

**ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND ITS UNDERLYING BASIC
ASSUMPTIONS AS A DETERMINANT OF RESPONSE TO CHANGE:
A CASE STUDY OF KWAZULU-NATAL'S CONSERVATION SECTOR,
SOUTH AFRICA**

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ABSTRACT

This study was concerned with elaborating theory and informing practice about the process of managing change in organizations. It was premised on the implications of organizational culture and its underlying basic assumptions for strategy, particularly in terms of responsiveness and resistance to change. Harmony between the external environment and an organization's culture was postulated as a critical determinant of the rate of uptake and acceptance of new strategic directions in an organization.

Drawing from organizational and critical social theories, past conservation efforts in KwaZulu-Natal were reinterpreted in the light of historical and contemporary developments. The theoretical contribution rests on exploring how basic assumptions, as the core of a culture, may be conceptualized and accessed to examine historically and culturally based meanings of conservation. The practical contribution relates to the need for mechanisms to explicitly address basic assumptions as the core of an organizational culture.

Data collection and analysis were informed by the ideas of hermeneutic philosophy, Giddens' Theory of Structuration and Schein's framework of organizational culture. The main source of primary data was interviews that were tape-recorded, transcribed and analysed using a multi-stage process in data organization and interpretation. The analysis involved the identification of common themes and differences in opinion amongst the respondents. Data analysis was done with the help of Nvivo – computer software for qualitative research. The software did not effect the analysis, but assisted in organizing the interview transcripts for analysis purposes: facilitating easy storage, retrieval and querying.

The findings revealed a temporal variance in the understanding and interpretation of the mission of conservation in KwaZulu-Natal. Respective executive leaders of the two erstwhile conservation agencies in KwaZulu-Natal were historically very influential in shaping the mission. For the present leadership, four basic assumptions emerged from the data: 'public funding defines who we are'; 'we are leaders in conservation'; 'we know our realities are changing' and 'we are conserving a great natural and cultural heritage'.

These assumptions reflect the various themes which the respondents discussed in respect of the present-day strategy processes in conservation in KwaZulu-Natal. Within and across these four assumptions, respondents expressed variable and sometimes contradictory meanings and interpretations. Differences were especially noticeable between the conservation sector's historical inclinations towards public service and its emergent commercial activities. Overall, the study demonstrated the variety of perspectives the respondents used to interpret their understanding and meanings of what the fundamental mission of conservation in KwaZulu-Natal ought to be.

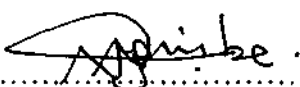
The findings highlight the need for those involved in strategic processes to base their activities, and their approaches to managing change, on the continual exploration of basic assumptions as the portal for the ideas, perceptions and beliefs that influence change. In matters of strategy, leaders should work with the prevailing organizational culture and its underlying basic assumptions, rather than develop the strategy and then attempt to deal with the basic assumptions and cultural support afterwards.

Finally, the findings suggest that in all visioning and strategy development processes, whether in a conservation agency or some other organization, explicit analysis of assumptions is critical for securing support for, and reducing prospects of resistance to change. Among members of an organization, visions, missions and strategies are unlikely to be effectively internalized unless they accord with the assumptions they hold. This process requires explicit mechanisms for doing so, and this study highlights such mechanisms.

DECLARATION

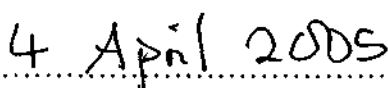
The work described herein was undertaken in the Centre for Environment and Development, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, under the Supervision of Professors Charles Breen and Robert Fincham at the Centre of Environment and Development, University of KwaZulu - Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

I hereby declare that this is an authentic record of work and has not in its entirety nor in part, previously formed the basis for the award of any degree of this or any other University. Wherever use is made of others' work, it is duly acknowledged in the text.

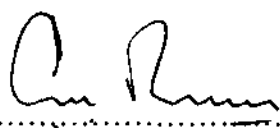
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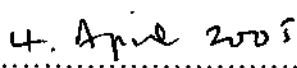
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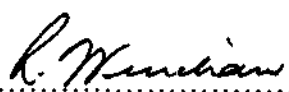
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ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CEAD	Centre for Environment and Development
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DAEA	Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs - KZN
DEAT	Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism
DNC	Directorate of Nature Conservation
EKZNW	Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
ICDP	Integrated Conservation and development projects
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
KBNRM	KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resource Management
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
NPB	Natal Parks Board

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is about the management of change and the influences of organizational culture in that respect. It was partially motivated by growing uneasiness and dissatisfaction about the performance of conservation agencies in dealing with change – a phenomenon increasingly recognized as a challenge affecting conservation organizations (McNeely and Schutyser 2003; WCPA 2003). Thus, it explores the implications of a fast changing external environment¹ on the management of conservation agencies with respect to their historical character of command and control (Holling and Meffe 1996) and the greater prospects of internal consistency in goals and behaviours as a result of long-established values, beliefs and practices.

Changes affecting conservation agencies and discussions of their implications almost unconsciously push to the fore usage of adjectives such as ‘resilience’ ‘turbulent’, ‘rapid’, ‘discontinuous’ (for example, Walker *et al.* 2002), to the extent of making these and related terms clichés. Seen in the context of what has been happening and is likely to continue happening in the conservation sector, usage of such terms can for once be claimed to be correct. Environmental changes and their inevitable implications for the conservation sector are so wide-ranging and far-reaching that they have serious implications for the traditional conservation paradigm (Gunderson *et al.* 1995). Various aspects of the conservation sector – whether funding, policies, stakeholder engagement or the management of protected areas, are open to the changes under way in the external environment at local, national and global levels (WCPA 2003). These changes make it practically inconceivable to imagine that the conservation sector will retain its historical and present character in the future. Unparalleled transformation in society and its implications on the conservation sector demand new ways of doing the work of

¹Every organization is a subsystem of a “wider social system, which is the source of ‘meaning’, legitimation, or higher-level support which makes the implementation of the organization’s goals possible” (Parsons 1960: 63-64). Thus, in this dissertation, I use the term ‘environment’ generically to denote the socio, political and economic contexts in which all organizations, including conservation agencies, operate.

conservation. These realities require innovative strategic directions, hence the increasing reliance on strategic approaches to planning and management in conservation agencies in the quest for survival and continued relevance.

Overt strategy making of a positivist and rational type, as generally understood in contemporary organizational discourse, is arguably a relatively new activity for conservation agencies. This could be partly attributed to the fact that for a long time, the environments in which conservation agencies operated were basically benign, incomes were generous and secure and the agencies' missions clearly defined and bounded. Under such circumstances, the need for a corporate strategy as we understand it today was far less than in other organizations which were exposed to the realities of environmental turbulence a lot earlier. However, the environment is no longer benign – it is increasingly turbulent and generating serious pressures with severe implications for managing change in conservation agencies (Walker *et al.* 2002).

'Environment', strategy and culture cannot be separated in practice (Linstead and Grafton 1992). These terms tend to be so intricately linked that their common usage, especially alongside each other, might be interpreted as abuse in some instances. Failing to understand environmental developments, and exacerbating this situation with an inability to align strategy with organizational culture significantly threatens the success of that strategy and hence that organization's performance. Conservation agencies are progressively more being compelled to be strategic in all they chose or neglect to do for various reasons (WCPA 2003). One wonders, therefore, whether or not there are any tensions between organizational culture and the emerging strategic objectives meant to fulfil the interrelated expectations such as financial self-sufficiency, contextual relevance, responsiveness to policy imperatives and change in general.

Against such a backdrop, this dissertation focuses on the tensions and complexities involved in the interaction among the external environment, organizational culture and strategy in the context of a conservation agency. By adopting this focus, I subscribe to the view that conservation is a social and political process and that a need exists to focus more on issues of human organization, for example, the organizational culture that

governs collective action (Wilshusen *et al.* 2002). Although organizational cultures play themselves out in many ways, they tend to exert critical influences in terms of what members of an organization perceive. Organizational culture influences perceptions of the fundamental mission, the environment and even decisions considered relevant for surviving environmental turbulence (Schein 1992; Senge 1990).

The term 'culture' was originally borrowed from anthropology and used in mainstream management theory to denote the totality of beliefs, behaviours and artefacts that characterize a particular social group - be it at national, industry sector, professional, organizational or team level (Schein 1985). However, culture can also be used to mean the intellectual and innovative activities that a particular group engages in and the advantages and disadvantages produced by it (Schein 1992). This usage of the term is fundamental to the conservation sector since conservation activities and processes are increasingly reliant on innovations in various facets of conservation such as protected area management, funding, eco-tourism, public engagement and acquisition of land for conservation purposes. In undertaking this study, I have been heavily influenced by the enduring debates in mainstream business management and organizational theory on the role of organizational culture in managing change. A key standpoint in the literature is that cultures exist in each and every organization as a foundation on which values and actions, and by extension, strategies are based (Schein 1985,1992). This makes culture a very strong and pervasive determinant of performance in organizations (Kotter and Heskett 1992).

Use of organizational culture as a 'lens' with which to study complex organizations is growing as the value of culture becomes more and more recognized (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992). This development is premised on the growing view that every organization has distinct cultural beliefs that shape the thinking, decisions and actions (Kotter and Heskett 1992; Schein 1992; Snyder 1985). Organizational culture is also widely regarded as a necessary approach for dealing with some of the contemporary challenges of organizational life such as mergers, acquisitions, re-engineering and downsizing (Deal and Kennedy 1999; Hofstede 1986; Snyder 1985; Denison 1984). An

organization's culture is widely acknowledged as one of its 'vital components' - a critical element of its functioning and an important contributing factor to success or failure (Snyder 1985).

Organizational culture has arguably become part of the standard vocabulary related to management across a whole range of organizations. A common proposition in both general management and academic literature is that strong cultures, defined as "a set of norms and values that are widely shared and strongly held throughout the organization" (O'Reilly and Chatman 1996: 166), facilitate organizational performance. The benefits of a strong organizational culture are believed to derive from three effects of widely common and strongly held norms and values: increased dexterity and direction within the organization, enhanced goal alignment between the organization and its employees, and boosted employee effort (Kotter and Heskett 1992; Gordon and DiTomaso 1992; Burt *et al.* 1994). However, strong cultures can have a downside. Organizations with strong cultures potentially experience an inevitable trade-off with respect to their adaptive ability in the face of environmental change (Sorenson and Sorensen 2001).

However, for purposes of this study, I extend the above-explained thinking to suggest that the influence of organizational culture could be particularly strong in organizations whose missions, and consequently products and or services, are tightly bound to values and are grounded in ethical positions as opposed to mere commercial imperatives. Influenced by this thinking, I was motivated to undertake this study with a desire to make an empirical contribution to an increasingly important debate in conservation circles, positioning conservation as an endeavour grounded in certain moral and ethical positions. This debate involves the implications of a fast changing external environment and its demands on conservation agencies and protected area management. One strand of the debate is that conservation agencies tend to exhibit certain characteristics in terms of norms, values and shared beliefs, or simply possess a culture, which threatens their success under circumstances of turbulence. This alleged culture of conservation agencies has been a subject of great speculation and debate, which often depicts organizational

culture as a powerful force, particularly in respect of influencing change within conservation agencies. This was the premise on which this study was based.

Undertaking this study demanded two things: a need to identify an organization whose mission or reason for existence was founded on moral or ethical considerations; and the development and or identification of a theoretical framework to inform my exploration and analysis. I chose Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife (EKZNW) – as an organization operating in an ethics based sector (conservation) for the simple reason that the origins of conservation can generally be associated with particular beliefs and values at some point in society. Reasons such as the protection of species, believed to have been decimated by uncontrolled hunting (Pringle *et al.* 1982) were anchored in particular worldviews and had strong ethical underpinnings that initially coalesced the early conservation agencies in southern Africa as ‘solidary units’. Another reason for choosing EKZNW was the fact that the organization has undergone considerable internal changes over the years and its external environment has also been particularly turbulent. Additional reasons for choosing EKZNW are outlined later in the dissertation.

My chosen theoretical framework is organizational culture. While organizational culture provided a broad ‘theoretical lens’ for my study, I still needed to either develop or adopt a framework that would provide specific conceptual underpinnings for the study. For this purpose, I adopted Edgar Schein’s framework² of organizational culture (Schein 1992) which emphasizes the role of basic assumptions in organizational change and learning and their inevitable implications on strategy. According to Schein (1992), the core of every organization’s culture is a pattern of deeply held interrelated beliefs. Such a pattern of basic assumptions, so ingrained that they are normally latent or unconscious, are the covert determinants of actions and accordingly are the source of beliefs and even attitudes.

² Schein’s framework is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT, AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The problem statement of this study stems from the view that organizational culture in conservation agencies, their unique founding circumstances and previously clearly bounded and defined missions predisposed them to resistance to change. While increasingly recognized in conservation circles, organizational culture is not correspondingly well researched. In conservation, culture has commonly been studied from the perspective of focusing on indigenous communities and their environment (Vivanco 2003). But this is not the approach being pursued in this study. I have based this dissertation on the view that if there is a weakness in the study of conservation organizations, the missing link could be attributed partly to inadequate attention being given to organizational culture.

There are theoretical and empirical reasons to claim that the unique founding circumstances of conservation agencies, their previously clearly bounded missions, the unity they enjoyed in terms of values and goals might have engendered a degree of insularity and disconnection from their external environments. Resultant cultures characterized by insularity, inadequate responsiveness, inadequate communication with stakeholders, and paternalistic management and leadership styles made conservation agencies aloof from environmental developments. These and related circumstances impose a limitation on conservation agencies in dealing with change. In short, their cultures were environmentally 'unadaptive' and therefore 'limiting' and this caused them to 'shield' themselves from environmental developments

But this could only go on for so long, especially seeing that environmental developments were so over-powering. In time, changes in the environment forced a redefinition of the mission, goals and the means by which those goals were achieved. Because environmental developments were very powerful, conservation agencies experienced change as being an abrupt and disruptive phenomenon. This means that we need to learn more about how conservation agencies deal with changes in environmental developments. Expressed as an hypothesis, I would say that *failure and or absence of mechanisms that promote dialogue around basic assumptions with respect to*

environmental developments predisposes conservation agencies to suffer the disruptive effects of change.

In view of the above, this study is founded on the theoretical perspective that the influence of organizational culture is strengthened in conservation agencies because of their histories of strong cultures, previously clearly bounded missions and particular worldviews that pre-dated and ran parallel to their founding. The basic aim is to investigate the influence of organizational culture and its underlying basic assumptions in matters of strategy. The major question explored in this study is how has the culture of the conservation sector in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) evolved in response to environmental developments? I am also seeking to understand the nature of organizational culture's impact on strategic process in conservation efforts over time. Specific study objectives include:

- to investigate the role of leadership in the evolution of basic assumptions in the quest for setting strategic directions;
- to explore the relationship between basic assumptions and strategic objectives and understand whether or not there are any tensions between organizational culture and strategic directions, and,
- to assess the value of using a cultural perspective for the study of change in organizations.

My intention is to develop an understanding of the issues at the nexus of culture, strategy and environment so as to inform the conservation management models in the hope that they become more responsive to change while at the same time making their experiences with change processes more continuous and less disruptive. By understanding the role of organizational culture and being conscious of its relevance, my other intention is to encourage explicit attention to organizational culture in the management of conservation agencies, in dealing with change, developing strategy and perceiving the environmental developments. It is important to note that the focus on the conservation sector was merely a chosen 'vehicle' for a much more fundamental phenomenon, that of the link between organizational culture and change, in so far as it applies to all types of organizations. In

this sense, the findings of this study have broader implications and cannot be confined to the conservation sector alone.

1.3 WHY SOUTH AFRICA AND KWAZULU-NATAL?

A long history of conservation and recent fundamental power shifts coupled with the imperatives they have created in the form of a constant need for organizational re-invention and adaptation to social, political and economic realities makes South Africa a remarkable country in which to test propositions about the significance of a changing environment in relation to the management of conservation agencies. Democratization has unleashed unprecedented demands for change particularly with respect to some of the areas of extreme poverty in the country and the role biodiversity conservation plays in that regard (Wynberg 2002). Moreover, the South African government has made explicit its intentions to transform the conservation sector to make it better able to respond to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs and to respond to a context of new realities and opportunities:

In a changing South Africa, a new policy framework is needed that will result in effective conservation through a rationalised and consolidated system of protected areas. Such a system will serve as the focal point for conservation activities, and the continued successful management of the protected areas will act as a barometer of the country's commitment to the conservation of biodiversity (DEAT 2002: 5).

This, it is envisioned will be realised “through a representative system of biodiversity protection; a new legal framework for protected areas and sustainable financing mechanisms” (DEAT 2002: 5). It can be inferred from all this, that it is the desire of the South African government to develop a conservation system characterized by increased participation by all sectors of society; by greater institutional responsiveness to policy imperatives and by a new set of cooperative relations and partnerships between the conservation sector and society at large.

The combination of legislative and policy changes together with society's expectations is engendering unprecedented pressures to which conservation organizations are obliged to measure up as a matter of necessity. There is an inevitable need to go beyond the status quo in conservation. In fact, the prospects are

such that in the future, the general approach to conservation in South Africa will be significantly different from that in which the current conservation practitioners grew up. Contextual change means that new strategic directions are inevitable for conservation agencies, and these directions will translate into operations that are quite different from those of the past. This requires conservation agencies in South Africa to ensure that aspects of the context be reflected in the content, focus, and general approach to conservation as well as in the institutional missions and policies.

A rich conservation history, coupled with recent turbulence in the area of conservation in the province and the current challenges provided fertile ground for this study. Having gone through a critical amalgamation phase, and increasingly expected to adapt and respond to the policy imperatives of both the national government and provincial government of KZN, EKZNW as a provincial conservation agency has no recourse but to shape its destiny under very trying circumstances. In this way, EKZNW fitted with the intention of this study, which is not to study the organization *per se*, but to understand how its basic assumptions - the core of its culture are interacting with emergent strategic directions. Through an exploration of the circumstances of the organization, and the pressures being brought to bear on it, I sought to bring to the surface the broad range of perceptions and value orientations and the way in which they informed strategic responses over time. The desire was to understand how culture affects strategy and not to investigate the strengths or weaknesses of actual strategies.

1.4 STUDY OVERVIEW

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction to the study. Chapter 2 reviews literature about conservation's changing environmental context and organizational culture. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical and conceptual frameworks while Chapter 4 provides the methodology. Results are presented in Chapters 5 and 6. A discussion and review of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks in light of the findings is made in Chapter 7. I conclude the study in Chapter 8 with a summary of findings, conclusions and research implications.

CHAPTER 2

CONSERVATION'S CHANGING ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter comprises two major sections. The first addresses conservation's changing environmental context by providing an historical perspective on the conservation sector in southern Africa. The second considers the notion of organizational culture. In terms of the second part, ideally, this chapter should have focused on the most recent studies of organizational culture in conservation agencies.

However, studies dealing specifically with organizational culture within conservation and related fields are rare. Where they exist, organizational culture often appears as an implied statement and therefore in the shadow of other subject matter like the need to use social sciences in conservation (McCool 2003), resistance to change (Gunderson *et al.* 1995), adaptive management (Salafsky *et al.* 2001; Lee 1999, McLain and Lee 1996), protected area evaluation (Conley and Moote 2003; James 1997), protected area funding (Alexander 1999), collaboration in protected area management (Stoll-Kleeman 2001) and transformation or reform of protected area institutions (Brinkerhoff 1999; Bensted – Smith and Cobb 1995).

Given the dearth of literature in conservation on organizational culture, this review borrows heavily from other disciplines, predominantly, business management, anthropology and political science all of which have for a long time grappled with the notion of organizational culture. Because of the nature of the study, it is important to conduct this review over an extended period of time in order to demonstrate the evolving understanding of a complex and evolving subject – organizational culture.

In this chapter, I adopt a critical perspective³ to review two sets of literature: one that provides us with an understanding of the changing environmental context of conservation and one on organizational culture. I will describe in detail in the next chapter what I mean by critical thinking. I have accordingly restricted my review to those studies that are critical in orientation. In this context, I focus on critical thinking oriented studies by examining how they address issues of contextual focus, attitude to conflict and predisposition to change. These three dimensions have previously been used as classification schemes in research (Laughlin 1995; Hirscheim *et al.* 1996).

2.2 CONSERVATION'S CHANGING ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

Conceptually, this section, as is the rest of the dissertation, is influenced by the view that any realistic analysis of conservation must recognize that conservation is an embodiment of the political, social and economic structure of society (Hulme and Murphree 2001). A full review of the history of conservation is not useful here, but if one can accept an abridged recounting, the point is worth consideration at the outset. The following is a sketch of conservation's changing environmental context. In this section, I draw attention to turbulence, complexity and ambiguity in the conservation sector through an examination of how the assumptions underlying the philosophy and practice of conservation have changed over the years in response to the interplay of social, political and economic realities within the context of southern Africa.

2.2.1 Background to conservation's changing environmental context

That society has always been turbulent and dynamic is irrefutable (Emery and Trist 1965). Even more glaring is the fact that turbulence is a manifestation of yet another characteristic of society - complexity. Turbulence and complexity have continuously engendered change, and created uncertainty in every domain of life, especially in organizations and other social institutions (Christensen 2001; Felkins *et al.* 1993; Goldthorpe 1968). The sheer rapidity and pervasiveness of change has always imposed a demand for adaptation on organizations (Argyris and Schön 1978; Ohlin 1958). And yet, adaptation has proved elusive for most organizations and this is suggested by their rise

³ The notion of critical perspective is discussed in detail in section 3.2.2.

and fall, tendency for short-lived success and growing failure – which all attest to their vulnerability to turbulence (Senge 1990; Bennis 1966).

Complexity is permanently beyond our complete comprehension, suggesting that the salient aspect is not our knowledge, but our ignorance (Zimmerli quoted in Ribbans 2001). Under conditions characterized by complexity, predictability becomes hard because “... great complexity makes it difficult to forecast the future in any meaningful way. Not only are forecasts uncertain, the usual statistical approaches will likely underestimate the uncertainties. That is, even uncertainties are uncertain” (Walker *et al.* 2002: 1). Inability to predict has increasingly led to the acceptance of uncertainty as the rule rather than the exception. Indeed, in conservation, difficulties associated with prediction are fast-growing: “... natural and social systems behave in non-linear ways, exhibit marked thresholds in their dynamics and social-ecological systems act strongly as coupled, integrated systems” (Folke *et al.* 2002: 3). Thus, reality can never be understood with precision and accuracy for “... there is no such a thing as complete information” (Salafsky *et al.* 2001: 16). At best, choices are made in an environment of uncertainty using limited rationality (Simon *et al.* 1986) as complexity is beyond our complete comprehension (Orr 1995).

Growing acknowledgement of complexity has been mirrored in the shifts in approaches to problem solving and decision-making models. Emphasis in the literature has in the past shifted from optimizing models to satisficing models (March and Simon 1958), from rational decision-making to incrementalism (Braybrooke and Lindblom 1963) and algorithmic models have given way to heuristic problem-solving approaches (Taylor 1965). These shifts suggest that causal explanations are difficult in contexts characterized by dynamic processes with multiple interactions. One way of demonstrating complexity in the context of conservation is through a consideration of the phases of conservation policy. In this process of policy revision lie strands of critical thinking in southern African conservation efforts. Hulme and Murphree help to encapsulate this notion:

Conceptually, a set of radical ideas of international provenance were introduced (and continue to be introduced to the conservation agenda. There are three particular strands to these ideas and they are woven together in different ways by theorists, policy makers and

managers of the African environment. The first is that conservation should involve the community rather than being purely state centric. ... Secondly, the concept of 'sustainable development' has promoted the notion that the things to be conserved (species, habitats or biodiversity) should be viewed as exploitable natural resources that can be managed to achieve both developmental and conservation goals. Thirdly, and in keeping with the neo-liberal thinking that dominated the late twentieth century, are ideas that markets should play a greater role in shaping the structures of incentives for conservation (Hulme and Murphree 2001: 1).

In this context, policy denotes an expression of the principles by which society wishes to guide and regulate the management of conservation. I would argue, therefore, that policy phases are an expression of the process through which the present understanding and wisdom are incorporated to shape practices and principles to accord with the desires and realities of society (Hoekstra 1995). In the paragraphs that follow, I attempt to expose the evolution of conservation in southern Africa as a 'critical thinking project'.

2.2.2 Phases of southern Africa's conservation policies

Conservation policies in southern Africa have not escaped the realities of turbulence, complexity and ambiguity described above. This is because conservation takes place in the face of environmental, economic and political uncertainty, and policy makers, planners, and practitioners operate under the influence of assumptions that seek to provide explanations of how to work under this unrelenting uncertainty (Adams and Hulme 1994). Many have now realised that some of the critical assumptions that have for a very long time informed conservation policy and influenced decision-making in natural resources management are erroneous, misleading or no longer applicable (Holling *et al.* 1995; Wilkinson 1992). According to Folke *et al.* (2002: 3), the

emerging recognition of a two-fold, fundamental error underpinning past policies for natural resource management heralds awareness of the need for a correspondingly, world-wide fundamental change in thinking, and in practice. The first part of the error has been an implicit assumption that responses of ecosystems to human use are linear and predictable and can be controlled. The second has been an assumption, largely sub-conscious, that the human and natural systems are separate and can be treated independently.

Rethinking the practice of conservation has been the natural consequence of these realizations. Policy changes to drive conservation in desirable directions have become more prominent. Conservation policies help to direct and inform legislation, which in turn defines the scope of any conservation agency's activities. But all policies are

dynamic, adapting and responding to situations as these and other situations dictate. Policies are like experiments, meaning they have to be revised in the light of new information, experiences, lessons and challenges (Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002), a process commonly called policy reform. A three-phased policy reform process is discernible in southern Africa's conservation sector, and as will be explained; the divisions among these phases are blurred.

Phase 1: Command and control

Conservation was traditionally premised on a command and control philosophy that was developed as the first-generation conservation policies. Such conservation policies were founded on a protectionist philosophy (Rudge *et al.* 1997). Conservation was approached from the perspective of the 'benevolent' role of government in terms of being able to provide the necessary resources and determining conservation priorities. Consequently, the objectives, organizational structure and resources for conservation were an exclusive domain of government through national policies, which also defined relationships between conservation and the rest of society (Child 1995). Conservation policy was an exclusive domain of technical experts – mainly scientists, conservationists and technocrats (Stoll-Kleeman 2001; Salafsky *et al.* 2001) because that is what protection and rehabilitation required.

Under such conditions, conservation evolved as an instrument of the natural resources management policy of government and was oriented towards national objectives as they were then perceived and defined. Conservation agencies formulated action priorities to ensure that their activities operated within pre-agreed legal and jurisdictional domains in the form of protected areas. Attempts to reserve areas for nature and to separate humans from other species dominated conservation efforts (Hulme and Murphree 2001; van Jaarsveld 2000). Conservation objectives were for the most part associated with, and limited to protected areas. This reflected the interpretation of the business of conservation then: to control the perceived unrestrained exploitation of natural resources through the formal declaration of protected areas.

Preservation was for the larger part designated as the principal aim of conservation actions, to which other value systems, particularly community needs, were perceived as subordinate⁴. Conservation ends and other stakeholder needs such as those of communities were largely seen as being in conflict with the goal(s) of preservation. Stakeholders were often viewed as not being part of the equation in resolving the biodiversity conservation problems. Established conservation strategies ensured the conservation system's legality and existence. Conflict was an inescapable consequence in the long term, and it manifested itself in varied ways. Overtly, conflict was illuminated in poaching or otherwise as in traditional leaders and communities simply refusing to cooperate with protected area managers in awareness initiatives (Kiss 1990). This stage in the evolution of conservation policy helped to address what may be termed the 'what' of conservation. However, the achievement of conservation goals sometimes proved elusive as conservation agencies were perceived to be avidly using up scarce resources without delivering anticipated conservation results. Perceived failures and inadequacies in conservation motivated calls for reform (Barrow and Murphree 2001; IIED 1994).

First-generation conservation policies provided a host of lessons. It became increasingly clear that technically biased rationality was a poor guide to decisions and behaviour in as far as conservation was concerned (IIED 1994). There has since been a realization that over and above the technical imperatives that sought to address the 'what' of conservation, society, governments and conservation organizations are enmeshed in socio-political relationships of power and authority. This led to a new awareness of the relevance of socio-political processes as a significant factor in promoting conservation (Adams and Hulme 1994). Understanding the socio-political landscape in which conservation is first of all conceived, and later pursued has become critical. Embeddedness of conservation and protected areas in social, political, economic and other societal contexts also created a need to address the many socio-economic challenges faced in the region that manifested themselves in the varied forms of poverty. Rethinking of the conservation, and new perspectives brought by progress in societal

⁴ Arguably, this was not always the case. For example, Kruger National Park was seen a way of ensuring the future of hunting (see Carruthers 1995).

knowledge in different fields created compelling reasons to address the ‘how’ of conservation⁵. Consequently, command and control conservation policies have largely subsided since the early 1990s. The shift is now toward participatory approaches in response to the identified socio-political pressures and the need to alleviate general development challenges (Hulme and Murphree 2001).

Phase 2: Integrating conservation and development

This phase of conservation policy was based on a new awareness of the relevance of socio-political and economic processes as significant factors in promoting conservation. A resultant approach was the development of policies that sought to integrate conservation and development (Uphoff 1996). Adopting an integrated approach to conservation was understood to mean that a successful strategy must meet multiple objectives through a variety of means. What these objectives should have been and the most appropriate means of meeting them was viewed to be highly dependent on various interacting factors such as the temporal and spatial scales involved. An effective approach to conservation was invariably regarded as one that addressed a mixture of environmental, economic and socio-political issues (Adams and Hulme 1994). This approach to conservation sought to link the management of conservation to the wider societal processes from which it was previously separated or to which it was at least only tenuously connected. Understanding the socio-political landscape in which conservation operated became a focus area only with time, not suggesting for once that it never was perceived as being necessary all along. However, political interpretations were imposed on conservation and were used to shield the sector from realities. This is very clear from both the colonial eras in most of southern Africa, and the apartheid era in the case of South Africa (DEAT 2003).

Integrated conservation and development policies (ICDPs) were thus developed on the basis that conservation could no longer remain the domain of government alone where it was subject to political manipulation (Barrow and Murphree 2001). Inaction concerning

⁵ It is important to note that the ‘how’ of conservation has always been addressed. However, the ‘how’ changes with context and understanding, which means approaches to conservation, must continually adapt. It is both the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ (even the where and when) that are at issue when considering the implications of culture.

an inclusive and participatory approach was seen as a factor prompting sustained opposition from various stakeholders, especially local communities to conservation. This conservation policy phase sought to address the 'how' of conservation, essentially not, a new 'how', but an approach that was more responsive to society. This led to the concept of community-based natural resources management (CBNRM), which has at its core an approach designed to combine conservation with sustainable use (Murphree 1993, 1994; Western and Wright 1994). Underpinning this approach was the position that pursuing conservation goals, unlike what had been witnessed in the past, needed to contribute to, and not conflict with, basic human needs (IIED 1994). Consequently, working with community members through direct participation in conservation efforts, facilitating their beneficiation from revenue generated from conservation, and decision-making processes were recognized as critical features for the success of conservation (Hulme and Murphree 2001).

Contestation has not spared integrated conservation and development policies. Conservation biologists have not lagged behind in questioning this approach, and explicitly expressing their reservations on its feasibility (Kramer *et al.* 1997). Many others have noted that the anticipated change in behaviour did not arise to the desired degree (Barett and Arcese 1995; Larson *et al.* 1997; McCoy and Razafindrainibe 1997; Wells *et al.* 1997). On the other hand, there are those who feel that the critiques levelled at the ICDP phase might not entirely be correct. It has been argued, for example, that the evaluation of this phase was flawed because it failed to adequately consider that the set expectations in terms of engendering behaviour change were rather unrealistic given the short history and the complexity of the issues involved (Uphoff 1996a). Besides, the same issues had not been resolved even under the command and control era. Uphoff (1996) has further noted that initiatives under this phase were often so poorly conceived and poorly implemented that they were not put to a fair or full test.

Integrated conservation and development policies have also been criticized for the alleged paternalistic tendencies of the conservation agencies⁶ (Brinkerhoff 1999). This

⁶ Within the southern African context, it must be appreciated that the thinking behind the initiatives under this phase coincided with the communism era, under which paternalism was a normal practice.

was, among other things, because of the fact that the basic organizational culture of the policing and enforcement role was unchanged while the emergent policy environment was trying to foster collaborative and participatory relations with local communities (Brinkerhoff 1999). These policies met with limited success at the outset because the relevant natural resources management departments failed to make structural and procedural changes to accommodate the new policies. Changes did not happen easily to accord with new policy directions because the entrenched beliefs, values, practices and behaviours were for the larger part still covertly at work. This failure to change reflected a tension between long-established norms, beliefs and behaviours and the predicates of an evolving context.

A major lesson to be drawn has been the importance of reconfiguring conservation roles in the presence of new policies and moving away from the inwardly looking ‘business as usual’ approach (Barrow and Murphree 2001). This understanding drew attention to the importance of the broader societal contexts in which conservation finds itself, implicitly acknowledging that conservation agencies should not be divorced from the wider society (Hulme and Murphree 2001). They must not be seen as closed technical systems, but rather as a part of a complex of relationships that have potential influences on conservation. It became clearer that conservation was but a component of environmental sustainability efforts; that there are other forces within the landscape, in industry and society at large that could harm the biosphere, and from which the traditional conservation approach had been aloof.

Phase 3: Strategic policies and approaches

This set of policies built on their predecessors, but they are based on the understanding that conservation agencies can improve their performance by better understanding the trends that might determine the present requirements of conservation by hypothesizing from the predicted future scenarios. Thus, the current thrust of conservation is that of taking an overview of the whole system rather than a view predicated on species protection, to select those features that might help leverage or hinder attainment of management goals in the conservation sector. A strong need is emerging to move away

Questions have been raised about the notion that organizational culture can be managed (see, for example, Fitzgerald 1988). According to Pettigrew, corporate culture could be manageable only “with the greatest difficulty” (Pettigrew 1990: 366). From a critical stance, focusing on culture-performance relationships, Siehl and Martin (1990) highlight ethical and practical concerns. First, they argue that studying such a link could lead to focusing on attempts by top management to inculcate staff with a value system that subjugates them. Expressed differently, cultural forms through language, physical arrangements and rituals can be used in subtle ways to exert control on the less powerful members of an organization. Siehl and Martin further contend that the link between organizational culture and financial performance is a nebulous area of research. They further argue that research that claims to have established this link is often characterized by conceptual and methodological limitations and that such studies are usually empirically questionable. With these arguments, they challenge even their own earlier study (Martin *et al.* 1988) in which they suggested that a strong and appropriate organizational culture could enable good performance especially in contexts where organizational culture and business strategy are consistent. Notwithstanding these criticisms, research on the relationship between culture and effectiveness proliferated into the 1990s (Denison 1984; Kotter and Heskett 1992; Denison and Mishra 1995) and continues to be widely referenced in the ongoing studies of organizational culture.

Culture as a root metaphor

Three perspectives that view culture as a root metaphor, namely, the cognitive, symbolic and structural perspectives are discussed here. In general, culture is seen as shared knowledge (Goodenough 1971) in a cognitive perspective, as shared meaning (Geertz 1973) in a symbolic perspective and as an illumination of the mind’s inherent unconscious processes (Levi-Strauss 1963) from a structural perspective. Clearly, seen as a root metaphor, there is recognition of the inevitable presence of different cultures in an organization. The essence, therefore, is to find out how organization can be achieved in the context of multiple and unavoidably conflicting cultures. Also, what exactly does it

mean to be organized in such environments? Below, I encapsulate research work from the perspective of the root metaphor to elaborate on these questions.

Organizational cognition espouses the treatment of culture as a system of learned codes for perceiving and acting, located in the minds of the culture bearers and shared by them to varying degrees. Researchers adopting this perspective argue that cognitive conditions of organizational members could lead them to think and act in a certain way. In line with this view, Hofstede (1991) calls culture the 'software' of the mind. According to this view, culture energises an organization and its actions. As Hagberg and Heifetz (2000: 1) put it: "It is like the 'operating system' of the organization. It guides how employees think, act and feel. It is dynamic and fluid, and it is never static. A culture may be effective at one time, under a given set of circumstances and ineffective at another time. There is generally no good culture."

According to Smircich and Calas (1987), the intention for the researcher is to gain an insider's understanding by tapping into the conceptual, ideational system of groups and by analysing the language used to make sense of their worlds. An underlying assumption is that language, if carefully analysed, can help depict the speaker's worldview and that there is a relationship between action and what is thought. Smircich and Calas contend that by focusing on language within organizations, it is possible to get to the core of thought patterns that are maintained through communication. In this sense, the researcher's concerns focus on communication norms that guide action, on how people make sense of their situation and on how that sensemaking facilitates or constrains coordinated effort (Smircich and Calas 1987), rather than on interpreting the pattern of interaction as it manifests itself. In general, however, the cognitive perspective is common in research in the related areas of organizational learning and sensemaking (Argyris and Schön 1978; Weick 1979, 1995; Argyris 1990).

Organizational symbolism is concerned with the way organizational culture is created, negotiated, and maintained through interaction. Organizational symbolism promotes the view that culture is a system of shared meanings and symbols, hence the intention is to

explore the meaning that culture might create for people in an organization (Schultz and Hatch 1996; Alvesson and Berg 1992; Dandridge 1983; Trice *et al.* 1984). Such meanings and symbols are located in the products of the mind shared in interaction by individuals in an organization. Thus, culture is conceived as a pattern of symbolic discourse that needs interpreting, reading, or deciphering. According to Geertz (1973), organizational culture is experienced and understood in interaction, presupposing that meanings and symbols are shared to varying degrees. The contention is that cultural forms like symbols and language can facilitate a sense of organization (Boland and Hoffman 1983). Contrary to the instrumental handling of cultural forms in the literature concerning corporate culture, research into organizational symbolism tends to aim at interpreting these cultural forms as part of the symbolic dynamics of organizational life (Smircich and Calas 1987).

Research into organizational symbolism, especially in the early works, has been criticized for lacking an emancipatory interest. This according to Stablein and Nord (1985) exposes organizational symbolism to being reclaimed as a technical interest by traditionally powerful interests in an organization. Studies that have acknowledged that values and meanings are not generally shared (Smircich 1983b; Martin and Siehl 1983) have tended to demonstrate how conflict was contained. Organizational symbolism continues to play a role in culture research despite the fact that some of the early authors have since adopted more critical positions.

A structural perspective perceives culture as being a manifestation of the unconscious aspects of the human mind (Geertz 1973). While the experience and manifestation of social arrangements in different social settings are inevitably varied, what connects different cultures, according to this perspective is not in their manifestation or experiences; rather, it is their sources - all cultures are considered as products of latent, common dimensions of the human mind, and therefore, all cultures will have some commonalities. The role of a researcher in this context involves exposing and elucidating these common features (see Krefting and Frost 1985; Lucas 1987). Researchers are

expected to “penetrate beneath the surface level of appearance to uncover the objective foundations of social arrangements” (Smircich and Calas 1987: 244).

The structural perspective has made significant contributions to research. Amongst these contributions are the notions of images and metaphors of organization (Morgan 1986, Tsoukas 1991, 1993); the stakeholders of the organizational mind (Mitroff 1983) and organizational identity (Fiol 1991). The structural perspective has also been applied to investigations into the relationship between organizational identity and learning (Brown and Starkey 2000). Brown and Starkey have outlined ego defences common in organizations that seek to maintain collective self-esteem and the status quo.

Diversity in the perspectives on culture is apparent. This is perhaps better illustrated with the argument by Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) that the discourse on organizational culture is characterized by a distinct biomorphic, anthropomorphic or sociomorphic flavour, noting,

in the first instance, organizations have purpose and survival goals (for example, Barnard, 1938; Rice, 1963), go through life cycles (Haire 1959; Kimberly and Miles 1980), are plagued with problematic health (Bennis 1966), and subjected to implacable selection processes (Aldrich 1979). The anthropomorphic processes metaphor endows organizations with personality, needs and character (Selznick 1957; Rhenman 1973) or typically with human cognitive processes (Argyris and Schön 1978; Heirs and Pehrson 1972; Hedberg 1979). However, in a prevalent and persistent analogy, organizations are conceived of as societies *writ small* (Silverman 1970; Allaire and Firsirotu 1984: 193).

It is within the latter analogy of organizations (i.e. as ‘little societies’ with their own structures, social norms and socialization processes) that the concept of culture in organizations seems to be largely perceived. This metaphor presupposes varying cultural characteristics across organizations seen as miniature societies. As Eldridge and Crombie (1974: 88) put it, “while the uniqueness of individuals is expressed in their personality, the individuality of organizations may be expressed in terms of their differing cultures.”

Further analysis of views on how early theories of culture were influenced by anthropology by Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) is also very instructive. Drawing on the work of Keesing (1974), they distinguish between socio-cultural and ideational theories.

Socio-cultural theories, according to them position culture as an element of the social system while ideational theories perceive culture as a system of ideas that are conceptually separate, but interrelated to the social system. Socio-cultural theories perceive culture as contributing to the social system through myths, rituals, symbols and other cultural factors that permit a social existence. Ideational theories focus on ideas and symbols that illuminate and contribute to social reality. Thus, in the ideational perspective, a cultural system may not necessarily be in harmony with the social system's structure and formal practices. Survival of a social system is brought into question in the event of problems in the cultural and structural aspects of a social system. To this end, the socio-cultural and ideational theories of culture outlined by Allaire and Firsirotu are respectively helpful to further clarify Smircich's theory of the dichotomy of culture as being an organizational variable and as a root metaphor.

2.3.2 Critical and post-modernist perspectives in organizational culture research

In this section, my aim is to demonstrate the emergence of post-modernist and critical perspectives in the study of organizational culture. Usage of the terms post-modernist and 'critical' is for now kept at the generic level consistent with the work of Deetz (1996). I will elaborate further in the next chapter exactly what is meant by these concepts. In the foregoing section (2.3.1), the discussion demonstrates that researchers not only lack consensus about why culture should be studied, but also that there is no agreement about how culture should be conceptualized. However, it is also clear that in the 1980s, interpretive scholars dominated the study of organizational culture. Their discourse was inevitably dominant, but over time, calls for new ideas in the study of organizational culture began to emerge (Martin and Frost 1996). Since then, the study of organizational culture has broken new ground especially in the wake of critical and post-modernist orientations.

The emergence of critical and post-modernist works began with the questioning of the then dominant literature, mainly from interpretive discourse which was almost exclusively focused on what happens within an organization's boundaries. Opposing literature to the interpretive discourse involved the treatment of organizational culture

from perspectives of broader societal issues like gender, race, ethnicity and identity. In short, this thrust was towards demonstrating that culture was not necessarily a unifying force because within a culture there are inherent tensions. Thus, the critical discourse pointed to the need to uncover and understand the tensions inherent in cultural systems to prevent them from being oppressive or marginalizing. A central feature of the critical perspective is the view that cultural systems naturally bound to be oppressive, marginalize certain groups and might be the result of deeply seated power differentials.

From the 1980s, interpretive scholars with their dominant discourse were the focus of critique. There were calls for classical organizational theory to transform in search of new ideas (Martin and Frost 1996). Critical analyses of the study of organizational culture research emerged, and in different ways called for a post-modernist perspective as the better approaches for studying organizational culture (for example, Smircich and Calas 1987).

The mid 1980s saw the emergence of critical studies (Rosen 1985; Young 1989). For example, Rosen drew attention to how the managers of an advertising agency attempted to impose their will on the staff by taking advantage of an established annual breakfast gathering. Rosen observes that the managers deliberately chose to hold the occasion in a luxurious setting to claim the agency's benevolence as an employer, shortly before announcing a wage freeze. Rosen posits that this is an illustration where those in authority attempted to diffuse what was apparently a contentious subject between management and staff using an element of organizational culture (the annual breakfast) as an opportunity for seeking support if not social control. Additional work that underscores the way the interests of women or minority groups are suppressed in organizational cultures dominated by white men includes research by Kanter 1977; Bell 1990; and Cox 1994). From a critical perspective, culture could be deployed as a tool for perpetuating power differences, conflict and tensions within groups even when such groups, especially to an outsider, superficially appear united (Van Maanen 1991).

