

UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCE

**INTEGRATING ACTION RESEARCH AND JOURNEY MAKING
DURING REAL-WORLD ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY
DEVELOPMENT**

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SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF Ph.D.

GLASGOW 2003

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My personal learning journey started in 1984 and has continued at a varied pace for nineteen years. Along the way I been privileged to meet many interesting people who when asked, provided me with sound advice regarding my academic studies and helped to shape my professional career. There have been so many helpful people that naming them all individually would fill a small book so to those who are not mentioned below, my heartfelt thanks. You have not been forgotten and I know that I could not have traveled for so long or so far without your guidance.

The first person I would like to acknowledge and the person to whom I owe the most gratitude is my former brother-in-law, Kevin Glasper. In 1983, Kevin convinced an unemployed former National Coal Board (NCB) worker, with learning difficulties and very few prospects, that he had the basic intelligence needed to start a learning journey. When I realised, several months into the journey, that it was not going to be as easy as I initially thought, Kevin convinced me that if I really believed I could achieve something and was prepared to work as hard as possible to achieve it, then in all probability I would achieve it. Similar to Einstein's contention that genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. When facing difficult times on my learning journey, Kevin's words of wisdom have often been recalled and always motivate me onward. The principle of working hard to achieve what I believed I was capable of achieving has stayed with me throughout my entire learning journey. Unfortunately, this is a posthumous acknowledgement, and a very long overdue one, because without Kevin's help and inspiration an enjoyable and very worthwhile journey would never have started.

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Dr. Elspeth McFadzean, a fellow traveler, has helped me immeasurably over the past ten years. We started as fellow doctoral students and ended up as very good friends. Along, our journey together we have co-written several published articles and discussed, debated, argued, agreed and disagreed on just about every subject in management research. I have been able to consult Elspeth, informally, about any academic problems I have had and she has always helped me solve them, without actually providing me with a direct answer to any question asked. Elspeth always maintains that an element of doctoral research is about learning ‘how to do’ research and being able to work out research related problems for yourself. Elspeth, is a colleague who often points me in the right direction but never tells me exactly what to look for, knowing that I will enjoy the challenge of working it out for myself.

I have only known Prof. John Bryson, for about six or seven years. When John came to the UK to lecture at the Civil Service College we would often meet for an evening meal and discuss many issues about how and/or whether management consulting and academic research could be linked together. John provided me with the pearl of wisdom that “*the only good Ph.D. is a done Ph.D.*” This one is now done John, thanks for the encouragement to get it finished and the many pearls of wisdom you have provided me with since we first met.

Roger Ivey, a personal friend, always encourages me to continue my work every time we meet. We often get together socially, for a couple of hours during hectic work schedules, when we solve all the problems of the business world. Roger’s questioning of my logic and ethics both academically and professionally constantly motivates me to explore the pathway that links ‘real world’ academic research with the provision of practical business consultancy services and solutions. I will find a way of doing both eventually Roger.

Dr. Robin Campbell read a draft copy of the thesis and provided me with kind words, encouragement and excellent feedback regarding the structure and content along with hints and tips on ‘How to write a Ph.D. Thesis’. Valuable information that needs to be passed from one doctoral student to another. I now look forward to a much longer working relationship with Robin as we research and explore areas of common interest.

My thanks go to all authors mentioned in the Bibliography at the end of this document because I have learnt something from each and every one of them and had many happy hours reading documents covering a variety of subjects. Mentioned there are my two supervisors at Strathclyde University, Prof. Fran Ackermann and Prof. Colin Eden. I have learnt more from them than from anyone else. They have been with me throughout this stage of the learning journey, always providing me with direction, feedback, support and motivation. It has taken a long time to complete this doctoral research programme and Fran and Colin have always been there for me even when my communication with them became sporadic due to career development activities. Balancing a full-time career in management consulting and undertaking part-time academic research has not been easy for me but Fran and Colin have guided me towards finishing this stage of my journey, with greatly appreciated patients.

The final acknowledgements are for my family. My parents and my brother and his family have always supported me regardless of what I have attempted to do. My partner Debra has supported me, physically, mentally, spiritually and often financially, during this part of my journey. Debra has experienced, first hand, all the highs and lows that undertaking doctoral research produces. I am certain that the journey would not have progressed this far without her patience, assistance, encouragement, support and love. She deserves a Ph.D. for the support she has shown me. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the contribution made by my two sons Steven and Michael. They have been with me throughout the whole journey and when younger, never complained when my work came before play. Sometimes I got the balance wrong and they were happy to tell me that I had gotten it wrong and to discuss how we could do things differently next time. Both are older now and have started their own learning journeys and the enthusiasm they are displaying for their work has encouraged me towards my finishing line. My motivation and enthusiasm had started to wane as I 'entered the finishing straight', but seeing how they approached their academic work has helped to re-establish why I started my learning journey so long ago and my motivation and enthusiasm became replenished as I approached the finishing line. In return for their contribution to my journey, hopefully, I can convince them that during their learning journey, if they believed they can achieve something and are prepared to work as hard as possible to achieve it, then in all probability they will achieve it. Perseverance often leads to success.

FOR
DEBRA, STEVEN and MICHAEL

ABSTRACT

Information systems (IS) researchers and practitioners have for some time now been advocating the use of Action Research as an appropriate means of undertaking work in the field of information systems (Checkland and Scholes, 1990; Mansell, 1991; Stowell and West, 1994; Baskerville and Wood-Harper, 1996, 1998; Stowell, West and Stansfield, 1997; Checkland and Holwell, 1998, West and Stansfield, 2001; Mumford, 2001). **Yet little has been written about the application of Action Research during the real-world development of organizational strategic plans**, where an important aim of the Action Researcher is also the attainment of an academic qualification. A possible explanation for this may be the amount of controversy that still surrounds the *theoretical principles* (Cady and Caster, 2000) and the *practice and application* (Stowell et. al, 1997) of Action Research. In particular, Action Research has been criticised for producing research with little action or action with little research (Foster, 1972), lacking in the rigor of true scientific research (Cohen and Manion, 1980), lacking in validity of data (Baskerville and Wood-Harper, 1996), lacking in internal and external control (Merriam and Simpson, 1984) and likely to be a problematic research method for doctoral students (Eden and Huxham, 1993, 1995, 1996).

This doctoral research programme has been set up to investigate two ‘themes’. The first, of more research/academic interest, concerns the development and testing of a diagrammatic Action Research Approach that will help to ensure the delivery of valid/robust research results. Also, because most existing diagrams don’t describe Action Research at a more useful lower ‘micro’ level (Lau, 1997). The second research theme, of more *practical* interest, concerns understanding what can happen when a ‘novice’ practitioner attempts to use Action Research and JOURNEY Making (Eden and Ackermann, 1998) to solve a real-world organizational strategic problem. To ensure that the research is seen as ‘valid’ Action Research, Checkland and Holwell’s (1998) ‘FMA’ model is applied because “*This is the intellectual structure which will lead to findings and research lessons being recognised as such. Without that declaration, it is difficult to see how the outcome of Action Research can be more than anecdotal*” (p.13-14).

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INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Introduction

This chapter has been included to serve two purposes. The first is to provide the reader with a roadmap of the main document. Here a full statement of the research subject/themes can be found, along with brief details of the content of each chapter, thereby, presenting the reader with an overview of how the storyline unfolds. *The roadmap only contains limited information about main text issues. A more detailed explanation of issues/areas of interest, etc., can be found by following the reference sources within the text.* The second aim is to provide an understanding of the structure of the document as this may help readers to locate, easily, an area of interest without having to read the whole document. Readers only wanting to read the main document should start at Chapter1.

The Document Roadmap

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003:13) suggest that *“Before you start your research you need to have at least some idea of what you want to do. This is probably the most difficult, and yet the most important, part of your research project... Without being clear about what you are going to research it is difficult to plan how you are going to research it.”* This is similar to the conversation between Alice and the Cheshire Cat in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1989:63-64).

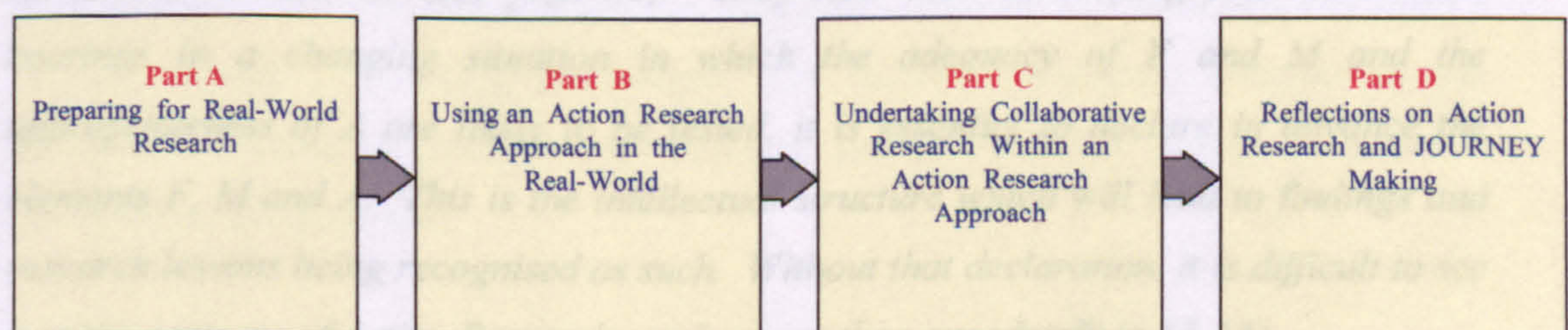
‘Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?’

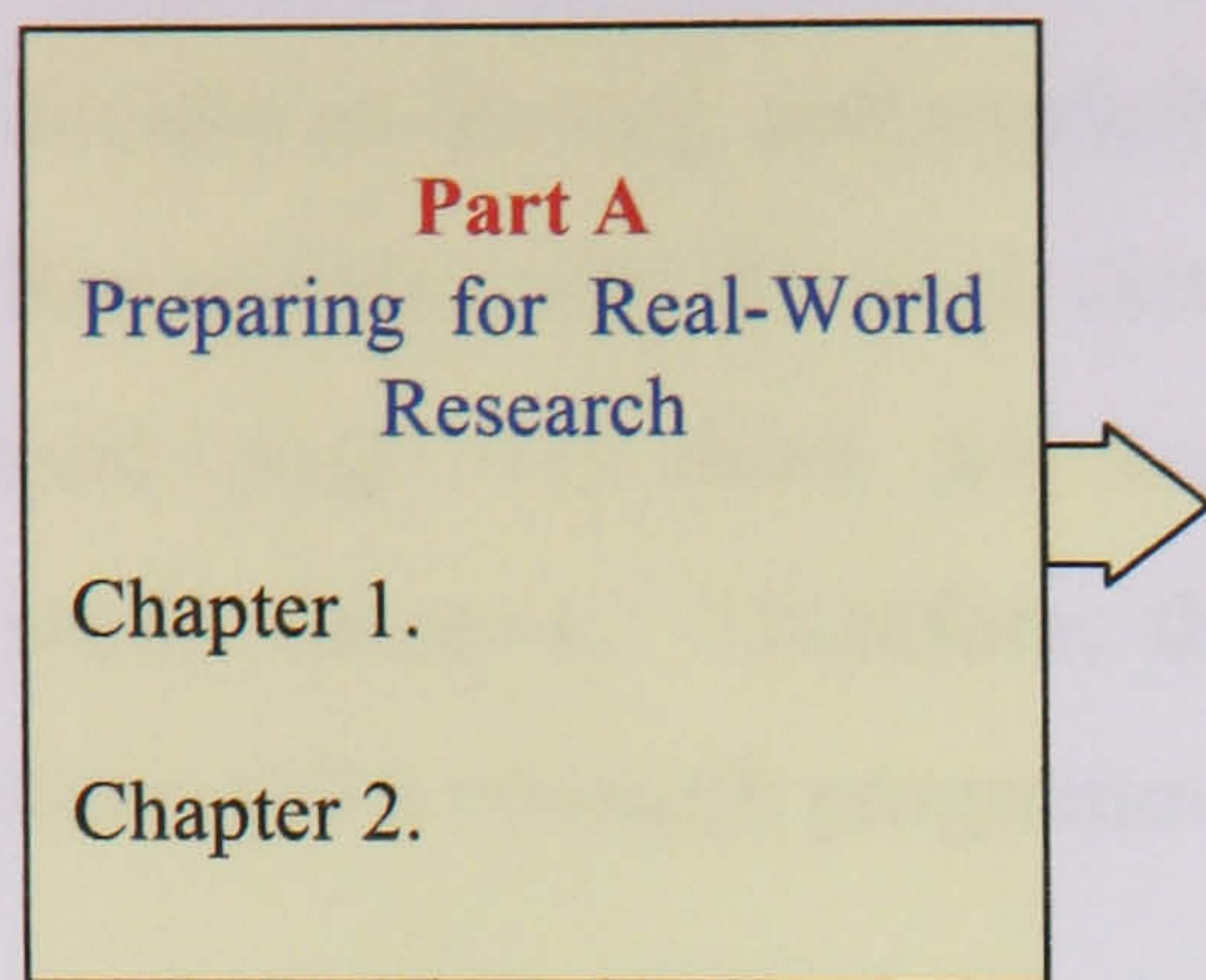
‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to’, said the Cat.

‘I don’t much care where’ said Alice.

‘Then it doesn’t matter which way you walk,’ said the Cat.

Mumford (2001:15) discussed this issue in more detail when suggesting that *“The first, essential, part of any research project is deciding on, and clarifying, the subject for study. Next comes identifying appropriate theory that can provide an intellectual basis for the proposed research area and choosing research methods that will enable this theory to be tested out. Also and most important, finding an organization that will welcome the research. ... Each of these activities is fraught with difficulty. Ideally the study should be something in which the researcher has considerable interest, believes to be important and hopes that it is an area where it will be possible to make a contribution to knowledge.”* **All of the aforementioned research programme issues, and more, are covered in the four major parts to this document.**





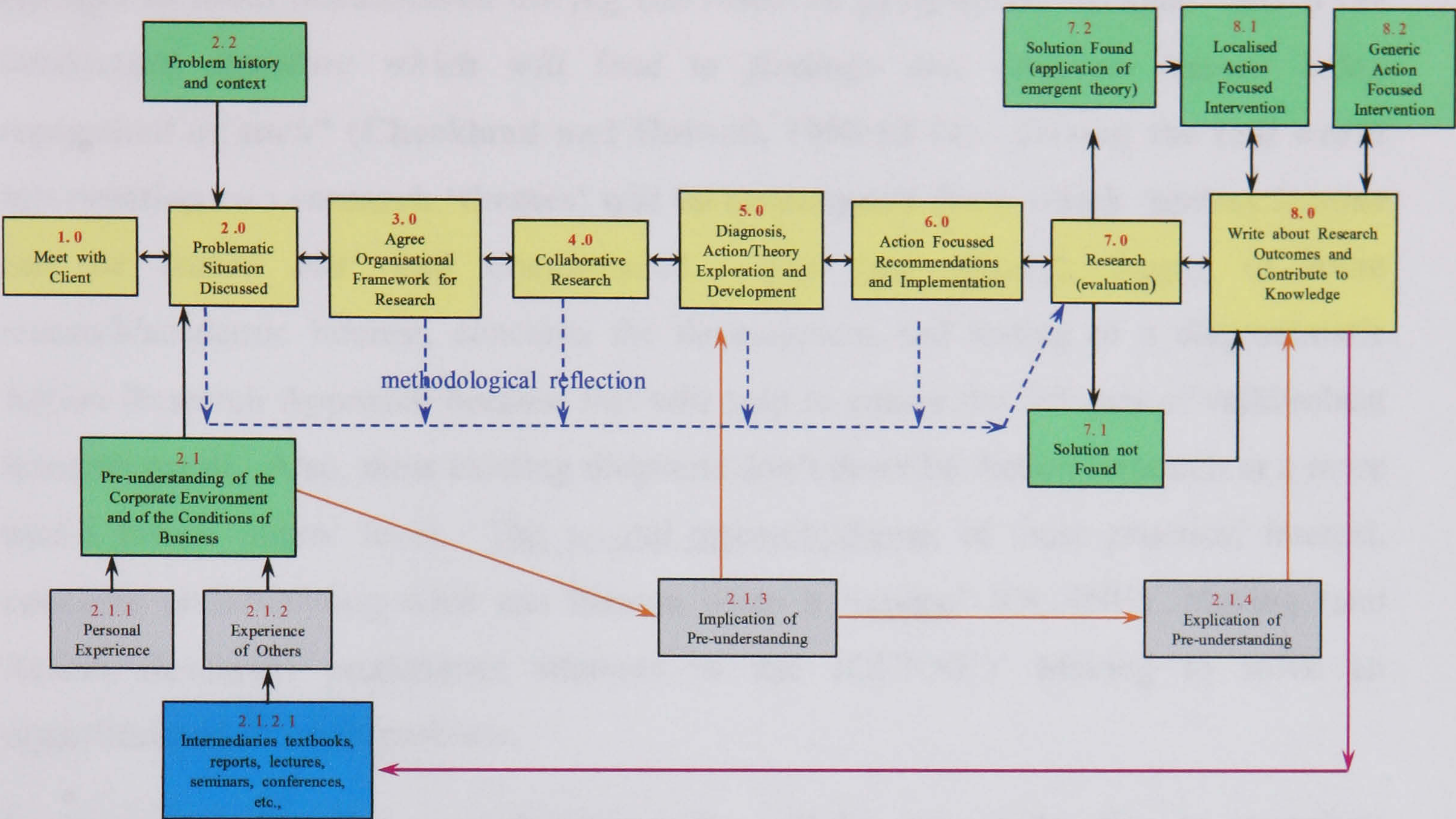
Chapter 1 ‘Deciding What to Research and the Methodology to Use’ describes why the researcher decides to research ‘soft’ organizational strategic problem solving methods and how Eden and Ackermann’s (1998) JOURNEY Making method becomes an integral part of the research programme (see page 28). Also described is how an initial research subject is developed that states ‘a practical aspect to the research will involve the application of JOURNEY Making during the development of a ‘solution’ to a strategic organisational problem during a real-world intervention. The researcher will also be the person attempting to use JOURNEY Making, thereby becoming a full participant-observer in the research programme (see page 31). Next, the researcher considers the application of an Action Research methodology for this research programme (see page 35). Several concerns regarding the theoretical principles, practice and application of Action Research are discussed (see page 37) as are the nature and validity of Action Research according to Checkland and Holwell (1998). Checkland and Holwell suggest that any research in any mode may be thought of as entailing three major elements. Particular linked ideas ‘F’ are used in a methodology ‘M’ to investigate an area of interest ‘A’ (see page 38). They state that *“In keeping your intellectual bearings in a changing situation in which the adequacy of F and M and the appropriateness of A are likely to be tested, it is essential to declare in advance the elements F, M and A. This is the intellectual structure which will lead to findings and research lessons being recognised as such. Without that declaration, it is difficult to see how the outcome of Action Research can be more than anecdotal”* (p.13-14).

Following a decision to use Action Research for this research programme the researcher decides to identify and explicitly declare the elements of 'F', 'M' and 'A' (see page 40). Recognizing that although there are many methodological variations of Action Research (see page 37) there are no existing declared 'Fs' or 'Ms' for use with these methodologies. Therefore, the researcher considers developing those needed for use during this research programme. The development of 'F' and 'M' will be done by:

- a. Identifying what the characteristics are that will ensure that the research is classified as Action Research and developing them into an Action Research Framework. The Action Research Framework will be used as a declaration of 'F'.
- b. Developing a diagrammatic Action Research Approach based on the identified characteristics because this will help to ensure the delivery of valid/robust research results (Checkland and Holwell, 1998; West and Stansfield, 2001). Also, although several high level 'meta' diagrams have been produced about Action Research these diagrams don't describe Action Research at a more useful lower 'micro' level (Lau, 1997). The Action Research Approach will be used as a declaration of 'M'.

This leads to the creation of two research 'themes' from within which findings and research lessons that have been elicited from the experience of the overall Action Research process can be sought (Checkland and Holwell, 1998; West and Stansfield, 2001). The first research theme, of more *research/academic* interest, concerns the development and testing of a diagrammatic Action Research Approach as this will help to ensure the delivery of valid/robust research results. Also, most existing diagrams don't describe Action Research at a more useful lower 'micro' level. The second research theme, of more *practical* interest, concerns understanding what happens when a 'novice' JOURNEY Making practitioner (the Action Researcher) attempts to use JOURNEY Making to solve an organizational strategic problem during a real-world intervention (see page 42).

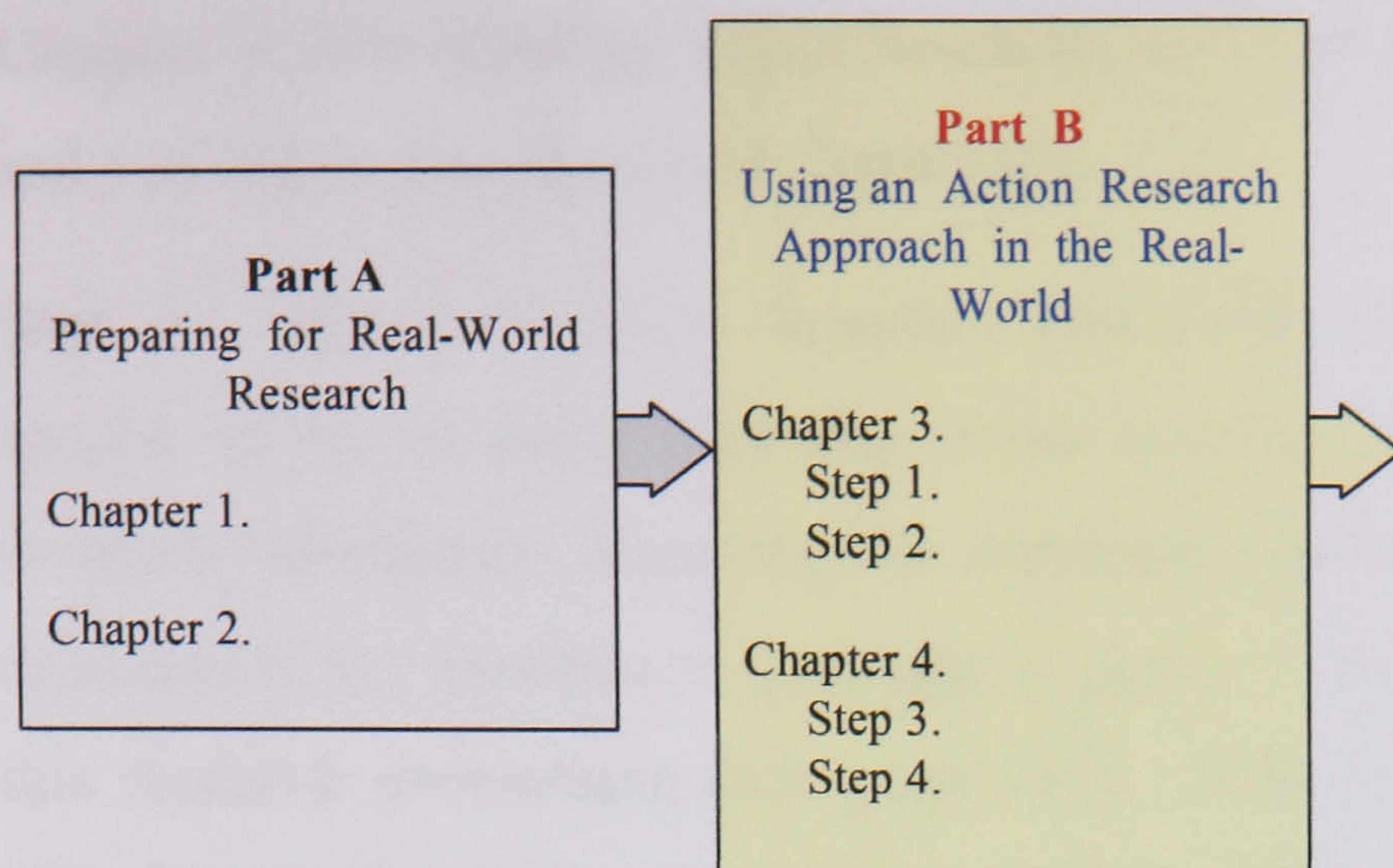
Chapter 2 ‘Developing and Action Research Approach’ describes how the researcher develops an Action Research Framework, see page 62, from characteristics associated with ‘good Action Research’ and how the Action Research Framework is then developed into an Action Research Approach (Checkland and Holwell, 1998; West and Stansfield, 2001) (see page 41, page 73 and below).



Next, a validation criterion for the Action Research Approach is discussed (see page 75). Here it is stated that a research programme using Action Research should be judged on the robustness of the Action Research model it professes to use and the adherence to the validity criterion identified for use with the model. In this research programme the model to be used will be the Action Research Approach, which is consistent with the Action Research Framework created. The validation criterion will be Checkland and Holwell’s (1998) statement that *“in a changing situation in which the adequacy of ‘F’, ‘M’, and the appropriateness of ‘A’ are likely to be tested, it is essential to declare in advance the elements of F, M and A. This is the intellectual structure that will lead to findings and research lessons being recognised as such. ... The change to or modification of F, M and even A has to be expected in Action Research”*.

In summary, to ensure that the research can be considered to be Action Research an Action Research Framework will be created ('F') from which an Action Research Approach ('M') will be developed that will be used during a real-world problem situation ('A'). The elements of 'F', 'M' and 'A' will be declared and explicitly stated before engaging in the real-world problem situation/intervention and changes to them documented during the research programme because *"this is the intellectual structure which will lead to findings and research lessons being recognised as such"* (Checkland and Holwell, 1998:13-14). During the real world intervention two research 'themes' will be investigated from which *'serious lessons can be teased out'* and documented. The first research theme, of more research/academic interest, concerns the development and testing of a diagrammatic Action Research Approach because this will help to ensure the delivery of valid/robust research result. Also, most existing diagrams don't describe Action Research at a more useful lower 'micro' level. The second research theme, of more *practical* interest, concerns understanding what can happen when a 'novice' JOURNEY Making (and Action Research) practitioner attempts to use JOURNEY Making to solve an organizational strategic problem.

In attempting this, the research programme will be one of the first to contribute additional knowledge about the application of JOURNEY Making in a real-world intervention, by a novice JOURNEY Making practitioner/researcher and to identify and detail the problems associated with using Action Research during a doctoral research programme. Also, the research programme will be one of the first to apply Checkland and Holwell's (1998) 'FMA' model when researching organizational strategic problem solving and probably will be the first to involve the combination of Action Research, JOURNEY Making and the 'FMA' model (see page 49). These aspects will provide a high degree of originality for this research programme.



Chapter 3 ‘Finding a Company to Work With’ explains what happens during the application of the first two steps of the **Action Research Approach**.

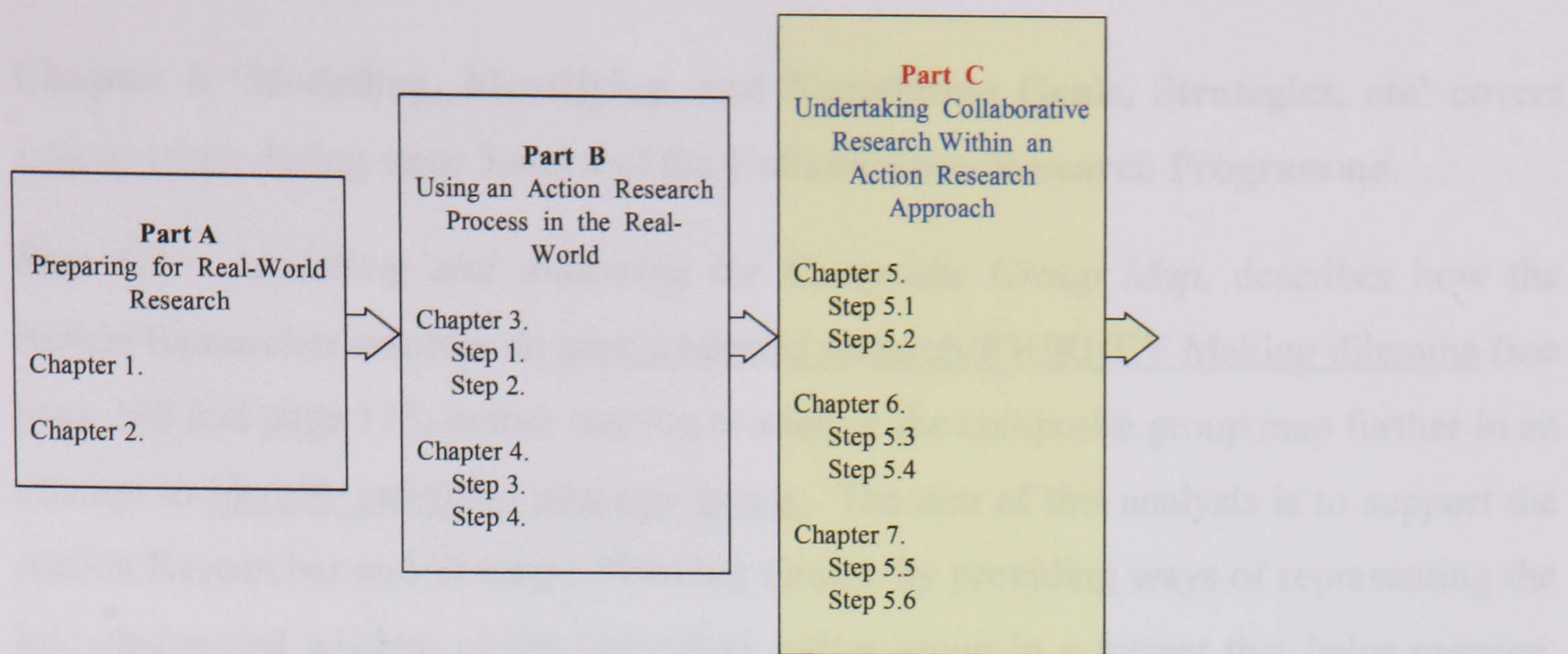
Step 1 - Gain Access to Undertake Research, describes the way the Action Researcher utilizes a number of ‘methods’ for gaining physical access to organizations (see page 84). Learning from the difficulties associated with applying these methods, leads to conclusions that this activity may need full time dedication from researchers (see page 92), that a ‘research programme value proposition’ needs to be carefully considered and effectively communicated to potential Clients (see page 95) and that ‘Gaining Access to Undertake Research’ needs to become the first Action Research Approach step (see page 97).

Step 2 – Meet with Client, discusses what happens when the Action Researcher attempts to ‘sell’ the concept of Collaborative Research Programme involvement to a company's Strategic Planning Group (see page 98). Here the Action Researcher’s academic and consultancy backgrounds are evaluated in great depth as well as aspects of the strategy development method (JOURNEY Making) to be utilized (see page 100). Following these deliberations the company decides to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme, as it is believed that this will add value to what the Strategic Planning Group originally intended to do by enabling them to be facilitated in a tried and tested ‘group’ strategy development method, albeit with a non tried and tested facilitator of the method, during the development of a five year strategic plan (see page 102).

Chapter 4 ‘Establishing What Needs to be Done’ details what happens during Steps 3 and 4 of the **Action Research Approach**.

Step 3 – The Problematic Situation Discussed, describes how, during the afternoon session of the Strategic Planning Group meeting, the Action Researcher gathers more in-depth information regarding the company’s perceived problematic situation to help establish if the situation is ‘strategic in nature’ and therefore, relevant for inclusion in this research programme (see page 113). This highlights a previously unconsidered dilemma for the Action Researcher. If the problem turns out not to be what the Action Researcher initially set out to research there may be the temptation to amend the research programme theme(s) to suit the Client’s specific problem because physical access is so hard to gain. On the other hand there is the possibility of declining the physical access and starting the process of seeking physical access elsewhere. This step details how the Action Researcher reflects on the validity of the qualitative data gathering method used, the data gathered and the interpretation placed on the data that helps the Action Researcher make the decision whether or not to accept the company’s offer (see page 122).

