back to talking about what would make people want to belong to an organisation.

The mention of power was suggested in the organisation of a new team to run the faculty. Directly any suggestion was made to give power to this team to run with that idea, then this was stamped on by the Associate Dean. Responsibility without power is nothing and reflects exactly the dilemma of the faculty, no direction from management. There is no structure, and although this factor has been obvious to many for years, nothing has been done about it. That's the question!

What kind of organisation do people like to belong to?

This was the task set at the end of the last meeting and seems relevant taking all factors into account, including the advent of the Western University, which now seems to be a reality.
Some thoughts on future team activities:

- Bring commitment to fruition.
- No backtracking for those who weren't present.
- More frequent and longer meetings.
- Pursuing a theme to trial action.
- Clarify what "Action Research Team" means.

Develop a time frame suitable for the project to proceed – end of semester:

* Project pressures (student)
* Student vacation
* Staff commitment over Dec - Feb 1989 period.
SESSION 5  NOV. 3

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

KEN WILLIAMS

SUMMARY

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION  -  WITHIN FACULTY.

*Laissez faire environment

*No agreed code of practice

*Not possible to enforce norms.

*Lack of accountability

*Managers full responsibility but powerless

*Unhealthy climate

A STRATEGIC ISSUE GIVEN THIS SITUATION

*To have Faculty:

1. address this issue

2. get agreement on a need for a code of practice as a key element of a response

3. Get the faculty to explore, and agree on, the means of using a code of practice to overcome laissez faire climate

All of this to be consistent with our "collegiate world view"... this view will needs to be articulated and even agreed to!
5. The suggestion by Stephen of the need for a code of practice seemed to give a focus to the discussion as the themes and climate was discussed. (See separate sheet Ken Williams).

6. The meeting ended with agreement to meet once a week for the next two weeks to develop a model, i.e. a system to develop a code of practice plus proposed action steps.

Present: David, Bob, Ken, Dennis and Stephen.

Additional Information:

1. David in discussing his commitment and perspective of A-R stated that the group had to decide whether:
   i. to stay together and what does commitment mean in time, priorities, etc.
   ii. and arrive at action plan by the 17.11.88.

2. There is a range of perspectives on A-R in particular when to use SSM.

3. Dennis continues to express concern about the climate in the Faculty. His and Olga's role in staff development is very important to this group.

4. The potential of staff development to be a vehicle for taking action arose during the meeting. Various options were quickly 'flagged' like doing something as a Faculty for the Experiential Conference in 1989.

5. There was continuous discussion around improving the Faculty via improving relationships and enhancing peoples commitment to a common purpose and understanding their contribution to this process.

6. Words such as power, norms, accountability, commitment, commonality of purpose were common in the latter part of our meeting.

S.R. BLUNDEN.
14.11.88
November 3.11.88

SESSION 5

Background

Ken had circulated a letter expressing his concerns about the level of commitment being exhibited in the group to our fortnightly meetings.

The Meeting Summary

1. The group discussed the members perceptions of action-research (A-R) and how we had been operating.

2. Following this David modelled the process of the group's activity to date.

   FACULTY UNEASE ABOUT MANAGEMENT
   i.

   Ken

   ii.

Ken 'fingers' five others who have strong feelings about the Faculty.

iii. Ken brings them together but not as a group. However, the 'unease' dominates the situation....

iv. Which prevents problem definition (~ have resisted using SSM because of group cohesion.)

v. First action step.

3. Endeavoured to identify themes from our previous meetings. Listed below.

   Need "common ground" for Faculty "unity".
   Allegiance to common philosophy.
   More of allegiance to one another - people becoming too individualistic.
   Disillusionment.
   Structure - management roles.
   Code of praxis.
   Current climate of do what you like.
   Need for pre-planning activities (negotiating).
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT - KEN WILLIAMS

Summary - Reflections Meeting No. 5

Following the last meeting and the circulation of my letter to the research team my feelings were very mixed. The group were not operating as a group and we seemed to be doing anything but looking at issues within the faculty. Suggestions made by different members concerning issues were mentioned and seemingly not dealt with. From past experience I know the issues were still there, but how to raise them seemed a major difficulty - issues concerning morale management structures, anger within the staff of the faculty to name a few. There seemed to be fear that the team may indulge in a personal stone throwing contest if some of the issues were discussed. Admittedly names had been mentioned in previous meetings to emphasise a point but from my perspective had not been done to point blame in any one's direction.

I concluded that in my position as facilitator I needed to reinforce the notion that the system was the subject of our work and not the individuals in it.

I have also had some thoughts about the understanding of what the commitment to the project might be and the team understanding of that commitment. The second issue for me was the understanding of the action research methodology by the group.

(1) Commitment – As previously stated the team had not experienced one meeting where all were present. Much time had been spent on "catching up" by those who were absent from a previous meeting. For me this seemed to be a symptom of laissez faire environment which persisted within the faculty. I was not used to this type of operating, and if the commitment was differently seen by other members of the team then this issue needed to be resolved and options and strategies developed to cope with the existing system.

Strategies that could be considered were:

- That the whole team meet for a prolonged meeting to evolve a general plan, then reduce the team to follow that plan and report back to full team at intervals. The staff included in the team were key faculty members and their time was very valuable to the faculty programs.

(2) Action Research - I was quite sure that even at this stage some difficulty was being experienced by members concerning what an Action Research Team was.

The meeting began by some members expressing the view that commitment was difficult unless a task was involved. This seemed to gain acceptance and the thought that a code of practice be established had a singular effect on bringing the group together as a group.

- The issues which had been talked about at the previous meetings were at last heard and agreed to be considered and were listed.
The second important step to be recognised was the importance of a time frame to reach some conclusion – weekly meetings.

The third recognition was that the group decided to meet without the facilitator and I believe this was a major step forward in the ownership of the group by the group members.

- OWNERSHIP OF THE GROUP BY THE GROUP.
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT - KEN WILLIAMS

Reflections Session 6 - November 10 - Group Ownership

At the previous session I had indicated I would be in New Zealand for a week, which I had arranged between the usual fortnightly meeting. Because of issues raised concerning commitment and the time frame concerning end of semester, with all the implications of the end of year. Staff holidays, serious beginning again by February - March, time would be running out, for task completion of Ken's work and also the impending University of Western Sydney beginning. The group decided to hold a meeting on the Thursday I was away.

This was a significant and important step of the group's ownership of the project.

I had felt some anxiety about the onward going motion of activity and I had to be very aware that I didn't impose my agenda on the group. The letter sent to the group expressed this anxiety and somehow helped to unblock the group toward moving on and discussing the issues of concern within the faculty.

The moving around around seemingly all over. The place touching on but not dealing with issues was an important part of the group's development. Backing off from conflict or challenging each other when presenting material. Silence rather than asking for clarification of an issue or point of view. A common pattern of behaviour in committees or groups where the leader is coming from a position of power. I think this was happening in the group in its early sessions because of the Associate Dean's being there considering the position not necessarily the individual.

This factor needed to be talked over in these sessions; a bit like teams weighing each other up before a contest. Now the weighing up had been completed and the testing of strength could begin. This activity began to show and members began challenging each other irrespective of their position within the faculty. They were behaving as people committed to a task feeling free to express their views without fear or favour.

The second important step which had been taken at the previous meeting was the listing of 6 - 9 important issues concerning the Faculty which introduced the beginning of the development of a code of practice (praxis). There was some discussion concerning the use of these words.

The introduction of a task generated a lot of energy and enthusiasm for the project, and strong debate was evident about the way the task should be handled. All this too was developing the ownership of the group to the project.

The introduction of what the group was doing at a Faculty meeting by a member of the research group was very important. This was further reinforced by a suggestion being made that some planning groups could combine with the research group and add their information. This seemed to
point to an acceptance by the faculty of the emerging importance of what the group was doing.

The general plan would need to be developed more and agreed to by the group before the first action step was taken viz communicating the plan to the Faculty by members of the group.
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

KEN WILLIAMS

Background to meeting

This is the first group without Ken (he is in N.Z.)
(This is significant as it is the first sign of "ownership").

Also, the previous meeting ended with a definite indication of full
commitment (only Olga wasn’t there) to a specific target, viz., generating
a code of practice (or praxis)

This target was arrived at via:
i) listing of 7-8 areas of unease;
ii) focusing on the one that was "strategic" in that it was underlying the
others.

At Faculty meeting yesterday (Nov. 9), the topic was Strategic Planning. It
became apparent to some that there was no systematic, forward, change
program afoot for the Faculty.

It became apparent to Bob at this Faculty meeting that there was good
sense in combining

creating a vision

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\node {creating a code of practice (praxis)};
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Meeting starts.

David reports on previous group meeting.

Bob suggests CATWOLE as a vehicle for generating an appropriate
transformation.

Group picks up in identifying 'T' by describing (i) the current situation
and (ii) the envisioned situation.
David introduced the distinction between "practice" and "praxis":

![Diagram showing the distinction between theory and practice]

Every bit of "practice" is informed by theory but because we are not aware of the theory, we cannot concurrently re-examine the theory that we are operating from.

Every bit of "praxis" is informed by theory. We are consciously wanting our theory to influence what we do, and what we do, we want to have influencing our theory.

We then developed CATWOE:

C  Academic staff, support staff, students, college, & wider clientile.
A  This group of researchers.
T  A system to develop a code of academic practice.
W  That shapes and is shaped by praxis.
O  That is generated and owned by the academic staff of Faculty.
E  *Historically, we have not been able to meet peoples' needs when shaping up praxis;
    *built-in apathy,
    *threat that code of practice (praxis) will pose for some people,
    *some groups are not committed to paradigm in its application, continued dependency on a historical structured system,
    *being able to meet people's human needs and to empower them to use their competencies within our paradigm.
This model of action is in the context of:
(i) what is the paradigm?
(ii) ownership by Faculty and meeting human needs.

FIRST ACTION STEP:
(i) communicate with Faculty what we are doing;
(ii) get feedback from them.

GENERAL PLAN:

develop an action system for generating a code of practice.

develop and articulate ( & communicate) our paradigm... i.e., the Faculty paradigm.
Details of (i)
*uncertainty about norms
*heavy demands on staff
*plans not articulated
*uncertainty about responsibility
(to self and to institution)
*human needs of staff not being met
*great commitment of most staff to achievement of systemic exp. vision/paradigm.

Details of (ii)
*Create visions of "House" we want to build
*Developing blueprint of how to achieve it
*acting to achieve it.

Bob proposed a "root" definition:

code of practice

that enables

a creative contribution
to development of indiv. & institution

while

enabling improved relationships between staff, students and clients.

There was then a debate as to what else might be put into the first cloud... what other than "a code of practice"?
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

SESSION: 17th November 1988

PRESENT: Ken, Olga, David, Stephen, Bob and Dennis.

PRE-PREPARATION BY BOB

Bob further developed and circulated "System to develop a code of academic practice" we started in our last session (See Appendix A).

The insights that came to Bob in refining this model and thinking out the desirable outcomes of the system were as follows:

- focussed energy
- clear norms
- improved relationships

TENSION, BACKTRACKING & DEBATE

Bob produced the model and was then ready to use the model as a basis to planning how we could implement the system of developing a code of practice.

The group had some concerns and these were raised and debated for some time. Examples of the debate are as follows:

"There is a need to clarify our vision and paradigm; this must be linked and developed parallel with the code of practice".

A System to develop a code of practice  A System to clarify our vision for the future

"The vision and classification of the paradigm will emerge in all the different groups presently operating in the Faculty".

"The vision and paradigm will become clear as we focus on the code of practice".

"I am not happy that the above will happen at all. The paradigm is not clear".
"The paradigm is and will continue to be an emerging thing".

"Even though the paradigm may be emerging it still needs to be clearly defined at the point of time in order for it to be debated, discussed and defended. Our paradigm must always be underpinned with a clearly defined theoretical base".

"The clarity of our paradigm is very important to the development of our code of practice".

"The paradigm will shape and inform our code of practice and the code of practice will in turn shape and inform our paradigm".

Another dimension to the above discussion:

"It's not our vision and paradigm which needs working on it is the task of filling human resources to the broad paradigm or vision we already have. People are feeling left out with nowhere to fit. The code of practice must meet this need".

**ACTION TAKEN BY THE GROUP**

The group felt the key issues around the code of practice had been sufficiently debated to have a clear context for our next step. We were now ready to take it.

The key question that confronted us was how to inform the faculty of our perception of the need for a code of practice.

We came to the following consensus for action:

- We do what we ask our students to do, that is sharing how they arrived at the issues they identified in an action research project.
As a group we decided to build a rich picture of:

(a) The story over time with pictures of how the group went round the learning cycle and arrived at the need for "a code of practice to improve the faculty". Ken was to complete this task before our next meeting.

(b) Build a picture of how the group perceives the faculty and the need for action in the areas of "a code of practice" and the clarifications of our paradigm". This picture was quickly put together before the end of the meeting (See Appendix B).

The picture was then to form the basis for sharing with small groups over the Faculty of how we saw the situation. The allocation between the group individuals was as follows:

Ken (Engineering and upstairs Plant Production)
David (Post Graduate Group)
Dennis & Stephen (Animal Production)
Bob (Dean Group)
Olga (Support Staff)

We felt that we needed to take an informal approach to sharing our understandings with the small group throughout the faculty rather than initially working with the whole Faculty.

Dennis Gamble

21st November 1988
The energy level was high and statements were made when "six people stand as one then something really good will occur". "This action research project is very important for Agricultural Education on a broader base than only in Australia". "Those who move down this path, and many are thinking about it, will travel this same difficult road and our work will help". "We must not fail or experiential work here will be set back years".

This was the background to the meeting. Then a lot of new material was introduced, relevant to meeting 6 and a development of the those ideas, but nevertheless new. The new material had to be digested by the group before acceptance or understanding could be achieved.

This was a painful process for the person who had worked hard and some frustration and anxiety was apparent in the hour that was taken up explaining the whole new developed system.

The process taking place showed that the group would only deal with its own agenda, and until that agenda was agreed to then the group would work in conflict until agreement and cohesion returned, then the group would proceed.

Many hidden agenda come forward during this time and many ideas and assumptions were discussed and discarded or accepted. All group members agreed that they had had their own ideas as to what should, come next and the group straightened this out so that it could proceed. One member became so frustrated that that person decided that he would only stay for half an hour more. Argument was reached that the new material was very acceptable and was really okay.

The facilitator asked each member of the group what was the next step, and all expressed the view that at the end of this meeting we should be able to go to the Faculty and explain:

- what we were doing.
- what had brought us to this point.
- what we proposed to do next.
- receive feedback on the idea of a code of practice.
- to develop the code of practice through consultation with the Faculty through each point so that the Faculty feels part of the process.

This also fulfils the Action Research model, with acting on each step and reviewing the result of the action with the possibility of altering the plan.
Now then was the work so far to be best presented to the Faculty. This step was seen as very important to bring Faculty members into the process. The decision was reached that each group member would undertake to address small groups and bring to the main group, feedback concerning the code of Practice suggestion.

The vehicle to do this was devised in cartoon form and depicted the current Faculty position as seen by the group. There was acceptance that a new game needed to be played, which was available to everyone and the development of a champion team with positions for all.

This was the First Step to go off and introduce to staff the idea of a code of practice.
Reports from Ken, David, Dennis - written notes.

Olga reported verbally on meeting with technical staff.

Ken on meetings with Engineering and P.P.C. staff, David with Social Ecology group, Dennis with Animal Production.

In Olga's case the intent was more to share what we as a group were doing: The others reported a response which reflected anger and frustration.

Discussion of what the high level of frustration expressed in the feedback means as far as the next steps in the project are concerned. Main negative reaction seems to have been to the role of "manager/coach" in the metaphor rather than the issue of "rules". The "rules" are the focus of this group with our perception of the need for a Code of Practice.

Once again the group became bogged down and on this occasion made no real progress that was identifiable as such.

In discussion after meeting, Olga, Dennis and Bob agreed that if we were to progress the issue of how the group was operating as an action research group should be the first agenda item at our next meeting on:

Thursday, December 15, at 8.30 a.m.

Ken Williams, David Russell, Dennis Gamble, Steven Blunden, Olga Slezacek.

30.11.88
Reflections On Feedback First Step - Friday, 25 November 1988

I talked to two groups of staff - Engineering and Top Floor of Plant Sciences meetings arranged through Harry Williams and Frank Kelleher.

Both groups had heard of the project and had been sent individual copies of rich picture diagram prior to the meeting. The first meeting was with the Engineering group at 9.50 a.m. in the Engineering Tea Room. I by briefly explaining how the team had reached this point and the proposed code of practice possibility being but alongside a vision of future Faculty development.