Critical studies of organizational culture argue that symbolic relationships and meanings that sustain organization are not inherently harmonious (Riley 1983; Lucas 1987; Knights and Willmott 1987, 1995). In these and related studies, conflict and power are the central concerns to the extent that culture, understood in its interpretive sense as a system of shared values and meanings, is arguably on the periphery. In an earlier study, Knights and Willmott (1987) focus on tensions around power over interpretive schemes in an organizational culture. In a later work of the same organization, explicit references to organizational culture hardly exist (Knights and Murray 1994). In short, these analyses are based on the view that organizational culture is a socially constructed phenomenon of organizations. Further, culture is treated as both a consequence and medium of political realities in organizations.

Post-modernist research on organizational culture began to emerge in the latter part of the 1980s. Like critical research, post-modernist research questioned the interpretive approach, except it focused on the perceived disarray and conflicting interpretations in an attempt to give influence and power to marginalized groups (Calas and Smircich 1987; Linstead and Grafton-Small 1992). These researchers use techniques like deconstruction to reveal the fact that organizational realities are at their core social constructions premised on language and thought (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992). Other deconstructionists adopt a feminist perspective (Martin 1990; Calas and Smircich 1991). Mills *et al.* (2001) have argued that dominant voices can create a sense of unity by drawing on the inherent properties of language to influence or to manipulate thought.

2.4 ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND CONSERVATION

Thus far, this review has focused on the nature and development of organizational culture research without being very specific to its connection and relevance to the conservation sector. This section narrows the focus to review literature that has applied a cultural perspective to strategy in conservation management specifically. For conservation organizations, the recognition of organizational culture is still in its infancy, and this is demonstrated by a dearth of empirical studies on the subject as discussed earlier. And yet, claiming that culture lies at the heart of the conservation sector, its organization,

performance, innovations, and responsiveness to societal and policy imperatives cannot be discounted without sufficient consideration.

The conservation literature is characterized by statements, which although often not empirically based and could be called mere conjecture in some cases, demonstrate a growing recognition of the importance of organizational culture and its related aspects in the current challenges facing conservation. For example, Rogers *et al.* (2000) and Gunderson *et al.* (1995) have made direct reference to traditional ‘command and control’ bureaucratic style of management as a barrier to adaptive management⁸. Gunderson *et al.* observed that most of the organizations in their study demonstrated “recalcitrance or inertia ... and the almost pathological inability to renew or restructure” (1995: 495). A related observation posits, “entrenched bureaucracies are characteristically resistant to change and unable to respond to challenges because the system discourages innovation or other behavioural variance. Individuals and organizations are unable to adapt to new ways of thinking, functioning and structuring which institutionalising an adaptive approach demands” (Rogers *et al.* 2000: 506).

Arguably, culture, in its many forms, features in a surprisingly varied range of contexts relating to the historical and current developments in the conservation sector. There are some aspects that would qualify as ‘conservation sector cultural elements’ in the way conservation has for long been conceived and practised. For example, since the early days, conservation has been an activity associated largely with the public service ethos. It was a pre-eminent example of a public good – a consequence of which was that it was characterized by special regulatory provisions in all it did and stood for. Conservation was typified by steady, often clearly spatially defined spheres of activity that were for the larger part buttressed by regulation. It was long understood to be an endeavour whose goals could only be realized by enforcing strict control of spatially designated places – protected areas. Stringent regulation ensured that market forces were kept on the periphery while conservation processes were inclined towards narrowly defined objectives focusing on the threat of species loss.

⁸ Adaptive management fits this discussion given that change and continuous learning underpin it.

Institutionally, conservation was characterized by insularity and deeply developed cultures arising from a unique mix of individual, national and professional influences. These characteristics, which were at the core of conservation, had implications in many arenas including policy development, political/public participation, financial support and conservation programme implementation. Various aspects of the conservation business model – whether funding, policies, stakeholder engagement or indeed the management of protected areas are increasingly open to the changes under way in the external environment at local, national and global levels. Related to changes brought about by environmental developments is the anxiety on how conservation organizations are performing in the wake of these changes:

Without doubt conservation as practiced in Africa is more sophisticated now than it was twenty-five or even five years ago. The question is whether the refinements represent changes in the basic attitudes and values of conservation, or simply the application of modern techniques to old-fashioned ideas – a new coat of paint slapped onto old. If that is the case, eventually, the cracks will show through (Adams and McShane 1996: xviii-xix).

The above quotation speaks to the point of the enduring nature of certain values and beliefs, or simply organizational culture in the conservation sector. Nevertheless, the sector is undergoing a paradigm shift which is in turn leading to a redefinition of some of conservation's cultural attributes: from preservation to conservation and sustainable use; from guaranteed public funding to business principles, outsourcing, and economic empowerment; from fences and fines to incentives and individual responsibility; and from an exclusive and an adversarial stance to that of partnerships with different stakeholders and the building of constituencies. The conservation sector is indeed undergoing a cultural re-orientation. Conservation organizations are responding in different ways including expanding access to benefits, expanding protected areas, fostering partnerships, effecting cost-recovery, outsourcing and commercializing and addressing issues of transparency and accountability in their governance, both at the protected area and organizational levels.

Recognition of organizational culture in the conservation sector has also come in the form of broader proposals for enhancing conservation practice⁹ (Moote *et al.* 1994; Machlis 1994). However, these proposals have generally lacked an explicit treatment of organizational culture. This is a serious limitation to understanding conservation challenges vis-à-vis change and strategy. Therefore, a compelling need exists to understand how conservation organizations are dealing with entrenched beliefs and practices, or simply culture, to adapt to changing realities. Engaging culture, however, requires that in addition to the earlier emphasis on the technical imperatives that have historically predominated in the conservation sector, we need to draw attention to the significance of the broader environment in which conservation agencies exist, and the trade-offs they have to make to ensure their relevance and survival. This view is premised on the understanding that conservation agencies, like any organization, are entities with a purpose. That purpose, in turn, determines what they set out to do, but what they actually do and how they do it is influenced by a number of external and internal forces, including the environment and the history of the organization (Figure 2.1).

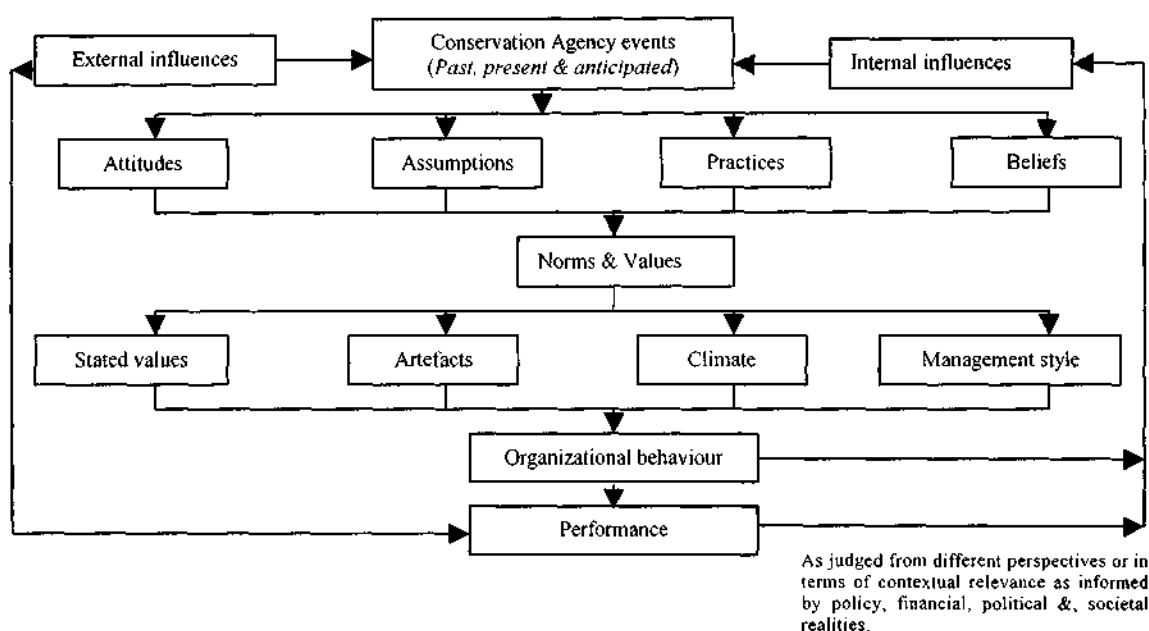


Figure 2.1 Interaction of external and internal influences in shaping organizational culture in conservation agencies

⁹ It is also important to point out that organizational culture within conservation in southern Africa is not a subject that has received attention. The references given here refer to models have been developed in the American context, and therefore, their application to southern Africa might be questionable.

2.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature concerning change in the context of conservation and organizational culture. I have also identified a number of ways in which a critical approach to studying these two phenomena has, and can be employed. In terms of conservation, we learned that conservation has historically been, and continues to be a socially constructed phenomenon underpinned by particular worldviews. The literature on organizational culture suggested that both critical and post-modernist perspectives provide interesting ways to challenge the *status quo* in order to reveal hidden sources of power within social relations. Building on this understanding, in the next chapter, I seek to make more explicit the assumptions and reasoning behind my theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: HERMENEUTICS, CRITICAL THEORY AND BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the literature on the changing context for conservation and organizational culture in general terms. In terms of the latter, if the purpose were to understand organizational culture in a generic sense, this review would have been sufficient. However, in this study, I focus the role and influence of basic assumptions as an integral part of organizational culture. As such, the literature review is helpful but not sufficient because it does not focus on the notion of basic assumptions. Further, in deciding on the study focus, I hold certain suppositions that I must make explicit. Exposing these suppositions requires me to delve into the theoretical understandings that have shaped my thinking and conceptual work.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide both the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study. I have divided this chapter into two sections: theoretical and conceptual frameworks. By 'theoretical', I mean the general body of knowledge that informed both the design and implementation of the study. The theoretical framework is further divided into three main sub-sections: firstly, hermeneutic philosophy as the general model of human experience and understanding which forms the premise of my study; secondly, critical theory and, thirdly, within that scope the work of Giddens (1984) explain the connection between individuals and society.

Section two provides my chosen conceptual framework, informed and motivated by the ideas and concepts explored and discussed in the review of literature and more specifically, those contained in the theoretical framework. 'Conceptual' denotes specific ideas and concepts that were used in data collection and interpretation. The core of my conceptual framework is Schein's concept of the 'pattern of basic assumptions' as being an integral component of organizational culture and the 'portal' for genuine change in

organizations. The concept of the 'pattern of basic assumptions' is a useful framework for interpreting the data presented in subsequent chapters.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.2.1 Hermeneutic philosophy

Philosophers and social scientists have used the term 'hermeneutics' differently. Three perspectives of the hermeneutic concept tend to dominate: it is considered as being (1) a model of the process by which meanings are formed; (2) a philosophical view on how to conduct research and (3) a specific methodology for interpreting text (Thompson *et al.* 1994). Different versions of hermeneutics exist. Attempting to provide a thorough discussion of the different versions of hermeneutics and their elements is not feasible within the scope of this study. In view of this, I rely on perspectives of Patterson (1993) and Arnold and Fischer (1994) who have broadly discussed hermeneutics in the context of qualitative research in general and more specifically from the disciplines of leisure studies and consumer research respectively. While these two disciplines may appear remote to this study, the key issue is the principles the authors present about hermeneutics.

Patterson (1993) posits that hermeneutics is fundamentally concerned with systems of meanings. His view stems from the theory that reality is understood in terms of meaning, which is co-constituted through transactions between the internal consciousness of the individual and the environs or place in the world. It is this element of co-constitution of meaning between meaning and action as understood in hermeneutics which is central to this study. This is because it makes the point that in reality, there is no distinction between subject and object. While many reasons exist for this subtle connection between the subject and the object, most of them revolve around the view that it is not possible to separate or reduce either the subject or object to a condition that can be easily understood. Knowing absolutely all aspects of the world is thus problematic and perhaps even impossible because all knowledge of the world and its component parts is co-constituted. This makes it impossible to conclusively distinguish between the subject and the object (Proctor 1998). Thus, the reality we 'think' we know is at best an amalgamation of

meanings that have evolved over time through transactions with the world. Importantly, knowledge of that reality is itself a reflection of meanings that are intricately connected to the external surrounds (physical world) in which an individual is enmeshed. Such knowledge is also a product of earlier interpretations of that environment. Expressed differently, one can say that individual constructions of experience can never escape the influence of the context. Hence, objective reality is outside the reach of human beings, for the only reality that can be accessed is that which is produced through constructions with the world. Hermeneutics is thus an interpretive philosophy because it is based on the view that meanings may be revealed through inter-subjective understanding which evolves from a fusion between the horizon of the researcher and that of the subject (Patterson 1993).

According to Arnold and Fischer (1994), every person's horizon, and by extension, that of a researcher, is informed by prior knowledge about a phenomenon. In the context of research work, regardless of the discipline, one's horizon of understanding may be influenced by professional and academic training as well as prior research findings to which the researcher has been exposed. Applying this thinking to hermeneutics, Arnold and Fischer (1994) have noted that prior knowledge - 'prejudice', is an unavoidable but at the same time a necessary part of any interpretation:

Prejudice is not necessarily unjustified or erroneous. In fact, prejudice is our window on the world, our basis for recognition and comparison. Without prejudice it would not be possible to make sense of the events and objects we observe or to find meaning in the words and actions of others (Arnold and Fischer 1994: 59).

In view of the above, the concept of prejudice takes on a broader meaning, one that transcends mere academic or professional training. This can be attributed to the fact that researchers are in no way different from all other human beings. Researchers also possess predetermined meanings (prejudices) which make up their 'cognitive horizon' and may influence in different ways and to varying degrees, their research pursuits, interpretations and even decisions on whether to study a given phenomenon. In short, all researchers have cognitive horizons bounded by their backgrounds, socializations, disciplines and related factors, which serve to link them to the world. As such, prejudice can be seen as constituting the basic understanding that informs social action and thought. No researcher

would be able to make sense of the phenomenon under study or find meaning in the words and actions of others without 'prejudice' (Arnold and Fischer 1994). Sensitivity to how meanings and understandings are formed is at the core of hermeneutics.

It is important to note that those who advocate objectivity in research can easily mistake prejudice for subjectivity. The problem with such views lies in the failure to recognize the fact that objectivity – as understood in classical research, is essentially an ideal for which researchers aim. Given the above-described understanding of prejudice, it is possible for prejudices to be either facilitative or erroneous. They can be erroneous when researchers deliberately choose to use values based on their prejudices in ways that prioritize the prejudices over logic or defy tenets of scientific tradition as to render their work subjective. Difficulties encountered in this regard have led to the suggestion that prejudice presents a paradox for researchers (Patterson and Williams 2002). It is a paradox because simultaneously, prejudice can be enabling and disabling in the process of developing meanings.

However, this paradox can be rendered less forceful by an appreciation that all individuals have personal meanings that reflect their past and present situations and their understanding of the world. This is because 'personal' meanings do not exist separately from the intricate network of the socio-historical circumstances individuals have previously experienced and the meanings that have been established by the various sources of cultural knowledge and socialization (Thompson *et al.* 1994). It can safely be argued that every individual has a prior knowledge-base which exists in the form of personal collections of meanings that influences his/ her actions and perception of specific situations.

The above-described understanding is important for research because it brings to the fore the point that meaning is not to be associated exclusively with the individual nor is it accessible only to professionally trained researchers. Rather, as Patterson (1993) has advised, in research, meaning derives from the inevitable fusion of the understandings of both the subject and the researcher. Meanings or simply an individual's reality are a

partial function of an individual's life history and current situation. Any explanation of meanings by a researcher is thus essentially a blend of the personal meanings of the researcher and the subject. In terms of hermeneutics, this blend should not be seen as a limitation but rather as a cornerstone to understanding meanings.

'Prior understanding' and the 'fusion of horizons' are central concepts of the so called hermeneutic circle (Lars 2000). General knowledge possessed by any individual tends to be the starting point for construction of meaning regarding a specific case. Applying general knowledge to a specific case implies that the underlying reasoning is evaluated in terms of the specific case. Thereafter and, or in the process, the general knowledge is potentially subject to re-interpretation. If re-interpretation of general knowledge occurs, the emergent understanding influences the understanding of the specific case which in turn influences the general knowledge base. In essence, it is a situation of co-evolution between general knowledge and a specific transaction. This co-evolution is frequently illustrated in terms of what happens in text interpretation whereby words, phrases and even sentences assume different meanings depending on whether they are treated singly or collectively with respect to the whole text (Arnold and Fischer 1994).

It is worth reiterating that the basic tenets of hermeneutic philosophy are helpful for understanding human experience. Similarly, the metaphor of the hermeneutic circle (Laars 2000) is a helpful procedural framework for conducting research. Together, hermeneutic philosophy and the metaphor of the hermeneutic circle may indeed be a sufficient theoretical framework for research if the focus were to understand just the meanings associated with a given organizational culture.

However, given the influence of institutionalization and the importance of socio-historic context within which cultures evolve (Selznick 1948), the basic tenets of hermeneutics might not necessary be sufficient. The tenets do not provide a sufficient framework for understanding the relationship between individuals; nor the socio-historic context within which particular organizational cultural aspects were constructed or emphasized; nor interpretations of the world. Although hermeneutics emphasizes that all understanding is contextual, it does not adequately help one to understand how contexts come about or

how they are structured. How do individuals negotiate amongst evolving meanings? Why do some meanings endure and what are the effects of that endurance with respect to organizational culture? My view is that critical theory, as explained below, can help shed light on these and related questions. Therefore, critical thinking can help to provide an additional theoretical platform that can help to move us closer to understanding these and related questions.

3.2.2 Critical theory

Critical theory, as with most concepts in social sciences is associated with different meanings. Two meanings of critical theory tend to predominate. More commonly, the concept 'critical' denotes a quest for rigour in the way social phenomena are investigated. On the other hand, it describes any one of the many approaches that have come to the fore since the work of some German philosophers in the 1920s who used the term 'critical theory' to denote a specific theory of society and social action that both motivates and guides investigations of social phenomena (Ashley and Orenstein 1998). It is in this latter context that I would like to confine this discussion. A detailed historical account of critical theory will not be given here. Rather, I want to point out that critical theory has undergone considerable changes and a brief background on the tenets of critical theory is helpful. A detailed discussion of the evolution of critical theory has been provided by Morrow (1994).

Early critical theory focused on the social conditions in Europe as well as capitalism and its perceived limitations for human emancipation. In this sense, the term 'emancipation' means the achievement of a measure of self-understanding and social awareness that could lead to an ideal relationship between individuals and society (Ashely and Oreinstein 1998). Applied in the context of this study, this thinking could suggest that the social and political conditions in colonial Africa that determined the structure of the conservation system was preventing opportunities for reflective thought and human emancipation. In the context of this study, critical theory would have more to do with the marginalization of individuals within an organization.

From its origins, often associated with the work of Karl Marx and his mentor, Georg Hegel, critical theory has been an approach characterized by reflection on individuals and their relationship with society (Rasmussen 1996). Morrow (1994) identifies three stages in the development of critical theory. The first two stages incorporate the shift in emphasis and focus in the works by Hegel, Marx and Weber. Whereas Hegel was concerned with the notion that reflective thought would engender human emancipation, Marx favoured the view that class-consciousness and the perceived flaws he saw in capitalism, would drive a social revolution towards emancipation. Weber proposed an alternative view to both Hegel and Marx, suggesting that rational thought and instrumentalism would limit opportunities for individual emancipation.

The third stage in the evolution of critical theory, according to Morrow began in the 1960s and is associated with the emergence of the works of another German theorist, Jurgen Habermas. The third stage continues to date and is characterized by varying views on critical theory. Included in this stage is the work of Habermas (1981, 1984, 1992), Giddens (1984) and other post-modernist scholars like Michel Foucault (1982) and Jean Fracois Lyotard (1984). For the purpose of this study, I focus on the work of Anthony Giddens, who in my view offers an important perspective on contemporary critical theory relevant to this study. Although Giddens concerns himself with the notion of 'structure' and uses language as a metaphor, his thinking, as I shall demonstrate later, has been instructive in my understanding of organizational culture. In fact, it is possible to substitute his idea of the language metaphor for the idea of organizational culture, without distorting his arguments in any detailed way.

3.2.3 Giddens and the theory of 'structuration'

Giddens (1984) espouses the theory of 'structuration' to explain the relationship and tensions between individuals, society and social change. Fundamental to Giddens' approach is the view that rather than preoccupying ourselves with questions on how reality should be known, it is better to ask questions of how to conceptualize reality (Lars 2000). For Giddens, this means conceptualizing three things: human beings, human

action and transformation of social life. Giddens questions the dominant classical actor/structure dualism. He proposes that the relationship between the actor and transformation ought to be understood not as a dualism but a 'duality', which implies that the structure does not necessarily determine individuals' actions. Equally, structure is not necessarily an aggregation of individuals' actions. Rather, structure and individuals' actions are co-constitutive, which means that their formation is inextricably linked.

Giddens underscores the fact that although social actions occur within the context of social structures, the enduring character of social structures should not be mistaken for objective reality. It means that society is not immune from the influence of its members. Further, as the basis of any social structure, people always have the potential of engaging in actions that can unintentionally alter that structure (Giddens 1984). Thus Giddens views society as a 'structuration process', which means that human actions concurrently structure and are structured by society. Giddens calls this process a 'duality' of structure or social practice. Social enquiry according to structuration theory should address neither the experience of the individual nor existence of some form of societal whole. Rather, the focus should be on conceptualization of social practice across space and time (Giddens 1984) mainly because it simultaneously constitutes individuals as actors and embodies and realises those structures (Lars 2000). To this end, social practice is the intersecting concept between agency and structure as well as between individual and society.

Essentially, Giddens suggests that action and structure cannot be entirely kept apart – they are intricately connected: attempting to distinguish action and structure is likely to be a futile effort and a misdirection of energy. Structure, according to Giddens is nothing but the enduring effects of social practices (Giddens 1979). 'Social structure' in this context is a term that can be used to denote a variety of aspects relating to human organization such as power, language and culture. Giddens uses the metaphor of language to illustrate the 'duality' of structure.

Every language, while not influential in what an individual actually says, places a restraint on the person because of the relevant rules of syntax and diction associated with it. And yet, at the same time, it is those rules that make speech logical. Unless a language

is spoken, it has limited value. Speaking it reinvigorates the rules of a language to the extent that the structure of a language is nothing more than the enduring effect of it having been spoken. However, structure is susceptible to change due to persistent individual agency. Since an individual agency cannot communicate by itself – there has to be a recipient of the message, structure begins to change with the enduring usage of particular phrases at both the individual and collective level, for example, usage of slang words. Considered pragmatically, structure – symbolized by language in this case comprises the “rules and resources drawn upon by actors in the production of interaction” (Giddens 1979: 71). The rules and resources refer to language, but language is only one example. Many other aspects that relate to, and are concerned with, human organization could replace the element of social structure in Giddens’ postulation. As shown later, Giddens also uses power as an example of a social structure.

Using the language metaphor, Giddens further clarifies his concept of “unintended consequences” of actions (Giddens 1984: 27). He explains that while speaking a language correctly is intentional, the contribution one makes to the reproduction of that particular language is not necessarily so. And yet, mere correct usage of the language, which presupposes a basic commitment to the rules of that language in the first instance, contributes to the co-evolution of the language. Elaborating further on the idea of unintended consequences, Giddens notes, “human history is created by intentional activities but it is not an intended project” (Giddens 1984: 27). In short, unintended consequences are inevitable, and to a large degree unforeseen products of purposeful social action.

Seen in the context of the original ideas about critical thinking with their mission of emancipation, Giddens’ theory of structuration is very instructive. It is instructive particularly regarding its postulation of the inseparability of agency and structure. This strong and subtle relationship also speaks to the notion of power and how it is exercised in society. Within this context, in the same way that structure and agency cannot be distinguished, it also follows that people can never be completely free from the influences of power in social relations. In Giddens’ words, “domination and power cannot be

thought of only in terms of asymmetries of distribution but have to be recognized as inherent in social association ... Power is not just the capacity to say no, nor can domination ever be transcended” (Giddens 1984: 31). A parallel view on power has been expressed thus:

Power is not to be understood as one person or class’s domination over others. Power is never localised, never exchanged as a commodity. It is and is employed through net-like organization ... People are subjects of power and simultaneously elements of its articulation (Foucault 1977: 98-99).

In short, power is exercised rather than possessed and is constituted in social relationships which can be conflicting or otherwise. Power is not a thing that people have in a proprietary sense (Clegg 1989). Thus power is a relative concept, shaped by the different relationships that actors engage in. In agreement with Foucault, Giddens has suggested that by no means is it possible to overcome all inherent and subtle limitations to achieving an ideal structure and process of language. To this end, he suggests that the notion of emancipation is a pipedream, but is also quick to note that oppressive social relations can be countered. Clarification on how this happens, in my opinion is Giddens’ major contribution. He argues that change, in this case, the type that could lead to emancipation, occurs through ‘knowledgeable social agents’. Giddens notes that in general, every member of a group or society is knowledgeable about that particular society, its expectations, norms and values. Knowledge of a particular society occurs through the process of socialization, and this process is required for any society to be functional. This means that individuals are neither ignorant nor passive products of their social circumstances. On the contrary, by their actions, what they choose to do or not and by their ongoing interactions, they paradoxically contribute to both the maintenance and renewal of that society (Giddens 1984). In brief, individuals are both inputs and outputs of the process of social change.

To further clarify the above postulation, Giddens (1979) using the metaphor of power, cites a study of working class schoolboys in Britain, using the metaphor of power. The schoolboys were aware of power distribution and informal rules at their school. However, they were also committed to their self-perception as working class children. Equipped with that understanding, and partially motivated by their commitment to their identity, the

schoolboys developed covert and understated forms of resistance to secure some degree of autonomy in a system in which they could wield only very little power. Subtle as it may have been, their resistance was a creative response because they manipulated the school rules in ways that met their expectations and self-perception as working class boys. Giddens calls this sort of behaviour 'strategic conduct'- essentially meaning behavioural responses in which perpetrators exploit the structural elements of a situation in the creation of social relations.

In short, overriding meanings may become the basis for emergent or new actions that the original disseminators did not envisage. Analysing and understanding of 'strategic conduct' or other emergent, unintended consequences of social structures is according to Giddens a major goal of the theory of structuration. As shown in the example of the British schoolboys, power can also be related to issues of identity, especially in cases where a particular structure seemingly attributes power to an individual or group with a higher status and thus in a more powerful position relative to other actors. This does not necessarily mean that the 'weaker actors' are completely without power.

In view of the above, Giddens acknowledges that socialization is one way by means of which individuals attain knowledge which helps them function properly in their social relations. However, he cautions that because they are perceptive, individuals do not always accept beliefs and ideas preordained by their culture. Thus, socialization as a process that engenders knowledge needs to be considered carefully because individuals can consciously or subconsciously undermine norms or societal expectations. By extension, "knowledgeability does not mean that knowledge is available to the discursive awareness of the actor" (Giddens 1987: 62). Knowledge, according to Giddens can either be practical or discursive. The latter refers to knowledge that resides in the conscious domain of individuals – what they are aware of and could possibly articulate. Practical knowledge on the other hand is the type acquired through socialization and might not necessarily be easy to explain. In agreement with Giddens, it has been noted that "practical knowledge is primarily about internalized rules and beliefs that guide social

interactions [actions] without conscious attention to those rules and beliefs” (Kondrat 1999: 460).

A particularly important point made by Giddens is that most action is routine. Such action is normally influenced by a sense of pragmatism or practical knowledge. Because forces operating at the subconscious level influence primarily routine actions and their related effects, they get effected as unrecognized or implicit conditions of social practice. Together, practical knowledge and implicit conditions provide the platform on which discursive knowledge normally is based. Individuals normally have more of the practical knowledge – influencing their thoughts and perceptions. Bringing practical knowledge into the discursive arena occurs normally through dialogue or some other form of social relations. But as mentioned earlier, purposive actions almost always have unintended effects.

Collectively, unrecognized or implicit conditions and unintended consequences can be considered as the ‘boundaries of action’ for the individual. It would appear that an individual’s actions can extend only as far as unrecognized or implicit conditions and unintended consequences ‘permit’. Social practice is, therefore, involved in enduring tensions that might arise when an individual’s activities push outside the ‘boundaries of action’ preordained by implicit conditions and unintended consequences. As a consequence of the ever increasing complexity in interactions, social relations are characterized by contradiction, uncertainty, and ambiguity which make it difficult to determine the appropriateness of given actions and whether such actions are bound to produce optimal outcomes (Giddens 1991).

Kondrat on self- awareness

Giddens’ depiction of individuals as intentional actors with contact to practical and discursive forms of knowledge brings to the fore the notion of self-awareness. A question to consider in this regard is the kind of self-awareness required for an individual to engage in strategic conduct. Kondrat (1999) helps clarify this question with her typology

of self-awareness. She depicts self-awareness in the form of four ascending levels, the first three being:

- *Simple conscious awareness*: is the state where perception is simply a matter of consciousness about one's environs and attendant attitudes. Kondrat qualifies the designation 'simple' by noting that awareness at this level is unself-conscious because search for self is outward and extrospective.
- *Reflective self-awareness*: is instigated by an individual's consciousness of a given experience or interaction. Search for self-awareness is introspective which leads to the consideration of one's own feelings and the evaluation of one's behaviour.
- *Reflexive self-awareness*: is self-centred and associated with the co-constituted notion of reality that is central to hermeneutics. The search for self-awareness is dominated by reference to the only viewpoint available, that of the self.

Kondrat notes that all the above three perspectives of self-awareness are a manifestation of the thinking which Giddens challenges with his notion of larger networks of social relations that pre-date the existence of agents. In other words, agents are part of a larger network of socio-cultural systems and structures in which they are often socialized.

In the fourth level of self-awareness which she calls *critical self-reflectivity*, Kondrat blends the three types of self-awareness to develop a model of awareness which illuminates the theory of structuration. In this vein, she argues that the notions of practical and discursive knowledge are critical for developing a more sociologically sensitive and appropriate version of self-awareness. Practical knowledge is consistent with the self-reflexive version of awareness (unconscious knowledge) while discursive knowledge is linked with the self-reflective version of awareness (conscious knowledge). Consistent with Giddens' perspective, Kondrat argues that knowledgeable agents or social actors can reflect on their intentional actions and draw aspects of their practical consciousness into the discursive arena.

Thus, Kondrat's 'critical self-reflectivity' connects reflective and reflexive conceptions of awareness. The essence here, although she does not use the same term is akin to the concept of 'embeddedness' which according to Granovetter (1991) refers to how knowledge and behaviour in institutions are affected by networks of social relations. People, as much as they are a product of their society are simultaneously actively contributing to the creation of that society, for example, through observing norms about social practices. Critical reflection can help a person acquire insights needed to modify that society, but complete alienation from that society is impossible. To this end, although every individual's knowledge and effects of his or her actions are at best partial and limited respectively, every person epitomizes his or her larger networks of social relations or society. In this sense, an individual is a 'lens' through which one can see the distinctive processes that constitute the structure of a particular society's institutions in terms of how those institutions and structures influence and shape the structure of knowledge.

Critical self-reflectivity is a useful elucidation of the theory of structuration. It is especially helpful for addressing Giddens' notion of strategic conduct. In combination, these ideas help to investigate the issues relative to general hermeneutic philosophy that were highlighted earlier in this chapter. Concerns about understanding how the context for human experience and understanding are structured are addressed by the discussion on knowledgeable social agents. Concerns about how individuals negotiate amongst multiple meanings are addressed via the notion of critical reflection and strategic conduct. Why some meanings endure over time can be ascribed to unavoidable power imbalances, routinized actions, and the unintended consequences of intentional actions.

3.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Motivated by the above thinking on hermeneutics, critical theory, structuration and critical self-reflectivity, I adopted organizational culture as an exemplar of a social structure. Social structure, as mentioned earlier can be interpreted as basically being any social construct that consciously or otherwise tends to influence social action or

behaviour through its associated norms, for example, rules and sanctions. Concerning the conceptual framework, I had two choices: to either develop my own conceptual framework or to adopt an empirically testable and relevant framework consistent with the theoretical framework outlined above. I settled for the latter by adopting Schein's framework on organizational culture. Thus, elaborating Schein's framework as my adopted conceptual framework is the purpose of this section with the view to clarifying in detail the framework's conceptual underpinnings that have informed my analysis of the collected data and findings.

3.3.1 Schein's concept of culture

Culture is to the organization what character is to the individual (Schein 1992: 196)

Schein is recognized as one of the most influential writers on organizational culture (Alvesson 1993; Schultz and Hatch 1996). Schein defines culture as

[a] pattern of basic assumptions - invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valuable and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems (Schein 1992: 12).

So perceived, culture represents an amalgamation of learning experiences shared by members of an organization. Learning occurs when members of the organization face challenges presented by the environment or engage in problem-solving and acquire insights from making decisions around those challenges. Learning is, therefore, largely experiential, that is, it derives from the shared reality of having to grapple with the challenges imposed by the environment. Learning is therefore dynamic, evolving with time as the experiences of the members of an organization in dealing with the challenges presented by the environment develop. As the problems are addressed, some principles repeatedly emerge to the extent of being regarded as 'feasible' and 'realistic' solutions (and or approaches) for dealing with similar situations. These principles in turn constitute the hub of basic tacit assumptions, which influence perceptions, thoughts, beliefs and to some extent, overt actions.

In time, those assumptions become more or less like ‘templates’ for any future decisions and problem-solving. In respect of change, these templates have a downside because they could potentially prevent adaptation and responsiveness. This occurs at both the personal level and amongst group members as past successes serve as a positive reinforcement, and new members are taught through socialization, hence the formation of an organization’s culture (Schein 1992). The word ‘taught’, unlike in the formal sense of education and training, means that cultural lessons are learned by observing and imitating role models as they execute their functions or as they are observed in the media (Schein 1994). In this way, new members learn these assumptions as part of their socialization, and thus the culture is propagated.

3.3.2 Schein’s framework of culture

Schein’s view is that most definitions of culture fail to address the concept’s complexity:

Many definitions simply settle for the notion that culture is a set of shared meanings that make it possible for members of a group to interpret and act upon their environment. I believe we must go beyond this definition: even if we knew an organization well enough to live in it, we would not necessarily know how its culture arose, how it came to be what it is, or how it could be changed if organizational survival were at stake (Schein 1985:3).

According to Schein (1992), researchers often treat culture superficially. Consequently, researchers end up preoccupying themselves with attempts to interpret the outward or tangible aspects of an organization such as rituals, uniform or dress style, its emblem or the style of communications to decipher underlying beliefs. In his model, Schein proposes a different approach, one that does the exact opposite: working from the covert, deeper aspects of an organization, starting by identifying the latent assumptions and using them to decipher the more tangible aspects of an organization. Underlying Schein’s approach is the necessity to understand the dynamic forces that govern a culture’s evolution. These forces influence how culture is learned, passed on and changed. Hence, Schein’s concept of culture is based on a dynamic model that underscores these three aspects: how culture is learned, passed on and changed.

Schein perceives culture as being manifested in artefacts, espoused values and basic underlying assumptions. Accordingly, his framework (Figure 3.1) involves the conceptualization of organizational culture in terms of three levels of elements: **artefacts**

– the physical manifestations and behaviours grounded in assumptions; **espoused values** – social principles, philosophies, goals and standards seen as worthwhile; and **basic assumptions** – core beliefs which are taken for granted, about what is correct and real. Attaining consistency amongst these levels of culture is the ideal and it is not strange that difficulties are to be expected when these three layers are incompatible or inconsistent. To understand culture as a complex and dynamic issue, we have to understand not only the behaviour of the parts, but also how they act together to form the whole (Schein 1992). This means that we must recognize the complexity and dynamic interdependencies that exist amongst the three levels of culture. Schein distinguishes these three levels in terms of how they are approached in research and analysis and their main features.

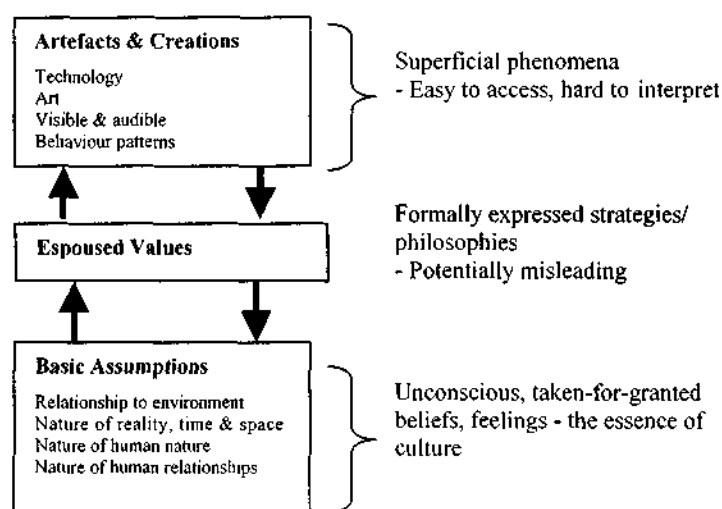


Figure 3.1 Levels of culture and their interaction

After Schein (1992)

Assumptions are central to informing organizational behaviour because they are the basis for dialogue and the exercise of power. Assumptions have the potential to impose their subtle and yet far reaching influence on many aspects of organizational realities. The subtlety of the influence of assumptions is well captured by Schein:

Such assumptions are themselves learned responses that originated as espoused values. But as a value leads to a behaviour, and as that behaviour begins to solve problems which prompted it in the first place, the value gradually is transmitted into an underlying assumption about how things are. As the assumption is increasingly taken for granted, it drops out of awareness (Schein 1985: 3-4).

The influence of assumptions can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, they enhance group identity, foster stability through minimising uncertainty and anxiety while at the same time make things 'manageable' a shorthand description of 'coping with complexity' (Kotter 1996). Negatively, assumptions can be problematic, for example in dealing with change because of their tenacity to embed themselves in the corporate and individual subconscious thereby creating a stability against change even when change is necessary. In this way, assumptions have the capacity to limit an organization's responsiveness to changes in the environment (Senge 1990; Schein 1992). Altering assumptions is therefore not easy because of their latent nature - a situation that is in most cases compounded by their history and dynamic evolutionary reinforcing processes that keep them in motion (Senge 1990).

An important insight gained from Schein is his emphasis and focus on basic assumptions as the core of every organizational culture. Basic assumptions do not exist in isolation. Rather, they exist as a pattern or paradigm of interrelated assumptions about humankind, nature and activities. "A cultural paradigm is a set of interrelated assumptions that form a coherent pattern" (Schein 1985: 4). As is the case with complex systems in general, the structure or pattern of a paradigm cannot be understood or predicted from the behaviour or properties of the component units alone. Therefore, the notion of 'pattern of basic assumptions' is central to Schein's understanding of culture:

Unless we have ... attempted to identify the paradigm [or pattern] by which the members of a group perceive, think about, feel about, and judge situations and relationships, we cannot claim we have described or understood the group's culture. Unless we achieve this level of analysis, however, we should not make any statement at all about culture, however superficial (Schein 1992: 142-143).

The above quotation is parallel to Giddens ideas as may be inferred from this interpretation of his work:

Can actors come to identify some of the extended social and structural consequences of their individually intended actions? Yes, according to Giddens. If encouraged to reflect on their own behaviour and assumptions in light of the larger structural question, then individuals could conceivably arrive at an awareness... (Kondrat 1999: 460).

An implication of this is that there can be no collective view without a process that continuously promotes dialogue about the basic assumptions leading to collective self-

reinforcing assumptions. It is this property of existing as a 'self-reinforcing collective' or in Schein's words a 'pattern' and their locus of operation (the subconscious) which makes basic assumptions a strong force in influencing behaviour. Schein's characterization of basic assumptions as the core of every culture means that if a culture is to be understood, it is essential to appreciate the underlying basic assumptions.

Assumptions are like a filter screen, which we all possess, but whose influence and usefulness we seldom have control over if it stays in the subconscious. Very rarely are we consciously aware of mental models at play in our lives or of the profound effects they tend to have on our behaviour (Senge 1990). According to Schein (1992), underlying assumptions can function as a cognitive defence mechanism for individuals and the group. The inherent challenge, therefore, is to make the assumptions behind our ideas explicit so that people can start discussing the conflictive and 'undiscussable' subjects without invoking defensiveness and appreciating deeper causes of problems and their interdependencies (Senge 1990; Senge *et al.* 1999). Thus, Schein reveals the need for an explicit mechanism that can promote dialogue on and around basic assumptions so that they can be brought into the 'corporate conscious'.

Schein's views about assumptions resonate with those of other authors like Argyris' ('theories in use', 1977) and McGregor's ('assumption sets' 1960). Further, Senge has helped to clarify the role of assumptions in his metaphor of 'mental models', which he describes as "deeply ingrained assumptions, generalisations or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (Senge 1990: 8). Along these lines, Senge *et al.* (1999) have suggested that decisions cannot be divorced from mental models or assumptions because through them, we identify challenges and opportunities we choose to engage with, as well as the actions we consider appropriate. Drucker (1995: 20) makes a parallel observation:

The root cause of nearly every one of these crises [in organizations] is not that things are being done poorly. It is not even that the wrong things are being done. Indeed, in most cases, the right things are being done – but fruitlessly. What accounts for this apparent paradox? The assumptions on which the organization has been built and is being run no longer fit reality (Drucker 1995: 20).

Difficulties in accessing or understanding assumptions have caused a blind spot in organizational research. Consequently, according to Schein (1992), most studies of organizational culture are not detailed enough to produce helpful results. This, he argues is the result of a tendency among researchers to focus only on the artefacts for example, rituals, dress style, logos or structure of communications within organizations. Using artefacts as pointers to underlying beliefs takes away the rigour with which organizational culture is supposed to be studied. To overcome this problem, Schein has proposed that it is more helpful to begin by studying the hidden then to study the apparent. Schein's approach entails beginning the analysis from the hidden assumptions and using those assumptions to interpret the overt organizational aspects. Real change depends on addressing basic assumptions, understanding their influence, evolution and how they can be brought into the 'organizational conscious'.

Bringing basic assumptions into the 'organizational conscious' is akin to Giddens' notion of 'discursive consciousness' (Giddens 1984). A discursive account occurs when we explicitly express an activity or phenomenon. In this respect, Schein and Giddens share common ground, each emphasizing knowledgeability of actors which by implication means that structures and systems do not operate in isolation from the actor. Discursive reflectivity around an action, in addition to providing logical explanations, entails prospects of changing our patterns of action which, in Schein's language rest on basic assumptions. Real change, according to Schein and Giddens, as well as Kondrat (1999) depends on the ability of those involved to make explicit their hidden assumptions. In this way, they can attain a level of 'discursive consciousness' which refers to the understanding which we attain through reflecting upon our actions (Giddens 1991). How reflection occurs is another view Schein and Giddens share: they both note that it can happen with the help of others, for example, as in interviews or a process of dialogue or as a solo act. Schein also asserts that the core of an organization's culture is contained in an underlying paradigm of shared unconscious assumptions. He further suggests that for most organizations, an important component of these assumptions relates to the organization's strategic processes and imperatives, and functions as an ideal and is

usually an implicit influence of strategic decisions and activities. At this stage, it is important to examine what Schein postulates on strategy and organizational culture.

3.3.3 Schein on strategy and organizational culture

While Schein in principle agrees with others on the link between culture and strategy, his approach is different to the extent that it offers an empirically tested method with which to reach the assumptions vis-à-vis strategy. Schein advocates an approach that is based on general discussions aimed at uncovering the ‘underlying assumptions’ around the following:

- An organization’s mission as exhibited by both its manifest and latent roles in society.
- Stakeholders or categories in society regarded as being critical and the management of those external relations.
- The organization’s core competencies – that which is regarded as the strongest niche of operation.

Mission

‘Mission’ is so widely used a concept in management that its meaning, though critical, has been rendered vague. Overuse and carelessness in the use of the term has affected the appreciation of its deep meaning (Hamel and Prahalad 1994; Senge 1998). Common usage of the term has tended to denote an integration of individual and group goals with those of the organization in ways understandable and appreciated at individual level. Mission is to Schein “an organization’s primary task, or reason to be, a set of beliefs about its core competencies and basic functions in society” (Schein 1992: 53) and he links it to strategy by noting that the strategy essentially denotes the evolution of an organization’s basic mission. Schein believes that discussions around an organization’s mission can illuminate aspects of its culture. He notes:

One of the most central elements of any culture will be the assumptions the members of the organization share about their identity and ultimate mission or functions. These assumptions are not necessarily conscious but one can bring them to the surface by probing the organization’s strategic decisions (Schein 1992: 56).