Step 4 - Agree Organizational Framework for Research, details how the decision to involve the company in the Collaborative Research Programme is communicated to the Client and how an agreement is reached between Client and Action Researcher concerning the strategy development/JOURNEY Making activities that are to be utilized within the Collaborative Research step of the Action Research Approach (see page 125). At this time the Action Researcher considers whether a ‘framework document’ needs to be produced for the Collaborative Research Programme. This type of document is not produced during what Eden and Ackermann (1998) consider a ‘typical’ application of JOURNEY Making, but for a number of reasons the Action Researcher perceives that the situation faced during a Collaborative Research Programme is not similar to that of a typical JOURNEY Making intervention (see page 131). Schein (1969) and Cropper and Bennett (1985) argue that this type of document helps to reduce any misunderstandings and/or ambiguities which could arise and that may have a significant effect on the failure of an intervention (see page 131).



Chapter 5 ‘Information Gathering, Modelling and Mapping’ describes what happens during the first two sub-steps of the fifth Action Research Approach step. These are the first two steps of the **Collaborative Research Programme**.

Step 5.1 - Cognitive Mapping and Information Modelling, discusses how the Action Researcher starts to gather qualitative data that will assist in the development of the company’s strategic plan. Data is gathered during individual Cognitive Mapping interviews held with all members of the Strategic Planning Group (see page 143 and page 144). The hand drawn individual cognitive maps are then reproduced into Decision Explorer software and briefly analysed. Finally, a draft composite group map is developed, by combining all the individual cognitive maps, to identify any similar, dissimilar or emergent issues (see 145). Reflecting on activities during this Collaborative Research Programme sub-step the Action Researcher discusses several recommendations that may help ‘novice’ JOURNEY Making practitioners (see page 147).

Step 5.2 - Mapping in Groups, provides details of how the Action Researcher gathers additional data during ‘group’ Oval Mapping Workshops. Two group workshops are held, the first at the company’s premises in a very positive manner but the second, at a nearby external training facility, does not run quite so smoothly. This is due to the Action Researcher failing to comprehend the significance of implementing a ‘trivial issue’ in the manner recommended by Eden and Ackermann (1998). Learning from actions undertaken, the Action Researcher considers the need to pay attention to detail when planning JOURNEY Making events (page 155) and generic issues associated with improving ‘group productivity’ during JOURNEY Making (see page 156).

Chapter 6 ‘Modelling, Identifying, and Negotiating Goals, Strategies, etc’ covers actions taken during steps 3 and 4 of the **Collaborative Research Programme**.

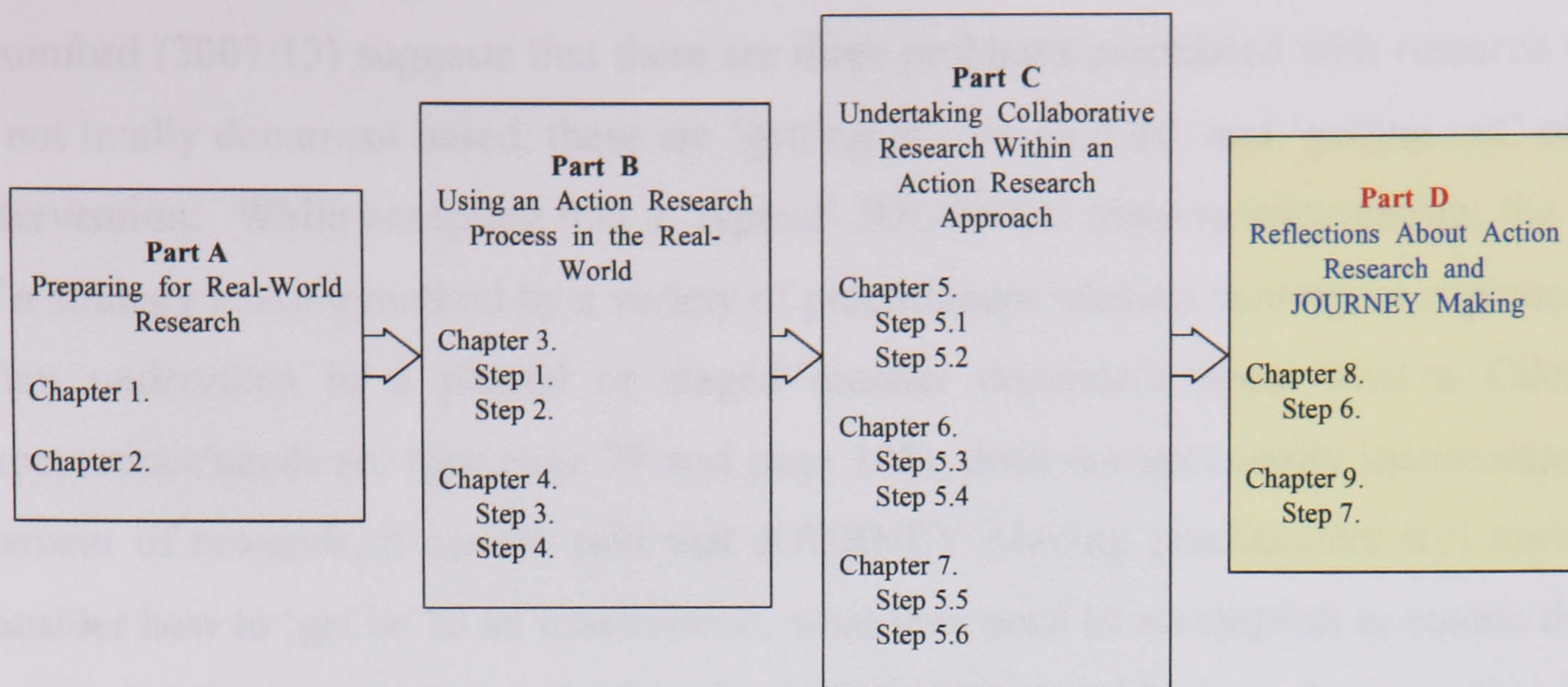
Step 5.3 – Modelling and Analysing the Composite Group Map, describes how the Action Researcher resolves an unprecedented research/JOURNEY Making dilemma (see page 165 and page 173) before starting to analyse the composite group map further in an attempt to identify emerging strategic issues. The aim of this analysis is to support the Action Researcher and Strategic Planning Group, by providing ways of representing the knowledge and wisdom of the individual and/or group in a format that helps manage, rather than reduce complexity. The Action Researcher considers several aspects associated with the application of both JOURNEY Making and the Action Research Approach, for example the use of software to analyse the composite group map (see page 175) and the issue of time management for ‘part-time’ researchers (see page 176).

Step 5.4 – Identifying and Negotiating Goals and Strategies, explains how the Strategic Planning Group is presented with the results from the analysis of the composite group map. The Strategic Planning Group’s task is then to explore the data further through discussion, debate and negotiation and ultimately identify strategic goal(s), strategies and strategic programmes. During this step the concept of gathering further data is considered when it is identified that not enough data has been solicited from an influential representative group (see page 179). However, agreement regarding ownership of each identified strategic programme is eventually achieved (see page 190). Following this the Action Researcher reflects on why so little information has been solicited from the influential group and how this may be avoided during future applications of JOURNEY Making (see page 191). Also, comments are forthcoming regarding the difficulties involved in combining part-time doctoral research involving the application of Action Research and JOURNEY Making in a real-world intervention while working full-time for a different employer (see page 176 and page 194).

Chapter 7 ‘Collaborative Research Programme Closure’ covers the final two Collaborative Research Programme sub-steps involving JOURNEY Making type activities and thereby completes the fifth step of the **Action Research Approach**.

Step 5.5 - Negotiating, Agreeing & Project Planning Goals & Strategies discusses how the identified Goals, Strategies and Strategic programmes are further amended. During this workshop a brief, heated, conflicting and intense debate between several members of the Strategic Planning Group occurs when a unilateral decision is made by an influential participant that has implications for the whole group (see page 198). Following this all individual strategies are discussed, in-depth and following debate and negotiation several minor changes are identified for the developing ‘strategy map’ (see page 201). Reflecting on several issues emerging from this step, the Action Researcher considers political aspects associated with strategy making (see page 203).

Step 5.6 – Closure, describes how the unexpected loss of the Action Researcher’s Client brings the Collaborative Research Programme to a long protracted closure. Learning from this situation the Action Researcher considers the impact that losing the Client has on the research programme/strategy development activities (see page 209). The Action Researcher also considers how ethical issues/dilemmas associated with the application of Action Research can be incorporated into the Action Research Approach (see page 214).



Chapter 8 ‘In-depth Reflections about Action Research and JOURNEY Making’ covers step 6 of the **Action Research Approach**.

Step 6.0 - Diagnosis Action/Theory Exploration and Development, explains how the Action Researcher incorporates previously unidentified published information with information developed during the implementation of the Action Research Approach and Collaborative Research Programme, to look deeper into both Action Research and JOURNEY Making.

With regard to Action Research, the twin subjects of Action and Research are discussed leading to discussion about whether Action Research can be thought of as a ‘dual cycle activity’ (McKay and Marshall, 2001) rather than the single cycle approach often described (Robson, 1995; Walker and Haslett, 2002) (see page 226). Also for consideration is the issue of whether the activities of PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING, often associated with single cycle Action Research, occur only once and discretely or multiple times and simultaneously. The Action Research Approach is amended to reflect these activities (see page 234). Final discussion regarding Action Research considers what elements (other than Checkland and Holwell’s (1998) elements of ‘F’, ‘M’ and ‘A’) can be associated with a Dual Cycle Action Research Approach and when during the implementation of the approach they need to be explicitly declared (see page 235).

Mumford (2001:13) suggests that there are three problems associated with research that is not totally document based, these are ‘getting in’, ‘staying in’, and ‘getting out’ of an intervention. While accepting that a ‘typical’ JOURNEY Making intervention, the use of a strategy making method by a variety of practitioners where a contingent approach is often undertaken in a phased or staged manner dependent upon what a Client’s expectations/needs are (see page 79 and page 105), does not necessarily incorporate an element of research, it can be said that JOURNEY Making practitioners still need to consider how to ‘get in’ to an intervention, what they need to accomplish to enable them to ‘stay in’ the intervention and when the time is right, consider how they can ‘get out’ of the intervention. JOURNEY Making issues associated with these three activities are considered during this step. Examples of these would be, preparing for a first meeting with a potential Client (see page 241), or what to discuss during a first meeting with a potential Client (see page 242) or understanding the importance associated with establishing a sense of urgency for the strategy development work to be undertaken (see page 244) or managing group conflict during JOURNEY Making activities (see page 246) or successful affecting a JOURNEY Making closure (see page 249).

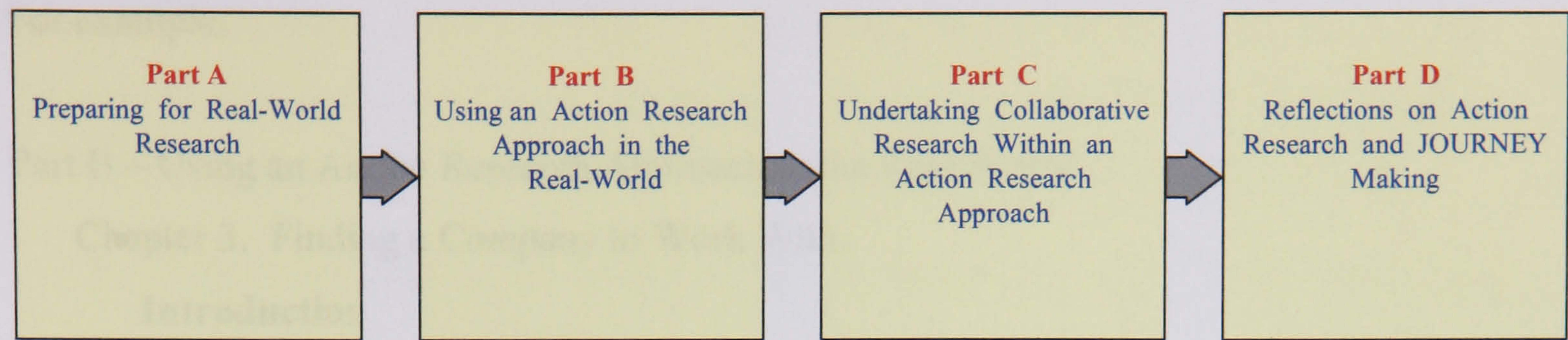
Chapter 9 ‘Evaluation of the Research Programme’ covers the seventh and last step of the **Action Research Approach** implemented during this research programme.

Step 7.0 – Research Evaluation, revisits how the research programme was initially set up (see page 261) and establishes what was achieved with regard to the declaration and explicit statement of Checkland and Holwell’s (1998) elements of ‘F’, ‘M’ and ‘A’, whether changes to them are documented during the research programme and what ‘serious lessons’ are teased out with regard to the two stated research themes (see page 265). Also for discussion is the issue of what was not achieved during the research programme (see page 271). The chapter concludes with comments regarding the issue of the generalizability of the research undertaken (see page 274).

All Chapters Contained in the Document are as Detailed Below

The Document Structure

As detailed earlier, the main document is produced in four major parts.



All ‘Parts’ have ‘Chapters’ contained within them, as detailed below.

Introduction to the Research Programme.

Part A - Preparing for Real World Research.

Chapter 1. Deciding What to Research and the Methodology to Use.

Chapter 2. Developing an Action Research Approach.

Part B – Using an Action Research Approach in the Real World.

Chapter 3. Finding a Company to Work With.

Chapter 4. Establishing What Needs to be Done.

Part C – Undertaking Collaborative Research Within an Action Research Approach.

Chapter 5. Information Gathering, Modelling and Mapping.

Chapter 6. Identifying, Modelling, and Negotiating Goals, Strategies, etc.

Chapter 7. Collaborative Research Programme Closure.

Part D - Reflections About Action Research and JOURNEY Making.

Chapter 8. In-depth Reflections About Action Research and JOURNEY Making.

Chapter 9. Evaluation of the Research Programme.

Bibliography.

Appendices.

All 'Chapters' commence with a brief '**Introduction**' that explains the purpose of the chapter. Individual chapters, from Part B onwards, contain information regarding specific Action Research Approach steps and/or Collaborative Research Programme sub-steps, involving JOURNEY Making activities, relevant to the theme of the chapter. For example,

Part B – Using an Action Research Approach in the Real World.

Chapter 3. Finding a Company to Work With.

Introduction

Step 1 Gain Access to Undertake Research.

Step 2 Meet the Client.

Chapter 4. Establishing What Needs to be Done.

Introduction

Step 3 The Problematic Situation Discussed.

Step 4 Agree Organizational Framework for Research.

Part C – Undertaking Collaborative Research Within an Action Research Approach.

Chapter 5. Information Gathering, Modelling and Mapping.

Introduction

Step 5.1 Cognitive Mapping and Information Modelling.

Step 5.2 Mapping in Groups.

Chapter 6. Modelling, Identifying, and Negotiating Goals, Strategies, etc.

Introduction

Step 5.3 Modelling and Analysing the Composite Group Map.

Step 5.4 Identifying and Negotiating Goals and Strategies.

Chapter 7. Collaborative Research Programme Closure.

Introduction

Step 5.5 Negotiating, Agreeing and Project Planning Goals and Strategies.

Step 5.6 Closure.

Action Researchers can draw upon many models to guide their research, however most Action Researchers agree that it consists of cycles of, PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING (Marrow, 1969; Cartwright, 1978; Peters and Robinson, 1984; Israel, Schurman and Hugentobler, 1992; Chisholm, and Elden, 1993; Elden and Chisholm, 1993; Coghlan, 1994; Robson, 1995 Dickens and Watkins, 1999). Therefore, *all individual steps* within the Action Research Approach (including Collaborative Research Programme sub-steps) are documented from this viewpoint.

- Under the heading PLANNING the question is asked: What should be achieved during this step?
- Under the heading ACTING the question is asked: What actually happened during this step?
- Under the heading OBSERVING the questions is asked: What differences that were immediately noticed by the researcher happened from what was planned to occur?
- Under the heading REFLECTING the questions is asked: Why did these differences happen and what are the key contributions to knowledge that derive from the observations?

*To differentiate between OBSERVATIONS and REFLECTIONS, both of which can be deemed to be 'reflective' activities, the following will apply. **OBSERVATIONS are usually made at the same time PLANNED ACTIONS are being undertaken and for a short period afterwards.** They may be thoughts the researcher has regarding a particular situation that are noted but given little in-depth consideration at that time. Therefore, they may only appear in this document as short bullet pointed paragraphs of text. **REFLECTIONS are made over a longer time period and following a literature search and review of relevant material, produce a more in-depth understanding of OBSERVATIONS.** REFLECTIONS should be viewed as **individual and distinct pieces of research** that ensure this thesis is a record of 'research' rather than a record of practice without in-depth consideration or understanding of theory.*

An example of how this is incorporated into the structure used for all 'Steps' is detailed below.

Part B – Using an Action Research Approach in the Real World.

Chapter 3. Finding a Company to Work With.

Introduction

Step 1 Gain Access to Undertake Research.

Planning, Acting, Observing, Reflecting.

Step 2 Meet the Client.

Planning, Acting, Observing, Reflecting.

Chapter 4. Establishing What Needs to be Done

Introduction.

Step 3 The Problematic Situation Discussed

Planning, Acting, Observing, Reflecting.

Step 4 Agree Organizational Framework for Research

Planning, Acting, Observing, Reflecting.

*It is perceived that identifying certain **OBSERVATIONS** will cause the researcher to consider the **OBSERVATION**, however shallowly, which in turn may lead to the researcher identifying a further **OBSERVATION**. Therefore, **OBSERVATIONS** and **REFLECTIONS** are documented in the order in which they are identified to reflect the researcher's progressive thought processes throughout the research programme.*

All individual Chapters conclude with a ‘**Summary**’. A characteristic that many Action Research authors (Rapoport, 1970; Hult and Lennung, 1980; Carr and Kemmiss, 1986; Gummesson, 1991; Bryman, 1995; Eden and Huxham, 1993, 1995, 1996) concur with is that it is a collaboration between a Client and an Action Researcher in the diagnosis and solution of a real-world problematic situation where both are seen as being involved in the process. Therefore, outcomes from undertaking research using an Action Research methodology may be of interest to two different communities. The first is the research community, to further the goals of science, and the second the practitioner community, consultant/business managers etc. who may want to apply the methodology in their daily work. *Therefore, when applicable the Summary splits into two distinct parts, the first detailing specific contributions to research and the second detailing specific contributions to practice.* This later part helps to satisfy Tranfield and Starkey’s (1998:346) “key distinguishing feature of research output resulting from management research is that it addresses directly the question, what are the implications for management?” An example of how this incorporates into the structure used for all Chapters is detailed below.

Part B – Using an Action Research Approach in the Real World.

Chapter 3. Finding a Company to Work With.

Introduction

Step 1 Gain Access to Undertake Research.

Planning, Acting, Observing, Reflecting.

Step 2 Meet the Client.

Planning, Acting, Observing, Reflecting.

Summary

Contributions to knowledge in the research community.

Contributions to knowledge in the practitioner community.

Summary sections briefly discuss certain issues, not all, from the REFLECTING sections. However, here two criterion are used to prioritise Summary information. The first the basis of the fundamental impact, i.e., the seriousness of their ramifications, and the second the extent to which they are generalizable rather than context specific.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the main document are written in the Times New Roman font. From the beginning of Chapter 3 to the end of the document discrete steps within the Action Research Approach and Collaborative Research Programme are detailed. To differentiate the information relevant to these two activities, steps within the Action Research Approach appear in *Monotype Corsiva* and sub-steps within the Collaborative Research Programme involving JOURNEY Making activities appears in Tahoma. Generic information appears in Times New Roman. Any identified areas for postdoctoral research are highlighted in red.

PART A

Preparing for Real World Research

CHAPTER 1

DECIDING WHAT TO RESEARCH & THE METHODOLOGY TO USE

Notes for the Reader

- a) Information contained within the Appendices will be referenced throughout the document. The format for reference will be Appendix name followed by start page number and end page number. For example ‘Appendix B25-31’ refers to a document in Appendix B starting on page number 25 and ending on page 31; a document of 7 pages in total.

Introduction

Deciding what subject to research should be the format of this first chapter, however following an extensive literature review into ‘organizational strategic problem solving’, it was found to be a subject that could be confusing to novice researchers, as the meaning of individual phrases or words used by subject authors/theorists to discuss ‘strategic’ issues can often be construed as having totally different meanings. This depends upon who used the phrase or word, an American, European or Asian author/theorist, the strategic approach/typology they were describing, what context they use the phrase or word in, and whether or not they give an explanation of what they mean by the phrase or word in their text. This lack of consensus in agreeing explanations of different aspects of strategy has been previously noted by several observers (Carroll, 1982, Greenley, 1993; Wind & Robertson, 1983). As this researcher is specifically interested in **researching strategic organizational problems** rather than any other problem type, the first activity to be undertaken during this research programme concerns finding an approach that can be used to classify ‘strategic problems’. Then, the specific subject to be researched can be defined, followed by the selection of the most appropriate research methodology to use.

1.1 Classifying Strategic Problems

In 1978, Hofer and Schendel established that strategic problems could be found at three different organizational levels (see Figure 1).

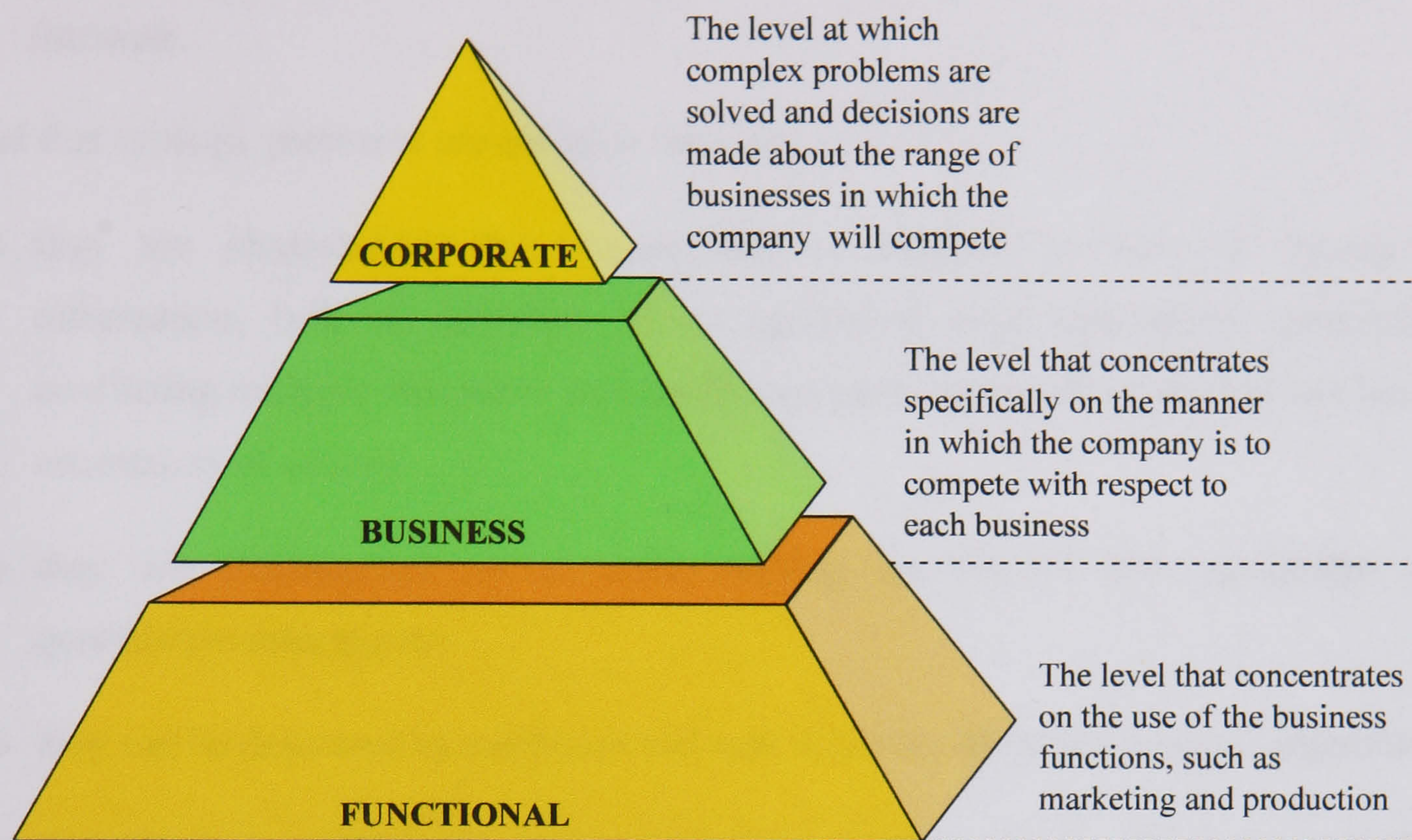


Figure 1. Levels of Strategic Problems

Different authors use different words to describe these various organizational levels. The Corporate, Business and Functional levels have also been written about as the Strategic, Tactical and Operational/Clerical levels (Baxter, 1983; Reynolds, 1988; Long, 1989). Yet one characteristic that most authors consistently associated with strategic problems was high complexity. Discussing this issue Churchill (1990) stated that the important reasons for high problem complexity were incomplete information; lack of definition of, or agreement over quantitative parameters, conflicting multiple objectives and conflicting participants. He suggested that most problems faced by senior managers could be fully described by this type of complexity. Churchill also described the nature of problems and decisions faced by the senior management team as 'crucial' because not all issues were complex in the sense suggested earlier. Nor were they surrounded by conflict, but at the senior level the outcome of most decisions was consequential for the future of the organization and its members, and was therefore also strategic.

He suggests that strategic problems are crucial because:

⇒ they are about choosing between portfolios of options that have significant ramifications for the future of the organization itself, for the future of members of the organization and to other organizations with whom the organization significantly interacts.

and that strategic problems are complex because:

⇒ they are characterised by intractability of analysis because of incomplete information, lack of definition of, or agreement over quantitative parameters, conflicting multiple objectives and conflicting participants (all issues that can lead to uncertainty of action).

⇒ they are characterised by an overwhelming quantity of both qualitative and quantitative information.

⇒ they can be described by confusion and lack of clarity about the problem definition,

⇒ they involve members of a team who have competing values, views and objectives with respect to the situation.

⇒ they reflect important interactions between different players outside the management team and

⇒ solving them will involve complexity in the interactions between team members as they negotiate their way through the dynamics of reaching consensus.

The lack of structure in making decisions concerning an organization's strategic problems was also identified as being due to the complex nature of these problems, because with strategic problems it was extremely difficult to understand the problem and to determine the criteria by which solutions should be judged (Mason and Mitroff, 1981). The reason for this was that such problems involve uncertainty, ambiguity and conflict among decision-makers, which in turn makes it difficult to develop a clear formulation process for them.

Smith (1992) confirms this by stating that strategic problems tend to be indefinite, displaying infinite variety and often have no neat boundaries between the problem and its context, which makes it very difficult to decide on a process for overcoming them.

For the purposes of this research programme, Churchill's (1990) criterion will be used to establish whether an organizational problem is strategic in nature, regardless of the organizational level where it is found. The reason why this has been chosen is that the set of questions can easily be used to evaluate an identified problematic situation and a decision can be quickly made by the researcher as to whether the problem situation is relevant for use in this research programme.

1.2 *Deciding WHAT Specific Subject to Research*

The specific subject to be researched, within the vast area of organizational strategic problem solving, can now be approached. To do this the researcher decided to understand more deeply **what he personally wanted to obtain at the end of the research programme.** He wanted to:

- complete the doctoral research by obtaining the relevant academic qualification for which the research was being taken.
- develop and contribute new material to the body of academic knowledge that already exists regarding the chosen research subject. This would involve the publication of (1) a doctoral thesis and (2) post doctoral journal/magazine articles, book chapters, conference presentations etc., and
- develop a 'hands-on' understanding of an organizational strategic problem solving method that he could use as a business consultant, to offer practical help to clients.

Having worked as a business consultant for a number of years, the researcher had undertaken projects for clients covering a variety of 'strategic' subjects. For example, scenario planning, group facilitation, strategic visioning, strategic planning for international business units, strategic benchmarking, managing organizational change, business process reengineering, group problem solving, group decision support systems (GDSS) and executive information systems (EIS). The researcher's most recent work had been in developing and applying practical consultancy methods, processes, tools, techniques etc., that helped consultants 'facilitate' their clients to solve strategic problems i.e., working together with clients and/or small groups of employees to solve strategic problems, rather than solving strategic problems for clients, with minimal client input. However, many of the 'consultancy' methods, processes etc., developed by the researcher did not incorporate the robust methodological underpinning that more 'academically' developed methods possessed. This was an aspect that the researcher wanted to introduce into his work. Therefore, a decision was made that the subject of the research programme would involve the application of existing organizational strategic problem solving methods that would complement the researcher's theoretical strategy making viewpoint, enhance his practical competencies, and help him to understand how strategic problem solving methods with more robust methodological underpinnings were developed. However, choosing the organizational strategic problem solving methods to include in the research programme would not be easy, as over the past thirty years numerous 'soft' and 'hard' methods have been developed and implemented (McPherson, 1967; Ulschak, Nathanson and Gillan, 1981; Van Gundy, 1984; Moore, 1987; Bryant, 1989; Churchill, 1990; Eden and Radford, 1990, Checkland and Scholes, 1990; Flood and Jackson, 1991; Eden and Ackermann, 1998, Rosenhead and Mingers, 2001) (see Figure 2).

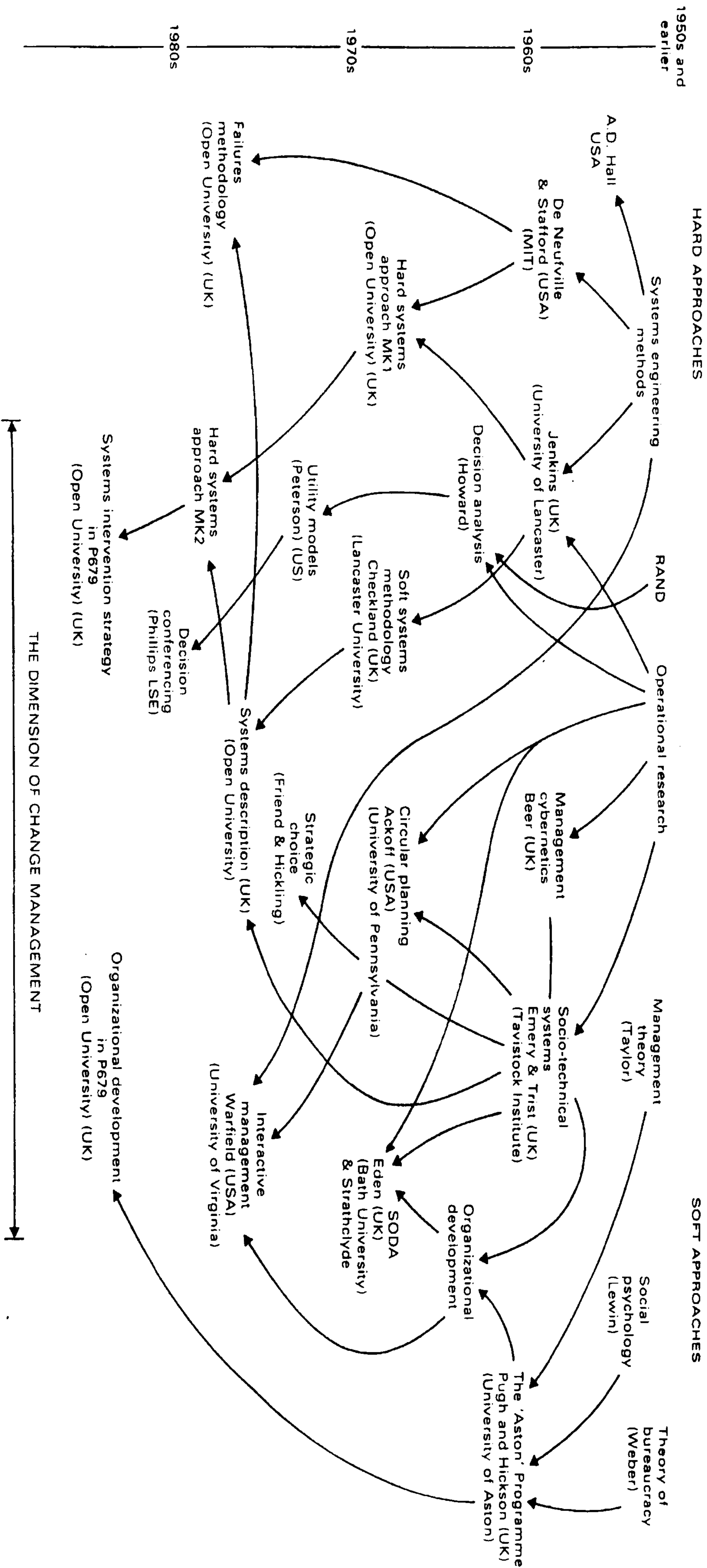


Figure 2. Problem Solving Approaches: Source Mayon-White (1990:79)

The researcher believed that he would be more comfortable working with 'softer' rather than 'harder' problem solving methods, as he had already used, in a limited manner, several soft methods and techniques, and there were many well documented soft methods to choose from. For example, '*Interactive Management*' (Warfield, 1976); '*Social Systems Design*' (Churchman, 1968, 1971); '*Interactive Planning*' (Ackoff, 1974, 1979, 1981); '*SSM*' (Checkland, 1972, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1990, 2001); Friend and Hickling's interpretation of '*Strategic Choice*' (1987, 1990, 2001) and '*SODA*' (Eden, 1982, 1987, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1992a, 1992b, 1993; Eden and Ackermann, 1992; 1995; 2001; Ackermann, 1990, 1992; Ackermann and Belton, 1994; Bryson, 1995; Ackermann and Eden, 2001).