The atmosphere was a mixture of "no hum" and verbal aggression. Phrases in brief are written below as they were said and copied on to butcher paper:

- Plenty of visions, no implementation.
- Forward planning - none.
- We are cynical about the possibility of change.
- What happened the last time!!
- If it's not the way at the top, it won't happen.
- The model is accurate at this moment.
- Where is the manager.
- We don't practise what we preach.
- Management of expertise, deplorable.
- Facilitation needs to be recognised as a skill along with other skills.
- New university environment will be different. Go and check.
- Are we looking at education or promotion.
- Overseas emphasis too strong, what's the matter with State and Australian scheme. We are funded locally.
- The top say we'll implement the decisions but won't do anything about those we don't like.
- Power play and all its implications.
- You are pushing the code of practice down our necks - check your methodology model.
Summary - I found the comments cynical and in some cases very aggressive. A group of good people who feel their energies are not accepted as is their expertise. They don't feel that a vision or code of practice will change anything, they have heard it all before - their needs are not being met.

The second group were the staff occupying the top floor of the Plant Sciences Building.

After the explanation as to why I was there and trying to explain how the research team had reached this stage the group did not want to hear any of that. I was assailed by comments like:

* What are you doing about farms.
* What about the non academic staff are presentation on team.
* How was the research committee chosen, was it from the "in" group.
* You will want to be bloody good to sort this one out old fella.

The fact that I stated I was there to talk about their views and receive feedback made no difference. I was the object of anger and disillusionment. I believe they saw me as a friend to whom they could unload. The following are verbatim messages:

- Another vision and no implementation - it's like putting money in a slot machine and getting your future read.
- Forward planning non existent.
- No middle management.
- No senior academic board attendance.
- Disdain for College important committees.
- Responsibility by senior management.
- Senior Dean not present at admission interviews, best we could do was a Technical Officer.
- Senior management sees the Faculty running on visions and paradigms whatever they are.
- If you can work this mess out you need a PhD. not a masters.

Summary. The problem is seen by both sections as a management one, and in general terms no planning, instructions given today on important issues are changed tomorrow. The needs are not being met.

At the end in both cases one or two people could see the big mess, in changing the game and rules and positions, but are very sceptical about anything happening.
The problems are serious and somehow the needs need to be flushed out and met soon.

After all this I had lunch with the staff in the Animal Production Centre. One comment made in half jest, was really very serious. I remembered a comment from a previous training in inter-personnal relations: "Lacking is ever said in jest".

The comment was this: "What's your team doing old fella, you should have it clear by now. You had better hurry or the joint will disintegrate".

My idea of a producer is one who maps the way and shares that way with you.
CONVERSATIONS WITH POSTGRAD GROUP .......... KEN'S ACTION RESEARCH

Communicating where the project is at and gaining feedback on how staff are viewing the Faculty.

November 28, 1988

Present: Judy, Julie, David, John, Graham, Marilyn

There was total agreement on what the metaphor communicated: No one knew what game was being played; what the rules were; and what positions were demanded of the players.

"A storm of frustration" was what greeted the discussion of the Faculty's practices. The issues that were highlighted were:
* An absence of year planning... No one knew when the games were going to be played; no one willing to take responsibility for the role of coach or captain.
* No identity with Faculty... there was for tearoom and/or work groups in which there had been emotional involvement, but not for Faculty meetings.
* Faculty meetings were not working... all that resulted was anger and frustration.
* Any planning in big groups is hopeless... faculty meetings are not a positive venue!
* Any "new game" needs to be totally participatory... especially is there a need to have the students as players. All need to be playing the same game... for example, everyone contracting there learning.
* The notion of 'collegiality' is a useless myth!

Given that these were the key issues raised as a result of the 'game' metaphor, are there any other comments that you would now like to add?

COMMENTS:
The feedback from Action Step were received by the group, 3 in written form, 2 verbal. I was a little disappointed as the team had agreed that the reports would be written. All three written reports were clearly expressing frustration and some anger. I have listened to the tapes and have summarised some of the responses. Remember the task was to present the diagram of steps taken by the group toward developing a code of practice together with a vision. Some of the responses. Remember the task was to present the diagram of steps taken by the group toward developing a code of practice together with a vision. Some comments appear below. Whilst seemingly trivial their importance will be discussed later.

I left the meeting anxious and frustrated. Anxious that the feedback wasn’t assimilated even suggestion made that the information must have been given in a negative context.

Frustrated that the methodology debate came up again concerning Soft Systems and Action Research. I believe that this should be clarified again, because for my masters as designated I am doing the major project within the framework of Action Research; a part of which is the Soft Systems Methodology. Also statements like let’s get on with it, when I don’t know yet what we should be doing.

I would like to list some comments taken from the tapes.

. We didn’t assimilate the feedback from Step 1.
. This research team should not be part of management policy.
. Some are wearing 2 hats and all that implies.
. What are we on about in the Faculty – what are the priorities?
. It’s easy to do why hasn’t it been done?
. Frustrations with organisation and management.
. No coach (see picture) chairman of board, no one filling the role of coach.
. Let’s stay with the organisation.
. Let’s stay with the rules.
. The coach was the theme.
. No response to code of practice.
Issue was about Faculty and meetings.

No more burdens; bugger them let them work out their own problems.

The meeting closed at 10.45 a.m. with no resolution coming from the meetings. So members felt it was a waste of time. My response was that perhaps it's better to consider the issues again rather than hurry something through.

I have had subsequent discussions with all members of the research team, and was not surprised to hear they had had some debriefing sessions in an attempt to unravel the confusion and frustration.

A very important response made after the question I put. Do you want to quit. Nobody wants to quit or throw in the sponge later. One member suggested he should perhaps withdraw. The whole problem is a group one and all members are willing to try and to analyse the situation in their own way. This is in fact the action research model.

My view is that the group is above the task, at this stage. It seems to me to be necessary to ask group members individually for their opinions as to the norms and characteristics under which this group should operate. The note made above concerning 2 hats worn by members of the team at these meetings was a heavy burden for the group to bear. All members have agendas; maybe they need to be put on the table to clarify. None of us can know what the others expectations are, unless we are told.

---

Ken Williams
From Ken Williams 8/12/88
To Research Team Members:

I want to make contact with the research team following our last meeting. I felt subdued after that time together. It affirmed my belief in the capacity of the group to work on blockages. Each I suspect has slight 2 hats to the team. So the professional and individual agendas are high. All are very much individuals.

At this moment I see the group as more important than the task. It seems an appropriate time to re-examine our individual needs and expectations of each other.

I would like to share a few thoughts with you to ponder before our next meeting.

* If it's difficult to work in some harmony in here, how much more difficult to work in harmony out there.
  * What change would I like to see happen?
  * How can I relate to you when I give you the "Jim Jams"?
  * I need to be sure of the message given by others.
* Exploring the problem doesn't work - let's explore the desired state.
* Let go the model that may not work. Try something else.
* The people need to be welling.
* What can I manipulate the model?
A

WHAT WAS DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS PROJECT
TO OTHER ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS

As researchers we were doing the project on ourselves NOT just on somebody else. We therefore brought to the project a whole lot of baggage (our concerns, our anger, our high points etc) as a microcosm of the Faculty as well as some set views of each other.

Personalities and role playing our roles in the Faculty were both a hindrance (blocked our progress) and a help (gave us some helpful insights as we felt the tensions within us that existed in the faculty) in carrying out the project.

As it was inhouse we dispensed more with niceties towards each other and engaged in (a) an unconscious power struggle over the action research process and (b) a role playing of our concerns in the Faculty towards the person who held most power and most accountability outside of our group in the Faculty. This whole process took a long time to work through in order to become a group that could work together on improving our Faculty environment.

B

WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE PROCESS OF
ACTION RESEARCH?

Allowed Bob to dominate the process with passive and unspoken resistance. Felt that Bob was using CATWOE to converge too early and that Bob did not really want to hear our concerns and needs as a Dean.

Spent a long time on what is there and what does this mean. Our one action step with the Faculty took us back by surprise at the very intensity of the response.

Most of the group were working to the Kolb learning cycle as a process while we saw Bob using a single technique (CATWOE).

For some reason it was not O.K to openly debate and challenge the learning process and methodology of the action research project. This took a long time for the group to be conscious of. A crisis in the group as a group was necessary to make debating methodology an O.K thing to do.
C

HOW WOULD I DO IT AGAIN?
- as an initiation
- as a participant

D

WHERE TO NOW WITH THE PROCESS OF ACTION RESEARCH?

E

WHAT DO I MEAN BY ACTION RESEARCH?
- Facilitating a group of people to learn about their situation and to take action to improve the situation.

F

REFLECTIONS ON THE FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE & WHERE IT IS GOING

- We are a volunteer organization facing enormous change with a radical learning paradigm, with a staff that is increasingly "hiking off" (for all sorts of legitimate reasons), with inappropriate management structure (roles, with some great ideas to help ourselves and the agricultural industry).
- At this time we are very vulnerable, with decreasing resources and the need to make continual adjustments to the way we operate.
- We must become more a champion team more than a team of champions.

DENNIS GAMBLE
24.12.88
REFLECTIONS ON FACULTY A-R GROUP

"RESEARCHING WITHIN AN ORGANISATION"

1. The difficulties of "physician heal yourself".
   * other staff wondering about the group and what they were doing.
     - need good communication between the researchers and the organisation
   * the researchers come with labels built up through the organisation's experience based on their role, style of operation, personality, perceived agenda interests and so their statements are interpreted in the light of this baggage.
   * too often because of this we fail to clarify what people are saying and so mistrust or misinterpretations occur.
   * because of the roles we have a more senior staff member may become a focus of blame or seen as the fixit man given the A-R.
   * knowing when you may be wearing you 'hat' or putting someone else's 'hat' on during the process. There is a real difficulty in determining when you are a researcher and not part of the situation.
   * other personnel begin to have expectations that may not be the brief of the A-R group.

2. The experiencing of how to improve a situation in an organisation.
   * the power of metaphors to step out of a situation and gain a new perspective
   * it enriches the research, it changes the vocabulary, it is more dynamic in nature and so engages and involves the group as a whole. There is more sparking off one another in the meeting discussion.
   * in an environment where there may be a variety of approaches in going about undertaking research in an organisation. It will be very important to consciously discuss methodology.
   * a lot of energy can be lost when there is not adequate sharing occurring outside the group meeting time between all members.
   * no matter how well people know each other there is need for adequate group building
   * how do a group of people "improve" a "situation" within the faculty?
   * have we adequately understood the culture of the faculty?
   * have we considered how people see us?
   * need a more participative approach between conceptualising and undertaking some action.
3. The invitation to participate in inhouse research.

An invitation to be part of a team has its problem:

* there will be problems with perceptions of staff - like why them and not me? in crowd perception etc.
* need to be prepared to be vulnerable - looking for challenge and criticism from within the group and from outside.
* that the group is seen to be a fix it - so becomes a place to focus blame of dump grievances like "what are you doing if you haven't done it yet?" otherwise we will feel guilty.

4. Monitoring progress

* informal discussions outside of meetings were helpful but ultimately there will be crunch points which need full group participation.

5. Reporting Progress.

* reporting internally was adequate but how this is done in a so called A-R mode was not clear or sorted out. "we kept our cards close to our chest."


* some very major insights can be achieved for the individual and the workings of an organisation. Eg: in HAC the modus operandi was seen to be volunteer organisation.
* certainly have gained an enhanced understanding of the people I work with
* people will have agenda's verbalised or not.

7. Things to be considered.

* an agreed framework of action-research (A-R)
* currently the client does not see themselves as a client
  - we have not worked in a co-learning manner with our client
  - faculty has expectations of us that are not realistic
  - are we studying our faculty from a distance.

30.7.87
Where We Left Off?

At our last meeting there was considerable frustration felt by members of the group with how we were operating, where we were going or not going and with each other. The temptation at the end of the meeting was to try and bandaid the situation up quickly and get some outcome.

We resisted this temptation. A date was set for our next meeting. Our frustration was left on the table to ponder and reflect on between meetings.

What Happened Between Meetings?

Much heart searching by individuals took place. A number of sub-meetings took place in different groups of 2 or 3 to reflect, debrief, clarify, confront, help one another work through their concerns. The net result was some clear insights on how we had operated as individuals, as a group and as action researchers. We came to the 15th December meeting with these insights plus a fairly high degree of anxiety as to what may be the outcome of the meeting and how best to manage the process.

What Happened At the Meeting?

Ken gave an overview of what he saw as the task of this action research group. He then called for individuals in the group to share their insight and understanding at where the group was at and how they were feeling. This was then followed by further interaction, sharing and insights on:-

- how we saw ourselves operating as an individual.
- how we saw each other operating in the group.
- how we viewed soft action research and soft systems methodology in relation to how we have operated.

At the end of the meeting we felt we have clarified a number of important issues, we had reached a deeper understanding of each other, we had cleared a few blockages, we had passed through our conflict stage, we have set up a few ground rules and now we were ready to get on with our action research project as a group committed to each other and to the task.

We agreed to do the following: —
1) Hold our next meeting 8.30 a.m. – 10.30 a.m., Thursday, 9th February, 1989.

2) Individually write up our reflections and insights to date on the action research project.

3) Give these to Ken by 30th January, 1989, to put together.

4) Write up a joint paper on our action research project for the International Conference on Experiential Learning to be held at H.A.C. in July, 1989.

We left the meeting with a great sense of relief that we had come a long way in practising being action researchers on ourselves.

In the Appendix I have included some of the conversation that occurred in sharing our insights.

Dennis Gamble
Appendix

What We Shared

(What is included below does not include all the conversations and some comments have been summarised or rephrased.)

Bob:

"I have been frustrated".
"We have all come with different agendas to the group".
"We need to clarify our agendas and directions to one another".
"There is no point in persisting with this group just for the sake of keeping the group going".
"There is no point in persisting with this group just for the sake of keeping the group going.
"To-day is a day of decision for me, a watershed".

Olga:

"Expressed her deep commitment to the group and to achieving an action to improving the Faculty".

David:

"I see action research and SSM as very similar".
"We came together because we shared a desire to make an improvement to the Faculty. Ken's project offered this group a vehicle to make this improvement."
"Our task was to follow a process based on action research principals".
"We assumed we were a group because of a common desire to make an improvement to the Faculty".
"A collection of people IS NOT A REAL GROUP. This is what we have been. When differences emerged we did not have the mechanisms to handle these and build a group. As a group and as a Faculty we are very poor in resolving differences".
"We are in a very complex messy environment with lots of pressure. The temptation is to get on with it and relieve the pressure quickly i.e. focus on a task and forget the people and the group. There are very few real groups in the Faculty at this point of time. We are mainly collections of people carrying out tasks".

Stephen:

"I came to this group without a mindset or an agenda. I came with some concerns and I came with an appreciation of a range of concepts to understand and improve situations. I see "Soft Systems Methodology" as a sub-set of action research. I use an amalgamation of a set of concepts.

"In terms of our group learning process there are all sorts of things this group has not addressed".
e.g. "The client does not see themselves as a client".

"No sense of co-learning of researchers with their client".

"We have failed to develop a perception of our clients need".

"Other Faculty members have expectations of what we will do that are not my expectations".

"We are all wearing different hats at different times. I see Bob as more a Dean rather than a fellow action researcher. This raises the question. "Are we behaving as professionals?"

"I also see Bob as continually pushing the barrow of soft systems methodology in a very narrow way and he won't let it go."

"We have to reach a point where we can accept and give criticism to each other. We must develop competence in this area to grow as individuals, as a group and as a Faculty".

"Finally we must put more energy and thought into our methodology."

Dennis:-

"I generally like to avoid conflict. This group has helped me to face it, work it through and grow as a result. It is important that this group addresses: -

1) Whether we are a real group? We are a microcosm of the Faculty as well as being action researchers. The hats we wear at different times in a meeting are not explicit and tend to block our progress. This crisis we now face will be a significant learning exercise for each of us.

2) Our process and methodology. I feel that SSM and CATWOE are being used as a technique. We tend to converge before we have a real understanding of the situation.

   The stronger Bob pushes SSM or CATWOE the more I resist and so the process is blocked.

3) Our prime motive i.e. to bring about an improvement to the Faculty. Not learning how to use a methodology or a paper at the end, although these may be valuable outcomes."

Bob:

"I see SSM and A.R. (Action Research) as very intertwined. Probably just different perspectives of the same thing.

My problem is the people did not want to talk about methodology in this group. People did not come back and say I don't agree with that
process. Instead I got a whole lot of criticisms dumped on me about the Faculty.

Ken:

"I feel I have been following a methodology in this project; the principles embodied in action research."

Bob:

"I don't see SSM as a technique.
"I am committed to the process of the learning cycle."
"I am happy to talk about our methodology in the above broader terms. But let's do it overtly. We must openly debate the process. We need to be clear/explicit about our process and agendas. I have assumed you were all on a similar wavelength when I use SSM. I was using it in a broader context. You perceived me as using it as a technique."

David:

"In the faculty SSM is quite often used as a technique rather than as a debatable methodology. SSM can be used in an open or closed way. We were seeing Bob using it in a closed way."

"We now have for the first time a group climate where we can now say the things we are saying."

Dennis:

"The learning for this group is that we did not debate methodology earlier. Ken again the group has to reach a certain stage in its life where it can be open with each other."

"My agenda is not methodology in this group."

Bob:

"Nor is mine."