Schein further explains:

A more useful way to think about ultimate or core mission is to change the question to 'what is our function in the larger scheme of things?' posing the question in this way reveals that most organizations have multiple functions reflecting the multiple stakeholders (Schein 1992: 53-54).

Stakeholders

Organizations function in the larger society, and as a component thereof, they not only benefit from society, they also feel the pressures generated by society. It is in this light that contextual approaches to management emphasize the need to enlarge the scope of analysis to include the broader social, political and economic environmental developments. One way in which such developments can be understood is through the demands of an organization's stakeholder groups. Considering the perspectives and demands of an organization's diverse stakeholder groups is an essential stage in integrating the complex stakeholder demands with those of the organization. Such a process allows an organization to enhance its chances of success through attaining some degree of independence from its surrounds (Gomez 1993; Morgan 1986). Other advantages have been noted as well: there is "need to respond [to stakeholder expectations and demands] in order to ensure further use of scarce resources, public and political legitimacy, profitability and financial assurance" (Fischer and Schot 1993: 5). It is against this background that it has been argued that organizations of all kinds and sectors are increasingly realising that their interests are better secured and served when they link their business interests with those of customers, employees, suppliers, investors and other groups affected, directly or indirectly, by their operations (Drucker 1995).

Every organization thus depends on the existence of stakeholders who essentially denote the various groups that have a genuine interest in its activities. Such groups tend to wield a lot of power which if not carefully considered can affect the performance and therefore, the very existence of an organization. Stakeholders have become, and will continue to be, a growing influence on how organizations operate and, in some cases, on what they do. This is because there is the predisposition of stakeholder groups for exercising political, economic and administrative authority to manage organizational affairs. In agreement, Schein (1992: 53) has observed that

... every new group or organization must develop a shared consensus of its ultimate survival problem, from which it usually derives its most basic sense of core mission, primary task, or reason to be. In most organizations this shared definition revolves around the issue of economic survival and growth, which in turn involves the maintenance of good relations with major stakeholders.

According to Schein, cultural assumptions influence an organization's stakeholder relations, determining where the weight of support is to be positioned and how priorities are to be considered. For example, the underlying assumptions of a culture can direct an organization's stakeholder relations, including the manner in which resources are allocated to establish and maintain those external and internal links. Failure to respond to stakeholder expectations and perspectives appropriately makes an organization carry the undesirable risk of operating at a tangent to stakeholder aspirations, thereby making its existence uncertain, and in some cases negating its ultimate purpose or mission.

Against this background, there is a need to understand an organization's stakeholder relationships as they might have a direct bearing on its survival. However, dealing with stakeholder demands is complicated. Stakeholders are not a monolithic entity. Rather, they are represented in various categories – each with its own priorities relative to an organization. This makes many organizations 'intersect organizations' (Bergquist 1993) because at any one time, they have to deal with a multiplicity of stakeholder demands and interests. The act of categorising stakeholders based on the nature of their demands and interests can be problematic because stakeholders do not fall into mutually exclusive camps.

Rather, their distinctions are nuanced and individuals can be members of different stakeholder groups because of their multiple roles in life, for example, as consumers, farmers, parents or citizens. Additionally, the demands and interests of stakeholders change with time. Attempting to meet all stakeholder needs at the same time is an unrealistic and impossible task. Organizations are faced with the difficulty of continuously reviewing and prioritizing stakeholder expectations and priorities since all cannot be met at the same time. This situation has an inherent risk in that it presents the

possibility of not meeting the expectations of one or more groups, and such 'aggrieved' groups can easily withdraw their support if they deem it necessary (Goold *et al.* 1994).

Competencies

There is a growing consensus that today's challenge for an organization is to achieve success in a changing world (Senn 1990). Amidst turbulence and volatility, some organizations are prospering and enjoying competitive advantage over others. Organizations have consequently been caught in a rush of having to not only adapt to the instability and operate at their best under unpredictable conditions, but also how to do it, and if possible, do so better than the competition (Drucker 1995). This situation is in part due to organizational competencies, defined as those properties that distinguish organizations by boosting their performance and productivity amidst stiff competition, while fostering the related imperatives of organizational adaptation and survival in the face of discontinuous environmental change.

The concept of competencies is not new. Its origins have been traced to 1957 when Philip Selznick coined the phrase 'distinctive competence'. Later, Ansoff (1965) developed upon the concept in his notion of 'competence grid'. After nearly two decades, the concept was developed further under the 'resource based school' with their emphasis on the role that resources and capabilities play in determining enduring competitive advantage (Wernefelt 1984). Later still, the concept was brought into the limelight by Hamel and Prahalad (1994) who expanded on the earlier notions to suggest that organizational competence involves the exercise of managerial and leadership roles within an organization so that present niches are nurtured to provide for a strong organizational future.

The origins of organizational competence are often linked to an organization's founding circumstances, taking root initially as the means through which an organization could pursue its original goals and mission. As such, the origins are very much linked to an organization's culture. Importantly, they engender competitiveness and the cognitive and social fabric responsible for an organization's early identity, differentiation and unison

(Schein 1992). This association between an organization's culture and its competencies is now widely recognized, with core-competencies being seen as part of the persona of an organization (Drucker 1995). However, in the same way that assumption sets can become both an advantage and a disadvantage, so are core-competencies. Essentially, as part of a winning culture, core-competencies potentially foreclose an organization from flexibility since it is unlikely that the underlying assumptions will be called into question when all is well. In particular, should there be environmental developments that render those competencies less worthy, an organization inevitably becomes susceptible to competitors' innovations because of its rigidity. Consideration of environment as it relates to culture becomes critical at this stage of my discussion.

Environment, organizational culture and strategies

Environmental considerations are critical to the success of organizational strategies. This is largely because an organizational culture's basic assumptions influence how an organization perceives its environment. By extension, they also determine the strategies considered plausible to respond to environmental developments. If synchronized, basic assumptions, strategic processes and environmental developments become co-constitutive. Basic assumptions influence how environmental developments are perceived; and on account of such perspectives, an organization then develops appropriate strategic processes (Schein 1999; Drucker 1995). As long as the underlying basic assumptions are consistent with the environment and there are enough and necessary resources, an organization is ideally positioned for success. Success in turn reinforces the established assumptions about the environment. Success creates opportunities for reinforcing an existing culture. A reinforced culture is a 'strong' one, and with strength of culture comes a 'shadow' opportunity cost:

Cultural assumptions are the product of past successes. As a result they are increasingly taken for granted and operate as silent filters on what is perceived and thought. If the organization's environment changes and new responses are required, the danger is that the changes will not be noticed or, even if noticed, that the organization will not be able to adapt because of embedded routines based on past success. Culture constrains strategy by limiting what the CEO and other senior managers can think about and what they perceive in the first place (Schein 1992: 382).

Put differently, the more a culture is associated with success, the greater the likelihood it will distance the organization from its environment. Logic in most cases would encourage members of an organization to examine or challenge the basic assumptions which have contributed to success and have become a source of pride and organizational self-esteem. But this is rarely the case in reality. Prolonged inattention to basic assumptions and environmental developments can be costly, especially if there is significant turbulence in the environment. Entrenched basic assumptions can become blinkers, preventing appreciation of environmental developments and sifting out suitable strategic alternatives because they are inconsistent with shared assumptions about the mission of the organization and its operations (Lorsch 1985). In short, a strong culture, among other things, predisposes an organization to rigidity and insularity. Both insularity and rigidity can lead to severance from the environment except in situations where basic assumptions explicitly address the need to learn, develop and be flexible to changing environmental circumstances (Senge 1990).

Schein is not the only one to draw attention on the relationship between culture and strategy. In fact, culture's influence on strategic processes has been widely acknowledged, with many viewing culture as a strategic change imperative (Goold *et al.* 1994; Ott 1989; Barney 1986; Wilkins and Ouchi 1983). Organizations whose values are aligned with their strategies tend to achieve outstanding results, while those that lack this alignment consistently fall short (Kotter and Heskett 1992). According to Schein (1992), strategic change - a characteristic aspiration of modern organizations in turbulent times, cannot and should not be implemented without due cognisance of culture. Hampden-Turner (1990: 253) explains the link between strategy and culture thus: "Strategy must be a natural expression of the potential latent in a culture. Because corporate cultures are unique, the products inspired by a culture can be original and incomparable to offerings of competitors. Hence, a competitive strategy should begin with the culture of the organization." The link between culture and strategy lies in the former's pervasive ability to influence many facets of an organization, including the way personal and professional objectives are set and how people respond, perform tasks and administer resources to achieve the set objectives (Sweeney and Hardaker 1995). This sounds reasonable if we

understand strategy to mean “the pattern or plan that integrates an organization’s major goals, policies and action sequences into a cohesive whole. A well formulated strategy helps to marshal and allocate an organization’s resources into a unique and viable posture based on its relative internal competencies and shortcomings, anticipated changes in the environment and contingent moves by intelligent opponents” (Quinn 1988: 3).

This definition accords well with the observation that culture is revealed in the manner in which people in top management in an organization identify key tasks, prioritize them, set objectives and administer resources to achieve them; and the way in which members of staff respond (Schein 1985). A related perspective has been given by Argyris (1977: 119), “for every manager, the strategy making process starts with a fundamental strategic choice: which theoretical picture of human activity and environment fits most closely with his or her own view of the world, his or her personal ‘theory of action’.” Culture is a kind of ‘latent decision support-system’ or ‘software of the mind’ (Hofstede 1991) because it affects the way in which people subconsciously think and the actions they take. According to Schein (1992), culture affects how people make decisions and ultimately, their perceptions, feelings, and actions towards opportunities and threats presented by the internal and external environments. Schein’s ideas are on the interrelationship of the environment, strategy and culture are summarized in Figure 3.2.

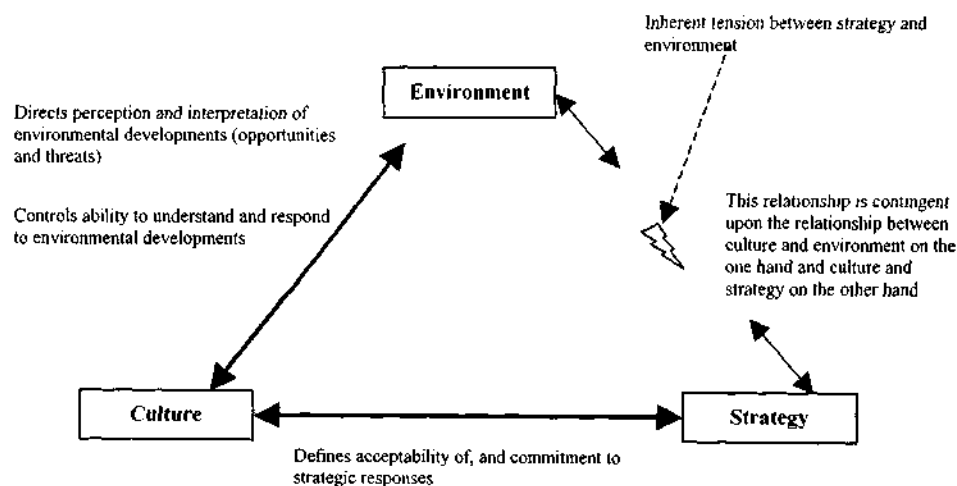


Figure 3.2 Culture's link to strategy and the environment

3.3.4 Schein on leadership and culture

It has been established from the foregoing that culture is the thread that links nearly all aspects of organizational life. As such, culture is a product of evolutionary forces inside and outside the organization, with history being an inherent component of such forces (Snyder 1985). It is, therefore, not surprising that literature on organization and management is full of references to the influential role that pioneers and top management play in shaping the culture of their organization (George *et al.* 1999; Kay 1993).

Long-established organizations are said to linger with the cultural orientations of their pioneers and past leaders (Schein 1991, 1992), while existing top management play a critical role of synchronizing an organization's past with its contemporary surrounds. It is imperative for researchers to critically examine the role of organizational pioneers for they in the first place set the organization on its cultural trajectory based on their beliefs, values and assumptions. Schein (1992: 212) stresses the point that:

... by far the most important for cultural beginning is the impact of founders. Founders not only choose the basic mission and its environmental context in which the new group will operate, but they choose the group members and bias the original responses that the group makes in its efforts to succeed in its environment and to integrate itself.

The role of present leaders in an organization is also critical. Leadership and culture are inevitably intertwined as the former partially develops from the historical character of the particular organization (Schein 1983). Present leadership has the responsibility of ensuring the attraction of group followers to the organization and their unison. It is only after the pioneers have attracted a leadership/ management team that these people can assist in recruiting and socializing other members of the organization. The founder should, however, be involved in such activities for it is his or her exceptional qualities that help to attract and motivate followers (Trice and Beyer 1993). Leaders ought to demonstrate in realistic ways that they understand what needs to be accomplished. According to Trice and Beyer (1993: 33),

... they need, at a minimum, to be effective role models, create impressions of success and confidence in their followers, be good at articulating beliefs and values, communicate high expectations in followers, and be good motivators of others. In addition, they need to have strong convictions about what they are trying to achieve and then manage to achieve some measure of success in the eyes of their followers.

As role models, leaders need to be cognizant of the fact that they are constantly being watched by their subordinates. For example, how a leader conducts himself or herself in a crisis might lead to new norms, values, and working procedures and might bring to the surface very important underlying assumptions (Schein 1985).

3.3.5 Schein on culture and organizational learning

Learning is at the centre of culture because it serves as the conduit through which assumptions are developed and exchanged by means of group interaction and experiences before becoming ingrained. Learning, according to Schein (2000; 1994; 1992), is important for internal integration and external adaptation as the organization experiences the pressures from its surrounds. To cope with the pressures from its surrounds, an organization has to learn new ways of doing things, and this requires organizations to overcome inherent barriers to learning (Argyris 1990). But this is not easy because it essentially entails discarding ingrained habits, assumptions, beliefs and the resultant worldviews they create, something which does not happen automatically. It demands a carefully designed set of activities and processes to facilitate empowerment of people within the organization (Schein 2000; 1999) and therefore the role of leadership is invaluable (Schein 1995; 1992). This situation of having to learn new ideas and how these can be sustained is an important consideration when dealing with culture. It is not surprising that organizational learning has emerged as a component of organizational studies, quite often discussed alongside change and culture. These ideas have been advanced by many authors including Argyris (1977); Argyris and Schön (1978); Senge (1990); and Pedler *et al.* (1991).

Authors on organizational learning contend that organizations can be considered to learn when the behaviour of the members changes in support of internal integration and adaptation to the external environment. These theories perceive individuals as learning conduits since organizations learn as people identify mistakes and take remedial measures in behavioural patterns thereby giving rise to an organizational culture (Argyris and Schön, 1977). Learning may be said to have taken place when an organization improves its performance and invents better approaches mainly as a result of its efforts in

dealing with the pressures to adapt and improve efficiency in times of change (Dodgson 1993). Hence, to change culture, the learning process is considered as an inevitable precursor (Argyris 1992; 1993).

However, it is important to be cautious about the extent to which learning is believed to facilitate culture change. Many authors generally studying culture is a daunting task (Senge 1990; Schein 1994; Pascale 1995; Day and Jung 2000). Moreover, only shared experiences of using new ways of thinking, perceiving or valuing can create a new approach and this takes time. A subtle interface exists between culture and learning. In fact, learning could be understood simply to be ‘unlearning’ – discarding what has been ingrained over time or simply the culture (Schein 1985). The centrality of learning to culture is further captured in this observation: “Learning that arises from the response to environmental challenges leads to the creation of a number of different assumptions, all contained within the organization’s overall culture, and a number of these relate to issues of mission and strategy” (Schein 1992: 53). The foregoing exploration of Schein’s work as an embodiment and elucidation of hermeneutic critical theory, structuration and critical self-reflectivity has implications for how I take this study forward. It is appropriate that I now highlight the implications of both the theoretical and conceptual frameworks outlined above.

3.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

I stated earlier that the purpose of this chapter was twofold: to present and discuss the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the study, and to outline a context for discussions of culture and strategy to be presented in the subsequent chapters. Based on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, presented above, I have inevitably affiliated myself with, and by extension, favoured certain theories over others. This affiliation, I term *normative commitments*, has important implications for this study. This is why I have elaborated on the philosophy hermeneutics, critical theory (Giddens’ theory included) and the notion of ‘pattern of basic assumptions’. Recognizing the implications that these normative commitments have on this study, namely, how I designed the study, including analysis and interpretation of the findings, it is important that I make them

more explicit at this point. My normative commitments can be seen in, but are not limited to the following ideas:

- Conservation agencies become institutionalized over time with distinct organizational cultures that determine how individuals (in this case managers) in those agencies behave and act.
- Managers hold and unconsciously share certain perspectives or meanings that can be ‘uncovered’ conveyed and understood by a researcher through interrogating the pattern of basic assumptions at play.
- Managers may ‘use’ these shared unconscious assumptions and understandings in a purposeful and/or self-reflexive manner to interpret their experiences in the strategic arena.

On a more general scale, normative commitments are also illuminated in the fundamental view guiding this study: that the nexus between organizational culture and strategy is characterized by tensions and complexities that offer a worthy topic of inquiry. This view reflects concerns outlined in the contemporary conservation management critique which is consistent with the notion of making implicit meanings more explicit. It also accords with the view that conservation is a socio-political process and its success depends on reflecting on aspects of human organization in pursuing conservation (Wilshusen *et al.* 2002).

In short, both the theoretical and conceptual frameworks contain elements of hermeneutic philosophy. So does Schein’s framework of organizational culture, especially with its focus on human experience and understanding and its approach to explaining how organizational cultures are created, maintained and transmitted. Although Schein does not make explicit the hermeneutics methodology and philosophy, he nevertheless seems to follow it. In part, this is because in his framework, he encapsulates how organizational cultures are formed, presents a philosophical view of how to conduct research and suggests a specific methodology for interpreting findings which are consistent with the notion of hermeneutic philosophy discussed earlier.

Hermeneutic philosophy draws attention to the centrality of meanings, which as discussed earlier, are created through transactions with others and the physical world. Critical theory is premised on the view that some meanings last longer than others and with their endurance may come domination and even greater prospects of 'oppression'. In this context, I do not use or understand the term oppression in the same way as it is used or understood in classical critical theory. But the classical understanding of the term oppression, if applied to conservation in Africa still applies. However, my interest is rather in the dominance of certain meanings over time and their implications for managing change. Implicit in the notion that some meanings may become dominant is the suggestion that such meanings generally do not change easily: they provide stability against change and they tend to be favoured over other meanings. This combination of hermeneutics and critical theory has been helpful in summarizing for me the background to Schein's framework in general and as it relates to the notion of basic assumptions in particular.

3.5 SUMMARY

An investigation of organizational culture informed by hermeneutics, critical theory (especially Giddens' theory of structuration) should focus on how individuals reflect on, and use meanings of conservation to define themselves and their tensions within social structures. This suggests that the study of conservation ought to be realistically broadened to include an understanding of how enduring dominant meanings may operate in ways that could engender cultural concepts of conservation management and the role of people in conservation.

Along these lines, Schein's theory of the 'pattern of basic assumptions' encourages the exploration of how individuals use basic assumptions to generate and use meanings of conservation to define themselves and negotiate tensions within social structures (and reproduce certain structures in the process). In this context, this study seeks to understand how strategy processes with regard to conservation can reproduce cultural meanings of conservation as an industry, as well as how those meanings are used in perceiving stakeholders, mission, core-competences and the environment.

The hermeneutic perspective on established meaning, alongside concepts relative to individual and group action and the constitution of society serves as a theoretical framework. Schein's notion of a 'pattern of basic assumptions' serves as the 'logic of interpretation and analysis' or conceptual framework of how the enduring meanings get expressed by individuals as a reflection of social practices. The existence of other compelling frameworks which could be used in a study such as this is unquestionable. However, in the light of the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, Giddens' theory of structuration and Kondrat's notion of critical self-reflectivity, I find that Schein's work brings all these understandings into one framework. Moreover, with Schein's focus on organizational culture with respect to strategy, I find his framework especially relevant to this study. In particular, the focus on basic assumptions was instructive in interpreting the data gathered during the study. In line with the objective of this study, I employed the notion of basic assumptions to investigate organizational culture in relation to what Schein terms strategic concepts which include the mission, stakeholders, core-competencies and environment.

Lastly, this dissertation investigates the strategic implications of organizational culture, and seeks to expose the impact of organizational culture on strategic developments in KZN's conservation sector. Within this context, this chapter has fulfilled two interrelated objectives: first to outline the theoretical underpinnings of the study and second to offer a context for the discussions of culture and strategy presented in the following chapters. In the next chapter, specific study methods in line with this general approach are described.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I start by describing the evolution of the conservation sector in KZN. This description is no more than an overview of the case, outlining the history of formal conservation in KZN and providing some information about the nature and organization of its work, the way its performance is judged, and how it has attempted to live up to societal changes and expectations. The second part provides a description of the research design of the study. This is because in the previous chapter, I proposed the use of a critical perspective in this study. In that proposition, the philosophical assumptions that inform my position were implied without being explicitly discussed. In this chapter, I endeavour to make those assumptions explicit and describe the data collection and analysis methods.

4.2 RESEARCH SETTING: OVERVIEW OF THE CASE

KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) is an amalgam of two previously separated areas: KwaZulu and Natal (Figure 4.1). After 1994, these areas came under one administration to form a huge coastal province, approximately 94.860 km². The province is endowed with a diverse range of cultures, natural ecosystems and a very rich history - a blend of which offers immense opportunities for conservation and what might in recent times qualify as its twin activity: eco-tourism. That KZN occupies a special place in South Africa's conservation history is unquestionable. The province has developed a reputation for its conservation initiatives dating back to the late 19th century and early 20th century epitomised by the establishment of some of Africa's oldest game reserves (Bainbridge 2001). Presently, approximately 7127.9 km² or 7.72% of the province is under formal conservation management – comprising more than 100 protected areas, nearly a quarter of the number of protected areas in South Africa.

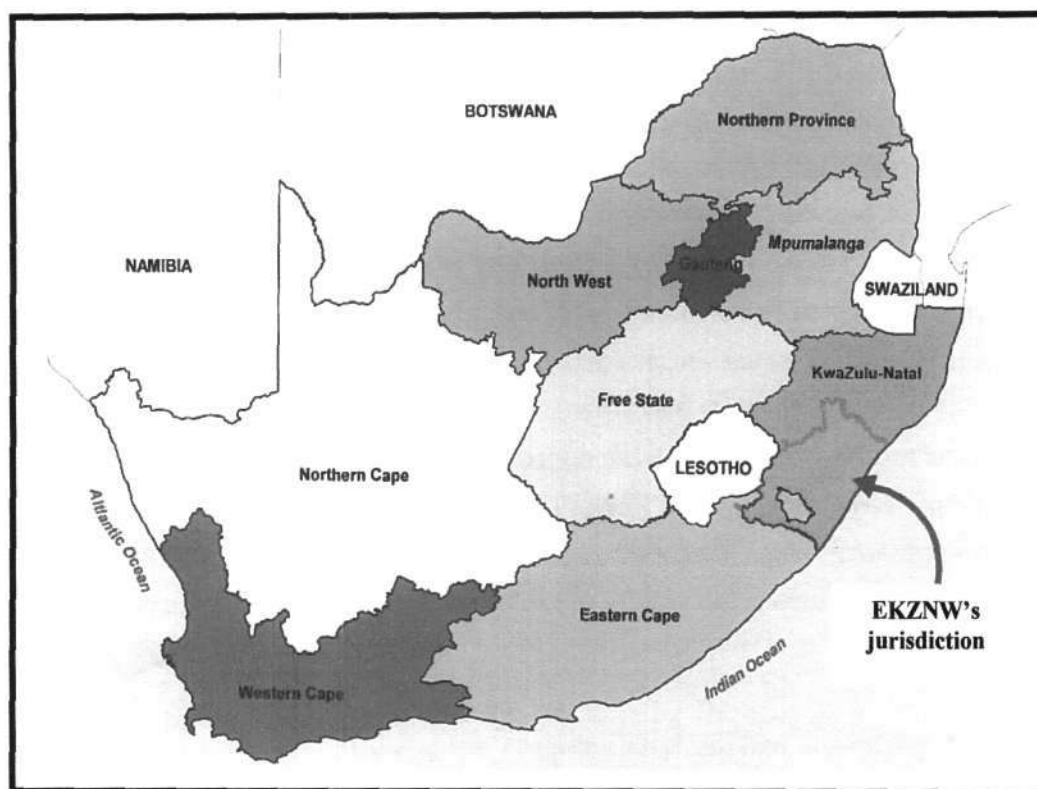


Figure 4.1 Map of South Africa

Source: www.agsa.co.za/.../Regional/Contacts/map.htm

4.2.1 A brief history of formal conservation in KwaZulu-Natal

Conservation in KZN has evolved from the pre-colonial era when the Nguni tribes enacted measures that protected wildlife by way of controlling, among others, access and use (Player 1999). However, formal conservation in KZN can mainly be traced back to 1947 when the former Natal Parks Board (NPB) was established as a parastatal conservation agency responsible for conservation in both protected areas and outside (Hughes 2001). Establishment of the NPB was largely motivated by a desperate attempt by the provincial government to curb widespread poaching and the unsustainable use of wildlife. Nearly 30 years later, another conservation organization, namely KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation (DNC) was established. Apartheid ensured that these two organizations operated independently of each other and held different views about conservation. Until 1998, conservation in KZN was managed by these two agencies.

In essence, there was in one region of South Africa two conservation bodies, with fundamentally different philosophies resulting from the contexts in which they operated, their interpretation of their roles and by extension, how they operated¹⁰. This duality ended when the two agencies were finally amalgamated¹¹ in a protracted process which started after the democratization of South Africa in 1994. No single factor underpinned the transformation process for new institutional and organizational forms in conservation. Two sets of factors seem to have motivated the KZN conservation and environmental management sector transformation process: firstly, the significant deficiencies of the previous system which limited its ability to meet the moral, social and economic demands of the new South Africa and KZN; and secondly, a context of emerging provincial, national and global opportunities and challenges.

Significant deficiencies in the conservation sector

In general, the previous system allowed polarization of responsibilities and perpetuated an inefficient, inequitable distribution and use of limited available resources (Joubert 1995). Lack of appropriate regulatory frameworks caused by a long history of fragmentation and weak accountability prevented planning and coordination. This in turn resulted in waste, duplication and prevented the implementation of effective monitoring and evaluation measures. A strong and almost preordained inclination towards 'closed-system' conservation practices and initiatives led to inadequately contextualized conservation practice, research and understanding of critical success factors such as management effectiveness of protected areas and engagement with stakeholders (Joubert 1995). Also, the previous duality in the conservation sector replicated racial divisions, which were triggered and sustained by wide-ranging policies compatible with the apartheid regime. Conservation policies, structures and institutions were in many respects inappropriate for the new era, meaning they were at best likely to make minimal

¹⁰ The NPB worked in the Natal area, mainly populated by white communities who were socio-economically far better off than the rural people of Zululand – the former operation area for the DNC. Note that the NPB had a strong presence in Zululand, but its activities were limited to the long-established game reserves.

¹¹ Prior to this, there was an amalgamation with the conservation section of Forestry (national department), but this fact is not the focus here.

contributions to the democratic dispensation's imperatives. Thus, there was a serious mismatch between conservation's output and the evolving needs of the province of KZN.

In short, the need to transform the conservation sector in KZN arose from the feeling that the conservation system, and its institutions and structures could not sufficiently meet the needs and challenges of a democratic society nor could it effectively meet the biodiversity conservation goals without a fundamental transformation of the sector (Joubert 1995). Limited human and financial resources to maintain a polarized and fragmented institutional configuration whose *modus operandi* and expected output were incompatible was another critical consideration. Therefore, a transformed conservation system promised to be socially just and equitable in its distribution of benefits and opportunities, both internally and externally. Such a system needed to meet the requirements of long term sustainability and enhance the productivity of KZN ecological systems through meeting the biodiversity conservation challenge, conservation partnerships, scientific research and other attendant needs (Joubert 1995). These are some of the sentiments and discussions of the need for a new conservation culture.

Emerging realities, opportunities and challenges

After a period of prolonged isolation and insularity, the conservation sector was expected to embrace the reality of pluralism, transparency and accountability. This new reality was brought about by the accelerating changes in social and political values and attitudes. Of critical significance were the fast changing national and international developments of the environmental ethos and shifting and expanding societal expectations (Joubert 1995). These developments and expectations moulded the structures and institutional arrangements that in turn added to the dynamics of conservation to levels never witnessed before.

Conservation faced twin demands: on the one hand, there was a socio-political demand for the equitable distribution of conservation benefits, especially to local communities because they were previously denied such benefits. On the other hand, there was a socio-political and economic demand for a highly relevant conservation agency with broad

capabilities, skills and competencies to enable it to perform better at satisfying the multiple but intricately linked expectations for biodiversity conservation (EKZNW 2002). Against this backdrop, the provincial administration, led by the Premier's office and supported by the provincial parliament believed that these demands, coupled with those of co-operative governance¹² and goal directed funding (through state subsidies and conditional grants while the agency strove towards realistic levels of self-sufficiency) provided a framework for transforming the conservation sector in KZN. The Provincial administration set out to transform the institutional structures required to deal primarily with the functions of the environment and nature conservation in line with the Constitution, while addressing concerns around legitimacy, transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness. Resultant proposals for conservation management:

- provided for expanded access to biodiversity conservation benefits by communities within a context of limited if not declining state funding towards conservation,
- suggested the establishment of a single co-ordinated conservation system that would replace the dual organizational arrangement and would improve management of the new single system,
- suggested and recognized the expanded role of conservation in contributing to meeting the province's ever growing but interrelated development needs, and
- stressed the fundamental importance of research, partnerships and eco-tourism and their vital contribution to the province and country's biodiversity system through a national protected areas system.

Furthermore, detailed principles were developed to guide the transformation process of conservation in KZN (Appendix 1). Two critical issues stood out in giving effect to the vision of transforming of conservation: increased participation and a single co-ordinated system of conservation. Increased participation was considered to be a precondition for meeting the interlinked imperatives of equity, redress and development while not losing sight of the goals of conservation (Joubert 1995). Fragmentation and insularity, which

¹² This philosophy is contained in the Constitution (RSA 1996) and calls on different government departments at different levels to work together in delivering goods and services to the people of South Africa.

had for a long time bedevilled KZN conservation needed to be eliminated, as they were regarded as potential barriers to a new order in the conservation sector in the long term. But it was stressed that transformation needed to occur within the context of a clear policy and legal framework for conservation, linked to capacity, empowerment, enhanced quality of life and provincial and national conservation needs and development challenges at a landscape level as opposed to focusing on protected areas alone (Joubert 1995). The effective management of protected areas was nevertheless not to be dispensed with. Proposals aimed at enhancing efficiency by means of co-ordination and rationalization were made for the merger of KZN's two conservation organizations with a view to:

- ensuring that planning addressed mismatches and inconsistencies between conservation outputs and local, provincial and national needs; and
- establishing a restructured conservation sector and improved provincial co-ordination to make optimal use of existing facilities and to reduce fragmentation.

Amalgamation was identified as a prerequisite for the desired single co-ordinated system of conservation. Such a system was deemed necessary to help streamline governance and planning processes as well as to mitigate inappropriate legacies. A single co-ordinated system would also provide opportunities for increased participation in decision-making and sharing of benefits at different levels. Implementing the above-mentioned and related proposals made the conservation sector experience severe and unparalleled turbulence in its history in KZN.

Amalgamation was finally effected in 1998 and the resultant body was the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service (KZNNCS) which was later renamed EKZNW. After amalgamation, the new organization assumed responsibility for the province's 110 terrestrial protected areas. Amalgamation simultaneously presented new challenges of both internal integration and external adaptation. Internally, the new

organization was faced with a bloated staff establishment that took up nearly 80% of the annual budget¹³ (EKZNW 2001, Goodman 2002).

This financial situation “was complex, but in essence the amalgamation had caused an imbalance in the ratio between the salary and operational components of the budget – too many staff with too few resources to operate effectively” (Goodman 2002: 2). The desire to address the funding problem led to restructuring and retrenchments with a view to realign resource allocation to various operational sectors of the organization. Because amalgamation, restructuring and retrenchments occurred successively within a short period, staff within the organization were exposed to a period of turmoil.

Externally, the organization found itself having to address issues that might superficially have appeared remote to its work, but were critically relevant for its survival in the province, e.g. community development initiatives. Most of the issues were thought of as contributing to the province’s economic and development imperatives (Msthalali 2001, EKZNW 2002). Essentially, this meant that conservation had to be responsive to policy imperatives from both the provincial and national governments and prove its worth to deserve any further funding from the state. This was, and continues to be the reality not only for EKZNW, but also for the other conservation agencies at both provincial and national levels in South Africa. In addition, conservation has found itself increasingly faced by challenges which were rooted in the country’s past discriminatory practices such as land dispossession, and faced by the need to respond to them in ways that are appropriate under the new socio-political order.

In such a changed context, EKZNW has had to develop new strategies to ensure its survival and relevance. Doing this, however, as in most organizations, cannot necessarily be expected to sit well with long established values, practices and cultural dispositions (Kotter 1996). While the leadership of the organization, at the level of artefacts and espoused values might show a resolve to pursue new strategies, the

¹³ There is need to be cognizant of the fact that other priorities which had not been previously equitably and effectively addressed under apartheid such as education, job creation, health, water and housing ranked high for the democratically elected provincial and national governments.

shared hidden assumptions, which constitute the 'corporate conscious', might not necessarily easily accept the new strategic directions. It was from this philosophical perspective that this study was conceptualized with a view to understanding the tensions and complexities of perceptions around strategy among senior employees as EKZNW sought to pursue new strategic directions to ensure both its own survival and relevance to the multiple constituencies it has to serve.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design denotes a strategic framework for action that serves as a link between research questions and the execution or implementation of a research project (Durrheim 1999). It involves

the arrangement of conditions for data collection and analysis in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose as economically as possible. A research design should provide a plan that specifies how the research is going to be executed in such a way that it answers the research questions (Selltiz *et al.* 1976: 90).

Thus, research design is a logical plan of how a researcher pursues a study (Yin 1994). It entails the consideration of the means for obtaining data; the skills of the researchers and their assistants; the objectives or the problem to be studied; and the availability of time and money for the research work. Therefore, a research design that yields maximum information and provides an opportunity for considering many different aspects of a problem, is considered the most appropriate and efficient (Kothari 1991). During research design, it is incumbent upon the researcher to "...keep in mind the sources of desired information, the type and nature of the data to be collected and the objectives of the study" (Powell 1991: 54).

Consistent with the foregoing observations, the research objectives and research questions of the present study determined the research design. The research design involved successive phases of data collection alongside data analysis and interpretation. Interspersing data analysis and interpretation was deemed relevant, as it permitted checks of material for relevance as the study progressed. A qualitative and interpretive approach was adopted. Interpretive methods are especially helpful in capturing and exposing different perspectives on issues about which multiple and usually conflicting points of

view are the rule rather than the exception (Burton 2000; Miles and Huberman 1984). The main theme of this study (organizational culture) fits this description given that much of the challenge is found in the many varying meanings and usages associated with the concept. As a much used concept, culture continues to take on new and diverse meanings over time.

4.3.1 Case study approach

A central feature of this study's research design was the case study approach. Despite the widespread use of case studies, there is little consensus on what the 'case study' actually constitutes (Burton 2000). Broadly, a 'case' as used in social sciences is seen to denote varying entities including an individual, an organization, or any single phenomenon forming the subject of a study. With this broad understanding ascribed to the meaning of a case, it is not surprising that case study research has been defined differently, with variations quite noticeable across disciplines (Platt 1988; Yin 1984). Although consensus seems to have been reached in the social sciences with the recognition of cases as the building blocks for collecting data, there is still some controversy on what should be regarded as a 'case' (Burton 2000; Neuman 2000). Others contend that case study research comprises a single case; otherwise the study is regarded as being comparative (Burton 2000).

For this study, the definition by Yin (1984), which describes case study research as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in context, was adopted. Applying this definition, a number of aspects can be adduced in relation to the phrase 'contemporary phenomenon'. Further, a case study approach is desirable in situations where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident and where multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin 1984). Case studies are often used in qualitative research. Adoption of a case study approach was thus made partly on account of the qualitative nature of the study. The contemporary phenomenon being investigated in a contextual situation in this study was the linkage between strategy and culture.

Why opt for a case study?

There is controversy about when to apply a case study approach. Although situations may warrant another approach,

in general, case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events and when focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context (Yin 1984: 1).

The case study approach allows the researcher to investigate particular socio-political processes in depth and detail, illuminating complexities, contradictions and nuances. However, the very strengths of the case study are also its limitations. The specificity of a case study limits generalization to the extent that few if any, other organizations can claim identical conditions to the organization under study. In addition, the case study approach is flexible because it permits the researcher to use different data collection techniques (Burton 2000). The combination of different data collection techniques helps to minimize the inherent weaknesses of each technique while simultaneously increasing the rigour of the data (Bless and Higson-Smith 2000). Although often producing information that is useful only in describing the specific characteristics of the system, entity or event under study, case studies can be used to generate broader philosophical and policy conclusions (Platt 1988).

However, generalization must be made with caution and its plausibility will hinge on the adequacy of the theory being proposed and the extent of the body of knowledge available to support it. The case study method also offers a different kind of 'generalization' compared to the literal interpretation of the term generalization. Results from case studies can inform and reform existing theories through elucidating the particularities of a single case study (Yin 1984). By recognizing the differences across cases, pre-existing theories can then be re-constructed, and it is this characteristic of case studies that enables us to better understand their context as opposed to samples of similar cases which holds the significance of case studies (Burton 2000). The value of a case study approach lies in its ability to retain context while informing broader theories and our understanding of a given phenomenon at different scales (Neuman 2000). While this study focused on a single organization, its findings have broader implications in terms of both the philosophy and practice of

conservation because the aim is to use the case study to inform both theory and practice.

Negotiating access

Accessing people, organizations and data are huge challenges to the research process.

This problem, according to Burton (2000) is accentuated in case study research because:

... securing access to people, organizations and data is necessary for the successful completion of any research report project, but it is particularly crucial in a case study research where the researcher may wish to spend a considerable amount of time with relatively few individuals or within a limited number of settings.

This observation was particularly relevant to the present study. Steps leading to the formalization of the study are outlined below:

- I used every opportunity to attend events organized by EKZNW from mid 2001 up to the time the project was officially accepted and registered in early 2003¹⁴.
- During such events, I took notes and made observations related to this study. Informal discussions were held with members of the organization to clarify matters. These interactions established contacts and informed the relevant people about the nature of the study thereby stimulating interest and support for the study long before the study commenced.
- In the process, I studied the literature and theories relevant to the study, making appropriate adjustments as I became more familiar with the organization.
- A meeting was held with two officials from EKZNW to formally present the study ideas. Thereafter, in line with the EKZNW's requirements, a proposal was submitted for consideration (Appendix 2).
- The project was finally registered in early 2003, and documentation to that effect was issued.¹⁵

¹⁴ This also helped with researcher visibility in the organization. Researcher visibility was also enhanced by the frequent use of the organization's library. Once the project was formally registered with the organization, most of those who were targeted for interviewing got to know of my existence through the Project Co-ordinator's communication. My visibility at the EKZNW head quarters reached its peak during the period of the interviews.

¹⁵ Background work on the study had been going on since 2001, but formal registration with the organization was a requirement for data collection.

4.4 SAMPLING

The purpose of sampling has generally been described as being to ensure representation of the population under study (Bless and Higson-Smith 2000). The sampling approach for this study was purposeful (Patton 1990) or criterion-based selection (leCompte and Preissle 1993). This involves the purposeful selection of a sample. Advantages of purposeful sampling are that it offers opportunities for choosing information-rich cases where a great deal can be learnt about critical issues relevant to the research (Bless and Higson-Smith 2000). Consistent with this study's focus on strategy, participants were restricted to those involved in issues of strategy. This effectively meant a focus on senior managers, or what Mintzberg (1983) calls the 'strategic apex' of the organization. As Snyder (1985) has noted, studies of this nature need to involve those who have the authority to make change.

Reasons for this discrimination are twofold: practically, it is not possible to study every aspect of organizational culture in large organizations and secondly, not all aspects of organizational culture are relevant to the issues being considered in this study. Thus, for this study, all 11 members of the executive and 10 middle managers¹⁶ were interviewed, bringing the overall number interviewed to 21. While the number of people appears small, it was adequate for the study's purpose whose guiding principle was representation through depth of insight as opposed to generalizability. Moreover, there can be only so many people actively involved in strategic work and in the case of EKZNW, it was the entire team of 11 members of the executive. To this end, the study exceeded the existing population by incorporating middle managers and providing room to interview two former CEOs, two board members and some former senior past employees.

4.5 METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

The determination of methods, defined as the specific research techniques or tools used to gather data (Bailey 1982), was influenced by the research questions and the theoretical issues encapsulated in the literature review as well as the theoretical and

¹⁶ Three of these are Regional Managers, responsible for strategy processes at the regional level. Four were interviewed based on the specific nature of their work in the organization while the rest were 'snowballed' interviewees.

conceptual frameworks. Formal data collection, which mainly involved interviews, occurred from February to May 2003. This period was sufficient to collect data, and seasonality generally had no influence on the nature or quality of data. This is arguably due to the nature of the study and the fact that there was no correlation between the data and the operations of the organization throughout the year.

I modelled my methods after Schein's conceptual framework of 'levels of culture' and the methods of accessing them (Figure 4.2). Culture, according to Schein is manifested in the members' characteristic approach to problems of external adaptation and internal integration. Schein views organizational culture as existing at three different levels. 'Visible artefacts' included: the 'socially constructed' environment of the organization; 'espoused values' depict justifications of people's behaviours; and underlying assumptions actually determine how group members perceive, think, and feel about situations and problems. Schein argues that these underlying assumptions eventually form a pattern, namely culture, and become taken for granted. Yet basic assumptions provide the key to understanding why things happen the way they do on aspects such as human relationships and activity, reality and truth.

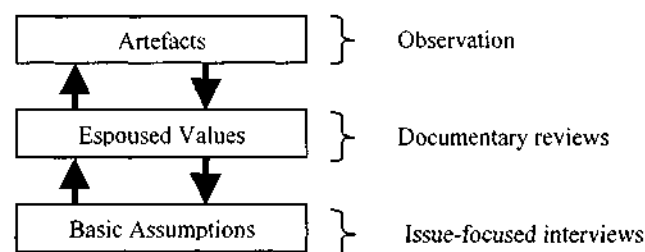


Figure 4.2 The levels of culture and means of accessing them

After Schein (1992)

Schein maintains that that the pattern of basic assumptions which forms the core of every culture, could be brought back to awareness through focused inquiry. Basic assumptions were the focus of this study and consequently, I used 'issue-focused interviews' as advocated by Schein (1992) and others (for example, Levinson *et al.* 1972; Snyder 1985) as sources of primary data. Schein's ideas very much fitted

Giddens' (1984) and Kondrat's (1999) ideas as well as the hermeneutics philosophy and critical research explained earlier. In line with Schein's thinking, this study used observation, documentary review and issue-focused interviews, with each playing different but complementary roles. Each of these methods is discussed in turn.

4.5.1 Observations

Observations provided important insights, contacts and context for the study, especially in relation to artefacts. Participating in activities such as workshops¹⁷ and seminars organized by EKZNW helped form acquaintances and the holding of informal discussions with many employees long before the formal interviews were commenced. A product of the observations was a compendium of personal notes about the organization, which raised issues of interest around which I sought clarity and reviewed literature, and which helped direct the construction of questions for the interviews, i.e. issue identification. Relevant material, and pointers to more information were also sourced in the process.

Further observations occurred during the process of conducting interviews. Over a period of five months, January to May 2003, I spent a lot of time at the EKZNW head office almost on a daily basis. This enabled me to be readily available for interviews in case somebody was available, to talk to individual employees informally, to make use of the library, and to conduct follow-up interviews. I must underscore the fact that my mere presence at the head office over a long period might have helped to 'break the ice' with some of the interviewees and those with whom I held informal discussions. Conversations with people at the head office, observations of activities/ daily routines which provided insights and getting to know some of the respondents on a personal level, all provided useful information.

¹⁷ I attended two annual scientific symposia, as well as two annual seminars at which EKZNW hosts NGOs from within the province. Two workshops relating to current issues and challenges were also attended as part of the preparations. Insights from these events helped to refine the research questions and overall approach to the study.