Having been introduced to SODA and SSM some years earlier, and agreeing with many of the methodological principles of both, and not wanting to waste time researching another method, only to find that he did not agree with the methodological underpinnings, the researcher felt that he would like to undertake research involving these methods. However, after reading an article written by Tomlinson (1990) the researcher decided that only one of these methods should be involved in the research programme. In the article, Tomlinson differentiates between a problem solving 'method' and a 'methodology'. He describes a method as being a general approach to a problem, e.g., SODA, SSM, Strategic Choice or any of the methods in Figure 2, while a methodology encompasses the philosophical and theoretical beliefs that underpin and lead to the construction of the method. He further explains that there were two major problems associated with the application of any particular method, the first being that many of the current methods had been developed from scratch based on a personal methodological approach to the subject by the creator. Therefore, if the underpinning methodology associated with the method was not fully understood, a person attempting to use the method would not be able to do so as effectively as someone who did fully understand the underpinning methodology, such as the creator, or creator's apprentice. Tomlinson termed the later category the second generation of facilitators or soft-problem solvers and suggested that learning in depth the methodological underpinnings of a method, and how to practically apply that method could take a considerable length of time.

Secondly, while a person could practice and compare ‘hard’ problem solving methods at a desk in the absence of a critical customer, ‘soft’ problem solving methods could not easily be acquired in the same way. They need either supervised study or learning on the job, both of which are painful ways of learning, risking the exposure of one’s incompetence to a client. Given these two concerns, Tomlinson, suggested that it would be quite natural if budding ‘facilitators’ were less inclined to try to master more than one soft problem solving method. From this discussion the researcher decided only to include one soft method in the research programme and a further decision needed to be made regarding which of the two known methods (SODA or SSM) to choose.

The decision was made easier by the publication of Eden and Ackermann’s (1998) book *Making Strategy: the Journey of Strategic Management (JOURNEY Making)*. This book could be described as bringing together many methodological strands that Eden and Ackermann had been attempting to incorporate into the SODA method, and many of the characteristics associated with the ‘sort of person most likely to enjoy working with SODA’ (Eden, 1990a), and now SODA/JOURNEY Making (Eden and Ackermann, 2001) were applicable to the researcher and his consultancy approach. Also, the methodological underpinnings detailed in Eden and Ackermann’s (1998) book were similar to the researcher’s ‘processual’ viewpoint on strategy making, which in turn had been influenced by Van der Heijden, (1996). As Eden and Ackermann acknowledge, *“Kees’s book and ours were always intended to complement each other – reflecting a common orientation.”* The processual viewpoint starts from the premise that business success cannot be codified, but requires an original invention from the people involved. This implies that the resource an organization needs to mobilise is the brain power of its strategists, and their networking and observational skills. The organization needs to engage in a process to make room for ideas. Any inventive idea directed towards improving the match between organizational competencies and the business environment needs to be brought to the surface and considered, wherever these may originate in the organization.

Van der Heijden (1996) suggests that processualists have identified the importance of talking to people not normally involved in the strategy making process. They also look at evolution not so much in terms of the survival of actual organizations, but the survival of ideas. This makes them interested in what happens inside organizations, and as such, they are very interested in internal processes. According to Margerison (1989), Schein (1969) suggested that as long as organizations were networks of people, there would be processes occurring between those people. Therefore, it was obvious that the better understood and the better diagnosed these processes were, the greater would be the chances of finding solutions to problems which would be accepted and used by the members of an organization. Van der Heijden (1996:36-37) builds on this concept by stating that, *“Studying the processes taking place inside organizations leads to the fundamental starting point of the processual paradigm, namely the interwovenness of action and thinking... Processualists agree with the evolutionists that most organizational situations are too complex to analyse in their entirety. Whether the strategic ‘answer’ is right or wrong is initially beside the point. The processualists hold that we need to get into a loop linking action, perception and thinking towards continual learning.”* This concept is similar to Kölb’s learning loop (Kölb, 1976; Kölb and Rubin, 1991; Long, 1992) (see Figure 3).

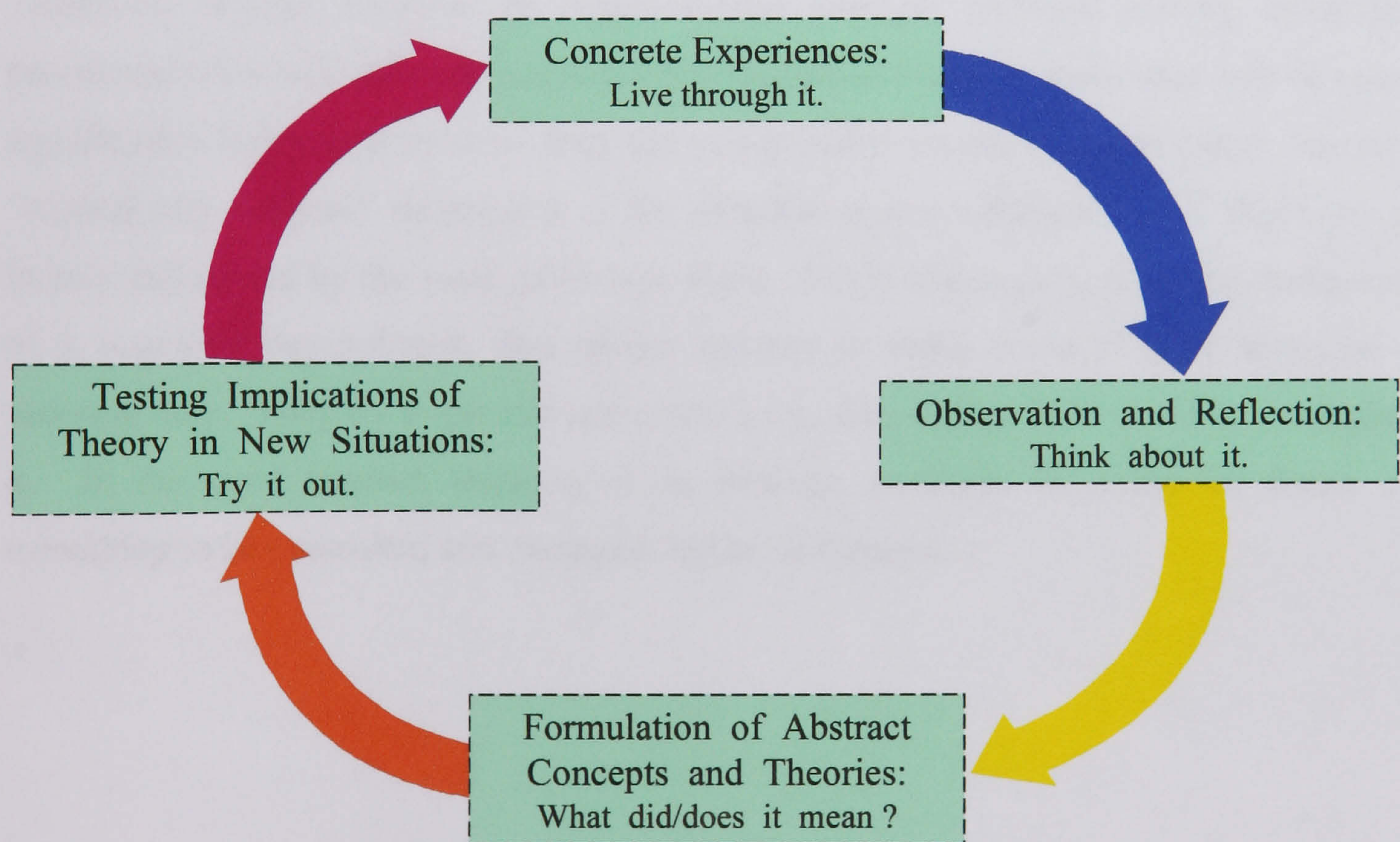


Figure 3. Kölb's "Learning Loop"

Van der Heijden (1996:41) suggests, “*The crux of the processual paradigm is conversation.*” The learning loop model shows the interwovenness of thinking and action, and that only through the “*social process of conversation*” can elements of observation and thought be structured and embedded in accepted and shared organizational theories. Similarly, new perceptions of opportunities and threats, based on the reflection of experiences obtained in the environment can only become institutional property through conversation. When working with organizational strategic problems, an effective ‘*strategic conversation*’ must incorporate a wide range of initially unstructured thoughts and views, and out of this create shared interpretations of the world in which the majority of the individual insights can find a logical place.

Eden (1987, 1992a, 1992b) concurs with the concept of ‘strategy development as a social process’ involving ‘strategic thought, conversation and action’. He also argues that if this perspective is taken, then aspects of the implementation of the strategy cannot be viewed as totally separate from the rest of the process; indeed he feels that all stages are inextricably linked. He argues that ‘in the real world’ individuals think about, discuss and consider the practicalities of possible actions at the same time problems are formulated; they do not leave implementation issues for consideration at a later time. Therefore, anyone involved in organizational strategic problem solving using the processual view will take into account implementation issues because they will be more significantly influenced by what they see as a possible course of action rather than any ‘strategically analysed’ description of the situation as it is believed to be. This view is largely influenced by the work of George Kelly (1955) who argues, from the standpoint of a cognitive psychologist, that people attempt to make sense of their world in a practical way. They try to predict and control, i.e., they define their world by managing it. In the same manner, thinking about strategic problems is seeing the future as something to be controlled and managed; not to be forecast.

From the processual viewpoint, implementation is not a separate stage, but rather a continually changing part of negotiating an agreement to act between those that have the power to act; an agreement that commitment to act depends on the perceived problem of making things happen, and not being disconnected from initial problem formulation, and that all steps in the process are not staged or linear, but rather cyclical (also discussed by Friend and Hickling, 1987).

Reflecting on discussions so far, a decision was made by the researcher that a *practical* aspect to the research subject would involve the application of JOURNEY Making during the development of a ‘solution’ to a strategic organizational problem (see page 21) during a ‘real world’ intervention. Also, that the researcher would be the person attempting to use JOURNEY Making, as this would enhance his own practical competencies, while at the same time providing him with a better perspective about the development of practical consultancy methods, processes etc, with robust methodological underpinnings (see page 25).

1.3 Deciding WHAT Research Methodology to Use

With regard to the subject of management research, one of the greatest debates over the past fifty years is whether the application of a positivistic/scientific research philosophy, collecting quantitative amounts of data, or a phenomenological research philosophy, collecting smaller amounts of more qualitative/rich data, are applicable for researching ‘*real life/social settings*’ (Bryman, 1995; Rosenhead, 1990; Gummesson, 1991; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Cassell and Symon, 1994; Robson, 1995). According to Robson (1995:2) “*the ‘real life’ situation refers to the actual context where whatever we are interested in occurs, whether it be an office, school, hospital, home, street or football ground.*” In the ‘real world’ a large degree of control over conditions is often not feasible. Therefore, one of the challenges about carrying out real world investigations is in seeking to say something sensible about a complex, relatively poorly controlled, and generally messy situation (Rossi, 1980; Hakim, 1987).

Trist (1976a) claims that while the natural sciences first generate pure research findings and then apply them, social sciences only make theoretical progress through application. The argument is that it is only feasible to get the proper access needed to study people in real life settings through proving your “*competence in supplying some kind of service*” (p.46), for example, by providing consultancy services to a client. Hence, practice helps to improve theory, which in turn helps to improve practice. All real-world research does not need to follow this pattern, but an active link between researcher and researched is a very common feature. Robson (1995) states that the emphases flagged by adopting the metaphor of the real world are very different from those of laboratory-based experimentalists, and suggests that in the real world enquiry the emphasis tends to be on different factors, or different interpretations of those factors (see Figure 4).

solving problems	rather than	just gaining knowledge
predicting effects	rather than	finding causes
concern for actionable factors (where changes are feasible)	rather than	relationships between variables (and assessing statistical significance)
developing and testing programmes, interventions, services etc.	rather than	developing and testing theories
outside organizations (industry, business, school, etc.)	rather than	research institutions
little consistency of topic from one study to the next	rather than	high consistency of topic from one study to the next
often generalist researchers (need for familiarity with range of methods)	rather than	typically highly specialist researchers (need to be at forefront of their discipline)
little use of ‘true’ experiments	rather than	much use of ‘true’ experiments
multiple research methods	rather than	single research method
oriented to the client (generally, and particularly in reporting)	rather than	oriented to academic peers
currently viewed as dubious by many academics	rather than	high academic prestige
need for well developed social skills	rather than	some need of social skills

Figure 4. Characterising Real-World Research, Source: Robson, 1995:12

Robson also points to the distinction in a more concrete fashion by contrasting examples of relatively ‘artificial’ and relatively ‘real’ approaches used to investigate a range of issues. These are shown in Figure 5.

	ARTIFICIAL	REAL WORLD
giving bad news	subject has to inform lab partner he is going to receive a shock (Tesser and Rosen, 1972)	coroner announcing a death to the next of kin (Charmaz, 1975)
inter-personal attraction	anticipating interaction with a stranger whose traits are listed as more or less similar to one's own (Byrne, 1961)	'fear and loathing' at a college social function (Schwartz and Lever, 1976)
behaviour on a train	response to an 'implanted' crisis (Piliavin et al., 1969)	defence of common territory (Fried and DeFazio, 1974)
reactions to fear	anticipating electric shock (Folkins, 1970)	learning first hand how to work on high steel in a 21-storey building (Haas, 1977)
superstition	predicting sequence in which bulbs will light up (Wright, 1960)	'poker parlours' in California (Hayano, 1980)
loosening of internal controls in response to anonymity	students delivering shock when clothed in laboratory gowns and hoods (Zimbardo, 1969)	tenants in high-rise housing exposed to danger (Zito, 1974)
impression formation	students reading lists of adjectives (Anderson, 1965)	folk-singers trying to 'psyche out' an audience (Sanders, 1974)
response versus place learning	infants in laboratory study (Acredolo, 1978)	waiters and 'switching' diners (Bennet, 1983)
(Several of these examples are adapted from Weick (1985) who provides further details)		

Figure 5. Examples of 'Artificial' and 'Real World' Approaches,

Source: Robson, 1995:13

For researchers interested in carrying out relatively small-scale real world investigations, each of the two traditional models presents difficulties. A problem in following hypothetico-deductive scientific approaches (positivism) is that one is often forced to work without maps, or with very sketchy ones; in other words, the firm theoretical base that is called for is not there. And anyhow, the primary concern is not in developing theory. Similarly, free-range exploration is rarely possible. For one thing, there isn't the time, and the reality is often that the real-world researcher has a good idea of the 'lie-of-the-land', and is looking for something quite specific while still being open to unexpected discoveries.

This suggests the need for some rethinking of the approach to be taken to real world research (Gibbons et al., 1994; Robson, 1995; Pettigrew, 1995; Tranfield and Starkey, 1998; Starkey and Madan, 2001). This rethinking has been postulated in discussions regarding the application of 'mode 1' and 'mode 2' models for management research. Briefly, mode 1 follows the more traditional model, whereby knowledge production occurs largely as a result of an academic agenda, predominately driven through, and categorized by, associated adjacent disciplines, developing knowledge stocks largely residing in universities, guarded by 'elite gatekeepers'. In mode 1 research there is a *"distinction between what is fundamental and what is applied; this implies an operational distinction between a theoretical core and other areas of knowledge such as the engineering sciences where the theoretical insights are translated into applications"* (Gibbons et al., 1994:19). In mode 1 knowledge dissemination occurs downstream of knowledge production, and little attention is paid to exploitation by practitioners which is purported to occur, if at all, through a series of obscure processes, often over protracted time-frames. The key consumer of the mode 1 process is the academic community and it is not, therefore, surprising that success in mode 1 is usually expected to be defined by criteria determined by this group (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998). Mode 2 on the other hand offers a different model of knowledge production. The mode 2 knowledge production system requires a trans-disciplinarity approach, in which team working, rather than heroic individual endeavor becomes the established norm.

Moreover, the mode 2 system results in immediate or short-time-to-market dissemination and exploitation, in that knowledge is produced in the context of application and “... *is characterized by a constant flow back and forth between the fundamental and the applied, between the theoretical and the practical. Typically, discovery occurs in contexts where knowledge is developed for, and put to, use, while results – which would have been traditionally characterized as applied – fuel further theoretical advances*” (Gibbons et al., 1994:19).

One research method that has been developed to use the principles of normal science to solve specific real world/social problems is Action Research. The notion of Action Research is often considered to have been identified by Lewin (1946, 1947), yet, it is worth noting that Ketterer et al. (1980), Aguinis, (1993), and Eden and Huxham (1995) all identify Collier’s 1945 research on ‘American Indians’ as an example of Action Research. While Bion (1948) also discussed the concept of researchers at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London, attempting to blend science and action to solve social problems, such as the repatriation of soldiers after the second world war. Lewin was concerned with inter-group and majority-minority relations, and societal change and improvement. These concerns led him to suggest that social research should lead to social action, and he proposed a model that includes both science and action, because “*research that produces nothing but books will not suffice*” (1946:35). Lewin’s argument was that research for social practice needed to take an integrated approach across social science disciplines and should be concerned with “*two rather different types of questions, namely the study of general laws... and the diagnosis of a specific situation*” (1946:36). Lewin proposed to use the principles of normal science to attempt to solve specific social problems, and in his 1946 seminal article, he proposed the first Action Research model. The model combined research and action to increase understanding and generate change. However, Lewin emphasized that the introduction of action into the scientific model “*by no means implied that the research needed is in any respect less scientific or ‘lower’ than would be required for pure research*” (1946:35).

According to Robson (1995:438) Lewin viewed the Action Research process as a spiral of cycles involving Planning, Acting, Observing and Reflection, where “...*planning is seen as starting with a general idea. For one reason or another it is thought desirable to reach a certain objective. More fact-finding about the situation is likely to be required. If this period of planning is successful, two items emerge: an ‘overall plan’ of how to reach the objective and a decision about the first step of action. The next period is concerned with carrying out the first step of the overall plan. The next step again is composed of a circle of planning, executing and fact-finding to evaluate the results of the second step. This assists in preparing the basis for planning the third step, and perhaps, for modifying the overall plan once more.*”

Lewin’s approach was to design hypothesis-testing experiments, the desirability to reach certain objectives, into workshops which he had been asked to run for delegates who were concerned, for example, with designing ways of tackling race relations issues. By applying a hypothesis-testing approach this indicated that Lewin’s initial work was similar in concept to the traditional controlled experimentation of the physical sciences (Clark, 1972). However, it did have the explicit aim of changing behavior and recording the outcomes of the attempt to do so, which the physical science approaches did not. The crucial difference between this work and that of others was the recognition that the researcher was visible and was expected to have an impact on the experiment (Eden and Huxham, 1995; Schein, 1995). This emphasis on hypothesis testing can still be identified among some groups of Action Researchers. For example, Aguinis (1993) suggested that Action Research was the process of systematically collecting data about a system (e.g., organization) relative to some goal or need of the system. Data collection was not arbitrary as the Action Researcher was guided by hypotheses and assumptions about the nature of the organization and its subsystems. Part of the action involved modifying the hypotheses if the empirical data so indicated. Aguinis concluded that Action Research was a process of hypothesis testing and problem solving (see the special issue of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* (Alderfer, 1993)).

Lewin's original work produced a great deal of mistrust about Action Research conclusions because of the difficulties in measuring outcomes and controlling contextual variables, and according to Cady and Caster (2000) there is still controversy surrounding the **theoretical principles** of Action Research, stemming from Lewin's untimely death in 1947. They state that because Lewin was unable to fully develop his theory, the field was left open for other like-minded individuals to fill in the gaps, and at times, even redefine Action Research. This led to a variety of action-oriented methods being developed, for example, *Experimental Action Research* (Chein, Cook, and Harding, 1948), *Action Science* (Argyris and Schon, 1978, 1991; Argyris, 1983; Argyris et.al. 1985), *Participatory Action Research* (Pasmore and Friendlander, 1982; Whyte, 1984; 1991; Whyte, Greenwood and Lazes, 1991), *Action Inquiry* (Torbert, 1976, 1991; Bell, 1985) and *Action Learning* (Revans, 1977, 1978, 1982). Each of these have become important labels applied to research which aims to build "*theories within the practice context itself, and test them there through intervention experiments*" (Argyris and Schon, 1991:86). For a greater understanding of the differences between the Action Research approaches see (Ketterer et. al, 1980; Reason and Rowan, 1981; Peters and Robinson, 1984; Bryman, 1995; Gummesson, 1991; Robson, 1995, Eden and Huxham, 1993, 1995, 1996).

More recently, concern has emerged in the literature about the **practice and application** of Action Research (Stowell et. al, 1997) while Lau (1997) points out that there is little guidance for the researcher on how to conduct Action Research. Several high 'meta' level diagrams have been produced about Action Research (Appendix A1 - A: McKay 2000; B: Susman and Evered, 1978, C: Burns, 1994; D: Checkland and Holwell, 1998) but these diagrams do not describe Action Research at a lower 'micro' level. While providing a good overview of Action Research, they rarely explain in detail how to conduct Action Research.

Action Research has also been criticised as either producing research with little action or action with little research (Foster, 1972); weak when simply a form of problem solving and strong when also emancipatory (Peters and Robinson, 1984; Kemmis, in Kemmis and McTaggart, 1981), lacking in the rigor of true scientific research (Cohen and Manion, 1980), lacking in validity of data (Baskerville and Wood-Harper, 1996), lacking in internal and external control (Merriam and Simpson, 1984), lacking in impartiality and bias by Action Researchers (Avison and Wood-Harper, 1991) and that it could be regarded as being little more than consultancy (an issue raised in Avison, 1993). All in all, of limited use in contributing to the body of knowledge (Marris and Rein, in Cohen and Manion, 1980).

Yet, Action Research also has its champions; Jones, 1987; Checkland, 1991; Eden and Huxham, 1993, 1995, 1996; Checkland and Holwell, 1998; Flood, 1998; Gummesson, 1991; McKay and Marshall, 1999, 2001; Cady and Caster, 2000; West and Stansfield, 2001. In discussing the nature and validity of Action Research, Checkland and Holwell (1998) suggest that any research in any mode may be thought of as entailing three major elements. Particular linked ideas ‘F’ are used in a methodology ‘M’ to investigate an area of interest ‘A’; and that using ‘M’ may then teach us not only about ‘A’, but also about the adequacy of ‘F’, ‘M’ and even ‘A’. They then state that *“The change to or modification of F, M and even A has to be expected in action research.... The susceptibility to change F, M and A in research in which the researcher becomes involved in the flux of real-world social situations leads to a (or probably the) most important principle in Action Research. It is a principle that is totally neglected in the literature of this area. In keeping your intellectual bearings in a changing situation in which the adequacy of F and M and the appropriateness of A are likely to be tested, it is essential to declare in advance the elements F, M and A. This is the intellectual structure which will lead to findings and research lessons being recognised as such. Without that declaration, it is difficult to see how the outcome of Action Research can be more than anecdotal”* (p.13-14).

Checkland and Holwell's 'ideal-type' model of Action Research can be seen in Figure 6.

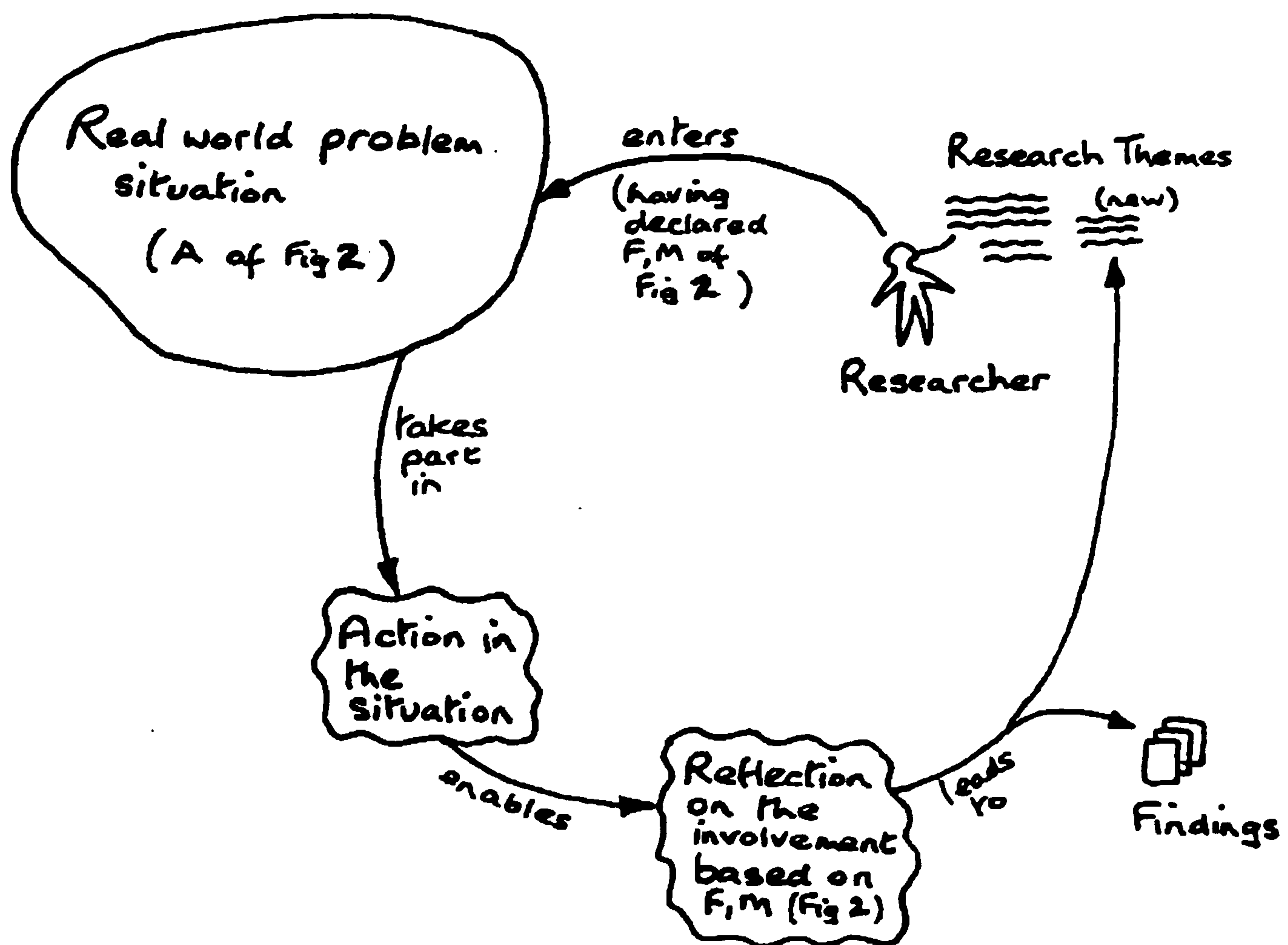


Figure 6. The Cycle of Action Research in Human Situations

Describing this model Checkland and Holwell, 1998 and West and Stansfield, 2001, agree that it has to be accepted that a researcher will deal not in hypothesis but in research themes within which lessons that have been elicited from the experience of the overall Action Research process, can be sought. Research themes are not static but are revised, and new ones developed at the end of the cycle. A researcher interested in particular themes, declaring 'F' and 'M', then enters the 'social practice' of a real world problem situation in which the themes are relevant, 'A', and becomes involved as both participant and researcher. Work to effect change and improvement (as judged by people in the situation) can then ensue, with the researcher also committed to continuous reflection on the collaborative involvement and its outcomes. This will entail trying to make sense out of the unfolding experience using the declared 'F' and 'M'. Finally, since real world situations continuously evolve, the researcher must negotiate an exit from the situation and **tease out the serious lessons learnt**. The negotiated exit may be an arbitrary act since the situation itself will continue to evolve through time.

There are five distinguishing features of Action Research that make it of interest for use in this research programme. These are:

1. Action Research has been specifically developed to use the principals of normal science to solve real world/social problems; it also has similarities to 'mode 2' research.
2. the cyclic nature of Action Research through Planning, Acting, Observing and Reflecting, as these are similar steps to those within Kölb's learning loops, which are incorporated within the researcher's existing strategic viewpoint (see page 29).
3. the involvement of people most likely to be affected by possible changes in the identification and development of the changes, as this is one of the 'processual' viewpoints the researcher fully agrees with.
4. the active and deliberate self-involvement of the researcher in the context of his/her investigation. In Action Research a researcher is viewed as a key participant in the research process, working collaboratively with other concerned and/or affected actors in the problem context (Checkland, 1991; Hult and Lennung, 1980). The researcher has already decided that he will adopt a fully participating part of the research programme (see page 31).
5. the concept of developing/improving theories/practice within the real world situation being researched.

Given the aforementioned concerns about Action Research, and the concept of declaring in advance the elements of 'F', 'M' and 'A' to improve the validity of a research programme being classified as Action Research, there are two major elements that still need to be established and declared for this research programme. 'A' was partly defined in the research subject on page 31, 'during a real world intervention', however, which specific real world intervention or which specific organization's strategic problem cannot be stated until an organization has agreed to become involved in the research programme.

This leaves 'F' and 'M' to be established, and this can be done by:

- a. Identifying what the characteristics are that ensure that the research can be classified as Action Research, and developing them into an **Action Research Framework**. This framework should not be viewed as static; it is simply a statement at a point in time of the awareness of the theoretical underpinnings of the methodological approach in the research. The framework of ideas may be adapted and developed as the study progresses, and a researcher reflects on their frameworks of ideas (West and Stansfield, 2001). **The Action Research Framework will be used as a declaration of 'F' for this research programme.**
- b. Developing an **Action Research Approach** based on the identified characteristics, which, when used in a real world research programme, will help the researcher to deliver valid/robust research results. The reason why an approach will be developed is because the Action Research Framework will have been created from Action Research characteristics, which are not pertinent to one specific methodological variation of Action Research (see page 37), making it difficult to select 'a methodology'. Also, because there is no existing detailed approach of how to conduct Action Research. 'Meta' level Action Research diagrams that have been produced (Appendix A1), do not describe Action Research at a low enough 'micro' level for them to be of use. West and Stansfield (2001:268) state that *"it is important that the methodology 'M' used to investigate the research themes within a real-world problem situation embodies the particular intellectual framework 'F'. Therefore, researchers should carefully consider the particular methodology that they are going to adopt since it should be consistent with the thinking that underpins 'F'."* Developing an approach to use from the Action Research Framework will ensure this consistency. **The Action Research Approach will be used as the declaration of 'M' for this research programme.**

The research subject can now be amended from that stated on page 31, to involve the creation of an Action Research Framework (Checkland and Holwell’s ‘F’) from Action Research characteristics, from which an Action Research Approach (Checkland and Holwell’s ‘M’) will be developed. This Action Research Approach will become the overall methodology used in understanding what happens when the researcher attempts to use JOURNEY Making to solve an organizational strategic problem during a real world intervention (Checkland and Holwell’s ‘A’).

This statement further defines the research theme(s) as defined by Checkland and Holwell (1998) and West and Stansfield (2001) (see page 39). There are now two identifiable research themes to be investigated, within the overall research subject, from which lessons can be sought. The first, of more *research/academic* interest, concerns the development and testing of an Action Research Approach, as this would help to ensure the delivery of a valid/robust research result. Also, although several high level ‘meta’ diagrams have been produced about Action Research (Appendix 1) these diagrams do not describe Action Research at a more useful lower ‘micro’ level. The second, of more *practical* interest, concerns understanding what happens when a ‘novice’ practitioner attempts to use JOURNEY Making to solve an organizational strategic problem during a real world intervention (see Figure 7).