Dennis:

"My agenda is to bring about an improvement in the Faculty. To move it more towards a team by whatever means."

Bob:

"The reason I wanted to belong to this group is because we would be a learning group as well as an action group."

"This Faculty has a big burden on it. As individuals we will all do all we can to help. From my travels I am convinced there is a need to keep doing what we are doing."
"It is more than just working on the Faculty, but also communicating it to the outside world to help them."
CONCLUDING PHASE I

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

KEN WILLIAMS

REFLECTIONS ON MEETING No. 9

The two weeks since the last meeting have been very thoughtful for me. I have been scanning my facilitator role and have been looking for improvement in that area. I feel that combining the receiver of content and trying to facilitate the process is an extremely difficult task. I have been also reflecting on how the meeting today should be structured bearing in mind the tense and frustrating atmosphere at which the meeting ended a fortnight ago. A lot of conflict was in place and unresolved with some, I believe accusation of pushing special one track agendas. The insight concerning 2 hats being worn by some or all of the research team.

I knew that all of the team had had debriefing sessions after the last meeting which shows the intense interest in the group activity. However my feeling was that meeting No. 9 would be a vital one in the life of the group.

I had looked at my previous experiences in group activity, they showed that a group needs to go through the garbage to come through to a worthwhile conclusion.

I wasn't at all sure that the other team members shared that view in fact I am sure some didn't. It was important that the group operate as a cohesive force, sharing ideas and above all listening to each other. So this was the background to the morning of the 16th December, the last meeting before Christmas. So what would be the strategy.

I had sent a letter to each team member, outlining my thoughts about the group and some thoughts to ponder prior to this meeting. (See copy attached).

I set my goal at the meeting to achieve:-

1. A sense of unity among the research team.
2. To explain my perception of the meaning of a group.
3. To ask each team member to express individually their needs and expectations of the group.
4. To confine our thinking and listening to the building of the group by this process.

I was tentative and dry of mouth as I opened the meeting and explained my needs and my vision of the group and finished by mentioning the four points above. I didn't ask for permission to conduct the meeting on this occasion. I had made up my mind to be the group leader and facilitator for this meeting. I believe I had not fulfilled this role adequately in the past. I had also had some expectation that the research group would facilitate themselves and grow in the process. I now believe that even among people who have had considerable experience in group work, that facilitation of the group is essential. A member whose task it is to be outside the content, so be free to exercise the process.
The action of facilitation is a deliberate one, clear to the group, and needing control of self to stay away from content. Particularly difficult if the facilitator is involved in the project.

I asked each team member to express their individual needs and expectations of the group. Comments were made as follows:-

I don't see a group as just another collection of people, but coming together and developing through listening to each and hearing each individual needs and values.

I am worried that I won't be able to pick up the meaning of what has gone on in the group when I come back from holiday.

Today will be a watershed for me and I will either stay in the group or leave it after today's meeting. I have been extremely frustrated by what has been going on.

I was invited to join the group by Ken to help look at unease in the faculty. I wonder about the expectations of the faculty members concerning the activities of the team. I feel too that some line of thought is being pushed too hard and I tend to resist the authority "hat" that goes with that.

Every time the systems methodology is pushed, I find myself resisting that notion harder and harder. I guess I worry about the different hats being worn at different times within the group. Maybe we should state and be clear about the hat we are wearing at a particular time. I find conflict hard to handle, but having said my piece I feel more comfortable.

I wonder whether I am doing a project on action research or soft systems methodology. I have been following the steps of action research but seem to be constantly dragged off on a tangent to systems. I need to be clear about what I am doing.

The group decided who the client was, and took the first step with the client and then completely ignored the feedback. This was completely opposite to my understanding of the action research framework. The revision of our general plan was not able to be accomplished before taking the second step (see diagram). Perhaps we need to review the picture and take it piece by piece and work through each issue. In this way we may come to a code of practice in the end.

It seems to me important to flesh out the methodology issues as we go along, not seeming by assume understanding of team members of that methodology.

**New Material**

The introduction of new ideas or written material to a group is counter productive particularly if the group has had no time to consider that information. I believe that rejection of such information is inevitable at group level. This is a loss because the material may be of value and time would have been spent in its preparation.
The learning cycle plays an important role at this point.

The diverging stage after the collection of material needs to be converged and assimilated and accomodated before any new idea is introduced. The role of the facilitator then becomes very important to keep the team on track to resolution or at least agreement at some level.

the team had been diverging at all the 9 meetings without fulfilling the learning cycle and moving on. Many tasks were not attended to at any level; many were completely ignored.

The outcome of the final meeting was that each group member should prepare a written document explaining the process of how we have reached the present position - these submissions then to be collated for submission as a paper at the experiential learning conference in July 1989.

My learning from this experience is:

1. However much experience group members have in group activity the facilitative role is vital.

2. The need to stay with task at hand. Reject introduction of "new material". Follow the group's agenda.

3. Some agreed resolution on group tasks before moving on to a new task and then beginning a new learning cycle.

I wonder about a group's need to go through the trial and difficulties experienced. Perhaps the movement for group development can be shortened and be less difficult by early disclosure of group member agenda, and allow emotional input to clear differences. For instance ange, differences of opinion being expressed and acceptance of members of this action.
In conclusion at the termination of meeting No. 9 the following had occurred.

. Members felt they had been heard.
. Conflict was expressed and accepted by members.
. Agreement was reached to discuss methodology both in the conceptual mode and exploration of meaning.
. The meeting closed on a very positive note; all members left in good spirits.
. That the group would individually prepare a document describing their view of the stage the group has reached.

This concludes for a phase of development within the group. It is an essential point in the group's ongoing. The members have accepted themselves and others as being different, and acknowledging the differences as positive. We can now celebrate the differences and use these attributes of difference as great strength.

The team can now proceed with the task of looking at the faculty needs.

KEN WILLIAMS
CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF ACTION RESEARCH

(Ken Williams) .......... progress after 9 sessions.

Background

The Faculty has been developing, over a period of 10 years, a mode of operating that can be explained as praxis. It is a process of decision making and action that brings together, in a recursive way, its evolving conceptual framework and its day-to-day activities.

As with all human systems, the day-to-day praxis has not always matched the espoused praxis.

The espoused theory

Basic assumptions:

(i) That organisation can learn...
   to do this they need to
   - be self-reflective
   - have a conceptual framework
     that is open for debate
   - have developed change processes
   - have a concept of an "improved state".

The espoused practice

Basic assumption:

That 'practice' be always informed reciprocally by 'theory'.

To do this it adopted a research design viz.,
the action research spiral.

Current Situation (which was the stimulus for the study)

The expressed perception is that the everyday practice was not matching the espoused praxis (theory & practice). More specifically, a large proportion of the academic staff was not getting its needs met in significant functional areas. The mismatch was variously expressed as:

- managers not having formal power especially over human resources
- faculty meetings are not functional
- yearly action plans are rare
- staff accountability is poor in any formal sense
- the felt sense is one of diversity with little unity
- the conceptual paradigm is not adequately expressed...
  it does not encourage open debate.
The Research Project

Because of his close contact with the faculty during its developmental phase and as a result of a series of structured staff interviews that he had recently carried out as a consultant to the faculty, the principal author offered to co-ordinate a research team to investigate and implement a change program which would address the identified mismatch.

The principal author chose the team on the following basis:

(i) that the members were skilled in two-way communication within the faculty

(ii) they were people who had strong feelings about the faculty's well-being

(iii) that they were capable of articulating the concerns that had been expressed, and

(iv) that they were willing to be part of a research team which would take action as an integral component of the research process.

The Research Process

STAGE 1

The development of a learning/research group (a task oriented group) to bring about an improvement in the faculty.

The group has 2 aims:

To identify the most appropriate task(s).

To develop the research team as a functional system in which participants

- act as 'whole' people (involving actions, emotions, values, intellect)

- work for the common good of the group

- work through individual agendas so as arrive at a common basis for learning research (working through conflict)
The dual aims of Stage 1 are arrived at concurrently. It is a recursive process moving backwards and forwards as the aims are tentatively achieved. The stage is complete when both aims have been accomplished.

The process to date:

**IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCH TASK**

- Exploration of background experience...
  - the mismatch

- focus on a 'task' viz., CATWOE

- searching for common ground to express faculty unease

**DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH "GROUP"**

- seeking common ground

- 'premature' closure on task...
  - no resolution of participants' agendas ...
  - unease within research team

- no resolution of conflicting issues around the notion of 'common ground' within team

- focus on a new 'task': establishment of project teams involving all staff

- conflict within faculty surfaced in project team and agreed upon task ignored. Poor commitment to group development. Conflict propped onto faculty. Participants desirous of taking some immediate action. Decision to formulate a code of practice (praxis) in consultation with faculty.
development of an action plan. First step was to communicate with faculty and get feedback on 'developing a code of practice'.

feeling of ownership of action plan. Conflict regarding whether or not generation of a code of practice was the most appropriate strategy was still present. Conflict over clarity of faculty's paradigm and sense of personal unease being experienced in faculty. Agreement 'issues' had been sufficiently debated.

development of a 'cartoon picture' to share with respective sections of faculty staff. Picture told the story of faculty unease leading to perceived need for action (the generation of a code of practice).

Interpersonal conflict not resolved ... only as intellectual debate about praxis

first action step ... 'cartoon picture' is presented to respective sections of faculty - feedback from sections to be written and brought back to research team.

Strong feelings of unresolved frustration variously resulting:

(i) non acceptance by a minority of the team of the general faculty feedback

(ii) a perception that some researchers had presented information (cartoon) in a negative context

(iii) only 3 researchers returned with written reports

(iv) 2 researchers seemingly not fulfill the set task
spontaneous and informal groupings of members of team met for de-briefing of unresolved conflict resulting from group behaviour

inability to resolve conflict and gain cohesion

recognition that the code of practice was not the strategic task that group initially thought it was

members positively responded to the principal author's definite role of facilitating the group's 'process'. This facilitation allowed for better listening, the tentative expression of emotions, and the beginnings of some resolution of basic conflicts.

each member would document a conceptual framework offering an explanation of the research process to date.
Be found the enemy!!!

Boss...

Who choose who?

Dean...

Us

What?
WHAT??

A "DRAMATIC" PRESENTATION TO

FACULTY STAFF

With a view to informing the Faculty on the progress of Ken William’s Action Research Project titled:

"Improving The Well Being Of The Faculty of Agriculture"

IT IS VITAL THAT ALL SUPPORT & ACADEMIC STAFF MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO BE THERE. WE ARE WORKING ON THE THINGS THAT EFFECT ALL OUR FUTURES. COME AND GIVE US YOUR FEEDBACK.

It will be a very different style of meeting: a "dramatic" presentation on how we have operated and what we have achieved.

WHEN: 11.30 - 12.30 Wednesday 22nd February.

WHERE: Central Seminar Room (S64 - North end)

WHO: Action Research Team
     Led by Ken Williams and David Russell
     (other team members: Bob Macadam, Olga Slezacak, Stephen Blunden and Dennis Gamble)

We invite you to stop after the meeting to help us with the next step of the project. Bring your lunch and we will provide tea and coffee.

Olga Slezacak
Dennis Gamble
(Staff Development managers) 14/2/89
Dear Faculty Member,

Attached is a summary of the activities of the Research Team working with me on my project. It has been prepared by David Russell and myself. It will serve as a useful backdrop to the talk on Wednesday 22nd between 11.30 - 12.30.
KEN WILLIAMS

REFLECTIONS – ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT
(Apology: Stephen Blundden – away from H.A.C)

Robert Woog addressed the group after making arrangements to do so through Ken Williams. The remainder of the group agreed. The group listened to Robert for half an hour and replied that his points of view had been heard and a response would be given. He presented concepts of communication, resourcing and some problems he was having in the faculty. Bob Macadam telephoned to say he would be late. He missed the interview with Robert. David Russell filled in a resume of what had been presented. Dennis had shown some concern about Robert’s contribution, expressing the view that would need to talk more with Robert to clarify Robert’s position. The comment sprang from a faculty meeting held the previous week (at Ken & David’s presentation) the view had been expressed by the research team that the team were looking for a client.

Ken mentioned that he had had an informed letter from Norma Johnson (circulated), a request to talk to Graham Bird and Jack Wolfenden. While felt these were important individuals to see, the issue was to have the faculty as a client. In our discussions with Robert Woog, he had, after some explanations agreed, to be a client if the other deans saw that as worthwhile.

The proposition was put to Bob Macadam and after some discussion he agreed that the dean group become the client as segment of the larger faculty as client. The group suggested that Ken approach Richard with the objective including him in the client role.

Bob asked the group if he might share with the research team some of the highlights of the seminar at Leura. The seminar included senior executives from both Nepean and H.A.C to look at a range of issues broadly based concerning the establishment of the University of Western Sydney.

He told us of the issues raised by the deans concerning the faculty which were presented at the end of the seminar. He explained that since the seminar the deans had not met to discuss the issues and felt a seminar with the research team to explore the issues would be a good way to involve the deans with the research team. The exploration would also set the bounds of the subsequent investigation by the research team.

The 3 items on the agenda from the Leura seminar are:
1. Design the performance measures for staff accountability.

2. Set in motion higher degree programs in Social Ecology and Rural Development (PhD in Ag).

3. Do a "functions audit" - what each of us does and compare the aggregate set with new demands.

The meeting discussed openly the issues raised by members. Some difference were expressed and discussed.

Ken agreed to see Richard on the basis that the research team would see the Dean group as an integral part of the client population. The research team must make very sure that this connection of Research Team and Deans doesn't alienate the remainder of the client population (viz the other faculty members).

After discussion, should the deans join as clients, the group can then set boundaries of operation, then the research team has a basis for movement with the faculty in a series of action steps.

Some difficulty was experienced in setting a date for this meeting. Mid-April was seen as being the time when Easter has passed and all may be present.

NB Ken discussed the proposal with Richard Bawden and he agreed to look at the possibilities and the date was set down for April 13th.

Thursday, timed from 9.30-11am.
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT - KEN WILLIAMS

PRELIMINARY NOTES PRIOR TO MEETING THURSDAY 13/4/89 - 9.30 - 11AM

It seems a long time since we met as a group. I am looking forward to our meeting with the 3 bears on Thursday 13th April at 9.30 - 11am. I have been in and out of the garbage pile during the course of the study. It is now clear to me that the coming together of the research team was vital for the ongoing process. The program that David Russell and I performed for the Faculty was a turning point. Important issues resolved that day were:

1. The Faculty membership got a picture of what we were doing and the point we had reached.
2. It clarified for my learning, the intricacy and complexity of action research. Almost unknown before experiencing the action.
3. It concluded what I want to call phase I of the project.
4. The difficulty of the Client relationship became very clear.

The stage is set for Phase II Act 1. Rehearsals are over and the new play is ready to take the stage.

A final preparation could include the issues presented as a statement of importance by the bears of the Faculty of Agriculture. The statement was declared in the context of plans within the University of Western Sydney.

The issues were as follows:

1. Design the measures for staff accountability
2. Set in motion higher degree programs in Social Ecology and Rural Development (+ PhD Agriculture).
3. Do a "functions audit" what each of us does - and compare the aggregate set with new demands.

In recent reading I came across Lewins famous dictum in Cartwright 1978.

Quote "Close co-operation between theoretical and applied psychology can be accomplished if the theorist does not look toward applied problems with highbrow aversion or with a fear of social problems, and if the applied psychologist realises that there is nothing so practical as good theory".

end of quote.

VENUE: HAWKAID HOTEL
Left hand seminar room.
9.30 - 11.00am

KEN WILLIAMS.
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT: Ken Williams

A set of criteria model for consideration before the meeting in 13/4/89

C. all faculty members
A. the Research Team

T. (1) A real transfer of authority
 (2) A mechanism to provide an efficient and effective decision-making process

W. Organisation required to permit creativity to continue
O. Richard Swooten
E. appointed seems to have
 - focused interests and
 - broad responsibility
8* MEETING
EMOTIONAL (KEN)
RATIONAL (DAVID)

PRESENT WHERE HUMANS MEET. A NEED TO ENGAGE AT ALL LEVELS.
(PRACTICE)
NEED TO UNDERSTAND AND CLARIFY THEORY - METHODOLOGY BY ENGAGING WITH OTHERS.

9* MEETING
A CLIENT NEEDED DISCUSSION.
ROBERT AND BOB - RE BEING CLIENTS

GROUP DISCUSSION - OPENNESS - FREEDOM SENSE BELONGING.

DECISION TO NEGOTIATE WITH DEANS TO BECOME PART OF CLIENTEL.
- TALK ABOUT LEURA
- DISCUSS BOUNDARIES
- SET A DATE

KEN TALKS WITH RICHARD ABOUT POSSIBILITIES ABOVE

SEEMS THE TIME RIGHT
RICHARD FEELS OK.
DATE SET FOR MEETING.
THURSDAY APRIL 13TH
9:30AM - 11AM

PIONEER
A NEW DIRECTION?

LEARNING
SUSTAINABILITY
ISSUES

WHY DON'T WE JUST DO IT!!
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

13TH APRIL, 1989.