4.5.2 Documentary review

Documentary review was particularly helpful in understanding espoused values relating to strategies, goals and philosophies of conservation, as well as the history of nature conservation in KZN. Documentary review must be distinguished from the ordinary review of literature, whose focus is on principles and concepts. Documentary review is distinguished by the nature of material consulted, which is oriented to data and information specific to the organization under study. For this reason, I endeavoured to analyze only those documents that are in the public domain as these are public statements of interest. Such documents were available in the organization's library and website. Documentary review relied on archival materials such as annual reports, correspondence, newsletters and other related materials.

4.5.3 Interviews

Interviews were the main source of primary data. Several reasons informed the decision to choose interviews. First, they provide an opportunity to obtain detailed information about the subject matter by permitting the researcher to investigate issues at great length and with more flexibility than would otherwise be possible using a structured questionnaire (Bless and Higson-Smith 2002). In addition, they allow the optimum use of time available. This was especially appropriate for this study given the normally busy schedules for executive staff and senior managers, as they are responsible for critical aspects in the organization especially at the time when transformation was underway. In addition, the face-to-face interaction made it possible to probe immediately and seek clarity where necessary. Because participants had the opportunity to elaborate, tell stories, provide examples, redirect questions and even contradict themselves, I gained a deeper understanding than would otherwise have been the case with most other sources of data. Interviews were open-ended and flexible in order to provide participants with the opportunity to determine for themselves the most important dimensions of their perspectives. In other words, interviews were made flexible because they allowed for dialogue, emergent phenomenon, and opportunities to probe.

To facilitate the interview process, an interview schedule (Appendix 3) comprising a series of themes to be addressed as well as suggested lead-in questions to ensure that the interviews produced relevant and comparable information was used (Charmaz 1991). Interview schedules are credited with the ability of allowing the researcher to reach different respondents more systematically and comprehensively by delimiting the issues to consider in each and every interview (Burgess 1991; Neuman 2000). In this way, the interview schedule ensured comparability across interviews and ensured that the focus of the interview was on themes relevant to the research (Kvale 1983). The interview schedule was adapted from past studies of organizational culture (Levinson *et al.* 1972), and further developed to include themes and issues with specific relevance to EKZNW, conservation in KZN and the respondents. The suggested lead-in questions were organized under different thematic headings. This arrangement was intended to facilitate the interview; it was not based on any expectation that the themes would prove to be independent or exclusive of one another.

Interview themes were identified from different sources including desk research and observations. They were based on the key aspects of an organization's strategic activities with respect to the inherent organizational challenge of internal integration and external adaptation. Schein and others have emphasized the need for interview themes to be related to the following:

- *Environmental change*: how are contextual changes regarding environmental sustainability and biodiversity in particular perceived?
- *Stakeholders*: who are the most critical stakeholders?
- *Mission*: what is the organization's core mission, its basic function in the larger scheme of things?
- *Competencies*: what are the organization's current core capabilities? Are these appropriate to environmental developments?

The above-mentioned themes served as a guide for more detailed questions. Each theme was introduced at every interview, but questions were not structurally followed as the interviews were carried out in a fairly informal and flexible manner, deviating from the

schedule if and when necessary, for example, when questions failed to attract ‘interested’ discussion, i.e. interest as shown by the respondents. Respondents were allowed enough time to express themselves at length – especially if they were addressing an issue in which they showed a lot of interest. Fascinating comments, metaphors and terms formed the basis for further probing and where necessary, were used as triggers for more discussion.

The above-explained process of observation, documentary analysis and interviews was underpinned by a series of encounters between myself as an outside investigator and various key informants, who either worked for the conservation sector or had some other relationship with the sector, for example, Board members and past employees. Determining the basic assumptions at work was thus a joint effort. This technique reduced the risk of researcher subjectivity because an outsider cannot experience the meanings that an insider does.

Two sets of interviews were conducted. The first set involved those currently employed by EKZNW while the second set comprised non-employees¹⁸. Both types of interviews were broadly focused to cover much ground, but focus varied depending on the issues raised by the respondent. In general, I constructed a detailed perspective from each respondent on issues directly concerning their line function or sphere of interest, for example, finances, human resources or conservation planning. In this way, all the interviews, while based on a broad template, were issue-focused in so far as they each addressed a dominant theme.

Organizing the interviews involved phoning the prospective respondents to make appointments. In all cases, I introduced myself, without going into details about the study¹⁹. Occasionally, I spoke to personal assistants who helped to find suitable dates and times. Every effort was made to accommodate participants’ needs in terms of time and

¹⁸ These included past employees – a former CEO and a former Director, three former senior managers, and three Board members. One of the Board members is a former employee. These interviews helped to provide a different perspective on the same issues as well as an external viewpoint about EKZNW.

¹⁹ The Research Co-ordinator had already indicated to them to expect a phone call from me to set up interview dates.

place. Most of the interviews were conducted in the participants' offices²⁰. This suited me as it permitted to the observation of artefacts. Additional interviews were held with middle managers at the recommendation of their superiors. This occurred where there was a need for further clarification on a specific issue²¹.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can contend that all of the interviews were very positive and friendly. Respondents who seemed shy or initially reluctant to speak often opened up and told animated stories as the interview progressed. Respondents indicated that they enjoyed sharing their experiences, or that they were pleased to contribute their time to a study that might somehow benefit the organization in particular and conservation in general. I can also safely speculate that the organization's recent turmoil might have had some influence on the positive acceptance of the study.

Occasionally, respondents sought clarity from me on some aspects, even personal opinions on conservation. Under such circumstances, I always endeavoured to politely indicate that I preferred to hear their opinions as opposed to offering mine. I justified my position with the view that I did not want my opinions to unduly influence the interview process. This was a challenging task because while focused on conducting the interviews successfully, I at the same time did not want to appear elusive or ignorant. Over time, I became more proficient in conducting the interviews, to the extent that the last interviews ran much more smoothly. The general quality of every interview, however, was basically determined by the respondents through their willingness to engage me on the issues that emerged during the interviews. Thus, there is no patterned variation in the quality of the interviews relative to when they were conducted.

Use of a tape recorder was made in view of the fact that note taking can be slow, less accurate and can reduce the possibility of quoting the respondents verbatim (Stroh 2000). Before each interview commenced, I explained the imperative of anonymity and the

²⁰ The one exception was due to problems with scheduling the interview.

²¹ This was a case of 'snowballing' sampling (Burton 2000).

merits of using a tape recorder which included the fact that it would expedite the process by keeping note taking to a minimum, for example, to record reminders of aspects to think about when transcribing. Since this study was predominantly qualitative, the need to use a recorder was compelling, as observed by Pile (1990: 217):

... an analysis of language can only be carried out with confidence if there is an entire record of a conversation. Hastily scribbled notes ... are not accurate enough to be used in this way. Tape recorded-sessions provide the only viable data for this kind of analysis.

None of the respondents declined to have the interview recorded. The duration of interviews was from 30 minutes to 2 hours, the majority being just a little over 1½ hours' long. In a few instances, respondents raised issues they could not confidently discuss but instead advised me to follow them up with a named colleague. Note taking was necessary for 'snowballed' issues.

Interview questions were based on issues raised from my observation of verbal, behavioural, and physical artefacts; from the data obtained from archival material and documents; and from meetings with people with an understanding of the conservation sector in KZN. Introductory questions were designed to generate information about a person's background and profession, general issues on conservation and perceptions about environmental change and how it is influencing the conservation sector. It was helpful to focus initially on problems of external adaptation and survival, internal integration, and basic underlying assumptions, around which cultural paradigms form. Thereafter, the interview progressed onto less familiar topics and potentially contentious issues. As the interview progressed, probing, checking, and testing were used to confirm emerging issues.

Question order and probes were also critical to the study. Anticipated flow of the interview was the main guide to question order. The order was frequently revised in the light of the issues emerging from the particular interview. This meant addressing the issue being discussed first, and where necessary returning to earlier questions later. In this way, respondents led me toward topics they desired to talk about. Arguably, this helped to create the comfort level required by respondents in every interview, which in turn facilitated dialogue. Question order was also amended based

on the participant's background and profession. For example, most of the respondents gave examples about issues they were involved with on a daily basis. It made sense to engage them on those issues so as to make the interviews much more focused. Since I spoke to each respondent in person, where necessary, it was easier to make follow-ups by email, telephone and in person. The face-to-face approach enabled probing and immediate follow-ups on responses. Probes formed a central part of the interviews as they presented opportunities to explore contradictions and inconsistencies as they arose or were noted. Probes included questions about the meaning of particular phrases and clarification about statements.

There is a downside to interviews as with all approaches to data collection (Burton 2002). Weaknesses include high prospects of poor interpersonal communication²² by the researcher or the respondent. While interview guides may systematize interview content, they can vary significantly depending on the participants' areas of interest, expertise, communication style, and the rapport between the researcher and the participant. Language problems can also diminish the value of interviews. Notwithstanding these disadvantages, for this particularly study, the advantages outnumbered the disadvantages, hence the decision to use interviews. Moreover, the subject matter itself demanded the use of interviews.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Qualitative studies generally require the use of exploratory and interpretive methods to gain insights into the depth and complexity of people's views about the issue in question (Burton 2000; Spiggle 1994). Accordingly, this study demanded an exploratory and interpretive approach to understand the different ways in which respondents viewed the challenges (and opportunities) being brought to bear on EKZNW. For this study data analysis, which is defined as the transformation of data into a more useful form by giving it some order or structure so as to decipher meaning and support decision (Marshall and

²² This is especially a concern where use of interview schedules is made because of inter-personal dynamics and language problems. It is important for the researcher to be proficient at applying the interview techniques so that respondents understand the purpose of the study and are motivated to participate.

Rossman 1989; Hutchinson and Sawyer 1994), was done in three stages which were all guided by the following requirements:

- In-depth understanding of each individual interview;
- Identification of cross-cutting and emergent phenomena (those not conceived of in the early stages of the study);
- Linking of analyses conducted during the different stages of the interview process to ensure a continuing dialogue between data and interpretation.

Stage 1 involved the transcribing and editing of tape recorded interviews. I began transcribing in the early stages of the interview process. Transcribing may not in the strict sense qualify as part of data analysis, but it helped to lay the foundation for further, more detailed analysis. This was possible because transcribing provided me with a first ‘scan’ at the ‘mechanics’ of the interview process such as the need to be more careful about the location of the tape recorder, to ask respondents to speak directly to the recorder or to turn off potential recorded sound quality detractors before the interview could even begin, etc. The above-described activities aimed at refining the ‘mechanics’ were undertaken for the first few interviews.

Every interview was edited after it was transcribed. The editing process involved listening to the interview as a whole and in the process detecting inconsistencies. Thus, it was this stage which can be said to be more closely associated with data analysis, though in a less detailed manner. Editing incorporated compilation of notes to provide a synthesis of initial emergent insights and a record of new thoughts. Tracking emergent insights and keeping a record of all insights from interviews facilitated the detection of both intra-interview and across interview similarities and contradictions. Such insights formed the basis for further questions as the interview process progressed. For example, notes encouraged cross-referencing and were an important resource during the writing stage, but more importantly, they provided immediate feedback about the interview process. Importantly, however, these notes were not interview summaries because they did not capture every subject raised by every respondent.

Each edited interview was converted to a rich text file and exported to a qualitative data analysis software known as QSR Nvivo. This software enables a researcher to identify coded texts that relate to his or her general themes. Coded text can be collated in different ways. Also, retrieval of coded text either within a narrative or a number of narratives is possible.

Stage 2 was concerned with intra-interview analysis with the aim of developing a more detailed understanding of each interview. Thus, this stage marked the beginning of more detailed data analysis. At this stage, I already had some understanding of every interview from the preceding stage of transcribing and editing the interviews. Careful reading of final edited interview texts was followed by the identification of dominant themes and the designation of codes to those themes. The coding process led to the development of an organizing system through which the interviews could subsequently be meaningfully categorized, interpreted and presented. Open coding was used, whereby themes and meaning units were identified and organized under single words or short phrases related to the theme. This approach allows meaning to emerge from the data and codes were created and adapted to best fit that data as opposed to starting with a predetermined set of codes (Straus and Corbin 1990; Coffey and Atkinson 1996).

It was necessary to keep the coding basic enough so as not to address all the complexities inherent in the narrative. Instead, coding was deliberately basic to serve just as pointers or markers to provide a framework for later, deeper and more complex analysis. For example, all references to finances, excess labour force and profitability within a given interview were assigned to the same general code of 'resources'. Subsequent re-reading of the interview text often led to a much more detailed coding profile. Text segments coded simply as 'resources' were further coded to indicate whether they referred to declining state funding, budgetary deficits, a disproportionate portion of the budget for salaries or commercialization. Coding was initially done by hand on hardcopies of the interview transcripts. Throughout this process, I was mindful of Schein's emphasis on

using issue-focused interviews and the need to establish patterns amongst the codes instead of treating them as being mutually exclusive (Schein 1992). As such, texts were often assigned multiple codes. For example, a description of commercialization might be referenced with the code 'income generation' and also with 'compromise of public ethos'.

Not all the themes developed were relevant for every interview. This necessitated the reorganization of the coded portions of every interview's thematic titles relevant to that interview. Reorganized coded portions of interview texts were generally a reflection of the earlier coding system, but they exhibited more interrelationships which suggested a much more developed and evolved understanding of the data. Sometimes, an excerpt contained several themes, in which case I had to make a decision as to which heading was the most appropriate for it. In order not to lose such an excerpt's connection to other headings, it was cross-referenced. Because interviews after transcription were on average in excess of 12 pages (single spaced)²³, it was important to abridge them for further analysis purposes. Thus, the last component of intra-interview analysis involved the development of narrative summaries for each interview. Narrative summaries provided an overview of the key themes and important interrelationships within the purview of each interview.

Stage 3 involved the identification of themes that were common across interviews. The earlier processes of reorganizing and summarizing interviews were therefore logical preceding activities. The goal of this stage was to develop a deeper level of understanding about the respondents in line with the hermeneutic principle of 'part-to-whole' analysis exemplified in the hermeneutic circle. In order to capture all the relevant themes, I ensured that this stage was iterative, often going back to the original interviews to clarify issues in the narrative summaries. Continuous reference to the narrative summaries helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the interview material, not individually, but collectively. This was a critical aspect of the analysis and

²³ Single spaced in font size 12 (Times New Roman and single spaced). Transcription produced in excess of 500 pages; the longest interview had 38 pages while the shortest had 9 pages.

it conformed to Schein's emphasis on the need for establishing an understanding of interrelationships in the interview material in order to gain an enhanced perspective on a culture under review (Schein 1992).

Analysis in stage 3 involved reading the summaries and identifying recurrent themes. Some themes were very closely linked and there was a possibility of redundancy and duplication of information. As such, I combined some themes deemed appropriate based on my understanding of the entire interview material. This obviously represents a potential downside of the study in that the final organization is not completely data-based, but also reflects subjective choices I had to make. After working through the list of themes that emerged, I organized them into coherent groups. Grouping of themes and the choice of a heading for each group were based on language used by interview participants with a view to capturing the common underlying meaning of the themes within each group. I selected or developed a heading for each group based on the language used by the respondents. Hence, grouping of themes expressed the relationships that were inherent in the narratives of the respondents.

4.6.1 Choosing excerpts for inclusion in the text

Not all interview quotes could be included in the final write up. It is therefore necessary to briefly explain the method used for the selection of excerpts. Frequently, there were a number of excerpts that could be used to convey a specific point. Therefore, the writing stage involved substantial analysis across interviews. Excerpts related to each theme were examined and further comparisons made across interviews. Analysis incorporated a variety of perspectives on a particular topic, and on how different participants articulated similar (or different) ideas. Underpinning excerpt analysis was the interaction between the individual and broader context. Short quotes are listed without much context. This approach was used for findings that were comparatively easy to communicate, and generally agreed upon and unlikely to be contested. In some instances, a number of related or contrasting excerpts are provided in order to show variety or similarity of views about a single issue. Verbatim excerpts from documentary sources are

indented, while those from interview material are indented and in italics and further distinguished by a unique identification number of the respondent²⁴.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology used in the study, outlining both the detailed research methods through which data were collected, and the more general philosophies upon which the collection and analysis were based. Details about how data were gathered and analyzed, as well the merits and demerits of chosen methods were also discussed. In the next two chapters, I present the results and analysis of the findings of this study.

²⁴ The use of an identification number is in the interest of confidentiality as promised to all the respondents at the start of every interview. The identification number is largely used in chapter 6 and to a lesser extent in chapter 7 for confidentiality purposes.

CHAPTER 5

LEADERSHIP AND BASIC ASSUMPTIONS IN KWAZULU- NATAL'S CONSERVATION SECTOR: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Basic assumptions, and more generally the values and beliefs underlying an organizational culture are often traced back to founders and or past leaders (Schein 1992; Drucker 1995). Implicitly, it means that basic assumptions can be persistent, especially in situations where members of an organization are dedicated to a shared mission underpinned by widely held and shared beliefs and values. Persistence of basic assumptions has implications for how people in an organization learn from and respond to both their own experiences and changes in the environment. In this way, persistent basic assumptions can mitigate against change that would otherwise promote the success of the organization under changing circumstances

Against this backdrop, I present in this chapter a discussion and analysis of basic assumptions as they evolved and were exhibited by different leaders over time in KZN's conservation sector. This chapter addresses objective 1 of the present research: *to investigate the role of leadership in the evolution of basic assumptions in the quest for setting strategic directions*. This objective entails presenting a narrative of each leader's overall orientation towards the external environment and change, towards interpretation of the mission of conservation as well as towards the strategies deemed appropriate for pursuing conservation.

5.2 THE NATAL PARKS BOARD (NPB) - Founding circumstances

In that December of 1947 the first nine men were appointed, to constitute the Board of 'directors' of the newly established Natal, Parks, Game and Fish Preservation Board. This autonomous body had been set up to control not only game and nature reserves in Natal, but also Wildlife conservation generally throughout the province (Vincent 1989: 191).

Some background on the founding circumstances of the Natal Parks Board (NPB) is important. Province-controlled conservation in KwaZulu-Natal²⁵ began with the establishment of the NPB in 1947. The establishment of the NPB is attributed to the vision and dedication of political leaders of the time in reaction to threats imposed by uncontrolled use or harvesting of wildlife and poaching (Hughes 2001). Particularly singled out in this regard are Messrs Douglas Mitchell, a Board member from 1948 to 1974, an influential politician in his capacity as the Administrator of Natal and W. M. Power, the first Chairman of the NPB. In tribute to their efforts, it has been observed that,

in their wisdom these two men had realised that there was urgency about the need for stricter control over wildlife areas. They appreciated also that if the many steps necessary were to be effected timeously, they should be taken by a body unfettered by those red tape delays associated with the bureaucratic set up (Vincent 1989: 192).

With an initial state subsidy of £15 000, an income of less than £100 in the first year of operation (NPB 1951), a skeleton staff at headquarters and in the field, the NPB made a very humble start, driven largely by inspiration and dedication of political leaders and conservation staff (Vincent 1989). The inspiration behind the NPB involved a focus on conservation of wildlife through regulating access and utilization of natural resources. A key mechanism for the realization of this goal was the establishment of protected areas.

But the challenges the NPB was established to address became evermore immense, and as it soon became evident, very controversial. Controversies abounded partly because the formation of the NPB was received with mixed feelings by sections of the Natal society. Sections of the Natal community vehemently resented the idea of a provincial conservation agency – with the white communities nicknaming the agency as the *'Natal Pigs Board'*²⁶. Public antipathies were rife, and the newly formed NPB was expected to face them head on (Vincent 1989). Divided support from bureaucrats, initial experiences of limited resources, inadequate policy and legislative foundations and generally less developed legislation, and an obvious lack of experience, all combined in different ways to make conservation in the region a formidably difficult task from the start (Vincent

²⁵ Because of apartheid policies, this region was previously administered as two separate entities: KwaZulu, a designated homeland for the black people and Natal, which was for white people. The two conservation entities were merged after the advent of democracy. In this Chapter, the term KwaZulu-Natal is loosely used to denote both territories. Where specific reference is needed, Zululand or Natal is used.

²⁶ Personal interview with George Hughes, former CEO, NPB and inaugural CEO of EKZNW.

1989). As with all organizations, and especially under the above-mentioned circumstances, the role of leadership was especially critical to what the NPB stood for and what was to become of it in the future.

5.3 LEADERSHIP OF THE NATAL PARKS BOARD

In this section, I describe the nearly fifty years of existence of the NPB, from its establishment until its amalgamation with the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation (DNC) in April 1998. The period under review is examined in the light of early patterns of leadership and strategy for conservation in KZN. In this context, leadership denotes “a set of processes that creates organizations in the first place or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances” (Kotter 1996: 25). In other words, leadership involves three core processes: a definition of what the future should look like, aligning people with that vision and engendering motivation and inspiration for action (Kotter 1996).

Three distinct periods are evident in the NPB’s existence, which coincide with three very different leaders: Jack Vincent, John Geddes-Page and George Hughes. Between the later years of Geddes-Page and the start of Hughes’ era, the DNC under Nick Steele was created. Therefore, strictly speaking, there were four leaders of conservation between 1947 and 1998. Each era faced different challenges and demanded different strategies from the leadership in order to safeguard and promote conservation. Strategies refer to “a logic of how the vision” defined as “a sensible appealing picture of the future” (Kotter 1996: 71) can be achieved.

As illustrated below (Figure 5.1), the foundation for province-controlled formal conservation in KZN was laid during the period 1949-1963 under Jack Vincent. This was a period when conservation was motivated largely by a need for protecting wildlife from unregulated use and poaching. Strict enforcement and regulation, as well as establishment of protected areas were designated as the key mechanisms for promoting conservation. Several other mechanisms were developed in due course to complement enforcement and regulation. Subsequent leaders responded to conservation challenges in their respective

eras by 'add on' strategies that entailed continuation with what was started under Vincent. Thus, while the approach and values instilled by Vincent remained, each of the later leaders had a different strategic emphasis: Geddes-Page stressed tourism and recreation; Steel stressed the 'policy of sharing' while Hughes stressed the Integrated Conservation and Development Policies (ICDPs) approach and commercialization. Below, I present a narrative of the leadership eras in conservation in KZN and how the founding values instilled by Vincent endured while at the same time served as part of the reasons for resisting change.

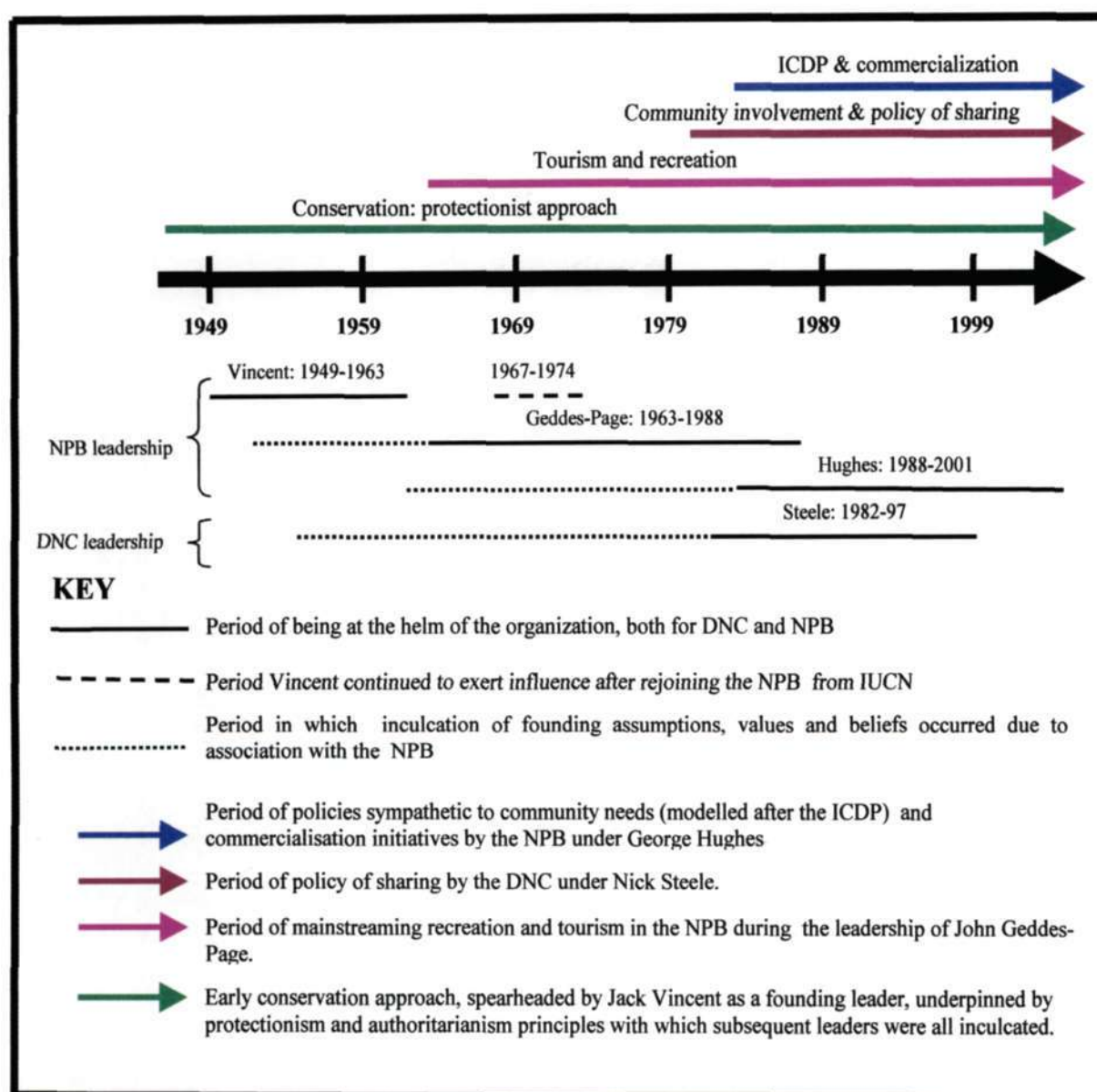


Figure 5.1 An illustration of continual addition to the tasks conservation had to perform as interpreted by respective leaders

Jack Vincent – ‘The Colonel’: 1949 – 1963

Brevity of tenure of the first two Board Secretaries²⁷ virtually made Vincent the *de facto* inaugural Board Secretary when he assumed office towards the end of 1949. Popularly known, as ‘the Colonel’, Vincent previously served as an Officer of the British Empire, but with a deep interest in ornithology – a characteristic that likely was the foundation for his general interest in conservation. In line with many conservation agencies in Africa – arguably the ‘industry culture’ of the time, the strategy of the NPB under Vincent revolved around minimizing species loss, which was blamed on rampant poaching and widespread unregulated use of resources (NPB 1951). Commerce and trade in wildlife species compounded the problem (Pringle *et al.* 1982). Countering the perceived causes of the loss of wildlife species was the focus of Vincent’s leadership, motivated by the reasoning that unless poaching and unregulated use were curbed, the problem was likely to continue. Regulation and control were central to strategy under Vincent’s leadership:

One of the most important tasks for early attention, therefore, was to think up every likely misdemeanour that could take place anywhere, and to decide upon a regulation adequate to deal with it. Such regulation would also have to be framed in a way that would cope with crimes committed both inside and outside of a reserve... (Vincent 1989: 195).

So rationalised and understood, initial strategies were focused on fighting poaching and effecting control in the access to, and use of resources (Hughes 2001). Key mechanisms for effecting regulation and control included the establishment of protected areas and the regulation of access to, and use of resources in areas outside protected areas. Since conservation at provincial level was just emerging, Vincent also paid particular attention to setting up structures and processes for conservation. In terms of structure and process, the NPB was simultaneously centralised and decentralised. Activities were centralised at head office in Pietermaritzburg, but at the same time, the organization developed a network of protected areas that were managed on a day-to-day basis by field rangers. Vincent is reported to have had a personal policy of decentralising as far as possible (Player²⁸ *pers. comm.*). This is also adducible below:

²⁷ The first Secretary to the Board, Mr. W. W. Williams assumed duty in March 1948. As a retired Provincial Accountant, he was able to establish a financial system for the organization. However, his untimely death led to the appointment of Mr. H. C. Lake, another retired Provincial Accountant in acting capacity until the appointment of Col. Jack Vincent in October 1949. In 1951/52, the position was changed to Director.

²⁸ Ian Player is a former Chief Conservator, Zululand and past Board member of the NPB and EKZNW.

Comfort for me, at a time when so much of my attention was needed to cope with administrative problems from my Pietermaritzburg office headquarters, was to have men in the field who had to be told but once what was needed, and who would then get on with it (Vincent 1989: 223).

In addition to setting up a system for wildlife management, Vincent developed the scientific services component for the purposes of providing scientific knowledge and information. Thus, one of the major elements of the strategy under Vincent's leadership was the creation and development of scientific services as a basis for informed decision-making on matters of conservation management:

It had to be decided how, where, and when people could legally shoot different mammals, angle for inland fishes, catch marine fishes, kill or handle wild and game birds for any purpose, pick or sell wild flowers, kill and sell snakes and tortoises, etc. (Vincent 1989: 195).

In terms of staff, Vincent initially surrounded himself with people with a military background²⁹. However, having successfully promoted the NPB's work, and attracting annual increases in funding, it did not take long before enthusiastic young men began to join the organization:

... the most satisfying development was the way in which dedicated young men began to come forward for the field posts, thus enabling me to start building a team of keen and thoroughly trustworthy officers (Vincent 1989: 193).

Within a few years, Vincent had managed to build a cadre of young field rangers. Those hired by Vincent remember him for his inspiration as a leader and his commitment to team work. They also remember him for being an avid worker who paid particular attention to detail - doing his best in his work and expecting no less from his subordinates³⁰:

Vincent used to say that treat this place as if it was yours own. And in Mfolozi, that's how I worked, that's how we worked. So consequently, there was a sense of ownership. ... As I said, Vincent really gave one, the individual the responsibility a very important leadership quality, because he gave the individual the responsibility and then he trusted you to do it. But God help you, if you didn't do it right! And I remember once going to him after being in Mfolozi asking for leave. He asked, 'do you think you can go right now?' I said no, and then he responded, 'you can't go (Player *pers. comm.*).

²⁹ This could be justified by the fact that conservation at the time was 'adversarial' and applying military skills in terms of enforcement was inevitable. However, militaristic tendencies caught on and spread in nearly all aspects of the organization including artefacts like uniform or the requirement for special permission to wear a beard, and symbolically, as in how subordinates interacted with superiors.

³⁰ Personal interviews with Ian Player and John Geddes Geddes-Page.

Vincent also inculcated a sense of commitment to the values of conservation, but also personal growth. This is shown below:

My own axiom, which became an instruction to field officers, is that you make up your mind that what you are about to do is morally sound and then press on regardless and maybe rewardless. Many were the onslaughts from senior officials of all kinds, some trying to assert imagined importance, other petty enough to dislike the board's growing public support (Vincent 1989: 195)

Vincent's management style can be partly traced from events leading to his appointment and the interpretation of the external environment at the time. Political leaders of the time saw the external environment as hostile to the notion of establishing the NPB. This recognition led to certain views about how the organization was to be run and what kind of person needed to be at its apex. Recounting the events leading to his appointment, Vincent noted:

I was told afterwards that he [W. M. Power] the Chairman of the Board and Mr. Mitchell had decided that someone with more initiative and aggression than a man with a bureaucratic background was needed to get conservation 'off the ground', and that I might fit the bill (Vincent 1989: 192).

With this 'unofficial' but explicit 'term of reference', expectations of Vincent's leadership were very clear: a combination of coercion and diplomacy – depending on who he was dealing with and on the subject. Using force, of course, was not strange to Vincent with his military background; hence his leadership is remembered as having been authoritarian and militaristic. He was an authoritarian whose leadership style was nonetheless envied by his subordinates: "Colonel Vincent's leadership was authoritarian, and it suited me very well" (Geddes-Page 2002). Directives were key aspects affecting how work was carried out, and these together with the militaristic orientation, were thought to provide a 'very strong discipline' (Geddes-Page *pers. comm.*). The agency had a very military culture, to the extent that even the uniforms, colour of vehicles and general behavioural characteristics of staff mimicked the military. For a long time, "we even had drastic measures such as a senior officer standing in front of the main entrance at the headquarters checking how well the uniform was worn, whether staff had hair cuts and other drastic measures like growing a beard which was against the rules of the time.

It was indeed a very military culture” (Densham³¹ *pers. comm.*). Everything was controlled or regulated in some form, including language:

[w]hen I was the executive head of the conservation body [NPB] I insisted upon the proper use of plurals, but I have noticed that the old carelessness remains widespread. Another form of written and spoken slovenliness which I endeavoured with little lasting success to correct was the use of unacceptable terms to discriminate between males and females of different animal species. I circulated a questionnaire among a large number of conservation officers, requiring them to fill in the names they used for the different sexes, in a complete list of Natal mammals. The returned forms were most interesting on account of the almost unbelievable discrepancies. When I realised that some species like the *nyala*, terms in common used went through the gamut of bull/cow, ram/ewe, stag/hind, and buck/doe, I issued a directive that in all reports and in respect of all species, the terms male and female only would be used (Vincent 1989: 202).

General impressions of what is understood by a ‘military culture’ might suggest etiquettes and procedures, uniforms, equipment, and human actors linked together in a disciplinary regime, with the intention that concerted action may be taken in a contest or struggle that has life and death outcomes. Interpreted like this, the designation ‘military’ is as appropriate for the conservation sector during the period under discussion as it is for the armed services. Fighting high levels of poaching in the past, especially of certain commercially desirable species like rhino, elephants and other big mammals was indeed confrontational, with casualties on both sides.

Indeed, historically, conservation in KZN was based on military lines of command, since many conservation employees were ex-military personnel. Within the conservation sector, such establishments have been referred to as ‘command and control’, implying military discipline, and even drawing attention to the use of firearms and other artefacts like uniforms and military insignia for those that fought in the Second World War (Figure 5.2). Although uniforms designated neither difference nor authority between subordinates and seniors, they served to differentiate conservation employees from others in society.

Behaviour was regulated in accordance with codified guidelines and procedures, in the sense that these provided an outline framework of the steps to be followed in a given situation. However, the competent enactment of that knowledge was seen as requiring experience and human judgement that could be acquired only by repeated exposure to

³¹ Personal interviews with Drummond Densham, former Chief Conservator, NPB.

conservation work and personal judgement as attested by Vincent's famous personal axiom³². In this sense, guidelines were adapted, albeit unofficially at times, to suit the specific circumstances of each incident as assessed by those involved (Potter *pers. comm.*).



Figure 5.2 A picture of Natal Parks Board staff reportedly taken in the early 1960s³³

(Courtesy of Wayne Elliot, EKZNW)

Vincent has been described variously as a man of extreme ethical standards, an autocrat, and a disciplinarian³⁴. Overall, his leadership was autocratic and this was aided by the fact that most of his 'lieutenants' were ex-military people. Presence of military etiquette was not strange to them, and those without a military background were quickly inculcated with military etiquette with its emphasis on orders and reliance on a command and control structure. Enforcement was consistent with the goal of protecting species. Scientific knowledge in wildlife management became an imperative too. For four years, 1963 to 1967, Vincent left the NPB to head the World Conservation Union (IUCN). He returned after his stint with IUCN except not as the Director but as Chief Conservator until 1974.

³² See page 99.

³³ Note the military insignia (for those who fought in the Second World War) and uniform –characteristic of the military. The uniform, together with the use of firearms, general code of conduct and even game reserves (protected areas) have been regarded as enduring artefacts of the culture of the ex- NPB.

³⁴ Personal interviews with John Geddes-Page (retired Director of the NPB), and George Hughes.

John Geddes-Page: 1963-1988

Geddes-Page joined the NPB in 1951 as an inland Fisheries Officer, and later served as the Board Secretary before succeeding Vincent in 1963. As a leader, he was seen more as a 'people's person'³⁵, which perhaps partially explains why it was during his leadership that the previous tensions with the white communities, especially the Afrikaners were lessened. It is believed that although Geddes-Page was an occasional autocrat, he did not match his predecessor in this regard. He was a 'benign' autocrat; intermittently making his weight felt especially when things went wrong. But he himself believes his leadership was autocratic:

It is entirely possible that what I have to tell will not please you because my leadership of the Natal parks Board was authoritarian. But law controlled my job – ordinance 35 of 1947, Natal – a product of that time – but the result was the Wildlife estate of the province of which we are enormously proud (Geddes-Page 2002).

Geddes-Page led the NPB in an era of considerable turbulence and significant threats. Threats of de-proclamation, as was the case under Vincent of some of the province's conservation icons were one of his worst nightmares (Player 1999). His diplomatic aptitude helped the situation nonetheless, enabling him to bring together the board members and politicians in the provincial legislature across the political divide³⁶. This was a particularly challenging era in respect of political tensions because Geddes-Page's era coincided with fully fledged apartheid policies. Geddes-Page drew immensely on his diplomacy to negotiate in favour of the interests of the NPB. Thus, the NPB is remembered for its official anti-apartheid stance under the leadership of Geddes-Page. In 1974, liaison committees³⁷ were created as a conduit for engaging with different resource users. In the same year, the first multi-racial conservation committee was created. The establishment of conservancies in 1977 was another highlight of his leadership. The following year, the first Zulu Board members were appointed. These and related key

³⁵ Personal interviews with Ian Player, Drummond Densham and Roger Potter, Head of Planning, EKZNW.

³⁶ Personal interview with Drummond Densham

³⁷ Hiking, coastal, trout and fresh water, angling, veterinary, hiking and mountaineering, biking, Zululand, yachting, conservancies

decisions, which under the political climate of the time made the NPB appear to be a maverick,³⁸ were made under Geddes-Page's leadership.

Recreation and tourism received a lot of attention during Geddes-Page's era. Commitment to recreation led to a structural response in the organization in the form of a Recreation Division. Fundamentally, this division's role was to optimise earnings from recreation through creating and running recreation parks around state dams and other viable sites (Geddes-Page, *pers. comm.*). Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, Geddes-Page motivated for funding for recreation in recognition that recreation and tourism offered an immensely promising opportunity for earning extra revenue. Taking advantage of the existence of several dams that had been established in the province, he set out to create public recreation parks.

A number of criticisms have been levelled against Geddes-Page's leadership. One of the major criticisms relates to the perception that he centralised power in head office. Criticisms were also made about the alleged grandiose manner in which he promoted tourism and recreation, which some people both inside and outside the organization believed was at the expense of conservation. Linked to this was the wide view that recreation parks and lodging facilities were not sufficiently premised on business plans to ensure their efficacy³⁹. An example cited was the fact that with the creation of the recreation division, many staff were employed on a permanent basis when their services were required mainly seasonally (Hughes *pers. comm.*). Geddes-Page's support within the organization also suffered partly because of his background in inland fisheries rather than game management. While conservation was believed to have been facing budgetary limitations, the recreation division was believed to exercise little restraint in its expenditure. This perception, coupled with the focus Geddes-Page put on recreation combined to create further strains between the conservation and recreation divisions – something Geddes-Page is accused of not having managed to resolve successfully.

³⁸ Personal interview with Roger Potter

³⁹ Personal interview with George Hughes

In summary, Geddes-Page inherited and continued with the work started under his predecessor. He carried on with the work of establishment and rapid growth coupled with consolidation and improvements. A law enforcement philosophy and increasing the size of game reserves and acquiring more land for new game reserves dominated his era⁴⁰. Geddes-Page continued with the vision of expanding the wildlife estate and seeking different forms of support including funding for operations. Some of the innovations started under his predecessor such as the sea turtle project⁴¹ and 'operation rhino'⁴² reached their climax during his tenure. The number of protected areas more than doubled and the expenditure increased from just slightly over R500 thousand to more than R47 million at the time of his retirement (Geddes-Page 2002).

While Geddes-Page put a lot of emphasis on recreation and tourism, his general approach to conservation was in many respects influenced by the authoritarian and militaristic tenets acquired under the leadership of Geddes-Page. Endurance of such an approach predisposed the organization to experiencing inbuilt tensions between the new strategy and some of the established elements of the organization's culture, for example, while Geddes-Page saw the need for recreation and tourism, and indeed went ahead to promote it, the demands for such a strategy for a 'people friendly' environment was difficult to attain in practice given the commonly held and display militaristic tendencies which were also reinforced by artefacts like uniforms, firearms, and behavioural aspects of some tourism staff, etc. Moreover, the strategic emphasis Geddes-Page put on recreation and other aspects like tourism was interpreted in the organization as shifting priorities from conservation and was as a consequence of which was diverting resources from the perceived core function of conservation (Hughes *pers. comm.*).

⁴⁰ Personal interview with John Geddes-Page

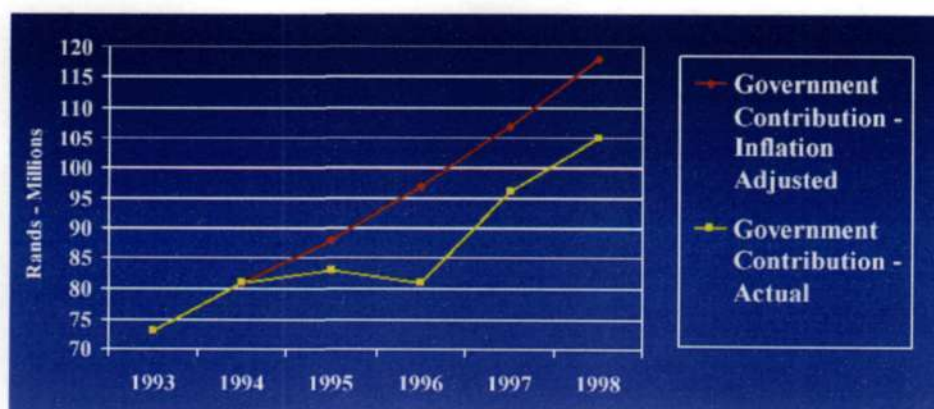
⁴¹ This project is heralded as the longest running monitoring programme on Leatherback and Loggerhead turtles in the world (http://www.kznwildlife.com/trust_dweturtles.htm).

⁴² This refers to the initiative initiated under the NPB which brought the white rhino back from the brink of extinction (Vincent 1989; Player 1999).

George Hughes: 1988-1998

A scientist by training who rose through the ranks from being a game guard, Hughes' succession brought hope for those who had misgivings about the 'lack of priority' for conservation under the management of Geddes-Page. When Hughes took the helm at the NPB, several significant changes had occurred in the macro-political context. Apartheid was crumbling and there were clear signs that it was only a matter of time before a new order was established. But it was the financial crisis that was looming for the NPB which became a major priority for Hughes. Drawing from experiences of continuing budgetary cuts in conservation in other African countries, Hughes from the start identified finances as a risk that had to be considered under his leadership. As he was later to be proved right, the NPB suffered a great shock in later years in terms of finances.

Figure 3 shows the trends in government funding towards the NPB. The red line shows the projected income adjusted for inflation while the yellow line shows the actual income received. By 1998, the value of government funding was nearly R15 million less than what it should have been, taking into account the inflation trends. Thus, although the actual money received was rising per year (red line), its value was taking a downward trend because of inflation (yellow line, especially between 1994 and 1996). This downward trend in turn created an urgent need for financial sustainability than ever previously experienced in the NPB. Even when there was a rise in the actual government contribution, it was still low seen in the context of inflation trends.



Source: Hughes undated

Figure 5.3 A contrast between the NPB's received government funding and projected finances adjusted for inflation during the 1990s

Firmly believing that the NPB had paid the price for his predecessor's long stay in power, Hughes immediately set as his target to address what he perceived as inadequacies of his predecessor's leadership in the 'old school' style. He defined his tenure's challenges as simply 'calling to account', emphasizing three interrelated issues: relevancy and inclusivity; modernisation; and financial management (Table 5.1). Hughes went 'full-throttle' with the notion of conservancies and neighbourhood relations. During his tenure, resource harvesting under supervision was allowed in the protected areas. He led the development of policies that accord with the integrated conservation and development philosophy. He was quick to promote the notion of Local Boards, an idea that came to fruition in 1998 when four Boards initially were created under the amalgamated organization. This was a landmark initiative towards community participation and empowerment in the decision-making processes in conservation.