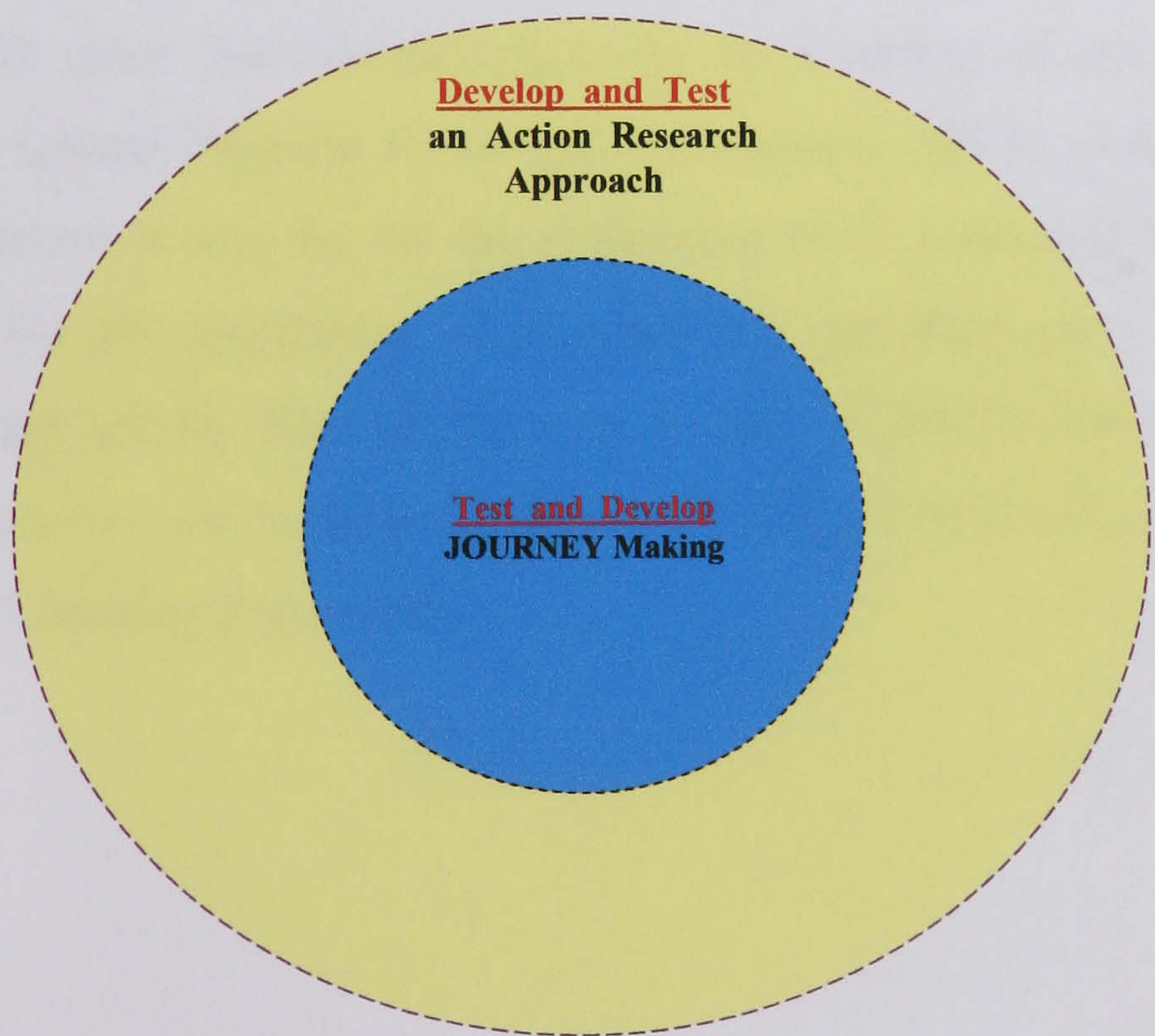


Figure 7. JOURNEY Making at the Centre of the Action Research

1.4 The Doctoral Student as ‘Novice’ or ‘Knowledgeable Expert’

Shortly after starting a literature search and review, to assist with the development of the Action Research Framework and to learn more about the JOURNEY Making method, it became apparent to the researcher that there are many different people who could use Action Research and/or JOURNEY Making in their work. Action Research may be used, for example, by professors/doctors/lecturers operating in the role of ‘professional academic researchers’ while undertaking research programmes for the benefit of the specific academic community that employs them (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003). The research may be of a practical and/or theoretical nature, but not for the achievement of an academic qualification. Alternatively, it may be used by the same people operating independently in the role of researcher/consultants to “*undertake consultancy and demonstrate the relevance of their research and teaching to practicing managers*” (Eden and Huxham, 1995:540). Undergraduates or postgraduates could also use Action Research, full-time or part-time, while attempting to obtain a recognised qualification. Here the emphasis may be of a more theoretical than practical nature. Alternatively, professional consultants and practicing managers in their daily work could use Action Research.

Similarly, JOURNEY Making may be used as part of a research programme, or it can be considered a ‘soft organizational strategy making method’ that may often be used in conjunction with other ‘hard modelling tools’ by a variety of practitioners during the course of their normal business (Eden and Ackermann, 1998). When utilised within a research programme it may be for the attainment of an academic qualification, or not. When utilised for the attainment of an academic qualification it may be applied by someone who has already been taught how to use JOURNEY Making, possibly during an MBA programme – see for example Brown (1999), or by a complete novice with very little JOURNEY Making experience.

Understanding these issues led the researcher to consider his own proficiency in the application of these activities at the start of this research programme, while accepting that these would be ‘**relative measurements**’ that would change as the research programme progressed. With regard to Action Research, the researcher could be considered a ‘**novice**’ in both the theory and practice of the research method, having never considered the theoretical aspects of the method or attempted to utilise it in practice, prior to starting this research programme. However, the researcher could not be described as a complete Action Research novice. A characteristic with which many Action Research authors (Rapoport, 1970; Hult and Lennung, 1980; Carr and Kemmiss, 1986; Gummesson, 1991; Bryman, 1995; Eden and Huxham, 1993, 1995, 1996) concur is that it is a collaboration between a client and an Action Researcher in the diagnosis and solution of a real world problematic situation, where both are seen as being involved in the process. Coghlan and Brannick (2001:120) note that “*the purpose of (action) research and discourse is not just to describe, understand and explain the world but also to change it.*” Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003:94) add to this statement by stating that “*In addition the person undertaking the research is involved in this action for change and subsequently application of the knowledge gained elsewhere.*”

While working as a professional consultant for a number of years, the researcher had undertaken projects for clients covering a variety of ‘strategic change’ activities (see page 25), and having attained an Advanced Diploma in Management Consulting at a leading UK Management College (see Appendix A2-5), was well versed in the theoretical and practical aspects of helping clients ‘in the diagnosis and solution of a real-world problematic situation through the application of the knowledge gained elsewhere’ (consultancy). By undertaking this research programme, the researcher would be seeking to become more proficient in both the practical and theoretical aspects of Action Research (linked to theme one from page 42), while accepting that the status of Action Research ‘expert’ (highly proficient in both practice and theory) would not be achieved by undertaking a single research project (see Figure 8).

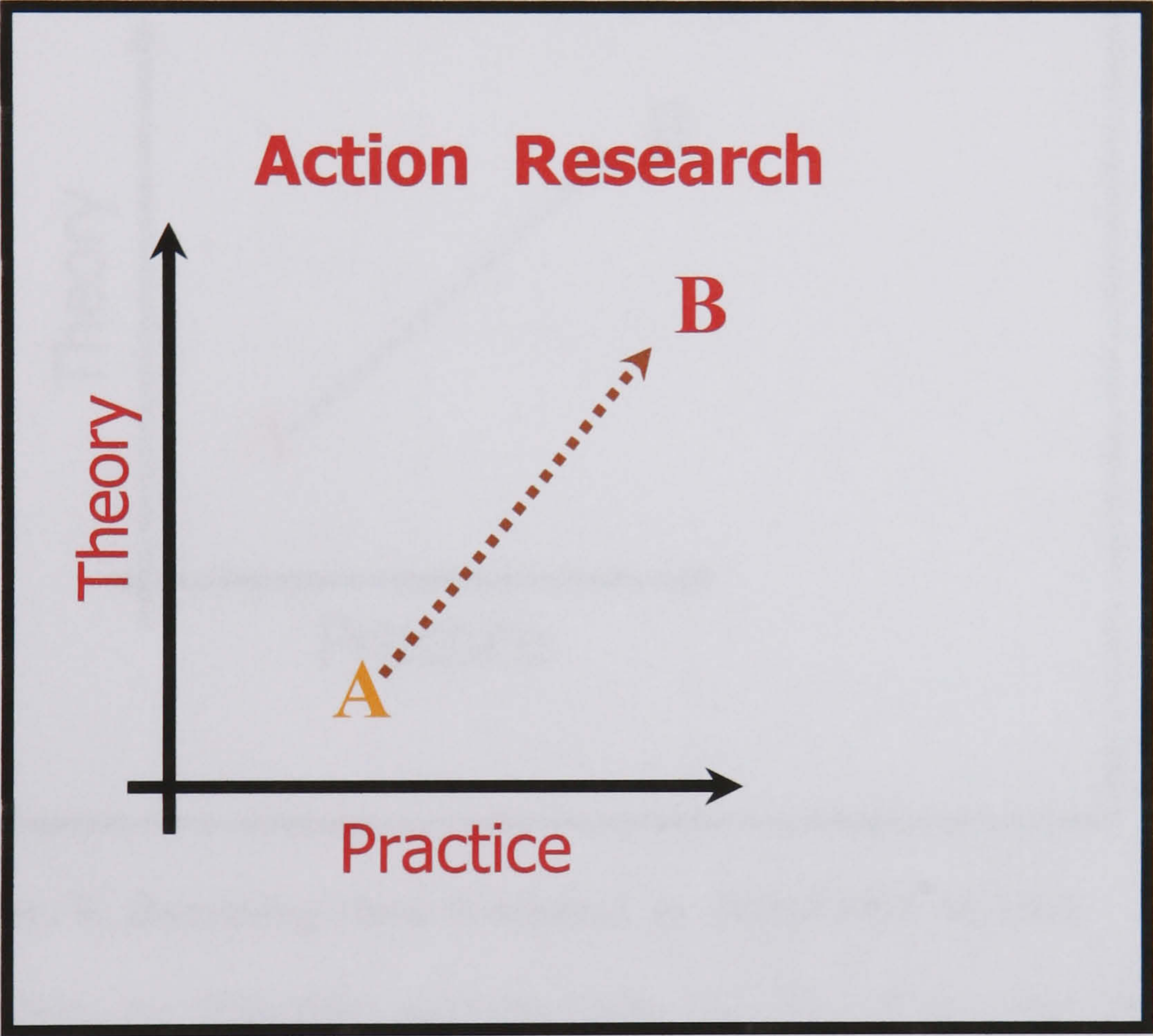


Figure 8. Becoming More Proficient in Action Research

The researcher, while being described as a novice JOURNEY Making practitioner, could not be described as a complete novice, as he had previously utilised several practical techniques from SODA (group facilitation and oval mapping) during consultancy assignments, albeit without any formal instruction in their theoretical development and/or practical use. More recently, the researcher had read Eden and Ackermann's (1998) book to gain more theoretical knowledge about JOURNEY Making but had not re-utilised any of the tools or techniques during consultancy projects, between doing this and starting the research programme (see Figure 9).

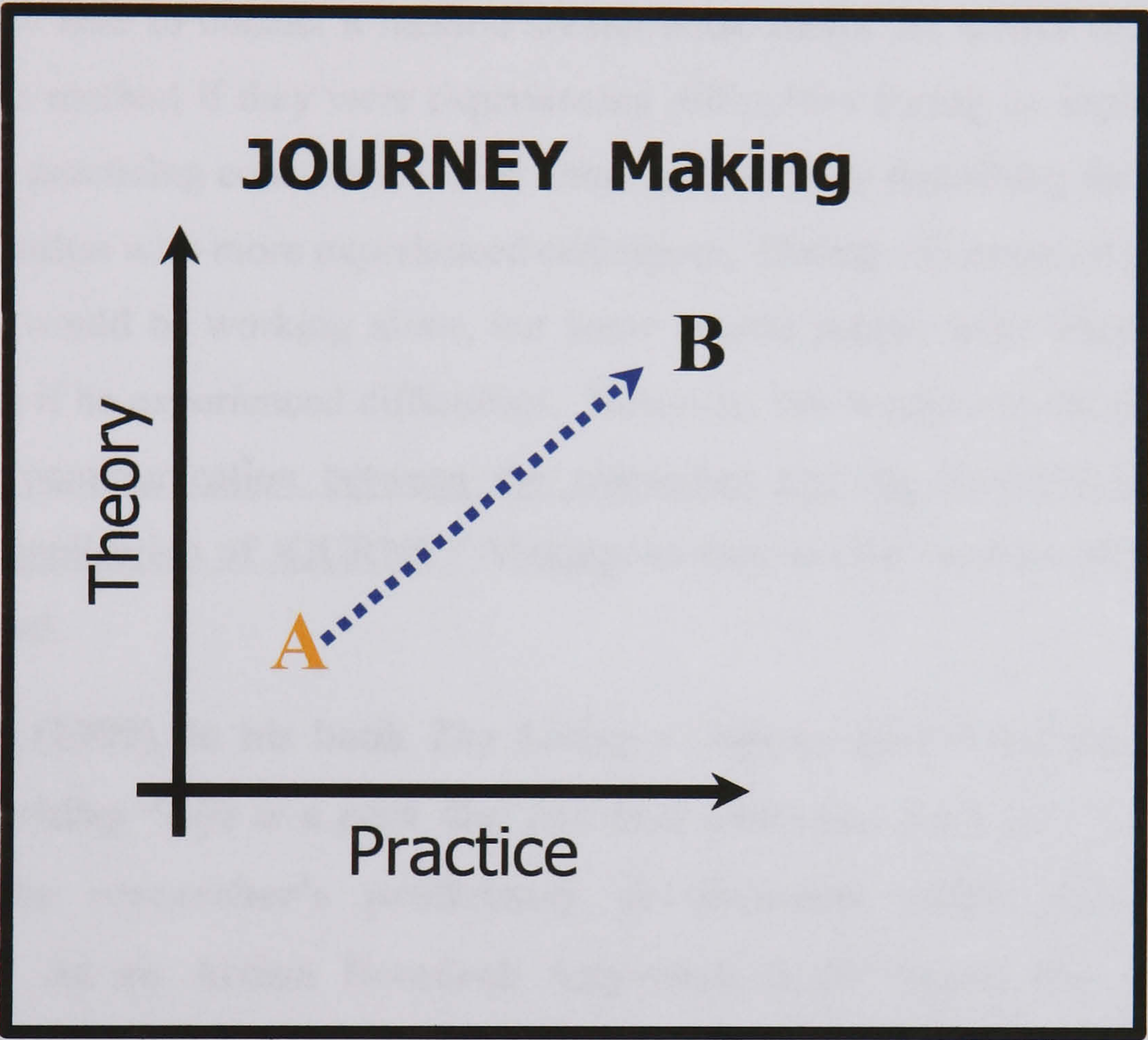


Figure 9. Becoming More Proficient in JOURNEY Making

While acknowledging the difficulties associated with learning SODA (Eden, 1990a) and SODA-JOURNEY Making (Eden and Ackermann, 2001), the researcher was interested in establishing, first-hand during this research programme, whether someone could develop an in-depth understanding of the methodological underpinnings and practical working expertise of JOURNEY Making by reading published literature and attempting to apply the method ‘on the job’ (linked to theme two from page 42).

Eden and Ackermann (1998:2) acknowledge some of the different ways in which JOURNEY Making can be understood, by stating “*Managers may start reading the vignettes and then be drawn to the theory and concepts used to guide practice. Consultants may join the book in the method and practice part and be led to the vignettes as examples of the methods in action. Academics and students may begin with the concepts underpinning our approach to the process of strategy making, and move from those to the vignettes and methods.*” The rationale behind the researcher’s enquiry was that during normal consultancy projects it would be unusual for a practicing consultant to be able to contact a method creator/book author for advice regarding the application of a method if they were experiencing difficulties during its application. In this situation a practicing consultant would either refer to texts describing the method or discuss the situation with more experienced colleagues. During this research programme the researcher would be working alone, but knew several people from whom he could seek assistance if he experienced difficulties. However, this would also mean that there would be no communication between the researcher and his academic supervisors regarding the application of JOURNEY Making, as they are the creators of the method being researched.

Arie de Gues (1999), in his book *The Living Company* quotes the poet Antonio Macado as writing “*Life is a path that you beat while you walk it.*” This will be similar to the researcher’s proficiency development within this research programme. As an Action Research Approach is developed the researcher should become more proficient in the theoretical aspects of Action Research. As Action Research and JOURNEY Making are applied during a real world intervention, and the researcher reflects on what has been learnt during these applications, the researcher should become more proficient in both the practice and theory of Action Research and JOURNEY Making. The Action Researcher will be beating his own Action Research and JOURNEY Making paths as he walks them.

Summary

Contributions to knowledge in the ‘research community’

- The researcher established that due to there being a lack of consensus in the literature about the explanations of different aspects of ‘strategy’, an approach would need to be identified that could be applied in this and/or other research programmes, to establish whether an organizational problem was strategic in nature. Churchill’s (1990) criterion was identified for this purpose (see page 24), because a problematic situation being discussed could easily be evaluated to establish whether it was strategic in nature, and a decision quickly made by a researcher as to whether the problem was relevant to a proposed research programme. Assuming that the use of this criterion is successful in identifying strategic problems it can be used by other researchers when undertaking research programmes where a problem needs to be identified as strategic in nature; a generic criterion.
- In the proposed research programme one of the research themes to be investigated involves the development and testing of an Action Research Approach, because most documented approaches rarely explain how to conduct Action Research at a low ‘micro’ level. However, this decision brought a degree of difficulty to the proposed research programme, as Eden and Huxham (1996:85) state “*that Action Research is likely to be a problematic research methodology for doctoral students*” because the uncertainty and lack of control creates anxiety for anyone other than confident and experienced researchers, and doing action in Action Research demands experience and understanding of methods for consultancy and intervention. Unless this statement is tested and the difficulties associated with applying Action Research during doctoral research are identified and detailed, whether Action Research is suitable for doctoral research programmes or just for the ‘confident and experienced researchers’ cannot be established. Figure 8 on page 45 provides an indication of the researcher’s Action Research proficiency at the start of this research programme.

The second research theme to be investigated involves establishing whether a novice JOURNEY Making practitioner (see Figure 9 on page 46 for an indication of the researcher's JOURNEY Making proficiency at the start of the research programme), could develop an in-depth understanding of the methodological underpinnings and practical working expertise of JOURNEY Making by reading published literature and attempting to apply the method 'on the job'. As Eden and Ackermann (1998:2) state *"the reader is not expected to take away from the book a precisely replicable recipe for working, rather to have reviewed ideas, techniques and vicarious experiences that can assist their thinking and practice. In particular, the practitioner/manager should be able to apply theory and practice contained in this book in a manner that addresses the contingencies of their own situation and organizational needs"*. However, it should be stated that difficulties associated with learning and applying SODA-JOURNEY Making (Eden, 1990a; Eden and Ackermann, 2001) have also been identified. In attempting this research programme the researcher wanted to identify specific difficulties associated with the application of JOURNEY Making by a novice practitioner in a real world situation, and thereby enhance the methodological underpinnings and/or the practical application of the method itself. This will also bring a further degree of difficulty to the proposed research programme. This doctoral research programme will be one of the first to contribute additional knowledge about the application of JOURNEY Making in a real world intervention, by a novice JOURNEY Making practitioner/researcher, and by identifying and detailing the problems associated with using Action Research during a doctoral research programme.

- To the knowledge of the researcher, this doctoral research programme will also be one of the first to apply Checkland and Holwell's 'FMA' model while researching organizational strategic problem solving. Although West and Stansfield (2001) have described two doctoral research programmes involving Information Systems studies, from the perspective of following the FMA model, these doctoral research programmes used Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland, 1972, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1990, 2001) for problem solving activities. This research programme will however, be the first doctoral research programme to involve the combination of Action Research, JOURNEY Making and the FMA model.

CHAPTER 2

DEVELOPING AN ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to develop an Action Research Framework. This should be seen as declaring in advance Checkland and Holwell's (1998) 'F'. From this Action Research Framework an Action Research Approach will be developed for use during this research programme. This should be seen as declaring in advance Checkland and Holwell's (1998) 'M'.

During a literature review to learn more about research methodologies, it became apparent that a considerable amount of Action Research literature described what 'characteristics associated with good Action Research should contain' and about Action Research projects per se. Little information had been written about the development and testing of a way of 'doing' Action Research. Therefore, characteristics from various authors will be identified, individually viewed and briefly discussed to establish whether they are similar/dissimilar to Action Research characteristics of other authors. This information will be used in the development of the Action Research Framework and the Action Research Approach.

Weick (1990:4), details one of his all time favorite map stories as being about a small Hungarian detachment on military manoeuvres in the Alps. A young lieutenant sent a reconnaissance unit out into the icy wilderness just as it began to snow. It snowed for two days and the unit did not return. The lieutenant feared that he had dispatched his people to their deaths, but on the third day the unit came back. Where had they been? How had they made their way? Yes, they said, we considered ourselves lost and waited for the end, but then one of us found a map in his pocket. That calmed us down. We pitched camp, lasted out the snowstorm, and then with the map we found our bearings. And here we are. The lieutenant took a good look at this map and discovered to his astonishment, that it was a map of the Pyrenees. Weick states that his *"favorite moral of the Pyrenees story is the advice, if you're lost any old map will do ... a map provides a reference point, an anchor, a place to start from, a beginning, which often becomes secondary once an activity gets underway."*

The developed Action Research Approach should be regarded as the 'map' to be used during this research programme, because no other map containing as much detail can be found in published literature.

2.1 Creating an Action Research Framework

According to Eden and Huxham (1993), Lewin argues that there were six characteristics that distinguished Action Research. These were that it was: (1) client centered, (2) problem driven, (3) that it challenged the status quo, and that it produced (4) theory designed to be usable in everyday life, (5) empirically disconfirmable propositions, and (6) propositions that could be systematically interrelated.

Rapoport (1970:1) state that Action Research *“aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable framework.”*

Carr and Kemmiss (1986:165) suggest that in Action Research there is *“firstly, the improvement of a practice of some kind; secondly, the improvement of the understanding of a practice by its practitioners; and thirdly, the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place... Those involved in the practice being considered are to be involved in the Action Research Process in all its aspects of planning, acting, observing and reflection.”*

Bryman (1995:178) agrees with some of these characteristics and introduces others by suggesting that *“action research is an approach to applied social research in which the action researcher and a client collaborate in the development of a diagnosis of and solution for a problem, whereby the ensuing findings will contribute to the stock of knowledge in a particular empirical domain.”* He continues (p.179) *“...the element of participativeness does not seem to be a necessary ingredient of action research; while many definitions stipulate that action research is collaborative, this collaboration generally denotes the nature of the relationship between researcher and client. Since ‘the client’ can simply be represented by senior managers, the involvement of a large constituency within the organization is not a necessary feature.”*

The tradition of Action Research, according to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991:33-34) is *“that it assumes that any social phenomena are continually changing rather than static. Action research and the researcher are then seen as part of this change process itself. The following two features are normally part of action research projects:*

- ◆ *a belief that the best way of learning about an organization or social system is through attempting to change it, and this therefore should to some extent be the objective of the action researcher,*
- ◆ *the belief that those people most likely to be affected by, or involved in implementing, these changes should as far as possible become involved in the research process itself.”*

Hult and Lennung (1980) suggest that *“Action research simultaneously assists in practical problem-solving and expands scientific knowledge, as well as enhances the competencies of the respective actors, being performed collaboratively in an immediate situation using data feedback in a cyclical process aiming at an increasing understanding of a given social situation, primarily applicable for the understanding of change processes in social systems and undertaken within a mutually acceptable ethical framework.”*

Several of these initial characteristics appear to have re-occurring themes, suggesting that Action Research can be seen as collaboration between a client and an Action Researcher, in the diagnosis and solution of a problematic situation where both are seen as being involved in the process. Solving the problem should lead to the improvement of the problematic situation, the practice(s) used, the competencies of the respective actors, and should contribute to the stock of knowledge regarding the particular empirical domain in which the problematic situation was located. Since the client can be represented by senior management, the involvement of a large constituency within the organization may not be a necessary feature in solving the problematic situation.

Gummesson (1991) identifies Hult and Lennung (1978a, 1978b) and Agyris et. al. (1985) as having discussed at length the characteristics of '*action science*'. Gummesson accepts the term action science rather than Action Research because he feels that: "*First, projects that have been labeled 'action research' have often not properly fulfilled the requirement of scientific research but have been closer to consultancy or journalism. Second, action researchers often limit themselves to the use of traditional methodology that stems from the positivistic paradigm*" (p.102). He concludes that none of the aforementioned studies into action science characteristics are primarily concerned with business administration but rather with social organizations in general. Therefore, he developed his own synthesis of the characteristics of action science, based on these studies, while including in it a perspective towards management. Some of his action science characteristics are as follows:

- "*Action science always involves two goals: solve a problem for the Client and contribute to science. That means that the person undertaking the study must be both a management consultant and an academic researcher at the same time*" (p.103).

The first part of this characteristic is similar to Lewin's (1946, 1947) first two characteristics that Action Research should be client centred and problem driven.

- "*During an action science project those involved - the researcher/consultants and client personnel - should learn from each other and develop their competence*" (p.103).

Researchers work towards the development of their own theoretical understanding and the reporting of their research to the academic community, while consultants work towards the development of their own consultancy ability and, on occasion, the client's ability. Action Researchers must work towards developing both sets of competencies. By stating that the Action Researcher and client should learn from each other during competence development, this adds a further dimension to the concept of Action Research collaboration, as identified by Rapoport, 1970; Carr and Kemmiss, 1986; Bryman, 1995.

- *“The understanding developed during an action science project is holistic” (p.103).*

The action scientist must focus on the totality of a problem, while still keeping it simple enough to be understood by those involved. A previously unidentified characteristic, but one which is commonly overlooked during many research and consultancy projects.

- *“Action science requires co-operation between the researcher/consultants and the client personnel, feedback to the parties involved, and continuous adjustment to new information and new events” (p.103).*

In doing this, both parties must engage in an iterative, cyclic process of planning, analysing the problematic situation, interpreting collected data, developing conclusions and recommendations that in turn lead to some new action(s), possibly more planning or analysis. This is similar in concept to Lewin’s (1946, 1947) characteristics of Planning, Acting, Observing and Reflecting.

- *“Action science is primarily applicable to the understanding and planning of change in social systems” (p.104).*

This implies that it is a suitable research and consulting strategy for change processes in business and other organizations. As Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991) stated earlier, social phenomena are continually changing rather than static. In organizations etc., there are many changing social environments, some occurring naturally and others more enforced, for example during change management or re-structuring initiatives.

- *“There must be a mutually acceptable ethical framework within which action science is used” (p.104).*

It should be possible, and may often be necessary, to undertake research when conflicting interests and values are involved in developing a holistic/totalistic understanding of the problematic situation. This is similar to Rapoport’s (1970) contention detailed earlier.

- *“Pre-understanding of the corporate environment and of the conditions of business are essential when action science is applied to management subjects” (p.105).*

Tisdall (1982) states that Sir David Nicholson, former chairman of London-based P-E Consulting Group, claimed that management consultants could not understand the problems of strategic and structural change unless they had practical experience of running a company. A comment similar to this has been made by Donald Hambrick (2001:41) regarding doctoral students researching strategy. He stated that “... *any students who pursue this stream of research need to know a great deal about mainstream contemporary strategy. You can’t do credible work in this area unless you understand strategy and organizations.*” Therefore, when undertaking research into organizational strategic problem solving using an Action Research methodology it may be advisable for an Action Researcher to have a practical/hands-on and demonstrable understanding of both academic research and management consultancy in the business environment to be studied i.e., corporate strategy, strategic change, recruitment, business development etc. Also, a pre-understanding of the corporate environment in which the organization operates may be desirable.

From past experience of developing ‘consultancy processes’, undertaking consultancy projects in the field of Business Process Reengineering and developing ‘process models’ using systems thinking software, the researcher concluded that processes can be thought of as ‘a collection of activities that takes one or more kinds of input and creates an output that is of value to a client/customer, etc’. This is a generic description of a process but it is similar to that espoused by Davenport, 1993; Hammer and Champy, 1993; Andrews and Stalick, 1994 and McManus, 1996. Reflecting on all of the Action Research/science characteristics discussed highlights that certain characteristics may be associated with different process stages. There are characteristics that may be termed ‘*input characteristics*’, i.e., they need to be understood, accepted and demonstrated by a researcher before starting a real world research programme using Action Research and ‘*process characteristics*’, i.e., characteristics that are associated with the activities of undertaking a real world research programme using Action Research.

There are also ‘*output characteristics*’ i.e., characteristics associated with the output from a real world research programme using Action Research that will be of value to someone. Figure 10 represents the basic development of an Action Research Framework using the characteristics identified so far.

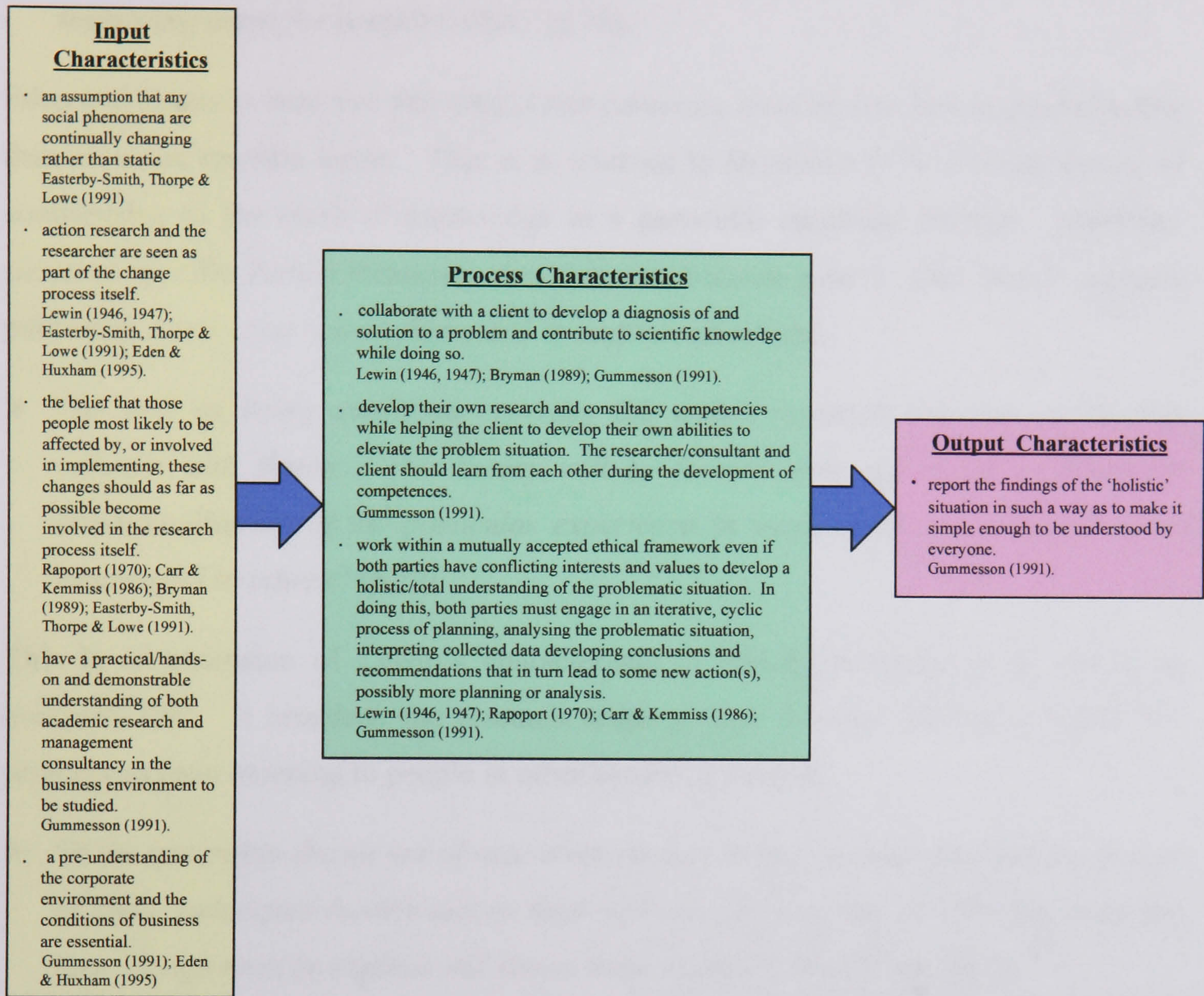


Figure 10. Basic Action Research Framework

To continue to build a more robust Action Research Framework, several of Eden and Huxham’s (1993, 1995, 1996) ‘*Characteristics of Action Research Outcomes and Processes*’ will also be considered as they have been specifically developed with a perspective towards Action Researchers working in organizations, which is what this research programme proposes to do. As these three articles are very comprehensive it is not the intention of this work to discuss them in great detail, unless applicable.