The meeting with the 3 Deans to discuss their relationship to the Research Team.

The atmosphere had been softened by an error in the pre-meeting notice to participants, in which the 3 Deans were referred to as the "3 Bears". The whole faculty enjoyed the joke.

Ken Williams opened the meeting and invited the Deans to inform the research team on current events and changes since:

1. The issues raised at the Leura conference.
2. What had happened since the Leura experience?

The issues raised for the Faculty of Agriculture may be seen in appendix

(The research team had agreed to act as observers and then have the opportunity to ask questions in pursuance of issues in a time allocated toward the end of the meeting).

Comments below are comments from the Deans and from tapes taken at the meeting.

. The creation of the U.W.S is creating all sorts of pulls and pushes.
. These could be totally destructive to this faculty.
. The U.W.S seems to be developing like a new university in the 'old style'.
. Agriculture will need to fight like hell to survive.
. The Rural University of N.S.W. could take over in N.S.W.
. Management training is an opportunity to exploit what we do i.e: is our experiential learning mode.
  - How to be better at managing, trade business, research and so on.
. The essence of H.A.C is very important eg: influenced by the environment.
. The importance of critical review, we have not done that at H.A.C.
  - There is a need to shift from being critical to being critical.
. Very few people have an understanding of the model.
. Problems in the faculty come from that there is no critical review. No debate in the faculty since 1979.
. We are in danger of "uncoupling". We need to establish what H.A.C is in the traditional style. This needs to incorporate the views of the faculty in some way.
. We come from Agriculture so we need to stay and let people see that, both inside and out.
. Only a minority group share these activities. And that is what they bring to meetings - no knowledge.
Research Team Responses

- At grass roots the perception is one of frustration, tension, work-loads, unable to cope with the system.
- There needs to be information and debate about directions for the 3 year interim period.
- A model which can be flexible enough yet holds a clear understanding of where we are and what we do here.
- A model was proposed and adopted by all – (See attachment).
- Two statements were made by the Deans clarifying their role – they may be seen as the owners in the action research project but also as part of the "client" body which embraces the whole faculty membership.

The statements:

1. "That the research team takes as it's brief, the development of the model to help the faculty facilitate a process whereby the faculty develop a process of managing change over the next 3 years and which will meet with the process of critically reviewing our praxis."

2. "The role of the research group to develop a process of managing change by helping the faculty to create its own action researching system."

The meeting felt the faculty should be advised as soon as possible about the proposal. There was a meeting that afternoon. At that meeting the Deans advised the faculty of the decisions taken that morning.

The question was raised on what the next step might be. It was agreed that an action plan needed to be generated but it was not resolved by whom.

Generally the research team were very pleased with the outcome and felt very optimistic that some action would take place.

The important issue agreed to was that the faculty meeting on Thursday 20th April, 1989 should devote some time to the presentation of an action plan now that the research team had had the brief given.

"A meeting was arranged for the research team to meet for an hour on the following Thursday to discuss an action plan and to then present an action plan that afternoon to the faculty based on the approved model."
An important issue for the author was the point raised, that very few in the faculty had any idea what was going on in the minds of the Deans. This fact in itself creates a great deal of tension particularly in times of rapid change. The disregard of the suggestion that there has been no faculty debate since 1979 presents a serious question of why? A combination of two items appear.

.. Information about trends or future direction is not available.
.. The forum for debate is not available. A strong denial of these two propositions is available. A close look at the propositions would be worthwhile.

NOTE The asterisks throughout these reflections refer to important points used to build a proposed action plan in conjunction with the adopted model and statements concerning the brief given.

KEN WILLIAMS.
This meeting was called following the meeting with the 3 Deans the previous Thursday 13th and a need for urgency to present to the Faculty a plan of action. The urgency was seen by the Deans and the research team. A model by David Russell was accepted as a basis for Action Research with the Faculty Action Researching itself and the Action Research Team acting as facilitators in that process.

David Russell and Ken Williams talked about the possibilities. They came up with a plan to make some organisational changes within the Faculty over the next 3 years to help meet with the changes which may occur during the transition period to the University of Western Sydney. The plan was put forward as a basis for discussion only; a tool to begin debate within the Faculty.

The plan had been developed from key points raised at the Dean's meeting in the context of (strands) streams of education to be pursued by the Faculty. The plan was then to be presented to the Faculty in the afternoon of the same day as an action step to begin the process of debate.

This was all part of the feeling of urgency to begin. The plan was presented by David to the team, and the response was unforeseen by me (Ken). For the others I cannot comment. However the reaction was immediate and phrases like:

- It will turn the Faculty upside down
- I don't have the energy for any more change
- It doesn't meet my needs now

The atmosphere was very tense and anger was expressed, particularly by David and Ken. The meeting concluded without resolution following reaction of the suggested plan. The only thing certain was that there was nothing to present to the afternoon Faculty meeting.

A hypothesis for the rejection process was that only 2 members of the research team were involved. It is interesting to note that no other members had made any attempt to put forward a proposal. A second hypothesis was that there are 3 groups operating in the team, two in each group. Some cognisance needs to be given to the following points.

- Ownership of the project
- Commitment of team members to the project
- Change is a big issue and is subjected to many complexities.
- There was a non understanding of the proposition. The change was too radical and perhaps seen as a short term rather than long term project. A suggestion was made that the team should explore the needs of the Faculty. The plan seems to be a way to do this.
- Response was that an assumption was being made that these were the needs of the Faculty.
- The group is certainly in conflict again which is a norm for group activity. Maybe something good will come out of it.
The possibility that the writer has a high ownership of the project leads to anger, when issues are looked over and action seems to be revoked in favour of another conceptual model.

The thought occurs to me that a kind of action paralysis is in place within the Faculty concerned with decision making and taking action. Perhaps other groups had information concerning Faculty needs.

As Professor John Gallesich of M.I.T recently said; it seems an important time to consider what we do well and research the possibility to do it better, rather than look for new systems.

Maybe too. The Faculty could look outward in a "thought" sense and look at what is done well and improve on that. The implication is that the Faculty is looking inward.

A change in language used could move the direction.

Questions for me:-

- Am I using the right model?
- Is there a right model?
- Currently the model is not working
- Is there an unease in the Faculty?
- Is change too difficult?
- Could I work on my own without a research team?

Process of this meeting.

- The change process is too powerful.
- No action – explore this with the group.
- Don't push the river. It will flood by itself
THE PROPOSED PLAN
(REFERENCE REFLECTIONS MEETING NO. 11 20/4/89)

Action Researching Faculty of Agriculture

The Task
. To set up the 3-4 "streams" approved by the Faculty
1 Farm Management & Technology
2 Agri-Business
3 Extension - Rural Development
4 Agricultural Education

The Faculty to promote 3-4 streams inside and outside using a framework Systems Praxis as a concept.

"HOW"
. Set up a task force for each "stream" developing its own praxis.
. Each "stream" task-force to develop its own process of:-
  . Education
  . Research
  . Resourcing
  . - all my be different

This will preserve:
  . Autonomy
  . Unity with diversity
  . Responsibility

Each task force brings in its own critical reviewing process.

This will meet the need to accommodate the changes which may (will) occur over the next 3 years.

To manage the University needs of:-
  . Research
  . Education - Educating
  . Resourcing
  . A 3 year change process

Finally - A task force to generate a process of reviewing the systemic praxis.
REFLECTIONS
FACULTY MEETING 3.15 THURSDAY 20/4/89

A very good response to notice advising of a possible action step to be put forward by the action research team.

Atmosphere - a lot of tension - some Faculty members anxious about their own research projects following interviews with the Associate Dean.

- Expectation of action plan.
- Research Team disagreed on plan put forward by David Russell and ken William
- Unable to present action plan
- Ken angry from mornings meeting - this was expressed by Ken
- Many staff had complained to Ken at one to one level, about stress, anger, frustration
- Nobody spoke at meeting about these concerns
- The meeting was abysmal - nothing done - only an extreme sense of tension.
- Generalities were discuss about important issues at future meetings!!!
- David said "Laissez Faire" attitude should continue
- Ken said the crisis wasn't big enough - THERE WAS NO RESPONSE OR A REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION
- Let's make some mistakes - at least they'll be ours

NOTES

The will to change is not present.
The head "think" process is dominant.
What happened to commitment and creativity? How can we get the will?

ACTION STEP

A full stop - what causes this immobilisation?
Hard bargaining too difficult.
What is it that creates the blockage?
No quantum leap.
Be safe!

The importance of the "owner" - ownership is power - vital in A/R.

KEN WILLIAMS
DATE: 28/5/89

TO: ALL FACULTY MEMBERS

FROM: KEN WILLIAMS

SUBJECT: PLAN OF ACTION 25TH APRIL 1989

Following my letter to all faculty members concerning the research team's decision to have its last meeting, I felt that some explanation concerning the rejected plan is necessary. The reason for this is to clarify any misconceptions which occurred on the afternoon of Thursday 20th April, when a full faculty met with the expectation of receiving an action plan.

To explain that dilemma I have decided make available the suggested action plan from that time.

It is important to note that the plan was put forward following definite guidelines as follows:

1. A brief given by the Deans at a meeting on 13/4/89.

2. Following "Themes" "Streams", "Centres" previously accepted by the faculty.

There was specific mention that the plan was "for debate".

I understand steps in this direction are in place, that is extremely good and a very positive step.

KEN WILLIAMS
THE FACELESS MAJORITY.

PARALISED - NO ACTION
IMPORTANT

To: Research Team
From: Ken Williams - Action Research Project

Subject: Reflections following the Meeting on June 9th

Having listened to the tapes following that meeting, I felt a need to share with you my reflections about the issues and context of that time together.

After a brief discourse on the recent meeting concerning student projects the group moved straight into the business of the day. The group quickly decided the agenda, which in itself was sure sign of group development; a cohesive coming together to work as a cohesive body; a move to interdependence.

The first item was to map out the individual expectations and assumptions at the beginning followed by a personal interpretation of these pictures. It was interesting to note the differences in how we started and our perceptions at that time. I saw the issues focused mainly around the ownership/client area and how complex that area is when operating with a sense of unease as the issue. It might have been different if we'd moved in a different way. The group didn't though, and we tried something different. I doubt whether my experiential learning could have been greater in any other way.

The second movement was to describe what had happened individually and a summary of these changes if any. Some changes were quite large and other felt hardly an change in practice. Here again the picture was completely individual and the complexity of human systems was very apparent. The scene was being set for a group interaction which had not taken place in prior meetings. The issues of client, owners, and others were used as vehicles for exploring much deeper interpersonal issues. These vehicles played an important part in what followed. Once used they were put aside to allow the greater things to be discussed in depth.

The sheer power of the group then became awesome in its movement toward its own goals and agenda. Out of confusion and disorder came order and clarity. Some of the issues stemmed back to the team’s beginnings. Conflict was okay; no one felt victimised or put down, or apologetic. That was my perception of that hour. The group finished its own agenda and worked on its own dynamic. The group was working without fear or favour and only needed very little intervention by the facilitator, which had been the project user's agreed role from the first meeting. This was also a clear indication that the group was operating at the high level of interdependence the group had reached, trust and goodwill toward each other at that time. There was acceptance of members' points of view and practice which had not been understood or accepted on prior occasions. Only glimpse had appeared during our 10 months of meetings but now it was happening. All the training experience over the years had come to pass. It was happening in the real
world of experiential learning action within action research and the learning cycle.

The question was raised asking what had happened to bring about this clarity. My interpretation would be that the team had reached a state of:

- Trust in each other and a belief that the group dynamic could operate at that high level. If the group were to continue, it would continue to operate at that high level. There would be no preliminary chit chat but an immediate continuation of work at any level of human complexity, on simple or difficult issues.

- That the group would move in and out of conflict and cohesion with ease and trust in each other.

- Because of a finality felt within the group of its activities a need to clarify issues within the group became necessary.

Concluding these discussions led to the issues confronting the Faculty becoming clear. Although the scene concerning developments of the U.W.S. were accepted, issues remaining for debate were discussed. The need to implement activities to allow these items to be canvassed at faculty membership level were considered.

They were as follows:

- To create a forum with the whole faculty and not necessarily single out any one issue.

- That relationships in the faculty are very critical at this time than perhaps ever before and that we should pull together.

- It is important to feed back the positions that are happening within the faculty around projects being undertaken, and at the same time debate the broader aspects which these activities have on the faculty membership.

- That individual beliefs need to be explored rather than leaving feeling of being bulldozed into a no win position. A feeling of being a victim instead of all being winners.

- A need for extended dialogue (debate) to get the motivation for a proposal, there has been no opportunity for challenge to the belief systems or acceptance of half developed new initiatives which need dialogue for expansion. The putting forward of nucleus ideas has been too daunting a task, being seen sometimes as a strong challenge to the existing paradigm.

- There is a disparity between the philosophy of giving away the power and taking it back. The disparity seen here is very confusing because the "rules" are not clear, because the rules don't say when the power should be given away with appropriate authority.
As the faculty membership becomes more independent the membership will feel more at ease to challenge the issues provided those challenged can accept a new point of view. Then empowerment will occur at both levels. You can't tell people to stop exercising power. This is development of person to person challenge; group to group challenge.

To develop a social climate where all this can happen.

To see if the International Experiential Learning Conference offers a forum for debate on the issues. After that some thought could be given to other means of dialogue and debate around the issues raised.

To develop a workshop around the Action Research projects that are happening.

That next semester we continue this process. Instead of inviting guest speakers, we involve the whole staff.

That we actively try to continue working through the issues of projects.

A need to continue the issues raised in the Research Team at Faculty level. The issues around:

(1) * Client
    * Owner
    * Responsibility
    * Invitation - Intervention

(2) * Groups off doing things.
    * How do these activities impact upon ————
    * The continuing evolution structure of the Faculty.
    * Use concrete projects to give support to a decision (as students are encouraged to do). Groups be invited to prepare background documents in abbreviated form. This information to be used as the background for structured debate.

The means to bring biological sciences into the programs.

Debate at Faculty level the area of responsible behaviour of faculty members toward each other, toward students, toward professional research work, and toward the Faculty. This is a key stage in faculty development which needs to be given the light of day.
o Debate what is an acceptable code of practice (e.g. return of documents for assessment).

o Will the new centres have an effect on some of these issues?

o A key factor is how we negotiate with each other and how we behave to each other.

o Is authority an issue to be debated?

The meeting closed with the thought that when meeting again the same arguments for clarity would go on and with the goodwill and respect for each other.

Isn't this where we started? Looking at the unease in the Faculty and working with these insights for situation improvement. The above issues seem feasible and attainable.

The what's seem to have emerged clearly. The next move is the how's.

Ken Williams

20 June 1989

P.S. (in italics)
Please commend on the above reflections
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT – KEN WILLIAMS

TO ALL FACULTY MEMBERS

I can celebrate, with the members of the research team, the completion of the last meeting – celebrating in the sense that a great learning experience has been exercised. To say the experience was experiential would be to understate the experience.

Many instances have arisen during the eleven meetings when conflict was the name of the game, real in every sense, but interesting not personal. Only personal in the matter of how firmly one held onto a particular methodology or line of thought. Nobody in the team has said that nothing happened, or that nothing was achieved. Upon reflection a great deal was achieved and will appear in future experiences as far as I am concerned.

The turning point came after reflection on the one act play that David and I presented for the Faculty. Above all else it displayed clearly the immense complexity of human relationships in spite of our using a methodology to try to make sense of issues.

I wonder if there are changes taking place as a result of the activities of the research team – changes in attitude by members toward their work or relationship with others.

My work now is to try to make sense of the many important questions raised. At no time did we have a client. No request was made from the faculty or from an individual. So how does one get a client – by invitation or by intervention? And what value is a research team in action research? I will have to look at the implication.

The list of queries is very long and will be debated long after I have finished. At our final meeting, for the first time, the team were discussing important differences in a debating rationale – freely and with strength. This was a time for celebration.

I have had a sense of failure; fracturing friendships were a possibility many times. Anger, frustration and a sense of powerlessness was an all pervading force – in recent times in particular.

Now after reflection, the friendships have stood the impact and are now unassailable. The anger, frustration and anxiety have turned from a sense of failure to that of new possibilities.

This is a letter to all to explain my current position in respect to "my" research team and where we finished.

Sincerely,

KEN WILLIAMS.
Many surveys have been made by the Faculty of staff and feelings of adjustment with individual expectations and "fit" with the environment. The surveys have been numerous and repetitive, under the guise of "Staff Development Workshops", "Special Faculty Meetings", Senior Lecturers' Survey", "Alistair Crombie" Workshop, "Ken Williams" Survey, two "Outward Bound" initiatives as a sample. Unfortunately it is difficult to correlate these with any degree of accuracy as

1. Records have not been kept of all surveys, or are inadequate
2. The questions have been slightly different
3. The populations have been different, for example, Horticulture has been and gone, the Social Ecology group has emerged.
4. The climate has been different - some surveys have been made in response to a perceived crisis, the Senior Lecturers' Survey was in response to "Low Morale", Outward Bound creates a climate of physical crisis which highlights intellectual boundaries, surveys this year have considered the Faculty role in the University of Western Sydney.