Table 5.1 A summary of initiatives undertaken during the Hughes era

<p>Relevancy and inclusivity</p> <p><i>Transparency:</i> establishment of new policies and improvement of communications through Director's seminars and an internal newsletter.</p> <p><i>Neighbour relations policy:</i> this policy was launched in 1991 and paved the way for the creation of neighbourhood forums, promotion of resource harvesting programmes, fostering of economic benefits for protected areas' neighbouring communities, establishment of community reserves adjacent to protected areas, enhanced environmental awareness and creation of neighbourhood trusts.</p>
<p>Modernization</p> <p>This included rationalization, computerization, establishment of a Management By Objective (MBO) system and accountability systems throughout the organization through a documentation system called Year Books. Rationalization covered the conservation, recreation, interpretation and administration divisions. The recreation division was incorporated into the Conservation Division.</p>
<p>Financial management</p> <p>This involved, among other things, the computerization of accounts, stoppage of subsidization of facilities, building of modern camps and the establishment of a conservation trust. For the first time, the organization sought permission from the Provincial government to borrow risk capital.</p>

Hughes is considered by many to have been the one who started addressing commercial issues more forcefully and strategically. Wanting to have a better understanding of financial challenges in the organization, Hughes soon after assuming office sought the

services of an external business consultant to review the gross revenues in the organization (Hughes *pers. comm.*). The assessment led to the closure of some of the facilities created under Geddes-Page that were running at a loss to the organization. Other key decisions included the removal of subsidies on biodiversity products⁴³. In 1989, game auctioning was introduced as an option by which to add income to the organization. Since then, income levels, especially from white rhino sales, have been growing (Figure 5.4).

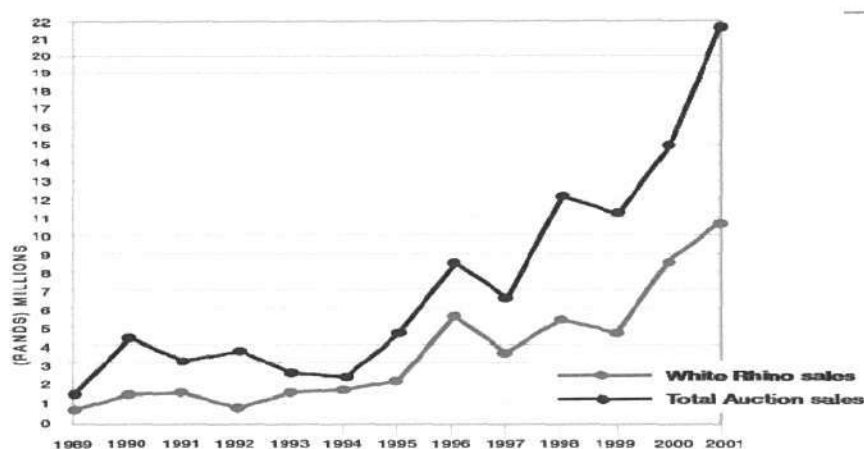


Figure 5.4 NPB game auctioning revenues⁴⁴

Source: Hughes undated

Hughes' role in putting the NPB on a path towards financial self-sustainability was widely recognized. Most respondents attributed this success to his astuteness. He was described as a self-motivated leader who wanted to make a difference in the organization. He was also willing to be bold and take decisions and he was focused and tenacious. Hughes negotiated for initiatives that would help the organization's financial situation. These included the borrowing of risk capital to upgrade older camps and develop new facilities, a conditional grant from the state, which led to the construction of a modern

⁴³ It was general policy for the organization to give away surplus animals to other conservation bodies or community parks at no cost, or selling them at considerably subsidised prices to private landowners. With this change, the market was allowed to set the price.

⁴⁴ Note that after 1998, the sales reflect those concluded under the amalgamated body. In 2002, game sales realized R24 million. Translated as a percentage of the state subsidy and overall income, it worked out to 15% and 8% respectively (Davies *et al.* 2003).

five star lodge (Didima), and a special grant from the provincial treasury, which permitted the construction of the Centenary Centre⁴⁵.

Hughes has been described differently as a charismatic, decisive, visionary and forward thinker, and as a high visibility public figure who enjoyed focus and recognition. Others viewed him as an autocrat who always wanted to lead from the front, with power and politics, and viewed him as taking strong exception to criticism. He was also accused of having planted the seed of conceit and pride in the organization with the slogan '*Leaders in Conservation*' – something some people believed was the reason why the NPB did not change as fast as it should have towards the new dispensation. While Hughes thought he was very different from Geddes-Page, others did not think so in some respects:

Geddes-Page was a good administrator and a good general manager. But if there was a failure, it was his inability to release total control. George Hughes was much more accentuated in that way. He was also a very good administrator, and a scientist of exceptional standard, but he failed to release control. Everything was confined to head office. It was over control, and the net result of that was they took away the individuality, something that's very critical in the conservation sphere (Former NPB employee).

It is important to note that Hughes played an important role during the negotiations leading to the amalgamation with the DNC. Following amalgamation in 1998, he was appointed CEO of the new KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service (KZNCS), which later became EKZNW. Hughes was the CEO of the new organization in its formative stages. As did many other people, Hughes saw himself as an interim CEO because he was very close to retirement⁴⁶. His leadership of the amalgamated organization started addressing issues consistent with the new socio-political order, for example, transformation of the workplace, equity and corporate governance. This, he could only do for a while as his retirement was approaching and Khulani Mkhize was appointed CEO-elect in preparation to taking over the executive leadership role. Finally, after forty years of service to conservation, thirteen of which he was at the helm, Hughes retired in 2001.

⁴⁵ This is the name given to a modern game capture centre located in the Hluhluwe Umfolozi Park.

⁴⁶ It is important to note that because of this dynamic, very little can be said in terms of strategy in relation to Hughes' last two years. In this time, attention was mainly on internal issues such as restructuring, retrenchments and other necessary initiatives following amalgamation. Hence, the strategic directions that are discussed in this dissertation are the ones undertaken after Mkhize became the CEO.

In summary, for Hughes, the challenges involved mainly the issues of community involvement in protected area management and commercialism. Community involvement implied among other things making conservation relevant to the local communities. On the other hand, commercialism was about ensuring that conservation activities generated an income to supplement government funding which had been declining over the years. Hughes was also heavily concerned about attaining internal efficiencies as another means of improving the financial situation in the NPB. However, the traditional aspects of the traditional approach to conservation, namely the elements of protection and enforcement as well as the philosophy on protected areas remained as key mechanisms for promoting conservation. Tourism and recreation were well-recognized activities within the conservation sector. As a scientist himself, Hughes also ensured that the scientific services received a lot of strategic focus and attention. Overall, the longstanding espoused values of conservation were very much in place as were the artefacts such as protected areas, military 'type' uniforms, firearms and the authoritarian management style. Like with Geddes-Page, this was not strange given that such values, beliefs and management styles were inculcated when Hughes served under Vincent.

5.4 THE DIRECTORATE OF NATURE CONSERVATION

Discussing the evolution of leadership of conservation in KZN would be incomplete without highlighting the role of the Directorate of Nature Conservation (DNC). A worthy starting point is the fact that the DNC was created to promote conservation in the black communities in Zululand or the northern parts of present-day KZN. Political leadership and support, as was the case with the NPB were also critical to the formation of the DNC. Instrumental in the formation of the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resource Management (KBNRM), which later became the DNC was the then Chief Minister of KwaZulu, Dr. Mangosuthu Buthelezi. Heading the DNC was Nick Steele, a product of the NPB and one Vincent was clearly proud of:

Another ranger who contributed more than most of his fellows is Nick Steele, whom I took on as a twenty-two year old in March 1956. A truly dedicated conservationist and a demon for hard work he soon became an outstanding member of the Zululand team (Vincent 1989: 223).

From inception, the DNC was challenged by the circumstances in which it operated. Besides the socio-political climate at the time and especially apartheid, it was particularly difficult to facilitate conservation in an environment characterized by poverty and intense demands for resource use. Inadequate funding made it especially difficult for the DNC to procure land for conservation purposes. 'Social memory'⁴⁷ in the local communities that had previously been subjected to forced removals, restrictions and related aspects generally made them hostile and suspicious of conservation efforts (Mkhize⁴⁸ *pers. comm.*). Thus, the DNC also faced the challenge of trust, something it very much needed in order to succeed in its mission that was within the scope of ICDP goals. Succeeding in its work demanded a great amount of ingenuity on the part of the leadership. Devising innovative ways of facilitating conservation that would simultaneously address conservation imperatives and the human dimension was the only realistic option available⁴⁹. The creation of the DNC and the development of 'community friendly initiatives' almost coincided with a change in the 'industry culture' in conservation with the start of the philosophy of ICDPs (*pers. obs.*).

Under Steele's leadership, the DNC developed innovative conservation strategies, mainly around providing benefits to rural communities and encouraging their participation. Steele spearheaded the development of a 'Policy of Sharing' through which poor rural communities received tangible benefits from conservation (DNC 1997). This policy recognized the right of and provided for access by local communities living in close proximity to protected areas under the DNC to harvest wildlife resources under controlled conditions. Another flagship policy facilitated the promotion of tourism operations involving the private sector and local communities in partnerships. This policy provided neighbouring communities with a proportion of the gross income from tourist facilities situated within DNC protected areas (DNC 1997). Both policies were implemented in full recognition that without embracing an inclusive and participatory approach to

⁴⁷ In particular, because of previous experiences that the communities had with the NPB, the DNC suffered from a degree of social stereotyping and stigmatization.

⁴⁸ Personal interview with Khulani Mkhize, current CEO of EKZNW

⁴⁹ Personal interviews with Wayne Elliot and Khulani Mkhize, former Director and Deputy Director of the DNC respectively.

conservation, the DNC was bound to endure sustained local opposition from local populations in doing its work.

Steele is remembered for his role in facilitating a ‘people included’ approach as opposed to a protectionist, exclusive approach to conservation. In this way, Steele encouraged the identification, in creative ways, of the synergies among rural governance, of the integrity of resources and of the livelihoods of those living around protected areas (DNC 1997). Governance became relevant because not only did the policies seek to support local economies and livelihoods, but they also relied on support of local institutions and management. The DNC approach could not be implemented without meaningful communication and Steele developed a cadre of black conservation personnel at different levels. Thus, another of Steele’s major contributions was his facilitation of the building of capacity amongst black people in the conservation sector at middle to senior management levels, something that was very unusual at the time. Consequent upon a functional relationship that the DNC developed with the local people were major accomplishments such as the successful negotiation with the local people, which led to the establishment of the Tembe Elephant Park and the Amathikulu Forest Reserve (⁵⁰Elliot *pers. comm.*).

In summary, Steele introduced the ‘Policy of Sharing’ which was in many ways unheard of in conservation circles in KZN. Arguably, partly because of his work and the changing conservation paradigm at the time, the NPB was positively influenced to develop its neighbourhood relations policy and put more emphasis on strategically engaging other stakeholders than it had done before. However, as with Geddes-Page and Hughes, Steele could not entirely divorce his approach from the influence instilled by his experience under Vincent.

5.5 EVOLVING PERCEPTIONS OF STRATEGY CONCEPTS

At this stage, it is perhaps logical to pause and reflect on the broad purpose of this study and its specific objectives and the role of this chapter in that regard. With my focus on understanding the influence of leadership on basic assumptions as the root of a culture, it

⁵⁰ At the time of the study, Wayne Elliot was the Director in charge of Conservation and Partnerships at EKZNW.

is now important that I consider the basic assumptions that were developed, taught and propagated under different leaderships. I also need to show how those basic assumptions gave rise to certain organizational inclinations and actions as opposed to others. Doing this, as Schein (1992) has advised, requires consideration of ‘strategy concepts’ beginning with the mission as it was understood and interpreted at different times, as well as the strategic decisions that were taken in that regard:

One of the most central elements of any culture will be the assumptions the members of the organization share about their identity and ultimate mission or functions. These assumptions are not necessarily conscious but one can bring to the surface by probing the organization’s strategic decisions (Schein 1992: 53-4)

There may indeed be many aspects to consider in order expose basic assumptions, but for this study and in line with the conceptual framework, I restrict myself to the mission alongside stakeholders, environment and competencies. For each of these concepts, I raise relevant questions to contextualize the discussion and analysis.

5.5.1 Mission

Schein (1992) terms ‘mission’ as being what is considered by the people in an organization as the fundamental reason for that organization’s existence and their role in the bigger picture. A question to ponder here relates to what was considered to be the mission of the NPB at the time of its formation and during the respective leadership reigns. Also, what strategic decisions did each of the leaders take to realize their respective version of the mission?

The mission of the NPB under Vincent was to strategically combat species loss from poaching and unregulated use. Enforcement and protected areas were designated as the mechanisms to fight poaching and unregulated use. Scientific knowledge was later recognized as a cornerstone for effective conservation, hence Vincent’s introduction of scientists into the NPB. However, the mission showed some variance with time and with this variance came different interpretations of the mission. Initial signs of varying interpretations and what was to others, a ‘weakening’ mission arose during the Geddes-Page era in the late 1960s and most of the 1970s with the emphasis that was put on

recreation and tourism – something ‘hardcore’ conservationists in the organization had for long treated as an adjunct of the core function of conserving wildlife.

During Vincent’s reign, mainstreaming of tourism and recreation was evident, both manifestly and symbolically. Manifestly, it included the acquisition of dams and investing in their operations, for example. Symbolically, it was shown by Geddes-Page’s support for tourism and recreation, for organizational policies supportive of tourism and recreation and the appointment of personnel at various levels (including at Director’s level) for tourism and recreation. This served to send one message: that conservation was no longer to be the only pre-eminent activity of the NPB. In many ways, tourism and recreation were for the first time positioned as a ‘twin activity’ as opposed to being an adjunct, a situation that inevitably polarised the organization in subsequent years (Potter *pers. comm.*).

Attention devoted to tourism and recreation unleashed unparalleled tensions in the organization in years to come. Resultant tensions were hardly conducive to efficiency, neither in the sense of stability nor in the sense of flexibility. Consequently, there was a change in terms of the previous values founded on a shared and commonly understood mission. This change arose due to a complex set of interactions of organizational factors, including personal, professional and ideological characteristics of the organizational members at all levels of the hierarchy. Fears that conservation was getting a ‘raw deal’ under Geddes-Page grew in certain circles within the organization and even outside. These views were largely propagated by those who regarded Geddes-Page as an ‘outsider’ essentially because he did not start his career in the ‘bush’ or reserves.

Two main pressures, which were both largely externally driven, and a manifestation of a fast-changing external environment, shook the foundations of the mission in the 1980s. First was the changing conservation industry paradigm which favoured the recognition of the need to integrate conservation with development. A peculiar strand of the ICDP paradigm was the imperative for providing for inclusiveness. By underscoring inclusiveness, the new paradigm challenged the old approach by providing for

meaningful participation founded on real and genuine communication as a platform for integrated conservation and development processes. Integrated conservation and development and related pressures heightened when the DNC, under Steele began its operations in the early 1980s emphasizing the need to work with local communities. This development represented a significant departure from the traditional conservation paradigm to which the NPB very much (Hughes 2001). Operating in essentially the same geographical region, the DNC created a kind of pressure which the NPB needed to respond to partly because of the realization that protection and management of protected areas were no longer sufficient tools to sustain conservation. A long history of treating communities as adversaries, however, could not just fade in a short time and organizational stereotypes of the communities were very much entrenched within the NPB.

The second pressure arose as a result of the NPB's past history of guaranteed funding. Despite a slow and difficult start, high levels of guaranteed income were at one time a reality for conservation in KZN:

Gradually, however, the money came; the Provincial Administration regularly and generously increased its annual grant, the authorities generally became better disposed towards the conservation organization [NPB], and the estimates which I drew up each year for Board approval invariably were passed without query (Vincent 1989: 213)

The above was especially true in the time of Vincent, and for the larger part true for the Geddes-Page era. During much of the 60s and the 70s under Geddes-Page, the budget grew considerably and the organization flourished. The pace of growth of the organization was rapid; whatever the demands for resources that were made, they were met. The organization grew to employ over 2000 people. Management was by and large responsible for this large appetite for resources. The organization was hardly successful, however, in building up internal systems for internal planning and control. Nor did the leadership devote much time to creating flexible organizational structures and processes. This was the scenario that Hughes inherited when he came to manage the NPB in 1988.

The succeeding period under Hughes saw efforts to rationalise the conservation agency, to cut down what was thought of as wasteful spending. The agency had grown to a point

that, even internally, the lack of efficiency was felt. And externally, the conservation agency was looked upon as part of the government sector that was at this time subject to severe treatment in the form of audits and budget cuts. Hughes called in a group of consultants, with experience from cost cutting and with competence in developing and implementing management control systems. The success of this effort was far from obvious. Of the targeted savings, hardly anything remained a few years later especially when the NPB was finally amalgamated with the DNC, with salaries taking up nearly 90% of the budget (EKZNW 2001). Organizational independence⁵¹ was now threatened in other ways compared to during previous periods – via financial pressure and harsh criticism of the efficiency of the organization from many outside constituencies.

The foregoing discussion illustrates shifts in the understanding of the mission. Overall, the mission expanded between the Vincent and Hughes eras from just focusing on species conservation, to incorporate tourism and recreation, community and stakeholder interests and finally to recognize the need for financial viability. Each leader introduced strategic emphases based on a particular interpretation of the environment. Vincent himself perhaps best summarizes this shift.

I suppose conservation bodies are like museums; those of their departments which form the main hobby or interest of the man in charge are emphasized, whilst other branches, beyond a few exceptional cases, are to some extent ignored (Vincent 1989: 204).

To summarize, the mission did not stay the same in all aspects over time. Each leader, based on his priorities and interpretation of threats and opportunities imposed by the external environment, devised what he deemed to be niche strategic directions to follow. However, one thing remained clear: conservation values and faith remained dominant over time. Subsequent additions to the mission took as their departure point, some level or version of interpretation of the mission premised on conservation values and faith. This made conservation a common denominator, except different emphases were developed in respective leaderships.

⁵¹ Independence of the agency was historically based and it was part of the justification of establishing the NPB as a parastatal (See Vincent 1989 and Hughes 2001). Thus, independence was a property the NPB wanted to retain as exhibited by the 'touchiness' of all the leaders in responding to critique about the organization's operations – especially sentiments that suggested reduction in funding.

5.5.2 Environment

‘Environment’ as meant in this study denotes the social and political context in which conservation ideas were historically nurtured and applied. In other words, the strategies that were ultimately developed for promoting conservation cannot be divorced from the subjective interpretations of people. Those interpretations themselves are reminiscent of underlying beliefs about the environment. KZN as the environment for conservation in the case of the NPB was understood differently under different leadership epochs. However, it is the initial understanding under Vincent’s leadership I want to address here, and its implications over time.

Of course there was opposition, plenty of it, but it became less enthusiastic when I picked on some of the more vociferous wrongdoers, and told them that to bring about their undoing was going to be my hobby. I added that the making of enemies did not dismay or deter me at all; that on the contrary I considered life would be dull without a few of them (Vincent 1989: 193-94).

... little headway was made in changing the prevailing public attitudes, and considerable hostility was experienced from private land owners [mainly whites] and rural indigenous communities (Hughes 2001: 33)

The above quotations provide an idea of the perception and interpretation of the nature of the environment in which the NPB was founded and expected to operate. They also encourage us to consider the following questions. What was the agency response to opposition in the environment? A related question concerns the nature of pressures that the environment generated for the conservation sector. What did those in management feel and consequently do about the changes in the environment? These questions are considered against a backdrop of the earlier discussion of the evolution in the interpretation and understanding of the mission.

While there are many aspects connected to the environment, by far the most dominant was that of opposition by the general public to the idea of setting up a conservation agency (Ellis 1975). Opposition by the general public and local communities was influenced by the perceived limitations regarding accessibility to, and use of resources (Vincent 1989) and latterly, it was boosted by the public’s interpretation of how the NPB went about conducting its business, for example, lack of adequate and meaningful consultation, and perceptions of regulations as authoritarian, paternalistic and generally

unfair. Conservation legislation and related regulations were bitterly resented as they were seen as authoritarian, threatening and restrictive (Kemf 1993).

With a commitment to conservation as demonstrated in the interpretation of the mission, a strong conservationist perspective existed from the onset in the NPB. Vincent, with his preoccupation for establishment and then expansion and consolidation, saw the environment as being highly inimical to the interests of conservation. Because it was thought that such a stance was justified and was followed over time, it became interpreted as an objective reality. Such an interpretation of the environment, however, formed the basis of what was to become an inherent process of stereotyping the general public of KwaZulu-Natal.

Stereotypes involve the highly simplified impressions and perceptions of 'outer groups', often in a disapproving and even derogatory manner and tend to worsen the differences between the presumed 'out group' and 'in group'. In this case, stereotyping of the general public among NPB employees, motivated and promoted by Vincent's leadership as the 'official interpreter of the environment', was enhanced consequent upon a growth in opposition. As a result of this stereotyping, there was a feeling that the general public knew little or nothing about conservation and that they were generally undisciplined when it came to conservation matters.

In retrospect I suppose that the inculcation of discipline among staff and general public seemed the most unpleasant part of the early work, but at the same time, it must be said that the needed metamorphosis took a great deal less time than had been expected. As soon as some of the staff 'deadwood' had been pruned by sackings and resignations, and some successful prosecutions effected by certain better rangers, it must have been clear that it was the Board's firm intention to stand no nonsense and to implement sound conservation measures throughout the Province of Natal (Vincent 1989: 193).

Stereotyping contributed to a lack of inclusive and meaningful participation by the general public. Therefore, stereotypes distorted, inhibited and eliminated prospects for engaging the general public. Not engaging or communicating with the public meant that there was no meaningful participation by the general public in conservation processes. Thus, opportunities for understanding the different interests and expectations of the general public were consequently lost.

When calls for participation started to emerge, initially under Geddes-Page and at a heightened pace under Hughes, the organization's 'social memory' and stereotyped interpretations of the general public distorted social interaction and communication between the general public (especially local communities) and the conservation employees. Absence of relevant skills and knowledge (Hughes 2001), as shall be shown later, did not help the situation either. Participatory approaches to conservation as we understand them today simply had no place in such a system. The approach was essentially that which favoured conservation values above all else. One official observed:

... you have to understand the history of conservation in South Africa in general and the additional influence of apartheid for that matter. Staff have for long considered conservation as a 'calling' – much more than a job. They tend to be moralistic and even emotional about the perceived importance of conservation. This sense of self-importance has historically prevented us from engaging and communicating with the general public. There was an entrenched belief that the public does not understand the importance of protecting wildlife, and institutionally, this misperception was historically reified by most of our actions and even what we chose to ignore. Admittedly, this is a historical weakness of considerable concern which will only be undone over time³².

The opposition to conservation was also compounded by apartheid in the case of black communities and the taking over of traditional lands in some cases (Kemf 1993) complicated the matter even more. Such stereotypes as the ones that were exhibited in the case of the NPB are difficult to resolve especially when the differences are embedded in different worldviews. A consequence of this was enduring tensions embedded in misunderstanding and lack of trust between the NPB and the general public. In terms of the NPB's responsiveness, this situation presented a huge challenge. While the stereotypes of the general public persisted, a need for responsiveness and change arose, but the basic assumptions endured. Schein helps to clarify this point.

Cultural assumptions are the product of past success. As a result, they are increasingly taken for granted and operate as silent filters on what is perceived and thought. If the organization's environment changes and new responses are required the danger is that the changes will not be noticed, or even if noticed, that the organization will not be able to adapt because of embedded routines based on past success. Culture constrains strategy by limiting what the CEO and other senior managers can think about and what they perceive in the first place (Schein 1992: 382).

In this study, therefore, we see that the initial interpretation of the environment by Vincent, which was perhaps appropriate at one stage in the organization's history, was

³² Personal interview with Cedrick Coetzee, Regional Manager of the Coastal region, EKZNW.

later to affect the organization's chances of success and ability to adapt. Curbing opposition may have been appropriate at one stage, but it was not necessarily going to be correct for all time. For example, artefacts such as, uniforms, firearms and the social distance that conservation staff kept from communities that initially supported the fight against this opposition were later to stand in the way of seeking to form alliances with communities. The fact that the mission expanded to incorporate tourism and recreation as well as community participation (and general openness to other stakeholders) meant that while these artefacts still had a role in the enforcement function, their usage and visibility needed careful consideration when it came to the implementation of the recreation and tourism programmes.

5.5.3 Competencies

The preceding sections have shed some light on how the mission was interpreted over time and how the commitment to that mission in turn influenced the interpretation of the environment. In view of the above, a question worth considering here relates to the nature of competencies – skills and knowledge that were deemed appropriate for the realization of the mission as they evolved in a turbulent and opposing environment. From the leadership of Vincent to Hughes, the NPB underwent a considerable transformation of perceptions about relevant competencies.

A number of factors were responsible for this transformation. First was the definition or perception of the role of the agency as being custodial – to conserve on behalf of the public. Second was the definition and interpretation of the mission which underscored species protection within protected areas. Third was the perception that the masses were generally hostile and that the only way to promote conservation was with an 'iron fist'. Collectively, these perceptions implicitly circumscribed the required competencies in the early days to military background, physical endurance and a liking for the wild and nature.

Under Vincent and Geddes-Page, the major skills needed were those that would help the organization fight poaching and enforce legislation. This was in accord with the NPB's

mission of protecting wildlife. Clearly, there were efforts initially by the politicians who facilitated the hiring of Vincent, and later by Vincent himself to ensure a close coupling between the kinds of skills that people he hired possessed and the nature of the environment in which they were to operate. In particular, the appointment of Vincent was deliberate – to involve someone with some aggression to get conservation off the ground (Vincent 1989). It was equally not strange that Vincent hired a sizeable number of ex-World War II combatants as his field rangers. A military background was necessary for dealing with the enforcement component which even involved use of firearms. Physical stamina was critical for surviving the harsh and physically demanding conditions in the wild where the protected areas were located.

The next collective of skills came in the form of scientists whose hiring Vincent initiated in response to an ‘organizational need’ directly relevant to the NPB mission: inadequate scientific knowledge and skills to inform management actions (Vincent 1989). Arguably, if it were not for this connection to the mission, it is unlikely that the search for additional competencies and let alone identification of scientists would have even been considered. Moreover, scientists were received with mixed feelings by the ‘old guard’ namely the rangers and those in management who strongly identified with the initial mission and the emphasis on protection and the centrality of enforcement related skills (Potter *pers. comm.*). However, scientific skills began to make undeniable contributions to the mission of conservation and were in due course accepted as their work gained profile and produced positive results through contributing to the agency’s management skills and policies (Hughes 2001).

Another major wave of changes was related to the growing public interest in recreation and tourism in the late 1960s and for most of the 1970s. Consequently under Geddes-Page, a need arose for skills in promoting recreation and tourism. Although tourism was being promoted under Vincent, it did not receive as much attention as it did under Geddes-Page. Creation of a directorate headed by an executive member of the organization, appointments of middle and senior management as well as the provision of a growing budget helped to raise the profile of tourism in the organization but only to the

concern of those who saw the mission of the NPB as only conservation. Moreover, recreation and tourism were for many years not run professionally, and the common trend was basically to acquire staff within the organization to perform the tourism and recreation related jobs (Frandsen⁵³ *pers. comm.*).

Under Hughes, two sets of extra competencies were needed. One was in response to the need to ‘professionalize’ the tourism and recreation function. This was translated into a need for expertise in business management and related skills that would help the NPB run its recreation and tourism functions effectively and efficiently. Moreover, tourism as a fast-growing industry was increasingly becoming competitive. Surviving this competition entailed more than just being custodians of a large wildlife estate, but also being able to provide quality services in the tourism and recreation facet. More broadly, the need for such expertise was also driven by the fact that the NPB’s finances were negatively transformed in the late 1980s. This came against a backdrop of decades of regular real rises in income and growth in costs of conservation in terms of operations, salaries, scientific services and equipment.

The second set of extra competencies was as a result of a ‘paradigm shift’ in the conservation sector, and more specifically how it transformed relations with local communities and other stakeholders. The new approach entailed engaging local communities and working with them in ways that created constituencies for the support for conservation beyond the previous conservation agency and protected area borders. Given that the NPB had a history of having almost nothing to do with the local communities, with an autocratic approach, and generally a lack of communication with local communities, a big weakness was exposed for skills in working with local communities – especially the black communities. This transition was not easy because it came at a time when enforcement and ‘professionalized science’ had bonded strongly as core-competencies for the promotion of conservation. After 1994, the need to work with local communities was in line with the democratic dispensation and it was only a matter

⁵³ At the time of the interviews, Dave Frandsen was the Director of Ecotourism and Marketing at EKZNW.

of time before the imperative of working with communities was provided for in both national and provincial legislation.

5.5.4 Stakeholders

Our notion of stakeholder is now vastly different from what it used to be in the past. We are a public service conservation organization; we have to talk to everybody including those whose interests might compromise conservation efforts. But we understand, we are in a democracy and we cannot go on ignoring people's rights and concerns (Brooks⁵⁴, pers. comm.).

The interpretations of the mission and the environment, as explained earlier, had decisive influences on who the NPB regarded as its stakeholders. Originally, the NPB stakeholder task was broadly about balancing the needs and expectations of the government and politicians on the one hand, and its employees on the other. The general public, perhaps because of its opposition to conservation was largely outside the stakeholder picture. In other words, opposition by the general public was initially dismissed and designated as 'indiscipline' (Vincent 1989). Under such circumstances, promoting conservation meant dealing sternly with the general public (and employees) who did not toe the Vincent line or agree with his vision for conservation in KZN. Also, the general public were treated as a homogenous group, ignoring the possibility of existence of different interests or perspectives from which people could approach conservation. Stakeholder relations as we understand them today were difficult to establish, let alone develop.

The notion of stakeholders was mainly seen from the political front. As a provincial agency, the NPB enjoyed political support and its formation was essentially politically facilitated. As shown earlier, even the appointment of Jack Vincent had political undertones via the influence of Douglas Mitchell whose association with the NPB continued for as long as he was politically active. What is important to emphasize, therefore, was the nature of relationships between the NPB leadership and the politicians. Relations were by and large developed and confined to political players. As long as the political stalwarts were around, the NPB was assured of realistic budgetary allocations and other forms of support.

⁵⁴ Dr. Martin Brooks was at the time Director of Scientific Services, EKZNW.

With a heavy emphasis on politicians as the major stakeholder group, the NPB did not sufficiently understand the perspectives and expectations of its various other stakeholders. This weakened its opportunities and ability to reconcile the complex demands of the environment (and the inherent stakeholder demands) with those of the organization, and as has been observed in other contexts, thus limited the organization's chances to achieve a level of autonomy from the environment (Gomez 1993).

In short, with his interpretation of the mission, the environment and definition of appropriate competencies, Vincent established what were to become fundamental beliefs or basic assumptions in how the employees of the NPB perceived stakeholders. It is these basic assumptions which informed and steered the NPB's stakeholder relations, influencing where emphasis was placed and how priorities were to be assigned (Schein 1992). Ignoring general public needs and feelings while putting a lot of emphasis on those of politicians signified a degree of aloofness to social trends by the NPB and disadvantaged the organization in the long term. The consequences of this aloofness were felt initially during the formation of the agency and much later in terms of highly charged opposition to, and critique of the operations of the NPB.

5.6 DISCUSSION

What does the above discussion and analysis bring to the fore in terms of the role of Vincent as a founding leader? How did his version of the mission, interpretation of the environment, what he considered as relevant competencies and perception of stakeholders play such an influential role of the basic assumptions of the NPB over time?

The foregoing sections have shown that the mission of the NPB was initially strictly about conservation in the traditional sense (i.e. protection of certain species) in what was considered a generally hostile environment. And originally, the competencies deemed necessary were those that could enhance achievement of the mission – mainly enforcement and science related. The notion of engaging with stakeholders was not tenable under such circumstances.

The study shows the founding assumptions to have been very persistent. Persistence of the founding assumptions can be ascribed to a number of factors, not the least being the fact that all the subsequent leaders 'cut their teeth' under Vincent's leadership. This is consistent with the observation that founders not only choose the basic mission and the environmental context in which the new group will operate, but they also choose the group members and bias the original responses that the group makes in its efforts to succeed in its environment and to integrate itself (Schein 1992). Having begun their conservation careers under Vincent's leadership and in essentially the same organization, region and within a short space of time (1951-1961), subsequent leaders were heavily influenced by Vincent and they subscribed to his version of the mission: conservation through protection and enforcement.

Over time, and as the environment imposed different pressures, each leader had a preferred version of the mission. Despite this, the founding basic assumptions, values and beliefs, e.g. a focus on species and a militaristic approach to conservation persisted and remained influential, in varying ways and to different degrees. Thus, for example, a military, command and control structure endured. Considered from the perspective of Schein's framework, it is arguable that Vincent's interpretation of the mission and the environment both had decisive influences on what the NPB regarded as competencies, stakeholders and also strategies for attaining the goals associated with the mission. A question to ask, therefore, is how did this situation occur? Also, what can be deduced as the consequences of Vincent's imprint on the mission? In short, how did the founding basic assumptions come to exert so much influence?

Following on Schein's lead, it can be argued that Vincent's values, solutions and ways of perceiving the world became part of the shared assumption pattern which can be outlined as follows. Vincent started off with some beliefs, values and assumptions that he taught to his new subordinates. With this 'teaching', Vincent's basic reality became part of the interim values of his group of subordinates. In short, Vincent planted the seeds of founding basic assumptions that were reinforced by the interplay among the understanding of the mission, environment, stakeholders and competencies. Founding

basic assumptions informed the NPB's strategic processes and priorities. The same founding assumptions functioned as a rationale for strategic decisions and activities under Vincent's leadership and to a lesser extent by under Geddes-Page's. I say to a lesser extent under Geddes-Page's leadership because by the time he took office, cultural assumptions had already 'kicked in' and had been reinforced many times by past successes during Vincent's tenure.

Nearly fifteen years at the helm of the NPB ensured that Vincent's values and beliefs were adhered to, if not entrenched. A command and control structure, coupled with his authoritarian management style and the fact that he carefully chose his subordinates, and was quick to dismiss non-conformists helped this process. Consequently, actions and behaviours based on Vincent's influence generally produced results which then validated his values, beliefs and assumptions amongst his subordinates on how conservation was to be pursued. Success in the number of prosecutions, numbers of protected areas established, gaining political support, growing international and national recognition and even the home grown initiatives such as the 'Operation Rhino' all coalesced to form the basis of an organizational culture whose effects laid the foundation of its initial success. And those basic assumptions leading to success were the very assumptions later that prevented change in the organization from occurring. Paradoxically, however, commitment to the mission and the successes associated with it placed an intrinsic limitation in later years as shown by the difficulties in dealing with an evolving mission. Those limitations can also be traced to the leadership and management styles reminiscent of Vincent's influence.

Many aspects can be mentioned in respect of Vincent's influence. Primary among these was the approach to management. A command and control system implied that decisions were made at the top where information and knowledge was presumed to be available. As management went about this approach, they laid down a codified system of enforcement rules that were to be followed. Consequent upon this was an outline of a command control with central planning capacities and follow-up procedures where violations were detected and reported to upper management who could act upon information, for

example, rewarding conformists and punishing deviants. Such a system was clearly a mechanistic control approach to management. Tasks were divided into distinct duties, power was allocated unambiguously among employees, hierarchical arrangements were promoted and the whole organization was co-ordinated from the top, where information was presumably available. Managers made decisions within fairly familiar expectations. Formal hierarchies were entrenched and management always knew best.

In summary, the founding circumstances under Vincent and also inherited by Page led to the development of certain basic understandings of the mission, the environment, stakeholders and competencies with which agency officials collectively identified. Those beliefs were in essence the premise of a ‘conservation culture’ which affected how NPB employees implemented the shared mission. With a complement of enforcement inclined staff, and later joined by those who were scientifically inclined (biologists and ecologists), there was no room for social scientists simply because the definition of responsibilities and roles was such that they did not need them. Consequently, with few or no social scientists or staff experienced in participatory procedures dealing with communities became a challenge which the NPB needed to face. As Hughes acknowledges, by 1991 when the NPB initiated its community outreach programme, not only did it seek the partnership of a community development organization (the Rural Foundation), “it committed a small number of staff who were enthusiastic [arguably neither qualified nor experienced] about the challenge of turning hostile communities into supportive communities” (Hughes 2001: 38).

5.7 SUMMARY

In this chapter, I worked from the perspective that the values and beliefs of founding leaders and their basic assumptions can be persistent and influential on strategy. Persistence of founding assumptions was postulated as especially influential if those assumptions were founded around a shared mission and experiences. This chapter has shown that although the basic assumptions of the NPB evolved from traditional protectionism to a ‘balanced people and economics’ oriented approach, the founding assumptions anchored in protectionism and enforcement, were and continue to be

influential. As conservation developed and as new pressures were imposed from the external environment, new additions were made to the mission with implications on perceptions of both competencies and stakeholders. Additions to the mission became a source of tension because the mission was no longer understood from a common set of basic assumptions. Based on the findings in this chapter, it can be postulated that the mission of conservation is presently understood in different ways. Thus, in the next chapter, I demonstrate the plurality of views arising from a changing mission and a diversifying mandate for conservation and the implications on strategic objectives. I apply Schein's framework and methodology to 'uncover' and present the basic assumptions at EKZNW – as the successor of the NPB and the DNC and seek to understand how these assumptions are interacting with strategic objectives under the leadership of Khulani Mkhize.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS OF BASIC ASSUMPTIONS AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 5, I examined the influence of founding basic assumptions and their persistence. A progressive change in beliefs, values and assumptions occurred over time, but those introduced during the formative stages were nonetheless very influential. Founding leaders are, however, not the only source of basic assumptions, values and beliefs. The analysis in Chapter 5 suggests the presence of two other sources of basic assumptions, namely the learning and experiences of members of an organization as the organization evolves and secondly the new beliefs, values and assumptions of in-coming members and leaders. Consequently, with expansion in the mission and new employees came a diversity of views on many aspects about conservation.

In this chapter, I set out to test the proposition about the existence of diversity of views and elucidate the basic assumptions of the present leadership at EKZNW in relation to emerging strategy imperatives. This approach follows on the lead by Schein (1992) of using interview material to decipher basic assumptions that constitute a cultural paradigm. The focus of this chapter is objective 2: *to explore the relationship between basic assumptions and strategic objectives and understand whether or not there are any tensions between organizational culture and strategic directions.*

I characterize how the respondents described their perceptions of conservation management and strategy in terms of common themes and broad dimensions that emerged from analysing and interpreting the interview material and other sources. I refer to the broad dimensions as 'basic assumptions' and their associated themes as 'beliefs'. A distinction between the two is necessary at the outset. *Basic assumptions* determined how interviewees perceived, thought and felt about conservation and strategy while beliefs reflected what people said were the reasons for their behaviour. These assumptions and

beliefs were analysed for countervailing meanings and tensions within participants' narratives so as to understand their relationship with strategy.

6.2 BASIC ASSUMPTIONS UNDER THE MKHIZE LEADERSHIP

An analysis of the interview material, supplemented with related insights from observations and documents strongly pointed to the existence of basic assumptions around the following: public funding, respondents' perception of EKZNW's standing in the conservation business, the changing realities in which conservation operates and the importance of the natural and cultural heritage under their organization's jurisdiction.

These assumptions and beliefs are generally applicable across the respondents, but not all interview responses are reflected in the assumptions, and not all the related beliefs were expressed in every interview. The presentation of discrete 'assumption statements' is somewhat artificial because in some cases, a belief could be associated with more than one assumption. But as Schein (1992) advises, basic assumptions are inevitably interconnected. In the remainder of this chapter, these basic assumptions and their associated beliefs are discussed and illustrated with interview excerpts (uncredited) and documentary sources (credited). The organization of the section is intended to facilitate the narrative flow of the discussion, not to imply hierarchical relationships of any sort.

6.2.1 Assumption 1: 'Public funding defines who we are'

This assumption is based on the public service ethos that has been associated with conservation in KZN since the early days (Vincent 1989). It concerns an interpretation and understanding of conservation in terms of benefiting the public. Simply stated, the interviewees saw conservation as an endeavour in the public interest, and therefore, as being good for the country and the province. Persistently raised was the view that conservation was a unique and important endeavour. This, it was often argued was the reason why conservation has historically been funded from state coffers, and by extension, why it should continue receiving state financial support. Associated with this assumption were fundamental beliefs which conveyed a sense of higher purpose, motivation, anti-commercialism and sentiments suggestive of a dedication to state

subsidy. Below, I elucidate each of these beliefs and values by illustrating them with representative interview excerpts.

Sense of higher purpose

... it is like a calling and not just a job. It is a commitment to serving the public, it is the commitment to conservation ... that keeps me and others here (Interviewee # 9).

In this case, most respondents spoke of their perception of the *raison d'être* of conservation. They expressed a commitment to conservation, deeply reflecting, in most cases, long-standing personal commitments to nature conservation. Conservation in KZN was seen to fulfil an important role through its unique contributions to the province (and the country). It was interesting to note how the public service ethos, linked with the perceived altruistic value of conservation were linked to serve as instigators for a sense of higher purpose in the way conservation was viewed as a profession and career. These feelings are partially reflected in the following excerpts:

We are involved in an endeavour that is different in character from endeavours associated with many other organizations. A combination of public service and commitment to nature is what motivates and keeps people in this organization (EKZNW interviewee # 4).

We are actually responsible for lives out there. It may not necessarily be people's lives but living organisms in general. We are responsible for lives of animals and biodiversity in general. One needs a great passion for the altruistic cause we are involved in because it is valuable for the planet. Anyhow, what is more critical than looking after lives? (EKZNW interviewee # 13).

It was also consistently pointed out that career wise, conservation has historically been a less paying occupation compared to other fields. But it was expressed that commitment to the public service ethos in general and that of conservation in particular compensated for the fact that remuneration levels do not always match the organization's status as one of the country's leading conservation agencies:

Working as much as I do here, you need to be paid five times than I am presently to keep your motivation levels as high in a corporate organization. But in conservation, it has historically been about emotional commitment; and with emotional commitment comes physical dedication which translates to working hard for less. But that's fine if it is a person's considered choice (EKZNW interviewee 9).

... conservation is more than a career, it's actually something that you believe in, ... a lot of people actually believe in conservation, so they work here because they love to work here... This is the reality; especially if you think that it's only in the last 5 years people working in conservation have been recognized seriously as a career and rewarded or remunerated according to the industry practices (EKZNW interviewee # 19).

In other words people join conservation because of shared motivations and beliefs in the role of conservation in society. They have a shared moral commitment to nature conservation and the presence of strongly shared values has implications for change. A strong presence of people with shared values makes efforts to implement change difficult because of the homogeneity.

Devotion to state subsidy

The Board (NPB) received benevolent financial support from the provincial legislature, which coupled with the flexibility of the parastatal structure permitted considerable freedom to experiment (Hughes 2001: 33).

The above quotation illuminates a strongly held belief amongst conservation employees, especially those previously associated with the NPB that conservation excellence attained in the past would not have been possible without state subsidies. A kind of pervasive belief was that past conservation success could not have been attained without government support in the form of a state subsidy. Others saw the reliance on continued state funding as critical if not inevitable:

We have come this far because of state subsidy. ... Receiving state subsidy freed us from expending our energies and time on generating income. This meant that we devoted all our resources and time to realising the objectives of the mission of conservation. But this is being challenged – we have to do our work differently and be prepared, strange as it might be, to raise some income from some of our operations. It is possible and we are already making good progress (EKZNW interviewee # 12).

It would be possible to argue that state subsidy and excellence in conservation combined to form a 'virtuous circle' relationship whereby guaranteed state subsidies facilitated commitment and freed conservation staff from worrying about commercial pressures which in turn facilitated greater commitment to experimentation (Hughes 2001). In other words, there were expressions that suggested an entrenched sense of dependence on the government for financial support. Dependence on state subsidy was so strong that in terms of the present and the future, public funding was even described as a source of competitive advantage:

We get state subsidy, the private sector don't, we are tax-exempt, and the private sector have to pay taxes. We can leverage off other public sector entities such as KwaZulu-Natal Tourism Authority, our department of agriculture and environmental affairs, the department of economic affairs and tourism. ... In terms of eco-tourism and marketing, I would maintain we have no competition

because we have a distinct advantage over the private sector. The biggest cost for the private sector is the purchase of land, but we already have the land under our control (EKZNW interviewee # 13).