Eden and Huxham's 1996 outcome characteristics are:

- *“action research must have some implications beyond those required for action or generation of knowledge in the domain of the project. It must be possible to envisage talking about the theories developed in relation to other situations. Thus, it must be clear that the results could inform other contexts at least in the sense of suggesting areas for consideration” (p.78).*

Eden and Huxham state that this means that outcomes must be couched in general rather than situation specific terms. This is in contrast to Bryman's (1995) characteristic of contributing to the stock of knowledge in a particular empirical domain. However, situation specific Action Research outcomes can become generic after they have been published, acted upon and implemented in multiple situations.

- *“as well as being usable in everyday life action research demands an explicit concern with theory. This theory will be formed from the characterisation or conceptualisation of the particular experience in ways which are intended to be meaningful to others” (p.79).*

This is an extension of Lewin's characteristic of 'theory designed to be usable in everyday life'. It broadens the research scope so that theories developed within the project can have meaning to people in other/similar situations.

- *“if the generality drawn out of action research is to be expressed through the design of tools, techniques models and method then this, alone is not enough - the basis for their design must be explicit and shown to be related to the theory” (p.79).*

The development of tools, techniques, models or methods can be regarded as an important outcome from Action Research, because they can be a very clear, but implicit, expression of theory. However, Action Research demands that research output explains the links between the specific experience of the intervention and the design of the tool – it is this explanation which is a part of theory generation. This characteristic can be related to Lewin's statement *“research that produces nothing but books will not suffice”* (1946:35).

- *“action research will generate emergent theory in which the theory develops from the synthesis of that which emerges from the data and that which emerges from the use in practice of the body of theory which informed the intervention and research intent” (p.80).*

The generation of emergent theory is similar to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) development of grounded theory and Gummesson's (1991) hermeneutic concept. The introduction of the information developed by the 'use in practice of the body of theory which informed the intervention and research intent' is part of the iterative, cyclic nature of Action Research as postulated by Lewin (1946, 1947). **The researcher disagrees with Eden and Huxham's contention that this is an outcome of Action Research. This will be classified as a 'process' characteristic as emergent theory can be generated during the process of undertaking Action Research.**

- *“theory building, as a result of action research, will be incremental, moving from the particular to the general in small steps” (p.80).*

This is also similar to Eden and Huxham's first characteristic in that it is in contrast with Bryman's (1995) characteristic of contributing to the stock of knowledge in a particular empirical domain. Initially the research output from an Action Research intervention may be applicable to a particular situation, but through description and development it will become applicable to more generic situations.

- *“what is important for action research is not a (false) dichotomy between prescription and description, but a recognition that description will be prescription (even if implicitly so). Thus, the presenters of action research should be clear about what they expect the consumer to take from it and present with a form and style appropriate to this aim” (p.81).*

This characteristic suggests that an output describing Action Research could influence the actions of the consumer of the research, because it highlights the areas that they should be concerned about. The next time that a similar situation appears the research consumer will remember the concerns, and at this time the content of the initial Action Research output changes from descriptive to prescriptive.

Therefore, an Action Researcher needs to recognise that the language used to frame the theory not only needs to be simple enough to be understood by everyone (Gummesson, 1991), but will influence the future thinking and actions of the consumer of the research.

Figure 11 incorporates Eden and Huxham’s outcome characteristics into the initial framework.

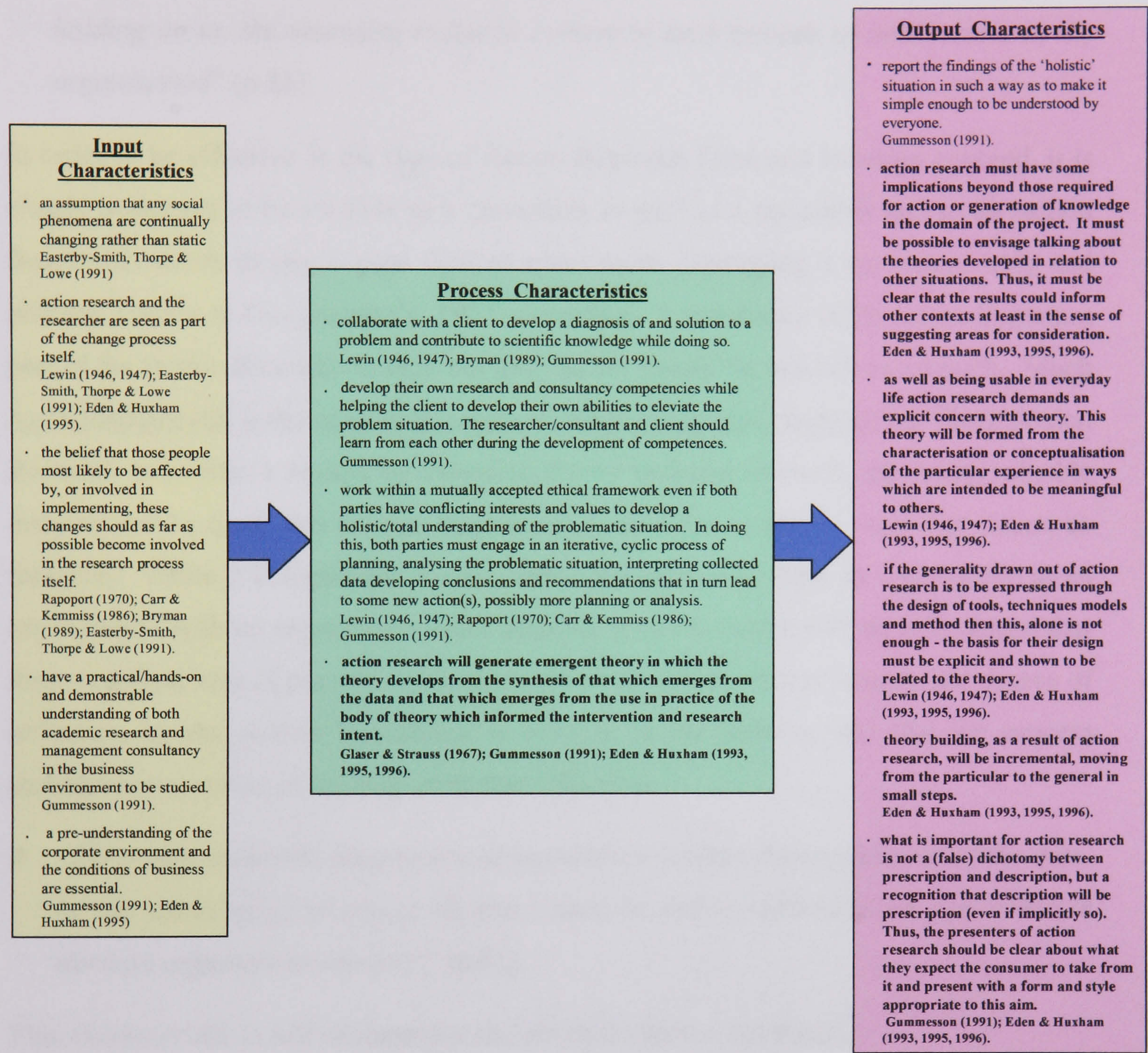


Figure 11. Updated Action Research Framework

As well as identifying the aforementioned characteristics of ‘Action Research outcomes’ Eden and Huxham (1996) also identify several Action Research characteristics that they describe as being ‘Characteristics of Action Research Processes’. They describe them thus:

- *“a high degree of method and orderliness is required in reflecting about, and holding on to, the emerging research content of each episode of involvement in the organization” (p.81).*

In order to be effective in the type of Action Research Eden and Huxham contend, it is clearly important to be credible as a consultant as well as a researcher and so an Action Researcher needs to pay a great deal of attention to developing a competent style and process, similar to Gummesson’s, 1991 contention. Consultancy skills are an important part of the Action Research toolkit, but they do not justify the activity as research. Much more fundamental is the need to be aware of the research aims themselves. Since Action Research will almost always be inductive theory building research, the really valuable insights will be those that emerge from a real world intervention in ways that cannot be foreseen. While it is legitimate for an Action Researcher to enter an intervention at an organization with no expectation about what the research output will be, it is crucial that there is a clear idea of process design and intended purpose, that an appropriate degree of reflection by the Action Researcher is built in to the process, and that the process includes some means of holding on to that reflection.

- *“for action research, the process of exploration (rather than collection) of the data, in the detecting of emergent theories, must be either replicable, or demonstrable through argument or analysis” (p.81).*

This characteristic is self explanatory and needs no further comment.

- *“in order to justify the use of action research rather than other approaches, the reflection and data collection process - and hence the emergent theories - should be focused on the aspects that cannot be captured easily by other approaches. This, in turn, suggests that having knowledge about, and skills to apply, method and analysis procedures for collecting and exploring rich data is essential” (p.83).*

While there may be forces acting against getting reliable data in Action Research, the method is likely to produce insights which cannot be gleaned in any other way. Eden and Huxham, along with Rapoport, 1970; Foster, 1972 and Bryman, 1995 do not see Action Research as being in competition with other research approaches, as if one is better than the other. Rather, Action Research offers a distinctive approach which is admirably suited to specific settings and to specific aims (Robson, 1995). The ability that Action Research has for linking theory with practice makes the outcome of Action Research potentially relevant, readable and persuasive to practitioners and academics.

- *“in action research, the opportunities for triangulation that do not offer themselves with other methods should be exploited fully and reported, but used as a dialectical device which powerfully facilitates the incremental development of theory” (p.83).*

Triangulation of research data is always important in understanding uncertainty in interpretation or measurement. Triangulation is a useful analogy because it suggests the process of checking a sequence of measurements from one point to another by surveying back to the point of departure by a different route. Triangulation to check the validity of research is as important in Action Research as other forms of research. Exceptionally, Action Research provides an opportunity to seek out triangulation between (i) observation of events and social process, (ii) the accounts each participant offers and (iii) the changes in these accounts and interpretation of events as time passes (Haré and Secord, 1976).

- *“the history and context of the intervention must be taken as critical to the interpretation of the likely range of validity and applicability of the results” (p.84).*

This characteristic focuses on the problems of research generalization. It concerns the need to understand and project the role of history, context and process in deriving research outcomes (Pettigrew, 1985, 1990).

History and context are differently defined by different actors in the situation, and by different observers. Nevertheless, a concern to understand the role of context, and the different interpretations of it, is a most important requirement of Action Research.

Figure 12 shows all Action Research characteristics discussed, from which an Action Research Approach will be developed. It should also be regarded as the ‘declaration in advance’ of the framework of ideas ‘F’ to be used in this research programme (see page 38).

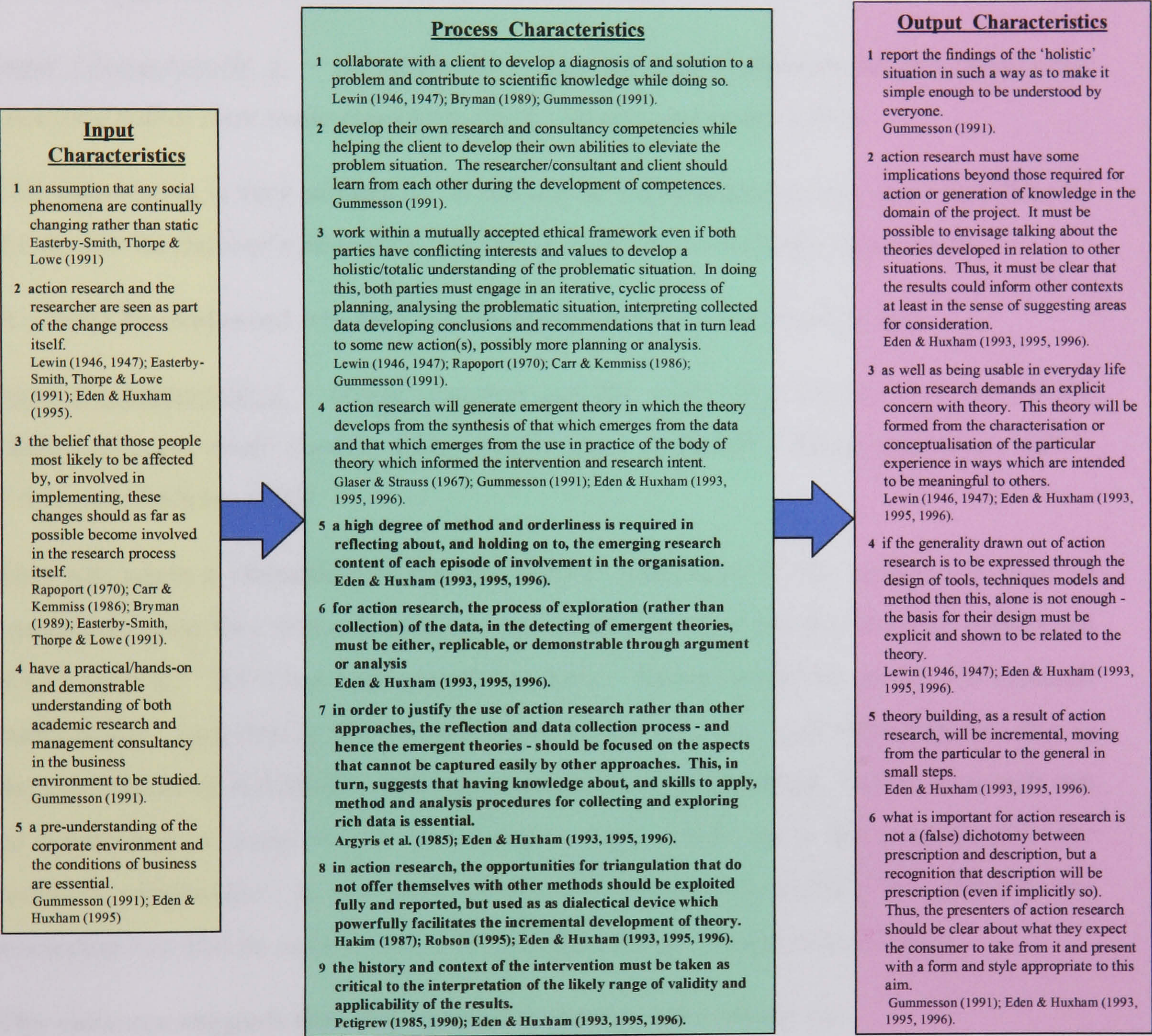


Figure 12. An Action Research Framework (F)

2.2 Validation of the Action Research Input Characteristics

Having defined ‘input characteristics’ as needing to be understood, accepted and demonstrated by a researcher before starting a research programme using Action Research, it needs to be judged whether the input characteristics within the Action Research Framework have been observed for this research programme. Failure to achieve this should result in this researcher reconsidering his use of Action Research, stopping further development of an Action Research Approach, and then considering the possible application of another research methodology.

Input Characteristic 1. - an assumption that any social phenomena are continually changing rather than static (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991).

This assumption is very subjective. It can not be demonstrated in any other way than by the Action Researcher’s assurance that this is a viewpoint he firmly agrees with.

It cannot be evidenced whether this characteristic was observed or not.

Input Characteristic 2. - action research and the researcher are seen as part of the change process itself (Lewin, 1946, 1947; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991; Eden and Huxham, 1995).

This was again a characteristic that the Action Researcher firmly believed in prior to embarking upon this research programme, as demonstrated by the research subject set out on page 42. As it has been stated that Action Research will be the overall research methodology used during this research programme to understand what happens during the application of JOURNEY Making in a real-world intervention, Action Research can be established as being part of the change process itself. As a full participant in the research programme, in the role of novice JOURNEY Making practitioner, the researcher can also be seen to be a full participant in the change process itself.

The evidence suggests that this characteristic has been observed.

Input Characteristic 3. - the belief that those people most likely to be affected by, or involved in implementing, these changes should as far as possible become involved in the research process itself (Rapoport, 1970; Carr and Kemmiss, 1986; Bryman, 1989; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991).

On page 28 it was stated that the researcher held a ‘processual’ viewpoint on strategy making. One aspect of this viewpoint is that when working with organizational strategic problems, an effective ‘strategic conversation’ must incorporate a wide range of initially unstructured thoughts and views, and out of this create shared interpretations of the world in which the majority of the individual insights can find a logical place (see page 30). To some degree this evidences the researcher’s belief in this input characteristic. Also, before selecting Action Research for use during this research programme, this characteristic was identified as one of the ‘interesting features of Action Research’ that suggested to the researcher that the methodology should be further understood (see page 40). When implementing JOURNEY Making in a real world intervention, as many people as practicable will be invited to become participants in individual cognitive mapping interviews and Oval Mapping Workshops to ensure that as much diverse information as possible is captured. However, while this is the intention, it has to be acknowledged that this can only be a request to a client. The number of people released to participate in JOURNEY Making will be at a client’s discretion.

It has been evidenced that this characteristic, as far as possible, has been observed.

Input Characteristic 4 and 5 - have a practical/hands-on and demonstrable understanding of both academic research and management consultancy in the business environment to be studied (Gummesson, 1991) and a pre-understanding of the corporate environment and the conditions of business are essential (Gummesson, 1991; Eden and Huxham, 1995).

Evidence to support these characteristics can be found in the researcher's CV/Resume, Appendix A2-5. This will be used, in part, to establish the researcher's competence to undertake a real world intervention with prospective clients. The researcher undertook undergraduate work of one sort or another between 1984 and 1993; a total of nine years, thereby demonstrating an understanding of academic research prior to starting this research programme. The researcher has also worked in various management consultancy roles since 1989, involving projects in a multitude of industry sectors (see page 25). During the past four years the researcher has been exclusively involved in the strategic development of management consultancy companies. This demonstrates a practical/hands on understanding of multiple business environments. However, because at this time no company has agreed to participate in this research programme, it cannot be established whether or not the researcher has a pre-understanding of the corporate environment and conditions of business in which a participating company will operate. **The evidence presented suggests that these characteristics have been observed.**

From the evidence produced it can be stated that the researcher has understood, accepted and demonstrated that the Action Research Framework 'input characteristics' have been observed as far as possible. Further Action Research Approach development should continue.

2.3 *Developing an Action Research Approach*

Note:

- a. Before proceeding to develop an Action Research Approach, a couple of caveats must be emphasised. The researcher acknowledges that real-life thinking and acting will rarely follow the neat linear sequence implied by the following diagrams and/or descriptions. Real life is really a much more messy business than is implied here and therefore causes problems for anyone attempting to model real world activities. The concept of a number of inputs being subject to a process to produce an output(s) of value to a client/customer rarely works as simply as it can be described. In real life erroneous decisions are sometimes made, for example, when there is not enough/too much information available, when not enough care is taken in analysing available information, or when a decision is rushed because of a tight time constraint. Decision errors may only materialise after some form of action has been taken that is seen to be incorrect for the situation being faced. This may result in a return to the decision making stage, where after further analysis different actions are recommended. Real life thinking and decision making are often a combination of cyclic and linear actions.
- b. The Action Research Approach to be developed assumes that the ‘input’ characteristics have been understood, accepted and demonstrated. This section on Action Research Approach development deals primarily with information from the ‘process’ and ‘outcome’ characteristics detailed in the previous section. However, ‘input’ characteristic information relevant to the development of the Action Research Approach will also be considered.

As stated earlier, several high ‘meta’ level diagrams have been produced about Action Research (A: McKay 2000; B: Susman and Evered, 1978, C: Burns, 1994; D: Checkland and Holwell, 1998) in Appendix A1, but these diagrams do not describe Action Research at a lower ‘micro’ level. While providing a good overview of Action Research, they rarely explain in detail how to conduct Action Research. Lau’s (1997) comments about there being little guidance for the researcher on how to conduct Action Research appear to be valid. In this section, Bryman’s (1995:180) diagram of Action Research will be used as the basis for the development of an Action Research Approach as it was created with reference to Pasmore and Frielanders (1982) report of a participative Action Research programme and it attempts to detail, at a lower level than the aforementioned diagrams, some of the chief activities of Action Research (see Figure 13). The figure also implies a cyclic and linear approach, if the Action Research programme is unsuccessful, the approach may be reactivated at one of a number of points.

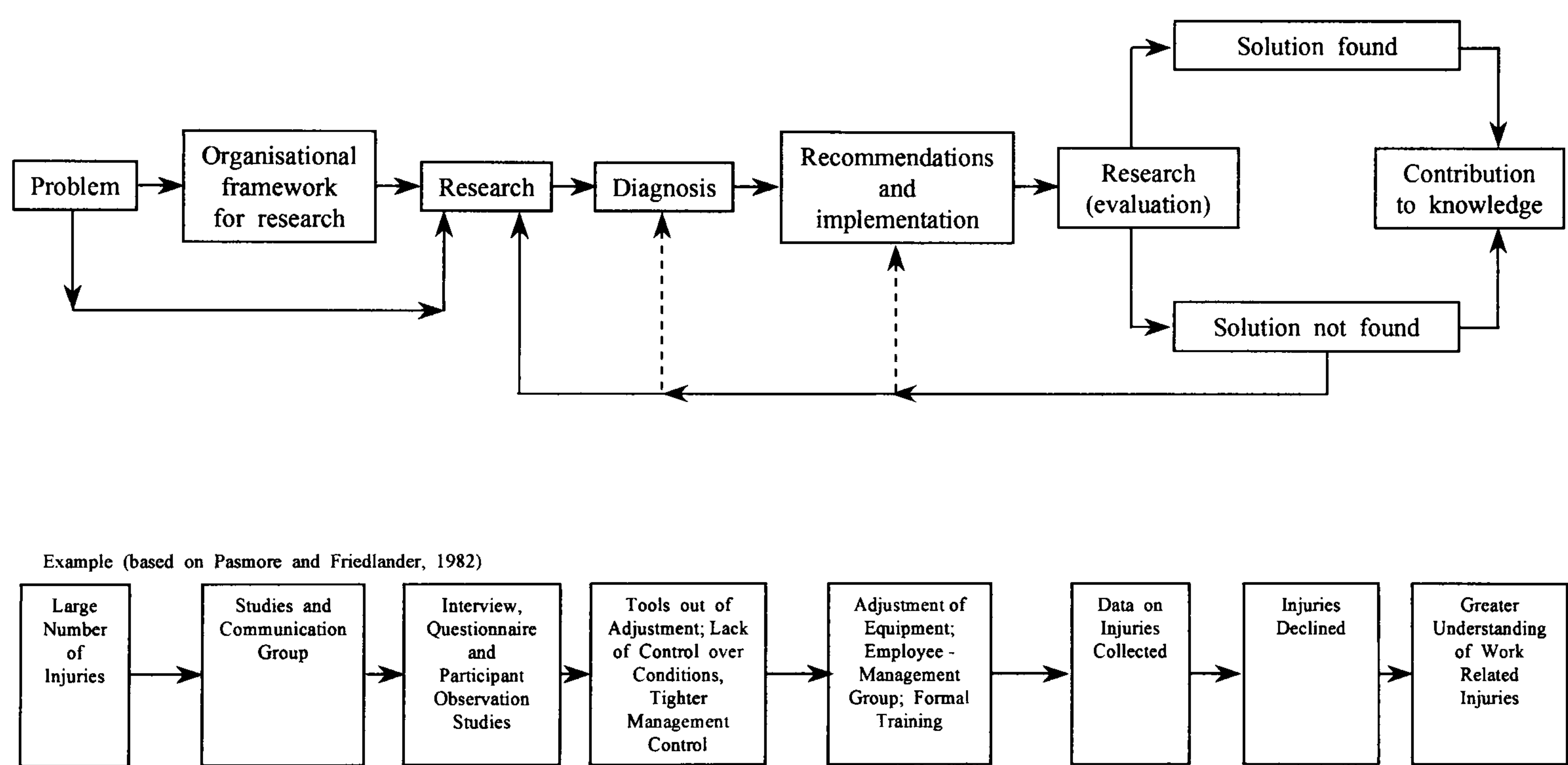


Figure 13. Stages in Action Research: Source Bryman, 1995:180

However, given the amount and variety of Action Research information within the developed Action Research Framework, Bryman's diagram needs to be amended to incorporate several characteristics and diagrams expressed by other authors. In particular Gummesson (1991) and Eden and Huxham (1993, 1995, 1996), whose characteristics have been specifically developed with a perspective towards Action Researchers working in organizations.

- Gummesson suggests that the researcher's number one problem is access, and most writers of Action Research see it as collaboration between a researcher and a client. Therefore, the most logical place for a researcher's personal involvement to commence will be during discussions/negotiations with a potential client to establish whether the client is interested in participating in a research programme.
- Both Gummesson (1991) and Eden and Huxham (1995) discuss a characteristic relating to the Action Researcher having a pre-understanding of the problematic situation to be researched. Gummesson suggests that pre-understanding is developed from two sources (1) *personal experience* - first hand pre-understanding, and (2) *experience of others* - second hand pre-understanding from textbooks, reports, attendance at conferences, lectures, seminars etc. A researcher with a pre-understanding of problem situations similar to that being faced by a client may be able to ask more in-depth and meaningful questions when discussing a client's specific problem situation than a researcher with no pre-understanding. Eden and Huxham (1995) also discuss the importance of realising the implications of pre-understanding during action and/or theory exploration and development and the explication of pre-understanding when writing about research outcomes.
- Pettigrew (1985, 1990) and Eden and Huxham (1995, 1996) discuss the importance of understanding the history and context of the Action Research intervention. This information is highly relevant during in-depth discussions with the client concerning the problematic situation being faced, as it can serve to convey a level of competence to the client. This knowledge may also be of further use during problem solving activities using JOURNEY Making (Eden and Ackermann, 2001).

- In common with Bryman (1995), Rapoport (1970) and Gummesson (1991) discuss the context of a mutually accepted framework for the research being agreed between client and Action Researcher. Similar to this subject, Eden and Ackermann (1998) discuss two elements that they feel are important to ensure the ‘political feasibility’ of a way of working. These are (1) Procedural Justice, attending to the fact that people are concerned about the fairness of the procedures used to arrive at a decision, as well as the decision itself, and (2) Procedural Rationality, establishing that the approach itself makes sense for the particular circumstances. However, there may be times when an organizational framework for the research is not defined correctly at the first attempt, for example, due to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of information between Action Researcher and client, or if an unforeseen change in government legislation occurs and has an impact on the situation being faced, “... *any social phenomena are changing rather than static*” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991). Therefore, the relationship between these two steps should be seen as cyclical.

In fact, if at any time during the research programme it is found that a preceding step should be returned to, to clarify or amend relevant details created there, then this should be accommodated within the approach. **The relationship between all sequential steps in the Action Research Approach should be cyclical, allowing the researcher to move backwards and forwards between them.** This is also discussed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003:5) who state that “*while research is often depicted as moving through each of the stages outlined, one after the other, this is unlikely to be the case. In reality you will probably revisit each stage more than once. Each time you revisit a stage you will need to reflect on the associated issues and refine your ideas.*” However, cycling backwards and forwards through approach steps should be fully discussed with a client before action is undertaken. Without involving a client in these decisions to return to an earlier step may be perceived by the client as a failure of the Action Researcher to undertake the proposed work correctly, and fast forwarding to a future step may be perceived by a client as the Action Researcher not giving sufficient attention to the work being undertaken at present. Both of these circumstances will impact on the Procedural Justice and Rationality as perceived by the client.

How the introduction of these four activities change Bryman’s original diagram can be seen in Figure 14.

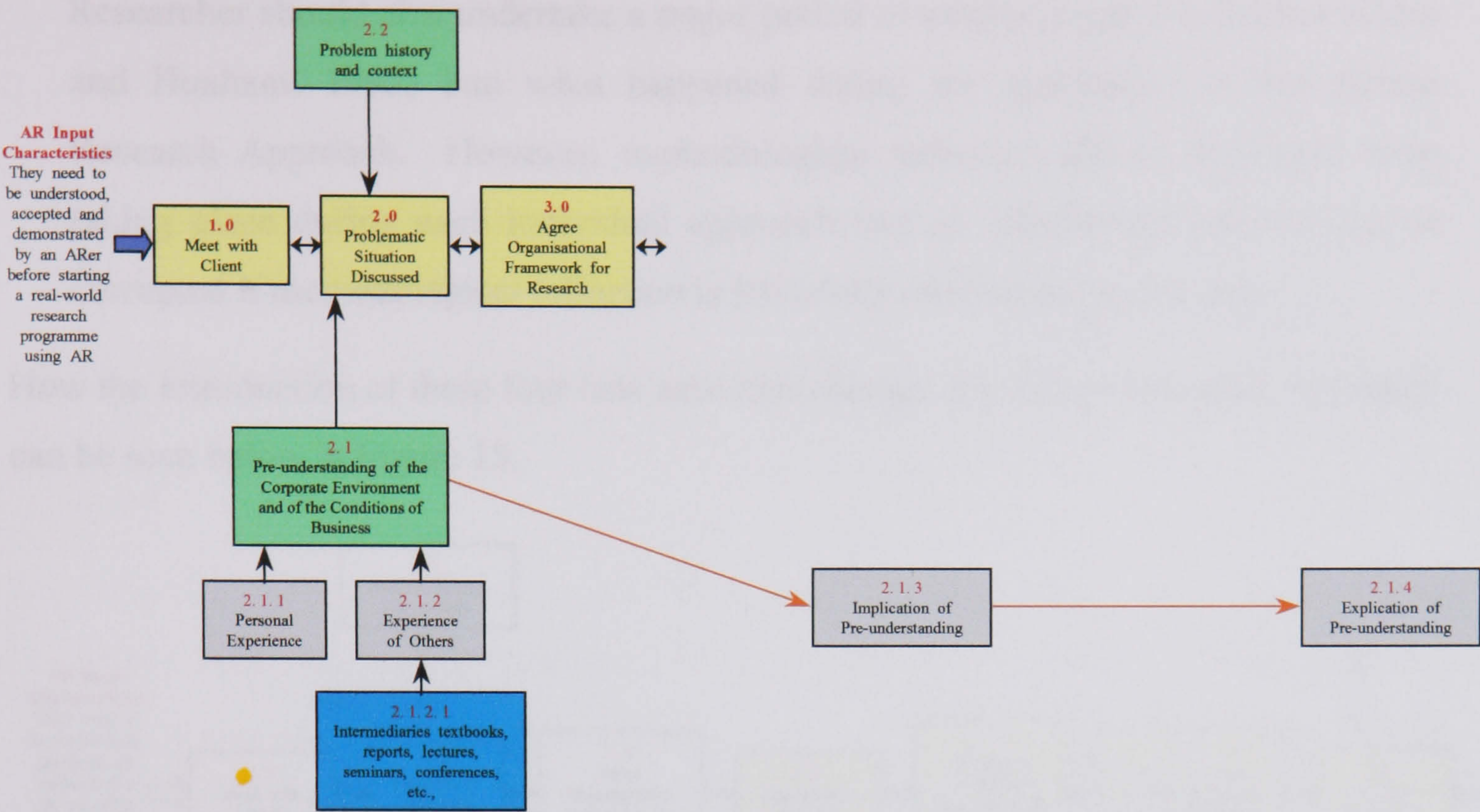


Figure 14. An Action Research Approach

- Once a framework for the research has been agreed the Action Researcher and client collaborate/co-operate while undertaking research (Carr and Kemmiss, 1986; Bryman, 1995; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991; Gummesson, 1991; Eden and Huxham, 1993, 1995, 1996). During the research programme various data collection methods may be utilised, provided they are applicable to the project and decided upon in advance of starting the project (Gummesson, 1991; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Robson, 1995).
- Having undertaken collaborated/co-operated research and collected data, the next stage is to synthesize and explore the data, while attempting to detect and develop any emergent actions and/or theories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Gummesson, 1991; Eden and Huxham, 1993, 1995, 1996). Utilising various data collection methods will allow the triangulation of emergent theories or conclusions, thereby improving the validity of the outcomes. Next, action focused recommendations and their implementation must be considered (Eden and Huxham, 1995).