The 1983 Survey "Reality does not fit Rhetoric" is the earliest survey obtained in this collection. The report has listed emergent themes contributing to the "Sense of Unease" experienced by staff.

Themes of Unease (Summarised)
1. Staff inhibitions about taking action
2. Conflicting personal paradigms
3. Lack of organisational support
4. Lack of understanding within and outside system
5. Disparity of work loads.

A conceptual model of a working system was devised in a plenary session. It consisted of the following:

Parameters of a Working System (Summarised)
1. Define principles of allocation
2. Define academic functions
3. Be aware of staff preferences/expertise
4. Match functions : expertise
5. Devise equitable work loads
6. Monitor system.

The 1986 Survey "Ken Williams" consisted of a series of open-ended questions with which virtually all academic staff were interviewed.

Three years after the previous survey the question "would you like to see any changes in managing programmes and resources" elicited a unanimous response for change, ranging from 56% for radical change to 20% for some
changes. As in the previous survey, discontent was in areas of management support, job ownership, accountability and communication. Many staff expressed the need for greater involvement in the development of resources. Most negative feelings were stated in areas of administration and facilitation. It was felt loads were not being shared equally and there was a need for Faculty to adequately confront issues and review mistakes made. There was concern that students were being given too much autonomy.

1989 Surveys. Three years later, the most recent survey is that undertaken by a Faculty group on Outward Bound. There was also an "Alistair Crombie" survey earlier in the same year, where staff perceptions were identified in response to the changes proposed by a Higher Education Policy of converting Colleges of Advanced Education to Universities.

Outward Bound (1989) – "What the Faculty needs to do" (Themes of unease?)

(1) Need for shared involvement, united effort
(2) Need for better communication, to be effective and honest
(3) Need for staff commitment, ownership
(4) Need for staff assessment and accountability
(5) Need for recognition of individual needs and skills.

With regard to students, there was overwhelming support for the principle to "adopt a stricter method/less subjective assessment/more structure more guidance and direction for students particularly first year./hybrid model with the teaching of basics."

These strong feelings were echoing those expressed in the "Alistair Crombie" survey undertaken earlier in the same year. "Weaknesses" of the Faculty could be summarised as

(1) Lack of unity/conflict
(2) Poor organisation
(3) Lack of monitoring/accountability
(4) Poor communication.

If we go back to 1983, it is unfortunately possible to match these with the "Themes of unease" expressed then, and which have been a constant theme of workshops and surveys held in the intervening years.

There seems to be no major or sustained problems perceived in the general faculty ethos – the educational paradigm and associated learning methodologies. This is really quite remarkable given the nature and impact of the changes involved. Dissatisfaction seems to be occurring mainly in the domestic areas of day to day function. Given the strength and unity of feelings expressed there must be a degree of optimism about finding solutions to these problems.
There really seems to be no better model proposed for the remedying of the ills of the faulty than that which was proposed on the 7th October, 1983, summarised earlier in this report and was, significantly, stated as a

"model-based on functions, ie what has to be done for the system to WORK."
Dear Ken,

After talking to you on the phone yesterday I thought it may be easier to put down on paper my views of our problem.

I also heard on the radio yesterday morning that the '80s could perhaps be called "The Decade of Self-Obsession," and this really struck me in part in relation to where we are in trouble. I am really afraid of this path we are taking in trying "to resolve differences by the resolution of conflict." I am afraid we are going to rip ourselves apart if we have much more of this—sitting across the room confronting each other, hardening positions which to me are non-negotiable and naming people with whom we have differences. I am no psychologist but I feel instinctively that we must focus on differences on issues rather than people in order to debate these objectively.

In saying the above I also must say I think now we cannot go back to positions in which we maintain the normal day to day social relationships of people who do not interface by choice but by necessity of employment. We must recognize the fact that the Faculty has its "sciences"—these may be papered
over from time to time but are likely to split very right open whenever stresses or pressures build up.

Therefore I would like to propose an Action Plan based on the fact we are different, have antagonisms, jealousies etc – but, conversely, have built up some rather close & effective working relationships, probably partly due to this “siege” atmosphere among groups. Let’s channel this energy into action.

The most effective way of doing this would be in responding reactively to our clientele in the market at the same time. I think we can be proactive in Educational methodologies we use – but we must react to perceived market niche in the Agricultural Spectrum.

To me, these are

1. Aquiflourness
2. Aqui science & Technology
3. Sustainable Agriculture.

I would divide the faculty into 3 groups charged with developing reference groups to service students, establish community leadership & support for Research. Funds in these areas. Staff who do not wish to operate exclusively in one area would not be required to do so but all would be required to make a commitment either entirely or in 1/3. I would
See other interests such as Teaching. Third would like to be a function of the major groups but not of sufficient market profile for a group at this time. All staff should be required to be committed (in the best outward bond sense) and some staff perhaps should be drafted (if we do - we may have far more unpleasant structures applied).

I would see these Resource Groups as the major structure of the Faculty with powerful group managers. I would see the present nominal leadership as:

1. Elwin T, Dennis G, Graham B.
3. Bob Mac, Roger P, David R

I hope I have covered the senior staff - essentially people are grouped with common interest but also with the ability to work together. These groups could then perhaps be antagonistic, competitive, whatever - with a positive outcome of benefit to ourselves, students and the community.

The Educational methodologies need to be seen in perspective as the servants of our pedagogic offerings. I think their perceived effectiveness would be immeasurably strengthened if they were seen as delivering
educational outcomes in a true experiential mode. I believe we are losing sight of students as we become more obsessed with our ideological struggles.

I was very much taken by the example of Social Ecology as a group of people with common missions able to move forward on and outward in the generation of a concept. I believe given the same opportunity and sense of purpose, groups of staff could do the same for Agriculture. We desperately need to re-establish ourselves in Agriculture, yet to define it educationally and for the future. So in summary:

(i) Split us into factions
(ii) give us individual challenges which will attract student, community & financial support.
(iii) Give power to group leaders for managerial structures
(iv) Require all staff to make commitments
(v) Allow students free access either wholly or in parts to established resource areas.
What follows is a report of the outcome of the staff development workshop (4th - 7th October, 1983) and some of the process that contributed to it. "Soft systems" methodology guided the evolution of the workshop and techniques associated with the methodology were practised. The methodology began with an exploration of what participants defined as a "sense of unease" and finished with an integrated series of proposal for desirable/feasible change as a constructive response to the, at first, ill-defined sense of unease.

A feature of the methodology and the way it was used in the workshop was the emphasis on exploration of the problem situation as a means of developing a common understanding of it. The first step was teasing out of the symptoms contributing to the sense of unease. The situation or context in which these symptoms were occurring was then analysed. Looking at elements of structure, process and climate was the way this was done. Perceived mismatches between these three situational factors led to the identification of a number of themes which were then explored in more depth.

DAY 1 - SENSE OF UNEASE.

REALITY DOES NOT FIT RHETORIC.

Defensiveness.

Withholding opinions/views/energy/commitment.

Mismatched concepts about education/agricultural education leads to conflict.

Why does everyone have to agree? Do they feel they have to agree?

When you feel you can't proact - you react.

Non-supportive organisational system (which has supportive people in it).

Nowhere people with problems can take them and expect support.

Staff outside School don't understand.

Self needs in conflict with demands of system-loss of freedom resulting from perceived social pressures.

Lack of information about colleagues' views.

Distrust among colleagues causes withholding.

"Haves" and "Have-nots" - competitiveness and fear.
PROCESS

Group Facilitation
Individual Facilitation
Assess students
Teaching (Resource)
Provision of Learning resources
Administering 
- operation
- allocation
- strategis
for all structures
Information Provision
Hiring staff
Promoting staff
Giving staff feedback
Developing staff competence
Staff roles/allocation
Integration
Hiring, promoting, terminating staff appointments.

STRUCTURE.

Contract staff
Course teams
Phase teams
4 Centres
Head of School
Principal Lecturer
Admin. Assist.
Admin Unit
R.A.M.U.
Agric./Hort.
Academic staff
Clerical staff
Technical staff
Farm staff
School Co-ord. Group
Board of Studies
Open Forum
Embyronic Outreach Group
Inner Cabinet.
Tea Clubs.
Maintenance staff.
Administration
- Finance
- Personnel
- S/Services
School of Food Science
School of Man. & Human Dev.
Council
Principal
Assist. Principal
Registrar
Bursar
Academic Board
Hawkaid.

CLIMATE.

* Individuals relating to large number of functional groups – conflict/competition/confusion/stress.
* Highly differentiated organisation.
* Rapidly changing organisational structure.
* Reducing individual stability.
* Lack of time.
* Richard's depth of commitment is both energising and frightening.
* Lack of staff roles and organisation.
* Individuals & groups who identify with Richard's views add to pressure on those who don't have same commitment.
* Contract appointment crisis.
* People who oppose the new philosophy tend to be heard in tea clubs rather than formal setting - passive resistance.
* Official system is non-supportive.
* School not effectively serviced by administration - we service them.
* Lack of information about work loads and for other management decisions.
* Confusion about legitimacy of some work activities.
* Inconsistency between management styles, structures, philosophy of Ag. School and other College bodies.

These lists of elements are not exhaustive and were limited by time and board space.
Some themes arising from analysis of process, structures and climate -

* Lack of a shared vision of the future of agricultural education within the School.

* A highly differentiated organisation considering the number of people involved.

* Lack of stability.

* Lack of a support system.

* Lack of integration in terms of managing the resources (human and physical) we have.

* Diversity of staff roles, role conflicts, coping with changed roles.

* Problems of staff development.

DAY 2.

The "lack of a shared vision of the future" theme was explored further on the morning of Day 2. In the afternoon it was decided to attempt to define and develop a conceptual model of a system to allocate responsibility for facilitation of learning among School staff. It was expected that this would impinge on all the themes and insights that had developed. It was also a response to a need expressed by Richard Bawden "how do we decide what roles staff should play in 1984? This is a high priority issue as decisions have to be made soon".

**ROOT DEFINITION OF A RELEVANT SYSTEM.**

C (clients or beneficiaries) = staff, both academic and non-academic.

A (actors, those who make the system work) = School Co-ordination Group, advisers to Head of School.

T (transformation process the system achieves) = allocate responsibilities for academic activities.

W (what the system is based on) = A system to allocate responsibility for management of operations is seen as a parallel development.

O (owners of system) = participative decision-making.

E (major environmental constraint acting on system) = School Board of Studies.

= current perceptions and behaviour of staff concerning facilitation and other staff roles.

A relevant system then, in the sense that it could lead to an informed debate within the School and subsequently to decisions about change that is both desirable and feasible, is:
"A system to allocate responsibility for academic activities in the School of Agriculture, the system to be based on participation of staff in the decision-making process, to be operated by School Co-ordination Group and Head of School and answerable to the Board of Studies. Current perceptions and behaviour of staff in relation to facilitation and other staff roles are seen as the major constraint the system has to take into account".

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE SYSTEM.

The model is based on functions, i.e. what has to be done for the system to work (how it should be done depends on (a) whether the functions are seen as essential and (b) choice among alternative ways of fulfilling the function).

DEFINE the principles upon which allocations are to be made.

DEFINE academic functions

- counsel individual students.
- design leaning experiences.
- provide resources relating to area of professional expertise
- consult with learning groups about (a) methodology and/or (b) content.
- evaluate learning experiences.
- assess students' competencies and provide (a) formative and (b) summative feedback.
- consult with peers for evaluative and decision-making purposes.
- develop individual staff member's academic competence.
- model appropriate behaviour.

FIND OUT what staff preferences are.

SUMMARISE AND EVALUATE expertise available among staff.

DETERMINE the needs that have to be met through academic activities.

MATCH staff preferences, expertise and needs as far as possible.

DETERMINE demands on staff in addition to academic functions.

DEVISE an equitable work load for each staff member.

NEGOTIATE with staff appropriate proposed work load.

DETERMINE AND PUBLISH the work profiles.

PROVIDE a monitoring/evaluating/counselling mechanism.

PROVIDE a mechanism for getting feedback to the Co-ordination Group.

This conceptual model is a composite of the remarks from three sub groups and subsequent discussion in a feedback session.
DESIRED "FACILITATOR" ROLE.

A system involving the staff and student effectively supporting and influencing the learning environment to optimise learning. The experience should stimulate, excite and motivate through commitment and exposure to intellectual variety. The staff should have a desire to support student learning, be aware of student needs and have a clear understanding of course (School) objectives so that agreement can be reached between staff and student on outcomes. The final aim is to foster interdependancy between staff and student.

This conceptual model is a composite of the reports from three sub-groups and subsequent discussion in a plenary session.

DAY 3.

David Russell ran a workshop on facilitation on Day 3. This was not a direct follow-on from the conceptual model developed on Day 2, but it enriched the perception of participants of the situation in the School and of the academic functions identified in the conceptual model. Amongst other things, a statement about the role of the "facilitator" was developed, and agreement reached that a new term for this person needed to be devised.

DAY 4.

There was concensus among participants that the work that had been done should be continued and finalised in a form that could lead to action to improve the situation in the School. It was decided to concentrate on the academic functions aspect of the conceptual model developed on Day 2. An outline model (see over) was developed, and then concrete suggestions made as to how each of these areas could be developed.
(a) **INDIVIDUAL ACADEMIC STAFF FUNCTIONS.**

(1) How to encourage the development and evaluation of Ag. education philosophy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Action required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>1. Formal evaluation reports - regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>2. Quantitative feedback from students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>3. (a) Forum for exchange of ideas - W/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with experience</td>
<td>(b) Regular 'formal' W/S following each semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>July and December.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current students</td>
<td>4. Seminars with other experienced groups off College.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is current?</td>
<td>5. Sharing outreach experience</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- student issues</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- staff issues</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- farmers</td>
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<td>6. Visiting 'experts'</td>
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<td>- Media</td>
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<td>- Uni's.</td>
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<td>- Schools</td>
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<td>- Industry</td>
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<td>7. Sharing Course Advisory Board imputs.</td>
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**How to implement:**

1. Head of School to nominate appropriate external evaluation. Registrar to provide administrative support in formal data collection and analysis.

2. Head of School

3. (a) Open forum could provide appropriate venue for this.

   (b) Needs to be implemented (and funded?) but exact mechanics not devised. People to be given responsibility to ensure these activities occurred.

(ii) How to encourage the development of individual expertise:

A staff group responsible for the following should be established:

1. Development of individual in terms of

   (a) Ag. Education Philosophy.
   (b) Counselling/facilitator skills.
   (c) Some aspects of individual expertise, for example to Co-ordinator of resource allocation, viz:

   - travel money
   - career development
   - P.E.P.
   - promotions
   - encouraging overall staff development programmes.

2. Overall staff support - the group would interact with staff, acting as a sounding board, and encouraging staff development.
Criteria for membership of group:

(a) High level of sensitivity to people.
(b) Diverse education experience in Ag./Hort.
(c) May be external to e.g. David Bond, David Russell, School & College.
(d) Counselling skills expected (my next training here).
(e) Have power/influence.
(f) About 4 people.

(b) DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL ACADEMIC FUNCTIONS.

(i) Course Operations.

1. Small staff group responsible for Course planning (3)
2. Submit documented proposal, ideas and outline to whole School for feedback in W/C.
3. Return to phase group (of 2-3) for phase implementation.
4. The phase groups present documented ideas on implementation to School for feedback W/C.
5. The phase team take amended ideas and implement.
6. Need arbitrator to generate school priorities when clashes occur - Academic Co-ordinator.
7. Course/Phase groups to develop assessment procedures.
8. Based on the following model:

```
UG3
Agriculture (3) \-\ Horses (2)
\   \  \   |
\   = Phases  \
Horticulture (3)

Team of 3 to lead = Course Group
```

```
UG1
Phase 1/2 (3) \-\ Phase 3 (2)
\   \  \   |
\   Phase 4/5 (3)  \

Team of 3 to lead - Course Group
```

```
P.G's
PGI + PG2
2 to lead = Course Group
```
(ii) **Package Development.**

1. For each expertise groups, i.e.
   - Education process
   - Animal Production
   - Engineering
   - Agronomy
   - Ecology
   - Macro-Micro Economics
   - Systems
   - Horticulture
   - Communication/Social Systems

2. Technical Support Groups to look at aspects such as
   - A.V.
   - Prose
   - Instructional Design
   - Curriculum innovation
   - Assessment techniques.

3. **Style - Student Groups** could be facilitated by resource people for the duration of a package, but a package (such as group dynamics) may require a two semester period.

(iii) **Student Counsellor.**

Objectives of this function -

1. Develop the student as autonomous learner.

2. Co-operative development of a competency model

3. Be accessible to student.

4. Provide critical feedback.

5. Gain confidence of student.

6. **Excite, stimulate, motivate students.**

7. Expose student to intellectual variety.

8. Each staff member to have about 10 students drawn from a variety of courses (UG3/UG1/PG's). Would require allocation of about 3-5 hours/week for student interests.
(iv) Outreach.