Consequently, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, all past leaders exhibited emotion on any suggestions of downscaling finances for conservation or any question of the need for resources:

We fought for funds to improve the service – we fought the Nats⁵⁵ in the Provincial Council (Geddes-Page 2002: 2)

Government support was, and continues to be viewed as critical because of conservation's status as a 'public good' whose benefits are for the benefit of all people. But others also saw the historically based reliance on government funding as a source of strength and vulnerability:

We are in the unfortunate position of having developed from a symbiotic relationship with state funding - if you will, which enabled us to focus our attention on conservation innovations. I think this led to a culture boosted by the guarantee of funding. This has changed very abruptly without us being adequately prepared for that change, and it is causing a lot organizational stress (EKZNW interviewee # 17).

The above quotation exposes the dilemma that KZN's conservation sector now faces. In other words, dependency on state subsidy was once a source of strength but it is also being seen as a source of vulnerability in the changed socio-political climate characterized by various government priorities. Vulnerabilities caused by dependence on state funding were also officially acknowledged:

Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife receives a subsidy from the State, which although generous in comparison with agencies elsewhere in the country and in Africa, is inadequate to achieve the level of performance which will ensure that key conservation programmes are successful (EKZNW undated: 7).

Motivation

The notion of serving the public good, of bettering the lives of the people of KZN was a point of discussion during the interviews. It was interesting to note the dominance of the assumptions of the public service ethos, linked with the altruistic value of conservation that has been central to the conservation sector as a source of intrinsic motivation for

⁵⁵ This term was used to refer to the Nationalist Party, the political party that was in power from 1948 until 1994 when the African National Congress (ANC) was democratically elected into office.

performance. Association with the ethos of public service was a potent fundamental motivator:

We are there to serve the public. We have always been fulfilling that role, but with democratization, the public service role has become even more relevant for our constituencies – the people of KwaZulu-Natal. I am here because of my belief in conservation... this organization has the ability to keep you motivated because of your personal and belief in the virtue of conservation (EKZNW interviewee # 8).

... conservation is more than a career, it's actually something that you believe in, and I think a lot of people actually believe in conservation, so they work here because they love to work here. And they believe in the work that they do, so actually salary hasn't historically been an issue. This is the truth; especially if you think that it's only in the last 5 years people working in conservation have been recognized seriously as a career and rewarded or remunerated according to the industry practices (EKZNW interviewee # 19).

Importantly, this recognition of commitment is not limited to recent years alone, but it goes back to the early days of conservation in the province:

It is in no sense an exaggeration to say each and every of Natal's older reserves, by which I mean all those proclaimed before about 1960, owes its present day popularity and enviable position to a single, dedicated early ranger. In those days ... no more than one man could be spared to control and develop a station, and he would be a good solid citizen, prepared to cope with just about any obstacle (Vincent 1989: 222).

It was also consistently pointed out that conservation has historically been a less paying occupation compared to other fields. But commitment to the public service ethos in general and that of conservation in particular compensated for the fact that remuneration levels do not always match the organization's status as one of the country's leading conservation agencies. Despite the international acclaim for the NPB for example, salaries were generally low. Dedication to the public service ethos combined with a commitment to conservation has played arguably helped to compensate for the reduced motivation that could arise due to low remunerations:

I feel motivated in this organization not because of the salary – it is the love for nature being part of a group of people who believe in the value of conservation which keeps me going and (EKZNW interviewee # 6).

Under the present EKZNW the issue of salaries is a major concern and it has been compounded by uncertainties in funding from government:

Many times I wonder why a lot of people have held on to this organization. The restructuring and amalgamation phase was a case in point. Everybody was stressed and unsure if they had a job the next day. It was traumatic and yet, they chose to stay. My view is that they decided to stay because of their intimate association with the organization, its heritage and what it stands for (EKZNW interviewee 7).

People have committed themselves to this organization and the cause of conservation notwithstanding the poor salaries because of their belief in, and love for conservation. Quantifying our commitment in money terms is impossible. Conservation, as we see it is more of a calling than a profession. Others may discount as mere rhetoric, but come to think of it, why are we here when we could get better paying jobs in other fields? It is because we love what we do (EKZNW interviewee # 20).

Sense of obligation

Another feeling that was common was a sense of obligation among the respondents to the province especially. In other words, because the provincial government made funding available for conservation, it was a requirement on the part of EKZNW to make a positive contribution to the province in return:

It's about the contributions we make to the province. It's not the wildlife we have that counts. That is for us to worry about, but now it is about how we use that wildlife estate under our control to the benefit of the province (EKZNW interviewee # 12).

Official documentation also frequently espouses this sense of obligation to the province:

The Province of KwaZulu-Natal has determined a Growth and Development Strategy which creates the imperatives that will build a winning province. It is essential that the mandate and core business functions of KZN Wildlife are aligned with and supportive of this strategic direction (EKZNW undated: 5).

The provincial government expects Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife via its grant to make contributions to the economic growth of the province. It is therefore important for the organization to set as its key performance indicators at corporate level the following: the measure of contribution to job creation within the province; the impact of Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife operations on poverty alleviation; responses to the impact of HIV/AIDS; and increased equity in eco-tourism by Previously Disadvantaged Individuals (EKZNW 2002:13).

Indeed, one of the corporate indicators for EKZNW has to do with the level of contribution to the provincial growth and development strategy (EKZNW 2002). If we reflect on the tensions that were discussed in the previous chapter about the mission, it is clear that espoused views such as the above represent a departure from past approaches where the external environment was for the larger part on the periphery of strategic considerations.

Anti-commercialism

Because there is a deeply ingrained belief in the public service ethos, there are prospects of EKZNW being blinded to financial and commercial realities. Having perceptions that the organization's mission was almost sacrosanct, some interviewees, while acknowledging the financial distress the organization was facing, expressed sentiments that bordered on anti-commercialism or at least, were suggestive of lukewarm support to commercialism. Although there was no denying that the organization needed to commercialize some of its components, anti-commercialism sentiments were not difficult to find. Interestingly, such sentiments were related to the belief that conservation was a unique venture, as something that benefits the public and society at large, and therefore, deserving of the highest level of public support possible. The mission of conservation, according to some of the interviewees should take precedence over commercial and profit-related considerations. This view was not strong, but its very existence suggests that attempts to promote a better appreciation of business challenges faced by the organization, it could be argued, face the risk of opposition premised on an anti-commercialism standpoint:

Are we a business? The answer is no. Do we need money to do our work? Yes we do. ... but we are talking about working for the public and conservation interests which by far outweigh commercial returns regardless of your calculations. We are in business, and ours is that of conservation. We may have facets that do business as an organization, but that does not make us a grand conservation business (EKZNW interviewee 7).

... one thing we are terrible at is doing business. We just don't seem to be getting our act right; it is frustrating ... if you know what I mean. Commercialization might not be the silver bullet its been made to appear in conservation, especially here in South Africa (EKZNW interviewee 11).

Anti-commercialism sentiments were also implied in discussions related to funding. Some respondents felt that lack of controlled expenditure and inefficiency accounted for a large proportion of EKZNW's budget and that unless those were dealt with, commercialism was going to be treated as a panacea to the organization's financial challenges:

If you listen to government pronouncements about the state of funding, it is largely not about commercialism. Many confuse this argument with that of efficiency. It is mainly about attaining efficiency, something we have not been particularly good at. Efficiency savings, yes we need that, but to be seen as a full-fledged business, I have a fundamental problem with that (EKZNW interviewee # 10).

This belief is clearly linked to the ideas discussed under ‘devotion to state subsidy’ earlier. Some of the interviewees sent one message, which in a paraphrased sense can read thus: ‘we are a conservation agency, not business people and our focus should be on the skills of wildlife conservation not business’. In short, EKZNW faces a particular challenge in ensuring that its commercialism principles are not seen to encroach upon the conservation and public service philosophies which seem to unite a lot of the staff. Failure to overcome this challenge could easily inhibit change. However, officially, the organization has embraced the commercialism agenda as attested to by an institutional refocus towards commercialization, new investments, appointments and the recognition of the opportunities for commercialization as reflected in the quotation below:

There is enormous potential to generate additional and more substantial profits from existing eco-tourism operations, and from conservation assets, and reduce both the cost to government and the reliance on state support (EKZNW undated: 7)

Overall, the notion of being a publicly funded entity blended with the moralistic views about conservation to create images of uniqueness about EKZNW. Most respondents saw their organization’s existence as being good for the province. The goals they espoused and sought to accomplish were to be viewed as being of a higher order than those of a strict commercial operation. This, it was argued is what should distinguish a conservation agency established within the public domain and associated with an altruistic cause from pure financial considerations.

6.2.2 Assumption 2: ‘Leaders in conservation’

In the old Natal Parks Board and the Department of Nature Conservation there were always new and innovative ideas and it is this innovative spirit that gives KwaZulu-Natal the right to declare itself a leader in conservation (Buthelezi 2002).

This assumption relates to the concern to effect the best conservation informed by best management practice, science and other relevant disciplines. Knowledge and support from different disciplines should help make conservation more relevant and responsive. Certainly in Africa, the former NPB was a trendsetter in some respects and this strand of EKZNW’s paradigm arguably has its roots in the perceived successes achieved by its predecessors in the past:

... the board's (NPB) reputation as an authority that was clearly different soon attracted resource managers, biologists and other scientists, all of whom have played a pivotal role in developing the board's management skills and policies (Hughes 2001: 33).

This assumption was arguably driven by perceptions that conservation could continue playing a leading role in an endeavour that was central to KZN's identity and socio-economic development. While the desire to motivate the employees may have been the primary motive for coining the slogan 'Leaders in Conservation' behind the assumption, three 'shadow' beliefs came to be associated with it: pride, arrogance and insularity.

Pride

The organization prides itself on being a successor in title to what many perceive as a very impressive conservation effort⁵⁶. Accolades have also been given in this regard at the international level, for example, Sheppard (cited in Buthelezi 2002). Study participants exhibited faith in the organization's historical skills and expertise and their relevance, as well as in the current innovations:

Some of the innovations of our predecessors like game capturing and the sea turtle programme were simply unparalleled in their times. In our era, we have promoted initiatives such as conservancies – an initiative that has spread throughout the country and helped to expand the conservation constituencies. Other innovations such as community levy and the formation of local boards are simply a marvel – they are a remarkable achievement of having full legal participation of our neighbouring communities (EKZNW interviewee # 9).

Even formally, EKZNW perceives itself as an important player in the field of biodiversity conservation, not just locally but also globally:

The organization [Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife] is also a global player in the field of biodiversity conservation and has won accolades in this regard. As a result, the organization's strategic posture has to recognize its role in meeting international and transfrontier conservation obligations (EKZNW 2002: 3).

Arrogance

During the tenure of Hughes after amalgamation, the organization retained the former NPB slogan 'Leaders in Conservation' in its logo. Mixed feelings were expressed about the use of the slogan. While some saw it as a corporate attempt to unite the employees, some felt that there was also a sense of arrogance associated with the slogan:

⁵⁶ http://www.kznwildlife.com/our_org.htm

We knew we were an acknowledged player in the conservation industry but we were arrogant enough to even tell the world about it. I think that was unacceptable (EKZNW interviewee # 17)

I think that was one of the biggest faults of the NPB is that we became very arrogant. And I qualify that by saying that yes we believe that we did a good job, but we were arrogant enough to say that no new ideas were acceptable. ... we need to be very careful with that. ... what we would like to believe is that we deliver the best conservation product in terms of world best practice ... that is what that should mean, and not to say that we are above everybody else ... I think we are trying to follow world best practice and deliver the best possible product for the province. It is a very dangerous statement because it can be very arrogant (EKZNW interviewee # 6).

Attempts to establish how the slogan was discontinued revealed different responses. These two quotations help demonstrate the lack of clarity as to what might have happened although the respondents were seemingly comfortable with the development:

Actually, I am not sure. But it made the organization sound arrogant; just as well we discontinued its use (EKZNW interviewee # 7).

We needed to depict our core functions [conservation, partnerships and eco-tourism] in the logo. I suppose we ran out of space to squeeze it [slogan - Leaders in conservation] in, and I guess that is how it was abandoned. (EKZNW interviewee # 15).

But it would seem that the ‘leaders in conservation’ notion has continued to be used in the organization, though in a less conspicuous manner:

... positioning Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife within Province as a leader in conservation, partnerships and eco-tourism. There is a need to improve the organizational image, entrench the new “Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife” brand, and broaden the market focus (EKZNW 2002: 11).

Insularity

While some of the respondents were concerned about arrogance, others were worried about the historically based insularity, reportedly a characteristic that had for so long epitomised the conservation sector in the province (Joubert 1995). The concern was that whereas KZN had been associated with some important conservation initiatives undertaken in the past, there was a potential risk of ignoring events and developments outside the province as well as of complacency:

... the NPB was historically run by and for itself. Operating in a rather benign environment and with very little competition, it basically did nothing to engage others for a long time. The problem was the entrenched belief that arose – that the NPB knew what was best and went ahead without consultation and stakeholders were kept on the periphery (EKZNW interviewee # 1).

Everybody knows that in the former NPB we reached a stage of unacceptable arrogance. Alternative views in the field of conservation were deemed irrelevant. We do not want this stance to continue in the restructured organization. Worse still, we may just be paying for all the missed opportunities during the era when we exhibited arrogance and insularity. If we can open up and make a turn around, there is a lot we can learn from others (EKZNW interviewee # 16).

The above sentiments demonstrate that there is at least some recognition of the external environment. Here, the respondents show their disapproval of the previous approach whereby the NPB was largely obsessed with itself and its own ethic. This presents opportunities for an outward looking orientation in terms of strategy. This changing 'organizational self-perception' and recognition of environmental developments is further demonstrated in the next assumption below.

6.2.3 Assumption 3: 'We know our realities are changing'

The democratization of the state and society in South Africa has seen the empowerment of communities, especially those living under communal land tenure, and has stimulated responses regarding resource use, land rights, land management policies, participation, control, and more generally, the relevance of nature conservation to a much wider constituency (EKZNW undated: 2).

As exemplified in the above quotation, this assumption contained sentiments about the recognition of changing socio-political circumstances and their implied demands for conservation. A consequence was a common recognition of the need for a pragmatic attitude towards conservation activities and a need for adaptation and flexibility:

... the challenges that we face today actually call for flexibility. If you followed the rule by the letter, I don't know how you would survive as an organization in this day and age. ... I think the time for paramilitary conservation agencies is actually gone ... especially in terms of the rights that people have in terms of our constitution, you just can't trample over people's rights (EKZNW interviewee # 19)

Recognition of the changing environment was also linked to the founding of EKZNW and what this meant for conservation in the future:

... [Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal] Wildlife was created as a result of the sweeping changes of the new democratic South Africa. ... Meeting these challenges [of unprecedented changes] and seizing these opportunities is imperative if viable and effective nature conservation management is to be sustained into the future (EKZNW undated: 1).

Interviewees expressed four fundamental beliefs in relation to this assumption: opportunism, cost awareness, commercialism and risk.

Opportuneness

It is believed by the respondents that EKZNW watches environmental developments closely and an important aspect of this is looking for opportunities that may emerge and be of benefit to the conservation sector. Interviewees expressed sentiments that suggested recognition of the inherent opportunities in the public service status:

Our public service status presents us with opportunities to make money, but this does not stop us from engaging the private sector. Joint venture business partnerships, concessions and other private sector related initiatives mean that we have multiple sources of income if only we play our game right (EKZNW interviewee # 17).

Some respondents were quick to note that the public service status of EKZNW was already being capitalised on. In recent times, the public service status has helped EKZNW to pursue certain courses which would have otherwise been impossible or at least difficult to negotiate: examples include its involvement in transboundary conservation initiatives with multi-lateral funding (for example, Ukahlamba Drakensberg Mountain Project⁵⁷) and accessing conditional grants from government for particular projects of significant strategic value. Opportuneness has also been helping EKZNW to earn extra income through serving as an implementing agency on behalf of national government departments (for example, the coastal fisheries on behalf of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism) and the Working for Water Programme. The latter programme under the national Departmental of Water Affairs and Forestry is focused on the eradication of invasive species through local community members and thus contributing to job creation and poverty reduction. In short, public service status was also seen as a form of competitive advantage as demonstrated in an earlier excerpt.

⁵⁷ This is a project funded by the World Bank under the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) to expand the Ukahlamba Drakensberg Park across the border into the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Park on both sides of the escarpment, which separates South Africa and Lesotho.

Cost awareness

Interviewees were generally of the view that budgetary problems have been a feature of the conservation sector since 1994. This has arisen principally because of the existence of other priority areas for government, mainly in the social and development arena. This means that conservation is now expected to present a compelling case to justify funding (DEAT 2003). It also means exercising a lot of restraint in terms of expenditure. Growing financial pragmatism at EKZNW translated into a high degree of cost consciousness:

...we have come to a stage where efficiency in terms of cost is rightly so, becoming a recurring theme in the evaluation of a lot of our decisions. This is no coincidence – we are operating on a cash budget and we have to account for every Rand that we spend. It is no longer a case of money being available and going about doing our business. Cost-consciousness, in my view is one of the best things to have ever happened to this organization. It has even taught us the importance of recognizing that past draconian budgetary decisions like a 20% slash across the board is often not the best approach. We are now attending to detailed aspects of decisions that have financial implications (EKZNW interviewee # 1).

For a long time, we deceived ourselves that the financial situation in the province's conservation sector was good. Far from it, it was only on account of inappropriate considerations, lopsided and blurred views. We are nearly bankrupt and desperate now because of past institutional inadequacies, and the situation will haunt us into the future. I am not certain when we will get out of this situation, but I am an optimist, it will happen some day (EKZNW interviewee # 15).

In short, respondents generally recognized that alongside the organization's commitment to conservation and sustainable use, there was a need to create value for money – spend only where it was most prudent and likely to realise optimal returns (EKZNW 2002). This implies among other things managing the organization on sound business principles, hence the observation that "... the restructuring process was a strategic decision with the intention of accelerating organizational transformation, refocusing to free capital resources from non-strategic and non-core investments" (EKZNW 2001: 2). Sensitivity to costs and expenditure is also externally driven including the demands by politicians:

... no administration has access to limitless funding and that more than ever before we need to judge very carefully the value of every Rand we spend. I am watching with interest the moves that Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife is making to boost its eco-tourism operations. There is, I believe, an enormous potential lying almost dormant. If the organization can achieve this turnaround it will mean a great deal to the province as a whole (Msthalali 2002)⁵⁸.

Commercialism

⁵⁸ Mr. Lionel Msthalali is the immediate past Premier of KZN

Some degree of commercialization may well be the only way that conservation can contribute to, and therefore become more relevant in the current socio-political realities of South Africa (EKZNW interviewee # 10).

The above quotation represents an understanding counter to the anti-commercialism sentiments presented earlier in this chapter and reflects an acknowledgement of the changing realities of finances towards conservation. The quest for financial pragmatism is not only confined to the management of expenditure or costs. It is also linked to the ability to generate income from available expertise and wildlife resources through eco-tourism, game auctioning, etc. It was evident amongst the interviewees that there was a shared understanding of the causes of conservation's financial distress, which was making commercialism an imperative. Such feelings were even reflected in official documentation:

... the problems that beset a developing economy have placed pressure on government to address basic needs, such as housing, health and education, leading to a decline in real terms of state funding for nature conservation. This is despite the recognition that sound environmental management is a key ingredient of sustainable development (EKZNW undated: 1).

Although the need for commercialism was generally understood, some concerns emerged in terms of its execution and implementation:

So in terms of our competitiveness, we have not been promoting the facilities within our game reserves, for we largely provide the beds in KZN, while we were living off Hluhluwe, we have not actually been publicising it ... promoting it whilst in the private sector, we are seeing a lot of promotions and they have captured a considerable share of the market. ... we have to get back our market share by investing in publicity (EKZNW interviewee # 1).

While commercialization is a realistic option, at the back of the minds of the people, I suspect, there is some degree of unease which is not being communicated. This relates to the perception that we as an organization are not adequately equipped to deal with the challenges of commercialization because of our history, skills and status as a public sector agency. Some of these are mere stereotypes – and you know how stereotypes can become powerful in helping resistance against change. As top management, we have an obligation to avert such fears, and I think we have managed to some extent. The fight has to go on because any slight negative development could easily throw the momentum we have gained in reverse gear (EKZNW interviewee 19).

My slight concern is that we as an organization are not particularly good at doing business. This is not a criticism, but I am merely stating a fact. We are learning the ropes at the moment, and that has to be at the back of our minds. I think the greatest challenge is to understand ourselves as an organization We need to pay particular attention to inherent organizational factors that might stand in our way as we seek to improve our performance in the commercialization realm (EKZNW interviewee # 2).

A major premise for commercialization is eco-tourism. Consequently, in the new structure after amalgamation, eco-tourism and marketing became one of the three pillars of EKZNW's operating framework. The importance attached eco-tourism was emphasized in different ways which included the creation of a position at Director level and the hiring of a host of professional staff in the hospitality field. Further, the traditional narrow market focus continues to be expanded to cater for a broad diversity of tourists, ranging from campers on a tight budget to international tourists who require a high standard of accommodation, catering and interpreted nature-based experiences (EKZNW online⁵⁹).

Risk and change management

The perception of risk was an important element in the context of a changing environment and its implied pressures. Several interviewees spoke of the need for the organization to manage risk. Some respondents suggested that risk management is going to become even more critical in the future especially as the conservation sector seeks to face the competition in some of its facets such as eco-tourism:

And to me, with corporate world experience, that [risk management] is one of the fundamental characteristics of strategic management ... to be worried about how you cope with the risks. I mean not worried in a negative sense ... cautious, aware of ... making efforts to learn and know about environmental developments (EKZNW interviewee # 11).

... we basically forgot that risks are part of life because we got used to this protection and pampering by the government. Consciousness about the risks involved in what we do is increasingly becoming important. From the government, the message is clear now, we even have to develop a strategy for risk management to be able to access government funding. (EKZNW interviewee # 3).

While there were many risks highlighted in the course of the interviews, they were mainly associated with dependence on public funding:

... entirely depending on the state subsidy is certainly not a healthy option for this organization. Many priorities exist for government and conservation cannot have easy access to the limited funds. We have seen in the last couple of years a rift between the subsidy and the rising costs of operations. No major option exists presently other than having to vigorously pursue the efficiencies and savings we can achieve by adopting new ways of working. Eco-tourism is certainly not the sole option, but it offers immense opportunities for kick-starting our journey to financial self-sustainability. We are already making good progress and at the rate we are going, I am convinced it will be possible for us

⁵⁹ Available at: http://www.kznwildlife.com/strategic_plan04.htm; accessed 5 February, 2004.

to achieve these aims, as well as to continue to uphold our traditions of public service (EKZNW interviewee # 11).

... I do not think we have reached a stage where we can say eco-tourism can fund conservation and we can become totally self-sustainable. I think that has to be something that we have to give a time line so that over a period of time that is what we are aiming for (EKZNW interviewee # 5).

... there is no way that this organization will be self-funding in the next five years. Actually it needs a lot of time if at all if it were to be financially self-sustainable. ... [Therefore], the biggest threat facing the organization is that we are not financially self-sufficient (EKZNW interviewee # 17).

The above excerpts were also echoed in official documentation:

... this emphasis has been familiar to many of us over the years as provincial government budgets tightened in the face of trying to deal with inequities and imbalances of the previous government. Hence, conservation was asked more and more to pay its way, to work towards a situation of reasonable self-sufficiency in order to sustain the well being of our precious parks and protected areas (Hughes in EKZNW 2001: 4).

Risks associated with funding that were expressed in this study were also expressed elsewhere:

*... protected areas [in South Africa] have to compete for government funding alongside a set of other important priorities. This has meant that there is no longer a guarantee that protected areas funding needs will be retained or increased into the future (Davies *et al.* 2003: 47).*

In short, the above quotations partially explain the source of the concerns and views about risk and change management. Presently, funding is not only inadequate, but also not guaranteed and not surprisingly, most respondents recognized the precariousness of finances as a serious threat.

6.2.4 Assumption 4: 'We are conserving a great natural and cultural heritage'

It's a duty to our heritage and the people of KwaZulu-Natal (EKZNW interviewee # 3).

In this assumption, respondents perceived their organization as fulfilling the functions of custodianship and stewardship of a unique and important conservation heritage. For many of the interviewees, the province's renowned conservation efforts were seen to be part of what should drive present efforts. EKZNW official statements frequently make

reference to defending the heritage by upholding the basic values of conservation in a changed context (EKZNW 2002). In its publications, the organization has a strong tendency to recount its history and the resultant drive it creates to uphold the province's conservation legacy:

[Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal] Wildlife has drawn on the rich heritage and experience of organized conservation in this region of over a hundred years, and must embrace the opportunities and challenges of its future as one of the newest African nature conservation agencies (EKZNW undated: 2).

The above quotation implies a fundamental belief that conservation in KZN plays a critical role, that its associated protected areas do not just take up land for its own sake, but that conservation contributes to the province's identity through conserving a unique cultural and natural heritage and biodiversity:

Formal conservation in KwaZulu-Natal goes back to nearly a century ago. As a province, we remain one of the last strongholds of different mammals, especially the white rhino. This is what helps put KwaZulu on the map and we have a responsibility and a commitment to deliver in ways that will sustain this legacy into the far future (EKZNW interviewee # 12).

... from very difficult circumstances with no systems, no resources and immense opposition, we were able to develop, as a provincial conservation agency a high degree of sophistication for doing conservation. Past successes will continue to give us the motivation to work even harder and I find this to be helpful (EKZNW interviewee # 20).

With the benefit of hindsight, considering terms of the history of conservation in KZN, I would submit that such sentiments are justifiable if we consider the important role that conservation has played for more than a century in KZN. There is no doubt, for example, that initiatives such as the Operation Rhino and the Sea Turtle project and many other innovations helped KZN gain international recognition for its role in conservation. Tendencies of 'historicising' itself and its situation in ways that were suggestive of self-praise were common:

Over the last 100 years of formal conservation in KwaZulu-Natal, this large world class organization, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, has regularly achieved local, national and international acclaim for its continued outstanding contribution to conservation and eco-tourism. Probably the best known conservation success story is bringing the white rhino back from the brink of extinction (EKZNW online)⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ Available at: http://www.kznwildlife.com/our_org.htm; accessed on 5 February, 2004:

The beliefs that emerged in relation to this assumption included sentiments about motivation, a commitment to KZN, opportunism, retrospection and introspection and resistance to change.

Motivation

Heritage was thought to be the component which made EKZNW and by extension, its employees special. It was expressed as a great source of motivation, both officially (i.e. expressed in official documentation) and individually:

... we are very fortunate to be involved in both the protection and conservation of such a special region of South Africa. Examples are myriad but where else do you find two areas of a single province having regions proclaimed as world heritage sites? In 1999, the Greater St. Lucia Wetland park received this accolade and now in November 2000 the Ukahlamba – Drakensberg Park has been awarded this status as a “mixed natural and cultural site”, a unique combination of outstanding landscape and one of the greatest collection of rock art boasting some 40 000 images. It is the 23rd “mixed property” to be declared in the world (Hughes in EKZNW 2001: 4).

We have the largest concentration of white and black rhinos and this is a great accomplishment – it is a legacy everyone working here takes pride in. And we are going ahead with innovations that will further promote our work with local communities and the private sector. While these initiatives are relatively new, I see us being ahead of the pack in some respects (EKZNW interviewee 5).

In some ways, this motivation counteracted the feelings of the frustration which others felt about the transformation process (including amalgamation, restructuring and retrenchments) which the organization has been undergoing over the years. There was an unusual blend of motivation and frustration that in for some individuals led to highly emotional sentiments:

It (heritage) helps to keep us together even though I know that the transformation was bloody hell for all of us. No one was sure of what would happen the next day but we chose to stay nevertheless (EKZNW interviewee # 14).

A commitment to KwaZulu-Natal

... when the anti-nagana operations came to an end, the government [national] had begrudgingly to give up their hold over the Umfolozi Game reserve. They did this when it was conclusively proved that they had had the place only on loan (Vincent 1989: 209).

We fought to retain Provincial control of the wild estate of Natal and Zululand and all of these efforts made it impossible to have a 7 to 5 job. One was ‘on call’ 24 hours a day (Geddes-Page 2002: 2).

As can be inferred from the above quotations of two former Directors of the NPB, control over the reserves in KZN has been a contentious matter. Statements suggesting a great affinity for and inclination towards the province were common during the course of the study:

KwaZulu-Natal boasts of excellent, near pristine areas and it is a privilege for us to be associated with the organization responsible for conservation in this part of South Africa. It makes perfect sense to argue that this organization is there because of what we as a province have identified as unique ecological and cultural values that ought to be conserved (EKZNW interviewee # 16).

Affiliation to the province was also expressed in terms of the interpretation of the organization's greatest challenges:

Our biggest challenge is an understanding within our electorate if you like, the people of KwaZulu-Natal as to what we do, what does it mean for them and what is in it for them. That is a huge challenge for us, and we have to get our act together to prove our relevance and justify continued state funding. Probably there are many more things, but these are the main ones in my view (EKZNW interviewee # 8).

Such sentiments were even echoed officially:

The Province of KwaZulu-Natal has determined a Growth and Development Strategy which creates the imperatives that will build a winning province. It is essential that the mandate and core business functions of KZN Wildlife are aligned with and supportive of this strategic direction (EKZNW undated: 5).

This study indicates that EKZNW perceived its role as transcending mere conservation efforts and management of protected areas. The role of the organization was seen not only as being in the service of the province but also being a fundamental part of the province, hence the need for its conservation efforts to help define provincial identity. As the above quotations demonstrate, EKZNW perceives itself as fulfilling a responsibility of custodial and altruistic value to the province. This view, it seems is driven by a fundamental belief in the notion that conservation can and has made important contributions to the province in the past.

Opportuneness

Linked to the element of long heritage, opportuneness was thought to be critical for current developments faced by the organization. An example is the notion of branding which is currently receiving a lot of attention in the light of the organization's commercialization agenda. Branding in business literature is an important strategic tool,

especially because of its role in building reputation and consequently distinctive advantage in the marketplace (Kay 1993). It was noted that important among EKZNW's distinctive attributes was the 'KwaZulu-Natal' brand which combines the natural and cultural heritage:

There are a large number of opportunities and options available to be explored. For example, KwaZulu-Natal has a number of unique characteristics that can be marketed, including the juxtaposition of biodiversity and culture in the "Kingdom of the Zulu" and this brand is accessible to KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife (EKZNW undated: 23).

To others, the province of KZN, with its unique blend of cultural and conservation heritage was regarded to be an under-exploited competitive advantage. As one respondent commented,

... if you were to ask me what is the competitive advantage for KwaZulu-Natal? For me, it is the Zulu kingdom and nature conservation combined. That for me is what we should be selling this province on (EKZNW interviewee # 20).

In other words, there is perhaps a growth towards an opportune style in decision-making. Recognition of the fact that EKZNW could benefit from the province's cultural identity also speaks to a lowering of the previously high levels of insularity where everything revolved principally around conservation.

Retrospection

EKZNW's commitment to its heritage is evident in some of its official documentation, public pronouncements and the presence of a statue of Douglas Mitchell in the foyer. Retrospection was reportedly involved in creating feelings of commitment, pride and motivation. At the same time, however, commitment to heritage appeared to pose a potential downside. Some of the interviewees expressed concern that upholding the legacy if not carefully done could lead to carrying undesirable characteristics of the past into the future:

Not everything about our past in conservation is good and we must be very careful not to take everything from the past into the future. We are very conscious about that, and the South African society will not sit and back watch us do that (EKZNW interviewee # 20).

Put differently, while a commitment to the organization was seen in a positive light by most of the respondents, others were more cautious about it. For example, some argued that because of its origins which benefited from excessive support by some political

leaders, the NPB was seen as a ‘protected’ organization. Consequent upon this protection was a sense of entitlement. Some believed that a subtle but pervasive sense of entitlement still exists in the new organization, reportedly not good for the organization’s desired strategic business directions:

I believe that staff within this organization have strong feelings of entitlement. In helping actually performing life's work that they are doing, they feel that the organization owes them a whole lot. And I would actually like to change that because they are rewarded financially for what they get, to take away the feeling of entitlement so that this organization can be run more like a business as opposed to a non-business organization (EKZNW interviewee # 13).

Feelings of entitlement could be traced back to the early days of KZN’s conservation efforts – the days when for example, the NPB enjoyed ‘protection’ of those in authority:

When problems seemed to verge upon the insurmountable I had always the comfort of knowing there was always a warm friend [Douglas Mitchell] and tower of strength in the background, ready to take up needed cudgels with anyone in authority, from a Prime Minister to a Police Superintendent (Vincent 1989: 221).

In short, while retrospection engendered motivation, pride and motivation, it also posed threats in terms of lack of flexibility and an attachment to past developments, priorities and practices. This, according to some of the respondents meant that performance was likely to be viewed in terms of precedence – what happened in the past and using past values and standards. An example was in relation to perceptions that since the change of management which has resulted in more black personnel taking up positions of authority, standards were falling⁶¹. A comment on the alleged drop in standards went thus:

When they talk about standards, whose standards are they talking about? Were those standards realistic? If we used them today, would they adequately reflect the socio-political and economic realities of a modernising democratic African country? I do not think so, especially that those values and standards were Euro-centric. We need to refocus our attention now on Afro-centric values so that we can see conservation performance in terms of the challenges we face as an African country (EKZNW interviewee # 19).

Resistance to change

It is a known fact that tensions are often engendered when the pressures of the environment demand strategies that might be seen as compromising the *status quo*. Mixed feelings were noted in respect of some of the initiatives under way in the country

⁶¹ This is a clear example of a mythology present in the organization amongst some employees.

in terms of how they might impact on conservation in the province. A good example is in relation to the ongoing efforts of national government to rationalize the conservation sector in South Africa (DEAT 2002). There were concerns about the organization losing its best wildlife assets in the proposed arrangements, something that was seen as potentially problematic as it would ultimately deprive the organization of important income streams. While the organization's formal position supports the initiative in general (EKZNW and DAEA 2003), some individual respondents were especially worried about the implications of these changes.

One cannot afford to be naïve as to overlook the serious implications that the Protected Areas Bill might have for this organization. Whichever direction one looks at it, it is obvious that it is going to dilute this organization's hold on this province (EKZNW interviewee # 8).

After working on St. Lucia for nearly 20 years, these bastards found it convenient to place it under national authority. It is also likely that Ukahlamba Drakensburg might slip out of provincial control in a similar way; taking with it the deep emotional attachment the province has had with the park and the opportunities for income generation... (External observer).

Others, however, adopted a view that showed inclination to the cause of conservation and not necessarily the organization:

It does not matter so much which organization ends up doing conservation in the province. If the push by national government to reconfigure the institutional landscape of conservation in the country is in the best interests of conservation, then there is no need to worry. My desire is to see the best conservation work being done in this province and the people in the province equitably benefiting from our parks (EKZNW interviewee # 14).

The former NPB, as mentioned earlier, enjoyed constantly growing and high levels of funding. There was concern that employees, especially those previously associated with the NPB saw themselves as impoverished scions of a once wealthy agency, now battling to acquire money for its operations. This sense of frustration was expressed as a source of opposition, but it was also compounded by old affiliations and divisions between the old and the new:

Conservatism was at the core of the NPB. Change of any kind was likely to be resisted in every possible manner. Past successes of the NPB are often used as an excuse for opposing change ... it is like a psychological safeguard for some people (EKZNW interviewee 8)

Resistance is real, especially among the middle aged, male, middle managers formerly associated with the NPB. They oppose all sorts of changes. They won't tell you in your face but you will hear about it as corridor talk. It is ... frustrating (EKZNW interviewee # 11).

6.2.5 Section summary

The foregoing section has outlined the basic assumptions that seem to be interacting with strategy at EKZNW and the resultant attitudes: a deep commitment to the province of KZN, an equally deep commitment to public service conservation ideals, the perception of being ‘leaders in conservation’ premised on both past and present successes, and a conviction that EKZNW plays an important role in protecting and carrying forward the natural and cultural heritage of KZN.

But as Schein underscores, the true character of assumptions lies in their interaction. Arising from the EKZNW assumptions are some paradoxes: while the same set of assumptions generate motivation and a set of exemplary attitudes (responsibility, sense of higher purpose, commitment to KZN, etc.), they paradoxically bring with them a set of implicit attitudes that promote gloominess such as resistance to change, anti-commercialism, insularity and the negative elements of retrospection, pride, arrogance and insularity. Figure 6.1 summarizes the pattern of basic assumptions at EKZNW and the attitudes and beliefs emanating from them.

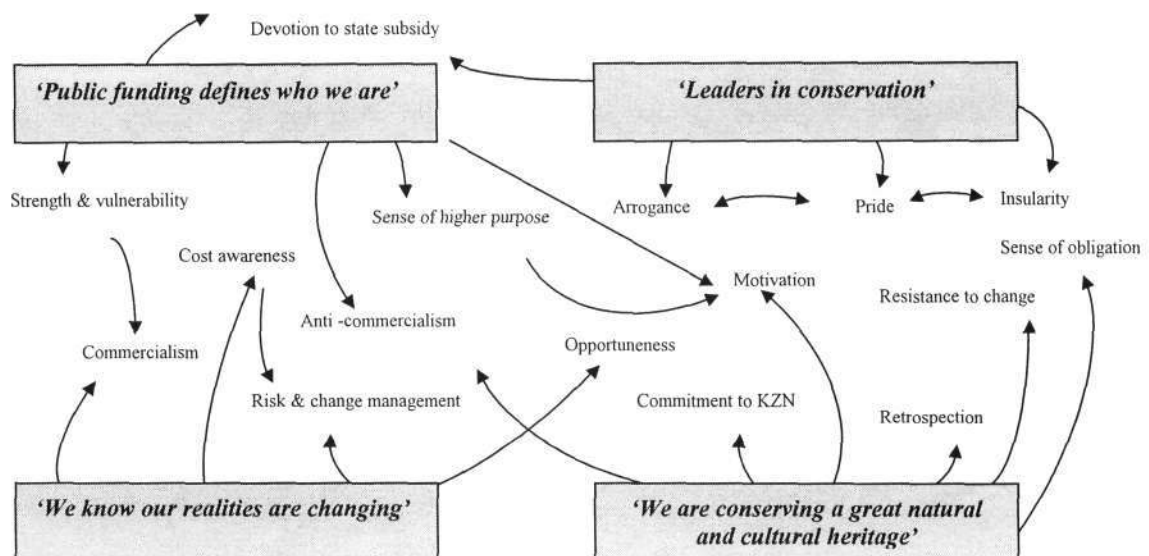


Figure 6.1: EKZNW's pattern of basic assumptions and the attitudes emanating from them as elements of the EKZNW organizational culture

6.3 INTERACTION OF BASIC ASSUMPTIONS WITH STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The point of departure in this section is the view that there is a relationship between organizational culture, environment and strategies. How this relationship plays itself out was discussed in chapter 3 and summarized in Figure 3.2 was used to illustrate this relationship. In summary, I drew on Schein (1992) and others (e.g. Argyris 1977) to elucidate that organizational culture, through its underlying assumptions is a strong determinant of how the environment is perceived. Especially, cultural assumptions were postulated as strong determinants of how the environment is perceived and experienced. Such perspectives and experiences in turn are crucial to the development of an articulate strategic approach to dealing with environmental developments.

Also emphasized was the notion of basic assumptions and their existence as a shared pattern. I drew on the view that an important set of shared assumptions often relates to an organization's strategic processes and priorities (Schein 1992). In this way, organizational culture serves as a covert determinant and influence of strategic decisions, processes and priorities. Basic assumptions can either be supportive or otherwise to both strategy processes and objectives. In this section, I review how the shared unconscious basic assumptions, in other words, the core of EKZNW's organizational culture, are influencing its present strategic objectives. It is, therefore, important that I begin with an overview of the niche strategic areas for EKZNW's operations with a view to ultimately demonstrating culture's link to strategy.

6.3.1 Overview of strategy at EKZNW

EKZNW's strategy is in response to a number of environmental developments. While there might be many environmental factors to which strategies are responding, the main ones which emerged from interviewing the participants were:

- increasing calls for **responsiveness and relevance** consistent with the democratization of the state and society;
- **conservation sector instability** due to ongoing policy reforms and attempts to restructure the conservation sector at both national and provincial levels;

- **financial pressures** and uncertainties arising from a flat income, rising costs, expanding responsibilities and concomitant expectations;
- **land transformation** which has led to biodiversity conservation challenges and the increased pace of development (for example, urban sprawl) in KZN.

Each of these forces has received attention in the EKZNW's strategic plan and processes (EKZNW 2002). Prospects for synergy amongst the strategic initiatives being proposed or already underway for addressing challenges pertaining to responsiveness and relevance were expressed by interviewees. Mainstreaming of community conservation efforts by the formation of local boards as statutory local level institutions for protected area management, the introduction of community levy as an initiative for raising money for community development projects and joint ventures with local communities were all, in general terms, favourably considered (EKZNW 2001).

Generally, respondents did not show any strong aversion to these initiatives. Perceptions of strategies aimed at addressing land transformation and of pressures concerning the conservation sector also were seen as positive. On the contrary, it was the initiatives towards financially related pressures that illuminated some tensions. The only exceptions to the tensions were those financially related strategic goals, initiatives and processes directed at addressing efficiency and partially for mainstreaming eco-tourism (Table 6.1).

6.3.2 Embracing business principles and commercialization as a dilemma

As explained earlier, reduction in state funding and related uncertainties have partially motivated the adoption of business principles and commercialization. In KZN, as in the other provinces in South Africa, funding is no longer sufficient to cover all aspects of protected area management and conservation (DEAT 2002). Budgets are so overstretched that they cannot sufficiently cover all the needs of conservation agencies. And yet, funding is an important determinant of what a conservation agency does, its capabilities and even the development of those capabilities. Limited state finances have led to an increasing strategic requirement for conservation to make its case compelling enough in order to justify continued state funding.

Table 6.1 Assessment of the fit between Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal's strategic objectives and basic assumptions

Environmental challenges	Strategic objective (& or relevant corporate thrust) & response*	Relationship with basic assumptions
Increased calls for responsiveness and relevance (via contribution to the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A single co-ordinated system • Benefits • Poverty reduction • Participation in decision-making • Land reform 	<p><i>Corporate thrust (s):</i> Risk management and diversity & change management</p> <p><i>Responses</i> Strengthened community conservation innovations and partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amalgamation, transformation, restructuring & regionalization • Local Boards • Community Levy • Community Conservation Programme • Joint ventures 	<p>✓</p> <p>⇒ Already committed to community conservation, partnerships & benefit sharing</p> <p>⇒ Strong track record of community engagement (for both ex-DNC and ex-NPB)</p>
Conservation sector instability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratization • New policies and legislation • Protected Area bill and Biodiversity Bill 	<p>Managing for uncertainty and change (risk management)</p> <p>Effecting management effectiveness</p>	<p>✓ ?</p> <p>⇒ Strong track record of working under unstable conditions</p> <p>⇒ Framework for risk management under development while managing for diversity and change management in formative stages</p> <p>⇒ National takeover of KZN's most valuable wildlife estates?</p>
Land transformation in ways that threaten biodiversity conservation	<p>Strategic objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure exemplary conservation of the indigenous biodiversity of KwaZulu-Natal both within and beyond protected areas. • To become a recognized centre of excellence and a leader in the conservation and sustainable use of KwaZulu-Natal's biological diversity in partnerships with people. • Systematic conservation planning and action/ Strategic Environmental Assessment 	<p>✓</p> <p>⇒ Already committed to the conservation ethos</p> <p>⇒ Growing track record in using IT in conservation and presence of scientific expertise</p> <p>⇒ Already a provincial authority</p>
Financial pressures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency improvements • Revenue generation • Business development • Inadequate state subsidy, etc. • Growing competition 	<p>Strategic objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To strive towards being self-sufficient and more viable through the medium of income generation and external funding • To establish appropriate functional management systems to adequately support strategic and operational management • To develop the eco-tourism potential resulting in delighted customers and an expanding market focus and profile <p>Responses Efficiency improvements across the organization</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>⇒ Internally recognized and reinforced by statutory requirement for responsible use of state subsidy</p>
	<p>Commercial activities (annual game auctioning, joint venture, eco-tourism re-development, etc.)</p>	<p>?</p> <p>⇒ Conflict with public service status; new skills take away attention & resources from conservation?</p>

Table 6.1 continued next page

Table 6.1 continued

	Development of new businesses	? ⇒ Limited experience in new business development?
	Robust business model	? ⇒ Different organizational skills base might limit performance?
	Mainstreaming eco-tourism	✓ ? ⇒ Strong track record in eco-tourism ⇒ Limited experience in competitive business environment?
	Joint ventures/ partnerships	? ⇒ Conflict with public service status?