- Following this a period of research evaluation can be undertaken to establish whether or not an action focused solution, the application of the emergent theory, and implementation recommendations, has been found. During this step the Action Researcher should also undertake a major period of methodological reflection (Eden and Huxham, 1995) into what happened during the application of the Action Research Approach. However, methodological reflection should also have been taking place during each individual approach step as information may be lost or corrupted if methodological reflection is left solely until arrival at this step.

How the introduction of these four new activities changes the Action Research Approach can be seen below in Figure 15.

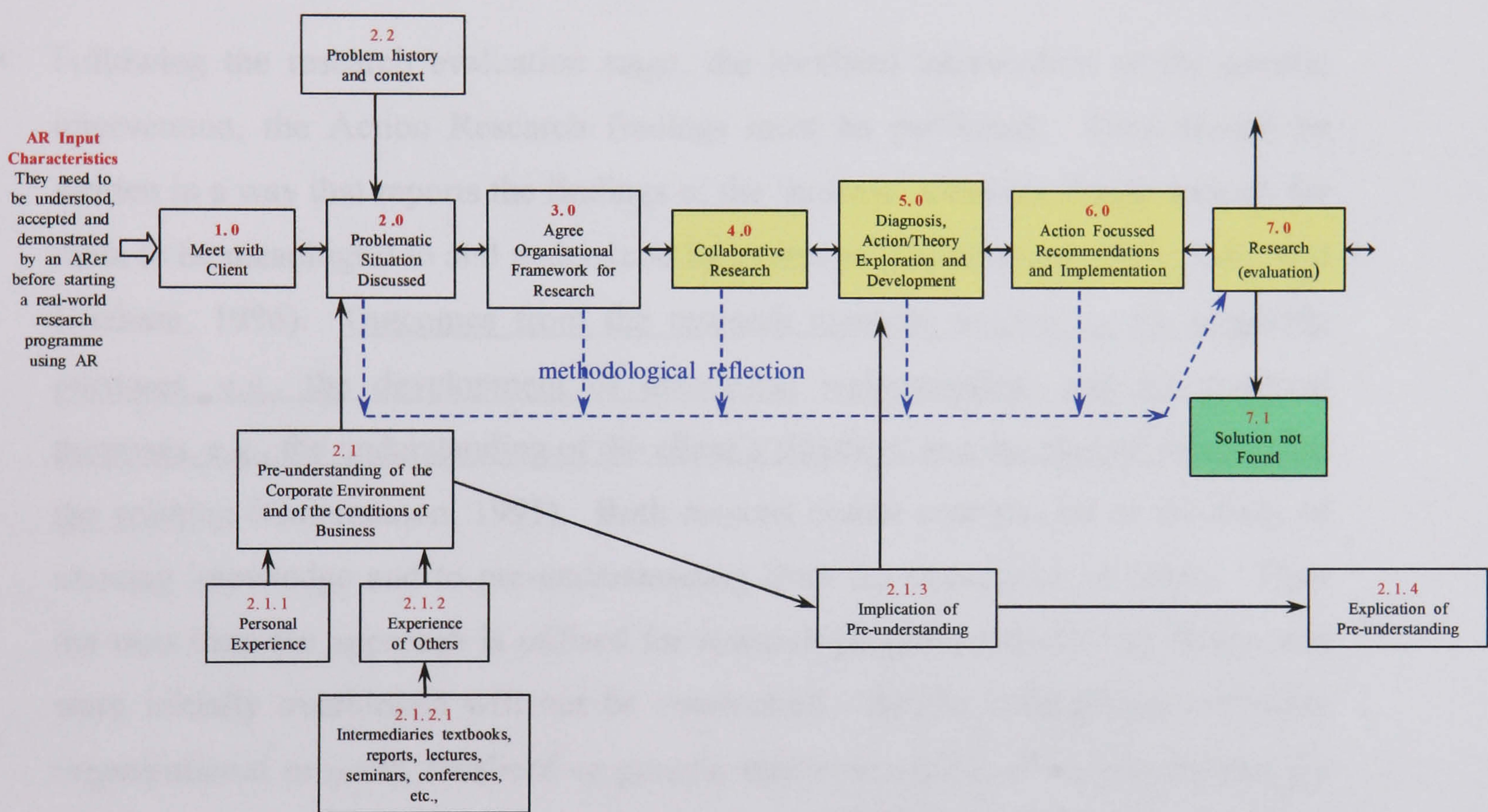


Figure 15. An Action Research Approach

- If the Action Researcher feels that the research has developed and/or enhanced actions/theory(s), then the application of the solution may take the form of a localised action focused intervention, thereby satisfying Bryman's 1995 characteristic regarding contributing to the stock of knowledge in a particular domain. If the localised solution is deemed successful, applying it to other situations will enable the solution to become a more generic action focused solution. This fulfills Eden and Huxham's (1996) first characteristic regarding Action Research having some implication beyond those required for action or generation of knowledge in the domain of the project. It also fulfills their fifth characteristic that Action Research will be incremental, moving from the particular, localised, to the general, in small steps.

- Following the research evaluation stage, the localised intervention or the generic intervention, the Action Research findings must be published. They should be written in a way that reports the findings of the 'holistic' situation simply enough for them to be meaningful to and understood by everyone (Gummesson, 1991; Eden and Huxham, 1996). Outcomes from the research must be written up for academic purposes, e.g., the development of theoretical understanding, and for practical purposes, e.g., the understanding of the client's situation, and the method of arrival at the solution (Gummesson, 1991). Both reasons ensure contribution to the body of existing knowledge and to pre-understanding from the experience of others. Then the next time the approach is utilised for research purposes some of the things that were initially overlooked will not be overlooked. As the consequences of some organizational projects, localised or generic interventions are often not realised for several years. When new information becomes available it should be documented, thereby ensuring an ongoing contribution to the body of existing knowledge and an ongoing contribution to pre-understanding from the experience of others. Articles and reports may still be written after the initial Action Research programme has concluded.

How the introduction of these new activities changes the Action Research Approach can be seen below in Figure 16.

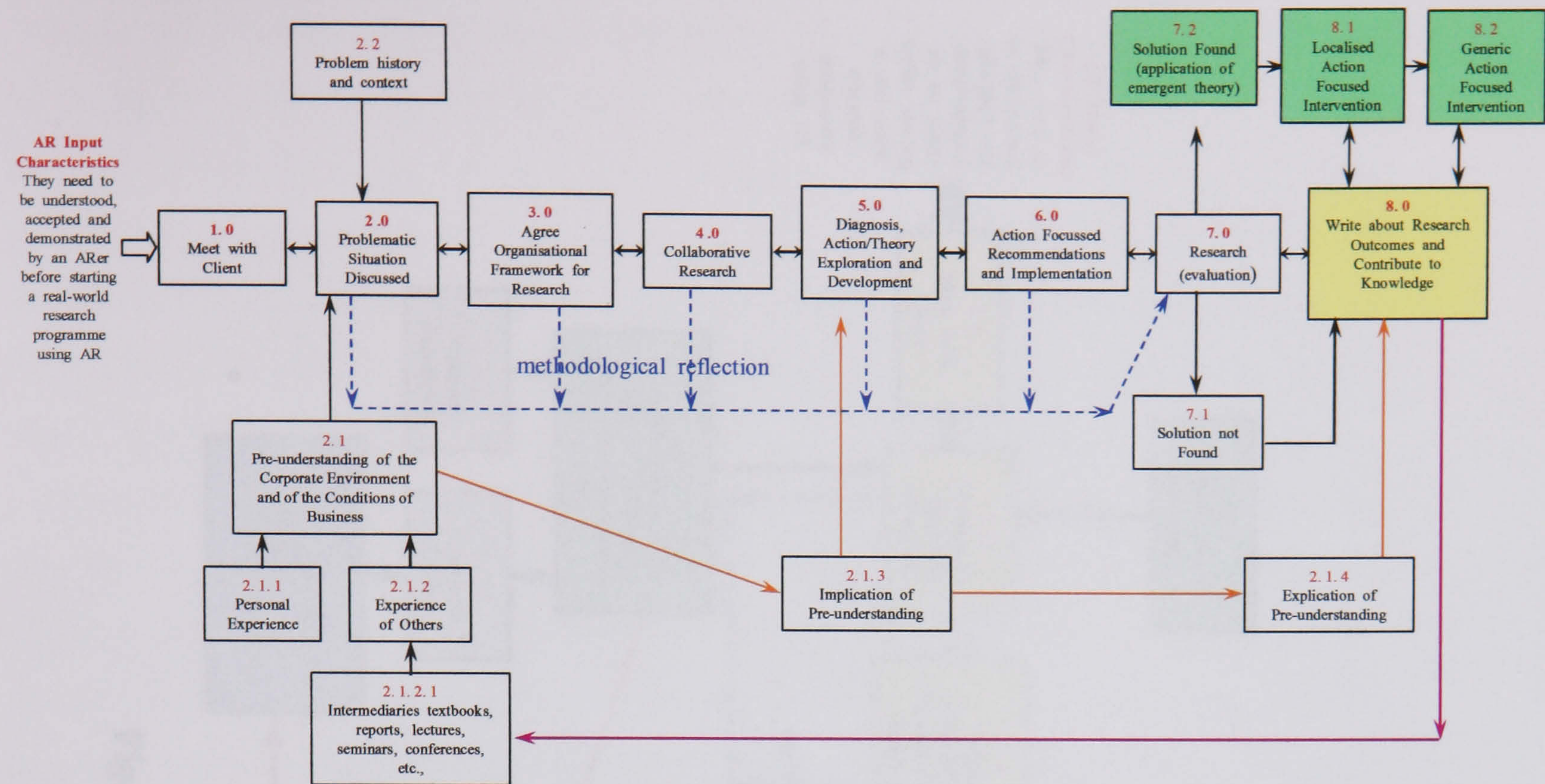


Figure 16. An Action Research Approach

All of the aforementioned activities can be seen more clearly in Figure 17, which is not intended to be ‘a definitive’ Action Research Approach, but rather, one that can be regarded as the ‘map’ to be used during this research programme. West and Stansfield (2001:268) state that “researchers should carefully consider the particular ‘methodology’ that they are going to adopt since it should be consistent with the thinking that underpins F. This is an important issue when undertaking formal research such as a Ph.D., since relevant material must be gathered and presented in a form that can be understood at a later date rather than simply depend upon the recollection of previous events. Therefore, in order for meaningful reflection to take place and lessons and findings to be derived from the research, the ‘methodology’ must be consistent with the framework of ideas if the theoretical principles underpinning the research are not to be compromised.” The Action Research Approach developed in Figure 17 is consistent with the Action Research Framework in Figure 12. The Action Research Approach should also be regarded as the ‘declaration in advance’ of the method ‘M’ to be used in this research programme (see page 38).

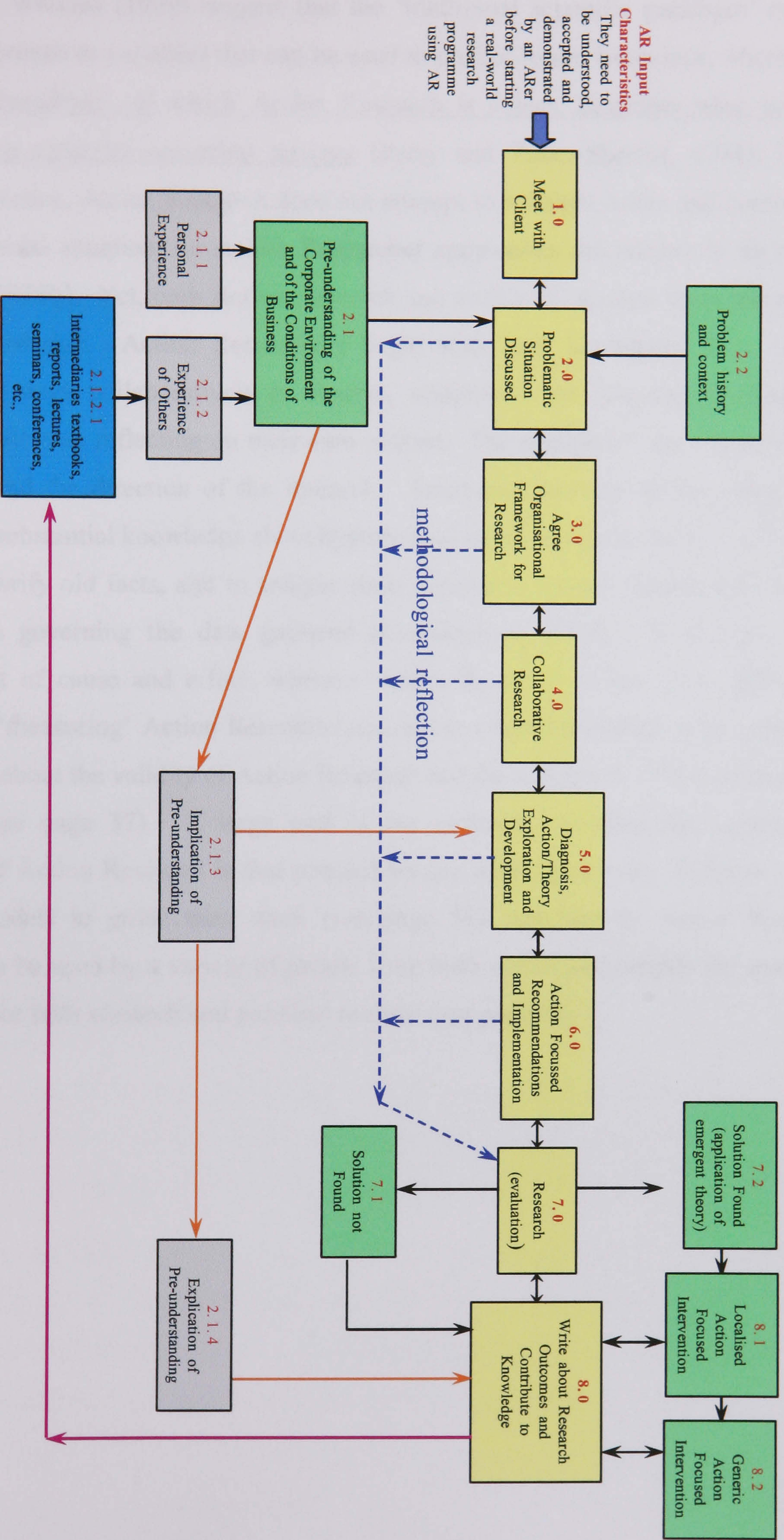


Figure 17. An Action Research Approach

2.4 *Validation of the Action Research Approach and Outcomes*

Dickens and Watkins (1999) suggest that the ‘traditional scientific paradigm’ reduces human phenomena to variables that can be used to predict future behaviour, whereas the ‘alternative paradigm’, of which Action Research is a part, describes what happens holistically in naturally occurring settings (Perry and Zuber-Skerritt, 1994). Unlike traditional science, Action Research does not attempt to set tight limits and controls on the experimental situation; an Action Researcher approaches the subject in its natural state (Trist, 1976b). Yet, both Action Research and traditional science share the goal of creating knowledge. Action Researchers begin with little knowledge in a specific situation and work collaboratively to observe, understand, and ultimately change the situation, while also reflecting on their own actions. The situational and environmental conditions lead the direction of the research. Traditional science on the other hand, begins with substantial knowledge about hypothetical relationships, seeking to ‘discover’ new facts, verify old facts, and to analyse their sequences, causal explanations and the natural laws governing the data gathered (Cunningham, 1993). It is exact in its measurement of cause and effect, whereas Action Research is not. The difficulties involved in ‘measuring’ Action Research success has caused concerns to be raised, for many years, about the validity of Action Research and the robustness of Action Research outcomes (see page 37). A large part of the problem regarding the validity and robustness of Action Research is that researchers can draw upon many different Action Research models to guide their work (see page 37), and that an Action Research approach can be used by a variety of people from both within and outside the academic community for both research and practical reasons (see page 43).

With regard to the differing Action Research models, Cunningham (1993) notes: *“The difficulty with any definition of action research is that the term can be used to summarise many activities which have the ‘veneer’ of research and action. Two researchers attempting to solve the same problem could inevitably reach different conclusions and still meet the criteria of action research within some paradigm or another”* (p.25). Different researchers using Action Research may disagree in their approach, while agreeing on fundamental philosophies or goals. The participants in any Action Research undertaking ultimately choose – either consciously or unconsciously – the particular route that directs the research. Because various forms of Action Research exist, practitioners may choose one or several methodologies to inform their action. Consequently, it may be difficult to identify a ‘pure’ Action Researcher, that is, someone who follows only one methodology (Dickens and Watkins, 1999).

From this it can be implied that a research programme using Action Research should be judged on the robustness of the Action Research model it professes to use and the adherence to the validity criteria identified for use with the model. In this research programme the model to be used will be the Action Research Approach, which was consistent with the framework of ideas (Action Research Framework) created; see West and Stansfield’s (2001) comments about this issue on page 41 and page 73. On page 38 of this document Checkland and Holwell’s (1998) suggestions about the nature and validity of Action Research were detailed. Here they stated that in a changing situation in which the adequacy of ‘F’, ‘M’, and the appropriateness of ‘A’ are likely to be tested, it is essential to declare in advance all three elements because this is the intellectual structure which will lead to findings and research lessons being recognised as such. Without the declaration it is difficult to see how the outcome of Action Research can be more than anecdotal. They further suggest that changes to or modifications of ‘F’, ‘M’ and even ‘A’ have to be expected during the use of Action Research. This will be the **Action Research validity criterion** for this research programme.

As the three elements of ‘F’, ‘M,’ and ‘A’ have been declared in advance of using the developed Action Research Approach, this only leaves changes to them to be identified and recorded during the application of the Action Research Approach for this research programme to be recognised as such.

Summary

Contributions to knowledge in the ‘research community’

- In developing the Action Research Framework the researcher identified that there were characteristics that could be described as ‘input’ characteristics, i.e., they needed to be understood, accepted and demonstrated by a researcher before starting a real world research programme using Action Research. These ‘input’ characteristics can be used, either by the researcher themselves or by an academic supervisor, while a research proposal is still being developed, as a way of judging whether a researcher has carefully considered what is involved in undertaking a research programme using Action Research, and to some degree, whether the researcher has the necessary practical and hands-on competencies, both as academic researcher and management consultant, needed to successfully complete a research programme using Action Research. Failure to understand, accept and demonstrate these characteristics should result in a researcher considering the application of an alternative methodology for their research programme (see page 63). Characteristics that need to be displayed to utilise a particular problem solving method could also be included in this activity, see Eden and Ackermann (2001:22) with regard to JOURNEY Making. This is a generic criterion that may be applied to all Action Research programmes, and also one that may terminate some of them.
- While acknowledging that the list of ‘good Action Research characteristics’ identified and used was not exhaustive, sufficient sources of information were used to suggest that the Action Research Framework (see Figure 12) was robustly constructed. The Action Research Framework is a means of declaring in advance Checkland and Holwell’s (1998) ‘F’. To the knowledge of the researcher no similar Action Research Framework has been developed or used in this way.
- The Action Research Approach (see Figure 17), was developed with regard to West and Stansfield’s (2001) contention that the ‘methodology’ must be consistent with the framework of ideas if the theoretical principles underpinning the research are not to be compromised. The Action Research Approach is a means of declaring in advance Checkland and Holwell’s (1998) ‘M’. To the knowledge of the researcher no similar Action Research Approach has been developed or used in this way.

➤ On page 44 the researcher considered his own ‘novice’ proficiency in the theory and practice of Action Research while accepting that these would be ‘relative measurements’ that would change as the research programme progressed. Following this period of in-depth research into Action Research it can be stated that the researcher has now acquired a considerable amount of ‘theoretical’ knowledge about the subject and can no longer be considered a novice in the area of Action Research theory. Also, given the researcher’s prior discussion regarding his ‘consultancy expertise’ (see page 45), he should not be considered a complete novice in the practice of Action Research. Figure 18 below details the researcher’s assessment of his changing proficiency in Action Research.

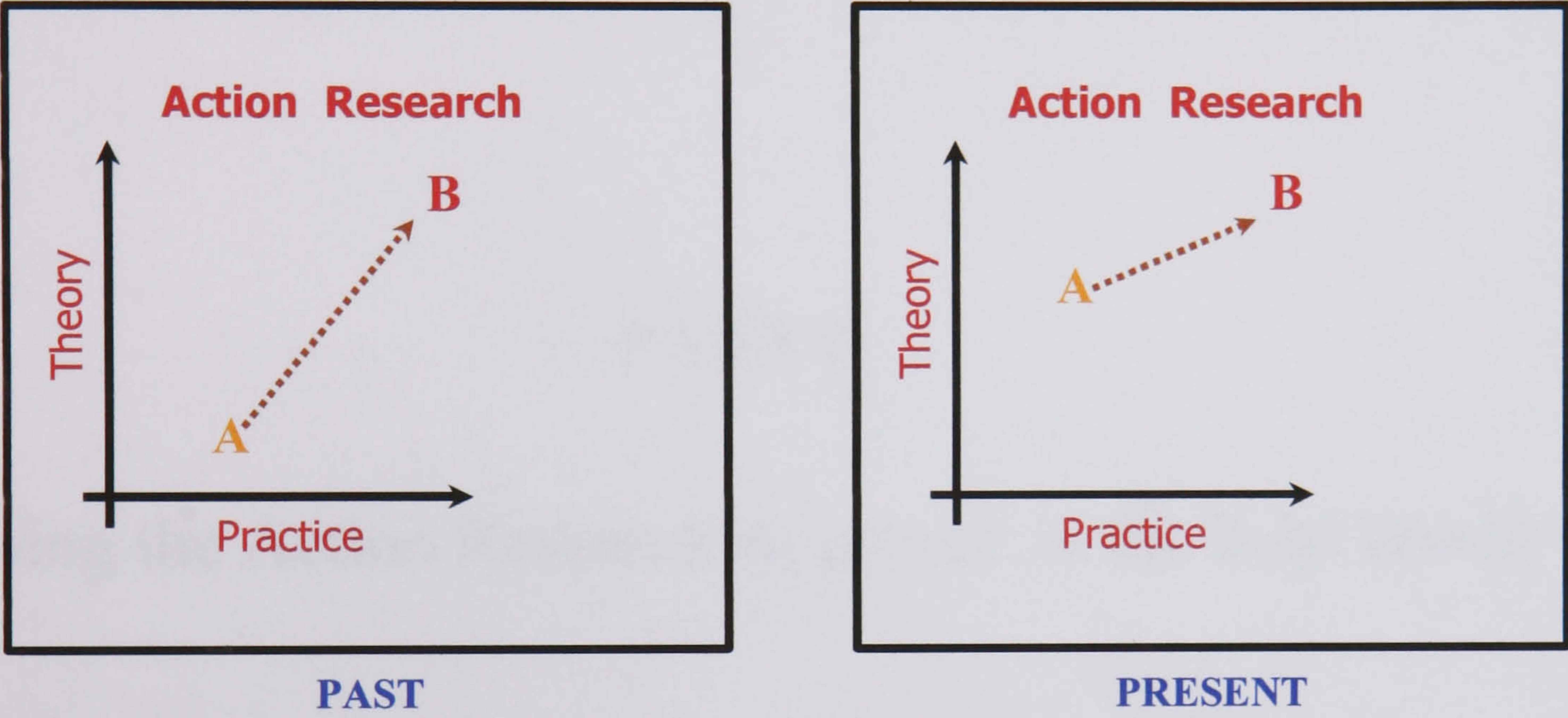


Figure 18. The Researcher’s Changing Proficiency in Action Research

Contributions to knowledge in the ‘practitioner community’

➤ All of the above comments are applicable to anyone wanting to use Action Research in their daily work. However, the Action Research Approach may have to be amended to the particular situation it is being used for. For example, Step 1 – Meet with Client’ may not be applicable if someone is considering the use of Action Research to solve a problem that they personally are facing. ‘Step 3 – Agree Organizational Framework for Research’ may need to be re-titled if the area of concern ‘A’ is not research driven.

PART B

Using the Action Research Approach in the Real World

CHAPTER 3

FINDING A COMPANY TO WORK WITH

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Notes for the reader

- a. As discussed earlier (see page 43), there are many people who could use Action Research in their work, making it difficult to establish a single criterion for judging the quality of Action Research outcomes. A similar concern can also be voiced about establishing a single criterion for judging the quality of a JOURNEY Making intervention, as it can also be used by different people in a variety of situations. In this research programme, a real world intervention, guided by many of the principles of JOURNEY Making, is to be undertaken by a ‘novice’ practitioner. Although Eden and Ackermann undertook most of their development of JOURNEY Making within the context of research, it was rarely explicitly acknowledged by the client to be partly research. Therefore, when reflecting on JOURNEY Making activities in this document, the ‘Action Researcher’ will be considering differences between what Eden and Ackermann (1998) state should be aimed for during a ‘typical’ application of JOURNEY Making, a strategy making method used by a variety of practitioners, and what actually happened when the combination of Action Research and JOURNEY Making were used by a part-time doctoral student and novice JOURNEY Making practitioner during a real world intervention, where an important aim is the attainment of an academic research qualification. Given the difference between what can be described as a typical application of JOURNEY Making and how it will be used within this research programme, the term **JOURNEY Making ‘type’ activity** will be used to describe any JOURNEY Making activities undertaken during the ‘Collaborative Research’ step of the Action Research Approach.
- b. Within the following text the term **‘Collaborative Research Programme’** will often be used. This term will only be used to describe the nature of the work to be undertaken between the Action Researcher and a real world company when discussing this issue with potential and/or existing clients. The application of JOURNEY Making type activities will be undertaken within the Collaborative Research Programme, similar to the way in which the Collaborative Research Programme is part of a larger Action Research Approach. The meaning placed on the word ‘collaborative’ will be *“to work together with another or others on a joint project”* (Collins English Dictionary, 1997).

The word collaborative has been specifically used for two reasons. Firstly, to fulfill the Process Characteristic attributed to Lewin (1946, 1947), Bryman (1989) and Gummesson (1991) that states that an Action Researcher should “*collaborate with a client to develop a diagnosis of and solution to a problem and contribute to scientific knowledge while doing it.*” Secondly, it would be difficult to perceive how, for example, an individual cognitive mapping session or a group workshop using the Oval Mapping Technique could be undertaken without the collaboration of the attendees. Eden and Huxham (1996:78) state that “*it is worthy of note that the view that action research will be collaborative is a point of agreement among most writers on the topic (see Peters and Robinson, 1994, p. 118) although we do not accept that action research must be collaborative.*” In this research programme, where a JOURNEY Making type activity is to be undertaken as part of a Collaborative Research Programme, it is the Action Researcher’s opinion that collaboration between Action Researcher and company must take place.

- c. To ensure that all events are recorded and reported accurately, a diary of events will be kept detailing what the Action Researcher perceived to have happened during every individual Action Research Approach step and/or Collaborative Research Programme sub-step undertaken. The diary will be used to record ‘findings and research lessons’ during an event, immediately after an event and up to a month after the event. This action has been taken to ensure that the Process Characteristic attributed to Eden and Huxham, (1993, 1995, 1996), “... *a high degree of method and orderliness is required in reflecting about and holding onto the emerging research content of each episode of involvement in the organization*” is fulfilled. Also, according to West and Stansfield (2001) the notion of valid findings is something that often cannot be determined at the time of the action from which the findings are later derived. Therefore, it is important that Action Researchers realise that for the findings of an Action Research study to be generally accepted as making a contribution, rigorous documentation, an awareness of the process of interaction, and continuous periods of reflection are required on the part of the Action Researcher. This is to ensure that useful lessons and findings can be identified.

d. Action Researchers can draw upon many models to guide their research, however most Action Researchers agree that it consists of cycles of PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING, REFLECTING and then further PLANNING etc., (Marrow, 1969; Cartwright, 1978; Peters and Robinson, 1984; Israel, Schurman and Hugentobler, 1992; Chisholm, and Elden, 1993; Elden and Chisholm, 1993; Coghlan, 1994; Robson, 1995 Dickens and Watkins, 1999). This is reflected in the Action Research ‘Process Characteristic’ attributed to Lewin, 1946; Rapoport, 1970; Carr and Kimmiss, 1986 and Gummesson, 1991 that states “... *both parties must engage in an iterative, cyclic process of planning, analysing the problematic situation, interpreting collected data, developing conclusions and recommendations that in turn lead to some new action (s)...*” To fulfill this characteristic, *all individual steps* within the Action Research Approach and Collaborative Research Programme sub-steps will be documented from this viewpoint.

- Under the heading PLANNING the question will be asked: What should be achieved during this step?
- Under the heading ACTING the question will be asked: What actually happened during this step?
- Under the heading OBSERVING the question will be asked: What differences were there, that were immediately noticed by the researcher, from what was expected to occur? **This step can be thought of as identifying the ‘findings and research lessons’ that have been elicited from the experience of applying the Action Research Approach (Checkland and Holwell, 1998) (see page 39).**
- Under the heading REFLECTING the questions will be asked: Why did these differences happen, and what are the key contributions to knowledge that derive from the observations? **This step can thought of as describing in detail the identified ‘findings and research lessons’, possibly following a literature search and review.**

If this structure later proves to impede the readability of the thesis, then this decision will be further reviewed.

To differentiate between OBSERVATIONS and REFLECTIONS, both of which can be deemed to be ‘reflective’ activities, the following will apply. OBSERVATIONS are usually made at the same time as PLANNED ACTIONS are being undertaken, and for a short period afterwards. They may be thoughts the researcher has regarding a particular situation that are noted but given little in-depth consideration at that time (identifying the findings and research lessons). Therefore, they may only appear in this document as short bullet pointed paragraphs of text. REFLECTIONS will be made over a longer time period and will produce a more in-depth understanding of OBSERVATIONS, possibly following a literature search and review of relevant material (describing in detail the findings and research lessons). REFLECTIONS should be viewed as individual and distinct pieces of research that ensure that this thesis is a record of ‘research’ rather than a record of practice without in-depth consideration or understanding of theory.

- e. More reflections than those documented during each Action Research Approach step will be reported in Chapter 8 ‘In-depth Reflections about Action Research’, following further extensive literature searches and reviews that are prompted by a more holistic understanding of all of the ‘REFLECTING’ sections, and providing insights for future researchers. The cyclical nature of Action Research and of the developed Action Research Approach will be discussed in depth during this chapter.
- f. The name of the participating company has been changed and company representatives will only be identified by their initials to afford a degree of anonymity. The company will be known as SI Ltd.
- g. The following text should be viewed in conjunction with the diagram of the Action Research Approach (see Figure 17 on page 74), as text headings will reflect the number of the Action Research Approach step they relate to.

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to detail what happened when the Action Researcher attempted to gain physical access to a company to interest them in taking part in a Collaborative Research Programme, and having found an interested party, what can be discussed during meetings with them to convince them to become involved in a proposed research programme. **The chapter covers Steps 1 and 2 of the Action Research Approach.**

Gummesson (1991) has stated that **access to reality** is an Action Researcher's "*number one problem*" (p.11). He describes 'physical access' as the ability to get close to the object of study, to really be able to find out what is happening: "*Physical access is usually a basic condition for research and consultancy, particularly when decision, implementation, and change processes are studied. This includes not only initial access but also the problem of assuring continued access*" (p.28). Bryman (1995:161) declares that one of the most 'vexed' areas for many researchers is quite simply getting into organizations and that problems associated with this activity are increasing. Van Maanen and Kölb, (1995:11) remark that entry into most organizations "*involves some combination of strategic planning, hard work and dumb luck.*" Many discussions on this subject describe what actions can be undertaken to gain physical access, but rarely continue to detail the difficulties associated with undertaking these actions. This chapter will help to explore some of these questions with the intention of informing Action Research practice.