Benefits -

- contact with 'real' world for service and extension of expertise to community for feedback.
- provide 'internship' for students.

These experiences require processing and dissemination to School, programme operators or package developers for benefits to have impact.

(v) School Communications.

1. Agrag.
2. Open forum.
3. Formal talks.
5. School Co-ordination Group
6. Staff + student groups.
7. School W/S programmed and regular (4 per year?).

Required to create open environment for exchange of ideas, to create and exciting learning environment and provide an atmosphere of support for staff and students in which problems can be analysed and improved.

These proposals are put to the School as what this group see as "a desirable and feasible model". The aim of putting it to the School is to allow comparisons to be made with the current situation, to allow for discussion and, hopefully, to lead to changes that can be implemented.

R. Macadam
R. Packham
on behalf of the W/S Participants
**QUESTION 1:** WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE ANY CHANGE IN MANAGING PROGRAMMES AND RESOURCES?

| Cross-phase facilitation not working - phase facilitation as was done 3 years ago to be reintroduced. |
| Re: Management - need to formulate requirements and policies for each phase (Management team could be commissioned to do so). |
| Needs to be greater emphasis on team building for management teams. |
| Ad hoc management problem; resourcing lacks rigour; load on staff uneven; time management not being learnt. Communication and goodwill poor. |
| Macro team building essential. Some people have given up - there are the OKs and NOT OKs - destructive!! Clarification of attributes needed to join the hierarchy. No feedback. |
| Program management style is excellent - will keep evolving. Resources doesn't have the same coherence as programs management. What about facilitation by students - 2nd years who have been through the systems - facilitate first 1st year, |

(a) No clear identification of functions = AD HOC.
- *Man.teams have some ideas of their functions.*
- *facilitation & phase/course management - some idea.*
- *resourcing major problem.*

(b) Lack of
- *Responsibility and accountability of academic staff. especially W/R/T resourcing. Lack of commitment.*
- *autonomy + Laisse Faire.*

(c) Staff have to be "seen" to have appropriate attitudes and to be doing the right things.

Some programs are not being managed by those who have a vested interest in the industry concerned and vested interest in the students and their well being. Managers of program don't have ownership. Vested interested people in teams are swamped by majority in decision making resulting in low motivation for minority then the judging starts about non performance.

Four areas of the nature of management and production of graduates. Technical skills, marketing, a wanted product, systems. Expectations of students and employers.

Yes. More consultation with individual staff in deciding management roles and free these roles from promotional/status pressures. More definition of roles and expectations of individuals in management roles and of management teams.
Yes. - Ownership clarity of philosophy.
- Accountability leads to responsibility and debate on how to run an experiential education system.

Relook at structures supporting people, resourcing and facilitation.

Give money to resource interest groups to facilitate their operations eg. packages, project, staff development.
Encourage the setting up of interest groups. Think of ways of improving the efficient use of scarce resources.

I think that the system of managing programmes and resources is generally working well. There are areas which could be improved but that is OK.

Clarification of roles. Ownership of specified jobs. Who leads who?

Would like more connection with other phase management teams, for feedback, more whole view of course.
Would like an active choice in what management groups I work with and also the people with whom I work.
I would like an atmosphere that encourages time for dialogue, processing personal difficulties within a team, and coming to terms with what management means. There is an assumption that because someone is a manager they know how to manage.

Feel free to expose own interpretation of philosophy and check own position in relation to others.

I want to spend my resources on student activity but I find I waste time and energy defending things (principles) that need no defence.

Yes currently people define their own roles.
Knowing what the students need and meeting that need and being able to resource those needs - not effectively meeting the students needs.
What is autonomy - clarity in its application.
How do we manage our resources so that students can effectively - 'can' and 'do'.
What's happening to the mediocre students.
Basic look at roles of staff.

Programmes - criteria for assessment is an area of concern.
Resources - Allocation and management of staff time to be reviewed.

An absolutely fundamental look at what "we" are doing - how can system be modified to meet all needs more effectively. I can't cope any longer. Lets have clarity about ALL THINGS. It's like a marshmallow - NO BREATHING SPACE.
I think some students can slip through without some competencies.

\[ \text{UNFAIR} \]

\[ \text{AGRI} \]

\[ \text{BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE} \]

\[ \text{RELEVANT} \]

\[ \text{RISKY} \]

\[ \text{TONE OF PLACE} \]

\[ \text{STUDENT ENERGY} \]

\[ \text{LOW HOURS} \]

\[ \text{SLACK} \]

\[ \text{ROLE MODEL OF LECTURERS} \]

\[ \text{AUTONOMY} \]

Some Senior Citizens not taking a senior role.

Substantial changes in management programmes - little responsibility - no accountability, "laisse fair" attitude at management at top. Inability to consider responsibility of others ad hoc.

Management groups should be small. Shaped so that staff membership in more than 1 group minimised to free up time that overlap - we are over managing. Improvement in managerial procedures - clear definition of management roles.

General Management not clear - poor communication. No communication line. If you are not in a management team you're nowhere, receipe is ok but cooks can't agree on finished cake.

Collegiate means to me that I am part of a team and at different levels people have different responsibilities. Technical resources need to be in departments to meet department needs. General course structure ok. in principle. Some polarisation of faculty.

Yes because of need to grow (programs, people & initiatives)

Managers taking responsibility and seeing "projects" through to action. This means they have to lead/persuade/educate and accommodate people's needs within context of paradigm. This is
currently variable - we have some interdependent and some dependent managers.

Yes. Clarity of principles behind the operation of faculty. Management checking out process that principles are visible in operation.

Second line management not clear as to demarkation responsibility. Everyday problems taken away from relevant staff. No decision making, person at top lines of management. Cloudy issues between UG1 - and between UG3 programs - alienation - no mapping of courses even NOW.

If courses a little more formal (to) allow student (to) adapt to new philosophy - would lead to responsibility and accountability? HOW - integrated management - teams operate in isolation.

I would like to see more accountability and appropriate sanctions for non performance. Staff are being asked to do things they are not happy about doing. Mismatch in roles in structure program base, 2 out 3 - out of kilter.

LISTEN - Experiment - They are speaking their truth. We are not listening to the hassels. I am frustrated - no room to change. Feel totally bound.

Disjointed - time scheduling. Cross resourcing - no support for staff in teams - a need for a consultative person who is independent. The individual's skills are not recognised. Lost opportunities in marketing.

Bring on "corporate" classroom autonomy, can operate very well within clear guidelines. We preach teamwork but are not aware of individual skills.

Changes are occurring all the time. Sometimes I feel the teams introduce changes which have been used before. No historic feedback "reinventing the wheel". Management cloudy. - very hard to get clear guidelines and answers. Communication is poor. No response to communications.

Important to elect management leaders. Sometimes I feel that we need wider support for policy decision - eg. graduation assessment consistent policy. Student not clear, staff not clear. Decision making process maybe needs clear guidelines.
QUESTION 2: WHAT WOULD YOU REALLY LIKE TO DO IF YOU HAD A
PERSONAL CHOICE?

The wealth of resources the staff have are not utilised effectively. I feel a certain amount of structured input/resourcing would benefit both students and staff and would accelerate progression following that.

For most of my time to be away from administrative matters. Rather, I want to focus on:
Consulting
facilitating
research

I like management policy making. Grow in resource base.

A guarantee that I only have a load I can handle. My learning is very important as a continuum.

I would like to do less "things" better. I have a problem in saying no. I like what I'm doing. I would like to consolidate thoughts to be more effective. Package - paper.

Given the choice of resourcing/facilitation/management some staff feel more comfortable/competent with one in preference to another, eg. why should all staff facilitate or manage? Management teams are too large.

I'd like to resource more in my area of interest. I really want to give. I don't get the opportunity to promote what I can do for people. Greater involvement with enterprise management.

Like to use skills for which I was employed and trained as well as learning new skills.

To make a positive contribution to the faculty in my areas of interest free of pressures of status/reward. To be able to feel I want to come to work to achieve positive results and work in an atmosphere of positive cooperative development.

I am happy doing what I do. However no REAL fast reward for top effort.

Need help to work this through. Being part of a team as number 2 or lower.

I am happy with what I am doing now.

Generally satisfied.

I want to be in a management position; in a facilitative role with individual students and group (workshops). I want more REAL contact with other staff - in task oriented
groups, in sharing ideas, in supportive and challenging ways. I want more time for my own processes of development, creativity, as they relate to the Ag/Hort paradigm.

I don’t know. As I am not sure where the faculty or course are going/developing.

Spend more time developing resources and writing and in face- to-face contact.

Marginal interest in management. My interest is research in my field of expertise.

Reduction in tasks so that I can perform as I see "properly" - self satisfaction. I like what I’m doing.

Outreach - happy in general. Like to be learning by practicing management at team development level.

Reestablish professional contact. Research. Why can’t I make a choice. More involvement in admin. in a meaningful fashion. Happy to work as a consultant for students.

I’d like to work in curriculum development. Science resources for 1 year no facilitation. Minimum attendance at meetings no managerial role for a limited period – do one thing properly and some research. I like to take on leadership roles if I know the resources are organised.

Resource Management is easy for me – I enjoy that.

I am generally happy about what I’m doing. No management goals. Satisfaction in interaction with students.

To facilitate further development of systemic, experiential learning globally. Current role

- project management
- action research
- consulting.
- policy making and implementation
- facilitating learning.

I am essentially doing what I feel good about - operational activity direct work with students.

Innovation – Management – Maketing:– students courses.

Specialise under systems. In my area of expertise – Horticulture Resource facilitator. We are different.

I enjoy my interaction with students but not in large group (16). 1-2 is good. I’m task oriented. I have difficulty – I like managing - power.
QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW WHICH YOU FEEL IS NOT FOR YOU?

Reading and Validating/giving feedback on student projects that cover areas outside my own interest area and expertise.

Nothing

I like what I’m doing.

Administrative stuff.

Administrative Detail – not a delegater.

(a) Attending too many meetings.
(b) Many of meetings I attend are inefficient – useless.
(c) See too many (frustrated/disillusioned) students individually – however I feel that students are what my job is about.

Facilitation is not my strength but I have gained some benefit personally. My skill has improved dramatically but I feel students may suffer because of my limited skill. Management role in areas outside my expertise is difficult.

I resisted being PUSHED into areas in which I have no expertise.

a) Attending a lot of meetings where decisions are not made because of communication problems or failure of individuals to accept responsibility and or their role.

b) Facilitation in groups is not working for me.

Administrative work that should be centrally co-ordinated and common over all programmes and resources.

Being a number 1. Depending on pressure and stress of management job. Desire to slow down but still with a high level of commitment to what I do.

Nothing – I would just like to do things a bit more efficiently.

Administration associated with management.

I am not interest in fine details of policy making (Board of Studies) more the ideas behind the policy ... or do I mean 'politicizing' in its narrowest sense. Manipulation style... not clear, not straight.

Procrastinating.

Politicizing being manipulated – listening to axe grinders who "won't come clean".
I am satisfied with what I am doing.

No politicking.

Dislike saying "no" - am enthusiastic therefore overloaded. Bartering for peoples. Time by Management Teams.

Cross phase fac. a disaster - students would like phase fac.

Formative assessments need review - leading to over servicing because students are not taking advantage - staff wastage.

Group facilitation is difficult for me to do well. Cross program facilitation is difficult it inhibites facilitation.

Cross program facilitation difficult because of different goals in courses.

Being a bureaucrat!!

Detailed admin. role - particularly where it involves Faculty/administration formal links.

Meetings which are not task oriented - no focus.

Not enough living education less passive interaction. I don't want to do this next year on such heavy teaching load.

I'm reasonably satisfied with what I'm doing. I can't resource Ag people re careers as well as I would like - Hort careers for sure.

Group facilitation. Trying to be something I am not. Experiential learning is a slow process.

I like in general what I'm doing. My FRUSTRATION is lack of action. "Doing things". I miss intuition in action.

I don't like ad hocery - talk! talk! talk! - no action. You have to go beyond CONCEPTUALISING. "THEY" preach communication, eg. no introduction link for new staff.

Management - non productive planning - I look for tangible results. No politics.

Generally ok.

I don't do enough with face-to-face contact.
QUESTION 4: WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE UGI PHILOSOPHY?

The improvements of practical problems from having taken a systems perspective.

Learning how to learn, understanding - environment in action. Systems situation improvement.

Autonomy of learning - systemic approach to problem solving.

Independent learner - experiential learning - outcome.

Experiential learning = tied up with systems. Situation improvement for others.

UGI development of competencies in autonomy - communication - systems. Who interprets (clear guidelines).

Autonomy, experiential skills, vision of broader horizons - systems.

The development of true interdependence in the students. The development of a true helping skill and attitude. The development of an adequate resource base.

Learn through experiences. Self motivation. Able to tackle new situations comfortably. Effective communication. Experiential learning and awareness of and management of one's own learning using systems concepts, techniques and methodologies in one's learning process to improve situations/help people.

Helping people manage change through improving situations. learning and communicating.

Experiential learning systemic approach.

A sense of self-learning through making meaning from experience - responsibility to manage improvements for self and for the wider society, in particular agricultural industry and associated people.

The systems approach to problem solving in agriculture as a process for overall development.

Systems experiential learning making sense of your world.

Sound knowledge base PLUS three competencies.

Students taking responsibility for self may be too hard, unnecessarily difficult. I'm not comfortable with current course structure (1st Year).
Experiential Learning

--- Autonomy ---

Systems Ag - Wholism

S
H
T
RS

Communication - mature way.
Situation Improving - Tell 'em how.
REALISM.

UG1 dev. students as a problem solver in broad ag. systems.

UG1 help others to see need for change and help others manage change.

UG1 = help others to manage change.

Experiential Learning - systems.

Environment autonomy - personal action
Philosophy is right. Implementation bad.
Contradiction - helping others to live in their world.

Interdependent learning community based on experiential learning paradigm.

Clarity needed between philosophy and action.

What is AUTONOMY as espoused by not necessarily carried out autonomous learning? — INTERDEPENDENT learning
Students not understanding the difference.

Effective Communication, Applied Systems - formalisation continuous through course. Talk 'TO' not 'AT'.

Course seems to be centred on "Autonomy" personal development more so than Ag. then we get conflict - between process and content.

Autonomy - Experiential learning - systems failing on experiential learning. They don't have to wander around in the desert.

Is there body in the wine or is it just HEADY stuff - should be at a high level skill.

'Interdependency' - ties in learning skills and people skills.

Helper in Ag (UG1) interface with man. - interface basic concepts in Ag. Creative-innovative - clear thinking.

More interface with management UG1
Basic philosophy similar
UG3 be managers.
QUESTION 5: WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE UG3 PHILOSOPHY?

The improvement of practical problems with much less awareness of the systems perspective.

As Q.4. - with less complexity.

Unfamiliar.

Not sure.

As Q.4. but situation improvement for themselves in a framework of farms/production units.

Same as 4 but not in same depth. Hands on skills - technical skills and knowledge.

Hands on skills with touch of as referred in 4.

The development of students who have a broader more worldly view of agriculture.
The development of students who question existing practice.
The development of students with considerable operational and some allocational skills.

As for 4. However career level is clearer with main direction towards management.

Don't know.

I dont have a clear idea of UG3 philosophy. It is concerned with managing (change?) in agriculture and has elements of learning autonomy, systems and communication.

Without direct experience of UG3 I sense it is a practical fact learning, structured experience for "doing" skills.

Same basic philosophy.

As 4 basically.

Skills in chosen area of agriculture.
Unfamiliar.

Experiential Learning (Autonomy)
Management Skills
Technolgical Skills
An "awareness" of systems.
Communication skills in action.

UG3 as a problem solver in specific Ag. sub. systems.
People who manage change.

UG3 manage change for themselves.

As for Q.4 - philosophy hand on skills - manage world they live in.

Problem Solving UG1 + UG3 share these corner stones. Systems Perspective For UG3 Faculty not clear about paradigm.

Applied academics not only know WHAT to do but WHY

Experiences applied at a different level.

Middle management skills touch of systems autonomy.

Skills at hands operational levels. Decisions made for his own or bosses level.
QUESTION 6: WHAT ARE THE KEY DIFFERENCES?

Level of autonomy expected.

UG People are very aware of the perspective they are taking... they can argue for/against it etc.

UG3 people are only minimally aware of the perspective at the conceptual level... their level is the practical one (by emphasis).

Time type of student enrolled reliance on skills - job.

UG3 more "hands on" work. Less philosophy... concentrate on application of philosophy only.

The degree of development relative unimportance of skills and technical training is inadequate.

UG1 boundless expectations of students - future view.
UG3 bounded expectations of students - current view.

Don’t know. UG3 focus on managing change - UG1 help others to manage change as well as managing change yourself.

Compared to the UG1, the UG3 doesn't seem to have a clear role, or function in the faculty. In myself and others I detect a lack of clarity about the role of the UG3 and how it should be operated.

UG1 - element of "improvement" as focus - dynamic.
UG3 - element of "what is" as focus - static.