* The items in this column are all extracted from the corporate strategic plan (EKZNW 2002)

Interestingly, it appears that the problem of funding towards conservation is not being merely acknowledged, but is also serving as a motivation for embracing business principles and commercialization:

There is no doubt in my mind that the course we have set ourselves in attempting to present conservation as a multifaceted business enterprise involving wildlife and environmental management and most importantly, an industry inclusive of all our people is paying handsome dividends (Hughes in EKZNW 2001: 7).

With these kinds of views, it is not surprising that creating a sustainable business model has been a preoccupation for EKZNW for some time now (EKZNW 2002). Opportuneness has emerged as one of the strong traits of the organization in terms of seeking financial resources or minimising costs. This has been necessary for the organization to strategically reposition itself in order to achieve greater levels of competitiveness in biodiversity conservation and eco-tourism. Identification of new business opportunities is an inherent feature of the business model. Embracing business principles and commercialization has been seen as an acceptable challenge, but as some people noted, it should not be at the total expense of what the organization has historically stood for:

I guess the restructured Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife has identified its core business as conservation, an objective to be achieved in concert with partnership with communities and other stakeholders and the tapping of the province's eco-tourism potential to the fullest extent possible. Embracing business principles, I hope will drive us more towards financial sustainability without having to lose our historical mission ... biodiversity conservation (EKZNW interviewee # 2).

Feelings of pessimism were also evident. While the application of business principles was in theory accepted, concerns were raised on their implications, especially in the long term, of the growing commercialization of conservation. In fact, some sentiments were so strong that they bordered on being anti-commercial:

This [commercialization] is something that has been forced on us by government in response to changing realities. We seem to have accepted, not only in this organization, but the entire conservation sector in the country the delusion that commercialism will solve all of conservation's ills. My personal view is that we are not, and should not be considered as a business because we do not exist to optimise shareholder wealth (EKZNW interviewee # 9).

While it is true we are cash strapped, it is only realistic to claim that commercialization will not solve all our problems. At best, it can only make a contribution to our budget. More emphasis needs to be on efficiencies as opposed to the business argument because it can be utterly misleading (EKZNW interviewee 13).

Perceptions of custodial responsibility appeared to serve as the main motivation behind the organization's innovations in conservation over the years. Against this backdrop, one sees at EKZNW an emergent and interesting combination of the altruistic with the commercial/ business realities. However, managing the potential tensions of mixing the two is likely to remain a challenge for some time to come:

Even though we are attempting to offer destinations and accommodations equal to those in the private sector, our concentration on customer service has a very strong public responsibility being the custodians of our parks and protected areas. In short, we have to compete, but at the same time, make our resorts affordable to the general public and schools, for example (Nzimande in EKZNW 2001: 2).

This quotation demonstrates the inherent tensions that the organization is dealing with as a public sector organization, increasingly expected to go the commercialism route, and having to deal with the implications thereof in terms of affordability and revenue generation. It means that the organization has the inherent task of continuously trying to balance the budget and serving the public. This development has in recent times been a serious issue to the extent that the organization has sought to alter its expertise composition by bringing in those with private sector experience to help run some of its functions. It was nonetheless clear in the sentiments expressed during the interviews that while business principles were being acknowledged and accepted in the organization, the organization's historical

mandate of conservation which is premised on the public service ethos was by no means to be seen as being of secondary importance.

6.3.3 Does commercialization undermine public service commitment?

The basic assumptions of EKZNW are both supportive and pessimistic regarding commercial activities. Widespread agreement exists regarding the important opportunities that lie in some commercial activities, especially eco-tourism. Greater financial efficiency is seen as a potential reliever of pressure on the organization's over-stretched finances. By extension, efficiency is seen as an opportunity to free up resources to invest in its conservation activities and services so that the organization can maintain and better still improve on its relevance in KZN and the country at large. An implicit desire, therefore, is to maximise benefits from the eco-tourism sector which effectively means acquiring a reasonable segment of the market. The fact that the organization's permitted commercial activities are limited, means it makes sense to concentrate growth on eco-tourism. Continued state funding and its ability to fight off growing competition depends on the organization's ability to produce innovative high quality conservation initiatives.

However, emphasis on commercial activities, an aspect which is anticipated to grow in the future, raised latent and subtle tensions in some respects. These latent tensions illuminate the ongoing attempts by the culture to align itself with commercial activities which might in some cases even be said to be an affront to some assumptions in its cultural paradigm – the public service ethos, and the commitment to conservation for altruistic reasons. Important though, the sentiments expressed were not done so much as to voice a total objection to the idea of commercialization. Discomfort centred on a suspicion that the challenges of embracing commercialization are being underplayed. The few that touched on this subject spoke more in terms of a need for caution against simplistic assumptions that all was well. They are of the view that despite being a good intention, commercialization implementation might not be easy, hence need for more care:

Going this route [commercialization] requires that we exercise utmost care, learning all we can along the way and bearing in mind that competition is stiff out there. No doubt we are

novices in business. In pursuing conservation, we should not forget that the key issue is funding – inadequacy of the budget. For me, this should be our focus. It is a matter of cost reduction, there is no alternative to cost cutting and this means pursuing efficiency in the most imaginative ways which ideally should not negatively impact our core functions (EKZNW interviewee # 19)

Commercialism appears to be a tolerable belief, given changing environments, but not necessarily a preferred one by all respondents. It is also interesting to note that many quotations use 'business' terminology, e.g. competition and subsidy indicative that EKZNW ought to be on a business path. However, given conservation's history which is rooted in public service, what does this mean? Here, I see a dilemma encapsulated in this question: are the basic assumptions of a 'commercialism' culture inconsistent with those of a public service one?

Reconciling the dilemma

Dealing with dilemmas is not strange to organizations seeking to address environmental developments as they impact on strategy and their cultures. The presence of seemingly contrasting intentions or desirable directions, many of which have a claim on the organization is a challenge that organizations are increasingly expected to deal with (Hampden-Turner 1990). Managing such paradoxes successfully is not only what is beginning to distinguish innovative and strategic organizations from those that are not, but also is a basic feature of dealing with complex environments (Handy 1995; Gomez 1995).

Although latent and presumably potential tensions have been highlighted, overall, there was a favourable climate for commercial activities amongst the respondents. This raises the question asked earlier: does the realization of the serious financial challenges facing the organization have a role in shaping current perceptions? It is plausible to argue that top management in the organization has simply stated its case: 'either we make money or we are doomed'. Symbolic and structural responses mentioned earlier are helping to reconcile the dilemma. Helping to reconcile the dilemma is an external stimulus in the form of increasing government calls for the agency to generate revenue from the assets under its control. It can be contended that the combined internal and external pressures as

well as recent initiatives, such as retrenchments, are demonstrating the need for financial sustainability and the seriousness attached thereto. It should also be mentioned that EKZNW has achieved some success in areas such as game auctioning and eco-tourism operations, and these are helping to build positive attitudes and perceptions of commercial activities (EKZNW 2002).

Drying oasis – what next?

Another dilemma derives from the organization's public funding status. In addition to the provision of money for operations every year, this status has a subtle but equally important role: it has been a fundamental source of motivation for commitment and performance. This motivation was expressed by one of the respondents in the statement that '*conservation was more than a career*'. The fact that the organization is funded from public coffers, in the interest of the public, promoted high commitment and performance in the organization in return for moderate financial remuneration:

It is only now that wages have improved in the conservation sector. They have historically been low, but people were committed because conservation is, and will always be, more than a career. This explains why, all other things being constant, staff turnover in the sector has historically been low (EKZNW interviewee # 19).

Nevertheless, state subsidy places its own demands on the organization. EKZNW must meet various stakeholder demands and policy imperatives simultaneously. This should be demonstrated in its processes, strategies and policies. This also requires the organization to develop and maintain a wide spectrum of outputs relevant to various constituencies to the best of its abilities. This has to happen in the context of an uncertain financial scenario. The opportunity cost to the conservation agency of such funding is undoubtedly critical. On the contrary, it is an opportunity benefit for the competitors, who can take advantage of it if they wish to, by employing carefully planned initiatives. Further analysis of EKZNW shows that its state subsidy status and the feelings it engenders are likely to remain controversial. Given the multitude of challenges that the government is facing in terms of social and economic development, conservation's role and access to limited financial resources is under severe scrutiny. Signs from the government, both provincial and national, are presently such that access to the state subsidy cannot be guaranteed. Aspects of its cultural paradigm might be strongly affected if significant cuts

occur in the state subsidy or worse still, if it is abolished; and if the role of EKZNW is expanded to strongly encompass commercial activities.

6.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter, I followed Schein's methodology to characterize the basic assumptions at play among those involved in planning strategy at EKZNW. Within these assumptions, it is evident that there are tensions and contradictions concerning a number of aspects around issues of strategy. Differences are noticeable between the conservation sector's historical inclinations towards public service and its emergent commercial activities. Evident from this analysis is the variety of perspectives interviewees used to interpret their understanding and meanings of what the fundamental mission of conservation ought to be. They saw conservation as an endeavour in the public interest, but also as an endeavour that increasingly requires new sources of income to supplement government funding. And yet, others felt that conservation needed to be well funded from public coffers if the employees were to commit their time to the cause of conservation and were able to worry less about finances. In the second part of the chapter, I have looked at how those basic assumptions might be responding to the strategic priorities of the Mkhize leadership. A prediction based on the analysis would seem to suggest there are difficulties to be expected for strategy on dealing with some of the initiatives within the commercialization agenda.

The diversity of views illustrates that those involved in the strategy processes of conservation agencies are socio-cultural beings, that is, what they know about conservation, their perceptions, interests and values with respect to conservation are inevitably an expression of socio-cultural and political forces. However, socio-cultural forces are dynamic over time so that the meanings associated with conservation now are radically different from what they were in the past. If socio-cultural forces are as critical to the management of conservation as I am suggesting, it means that they have to be understood better in dealing with the strategy processes of organisations. In the next chapter, I provide a discussion and evaluation of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks employed in this study.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION OF THE THORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the findings within the context of my theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Two major parts make up the chapter. The first is a discussion of the strategy concepts – mission, competencies, environment and stakeholders. This reflection is in terms of how the interpretation and perception of these concepts has changed, both at the individual and organizational levels. The second part is a review of the usefulness of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. In the latter, I address objective 3: *to assess the value of using a cultural perspective in the study of change in organizations* (bearing in mind that the conservation sector is used mainly for purposes of situating the study).

7.2 A REVIEW OF STRATEGY CONCEPTS

I start by reviewing the strategy concepts as espoused by Schein (1992) and others (Drucker 1995; Senge 1998) because it is only through an understanding of the evolution of the mission, and its influence on the interpretations of the environment, stakeholders and competencies that we can develop a reasonable grasp of an organization's strategies.

Mission

Initially, the mission was largely about conservation of certain species. Thus, the initial mission was clear and simple: the protection of wildlife⁶² and associated habitats. Simple as it may have been, however, the mission was critical from an organizational culture point of view in so far as it served to unite the members of the NPB. This was a unique period when the artefacts, espoused values and basic assumptions were consistent. The findings of this study have shown that because of the influence of the initial mission,

⁶² Even the term wildlife was condensed to focus on particular species rather than others, for example, rhinos and elephants.

there existed in the sector a conservationist culture with which a lot of the staff identified, individually and collectively. This culture affected how the conservation mission was interpreted and implemented.

This study also suggests that the mission of conservation has undergone a process of polarization in which the previous focus on species conservation ceased to be the only major concern⁶³. In terms of the present era, the relevance of species protection is implied in most of the excerpts (chapter 6), particularly those under the assumption about conserving a great natural and cultural heritage. However, conservation of species is only part of the mission as is officially espoused:

Biodiversity conservation is generally accepted as the underlying and paramount purpose [mission], but conservation organizations have to perform many functions to achieve this purpose, and these functions are not limited to the management of biodiversity per se. They include a diversity of functions, which must be performed, since they are either executive policy or strategic functions, are critical for the achievement of key performance areas, have long term implications, or are required by law (EKZNW undated: 3).

Some individual interviewees echoed the official sentiments that:

...the mission of the organization is to ensure biodiversity conservation, and we are acknowledging that we can't ensure biodiversity conservation if we don't include the people of this province. So, it's actually conservation through the people. That's our mission (EKZNW interviewee # 15).

We can see from the above that the mission has not stayed the same. In fact, the polarization in the interpretation of the mission started under Vincent, and has continued to date. The difference, however, is that the additions to the mission now have a much stronger legal basis. Whereas eco-tourism (and public recreation), community involvement and commercialism were seen to dilute the mission, they are now part of the espoused institutional and legal mandate. Even the espoused mission of conservation in KZN now reflects this understanding: "To ensure sustainable biodiversity conservation and eco-tourism management in KwaZulu-Natal in partnership with the people" (EKZNW 2002: 5).

⁶³ This change should not in any way be seen to denigrate species conservation for it continues to be a critical component of the mission.

Trends in leadership suggest that the mission, while at all times underpinned by the conservation ethos under a bureaucratic structure, was understood and interpreted differently at different times. Interpretation was, and continues to reflect changes in the pressures, expectations and demands in the environment. Changes to the mission and interpretation thereof arose in response to a number of major developments including the:

- introduction of scientists as part of the staff complement of the NPB;
- mainstreaming of tourism/ recreation within the operations of the NPB;
- emergence of community conservation initiatives as an imperative;
- financial problems and emergence of commercialization as a partial solution;
- calls for relevance and responsiveness of conservation to the broader society

The latter two developments can be much more strongly associated with the last two leaderships of conservation in KZN. While conservation was initially largely about enforcement, the introduction of scientists brought some degree of polarization amongst the staff because of interpretational differences of the mission. Views on the skills deemed more critical to the mission basically divided the organization into two camps: managers – with an inclination towards enforcement and scientists – with an emphasis on scientific knowledge and research. Promotion of tourism and recreation did not prevent polarization either. It added to the polarization in the interpretation of the mission and perpetuation of attitudes of ‘protecting the turf’ amongst managers, scientists and those bent on promoting tourism and recreation. Channelling resources to tourism and recreation was interpreted as taking away resources from the core tasks of enforcement and scientific research. Appointments of tourism and recreation staff to senior positions, the acquisition of dams as recreation sites (in urban and not rural areas in some cases) and the creation of a huge tourism/ recreation division under a Director served as artefacts that reinforced the afore-mentioned fears which I must add, were grounded in stereotypes, power plays and politics amongst those involved.

While all the above was happening, an identity crisis among the staff in the organization was looming and with time, it was real, deep and fast expanding. For most of the time during the leadership of Geddes-Page and Hughes, the NPB was divided and united at the

same time. Although Hughes' restructuring efforts showed an inclination towards enforcement and scientific research, he could not completely abandon the tourism and recreation function. It had by the late 1980s become an accepted role for the NPB on the one hand, and an important source of revenue on the other hand. The least Hughes could do was to strategically reorganize the tourism and recreation function so that it operated more effectively and efficiently.

The identity crisis, however, took on another dimension with the emergence of the community conservation initiatives which were a consequence of a paradigm shift in the global and regional thinking on conservation. While the creation of conservancies was not without challenges, it was the engagement of local black communities which held peculiar challenges for the NPB. Not only did the NPB lack a history of working with black communities on conservation and related issues, but also it made a radical departure from its previously authoritarian way to which it was accustomed to dealing with black communities. And obviously, the NPB staff complement of scientists, enforcement personnel and those in tourism and recreation did not have the necessary background or practical experience in implementing community conservation initiatives in black communities (Hughes 2001). Resultant frustrations and perceptions on whether the NPB was suitably positioned to contribute to the livelihood and development needs of local communities further complicated the NPB's internal identity crisis.

Because the pressures were overpowering, within about half a century, the mission has been significantly altered to embrace even aspects to which conservation was initially averse, for example, local livelihoods and development needs and participation of stakeholders. From adopting a previously hard-core position, the conservation sector in KZN changed, initially under Nick Steele during his tenure with the DNC and later under George Hughes at the NPB, and started adopting an approach to conservation that included people (DNC 1997; Hughes 2001). This entailed the identification of creative synergies between the integrity of ecosystems and livelihoods of people living and working in and near protected areas. The goal of this approach was arguably to enhance the conservation mission through mechanisms that not only supported local communities'

livelihoods but also relied on their support. An important point to note is that there was a major difference in this undertaking between the two erstwhile organizations: for the DNC, engaging and working with local communities was an inherent aspect of its formation and was thus part of the institutional mandate. Of course, one could argue that the time of its formation – the early 1980s, and the place of its operations – Zululand, both influenced the development of the DNC's institutional mandate. In other words, there was already a lively but unresolved debate about the merits of the 'people included' approach while high levels of poverty characterized Zululand and the interrelated strong consumptive demands for natural resources.

For the NPB, it was an administrative decision taken under Hughes' leadership to consider relationships among species and habitats, human uses and ecological awareness to find ways to address the conservation challenges (Hughes *pers. comm.*). Arguably, this change in direction for the NPB was based on an interpretation of its environment and on a revision of its mission. It may be correct, however, to also argue that there was a new recognition that the protection and management of protected areas on their own were not sufficient tools with which to promote biodiversity conservation. This was going to happen only if the NPB communicated with the people who lived or worked within or near protected areas, including areas proposed as protected areas and only if sustainable stewardship principles were incorporated into all existing and proposed sites. Thus, the NPB began consultative processes to involve a variety of interested and affected parties in managing protected areas. Changes to the mission have not been in isolation. They also have forced changes to the other three 'strategy concepts' as I demonstrate below.

Environment

A major issue regarding previous strategies was the extent to which environmental developments were not considered to be critical in conservation strategy and management. Again, the assumptions brought out in this study amongst the executive staff at EKZNW (chapter 6) suggest that actually, the environment is considered critical for strategy processes. Respondents demonstrated that the environment is no longer perceived as the previous 'source of problems' one has to contend with. The changed

perception, at least officially, can be deciphered from EKZNW's corporate definition of strategy with regard to its vision and purpose: "an adaptive process of interpreting challenges and opportunities of the environment and designing an approach to achieve its overall vision and purpose" (EKZNW undated: 2). Recognition of the environment was also implied in statements relating to the founding of the organization (EKZNW) under a democratic dispensation, and how the same democratic dispensation has engendered forces which the organization has to be cognisant of and responsive to:

... [Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal] Wildlife was created as a result of the sweeping changes of the new democratic South Africa. ... Meeting these challenges [of unprecedented changes] and seizing these opportunities is imperative if viable and effective nature conservation management is to be sustained into the future (EKZNW undated: 1).

The democratization of the state and society in South Africa has seen the empowerment of communities, especially those living under communal land tenure, and has stimulated responses regarding resource use, land rights, land management policies, participation, control, and more generally, the relevance of nature conservation to a much wider constituency (EKZNW undated: 2).

Stakeholders

A narrow definition of the mission, and a strong belief that the conservation sector was fulfilling a custodial rather than a stewardship role, ensured that stakeholders were almost non-existent in the thinking of conservationists. Previously, autocratic tendencies and a pervasive perception that the environment was generally hostile to conservation promoted a sense of autonomy and control. As long as enforcement was ensured, there was not much to worry about. My analysis of early strategies of conservation suggests that the concept of having stakeholders was not tenable under those circumstances. However, a considerable turn around seems to have been registered in terms of perceptions about stakeholders. This change, I would argue has occurred over time and dramatically in recent years. The change has occurred against a backdrop of the acceptance of the role of stakeholders in different aspects of conservation management. The discussion of the basic assumption about 'Conserving a great natural and cultural heritage' supports this view. Incorporation of stakeholders' related issues in the legislation has undoubtedly helped this process. This study shows that the notion of stakeholders participation is widely understood and includes perspectives including support for the objectives, sustainability

of initiatives, earning legitimacy, diversity of stakeholders and the decision making process:

Working with different partners, we can achieve our twin objectives of conservation and financial sustainability. The significance of our partners is going to become even more critical in the future, for without them, our work faces insurmountable challenges. Without their active involvement, the strategy I am explaining would even more difficulty than it presently is the case" (EKZNW interviewee 1).

I guess the restructured Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife has identified its core business as conservation, an objective to be achieved in partnership with communities and other stakeholders and the tapping of the province's eco-tourism potential to the fullest extent possible. Embracing business principles, I hope will drive us more towards financial sustainability without having to lose our historical mission on biodiversity conservation (EKZNW interviewee # 2)

Things inevitably take longer than before; there is a lot more consultation processes. You cannot simply say, 'we are culling elephants' for example. You have to consult with welfare organizations, with other people who could be affected. So I think the time for paramilitary conservation agencies is actually gone. Moreover, there are people's rights to consider too. (EKZNW interviewee # 7).

EKZNW has committed itself to forging partnerships with neighbouring communities, traditional authorities, municipal structures, provincial and central government departments, user groups and international agencies as well as NGOs (EKZNW undated). The recognition of the role of stakeholders has further been emphasized by the establishment of *Conservation Partnerships* as one of the core-functions (EKZNW 2002) as well as by the recognition of the centrality of stakeholders to meeting the mission and its attendant goals:

[Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal] Wildlife's primary responsibility to conserve, sustain and equitably share the benefits of biodiversity indigenous to KwaZulu-Natal can only be achieved if there is broad political and community support for the organization, if it equitably represents the demographic composition of the province, reflects and supports the province's values and objectives, and if employees are capable and committed (EKZNW undated: 10).

Sentiments suggestive of a willingness to recognize different values, interests and concerns were expressed in different ways. This includes openness to various types of natural resource management entitlements, transparency, equity and allowing of stakeholders to assume important roles and responsibilities. Recognizing that stakeholders are heterogeneous, some respondents emphasized the need to harness the relative advantages of different institutional actors. Similarly, there is a growing

recognition of the need to adapt conservation policy and implementation in order to increase the chances of gaining support from stakeholders.

From the above, we see that there is a need to track shifting stakeholder interests and coalitions. For EKZNW or any other conservation agency, tracking stakeholder interests should not be viewed as a 'one off' activity. Rather, from the way the notion of stakeholders has evolved in the context of this study, it seems more realistic to think of stakeholders as being part of coalitions and interests that constantly change over time. In other words, their support will increase and reduce as a function of changing interests, relative shifts in power among social groups, increases in capacity, perception of conservation policy success, etc.

Competencies

Changed interpretations of the mission, environment and stakeholders have collectively challenged perceptions of competencies or knowledge and skills needed for conservation. The changing nature of competencies needed by the conservation sector to effectively perform its roles, I argue, reflects the changes in the mission and associated goals. Whereas the major competencies required in the past mainly involved enforcement and relevant scientific expertise, there is presently a growing need for expertise in different fields, some of which were previously non-existent or not considered, in conservation circles, to be relevant. In this study, while respondents did not always make specific reference to required expertise, they implied it in terms of statements they made. Examples are provided below:

We are looking trying to turn round our tourism business so that it becomes more competitive because it started decades ago when there was no competition, and now the tourism industry has developed incredibly. We haven't been marketing our facilities, so we have actually become uncompetitive financially (EKZNW interviewee # 1).

I still feel a bit concerned that we haven't got effective strategies down at the middle class levels of our tourism business. That is where our real hopes lie if we are to expand our client profile (EKZNW interviewee # 20).

What was interesting in discussions of competencies was that the majority of respondents pointed to eco-tourism, commercialism or the management of finances as particular

domains in which competencies were either lacking or low. This view was also reflected in official documentation:

The recognized shortage of financial, commercial and administrative skills at all levels of the organization is a major impediment toward future success. Closely related to this are the cumbersome manual systems of processing requiring significant duplication and delays in system processing and reporting. Upgrading systems exacerbates the skills problem, as staff have difficulty in upgrading both skills and the necessary infrastructure, [for example], computer systems. There is also poor accountability to financial performance measures as financial accountability is largely limited to remaining within a budget, and not for increasing value (EKZNW undated: 7).

If present indications are anything to go by, we can anticipate that the issue of competencies is likely to be an important corporate strategic focus area for EKZNW. Indeed, in its 2004-2007 corporate strategic plan, this is illuminated in the objective “to improve staff skills and knowledge in alignment with organizational strategy”⁶⁴ and this strategy clearly puts a lot of emphasis on commercialization as a way to generate additional income.

7.3 REVIEWING THE THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

In this section, I review the usefulness of both the theoretical and conceptual frameworks adopted for the study. With regard to the latter, I address the third objective of this study, i.e. the usefulness of a cultural perspective. In this regard, since I chose Schein’s framework, it follows that I have to assess the usefulness of this particular framework. In both instances, I will draw upon the ideas from the two results and analysis chapters to explain my views. But before I address the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, it is important to review the hypothesis and my findings in that respect.

My hypothesis was stated thus: *failure and or absence of mechanisms that promote dialogue around basic assumptions with respect to environmental developments predisposes conservation agencies to suffer the disruptive effects of change*. This hypothesis presupposes a functional communication pattern based on some form of mechanism that helps to structure and track the discussions. In other words, coping and surviving the pressures imposed by change requires mechanisms for dialogue that explicitly address the changes⁶⁵ in basic assumptions. In other words, a central feature of

⁶⁴ Available on line at: http://www.kznwildlife.com/strategic_plan04.htm#corp

this hypothesis is communication; namely how well or badly the respondents perceive their organization's communications.

Based on what we have learned in terms of the centrality of basic assumptions to organizational culture in this study, the above-stated hypothesis can be restated by emphasizing the importance of talking about basic assumptions in an explicit way. I find this view especially helpful considering that one of the major weaknesses highlighted in the study had to do with communication. What was interesting was not only the mere identification of communication as a challenge for the organization, but also the various interpretations of the communication problem, especially in relation to its source, remedy and effects as illustrated in the quotations below:

We know that we have a communication problem in the organization. In certain sections of the organization, strategies are not adequately discussed downwards, and in a sense opinions are not adequately communicated upwards and so inevitably, comments/ ideas are not adequately expressed upwards. So there has been a degree of polarization between senior staff and this is particularly true for people in the field (EKZNW interviewee # 19).

Communication is exceptionally a problem in this organization. We receive the press reports from the media office. And I think this is no way a criticism, but I think we do not communicate good news often enough. It is often more informative like it's good time for hiking in the berg or cray fish season; but the real success stories that are happening on the ground are not making into the local market place (EKZNW interviewee 4)

...we have created reporting lines within the regions, but the reporting lines from the regions to the head office function holders are very blurred. They are very often misunderstood and either abused or misused for not doing something I tend to suggest. But I also tend to think that head office in its present form is almost removed from the operations on the ground; its kind of we and they, the executive support staff and field staff; and we have almost created an artificial barrier between the two of us (EKZNW interviewee # 11).

Communication is very poor indeed. It is poor within the building here at head office, it is even worse between head office and the regions and between regions or amongst regions themselves. Obviously, decisions taken by the executive should be communicated throughout the organization. That is not happening as effectively as it should. In other words, the executive through various channels of communication should be communicating, they are not communicating (EKZNW interviewee # 14).

I think regards poor communication, we do not share information readily and our internal communication and our internal marketing of the organization is severely lacking. And I think that this in some way gives rise to the cynicism, depression and the pessimism because people are not hearing the success stories and the good news in areas where they are predominantly facing difficulties like poaching, snaring and law enforcement because it is very easy to get caught up in that kind of cycle of gloom and doom when there's actually a lot of good happening (EKZNW interviewee # 21).

⁶⁵ It is not always a case of change in basic assumptions, but an understanding of the assumptions at play as well.

The problem of communication was also acknowledged officially: “whilst there is a communication and reporting structure within the organization, the chain is relatively long and communication either fades up and down the line or becomes distorted (EKZNW undated: 5). External stakeholders have their views regarding EKZNW’s communication: “I’d say that overall the communication is old fashioned, and requires a complete overhaul in terms of communicating both the benefits of what they are doing as well as dealing with criticisms. They tend to be a bit reactive in terms of communicating with people” (External observer⁶⁶). With the diversity of views illustrated in the previous chapter as part of the cultural paradigm, and given the sentiments about the state of communication, we can realistically anticipate problems in reaching the core of the culture, namely its basic assumptions. After applying Schein’s model in this study, I am of the view that the model can be useful in this regard as will be elaborated later in this chapter.

7.3.1 Evaluating the theoretical framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study needs to be evaluated as it has implications on the validity and relevance of the study findings. In assessing the usefulness of the framework, it is important to retrace the steps on how the various theories were brought together. The process of developing the theoretical framework began in the review of literature where I started with a generic review and narrowed this down to critical perspectives on organizational culture. To further clarify the critical perspective, I outlined my theoretical framework in which I discussed hermeneutics, and critical theory, focusing on structuration theory and the notion of critical self-reflexivity by Kondrat. This is how far, in my opinion, the theoretical framework could be used. I needed then to find a mechanism of uncovering the hidden assumptions which individuals hold and use as instruments for critical self-reflectivity. I found Schein’s framework instructive in this regard. Below I explain my reasons for this view.

⁶⁶ This respondent has a professional interest in the activities of EKZNW due to his organization’s reliance on tourism operations in KZN.

Based on the understandings from all these perspectives, I adopted Schein's conceptual framework, the reason being that not only does Schein address the notion of organizational culture, but also he outlines a research methodology that conforms to hermeneutics, critical theory, structuration and critical self-reflectivity. In essence, although he does not explicitly state it himself, Schein operationalizes and elaborates these theories. The importance of critical self-reflectivity is illustrated in the emphasis Schein puts on basic assumptions and the need to make them explicit, in other words, to bring them into the discursive domain as Giddens and Kondrat would argue. Below, I offer a perspective of my assessment of the application of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

Hermeneutics, critical theory, structuration and critical self-reflectivity

The above four theories formed the framework of this study. The question, however, is did these collectively provide a credible theoretical framework? My answer is in the affirmative. While the hermeneutic perspective on constructed meaning served as a basic foundation, the more specific concepts relative to individual agency and the constitution of society served as the 'interpretive logic' for understanding how individuals express meanings as they reflect on social processes.

Four implicit questions arise from adopting the above quartet of concepts as the theoretical premise of this study. First, how is the context for human experience with regard to conservation management strategy processes and understanding structured? Second, how do individuals of the executive staff at EKZNW negotiate amongst multiple meanings about conservation? The closeness of these two questions compels me to treat them simultaneously to avoid repetition. For both questions, critical theory and especially Giddens' theory of structuration would bring to the fore the notion of knowledgeable social agents. An implication of this reasoning encourages us to examine how individuals reflect on and use meanings of conservation to define themselves and negotiate tensions within social structures (and reproduce certain structures in the process). How meanings are differently used as shown by the behaviour of conservation staff, has been demonstrated in both results chapters of this study. Kondrat and Giddens would also

suggest that the negotiation of multiple meanings occurs through critical self-reflection and strategic conduct. This study has validated the notions of knowledgeable social agents, critical self-reflection and strategic conduct. Below, I explain, drawing on the two results and analysis, chapters how each, of these concepts has been validated in the findings.

Knowledgeable social agents

This concept implies that individuals are not passive objects of organizational life. They exhibit certain deeply held values as a result of their being enmeshed in the broader socio-cultural contexts in which they exist and have been socialised. The findings of this study seem to support this view. In chapter 6, titled '*Analysis of basic assumptions and strategic objectives*' we learned that the NPB was simultaneously united and divided over time due to a polarization in the interpretation of its mission. Unity was largely due to an enduring conservation ethos which remained a firm feature of the organizational mission. Division arose due to additional components to the mission. Because there was no consensus, divisions started to emerge and grew with time. In other words, the mission did not stay the same over time but evolved in response to external pressures. Respective leaders, drawing on their beliefs and interpretation of the environment influenced the mission variously in terms of emphasis. As knowledgeable social actors, employees responded by drawing on their personal beliefs to help them to choose to either support or oppose the new aspects added to the mission.

Critical self-reflection (and strategic conduct)

In chapter 4 titled '*Theoretical and conceptual frameworks*', we learned from Giddens and Kondrat that agency, i.e. the "transformative human action" (Wilshusen 2003: 43) usually takes the form of routine activity. They also posited that agency might also occur in the form of 'strategic conduct' which denotes the intentional, self-reflexive activity of knowledgeable social actors. Kondrat, drawing on the work of Giddens, further extended the notion of self-reflectivity to encompass the notion of critical self-reflectivity. In terms of applicability to this study, I would argue that this concept has been demonstrated in the findings of this study. Although Kondrat and Giddens use this concept at the individual

level, in the context of this study, it is very much relevant at the organizational and or institutional level. Respondents questioned both the established and emerging meanings about conservation, for example in terms of the commercialism agenda.

... in terms of eco-tourism, I think it was largely due to the personalities involved, rather than a strategic refocusing. It was partly saying that we need to bolster eco-tourism up in terms of budget, but it also related to the personality of the person who ended up heading that eco-tourism division" (EKZNW interviewee # 13).

If you are dealing with eco-tourism as a business, you should be watching your customers very carefully, and make sure you don't enter duplicate customers in the database. We are making the necessary changes and we are definitely better than we were a few years back (EKZNW interviewee 20).

The above quotations depict the critical stance adopted by some of the interviewees. Critical self [organizational] reflectivity was also demonstrated by some respondents who noted that the commercialism inspired by the government led to a huge increase in the eco-tourism and marketing division at a time when other departments were facing staff retrenchments. Along with the new staff came a deliberate focus on commercialism. While other departments were shrinking in terms of staff numbers, the eco-tourism division grew and received more funding. And this was, in the same light that tourism and public recreation was perceived during the Geddes-Page era.

As this study has shown, individuals are not passive objects of organizational life. Individuals continue to hold certain values that are deeply held which are largely the result of the broader socio-cultural context in which they exist and have been socialized. Thus, we see in the previous chapter a diversity of views being expressed by the executive staff who one would ideally expect to have a shared understanding about strategy since they are under one institutional setting. But as this study shows, diversity of meanings is underpinned by various basic assumptions about many aspects of life. Again, it would appear that the focus of most of the critical reflection was on commercialism. This is not particularly strange especially if we consider the fact that the notion of commercialism is presently on the agenda of the evolving mission. It is as much a contentious issue, as was the issue of attempts to mainstream tourism and recreation under Geddes-Page's leadership.

Another question to consider is: *Why do some meanings persist over time?* The theoretical framework I adopted would point to many reasons, but most importantly, to inevitable power imbalances, routinized actions, and the unintended consequences of social actions. Again, all these aspects are illustrated in this study. The fact that each leader in the NPB tried to follow a different approach to realizing the mission speaks to the power dimension. The policy of enforcement, which became entrenched over time, exemplifies routinized actions. Unintended consequences of intentional actions are exemplified by certain groups within the NPB in regard to opposition to changes in the mission. For example, Vincent did not anticipate the acrimony and tensions that arose between managers and scientists nor did Geddes-Page anticipate that his attempts at mainstreaming public recreation were going to polarize a once united organization.

Logic from applying these theories enabled me to depict the respondents as knowledgeable social actors. In other words, despite the existence of an institutional framework, for example, policies and missions, individual respondents, as shown in both results chapters were able to enact their personal interpretations. To a lesser extent, they did this under a command and control regime as explained in chapter 6. Through their opposition to the evolving mission, they were in fact asserting their deeply felt perspectives on what they saw as the fundamental mission or purpose of conservation, and from that flowed the interpretations of stakeholders, the environment and competencies.

7.3.2 Evaluating the conceptual framework

In this section, I consider the question: was Schein's conceptual model, which was developed for the study of basic cultural assumptions and adopted for this study useful for deciphering culture in a conservation agency? Schein's (1992) conceptual model was useful as originally envisaged. The usefulness can be explained from two perspectives: methodological and philosophical. In terms of the latter, the following are some of the pointers.

- That the underlying assumptions at the core of a culture can be brought back to awareness through a focused inquiry using the efforts of both insiders who live

the unconscious assumptions, and the efforts of an outsider who helps uncover the assumptions by asking the right kinds of questions.

- Schein's theoretical categories of external adaptation and survival, problems of internal integration, and basic underlying assumptions around which cultural paradigms form provided me with areas suitable for observation and from which responses could be elicited.
- Spending a lot of time at EKZNW headquarters was necessary in order to observe and to interview the participants (some more than once), to access the relevant organizational documents, and to become familiar with the organizational surroundings and the respondents.
- The data collection design outlined by Schein provided a plan for a highly interactive process of data gathering. Eventually I came to confirm certain aspects that could be verified to be the basic assumptions of the organization's culture. Schein's conceptual framework was useful in the deciphering of these assumptions.
- Schein's issue-focused interviewing technique proved to be useful in analyzing data. Throughout the entire data collection phase, the formulation of hypotheses about EKZNW's assumptions became the basic tool used to collect and to analyse data. The need to analyse simultaneous data from observations, interviews, and archival material was also very helpful.

Using the above methodological premise, I was able to obtain a diversity of understandings by following Schein's methodology, which in my view elaborates, and operationalizes the hermeneutic philosophy, critical theory and structuration. What this diversity of views did for this study was to provide a confirmation of the hermeneutic tenet that an individual's reality is composed of meanings that are constituted through transactions with others and the material world. The central tenet of critical theory which suggests that some meanings endure over time, dominate others and might become oppressive was illustrated at both the organizational and societal levels. We saw how organizationally, species protection was a central policy from the time of Vincent.

Indeed, it continues to be so to a certain extent, except now it has been expanded to incorporate or depict ecosystems and landscapes in KZN alongside the other considerations which are now part of the mandatory functions of conservation in the province (EKZNW 2002).

At the philosophical level, an important aspect to understand in regard to this study is the importance of the concept of meaning, structuration and social agents which in my view Schein tries to operationalize. Simply stated, the executive staff and managers involved in this study are individuals who possess a variety of cultural meanings on which they draw to express their understanding of conservation. This means that unless we understand the sources of those meanings, namely, their underlying basic assumptions, then we are likely to be dealing with only superficial aspects of the culture. This philosophical view was essential to the way I approached this study. It is also important to note that the interviewees are all part of a post-amalgamation team. Together, this group and others in the organization were involved in the preparation of the corporate strategic plan for EKZNW for the period 2002-2005. One would assume that they would be in a position to exhibit a high degree of consensus on strategy. But as the findings have shown, there was a diversity of understandings and meanings about conservation. Although there were commonalities, differences, largely stemming from an individuals' critical self-reflectivity, were inevitable. It is at this level of critical self-reflectivity that basic assumptions play themselves out.

In view of the above, I believe a major strength of Schein's framework is the importance of explicitly talking about basic assumptions. What this study suggests is that although there was a mechanism for talking about conservation issues, for example, by way of management plans, nothing of a similar nature existed in the past. Ironically, the presence of concerns about poor communication amongst the respondents was indicative of an absence of such a mechanism to date. In essence, the various views individuals held, whether in harmony or otherwise, continue to be held implicitly. For a conservation agency, or any other organization for that matter, this is an unhealthy situation especially in relation to strategy where there is a need to develop a shared vision, by sharing a future

impression of the social, economic and political implications for it. This cannot happen without a strategy that encourages dialogue around basic assumptions. This study also suggests that the dialogue must address the pattern of assumptions. This is perhaps part of the reasons why subsequent foci areas like tourism and recreation were treated as adjuncts when in fact, the intention was to have them as integral components of the mission. I believe, Schein's framework has a role in this regard, as a practical tool for promoting dialogue around basic assumptions and I elaborate on this in my conclusions.

In the light of the above understanding, the results of this study have some important implications for leadership and strategy formulation in conservation agencies. In the paragraphs that follow, I encapsulate my interpretation of the practical utility of Schein's framework. In doing so, I also recognize that developing practical recommendations for resolving the tensions between strategy and culture is outside the remit of this study. However, I believe it is valuable to present some perspective on how this task can be confronted.

Practical usefulness of Schein's framework

The ongoing evolution in the nature of the mission of conservation poses a challenge to the management and leadership of conservation agencies. Given that this trend is unlikely to stop, what can be done to better prepare people in conservation agencies to deal with the likely advent of even more complexities around the mission of conservation agencies? There is no probability of another era when the conservation sector will be organized around a simple mission with guaranteed funding. Equally, a more or less stable environment and a consistency amongst the basic assumptions, espoused values and artefacts is unlikely. Therefore, what can leaders do to ensure that the likely additions to the mission of conservation can be embraced without causing much disruption to the agencies? This is where Schein's framework becomes particularly instructive and it is in this context that I recognize its value.

According to Schein, culture involves constant interaction of artefacts, espoused values and basic assumptions. Problems are likely to occur in the event of there being

an inconsistency among the artefacts, espoused values and basic assumptions. Although a culture is a self-reinforcing system involving these three aspects, its essence, however, lies in the pattern of basic assumptions that operate at the subconscious level. That is, basic assumptions lie at the core of any culture and operate more or less as an undercurrent that influences both the artefacts and espoused values. Organizational culture is, therefore, nothing more than the enduring effects of some pattern of basic assumptions over time and at a particular point in time. However, such a pattern of basic assumptions emanates internally from espoused values which become reinforced as successes are experienced in resolving problems. It is this process of repeated successes, according to Schein that might lead to an assumption dropping out of the awareness domain (Schein 1992).

We have seen in this study that, with changes to the mission, there developed a need to reconceptualize strategy or approaches of pursuing conservation. Successive interpretations of the mission required different ways of pursuing conservation, but these different ways inevitably encountered pockets of resistance. Given the pervasiveness of culture, especially in creating opportunities for maintaining the *status quo*, it is no surprise that it brings forth serious implications for management. The impression about the NPB that emerges from this study is of an organization, which although sensitized to changes in both its micro and macro-environments, struggled to understand the strategic developments, largely because it had no mechanism for dialogue around basic assumptions. Since the basic assumptions were implicit, they could not be translated into espoused values and artefacts consistent with the culture of the organization. As a result, the organization's strategic responses were perceived as being the personal initiatives of the top management. Because of the implied changes to the mission, such initiatives were seen as inimical to what the organization traditionally stood for as opposed to being an uncomfortable but necessary response to a potentially overwhelming set of external forces. In essence, there was no agreed upon framework for interpreting environmental feedback and no common set of initiatives for responding to different occurrences in the environment. Thus, heterogeneity in beliefs within the organization with respect to the mission

made coordination and the much-needed harmony for implementing strategy more complicated.

In short, a relationship exists between strategy and culture. Culture, through its underlying basic assumptions determines how an organization perceives its environment. Accordingly, culture shapes the strategies deemed appropriate which are needed to respond to the identified environmental pressures or developments. There is thus an inherent risk of developing strategies that may indeed be appropriate to the identified environmental pressures but may not necessarily be in harmony with the prevailing culture. I would argue that the priority should be to widen the understanding of the context, rather than the content of strategies. By implication, it might follow that focus ought to be put on ensuring that the rank and file in an organization understand the implications of the changing environment and the necessary responses on the part of the organization. Ideally, the rank and file should be part of building this understanding just as much as they are part of the experiencing of environmental pressures. Thus, an inherent challenge in this respect revolves around improving communications within the organization so that all employees better interpret and appreciate the environmental pressures. I suggest that Schein's framework, with its theoretical and conceptual clarity can help to promote structured dialogue within conservation agencies.

This study has also shown that in the absence of radical environmental change, performance is largely a function of internal organizational processes. Environments do change, however, as we have learned from the events in KZN, both incrementally and discontinuously. Organizational performance in changing environments thus depends on the ability of an organization to modify its day-to-day activities in response to environmental changes. The nature of environmental change, therefore, affects the relationship between culture and performance, since organizational strategies incorporate assumptions about the state of the environment and the anticipated directions of change in the external environment.

The experiences of the NPB are consistent with the above-described scenario. As alluded to earlier, initially, the NPB enjoyed the benefits of a strong culture. However, a rather benign external environment meant that environmental change was incremental or did not challenge the basic assumptions underlying the organization's day-to-day activities. Incremental changes in a benign environment were also facilitated by the fact that not many new competencies were required. In a relatively stable environment the NPB, as a strong-culture organization exhibited consensus around basic values and goals and it was consequently proficient at refining and improving established competencies especially those relating to enforcement and the scientific aspects of conservation.

However, past research in other fields of study has demonstrated that if environmental change is radical or discontinuous, successful adaptation cannot come about through incremental improvements in organizational routines (Tushman and Anderson 1986; Henderson and Clark 1990). Instead, successful adaptation hinges on the ability to be innovative and identify alternative approaches, technologies, and purposes. According to March (1991), adaptation to discontinuous change requires exploration or according to Lant and Mezias (1992), second-order learning. Such exploratory learning demands an ability to perceive changes in the environment and a readiness to accept the possible disappointments and uncertain results that might accompany fundamental change in organizational processes. This has implication on a strong-culture organization such as a conservation agency.