Step 1 - Gain Access to Undertake Research

PLANNING (Action Research Approach)

The Action Researcher considered attempting to gain physical access to companies using two different scenarios:

- *Immediately informing companies that the collaborative work to be undertaken would be used as part of a 'research programme'.*
- *Approaching companies offering a 'consultancy service' and working within a research programme where the research is taken to be of no interest to the client.*

*The first approach was favored by the Action Researcher for two reasons. Firstly, the Action Researcher wanted to develop a **trusting relationship** with prospective clients from the initial contact. The Action Researcher was concerned that if he attempted to convert a part or fully completed consultancy project into a research programme, the client might perceive that they were incorrectly approached in the first instance. This could result in a loss of trust between the client and the Action Researcher, and a refusal by the client to allow any information to be used for research purposes. The concept of using information from a consultancy project in a research programme without a client's consent was felt to be ethically indefensible by the Action Researcher (Reynolds, 1979; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1981; Robson, 1995; Morton, 1998). Secondly, the Action Researcher was concerned about the quality of consultancy service he could provide to a client when using a strategy making method, JOURNEY Making, that he had little practical experience in using.*

The Action Researcher felt ethically more comfortable, from both an Action Researcher and Professional Consultant standpoint, informing potential clients that they would be participating in a Collaborative Research Programme where the Action Researcher was attempting to “develop their own research and consultancy competencies while helping the client to develop their own abilities to alleviate the problem situation. The researcher/consultant and client should learn from each other during the development of competencies”; a Process Characteristic attributed to Lewin (1946, 1947), Bryman (1989) and Gummesson (1991). This approach was felt to be preferable to having a potential client expect a ‘professional’ consultancy project and later establishing that the Action Researcher was ‘incompetent’ in the application of JOURNEY Making (Tomlinson, 1990).

To gain physical access to companies the Action Researcher planned to approach several ‘warm’ companies he had previously known (from successful consultancy assignments) to see whether they would be interested in becoming involved in a Collaborative Research Programme. If this access method proved to be unfruitful, the Action Researcher would then attempt to gain physical access to ‘cold’ companies that he had not previously contacted. If both of these physical access methods failed, the Action Researcher would then approach their current full-time employer to establish whether they would be interested in participating in a Collaborative Research Programme. The reason why the Action Researcher chose not to approach their current employer until all other options had failed was purely a personal reason. As the Action Researcher was unsure of how long he would remain fully employed by his employer, it was uncertain whether the Action Research Approach step ‘Undertake Collaborative Research’ would be completed before the Action Researcher sought full time employment at another company. The Action Researcher felt that being involved with a company on a strictly client and independent Action Researcher basis would allow the continuity of the research programme for as long as needed, without other work related issues getting in the way.

ACTING (Action Research Approach)

Four companies were contacted between March and mid April 1999. Functional Managers whom the Action Researcher had known and developed a relationship with were contacted by telephone to establish their initial interest with regard to Collaborative Research Programme/strategy making involvement. Based on comments made by people when first contacted by the Action Researcher, it appeared that warm start companies would be interested in becoming involved in a Collaborative Research Programme. This was because of the personal relationship the Action Researcher had previously developed with the individuals representing the company; however it later materialised that many of these people did not have the authority to grant access for any form of research programme to be undertaken. When acting as a 'research sponsor' and referring this matter to someone else in the company who had the authority to grant physical access, a refusal resulted. When the personal contact was asked by the Action Researcher if they could be granted a face-to-face meeting with the 'appropriate person' (someone who has the authority to grant physical access and can establish whether the proposed research programme will be of value to the organization) to formally discuss research programme/strategy making activities, it was always refused. The reason given for this was that all personal contacts stated that they would be bringing the matter to the third party's attention informally as there was no formal/established method of dealing with 'research programme' requests within their organization. The Action Researcher considered that this could also be a possible reason why refusals were occurring. Following numerous telephone conversations, nothing materialised from this physical access method. Therefore, it was decided not to pursue this method further.

The next physical access method adopted was to contact companies that the Action Researcher had not had any previous contact with; 'cold companies'. A list of companies was created from Dun and Bradstreet's 1998 Index that fulfilled the following categories:

- *Profit, >£4,000,000. This was chosen because the Action Researcher did not want to work with start-up or recently established companies. With a turnover of £4m and above it was assumed that the company would have been trading for some time and may already have held discussions about their potential participation in a research programme with either a researcher or academic institution.*
- *Number of Employees, >75. The number of employees would provide the Action Researcher with an indication of the size of the company and possibly an indication of the complexity of the problems that the company may be facing.*
- *Geographic Location, Buckinghamshire/Northampton-shire/Bedfordshire. The geographic location chosen was within a radius of two hours' travelling from the Action Researcher's base. This would allow the minimisation of time spent travelling to and from a client.*

Although Dun and Bradstreet's 1998 Index provides names of senior executives in companies, the inconsistency of titles associated with these executives, and the fact that there are few 'strategic planning' executives, made it difficult to establish the 'appropriate person' to send Collaborative Research Programme details to without first telephoning to find out. However, towards the end of April 1999, a letter detailing the proposed research programme (Appendix B1-2), was drafted and sent to 50 'named' senior executives of companies randomly selected from the list. The Action Researcher perceived that a letter enquiring about Collaborative Research Programme/strategy making involvement would be a better method of making initial contact with companies than a speculative telephone call.

Several weeks later telephone follow-up calls were made to most of the mailed companies, with very little success in talking to the letter's recipient. However, the telephone conversations provided the Action Researcher with some information regarding the failure of this physical access method. Many companies did not have a designated person to handle enquiries about involvement in research programmes per se. and incorrectly addressed letters were either destroyed or referred to another person who took no action at all. Rarely did a mailed enquiry get passed to a person who had the ability to approve a research programme, normally a Senior Executive. When letters did reach the intended recipient they were often given a low priority or totally ignored. No written replies were received from the contacted companies by the end of May 1999, although five organizations telephoned to ascertain what would be expected of them should they agree to participate. The Action Researcher kept in regular contact with these companies but none of them took the matter any further. This method of gaining physical access proved to be very slow, time consuming and frustrating with little reward associated with it.

Next, the Action Researcher approached his employers to establish whether they would be willing to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme. Although this consultancy company had been trading as an 'independent' limited company for a number of years it had recently been acquired by a larger world-wide organization. A new Managing Director had been appointed and the Action Researcher had recently joined the company in the position of Senior Partner with responsibility for developing the company's strategy. Following extensive negotiations the offer to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme was rejected. Unbeknown to the Action Researcher the parent organization was attempting to standardise operating practices across all business units with the intention that strategic direction would become centrally rather than locally developed. The parent organization intended to create the strategic direction it expected all business units to follow, and did not perceive any value in business units developing or having the capability to develop their own strategic plans.

Having exhausted all of the planned physical access methods without finding a company interested in becoming involved in the Collaborative Research Programme, the Action Researcher decided, in early June 1999, that the physical access approach needed to be re-planned. The Action Researcher now planned to reach a large number of companies within a short timeframe through a selective advertising campaign, using a generic 'message'. This was the opposite of the physical access approaches attempted so far in that they had been targeted at a select number of companies with a more 'individualistic message'. A brief narrative about the Action Researcher and the value of the proposed research programme, both for the Action Researcher and a participating company, was written and submitted to a local newspaper's weekly business section to establish whether they would be prepared to print an advertorial, part advertisement part editorial, about the Collaborative Research Programme (Appendix B3-4). An approach was also made to several large membership institutions, the Strategic Planning Society (SPS), the Institute of Management (IOM) and the Institute of Directors (IOD), toward the same end (Appendix B5-6). These institutes produce monthly and quarterly newsletters, magazines, journals, etc., which are sent individually to thousands of members. The same type of advertorial could be printed in these magazines. Following several weeks of telephone conversations with all parties, only one institute remained interested in the proposed Collaborative Research Programme. The Institute of Management explained that they were not interested in offering this type of service to their members and the proposition was turned down by an internal committee at the Strategic Planning Society as something they felt their members would not be interested in. When asked why they would not be interested in offering this type of service to their members, so that the Action Researcher could have some idea of how to amend the approach for future Action Researchers, neither of these institutes would provide the Action Researcher with more in-depth explanations for inclusion into this document.

The IOD head office in London employs a person whose role involved handling research programme enquiries. This contact suggested that a better approach would be to contact several of the IOD's local branch chairmen because they were closer to individual IOD members and companies and therefore should be able to offer more practical assistance. The IOD supplied contact details for several of these people. Mr. JP was the local branch chairman for Buckingham, and following a brief telephone conversation with the Action Researcher, asked for information regarding the Collaborative Research Programme to be emailed to him so that he could decide what would be the best course of action to take. Later the same day JP telephoned the Action Researcher to state that he would be willing to place a small advertorial in his branch's July newsletter to find out whether any companies would be willing to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme. However, shortly before the print run he contacted the Action Researcher to state that because of a late breaking piece of news the advertorial would now appear in the next quarter's newsletter (Appendix B7). The Action Researcher kept in regular contact with JP during late July and early August 1999 to ensure that the advertorial would be printed as expected. During this period a warm relationship started to develop between Action Researcher and JP.

In one particular telephone conversation JP suggested that if, following the advertorial's publication, no company could be found to participate in the Collaborative Research Programme, then his own company would like to be considered as it was about to undertake a major 'strategic review'. In mid August 1999, JP telephoned the Action Researcher to state that he had discussed the concept of becoming involved in the Collaborative Research Programme with his senior management team and that they were willing to investigate whether involvement would provide them with added value during their 'strategy review' work. However, he requested a copy of the Action Researcher's Resume/CV (Appendix A2-5) to show to the Senior Management Team as they had indicated that they did not want an 'unprofessional researcher', someone they described as 'not a practicing business consultant', involved in the strategic development of their company.

Also, the feeling was that a purely academic exercise would be of little use to them as they needed a very practical strategy in which they collaborated during the development and that could be implemented smoothly at a future date. After viewing the Action Researcher's Resume/CV, JP invited the Action Researcher (Appendix B8) to a meeting at the company's (SI Ltd.) offices on the afternoon of 7th September 1999 to discuss the Collaborative Research Programme in more detail. JP also stated that if, following this meeting, he was still interested in becoming involved in the Collaborative Research Programme, a meeting with SI Ltd.'s Strategy Planning Group would be entailed, and a more formal presentation would then be required.

OBSERVING (Action Research Approach)

Observing what happened during this step in the Action Research Approach the Action Researcher identified several differences from planned activities. These will be identified below and discussed further in the REFLECTING section.

- *Following the failure of all the planned physical access methods the Action Researcher had to re-plan the physical access approach. The reason for this was that the Action Researcher had never considered in depth all possible physical access methods, the time needed to undertake them, or the difficulties associated with undertaking them, when planning his initial actions.*
- *When talking directly to a potential client about Collaborative Research Programme involvement, one of the first questions asked concerned the value to the company of involvement. The Action Researcher had expected some 'value' discussion about the Collaborative Research Programme itself, or the JOURNEY Making type activities to be undertaken, or the elapsed time for Collaborative Research Programme completion, but these were rarely asked at this time.*

A possible reason why the Action Researcher never received any written replies from 'cold company' enquiries could be because the letter recipients could not perceive any value in participating in the Collaborative Research Programme from the details presented. The value of involvement for a company and an explanation of this issue had not been considered carefully enough by the Action Researcher.

REFLECTING (Action Research Approach)

Methods of Gaining Physical Access to Organizations

Before attempting to gain access to a company to undertake a Collaborative Research Programme, the Action Researcher was aware of some of the difficulties associated with this task. For example, people acting as gatekeepers between researcher and company, companies that operate a policy of non-cooperation with researchers, companies often viewing research based activities as non practical, suspicions about the aims of the researcher, and concerns about the amount of company time that is likely to be consumed by an investigation (Bryman, 1995). The Action Researcher was also aware of some of the statistics indicating that gaining access to companies for research purposes was not easy. Jackall (1983), for example, carried out an interview-based study in four companies but was denied access by thirty-six others, and Sutton (1987) initially contacted twenty organizations but was refused access by twelve. However, the Action Researcher was still not prepared for the degree of difficulty actually experienced, or aware of the number of access methods that might need to be employed to successfully gain access to an organization.

Conway (1987) has proposed a useful method detailing methods by which physical access to clients can be gained to undertake a variety of projects (see Figure 19).

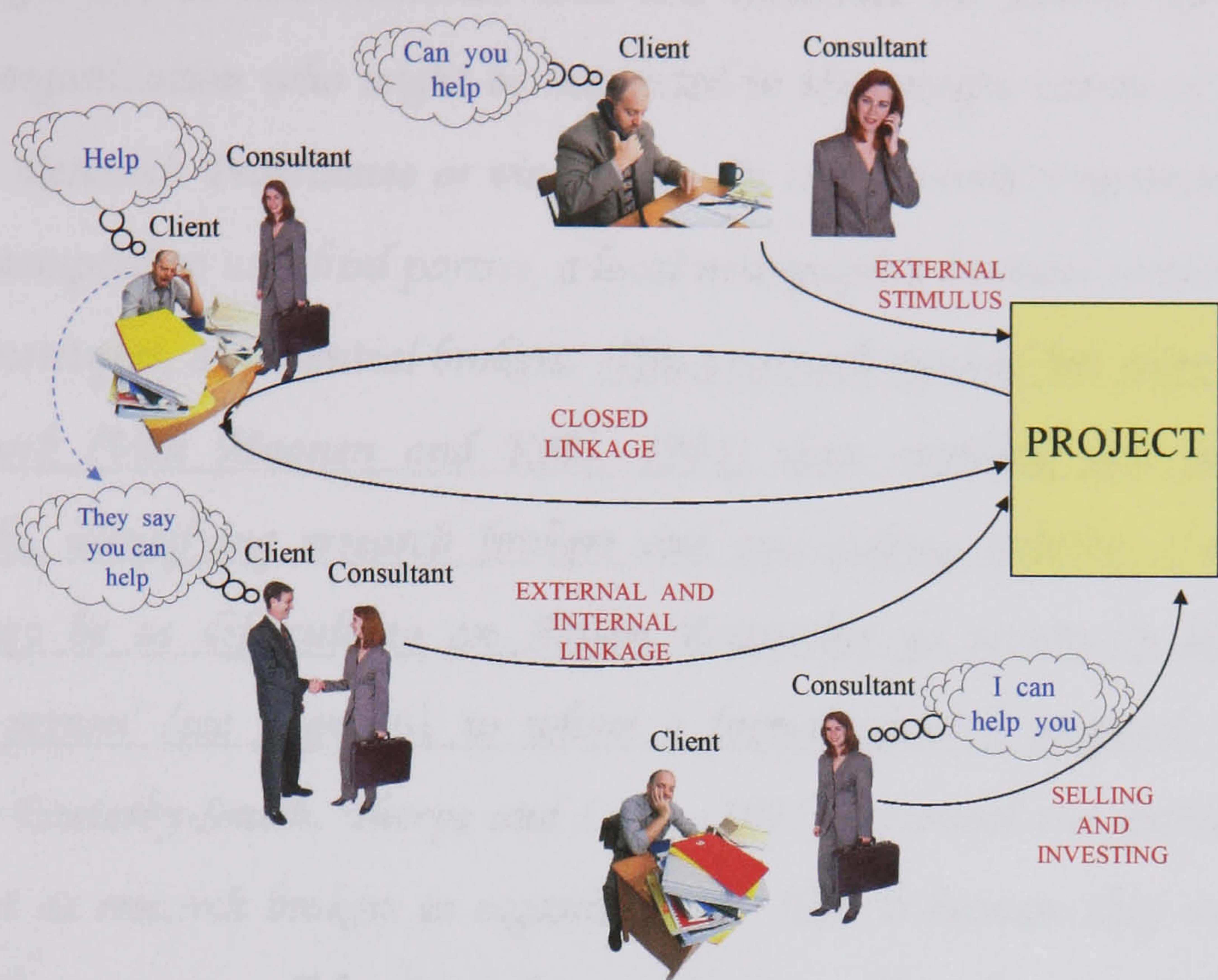


Figure 19. Methods of Gaining Physical Access to Organizations

The first method derives from problem-owner initiated enquiries (“I have a problem, can you help?”) whereby the problem-owner already knows of, or has seen marketing material about a problem-helper and the services they provide (**previous client/contact**). In the second method, **closed linkage**, a client may be courted through a succession of varied projects until a relationship develops between client and problem-helper which helps them to reach a working consensus more readily and exclusively. This is similar to the SODA access method described by Eden and Simpson (1990), who state “The experience that we have had in a wide range of situations with a variety of potential clients has highlighted the importance of personal relationships in establishing the nature of the consultancy contract” (p.44). Alternatively, a problem-helper’s reputation may travel around an organization and/or group of companies (**external or internal linkage**) and this may lead to new commissions, notably in the case when a problem-helper specialises in specific types of work (Norman, 1988). The final method derives from the deliberate **selling** of the problem-helper service to potential customers, including speculative problem solving in cases where no client is immediately in view.

Identifying and contacting 'Brokers' (Boissevain, 1974; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991) is another physical access method that Action Researchers may consider. Research brokers act as intermediaries who can introduce an Action Researcher to a person in an organization who might be interested in the specific nature of the proposed Collaborative Research Programme or vice versa. In this research programme the Action Researcher attempted to use third parties, a local newspaper's business section and several membership institutes, as potential brokers. This approach worked but more through luck and hard work (Van Maanen and Kölb, 1995) than anything else (see page 91). Unfortunately, identifying research brokers and establishing whether they can be of assistance may be as difficult to an Action Researcher as personally identifying an 'appropriate person' (see page 86), to whom a formal research proposal may be sent. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991) personnel and training managers frequently act as research brokers in organizations. This is because they usually have a wide range of contacts at all levels of the organization. Thus, because of their influence with senior managers who are able to provide authorization, they are often the best people to arrange access for novice researchers. However, given the number of organizations contacted by the Action Researcher which stated that they did not have a formal manner of dealing with research proposals, it can only be assumed that in many cases personnel and training managers are acting as 'informal' research brokers.

The main learning point from this reflection was that the Action Researcher failed to fully comprehend the amount of 'physical' effort needed to complete this activity successfully, or the number of 'access' methods that would need to be utilised. Also, as a part-time doctoral researcher the Action Researcher had only dedicated himself 'part-time' to this activity, instead of the 'professional/full-time' dedication that the activity demanded.

The Collaborative Research Programme Value Proposition

An important aspect of gaining access to companies is to decide how the 'value' of involvement, for the company, can be defined and communicated by an Action Researcher, because what might be an important topic of research to an Action Researcher might not appear relevant, and therefore of little value, to someone receiving a research proposal that they have not requested (Starkey and Madan, 2001). Also, how an Action Researcher presents themselves to potential clients may become an integral part of this value. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest that, "Getting into a setting involves a process of managing your identity; projecting an image of yourself that will maximize your chances of gaining access... You want to convince gatekeepers that you are a non-threatening person who will not harm their organization in any way" (p.20). According to Bryman (1995), these authors advocate an initial approach which guarantees confidentiality and privacy, and gives a 'truthful, but vague and imprecise' summary of research procedures and objectives to reduce the risk of eliciting defensive or self-conscious behaviour. Stebbins (1987) makes helpful suggestions about fitting in to the research environment, agreeing with Lofland and Lofland (1984) that you need to have enough knowledge about the setting or persons you wish to study to appear competent to do so. In this research programme a 'novice' Action Research practitioner was attempting to gain access to a company to undertake a Collaborative Research Programme which involved the application of a JOURNEY Making type method in which the Action Researcher was also a novice practitioner. Initially, ethical considerations about the image that the Action Researcher would use to present himself to potential clients needed to be considered. On this subject, Morton (1998:2) suggests that an Action Researcher "may have to decide whether to present themselves as predominantly an academic researcher (who happens to do consultancy) or predominantly as a consultant (who happens to have theoretical interests)." Yet, in this research programme the Action Researcher decided to be wholly truthful when contacting organizations, explaining that he would be undertaking a combination of these roles while fulfilling the role of an Action Researcher.

Furthermore, the Action Researcher also decided to explain that he was both a novice Action Research and JOURNEY Making practitioner, and that a part of the Collaborative Research Programme would involve the Action Researcher developing his own research and consultancy competencies while helping a client to develop their own abilities to alleviate the problem situation (Lewin, 1946, 1947; Gummesson, 1991 and Bryman, 1995) (see page 53). This could not be said to be presenting an image that would be maximising the Action Researcher's chances of success. However, the Action Researcher believed that it would help in the development of a trusting relationship with a potential client and reduce the possibility of the potential client establishing later on that the Action Researcher was incompetent in the strategy making method to be used.

When the Action Researcher was able to talk directly to JP (an 'appropriate person' – see page 86) to discuss the Collaborative Research Programme in more depth (while still providing a vague and imprecise' summary of research procedures and objectives to reduce the risk of eliciting defensive or self-conscious behaviour) an indication was given to the Action Researcher that the company would be willing to investigate whether involvement in a Collaborative Research Programme would provide it with added value during its 'strategy review' work (see page 90). It was explained that the perceived initial value of involvement was for the company the Action Researcher's knowledge, competence and practical expertise in making strategies for consultancy companies, and possibly the fact that company representatives would be able to learn from the Action Researcher about strategy making per se. However, this still needed to be investigated further.

From this the Action Researcher learnt that in this type of Collaborative Research Programme demonstrating value can be seen to be something of a paradox; attempting to demonstrate the value of Collaborative Research Programme involvement to a potential client, while at the same time informing them that the work would be undertaken by someone operating in both the role of a researcher who had limited practical exposure to the research methodology to be used, and a consultant who had limited practical expertise of the strategy development method to be used.

Changes to the Action Research Approach

Reflecting on the struggle to gain physical access to a company to undertake a Collaborative Research Programme leads this Action Researcher to conclude that 'Gaining Access to Undertake Research' can be included as the initial Action Research Approach step (see Figure 20).

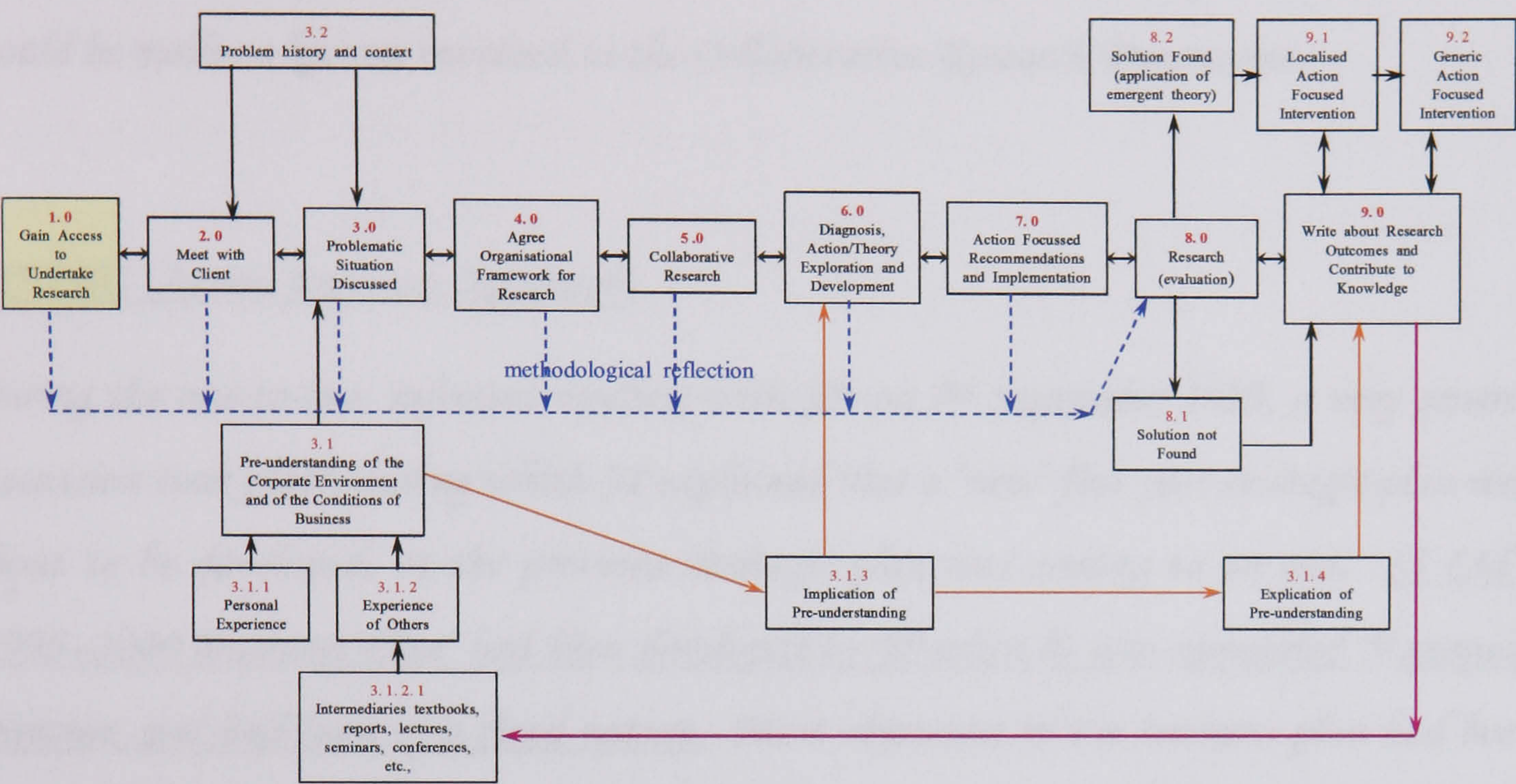


Figure 20. Amended Action Research Approach

If the approach is problem-owner initiated then this may only warrant a simple action, a single line in a document explaining this access method. However, if the Action Researcher has to 'sell' the concept of Collaborative Research Programme participation, then the 'new' first step of the Action Research Approach should cover the development of a 'strategic plan' (Van Maanen and Kölb, 1995) detailing how an Action Researcher intends to establish who appropriate people are within organizations to formally receive a research proposal, what communication media will be used to contact these appropriate people, how the value of Collaborative Research Programme participation will be explained, and how the role of Action Researcher will be presented to potential clients.

On page 76 it was stated that a judgment of the validity of the Action Research Approach will be to provide evidence that changes to the elements of 'F', 'M,' and 'A' have been identified and documented during the application of the Action Research Approach. This is an identified and documented change to the element 'M'.

Step 2 – Meet With Client

PLANNING (Action Research Approach)

The Action Researcher planned to meet JP to discuss the Collaborative Research Programme and to secure from him an invitation to attend a further meeting with SI Ltd's Strategic Planning Group. At this second meeting it was hoped that a decision would be made to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme.

ACTING (Action Research Approach)

*During the one-to-one, informal meeting with JP, on 7th September 1999, a very general discussion took place, during which JP explained that a 'new' five year strategic plan was about to be developed, as the previous strategic plan was coming to an end. SI Ltd's '1995–2000 Business Plan' had been developed by JP when he was appointed Managing Director, and had been of a fixed nature. Most objectives in the business plan had been achieved; however, **company performance for the past two years was below that forecast** due to an increasingly competitive marketplace. This had not been completely identified five years earlier and therefore had not been fully factored into the initial business plan. To be able to include unanticipated occurrences into the 'new' business plan, JP stated that the Strategic Planning Group, and himself, were now keen to explore the possibility of developing a more flexible strategic plan. The Strategic Planning Group felt that without such a plan they would just keep 'fire fighting' the company's daily problems. However, the Strategic Planning Group had not yet decided how to approach the development of a flexible strategic plan as a group. The Action Researcher briefly detailed what the Collaborative Research Programme entailed, and how this could enhance SI Ltd's intended strategic planning activities. The rest of the meeting was spent with JP inquiring about the Action Researcher's practical and academic competencies in more detail, especially any relevant experience of business development in consultancy companies.*

JP also re-informed the Action Researcher that the Strategic Planning Group had stated that any 'researcher' involved in strategy development work at SI Ltd should possess personal experience in the development of consultancy companies and be able to demonstrate a general understanding of the business environment in which consultancy companies operated. Discussing these subjects and swapping 'war stories' enabled a personal rapport to develop between JP and the Action Researcher that enhanced the warm relationship that had been developing (see page 90). Towards the end of this meeting JP invited the Action Researcher to attend a Strategic Planning Group meeting, a more formal one-to-group affair, on 20th September, at which time the Action Researcher would be expected to 'sell' the concept of the Collaborative Research Programme and his relevant consultancy experience to deliver the programme to the whole group. The Action Researcher enquired when a decision would be made by the Strategic Planning Group regarding involvement. JP indicated that Strategic Planning Group members would most likely want to discuss the issue further, without the Action Researcher being present; therefore, a decision would probably be made some time after the meeting. JP then stated that should SI Ltd agree to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme then he should be regarded as the **Action Researcher's client** and all subsequent requests for information about SI Ltd. should go directly to him for distribution.

Shortly after the meeting, JP sent the Action Researcher a letter confirming details of the Strategic Planning Group meeting and stating that an hour would be set aside for the Action Researcher to overview the proposed Collaborative Research Programme and his personal experience. The letter also contained a **Confidentiality Agreement** which was later signed and returned by the Action Researcher (Appendix B9-12).

At the meeting on 20th September 1999, JP introduced the Strategic Planning Group, which included all members of SI Ltd's Senior Management Team, to the Action Researcher, describing them as the **key actors** involved in SI Ltd's future development. These were: Mr. DT (Operations Director), Mr. RH (Client Support and Research Director), Mr. EP (Sales Manager), Mr. CR (Marketing Manager) and Mr. JP (Managing Director).

Opening the meeting JP asked the Action Researcher to overview his academic and consultancy background before presenting the proposed Collaborative Research Programme. Following this, the Action Researcher's academic and practical experience and competencies were discussed in greater depth. The Strategic Planning Group stated that JP had acted very diligently in immediately establishing the professional business consultancy and practical strategy development credentials of the Action Researcher prior to agreeing to a first 'face-to-face' meeting, and without these being subsequently approved the Action Researcher would not have been invited to attend the Strategic Planning Group meeting. After this discussion the Action Researcher was assured that any expectations the Strategic Planning Group had with regard to the Action Researcher working with them had been fulfilled.

Next, the Action Researcher explained why he believed that Collaborative Research Programmes were important academically and practically, the proposed research methodology, how the intervention would be undertaken, and the level of commitment that would be expected from SI Ltd. and individuals within the company. The Strategic Planning Group then asked in-depth questions about Action Research, JOURNEY Making, and the facilitation techniques that would be used by the Action Researcher. Following this the Strategic Planning Group asked the Action Researcher to overview all of the main JOURNEY Making activities so that they would have some idea of the full scale of possible JOURNEY Making activities. The Action Researcher overviewed JOURNEY Making with the group by providing them with diagrams, developed from Eden (1993) with regard to SODA, and the Action Researcher's own interpretation of possible JOURNEY Making activities from Eden and Ackermann (1998) (see Appendix B13 and Figure 21), and a diagram detailing JOURNEY Making and strategy making from Eden and Ackermann, (1998) (see Figure 22), and briefly discussing represented activities.