A difference in approach, viz: UG3 operator manager - to do.
UG1 Professional agriculturist - to do and to help to do.

UG3 less philosophy and more emphasis on allocation operational skills.

Not qualified to comment.

UG3 no need to help other manage change.

Competence broader for UG1. Bias UG1 in cognitive domain - UG3 cognitive bias.

The "fence" is the difference. UG1 outside "fence" UG3 inside.

As Q5. - in implementation rather than philosophy.

Both UG3 and UG1 will have to be open to new experience approach and feel confident about their ability to cope with change. In the case of UG3 this will be linked to specific vocational skills
- in the case of UG1 a broader and less defined professional orientation.

UG1 Student know more WHY
UG3 students know more WHAT

Confusion seeking similar ends over different lengths of -
conflict of(or ok) managing self - in 3 years or 2 years.

Higher level of skills in UG1 - hands on UG3

UG3 - by guess - operational level
UG1 - Policy makers - allocaters.
QUESTION 7: ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

i I would like to see staff grouping themselves in certain interest group for research, resourcing etc. so as to provide a supportive environment.

ii It's easy to point out the obstacles in front of the students BUT to tell him how to overcome them is another story. This would be made an easy task if these points were brought up at Management team (or better still phase team) meetings.

Need for greater
* debate of issues at every level
* team building at every level-->
  teams are programme teams ...
  not subject teams.

Lump courses together. I like clear cut boundaries - leadership poor - system accountability.

There are demons nipping at ankles. What are the demons? A very fln! age profile.

Review - pulling out Lessons of last 7 years to situation improve next 7 years.

Degree of autonomy in ALL students EARLY in the course is unrealistic.

I would like to do a good job and feel good about that.

This is a good exercise. It is now up to the faculty as a whole and each individual in it to use this opportunity to confront issues identified and come to some constructive end point to allow future continued growth.

I feel I have control over my destiny. I enjoy what I do because I do what I feel is relevant to me and staff and students and society at large. I get annoyed at myself when I don't allow myself time to plan/invent/test out ideas. I get annoyed at any who call for support but don't give it, or call for honesty - openness but "sit on it".

I feel part-time staff have little structural (secretarial), intellectual (ac.staff) or emotional support of a continuing basis. (I believe this to be a structural problem).
I am inclined to think those who suggest others should carry more of the weight should look at the dead weights they choose to lug around.

I believe the impetus to innovate has slowed down and that this is unfortunate as we are missing opportunities to make work more enjoyable, more efficient and more effective.
Needs to be accountability and responsible staff should set out contract for what they want to do for year and should be encouraged and supported. This should be accounted for promotion. Revaluate facilitation - do we need it?

I really enjoy working in this faculty with the people in it and the philosophy espoused by it. I believe the degree course is for people with work experience in the main.

Worthwhile exercise/Please follow up.

We are pioneers and it sometimes doesn't feel like that ... it feels contained, limited resolution and follow through and structure to facilitate the many terrific ideas and energies that exist.

No forum to express ideas and understandings.

Younger 1st year students need more direction.

Facilitation time limited.

Changes made without views of staff REALLY being heard.

Don’t like camp knockers - negative views I can do without.

Accountability for actions seems slow in our system.

Lot of staff time in management. BUT is it effectively managed?

I am doing a lot of learning which is 😊

I am a strong believer in the elective process for Deanship, Assoc. Dean; Program managers; -Middle management function diffused.

I am very disappointed to see that we haven’t seen the need to have a business manager to have a look at operation. No accountability in current system.

Career facilitation = develop a career profile = motivation = learning needs = autonomous learning. UG3 - review model and check - are we doing it?

I believe facilitation is vastly over emphasized in importance relative to people's resource base.

We are getting better and better.
I wish they would "like" to 'fall out of love' with their paradigm.

Credibility of students affects credibility of staff. I have had to sell myself ——> not HAC.

People would better operate within systems if they understood the basic principle of AG.Hort and therefore be better able to situation improve.

I'm glad the experiment happened — It's been uncomfortable. I'm out of rut.

Stronger framework EARLY in programmes on which to hang autonomy — experiential learning.

Investment in training staff essential to achieve collegial goals (classroom corporate).

Structure change needs to look at difficulty students have in contacting staff — ACTIVE RESEARCH may make this shortcoming worse — fewer bodies on campus.

The experiment is working well — still a trial
Mature age — fly
Brilliant HSC difficult but make it, what about middle ground students — need support xxx motivating exercises to burst them along.

I have been a participating supporter of the changes in Ag. over the last 8 years. I have consistently pointed at interpersonal relationships as the key factor in our development.

The most positive thing I have to say about the "new" way is that it rationally responds to a perceived (Ag.etc) industry situation and that it has consciously designed and tried to implement and educational policy.
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT – KEN WILLIAMS

OUTWARD BOUND

The Faculty of Agriculture began a team building exercise last year which approximately half the staff attended. This year 12 staff and myself experienced the Outward Bound Management Team Program which extended over 8 days. The venue was the Outward Bound School out of Canberra.

Using the Bungonia Gorge for field management exercises. My interest was twofold:

- To experience the team building system.
- To get to know staff at a level away from the work place. The hope was that this knowledge would be helpful in my major project.

The program - I felt at first as though I had been put back 40 years to naval training days with the rigors involved in that era. This was far from the fact and even after the first day, team building was the objective in various challenges. The challenges began in relatively simple form gradually growing more challenging and all the while encouraging support from other members of the group. I was surprised how quickly the group support for each other grew.

A questionnaire aimed at a collation of individual thoughts about what they saw as a useful outcome for the faculty. The information was gathered and collated and presented to the group the next evening. A copy of the questionnaire and the collated result is attached. This result was circulated to all members. This seemed to follow other information collected at other times. I wonder if the action plan is available to implement the needs and desires of faculty staff.

The instructors had told us that they would gradually withdraw until the group were handling the organisational systems in all detail. At the last evening briefing we divided into 4 groups in which we would remain for the rest of the course. If other group would in turn take responsibility for the whole group for a whole day including the activities, food and all equipment. As the course progressed the responsibilities and range of activities increased. The responsibility for safety as well as organisation were included. I made my task apart from those allotted; that of an observer to the response and actions of those taking on tasks.

This was "foreign" territory to all of us. The realms of catering, organising personnel, checking and gathering equipment were new but the ways of leadership were perhaps the same as in other places. The first obvious reflection was the responsible and thorough way tasks allotted were performed and in safety areas rechecked with others. There were many variations in the manner of carrying out the duties; however the responsibility of the job was taken very seriously.
One issue which was obvious was the fact that once the responsibility was given and the authority, the person carried out the duties extremely well. The steps taken to carry out a task were:

* Describe the task in full.
* The clear detail of what results were required.
* A time factor to complete task.

How the task was completed then rested with the person involved. Decisions could then be made concerning personnel requirements, materials needed and time involved.

A simple but very effective organisational strategy to complete quite complex tasks. Simplicity and clarity were the keynote factors. The expectations of both the giver and receiver of the task were very clear.

Each evening there was a reflective process at both personal and group level; see attached outward bound review card. Both reflections were worthwhile, but the group discussions concerning the things that went wrong and the things that went well, were very worthwhile. The changes necessary to plans were simple because the events calling for change were very recent. This evening reflection time was run by a member of that day's management team and time was taken to hand over to the next management group for the next day's activities. At the conclusion the new management group delegated duties for meals, activities and commencement times for the next day.

How effective were the Outward Bound techniques? - I believe very effective in that setting where total group support for each other as individuals and as a large group was necessary to get through the day safely and well. My perception was that much of the material could be translated back to the faculty at "home". Individuals I spoke to were diffident about that possibility. The main obstacle seemed to be that the situation was very different. Of course this was so however I believe the same management principles can be applied to many situations with small adjustments. Small adjustments because major changes change the whole context of the system. Then the complications become too large for assimilation and relating to the original management plan.

In all management situations the human element is the mainspring to success. The support of each other at all management levels is essential for the ongoing completion of tasks. The interesting thing about the Outward Bound model was the Action Step which I believe is lacking in the faculty. It seems to me that in the faculty activities, a new task MEANS ANOTHER CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND NOT AN ACTION STEP.

During the management course, particularly toward the end, the confidence had grown in each other. Confidence in both the daily group leader and those to whom tasks had been delegated by that leader. Some difficulty was experienced by group leaders during the execution of a particular movement. For example during checks of harness for safety reasons. The delegated person on a particular task may have asked the leader to check his harness, or even correct a position. At times I believe the leader may have resented
being questioned by his delegated person. This is an important lesson to learn, and a hard one.

If the power base has empowered someone else, then a very destructive action can remove that empowerment and render the delegated powerless. I would say don't look over the shoulder physically or mentally once the confidence has been given. The task may be completed very differently from the way I would do it. It could be that this different way is better than mine.
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

HAWKESBURY

Graham Swain, Chief Executive Officer
Owen Carter, Deputy Principal
Richard Bawden, Dean, Faculty of Agriculture
Paul Baumgartner, Dean, Faculty of Food & Environmental Sciences
Alan Millington, Dean, Faculty of Business & Land Economy
Snow Barlow, Dean, Faculty of Horticulture
Mavis Bickerton, Dean, Faculty of Nursing
Philip Dutton, Dean of Students
Noel Burnett, Registrar
Brian Lindsay, Bursar
Aileen Stevenson, Head of Resources Centre
Doug Kohlhoff, Manager, Computer Centre
Colin Hawkins, Assistant Registrar
Peter Noble, Accountant
Bob Snedden, Manager, Works & Properties
Robert Macadam, Associate Dean (Academic), Faculty of Agriculture
Robert Woog, Associate Dean (Resources), Faculty of Agriculture
Jim Hourigan, Associate Dean (Academic), Faculty of Food & Env. Sciences
Grant Wyllie, Associate Dean (Resources), Faculty of Food & Env. Sciences
John MacFarlane, Associate Dean (Academic), Faculty of Business
Robert Spooner-Hart, Associate Dean, Faculty of Horticulture
Geoff Wilson, Associate Dean (Academic), Faculty of Nursing
Robyn Moroney, Associate Dean (Resources), Faculty of Nursing
ISSUES/CONCERNS OF MIDDLE MANAGEMENT GROUP

1. Model developed does not incorporate appropriate academic structures, viz. levels of qualifications, etc., NOT programs, e.g. B.A. B.Sc. Masters Ph.D. B.Com. still with diversity across network members.

2. Model requires co-operation trust and corporate spirit at a "miraculous" level. This we don't have within the individual network members: - in limited growth/resources - change to Model 2.

3. New areas to move into.

4. With changes/redirections/etc., research/management/etc., what are implications for existing staff/students:
   - teaching
   - staff time
   - money?
   How can we develop and maintain simultaneously?

5. Current concerns - too many decisions/information all URGENT.

6. From 4 (above) need for State assistance - incentives especially for middle management to do job well.

7. Need communication down and up, i.e. consultation with appropriate staff.

8. How to institute better communication between middle management and upper levels (is Hawkesbury already developing Model 2?).

9. Don't lose educational paradigms + what we currently demonstrate we do well - for the sake of doing "what universities do".

10. What level autonomy/management structure?

11. Critical strategic decisions being taken without understanding implications, i.e. "populist" courses rather than what we do well. Quality or size - what do we/Government want?

Summary:

1. Don't lose what we currently do well. Education appears to already be losing out.
2. Level of autonomy/management structure $\rightarrow$ HAC/UWS - role of Chief Executive Officer - need for structure to suit.


4. Problems with new developments/existing staff and resources, specifically the time lines (as shown this morning).

**BASIC ASSUMPTION FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING TASKS:**

1. Maintain high quality learning in growing.

2. Design 'HAC' organisation consistent with Model 3.

3. From Mission Statement to practical management structures:
   - flexibility
   - basic principles.

4. Action planning process/priorities.

**Staff**

Design more appropriate management systems to enable academic objectives to be achieved and also to devote more resources to ensure that adequate management skills exist.

**Programs**

A high priority in implementing the Mission Statement is maximum transferability of resources and students between programs (both within and between network members and other institutions). This has to be a salient criteria in the design and implementation of programs and supporting structures.

The implementation of the Mission Statement requires a committed and dedicated staff as a first priority. The development and maintenance of the staff quality requires a policy, an appraisal and reward system.

Accountability and responsibility must be more closely linked to Mission Statement, down to and particularly at the individual level.

**Core**

1. Well-designed, high demand undergraduate critical mass.

2. Provide basis for specialized low demand subjects.

3. Subject basis for structure rather than program.
Management policy consistent with Mission Statement.
Accountability vs performance criteria vs Mission Statement within and by Faculties.

Is Model 3 Appropriate?
If YES - what organisational structures are appropriate?

FUNCTIONS:

Decentralized
* Curricula - undergraduate
  - postgraduate
* Financial management (responsibility)
* Research conduct & management
* All operations management
* S.P. planning
* Development of data base

Centralized (Onus of Proof)
* Standards/Academic (performance measures)
* Budget allocation (formula)
* Research macro policies
* Choice of specializations & profiles
* Policies for key operations
* Longterm planning of University/campus

ISSUES:
* increased level of involvement
* increased "depth" of profile
* increased spread of activities
* increased management of resources

Management implications:
management units = academic units
budget

Resource implications:
structural changes
organisational changes
OUTCOMES

* + Responsibility/accountability
* + Delegation
* + Single line budget + flexibility
* + Decentralization of resources
* + Need for resource management
* + Need for academic leadership
* + Need for more resources
* + New communication that simplifies volume of communication
* + Need to "fight" centralizing tendency

REORGANIZE (functions)

--- HOW ???

\|/

HAWKESBURY ONLY: BASIC DESIGN FOR COST CENTRE ACTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Our Control</th>
<th>Requires Collaboration</th>
<th>Outside Our Control</th>
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<td>LATER</td>
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REGISTRAR: COMPUTER AND RESOURCES CENTRES

NOW: Ours: Place the spotlight on customer driven administrative support systems.

SOON: Collaboration: Policy identification and maintenance system that provides information to allow delegations to be exercised.

LATER: Collaboration (leading to processes):
Development of policies on information systems that closely interface with and support decentralized Faculty development and decision-making.

HORTICULTURE

NOW: Implement Faculty organisation - delegation of responsibility. Collaboration with staff development.

SOON: Develop Honours and Postgraduate programs.

SOON: Develop an industry-related research ethos with the Faculty to promote staff development and research.

FOOD & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

NOW: Own control: Rapid development of graduate programs and research.

NOW/SOON: Own control: Increasing the size of the CAKE by government/community/industry interaction.

SOON: Requires collaboration: Staff development/management effectiveness.

AGRICULTURE

Design the performance measures for staff accountability.

Set in motion higher Degree programs in Social Ecology and Rural Development (+ Ph.D. in Agriculture).

Do a "functions audit" - what each of us does - and compare the aggregate set with new demands.
LAND ECONOMY

NOW: Own control: Relaxation of staff salary rules.
     Collaboration: Funding supplementation.

SOON: Collaboration: Consultancy, research and development.

FINANCE

NOW: Our control: Single line budgeting and delegations.

NOW/SOON: Collaboration/Outside: Budget allocation system.

SOON: Our control: Look at functions to delegate/decentralize.

HAWKESBURY LEVEL

Academic forward planning mechanisms.

Academic performance monitoring.

Policy - consultancy/research/development.
ACTION PLANNING PROCESS (NOT PRIORITY): MANY OF THESE COULD BE ACHIEVED IN 1 MONTH

1. Staff resources - support to allow planning ----> Task Forces with relief of staff

2. Prioritize need from senior management ----> System to prioritize (perhaps colour coding?) activities/communiques. Teaching first responsibility.

3. Short term and longterm planning and time lines and priorities (longterm are continually put back) ----> All staff have this function. Written information?

4. Develop planning time frame for UWS with pert charts.

5. Meeting frequency and duration.

6. Better communication about what is happening to all staff to let them know where they stand (improves motivation).

7. As we are a network member, what things can we do in common? What resources can we share? ----> High degree of competition (i.e. Faculty representation) at Hawkesbury between groups/Faculties for resources. What hope is there for a united UWS?

8. Monitoring and feedback needed. ----> All staff have this function.

9. Rotation of responsibilities of staff - need to involve ALL staff not only the committed ones.
YOU WON'T FIND IT IN THE TEXT BOOKS.

And you won't either. The text books I've read concerning the Systems and Action Research programs do not deal with the conflict issues. These issues are those that represent personal values and are usually well established within each of us.

The program of Systems and Action Research texts show the steps necessary to carry out these programs.

On the surface this looks comparatively easy. Ultimately the "people" element in a project will either cause a "situation improvement" or the whole thing will be committed to the filing cabinet.

To let an important project falter and fail at the point of "horse trading," strong dialogue, or when hard decisions are to be made is a great waste of energy.

So why does this happen? What stops the momentum? Why don't the text books produce another set of steps to bring about finality of projects with the short and long term rewards.

In my opinion the main reason why the conclusions are not completed is that to write down the context of the difficult stages in human growth is difficult and messy. No two situations are the same.