Analysing how the NPB struggled to cope with the turbulence in its external environment, I would argue that strong-cultures are probably not very conducive to exploratory learning, for several reasons. First, they may experience significant difficulties in identifying the need for change. This is likely especially with the suggestion that second-order learning is triggered by suboptimal experiences that the organization can either not over look or handle within its existing interpretive frameworks (Lant and Mezias 1992). Often, members of such organizations tend to have a greater commitment to a particular understanding of the world, which in this case was initially that of the need for species protection. Because of this commitment to a

particular worldview, they become susceptible to procrastination in detecting critical changes in the environment.

Additionally, those aspects of strong cultures that facilitate first-order learning may paradoxically obstruct second-order learning. One source of learning is the presence of individuals whose beliefs may not necessarily be in line with the organization's dominant beliefs (Senge 1990). Learning from such individuals entails preparedness to permit such individuals to maintain their unusual beliefs and be willing to incorporate potential insights into the organization's procedures. For the NPB, the command and control structure as well as the military style of management simply provided no room for different beliefs. In essence, there was an inherent weakness in this regard in so far as the NPB attempted to control strategy and other organizational processes in ways that suggested uniformity across the organization. Consequently, learning opportunities were stifled and this is consistent with the suggestion that organizations that are better at learning from their members and exhibit weak socialization pressures will have a comparatively better understanding of a changing environmental reality (March 1991). Noted in a parallel observation is that in a strong culture, "the lack of variety... limits the organization's ability to adapt to changes in the environment" (Denison 1984:18).

Based on the findings encapsulated above and on the experiences of the NPB, I submit that in the ideal world characterized by an absence of, or very slow incremental environmental change, organizational performance would simply be a function of internal organizational processes. While this may have been true at some stage in the NPB, it is not entirely correct that there were no external influences. Rather, the forces were existent, but they were benign. They were thus not as threatening, as they were for example in the later stages including the present era, when finances became an added point of vulnerability. What is important is to be cognizant of the fact that environments do change. Changes in the environment can be both incremental and more discontinuous. As such, organizational performance in changing environments depends on the ability of the organization, in this case a conservation agency, to modify its routines in response to changes in external pressures. Thus, it is plausible to contend that the nature of environmental change can affect the relationship between culture and strategy, and by

extension has implications on performance. This connection can be attributed, as we have seen in this study, to the fact that organizational actions, priorities and processes incorporate assumptions about the state of the environment and the expected path of change in external conditions.

With this understanding, a few questions come to the fore. What is the value of applying Schein's framework of organizational culture to a study on change and strategy processes? Also, are there any lessons emanating from this study for those in management positions in conservation agencies? What can be learnt about the powerful influence of culture on strategic activities in response to an evolving mission in conservation agencies? In the paragraphs that follow, I address these questions.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can argue that Schein's framework was appropriate for this study. This is especially so given that most studies of organizational culture implicitly assume that the strength of a culture can be assessed or represented adequately by a measurement taken at one point in time (Kotter and Heskett 1992; Gordon and DiTomaso 1992). In other words, a 'snapshot' of an organizational culture can be helpful especially if we can understand the dynamic stability of a culture or components thereof vis-à-vis the degree of change found or experienced in environmental pressures. A study by Harrison and Carroll (1991) suggested that cultural systems tend to be rather healthy in the face of turnover and organizational growth and decline. In a related study it was posited that that organizational structures are comparatively stable over time (Hannan and Freeman 1984). It might therefore be plausible to contend that organizational cultures are also inclined towards some kind of stability or *status quo* (Schein 1992). I can argue based on the foregoing insights that by facilitating an examination of the 'snapshots' over time, Schein's framework was useful in capturing, exploring and comparing the evolution of organizational culture. Also, the framework was particularly useful in analyzing the present leadership's processes in strategy processes, and investigating the interaction between strategy and culture during different leadership periods. The framework is interpretive and focuses on values and meanings that make up a culture rather than on output, production or profit. Thus, the framework encourages the examination of the experience of work and what is meaningful to members of an organization.

More specifically, Schein offers the idea of learning and change that inevitably accompanies it as a model of how organizational cultures are made and changed (Schein 1992). According to Schein, learning has the dual effect of challenging or transforming certain social structures (and processes) even while it produces others. In this way, learning and change are like two sides of the same coin and their inevitable interaction and influence on basic assumptions underscores their centrality to any culture. I propose that learning and change are useful concepts for understanding how cultures evolve. By extension, they are also critical to understanding the tensions that might arise between an existing culture and emergent strategy processes and priorities. The ways in which organizational culture has evolved in KZN is an excellent case in point.

If as Schein postulates, learning and change are critical to organizational culture, how can leaders of conservation agencies facilitate better learning in their agencies? I contend that learning should be directed at dealing with underlying basic assumptions. However, underlying basic assumptions ought to be dealt with as a pattern (and not in isolation) if genuine change is to be expected. In short, a systemic view helps one to understand how the leaders can continually create a pattern of basic assumptions that is not only closely knit but is also able to continually recreate an agreed (or sufficiently agreed) set of espoused values. The challenge for managers and leaders of conservation agencies is therefore to understand how they can facilitate learning and change (specifically in respect of assumptions and values) at the same time, so that their agencies can become more responsive and adaptive. This conclusion is valid only so long as change in basic assumptions is viewed as good or desirable.

If indeed why much of the learning is difficult has to do with organizational culture, then it is incumbent on those in the leadership of organizations, to understand more about the interaction of culture and learning. There is also a need to identify, if possible, what elements of a culture would genuinely facilitate change, i.e. institute a basic assumption of a changing environment. As mentioned earlier, in reality, organizational cultures and learning cannot be kept apart. It is not strange that several authors have understood organizational culture to be a product of the histories of organizational learning. More

specifically, there are those who have characterized organizational culture as being the product of efforts by the organization to enforce coherence, order, and meaning on its experiences (Weick 1995). In a parallel observation, Schein (1992: 68) argued that “culture ultimately reflects the group’s effort to cope and learn and is the residue of learning processes.” Schein further posited that organizational cultures are strongly influenced by shared experiences in an organization’s early history and that, once established and taken for granted, the basic assumptions are difficult to change. The experiences NPB seem to corroborate the view that change can be difficult in value/ethic-laden organizations. In brief, organizational cultures illuminate the manifestation of an organization’s early environmental circumstances (Stinchcombe 1965). In that way, organizations are inherently susceptible to inertial pressures (Hannan and Freeman 1984).

Although organizational cultures reflect past learning, they also define the context for future organizational learning, which, in turn, has consequences for future performance. It follows from the above that environmental change seems to present two interrelated problems. On the one hand, environmental change can engender internal inadequacies by raising the prospects of failures in communication, coordination, and control. On the other hand, environmental change can potentially render already existing organizational activities and processes inadequate or inappropriate. Environmental changes of this nature require learning as well as alterations in organizational processes and activities that take the new conditions into account. If the resultant learning leads to new ways of seeing and perceiving situations and facing challenges, it can be called generative learning (Senge 1990). And as Senge further argues, in the absence of generative learning, performance is likely to be hampered.

An examination of Schein’s framework points to the basic assumptions as the only fundamental portal for effecting organized change, and unless learning deals with the inherent potential resistance to change in basic assumptions, change is unlikely to take root. It is not helpful to change the artefacts because they are by their very nature only an outward expression of a culture. And it is equally not helpful to focus on the espoused values randomly. Changing espoused values and artefacts is not the solution and initiatives founded on changing either artefacts or espoused values are at best likely to be

short-lived. Focusing on artefacts and espoused values implies dealing with the manifestations of a culture, but not essence of that culture (Schein 1992).

Organizational cultures may not necessarily be inimical to change. Failure to understand the prevailing culture and a lack of commitment to doing so, is perhaps more of the problem than resistance to change. It is thus plausible to contend that leaders of conservation agencies and other organizations should energetically seek to benefit from the latent benefits of their organizational cultures; to use them to enhance strategic performance. This suggestion is premised on the view that cultures can be supportive of certain new strategic directions if only there were adequate grounding for the culture to co-exist with any desired innovations or new strategic directions which were deemed necessary to adapt to an evolving environmental context. Thus, understanding the existing culture, and especially the underlying basic assumptions is essential.

An implication for those in management positions of conservation agencies is the imperative to understand their respective agencies' culture. This calls for those in leadership in conservation agencies to better understand their cultures in general and more specifically how basic assumptions operate and evolve. Understanding of the prevailing culture requires conscious efforts aimed at analysing the unconscious assumptions that influence and nurture and nourish the culture. Being aware of the culture is also critical for developing and implementing new strategies because it presents opportunities to use the resultant knowledge to inform the strategic process. Such an approach can help to attenuate the widely recognized, and potentially negative effects of culture on strategy⁶⁷, especially if the proposed strategy is not in line with the cultural orientations of members of an organization.

Against this background, I contend that the role of leadership in dealing with change is therefore more about understanding basic assumptions than either artefacts or espoused values. The question therefore is: how can leaders create and sustain a pattern of basic assumptions that is able to facilitate an agreed set of espoused values (or sufficient agreement) and reinforce them with a set of cohesive artefacts so that the cohesive

⁶⁷ These negative effects are being discussed here in the context of where the organizational culture has not been understood by those in leadership.

organization is able to operate in an efficient and effective manner? Equally important is how leaders can promote a culture of learning. I would also argue, based on this study, that leadership is supposed to continuously promote and re-examine the basic assumptions and work out whether they are consistent with the other two dimensions of culture: espoused values and artefacts. Based on that re-examination, leaders ought to facilitate change by modifying the espoused values and artefacts to reflect the state of the basic assumptions. An inherent challenge for leadership is ensuring that there is a high degree of consistency amongst artefacts, espoused values and basic assumptions. Leaders also need to be constantly aware that even as the basic assumptions change, not everybody agrees with that change, but there are opportunities for individuals to agree with more of the changes progressively over time. To this end, it is incumbent on leaders to recognize that more and more of the people in the organization have to be supported to appreciate change. Schein provides a framework for organizing dialogue on this matter. Failing to do this creates opportunities for polarization in the interpretation of the mission and the inevitable consequence of lack of unison in an organization.

If we accept the importance of learning for change to occur, and the inevitable influence that culture exerts in that relationship, it can be argued that one of the roles of leadership should be to facilitate a style of learning that is not only adaptive, but also generative (Senge 1990; Schein 1995). Such a style of learning would entail new ways of perceiving and thinking about problems or situations. The experiences of the NPB are again a very good example. And if basic assumptions are as influential on strategy processes as being suggested in this study, then a compelling challenge for those involved in strategy is that they should underpin their activities and approaches to achieving strategic ends or change with a clear understanding of their organizations' culture. Change initiatives, strategic or otherwise that are not supported by a culture, and more specifically its underlying basic assumptions or are implemented in total disregard of basic assumptions are likely to be short-lived and unsuccessful. Averting such situations requires that efforts be directed at the deep-seated basic assumptions and appreciating the fact that every culture is at once an inhibitor and facilitator of change. Thus the role of leaders in this regard is to understand the potential limitations and leverage points intrinsic in the basic assumptions of a given culture. Understanding the tensions that may arise when strategic activities are

outside the bounds of a prevailing culture ought to be a preoccupation of leaders. These tensions could most effectively be addressed by way of an explicit process that shifts attention from individuals holding certain views, to the views themselves and the assumptions underpinning those views. Schein's model provides for such a process.

Lastly but not the least, the importance of understanding the broader environment cannot be emphasized enough. Based on the earlier discussion, I would contend that central to any successful initiatives for change are two factors: learning and a proficiency at understanding the environment. An awareness of the environment – understood in this context to mean the mosaic of changing assumptions held by stakeholders outside of the organization is essential to ensuring that culture does not impede strategy. To this end, I submit that the quest to facilitate coherence between a culture and an organization's strategy should have as its starting point a thorough understanding of the general environmental trends or developments. This implies that culture should inform strategy and not vice-versa. An implication for management is consequently the need to discover not only effective ways of communicating. This implies that employees should be adequately informed of the rationale for the choice of strategy and be spared the specifics of strategy.

7.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter, I reviewed the findings within the context of my theoretical and conceptual frameworks. I started with an assessment of Schein's strategy concepts – mission, competencies, environment and stakeholders in terms of how there has been a change in the perceptions of these concepts, both at the individual and organizational levels. Thereafter, I assessed the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The last section looked at the usefulness of applying Schein's framework to this study. I have argued that the framework was very useful and I identified, within the context of this study, that its use can be extended in a practical sense to serve as a tool for dialogue aimed at reaching the basic assumptions in issues of strategy in organizations including conservation agency. In the Chapter 8, I provide a summary of the findings, conclusions and research implications.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This study has been an attempt to better understand the tensions and complexities involved in managing change in conservation agencies, which were postulated to be influenced by organizational culture. Thus, my starting point was the view that organizational culture was a linchpin in managing change, and its overall predisposition influences how an organization experiences environmental developments. My view was that organizational culture was particularly strong in organizations founded on ethical considerations. I therefore chose to conduct this study in an ethics or value-based public service organization, with a conservation agency being an excellent exemplar of such organizations. Although proposed before as a subject deserving of serious consideration, little serious investigation has been undertaken into organizational culture's practical and theoretical implications within conservation agencies. In this concluding chapter, I summarize the findings, the conclusions and the research implications.

8.2 A SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

I considered organizational culture with respect to three aspects: leadership, strategy and underlying basic assumptions. With regard to leadership and strategy, I looked at leadership epochs, beginning from the establishment of the former NPB to the present day. Specifically, I considered the management styles – the ways in which leadership and authority were exercised as exhibited and encouraged by different leaders over time. I also examined how those management styles were interpreted in respect to what Schein calls 'strategic' concepts: the mission, stakeholders, environment and competencies.

The results have shown a temporal variance in the mission of conservation in KZN. In other words, KZN's conservation mission has not been static. Rather, it has evolved in ways that have epitomized the changing challenges that the conservation sector in KZN

faced, and continues to face during different phases of its evolution. Previously, the mission was tight and narrowly focused and this ensured that the NPB remained cohesive because everybody in the organization, individually and collectively, identified with the mission. In this sense, the NPB had norms and values that were strongly held and shared in the organization, or simply there was a strong organizational culture (O'Reilly and Chatman 1996). Further, these norms and values were strongly reflected in the artefacts. Prominent among artefacts were the fenced reserves⁶⁸ or protected areas and around which artefacts certain norms and values were developed and shared.

One of the key consequences of such a strong culture was behavioural consistency across individuals in the organization. This is in line with the observation that organizational cultures "provide group members with a way of giving meaning to their daily lives, setting guidelines and rules for how to behave, and, most important, reducing and containing the anxiety of dealing with an unpredictable and uncertain environment" (Schein 1991: 15). With this understanding, I can argue that organizational culture served as a source of consistent behaviour within the organization. Consistent behaviour was itself a product of widespread agreement about basic assumptions and values in the organization (Gordon and DiTomaso 1992) and thereby enhanced organizational performance. In this sense, organizational culture is a social control mechanism (O'Reilly 1989; O'Reilly and Chatman 1996).

At the same time, organizational culture influenced employees' interpretations of organizational events and basic assumptions about organizational processes. Such a culture derived from three effects of widely common and strongly held norms and values: increased direction, enhanced goal alignment between the organization and its employees, and boosted employee effort. It is important to emphasize the aspect of increased direction. The emphasis on increased direction is important because an examination of the trends in leadership and management styles as they existed during the early days, demonstrates that the militaristic climate, and command and control structures and processes in the NPB supported this approach which was largely effected through the

⁶⁸ The fencing was in line with the protectionist stance and this stance was further effected with other supportive artefacts like firearms, uniforms and a general militaristic climate within the NPB.

issuing of directives. As the agency grew, administrative practices became entrenched, with delegation, collaboration and other responses to increasing complexities only coming much later in the 1990s and beyond. However, bureaucratization persisted, and top management, at least in very general terms and to varying degrees, maintained control at the centre. This continued, especially in the absence of political decision-makers' prescription for a decentralized structure or participatory approach. In short, different management styles were exhibited at different times, and similarly different aspects of 'conservation effectiveness' were emphasized over time with respect to how conservation was practiced and pursued. Enhanced goal alignment and boosted employee effort, I would argue, derived from a commitment to a shared mission. This aspect supports earlier research findings, though not in conservation management, that concluded that organizations benefit from having highly motivated leaders and employees dedicated to shared goals (Peters and Waterman 1982; Deal and Kennedy 1982; Kotter and Heskett 1992).

However, the unity mentioned above started to wane as the mission expanded from focusing on species and protected areas to the present focus on people, landscapes and ecosystems. Within this transition, a number of major developments that not only shook the very foundations of the mission but also challenged the implied *status quo* were made explicit. During about half a century, the mission of conservation in KZN has undergone several changes. While the mission has maintained conservation as a common denominator, it has been considerably changed to provide for previously ignored aspects. This evolution has at all times epitomized expanding values in conservation. With proliferation in values has come contestation about the fundamental purpose or mission of conservation within the conservation sector and among others within society. Within the conservation sector, from what was initially a tight and narrow mission, and what might have qualified as a 'solidary unit', there is now a broad mission reflecting many more facets of relationships with the rest of society than was previously the case. And society also has a broadened set of expectations about conservation: in addition to its concern for cultural, scientific and recreational purposes, conservation is now expected to include livelihoods and other development challenges.

Because different views have been the norm rather than the exception, the conservation sector suffered from considerable polarization around the interpretation of the mission. For example, amidst the evolution of the mission, required competencies have undergone significant changes as well. From an explicit focus on enforcement-related competencies, based on the interpretation of the conservation mission as being largely about protecting wildlife and seeing the role of conservation as being custodial, the nature of skills and capabilities to perform the evolving role of stewardship have changed. Thus, from essentially one core competence (enforcement), there has been an expansion in core-competencies to include: scientific services and research; tourism; recreation community participation and business management skills (to meet the commercialization imperative). Each of these core-competencies reflects a desired improvement in what are regarded as strategic performance areas of the expanding mission. Re-definition of the role to mean more about stewardship and not necessarily the previous custodial function has facilitated the recognition of the importance of partnerships in an effort to ensure sustained and functional relationships with a variety of stakeholders. Thus, we see in the current management of EKZNW that the creation and sustenance of partnerships is emphasized as being one of the mandates alongside those of conservation and eco-tourism. Based on the above findings, I now wish to revert to the stated study objectives by stating the conclusions and implications for managing change in organizations.

8.3 CONCLUSIONS

Before I present the conclusions, it is helpful to reflect on both the hypothesis that failure and or absence of mechanisms that promote dialogue around basic assumptions with respect to environmental developments predisposes conservation agencies to suffer the disruptive effects of change. Restated, this hypothesis suggests that the failure and or absence of mechanisms to explicitly address change in organizational culture within public service agencies, particularly conservation agencies, leads to poor strategic performance.

The following objectives guided the study: (1) to investigate the role of leadership in the evolution of basic assumptions in the quest for setting strategic directions; (2) to explore

the relationship between basic assumptions and strategic objectives and to understand whether or not there are any tensions between organizational culture and strategic directions, and (3) to assess the value of using a cultural perspective in the study of management challenges in the conservation sector. These objectives should be reviewed bearing in mind the stated study hypothesis and the various questions I have raised as the dissertation progressed.

Generally, organizational culture has been shown to be very influential in creating resistance to change. During the various developmental phases of the NPB, culture was so strong that it also effectively served to facilitate insularity and an inward looking perspective. Such a culture was predisposed to dealing with predictable situations through processes of gradual change. But in time, the external forces became too forceful to face using gradual changes. The resulting changes then were dramatic and disruptive, and left in their wake different organizational implications including difficulties in adapting to the changes in the external environment. An encapsulation of the findings relative to the above-stated objectives helps clarify the implications of the study.

Regarding the first objective, it was found that leadership played a critical role in interpreting the environment and developing strategies based on an interpretation of the environment. Also, it was apparent during the succeeding leadership phases that different management styles were developed and used for different times in the agency's history. A consequence of this was that different management styles and aspects of 'conservation effectiveness' were emphasized over time to reflect leaders' interpretations of the environment during the different phases of conservation's development in KZN. An outstanding development, however, was that of persistence of founding assumptions which occurred partly because they were strongly shared and reinforced at the level of artefacts and espoused values. A command and control management style created a conducive 'organizational climate' which supported the persistence of the founding assumptions.

With respect to the second objective, the relationship between organizational culture and strategy was found to be initially one of harmony. This was a unique period – one characterized by a benign environment, guaranteed funding and a strong but functional organizational culture. A major mediating factor was the mission – which was simple in so far as it was based on protecting species and was underpinned by enforcement as the ideal approach. Under those circumstances of a clear mission, employees were highly motivated and dedicated to common goals, both being consequences of widely shared and strongly held values and beliefs.

This study has revealed the absence of a robust theory for understanding of conservation agencies as public service organizations characterized by strong organizational cultures. It is in this context that I see the third objective being relevant and addressed in this study. Schein's framework provides a critical and useful starting point for empirical examinations of the relationships between organizational variables and conservation agency management approaches and related implications⁶⁹. The framework is robust because it is theoretically and conceptually rigorous. With reference to the former, the framework is clear about its underlying normative commitments. Conceptual rigour refers to the specific ideas and concepts used in the framework. In this connection, Schein has posited that terms such as beliefs, attitudes and values are principally different psychological constructs and uses the concepts sparingly as opposed to the trend of interchangeable use in many other studies.

In view of the above, I submit that Schein presents us with a useful framework on human experience as it occurs in groups and organizational settings. Generally, the framework provides three distinct but interrelated dimensions: an understanding of how cultures are formed, a philosophical view of how to conduct research (about change, learning, organizational culture and related concepts) and a specific methodology for interpreting data. To this end, it is critical to the research process since it helps to streamline the data collection by aiding different aspects of research including conceptualization, design and implementation and data interpretation.

⁶⁹ I have outlined the reasons for choosing Schein's framework, but here, I am reflecting after using the framework.

Schein underscores adaptation and responsiveness and their susceptibility to the influence of basic assumptions in the processes of change. While Schein is not alone in encouraging this view (for example, Senge 1990; Drucker 1995), where he differs from the others is in offering an empirically testable framework. He is also different from the others by the stress he puts on the need to understand basic assumptions as 'patterns' as opposed to being stand-alone entities. In this way, he seems to implicitly borrow from the well-known dictum – 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts'. With an understanding of basic assumptions, it is possible to conduct structured enquiries or to hold dialogue on basic assumptions. The latter can be especially useful for those involved in the management of conservation agencies in order to question the appropriateness of basic assumptions in relation to emerging strategies within the conservation sector. Against this background, I find Schein's framework particularly well-suited for the analysis of management with respect to change, responsiveness and adaptation in conservation agencies. The framework can help to increase understanding of why and how adaptations take place, and what results are achieved through making the often unconscious basic assumptions more explicit. Reasons for these claims have been elaborated in the evaluation of the framework (Chapter 7).

Theoretical contributions

Appreciating the theoretical contributions of this study first requires recognition that the study is concerned with elaborating theory and informing practice about the process of managing change using the case of the conservation sector. I have explained my interpretation of the practical utility of Schein's framework in the previous chapter. I have acknowledged that Schein's framework is useful especially in that it encourages a systems view⁷⁰ of culture. A key issue emanating from this study is the importance of dialogue. Most of the theories, including Schein's (1992), recognize the significance of dialogue to organizational change and culture. They go further to underscore the importance of basic assumptions in strategy processes and change management, but

⁷⁰ By 'systems view', I am referring to the recognition of the dynamic, integrated, responsive way of enabling organizational culture to track changes in basic assumptions so that they may accord with the external environment.

unlike Schein, not as the focus of the dialogue. My view is that dialogue is indeed critical, but one needs to ask: dialogue about what, and how can one structure dialogue so as to be meaningful?

I share Schein's perspective about the importance of basic assumptions. Schein's view is that if there is a process for dialogue specific to assumptions and that if it precedes strategy processes (incorporating the visioning exercises and the setting of the mission), it would lead to sharing those assumptions. It would also result in an understanding of the underlying pattern of basic assumptions. If understood and appreciated, such a pattern of underlying assumptions would lead to support for the mission, vision and strategy processes. In terms of my theoretical contribution, specifically in reference to Schein's model, I see that the temporal dimension that I have emphasized and used in tracing the strategic emphases of different leaders as being critical to studying organizational culture. This has been helpful in exposing the point that dialogue must not just address the assumptions in isolation from one another. Rather, they must be analysed as a pattern because their strength is in their dynamic interaction. Thus, in addition to developing dialogue around basic assumptions and trying to understand them as a pattern, a temporal dimension is also critical in order to understand their evolution. A temporal dimension is helpful in demonstrating how an organization has coped under the influence of different leaders and how certain assumptions, especially founding ones, may be persistent, and therefore, influential in subsequent periods. This suggests that dialogue around basic assumptions should be structured into adaptive management plans of organizations. In short, there is a need for development of efficient and effective means for incorporating analysis of assumptions into adaptive management. Importantly, such mechanisms ought to be founded on principles of effective dialogue.

8.4 RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study provide important research implications and opportunities. The study demonstrates unequivocally the importance of fostering a culture that does not insulate an organization from its environment. Logic instructs us to acknowledge that cultures that are open and adaptive to change are going to be particularly critical in the

future as the complexity of the environment increases. Because of this prospect, conservation agencies need mechanisms for dealing with culture more explicitly. In brief, culture need not be the 'hidden' phenomenon. An important research implication is in terms of how organizational culture and its underlying basic assumptions can be made a 'manifest phenomenon' and not the 'supernatural latent force' (Tichy and Sherman 1993) it has become and continues to be in many organizations. My view is that while culture cannot be revealed or accessed in full, it is possible to understand an organization's underlying assumptions relevant to a particular issue. Thus, in terms of research, Schein suggests the use of 'issue focused interviews'. A research implication deriving from the above relates to the development and testing of frameworks for managing the evolution of organizational culture in conservation agencies. I propose Schein's framework as a good starting point.

The findings also point to the significance of organizational cultures that are supportive of perpetual learning as a prerequisite for ongoing successful adaptation. According to Schein (1993), organizational cultures that acknowledge uncertainty are inherently predisposed to adaptation and learning. This brings into focus the link between organizational culture and learning. Research addressing questions of how organizations in general and conservation agencies in particular can develop learning cultures would be an important area of exploration. Conservation agencies deserve special consideration because of their unique histories which have in the past limited their prospects for organizational learning. Important questions would include: what determines an organizational culture's predisposition to learning? How can such a predisposition be developed and kept alive? And lastly but not the least, what is the role of basic assumptions in the learning process?

Borrowing from the work of Schein, I have argued about the centrality of basic assumptions. Such assumptions are pervasive and although they are a social and psychological construct, people in organizations tend to experience them as objective reality. In the 'objective reality' mode, people in organizations use basic assumptions unconsciously as a pattern which determines how the environment is perceived and

defines both the organizational image in relation to the environment and the desired relationship and domain of operation in terms of dealing with that environment. It is these underlying assumptions and values that predispose an organization on the one hand to learn, to be open, to adapt but on the other hand to be stagnant, insular and dogmatic in dealing with the environment. It is important to ensure that existing assumptions are reviewed and changed and new assumptions allowed to evolve as necessary.

However, left unattended and allowed to operate at the subconscious level, basic assumptions can easily facilitate the *status quo*, oppose change and subvert new strategies. Understanding how basic assumptions can be made more explicit is thus another research implication of this study. Internalized dialogue processes need to be promoted especially given that cultures are a function of shared mental models (Senge *et al.* 1999) – shared ways of perceiving the world, how we psychologically respond to those perceptions and even how and what meanings we attach to situations or things.

A dire need exists for frameworks to aid the processes of dialogue. Practical implementation of frameworks like Schein's may be helpful in structuring dialogue and structuring the process of enquiries relating to culture. This endeavour would attract several further questions, but they revolve around the imperative of promoting a shared commitment to the following: open, engaged and extensive communication; learning and thinking systemically in the face of complexity; and accepting the view that teams are an indispensable component in the learning process as well as the fact that they can and would learn under supportive circumstances.

Another research implication is related to an implicit assumption of this study, namely that the strength and nature of a culture can be characterized adequately by making an evaluation at one point in time, i.e. a 'snapshot'. This assumption is common in research of the effects of organizational culture strength on performance and relationship to the environment (Denison 1990; Kotter and Heskett 1992; Gordon and DiTomaso 1992). The soundness of this assumption is arguably dependant on several factors including the

degree of inaction caused by basic assumptions and other cultural elements with respect to the pace of change in environmental conditions.

Moreover, simulations by Harrison and Carroll (1991) suggested that cultural systems are somewhat pervasive and strong in situations of organizational turbulence such as during organizational growth or decline. Organizational structures have been reported also to be simultaneously robust and inert (Hannan and Freeman 1984). Future research should examine the soundness of this assumption in conservation agencies and explore the processes that drive change relative to the strength of organizational culture in conservation agencies. An important question in this regard would be whether basic assumptions, and therefore, organizational culture strength changes in response to an evolving mission.

Comparative research designed to explore and understand the link between the state of basic assumptions and the evolving mission may be helpful. In addition, I would suggest that there is one important area for research which relates to the interface(s) between society (stakeholders) and conservation agencies as public service agencies. This interface, I believe would be quite different than that for commercial companies. Two principal research questions are worth exploring in the future:

1. How do public service agencies track and adapt to changes in the assumptions and values held by stakeholders?
2. How can changes in assumptions be built into organizational adaptive management procedures and practices within conservation agencies?

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APPENDIX 1

PRINCIPLES FOLLOWED IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF KWAZULU-NATAL'S ENVIRONMENTAL MANGEMENT AND CONSERVATION SECTORS

- The integrity of the province shall be protected and maintained as a primary objective in the development of the province, and shall include all matters relating to the conservation of the natural heritage and the maintenance and protection of ecological integrity, natural attractiveness and the biodiversity of the province.
- The integrity of the environment, as a fundamental asset of the Province, is an essential precondition for the rights of present and future generation of citizens in KwaZulu-Natal to enjoy their right to live, work and relax in a safe, productive, healthy, aesthetically and culturally acceptable and sustainable environment which promotes the quality of life and the well being of all citizens and ensures intergenerational equity.
- Integrated management of the environment shall be applied and shall have due regard for other heritage assets such as the indigenous knowledge systems and cultural heritages, and shall include the judicious management and planning of land use and physical development activities within the framework of these principles.
- The Provincial Government, as the custodian of the environment on behalf of the people of KwaZulu-Natal shall ensure that the legislative, executive and judicial mechanisms are in place for the purposes of the protection and maintenance of the integrity of the environment.
- Appropriate environmental management and conservation are preconditions for sustainable development and shall be managed in a manner whereby by it serves as a catalysts for economic growth and development.
- Development shall not compromise the integrity of the environment or exceed the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effect of human activity and must minimise the reduction of the level of renewable resources within the Province as a whole.
- The executive and administrative systems shall, within the framework of these principles, provide for sufficient checks and balances in the process of decision-making on the environment, whilst being flexible and providing for political, social, production, technological, financial and investment options which will ensure the maximisation of conservation, whilst pursuing the effective maximising of the recreational, social and economic opportunities and benefits to the communities and citizens of the Province.
- The Provincial Government shall ensure the maximisation of the mobilisation of resources within the economy of the province towards the achievement of these principles and as such shall ensure that a sustainable and appropriate legal framework exists within which the activities of the local communities, the private sector and investors, each with its own particular resources and expertise, can be accommodated and maximised.
- Any executive, administrative, recreational, developmental or other activity within the province shall be subject to these principles, which activity will be testable on objective grounds by an appropriate judicial or quasi judicial entity as established by law.

Source: Joubert 1995

APPENDIX 2

PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO EZEMVELO KWAZULU NATAL WILDLIFE

The Evolution of Organisational Culture and Its Role in Biodiversity Conservation

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ORGANISATION: Centre for Environment and Development

SUPERVISOR: Prof. R. Fincham, University of Natal, CEAD

CO-SUPERVISOR: Prof. C. Breen, CEAD

PROJECT LEVEL: PhD

OBJECTIVE(S)

- To assess the role and influence of organisational culture in the pursuit of biodiversity conservation as a strategic goal of conservation agencies.

RATIONALE

Background to the study

This study is concerned with the challenges of managing conservation agencies in an increasingly changing environment. The point of departure is the view that conservation agencies are organisations, and “every organisation, whether a business or not, has a theory of business” (Drucker 1995: 20). The foundations for a ‘theory of business’ are the assumptions about the environment or context in which the organisation operates, the mission and core-competencies.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the assumptions on which the conservation agencies were built and have been run for a long time, no longer fit reality. Conservation agencies are faced with the rapidity of change in external interconnectedness, which continues to engender ever more unpredictable transactional interdependencies with the wider society. Conservation is consequently finding itself in a period of hitherto unforeseen turbulence and far-reaching change, with equally far-reaching implications. A blend of changes in the legislation, and seemingly unstoppable forces of liberalisation and democratisation, variations in social structures and attitudes, technological innovations and the orientations of political and administrative structures, both nationally and internationally, are collectively challenging the traditional conservation paradigm. As a result, the way in which conservation agencies fulfil their fundamental function (or, in

some cases, whether they are able to fulfil their basic function at all) is subject to debate and scrutiny. But what is vivid is that the practice of conservation is significantly being reshaped by this inevitable interplay of contextual factors.

Against this backdrop, biodiversity conservation is increasingly seen to be dependent on adaptive capacities of conservation agencies to the new realities as opposed to merely 'coping'. The search for meaning is now outward and retrospective, a temporal emphasis inclined toward the future, and striving for greater relevance and enhanced match with the external environments – namely physical, economic, social, institutional, technological, etc. The thrust for conservation is now directed at change of both the external and internal environment to accord with external conditions with the view to engendering greater relevance. And here in lies the challenge, conservation agencies, like other organisations, have a history with staff who have an idea of what has previously worked, what might work in the future and even personal and group perceptions on how the future ought to be. A compelling need exists to understand how conservation agencies are dealing with entrenched beliefs and practices to cope with the changing realities as manifested in dwindling resources, calls for increased stakeholder participation, greater responsiveness to policy imperatives and increased cooperation and partnerships.

Nowhere is a study seeking to investigate the kind of issues sketched above more appropriate and interesting than in South Africa. This is partly because of South Africa's context as a developing and modernising African country in a period of transition from racial discrimination and oppression towards a democratic order with constitutional provisions for justice and equal opportunity. South Africa's long history of conservation and recent fundamental power shifts coupled with the imperatives they have created in the form of constant need for organisational re-invention and adaptation to social, political and economic change, makes it a remarkable country in which to test propositions about the significance of the changing environment in relation to the management of conservation agencies. In terms of biodiversity conservation, the South African government has made explicit its intentions to transform the conservation sector to make it better able to respond to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs and to respond to a context of new realities and opportunities (DEAT 2002). According to DEAT, "In a changing South Africa, a new policy framework is needed that will result in effective conservation through a rationalised and consolidated system of protected areas. Such a system will serve as the focal point for conservation activities, and the continued successful management of the protected areas will act as a barometer of the country's commitment to the conservation of biodiversity" (DEAT 2002: 5). This, it is envisioned will be realised "through a representative system of biodiversity protection; a new legal framework for protected areas and sustainable financing mechanisms" (DEAT 2002: 5).

One infers from all this that it is the desire of the South African government to develop a conservation system characterised by increased participation by all sectors of society; by greater institutional responsiveness to policy imperatives and by a new set of cooperative relations and partnerships between the conservation sector and society at large. Government intentions in this regard are generally spurred by the

Constitution, and reiterated and reinforced in an array of pieces of legislation, policies and strategy documents. The combination of these legal and policy changes and expectations is engendering unprecedented pressures to which conservation agencies are obliged to measure up as a matter of necessity. There is an inevitable need to go beyond the status quo in conservation. In fact, the prospects are such that in the future, the general approach to conservation in South Africa will be significantly different than that in which the current conservation practitioners grew up. Contextual change means that new strategic directions are inevitable for protected areas, and more so for conservation agencies as organisations responsible for the management of protected areas. This requires of conservation agencies in South Africa to ensure that aspects of the context be reflected in the content, focus, and general approach to conservation as well as the institutional missions and policies.

I have chosen to focus on Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife (EKZNW), itself an organisation in transition having recently come out of a critical merger, and increasingly expected to adapt and respond to the policy imperatives of both the national government and provincial government of KwaZulu Natal. The intention is not to study EKZNW *per se*, but to understand how culture plays a role in shaping the development of strategies and the practice of conservation. Thus, the study's significance lies in its potential to generate perspectives that have wider implications for the management of conservation agencies in Southern Africa and beyond. The study does not attempt to pass judgment, however defined – qualitatively or quantitatively on the performance of EKZNW. But through investigating EKZNW, an organisation responding to an identified stimulus (the biodiversity challenge in a changing context), the study seeks to bring to the surface the broad range of perceptions and value orientations and the way in which these value orientations could create an organisation's strategic responses. The desire is to understand how culture affects strategy in EKZNW and not to investigate the strengths or weaknesses of actual strategies.

Why study 'organisational culture'?

The term 'organisational culture' has become part of the standard vocabulary of management. An organisation's culture is widely acknowledged as one of its 'vital components' like strategy, structure or process, a critical element of its functioning and an important contributory factor to success or failure. This view is premised on the notion that every organisation has distinct cultural beliefs that shape the thinking, decisions and actions. Globally, organisational culture is acknowledged as a strong and pervasive determinant of performance in organisations. While the subject of organisational culture has received prominence in mainstream business and organisational studies, the same might not be entirely true in conservation agencies. Reasons for both resistance to change and poor performance vary, but they seem to revolve around the perception that culture holds the key to intrinsic motivation and innovation, especially in times of adversity (Schein 1992).

In terms of biodiversity, culture has commonly been studied from the perspective of focusing on historical significance, trends and relationships between the communities and their environment. Such studies have shown that communities have for a very long time developed systems, rituals and practices that regulated off-take levels, access to critical resources and distribution of harvests. But this is not the approach being pursued in this study. This study is premised on the understanding that cultures exist in each and every organisation as a foundation on which values and actions are based (Schein 1985). Importantly, the subject of organisational culture of conservation agencies or business organisations in relation to biodiversity conservation is rare.

TIMING

I have been working on this project since July 2001. Advanced drafts (incorporating data analysis) are envisaged for December 2003 and January 2004. Proposed completion time of write-up of the thesis is July/ August 2004.

Data collection is the next phase, expected to begin February 2003 until the end of March 2003. The breakdown of time being requested to facilitate interviews and follow-ups is as follows:

- Between 45 minutes and a maximum of 1 hour 30 minutes for individual interviews;
- Where necessary, follow-ups might take a maximum of 2 hours (spread across the duration of the study) in the form of responses to specific email, telephonic, etc. requests for clarifications/ elaborations.

Therefore, the estimated total time being requested of individual executive management and other EKZNW staff who might participate in the study is 3 hours 30 minutes (for the entire duration of the study).

STUDY AREA

Not relevant given the nature of the study.

STUDY PROCEDURE

Both the detailed research methods through which data will be collected, and the more general philosophies upon which the collection and analysis of data will adopt a qualitative approach based on an identified model of organisational culture. Documentary analysis and interviews will be used to gather secondary and primary data respectively. The respondents (for interviews) will be restricted to those who are involved in strategy formulation at EKZNW or in short, top management position holders. Consideration is also being given to those in middle management since important issues are likely to emerge from these people.

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Introduction: to explain purpose of study and the role of the respondents, assurance of confidentiality and request permission to use tape recorder.

<p>2. General questions and access to questions about perceptions of EKZNW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brief discussion of respondent's job at EKZNW, period (length) of service, past employment, and reason for joining the conservation sector. ▪ What is the role of conservation agencies (like EKZNW)? What challenges have they been facing in recent times? ▪ Tell me about EKZNW. How did it get to be the way it is? (Anything else?) Why? ▪ Make believe EKZNW is a person. Think about that person for a moment. Describe that person to me so I can get a good idea of the picture you have in mind? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is he/she always like that? (If not, what other pictures come to mind?) ○ How energetic is EKZNW? (Tell me what you mean?) ○ In what ways is this energy useful? (Give examples) ▪ What are the main rules around here that everyone has to follow? (Specify) ▪ What are the busy times around here? ▪ How closely are things/ activities scheduled? What does a typical day look like? ▪ What ways are there to find out what is going on around here? (Any others?) ▪ What are the four things that EKZNW is working hardest for at this time? ▪ In the last few years, how much has this organisation changed and how has it stayed the same? ▪ How would you rate EKZNW compared to other conservation agencies? ▪ How would you rate the strictness of the rules of the rules of EKZNW? 	<p>2 continued</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What topics, if any is taboo in the organization? Which rituals, if any, are obligatory in the organizations? ▪ What would you regard as a low point in the history of EKZNW? And the opposite? ▪ Describe your views about the transformation process of EKZNW. Probe for the pros and cons. ▪ Who are the heroes of the organization? Who are the villains? <p>3. Questions to get an idea of perceptions about mission and strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What does EKZNW say it stands for? /Tell me what is regarded as the central purpose of EKZNW? ▪ What is EKZNW's most important product/ service? ▪ Kindly describe the means by which EKZNW intends to achieve that purpose over an extended period of time? (Probe past approaches, present approaches and those likely to emerge in the future?) ▪ What types of policies, strategies, structures are used by the EKZNW, and how do these affect behaviour? ▪ Where does your job fit in the general strategic framework of EKZNW? (Probe for clarity in relation to one's substantive position). ▪ How much consideration are stakeholders' ideas or suggestions given by EKZNW?
<p>4. Questions about the external pressures and the environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are the most critical events of the organisation's history? 	<p>5. Questions about stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How much do people (outsiders) know about this organisation? Why? How do you know? ▪ Which outside groups does EKZNW pay attention to? How? Why? (Specify) And others? How? Why?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What stories are told about those events, who tells them, under what circumstances and what impact do they have on behaviour? What sort of pressures does the environment (context) impose on the work of EKZNW? How does EKZNW keep up with what's going on elsewhere? Where do you most often learn what is going on in the community (and elsewhere)? What kind of things is EKZNW most interested in keeping up with? Where does the impetus for change come from/ Where should it/ Where/ Who would be most effective? Whose role is it to make changes? How has EKZNW faced environmental challenges over the years? What works for EKZNW? What works against EKZNW? What opportunities and threats can you highlight for EKZNW? 	<p>to? How? Why (for each?) And others? How? Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do outsiders think of this of EKZNW? Please specify which groups have which attitudes? Why for each? From your personal perspective, explain your understanding of the EKZNW –stakeholder interaction. Probe for examples of both functional and dysfunctional interaction. How does EKZNW endeavour to better stakeholder roles in its activities? (Probe for examples). Tell me what is done at EKZNW to forge relationships with stakeholders? Anything else? How much and what kind of involvement do stakeholders have in EKZNW's affairs? With respect to effectively engaging stakeholders, how does EKZNW go about it? How does it get the message across? (Both what media and how effectively?) How do communities and other stakeholders feel about EKZNW? How do communities and other stakeholders feel about EKZNW?
<p>6. Core-competences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell me what you feel are the distinctive features/ attributes that make EKZNW better at performing its functions? (Probe each attribute and seek examples of how these attributes are currently leveraging the organisation currently). Compared to other conservation agencies in RSA and the world, how would you rate the employment policies and benefits of EKZNW? (Probe) What is unique about EKZNW? What values are true priorities for the future at the EKNW? 	<p>7. SWOT analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage the respondents on their perceptions of EKZNW's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. What are your hopes for the future? What are your fears for the future?

8. General follow-ups based on issues emerging from the interview

9. Concluding questions

- What future do you see for EKZNW? (Why?)
- Thinking ahead five years, would you want to be working for EKZNW?
- Suppose you were the CEO and had to make long range plans about EKZNW. What do you think would be the most that you should have to keep in mind in making these plans?
- What would make you professionally commit your mind and heart to this vision?
- What do KZN and RSA need that the EKZNW can and should provide?
- If you could make changes that would make EKZNW a better place for you to work, what changes would be the most important to you?

- What would you want the EKZNW to accomplish so that you will be committed, aligned and proud of your association with the organisation?
- What recommendations would you make to EKZNW that would help achieve its goals?
- Thinking back over the things we have talked about, do you think most people here would at these things the same way you do?
- I have asked you a lot of questions. Do you have any you would like to ask me?

10. Thank the respondents for their time and help; request permission for further contacts to seek clarification or additional interviews if necessary.