Who wants to be involved in high drama at a personal level? Who wants to be involved in situations in a group which are messy and don't seem to be leading anywhere? In the middle of all this have the ability to say to yourself all this is okay and everything that's happening is worthwhile and on target.

It is difficult for Society to be up front and honest. I don't think the social norms have always helped. We always need to behave in a soft way, and not talk about feelings. I believe society tends to dodge being honest about what people say in difficult interpersonal situations. Society doesn't offer rewards for expressing honest opinion.

I heard a good example of this on television this week. An acting group have been taking a play to schools to explain to children some facts in drama form, about child abuse.

After the show had been on the road for 2 weeks they got 17 cancellations with superficial reasons for cancelling.

Nobody was honest enough to say the play was unsuitable.

In my present Research project, on 4 meetings the research team mentioned issues of great importance to the project but were unable to deal with the issues at a personal level.
The tension and frustration generated was at a very high level. In fact the
group came very close to disintegration. And even though I had had 10 years
experience with group activity and dynamics, the frustration for me, as the
facilitator, was also intense.

A letter I wrote to the team expressing my concern about commitment may have
helped to crystallise the group. Quite suddenly the group commitment and
ownerships of the project appeared and grew.

The previous pain of considering the personal values and stake in the
outcome became issues which could now be discussed in an open but still very
challenging way. The defence system of the individual wasn't now the first
obstacle to appear. The thought of individual blame for the ills moved away
to be superceded by the thought that maybe the issues are deeper and wider.
A feeling of community building at all levels started to emerge against the
individual wants. The crisis has been accepted as being big enough for
change to take place - a painful but rewarding process. I have to ask
myself the question as to whether there can be growth without pain in
letting go old values. Being able to say, sorry I was wrong, or I like your
point of view - loosening up; being able to take criticism and benefit from
it. All the hard things.

I have just read a booklet on organisations and their development and one of
the thoughts which struck me as being important was the statement that the
Group was more important than the task. I believe that in the early stages
of the project this would be true. When the group is operating as an
empowered entity then the task will emerge as being important. The task
comes an integral part of the group maintaining its energy and functions.
At the same time, group maintenance, ground rules, norms, all which would
have been set earlier, need to be reviewed.

How hard it is to say what's happening in concrete terms when what's
happening isn't concrete. You can't touch it, but you can feel it. And once
its been in tune its easy to feel when its out of tune, then to be
perceptive enough to monitor any new unease. I have to constantly remind
myself that change is a process and not an event.

The Compost Heap. When developing that sweet smelling soil so rich and
desirable for growing other beautiful and wanted plants, all the rubbish has
to be collected. So its off to the compost heap; to be mixed with dirt and
manure to help the casting off of undesirable to becoming that most
desirable growing medium for new life and strength. The interesting thing is
that unless this process is watched, nurtured, added to, sifted out, turned
over, the final product will not be forthcoming. All we would have is a bit
more mess of the same as we have had before.

Our resource team is the same; going through the rubbish stage, turning it
all over and feeling the anxiety, frustration and pain that goes with that
process. Many will do anything to avoid the issue of conflict or differences
of opinion; change the subject; not believing what's said; diverting away
from contentious issues and presenting their own agendas. None of these activities are helpful to anyone – much less the research team.

What stops us from being ourselves? Letting go of whatever causes our actions? Is it power, self motivating values, and old theories that won’t damage the image? Maybe all need to be explored and looked at closely. This could be the task of the team. I believe the team is not a team until the “compost” stage has been passed and the team recognise each other as individuals. Then we will begin to care. Yes, then we will begin to care. We must respect and appreciate the expertise and talent waiting to be tapped. Relinquishment of power of the individual allows empowerment of the team.

The Action Research Planner says:

- Take the first step then
- Revise the plan if necessary.
- How simple that seems.

Very often we don’t listen to the client. It seems crazy to take a first step, talk to the client, receive feedback then ignore that feedback, pretending it didn’t happen.

If this research team can stay with and work through the mess then in turn we can collectively and individually handle conflict anywhere else and great things will happen. I believe this is our first task in our Action Research – researching our own actions in depth. Then we can move.

Ken Williams
Conflict in the "Place"

Acknowledgement that neither the Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland) or the Action Research (Mr Foggart) is not dealt with at group or action research team level. It would be my belief that many good systems studies and action research programs have faltered and fallen at the bargaining horse trading stage when the research has shown that some hard decisions have to be made.

Some may say the situation may improve by doing nothing; I don't in any sense subscribe to that theory. In my own action research project it took 9 two hour meetings to come to an understanding that agendas and assumptions at all levels needed to be on the table so that acceptance of each other as different people was an O.K thing and of itself a freeing agent toward a true situation improvement.

What then are the criteria for reaching this place and space and freedom to move.

. Personal Agenda - clarity early in the group's life

. Clarification by challenge of assumptions concerning words, methodology, terms, and jargon.

. Rules and guidelines, norms operating within the group and strict adherence to those agreed principles.

. Facilitation and leadership role clearly defined maintained, particularly important in the area of group task maintenance.

. Personal agendas. All come to a group with personal agenda. The unease or messy situation has already been thought about by each member prior to the first meeting. And although the methodology leads in a search for the improvement at a very broad picture, it is my belief that some thoughts have formed in our minds concerning possibilities of the improved situation.

In other problem situations the task (problem) is often defined. In that situation the group may experience several possible solutions around a common task (problem).

In the S.S.M and A/Research the possibilities are individually presented and all refer to a different possibility. So the environment in which the group is working is far more complex. The need to clear and bring out the individual agendas may help to bring the conflict out at a level which is not too difficult to resolve.

Clarification by challenge. The setting up of a group to research anything brings with the formation. It seems assumptions are made about methodology among other things that all who hear understand by those espousing their terms. And those who are listening nod and carry on as though understanding is there when often no understanding exists. I suspect I could guess at reasons: fear of being seen as ignorant if questions are asked. The need to accept the "word" from on "high" as the truth and must be believed. I suggest there are many more. Other mysteries include words, jargon and conceptual dreams.
All these things can be highly legitimate and useful. However without explanation and understanding, these things become the perfect foil for anxiety, frustration and non resolution within the group team activities.

Rules & Guidelines. Sounds pretty non experiential and taking a step backward. It is far from that. We are creatures of habit and seem to live happily within that framework. Provided those habits, rules are flexible then all is well. It seems important to know roughly what we are doing. Most human beings in many societies find diaries useful to regulate in a chosen way our activities. So in a group ground rules need to be initiated very early with acceptance by members of these rules. And in those I would include the explanation and definition of terms. Clarification of the above would help reduce and facilitate the conflict issues early.

Facilitation Leadership Role. Because of the experience in group activity within the research team I wasn't quite as particular in my facilitation role, tending to allow the group to work alone. I had mistakenly assumed they were a group too early, when they were still only a collection of people, albeit very independent bright people. Experientially I can't say whether the team would have come together earlier or not. Perhaps the challenge mightn't have been as great but who knows.

I do know that a group who want to work a rather than a collection of people takes a great deal of work. Both by the facilitator and team members - toward this end the facilitator needs to remain outside the content of the members and constantly monitoring the act of resolution and completion.

NB Clarification by each member about his/her perception of a group is very important at ground rule, first meeting stage. Constant monitoring at the beginning and end of each session will give continuity and clarity to sessions - a facilitator role.

Personal Agenda. I have mentioned earlier that everyone brings a personal agenda to a team. These need to be heard and resolved. The danger inherent in contained agendas is that diverting away from the task at hand and the team finds itself frustrated. The facilitative role is a key element in this activity.

A phrase developed by the team which says - we want a champion team rather than a team of champions. When the personal agendas are out front and have been dealt with then a champion team can emerge and acceptance of other team members begins, warts and all. IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE!!!
"YOU WON'T FIND THIS IN THE TEXT BOOKS."

Following the dramatised version of the Action Research Project several insights seemed to become clear. The dramatisation re-enacted the nine sessions of the research team development. A video film of the interaction is available from the resources centre at H.A.C. The performance was exacted for the staff of the faculty of Agriculture. The object was to show

1. What the research team were doing. There had been much speculation concerning it's activities.

2. To show the difficulties experienced in forming a research team. To move from a collection of people toward a group who had worked through agendas, the wearing of different hats, different personalities, beliefs, values, self interest and all the human differences which com forward, but are often not dealt with when groups committees meet.

The result of all the very hard work was a group of people who trusted each other and could bring up and talk about issues and reach a resolution even if agreement to differ was the end result. Interpersonal respect remained intact.

At the time when it was going on there seemed to be no end in sight during the turmoil, and in many instances no benefit could be seen or imagined. But in retrospect my belief was that the group needed to go through that difficult time to reach the state of cohesion, and be ready to look at and be confident of working on a faculty problem for the benefit of the faculty rather than individual gain. Benefits would occur only through faculty action.

After all this what did we have? A top research team and no client!!

The dilemma is a very real one and the text books don't help. Checkland in Soft Systems talks about the client being the beneficiary or the victim. In action research McToggart and Kemmis just talk about the client. That's good but how do you get one. The suggestion is that you wait until one comes along. I don't believe that the analyst sits around waiting. In my experience they go out and sell their "package" to a prospective client offering something; situation improvement at least.
I can understand very clearly the problem facing undergraduates who go out to a farm on farm experience and try to find a client according to the S.S.H or Action Research methodology; an almost impossible and impractical situation may develop.

The suggestion that the client may be the beneficiary or the victim seems real enough. The positive thought remains that the outcomes will be beneficial.

In the current project let's look at the emerging picture to clarify thinking and development to this point.

1. A sense of unease articulated in the faculty. The exact position is not completely clear.

2. A research team has been developed, and is now ready as a group to work on the unease and maybe identify areas for investigation.

3. The researchers are now looking for a client. No-one in the faculty has come forward.

Using the S.S.H criteria, the client is seen as the faculty of agriculture membership. If this is so then the research team may have 40 people as individual clients. (That would be an impossible task). The research team then has to consider the options.

1. Reduce the size of the client body but explore the faculty.

2. Consider the decision making process within the faculty. Where is the power base?

3. How could the power base, seen as the "deans" be approached to become the client.

4. What effect would such a decision have on the rest of the faculty if the membership saw the "deans" and research team making the decisions.

The dean and 2 associate deans agreed to meet with the research team with the possibility of becoming the client and to discuss the boundaries within which the research team may operate (see Ken Williams reflections on session 10).
In using S.S.H and Action Research a model may be developed for Agriculture in Australia to pursue the unease about the picture by:

1. Beginning at grass roots level.
2. Demonstrating by Action Research that opportunities for improvement are possible.
3. Encouraging agricultural institutions to follow guidelines put in place by this experience to broaden the base of such studies.

The model might be to set up the research team before determining the client. Once the unease becomes apparent the make up of the research team could be obvious and the team could develop into a "group" before going out to the client. It is vital that a facilitator operate with the group as a process member to assist in the group's development, not on any account must be enmeshed in the context.

The need for the research team to develop as a team and not a collection of people is that they would become the centre of the operating wheel. The can seek out the client and act as facilitators to research the perceived problem and bring back the information from those groups for dissemination, to revise the general plan and take the second step.

Sounds like text book stuff again with no emotional agenda. Any group has an emotional agenda and if allowed to explore that, emotion can become a powerful force. This is the skill of the research team and its work with the client. One of the powerful tools is that the research team can well be part of the perceived client, and not be seen as those experts from outside. This is an important point, and fits into the participatory collaborative and emancipatory functions of action research.

The Research Team

In preceding paragraphs as well as the word client, research team has regularly been mentioned. The question remains: what is a research team? The answer may be varied according to various beliefs about action research methodology. Nobody, including Kurt Lewin, who many regard as the father of action research in the 20th century gives a specific definition of action research. Therefore the research team may be formed according to the needs of the action research to be undertaken. As the name implies the learning from the action of the research will guide the work to an understanding of the type of research
team which is appropriate. The current project concerning the faculty of agriculture seemed to indicate a certain type of dimension necessary. The team needed to have a depth of academic interest, i.e. people in authority so that changes seen as important could be implemented. the team needed to have some common interest and the possibility of being communicated. This latter thought didn't seem to be important in initial growth period but was important for the survival of the team.

So what are the selection criteria?

Compatible people to work with.
Similar interests.
Commitment.
People with a larger view.

The answer is complex where human beings are involved. There are no right or wrong answers or decisions in communication - only outcomes. There is no certainty that members need to be deeply involved in the situation. Generous minds would be an important criteria; excitement about change, and an appetite to learn by thinking and doing. Change should be an improvement in some way in the human condition. Change will occur in some permanent way when the individuals concerned see an improvement. Change is a process not an event and because it is a process which takes a lot of time some permanence is assured. Change by crisis is difficult and takes longer for the system involved to feel the gain.

The Research Action.

After the research team has developed and grown together as a group, and feels confident to look at situations of unease what happens! What is the next step? My own experience working with aboriginals drew my attention to the dilemma concerning the progression to action phase. The complaints in Walgett were that many people came with various studies toward PhD qualifications, with explanation about, how much the study would benefit local people. The cynicism and reluctance to talk was based around the thought that nobody ever saw or heard of the study or the person again.

So after the research has moved from a state of unease to a position of action, how does the momentum keep going and who keeps it going. I see that in the action research model used in the general plan a need for this important part must be addressed and understood, and planned. Once the research team has completed its job in consultation with the client
then the mechanism needs to be in place to continue to take steps and review planning. The text books tell it needs to be done but how and by whom is missing. The inference of steps taken and review of that action suggests that the follow up mechanism needs:

1. To understand the methods already used.
2. To have been included in some way in the research.
3. To be part of the organisation in which the issues exist.
4. To have responsibility and authority to carry on the suggested plans for situation improvement.

The action research programs which don't include members of the community, organisation or institution in the research team interest me. I fail to see how a research team working on a rural problem can operate outside the farmer group. The following problems may occur.

- How can the real issues be explored?
- How can the needs of that group be heard?
- How can the research team form a general plan without this input?
- How can the first action step be taken without knowledge of what the step should be?

The only experts for me are those who are experiencing the unease. Professionals may be helpful in education skills in building research teams and other needs. But the continuing success of the research project is dependent upon the goodwill of the client.
To Post Graduate Committee
University of Western Sydney-Hawkesbury
RICHMOND NSW 2753

29th May, 1989.

Soon I will be looking toward the construction of my thesis (major project) following my twelve months of raw data collection. This step is, of course, dependant upon my progression from Phase II to Phase III.

To think about and develop constricts for the thesis I would like guidance about the type of work to be produced.

I believe my work should be geared to organisations outside the world of academia – organisations in the rural community both large and small in the hope the document may be helpful in their problem world.

I have been reading recently an excerpt from a book by Sue Jones, chapter 4 on analysis of Depth Interviews in which she talks about the differences in preparing data for academic clients and those organisations of industry. The term used is audience selection. Quote "when it is an academic audience I tend to make more references to existing theory used within that audience and I use words like concepts, models, theory relatively freely whereas I would be more circumspect with other clients", end of quote p.57.

I understand references to authors on the various theories is important and need to be made, but my need is that the document be produced for a wider audience rather than a purely academic one. I believe there is plenty of material available in the academic sphere, and perhaps less for organisations.

It is very important for me to have a clear direction to travel so that my thoughts may have guidance. It would not be appropriate for me to write material and then have that material rejected because it didn’t meet one requirement or another.

It is difficult enough for me to produce the work anyway without having to backtrack because I am going in the wrong direction.

I would also like to submit (for consideration) a plan of action to produce the thesis. Please find it attached.

Yours sincerely,

KEN WILLIAMS
Possible title: Action Researching Action Research in Faculty of Agriculture at Hawkesbury.

Submission – A suggested plan for the Thesis.

1. Introduction
   - As seen from 2 frameworks
     1. Setting the scene. Describing my rationale for doing the research. Why I decided to do it. That the research proposal should be around "action researching", action research to perhaps clarify and consolidate the many methods and understandings used at this time.
     2. As part of the introduction to talk about the philosophical theories in a historical sense. Bringing forward the ideas of Darwin, Boas, Vickers and others.

2. The method
   - How I went about the research
     . The methodology of Action Research
     . My methodology (an interpretation)

Issues which I want to deal with are

. The invitation or intervention
. The Client
. The Owner
. The research team
. Setting the boundaries of research
. The commitment issue
. The power-owner relationship
. Selecting the audience

There are, I am sure, more which will move in and out of the study as it progresses.

How will I do this?

. By analysing tapes
. Reviewing minutes
. Reviewing written reflections

Drawing out themes from the above material. This will assist in supporting issues that have arisen mentioned at the beginning of this section.
4. Results

Some difficulty to gauge exact results in a social science study. The area of black or white is seldom apparent. But six months hence some result may become clear. Even now the effects of the activities of the research team may have had an effect. Time may or may not permit a result to be seen in a concrete sense.

5. Discussion

- Having drawn out the implication of (4) "results" and the findings then look at:

  - Practical implications
  - Implications for future research
  - What are the theories?
  - Is there a simple starting point?
  - Is there a simple application?