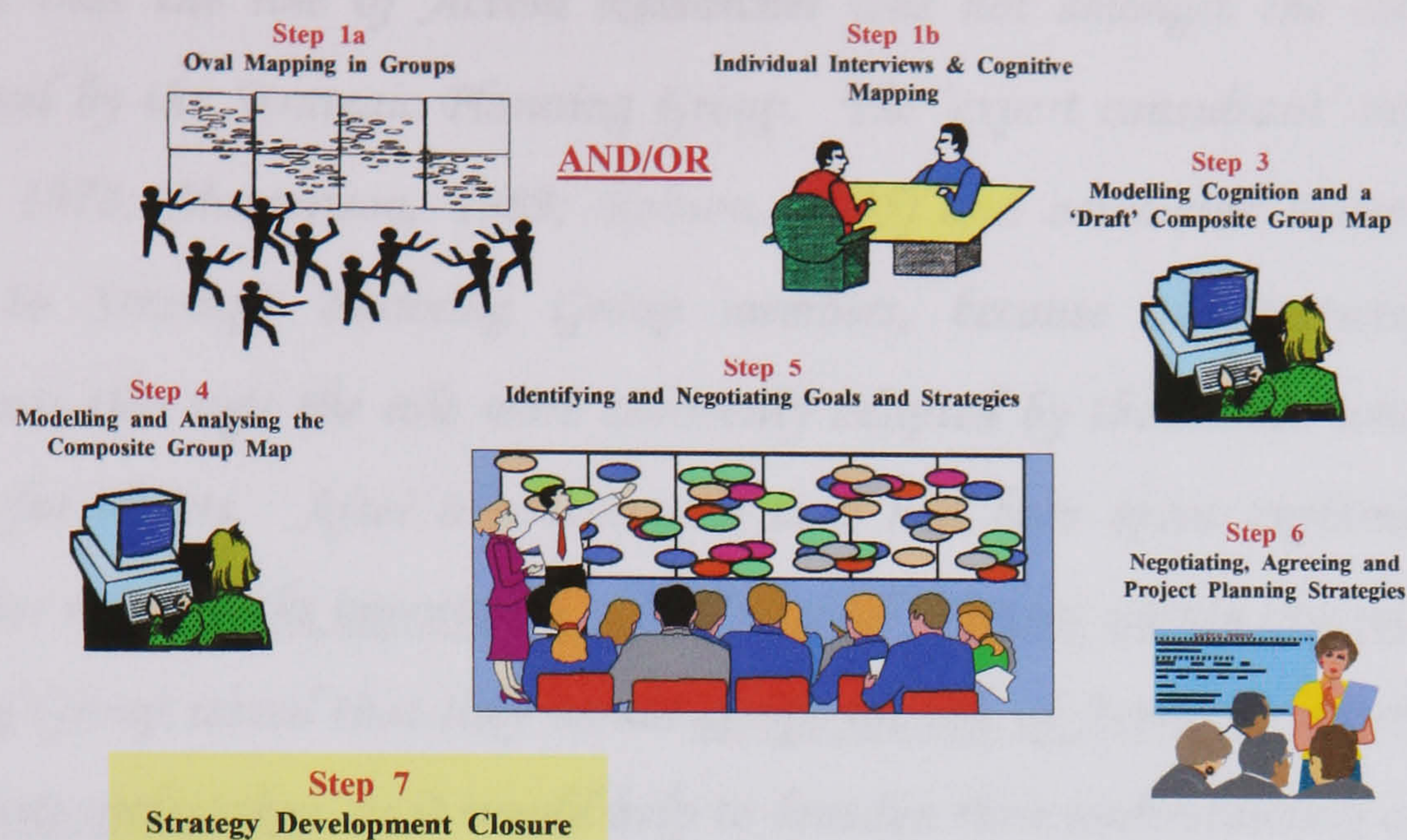


Figure 21. The Action Researcher's Interpretation of Possible JOURNEY Making Activities

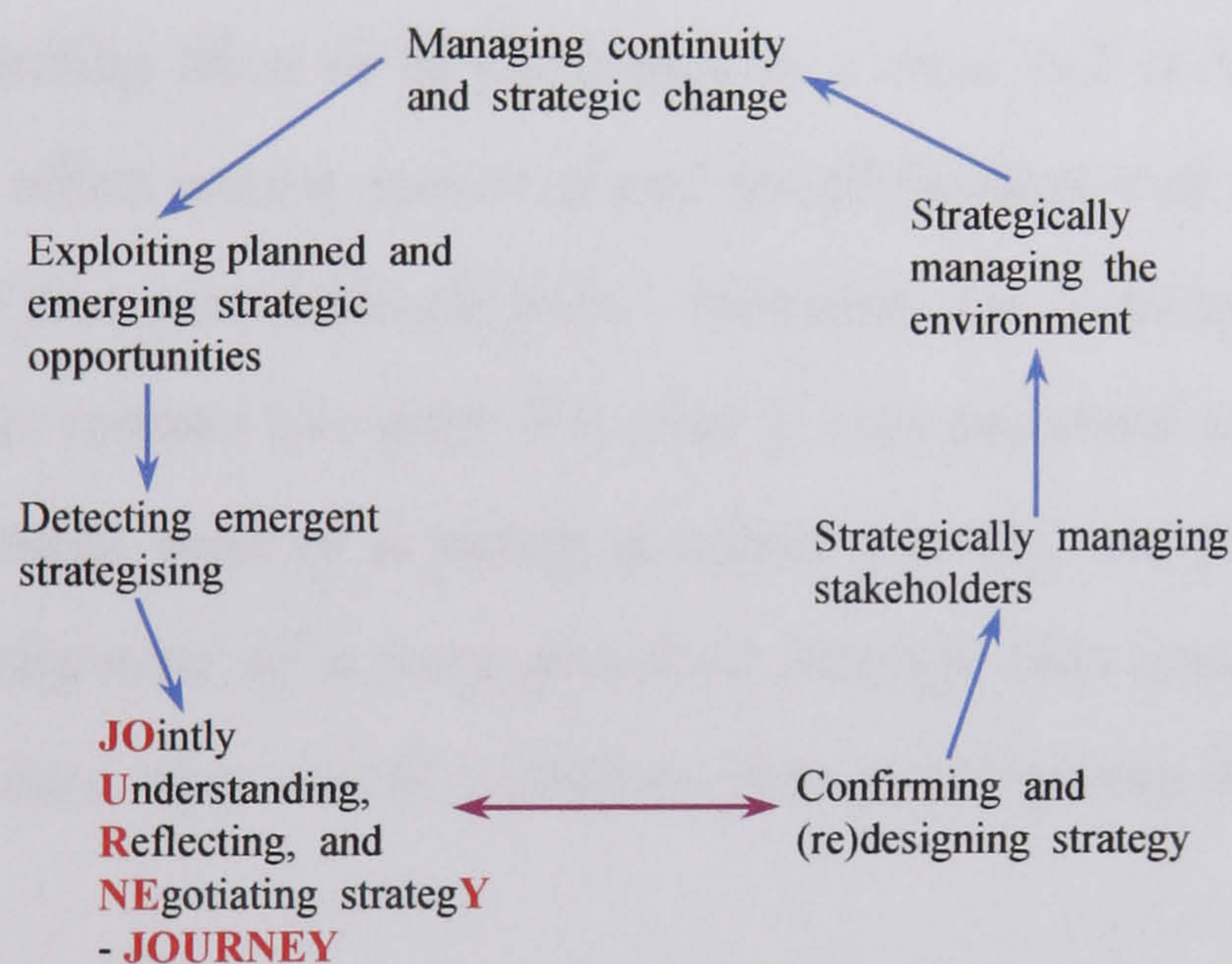


Figure 22. Strategy Making and Delivery, Source: Eden and Ackermann, 1998

The Action Researcher suggested that these diagrams should be used as reference points between the Strategic Planning Group and the Action Researcher, regarding possible JOURNEY Making/strategy making activities that could be undertaken, until such a time as an agreement was reached to change them.

The final item to be discussed with the Strategic Planning Group concerned the role the Action Researcher would be assuming during the intervention at SI Ltd. The reason for this was that **the role of Action Researcher** was not amongst the consultancy roles understood by the Strategic Planning Group. The 'expert consultant' role (Lippitt and Lippitt, 1978; Margerison, 1989; Robson, 1995) and associated activities were well known to Strategic Planning Group members, because as practicing IT/telecoms consultants this was the role more commonly adopted by themselves when undertaking projects for clients. After a considerable time had been spent explaining the Action Researcher role and the importance of the 'research' element within this role, the Strategic Planning Group stated that they would accept the role of Action Researcher and observe how it was undertaken, as it would help to broaden their understanding of how the roles of 'academic' researcher and 'professional' business consultant could be combined.

Following lunch the Action Researcher was unexpectedly informed that the company would be prepared to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme as it was believed that this would add value to what the Strategic Planning Group had originally intended to do by enabling them to be facilitated in a tried and tested 'group' strategy development method, albeit with a non-tried and tested facilitator of the method, during the development of a five year strategic plan. However, the Strategic Planning Group also restated an earlier concern (see page 90), that if they perceived that the work being undertaken was becoming more of a purely academic exercise, too focused on research, rather than the development of a very practical strategy that could be implemented smoothly at a future date, they would withdraw from participating in the Collaborative Research Programme.

OBSERVING (Action Research Approach)

From observing what happened during this second step in the Action Research Approach, the Action Researcher identified several more issues that had not been fully considered. These are identified below and will be discussed further in the REFLECTING section.

- *In the letter inviting the Action Researcher to a meeting with the Strategic Planning Group, JP stated that a 'confidentiality agreement' would have to be signed by the Action Researcher so that no strategic or sensitive information was placed in the public domain without SI Ltd's approval (Appendix B9-12). Although the Action Researcher recognised this as a 'standard' consultancy practice, he was concerned by the condition with regard to involvement in a Collaborative Research Programme.*
- *When the Action Researcher decided to approach companies to establish their interest in participating in a Collaborative Research Programme rather than a consultancy project (see page 84), the Action Researcher hoped to avoid confusion about the role that he would be undertaking by stating that he would be adopting the role of an Action Researcher rather than adopting a more traditional 'consultancy' or 'researcher' role. However, at the Strategic Planning Group meeting, this provoked unexpected in-depth questioning about the role of an Action Researcher as it was not understood by Strategic Planning Group members.*
- *On page 80 it was identified that Eden and Huxham (1996:78) have stated that "it is worthy of note that the view that action research will be collaborative is a point of agreement among most writers on the topic (see Peters and Robinson, 1994, p. 118) although we do not accept that action research must be collaborative." It is this Action Researcher's observation that while Action Research might not always be collaborative ("to work together with another or others on a joint project" - Collins English Dictionary, 1997), Action Research will always involve participation ("active involvement" - Collins English Dictionary, 1997).*

REFLECTING (Action Research Approach)

Confidentiality Agreements and Research Programmes.

By signing a confidentiality agreement covering the proposed Collaborative Research Programme the Action Researcher would have the restriction of having to seek approval from SI Ltd. for the inclusion of company related information in the final doctoral thesis. This could cause difficulties during the production of the document. For example, the Strategic Planning Group and the Action Researcher's academic supervisors could both be approving draft texts and this may result in longer than anticipated time delays in amendments/comments being returned to the Action Researcher. One reason for this could be that information regarding actions/happenings within the Collaborative Research Programme might identify insights of importance to the research community. Yet, these insights could be classified by the Strategic Planning Group as confidential or sensitive information and therefore not permissible for use within a doctoral thesis that could be accessed by members of the public. This type of situation could lead to an Action Researcher having to negotiate the thesis content between academic supervisors and participating company and compromises made to either side may not gain approval from the other (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991). For this Collaborative Research Programme the Action Researcher decided to sign the confidentiality agreement and handle any conflicting issues when they arose.

From this action it was established that there could not be a 'win-win' solution for the Action Researcher. If the Action Researcher signed the confidentiality agreement it could create difficulties when producing the doctoral thesis, and if the Action Researcher refused to sign the confidentiality agreement, SI Ltd. would probably refuse to participate in the Collaborative Research Programme, leaving the Action Researcher to face the difficulties associated with gaining access to another company.

Altercasting to a Potential Client's (problem-helper) Expectations

Mangham (1978) states that during first meetings between a problem-helper and a potential Client both parties will be forming initial opinions about the roles they will adopt. He describes this activity as 'altercasting', A's 'self' presentation says 'This is who I wish to be taken for in this interaction'. It also says, 'And this is who I take you to be'. During the initial 'informal' meeting with the Action Researcher, JP altercast himself as client and first point of contact for company information and during the more formal meeting the Strategic Planning Group were altercast as the key actors involved in SI Ltd's future development (see page 99).

Eden and Sims (1979) suggest that at the beginning of any interaction a client has a set of what he may regard as realistic expectations about the assistance needed to help solve a perceived problem. These expectations may be "derived from past experience of consultants, from the journals, from the library bookshelf contents or from the knowledge of the education and experience of the consultant" (p. 124). This concept of matching problem-helper to problem has also been discussed by Bryant (1989) and Bryman (1995). The Strategic Planning Group's expectations had been identified by the Action Researcher during various communications with JP both during the last Action Research Approach step (see page 90) and this Action Research Approach step (see page 98). However, it became apparent to the Action Researcher that by fulfilling the Strategic Planning Group's expectations, the Action Researcher was being altercast in the role of an 'expert consultant' (Lippitt and Lippitt, 1978; Margerison, 1989; Robson, 1995) by the Strategic Planning Group, rather than the role that he had set out to be altercast into, that of Action Researcher. After considerable explanation the Action Researcher achieved the objective of adopting the role of Action Researcher during the intervention when the Strategic Planning Group stated that they would accept the role of Action Researcher (see page 102).

At this point in time the Action Researcher disagrees with Morton (1998, 1999) that Action Researchers may have to decide whether to present themselves as predominantly an academic researcher (who happens to do consultancy) or predominantly as a consultant (who happens to have theoretical interests).

The role of Action Researcher may not be familiar to a company hosting an intervention; however that should not stop an Action Researcher from adopting it. In doing this care must be taken by Action Researchers to altercast themselves accordingly and to not allow themselves to be altercast into an inappropriate role because they have fulfilled a set of client expectations or because the role is more robustly understood by a potential client. An Action Researcher may for a brief period be altercast into a different role by a potential client, as happened in this research programme, but through detailed discussion, which may need to be repeated whenever necessary during the intervention, an Action Researcher will eventually be able to become altercast into the role of Action Researcher once the role is accepted as legitimate by a potential client.

Participation and Collaboration During an Action Research Programme

The Action Researcher's observation that while Action Research might not always be collaborative ("to work together with another or others on a joint project" - Collins English Dictionary, 1997), Action Research will always involve participation ("active involvement" - Collins English Dictionary, 1997), contrasts with the view of Bryman (1995:179) (see page 51), who states that "...the element of participativeness does not seem to be a necessary ingredient of action research." Having completed the first two steps of the Action Research Approach it can be argued that the Strategic Planning Group were participating rather than collaborating in the overall Action Research Approach. While the Strategic Planning Group were 'actively involved', no specific 'joint project' had been identified on which both parties could 'work together'.

It is anticipated that further 'participative' activities will identify a 'joint project' (a Collaborative Research Programme) on which 'both parties' will 'work together' during the 'Collaborative Research' step of the Action Research Approach. Yet, for this step to be truly 'collaborative' the observational/data collection method (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984; Waddington, 1994; Bryman, 1995; Robson, 1995) to be utilised by the Action Researcher must enable them to become involved in collaborative activities, and the problem solving method to be utilised must incorporate techniques that commend collaboration rather than participation between both parties. For example, during JOURNEY Making, clients are directly involved in designing workshop agendas, clients believe that they are in control of the overall process, and clients are involved in both the process and content design. JOURNEY Making also utilises individual cognitive mapping sessions or group workshops using the Oval Mapping Technique, where collaboration is essential to ensure success. If the observational/data collection method to be used by an Action Researcher does not allow for collaboration, for example, an observer participant or complete participant, rather than participant observer (Burgess, 1984), and a problem solving approach is applied that does not incorporate collaborative techniques, for example, where data is gathered through surveys/questionnaires then problem solving activities will be participative and not collaborative.

This Action Researcher agrees with Eden and Huxham (1996) that Action Research is not always collaborative. Yet, the Action Researcher concludes that 'Action Research will always be participative and that an overall Action Research Programme will involve a number of individual Action Research Approach steps, during which participation, and at times collaboration between an Action Researcher and a client will occur'.

On page 76 it was stated that, a judgment of the validity of the Action Research Approach will be to provide evidence that changes to the elements of 'F', 'M,' and 'A' have been identified and documented during the application of the Action Research Approach. Given the information detailed above, an addition to 'F' has been identified and documented.

Changes to the Action Research Approach

From reflecting on this Action Research Approach step the Action Researcher also concludes that the step entitled ‘3.1 Pre-understanding of the Corporate Environment and of the Conditions of Business’ can be linked to both of the first two steps ‘1.0 Gain Access to Undertake Research’ and ‘2.0 Meet with Client’. The reason for stating this is that when these first two steps were undertaken, the Action Researcher’s business knowledge, personal experience and general understanding of SI Ltd’s business environment were questioned, and this questioning became more intense as the steps progressed. Therefore, the Action Research Approach step ‘3.1 Pre-understanding of the Corporate Environment and of the Conditions of Business’ may be linked to all of the first three Action Research Approach steps (see Figure 23).

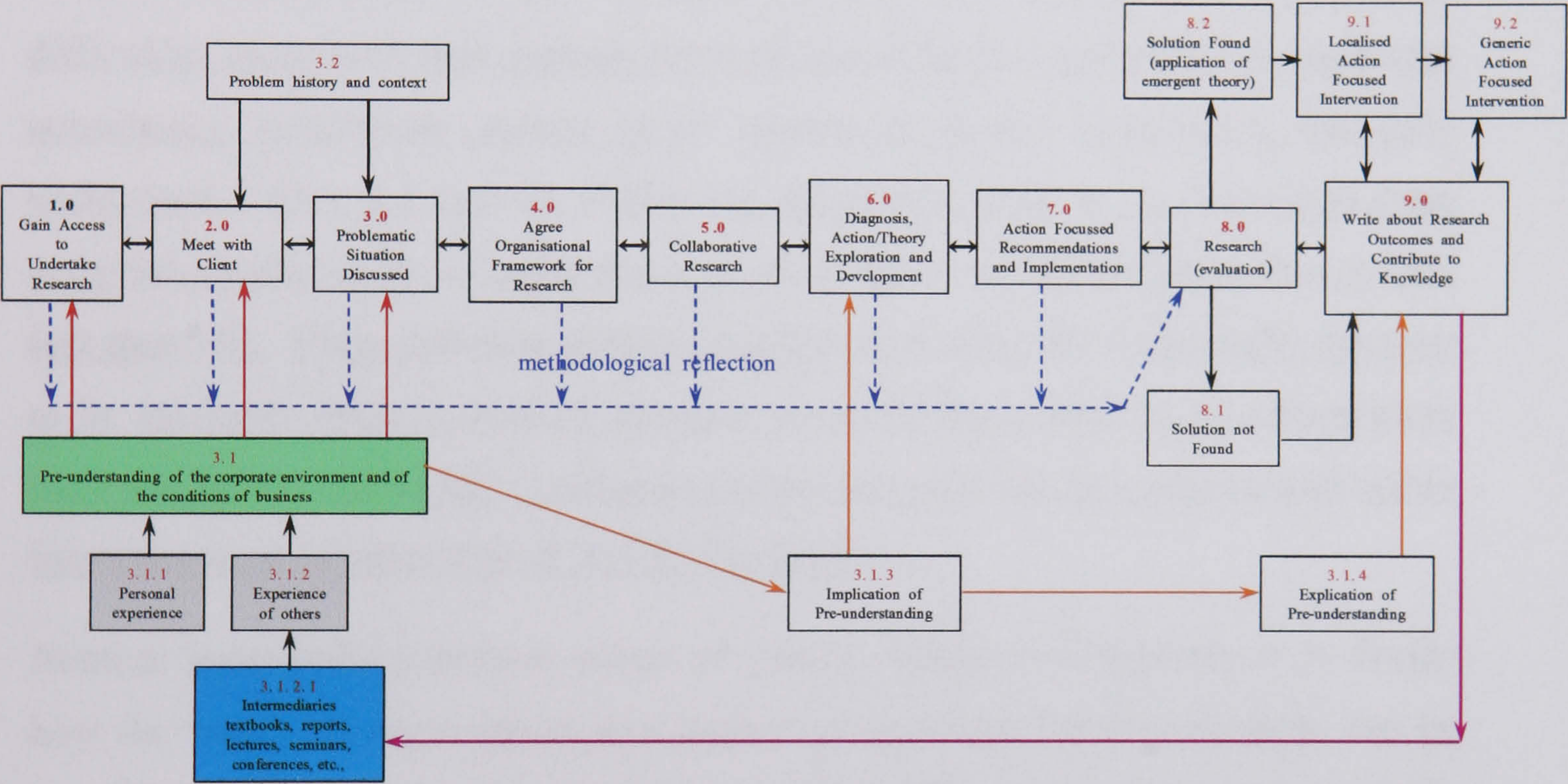


Figure 23. Amended Action Research Approach

On page 76 it was stated that a judgment of the validity of the Action Research Approach will be to provide evidence that changes to the elements of ‘F’, ‘M,’ and ‘A’ have been identified and documented during the application of the Action Research Approach. This is an identified and documented change to the element ‘M’.

Summary

Contributions to knowledge in the 'research' community

- Difficulties associated with 'selling' the concept of involvement in a Collaborative Research Programme to an 'appropriate person' (see page 86), or prospective client are rarely discussed in detail within published research literature. They are however issues that are discussed in great depth in most 'consultancy' literature. Having spent approximately seven months attempting to secure an agreement from a company to become involved in a Collaborative Research Programme, and reflecting on the outcomes, the Action Researcher concludes that the problems associated with researchers wanting to undertake real world organizational research involving Action Research outside the boundaries of their own workplace are similar to those of consultants attempting to gain physical access to organizations. Therefore, difficulties associated with gaining physical access to an organization to undertake consultancy assignments should be of interest to Action Researchers and fully understood. Also, the amount of physical effort that needs to be devoted to these activities should not be underestimated, particularly by part-time Action Researchers (see page 94). These activities demand full-time dedication for a successful outcome to be achieved, because without physical access being granted to an organization there can be no 'real world' organizational research programme; a generic and highly important issue of interest to all Action Researchers.
- Another generically important aspect of gaining access to companies is to decide how the 'value' of involvement in a research programme, for the company, can be identified, defined and communicated by an Action Researcher, because what might be an important topic of research to them, might not appear relevant, and therefore of little value, to the recipient of a research proposal that they have not asked for (Starkey and Madan, 2001). In this research programme it was established that it is difficult to describe this value proposition to potential clients through discrete non-face-to-face activities, for example, via intermediary, letter, or telephone (see page 86).

Only following several telephone conversations with, an ‘appropriate person’ (JP) the receipt of the Action Researcher’s CV/Resume and a subsequent initial one-to-one meeting with JP did the Action Researcher learn that the perceived initial value to SI Ltd for involvement in the Collaborative Research Programme, was the Action Researcher’s knowledge, competence and practical expertise in making strategies for consultancy companies. Also, the possibility that SI Ltd. representatives may be able to learn from the Action Researcher about strategy making per se. Yet, this issue still needed to be investigated further by SI Ltd’s Strategy Planning Group with whom the Action Researcher could be working. Following in-depth discussion covering a variety of subjects (see page 100), the Strategy Planning Group decided that the proposed Collaborative Research Programme would add value to what they had originally been tasked to do by enabling them to be facilitated in a tried and tested ‘group’ strategy development method during the development of a five year strategic plan. The value to SI Ltd of involvement in the Collaborative Research Programme was eventually established as being both in the Action Researcher’s competence and practical expertise in making strategies for consultancy companies and in the tried and tested group strategy development method to be used, albeit with a non-tried and tested facilitator of the method.

- Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest that *“Getting into a setting involves a process of managing your identify; projecting an image of yourself that will maximize your chances of gaining access... You want to convince gatekeepers that you are a non-threatening person who will not harm their organization in any way”* (p.20). Action Researchers need to be aware of the concept of ‘altercasting’ (Mangham, 1978) as this is a way of self presentation that suggests ‘this is who I wish to be taken for in this interaction and this is who I take you to be’ because both Action Researcher and potential client will be considering these issues in the early stages of their engagement (see page 105). Discussing, clarifying and establishing the roles to be adopted at an early stage in the Collaborative Research Programme will help to avoid misunderstandings about the roles and associated actions undertaken in further stages.

However, another issue also needs to be carefully handled by the Action Researcher while presenting their role. This concerns the accuracy of information projected to potential clients (Bryman, 1995). Novice Action Researchers attempting to gain access to a company, to undertake a Collaborative Research Programme in which they are a practicing novice in both the research methodology and the problem solving method to be used, may find it difficult to present any image that would maximise their chances of success, if they are wholly truthful with a potential client. Yet, by not providing truthful information a 'novice' Action Researcher runs the risk of being identified as incompetent during the application of the Collaborative Research Programme, and thereby destroying any trusting relationship that has developed between client and Action Researcher. Miles and Huberman (1994) claim that it is unethical for a social researcher to promise a client a research programme which he/she can not reasonably deliver (for reasons of skill, or time, or resources). A **paradox** for contemplation by all novice Action Researchers. A solution to this paradox, in this Action Researcher's opinion, and one which appears to have worked in this specific research programme, is that novice Action Researchers declare themselves as such while stating that one of the important aspects of the Collaborative Research Programme involves developing "*their own research and consultancy competencies while helping the client to develop their own abilities to elevate the problem situation*" (Lewin, 1946, 1947; Gummesson, 1991 and Bryman, 1995). It has to be recognised that this solution may not work for other novice Action Researchers.

CHAPTER 4

ESTABLISHING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Introduction

This chapter covers Steps 3 and 4 of the Action Research Approach. The first purpose of the chapter is to detail how data will be gathered regarding the perceived problem situation at SI Ltd, and how this data will be evaluated to establish whether a perceived problem situation is similar to that which the Action Researcher had set out to research; strategic problems (see page 21). At this point a company had indicated that they would like to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme and the Action Researcher needed to make a decision as to whether to involve the company or not. Step 3 of the Action Research Approach describes how the Action Researcher gathered more data about the perceived problem situation and how a previously identified criterion (see page 24), was used to establish whether the problem was strategic in nature.

The second purpose of this chapter is to establish whether or not, given that a company is to be involved in the Collaborative Research Programme, a document detailing what all participants expect to gain from the Collaborative Research Programme (a Collaborative Research Programme framework document) should be developed. Schein (1969) suggests that if the expectations of all parties are not made explicit and written down, prior to an intervention, they can be an easy source of misunderstanding during the intervention. Step 4 of the Action Research Approach describes how the issue of a Collaborative Research Programme framework document was handled.

Step 3 – The Problematic Situation Discussed

PLANNING (Action Research Approach)

During an earlier discussion with the Action Researcher, JP indicated that the decision whether SI Ltd. wanted to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme or not would probably be made some time after the Strategic Planning Group meeting (see page 31). From experience of selling 'consultancy services' to potential clients, this time delay was considered 'normal' behaviour by the Action Researcher (also see Conway, 1987; Margerison, 1989; Markham, 1993). Yet this decision was unexpectedly made immediately after the morning session of the Strategic Planning Group meeting, contrary to what JP had anticipated. The Action Researcher was then invited to join the afternoon session of the Strategic Planning Group's meeting, providing him with an opportunity to discuss in depth the perceived problematic situation facing SI Ltd.

The Action Researcher had, earlier in the research programme, briefly considered several options of how Churchill's (1990) criterion, as detailed on page 24, could be used to gather data that enabled a decision to be made regarding company involvement in the Collaborative Research Programme. Now the Action Researcher decided to use the criterion as an aide-mémoire during the rest of the Strategic Planning Group meeting, rather than asking the Strategic Planning Group to respond to a predetermined scheduled list of questions. The reason the Action Researcher decided to use the criterion in this way was that individual criterion questions could be asked at opportune times during the Strategic Planning Group conversation so that they did not appear to be out of context with the conversation taking place, and the flow of the conversation would rarely need to be halted. If during the conversation the Strategic Planning Group went off at a tangent or chose to speak about issues that they believed to be important the Action Researcher could go along with the drift of discussion, while accumulating information relevant to particular criterion questions. Clarifying questions could be asked to establish whether the Action Researcher's interpretation of an event(s) was accurate or whether it was relevant to a particular criterion issue(s).

ACTING (Action Research Approach)

*At the start of the afternoon session of the Strategic Planning Group meeting the Action Researcher explained that not all problematic situations would be relevant to the overall research programme, therefore, the Action Researcher needed more information about SI Ltd's **perceived problematic situation** before a decision could be made as to whether or not to accept the invitation of physical access. The Action Researcher then asked Strategic Planning Group members to describe the inherent features of the problem situation as they believed them to be in a **group conversational manner** and to try not to discuss potential solutions. The Action Researcher explained that what he was attempting to do was to develop an understanding of why the Strategic Planning Group believed that there was a problematic situation at SI Ltd., and whether this situation was perceived as being strategically important to the company. Rather than the Action Researcher attempting to understand the intricacies of the problem itself in detail (Sims, 1979), the Action Researcher suggested that the Strategic Planning Group start by providing the Action Researcher with an overview of the company's history and then describe the perceived problem situation collectively (Robson, 1995). The Action Researcher explained that the purpose was to gather information about the problem situation with respect to the perspectives of all Strategic Planning Group members (similar to the approach detailed by Kvale, 1983; Watts and Ebbutt, 1987) rather than from a single person. There should be no judgment from Strategic Planning Group members or the Action Researcher regarding whether one person's viewpoint was correct or not; only an appreciation that different perspectives could exist.*

From listening to the Strategic Planning Group's conversation and viewing information in SI Ltd's 1995 Business Plan (April 1995 to March 2000), both during and following the Strategic Planning Group meeting, the Action Researcher established the following with regard to the criterion questions.

- ❖ *Was the problem situation about choosing between portfolios of options that have significant ramifications for the future of the organization itself, for the future of members of the organization, and to other organizations with whom the organization importantly interacts?*

The answer given to this question was that the Strategic Planning Group were unsure of the portfolio of options open to them as they had not explored them to a level they considered satisfactory and felt that it was part of what the Collaborative Research Programme should attempt to do. The Strategic Planning Group stated that the situation facing them did have significant ramifications for the future of the company, and therefore employees of the company. The Strategic Planning Group wanted to develop a long-term strategic plan that may or may not be amended during its tenure. The 1995 Business Plan had been of a fixed nature and the group were now keen to explore the possibility of developing a more flexible strategic plan that would help them to sustain a consistent level of business growth over a number of years. They felt that without such a plan they would just keep 'fire fighting' the company's daily problems.

- ❖ *Was the problem situation characterised by intractability of analysis because of incomplete information, lack of definition of, or agreement over quantitative parameters, conflicting multiple objectives and conflicting participants?*

Strategic Planning Group members agreed that the problematic situation being faced was not the viewpoint of one particular person that had been brought to the attention of the group (Eden and Sims, 1979; Sims, 1979). Over many months, at various Senior Management Team and/or Strategic Planning Group meetings different individuals had identified and detailed different aspects of the overall problematic situation, thereby making it what the Strategic Planning Group considered to be a group problem.

Discussing these different problem aspects had also enabled individuals to develop limited understandings of other group members' situation(s) (*intersubjectivity* - Eden, Jones, Sims and Smithin, 1981). Yet, there were still multiple conflicting views about how to improve the perceived problematic situation. The Strategic Planning Group agreed that they probably hadn't discussed the overall situation in great enough depth, together as a full group, and therefore all individual viewpoints were not fully understood by everyone. With regard to analysis, an opinion was expressed that it should be done but unfortunately no one person had the time to do it because of project delivery commitments.

❖ Was the problem situation characterised by an overwhelming quantity of both qualitative and quantitative information?

Both qualitative and quantitative information were involved in this problem situation. However, it was expressed that at SI Ltd there was enough information to be useful, if it could be collated in one place, but not too much to be overwhelming. The situation was more one of locating relevant 'external' information needed to help solve the problem. SI Ltd. knew of several sources of such information but did not know whether the integrity and/or accuracy of the information was good enough. They had struggled in the past to find industry/competitor/product, etc., statistics from multiple sources that agreed with each other.

❖ Was the problem situation difficult to describe because of lack of clarity about the problem definition?

It was initially felt that the problem definition was easy to clarify. Being a small company working in a niche marketplace the problem was easy to understand. The company had made considerable progress towards achieving objectives detailed in the 1995 Business Plan but now needed to identify any new limitations to future development and prepare a strategic plan to overcome them. How this should be done, what it entailed or who should be involved had not been deeply considered and therefore lacked overall clarity.

- ❖ *Did the problem situation involve members of a team who have competing values, views and objectives with respect to the situation?*

Most members of the Strategic Planning Group had worked closely together for a considerable time and they were all aware that a problem existed. However, they all agreed that none of them could see the whole problem as they were 'functionally oriented'; individually only responsible for certain aspects of company performance (see Sheldon, 1980; Beyer, 1981; Mason and Mitroff, 1981; Schwenk, 1984; Cosier and Schwenk, 1990 with regard to functional or organizational experience constraining the development of a strategy). The Strategic Planning Group agreed that they held competing views with respect to the situation, but how they competed in depth had not been explored or explicitly stated.

- ❖ *Did the problem situation reflect important interactions between different players outside the management team?*

The problem situation involved interactions between all of the senior executives, consultants employed in product and/or service delivery, and all of the office support staff. Also, many employees held company share allocations, making them stakeholders in the company's future.

- ❖ *Would solving the problem situation involve complexity in the interactions between team members as they negotiate their way through the dynamics of reaching consensus?*

It was accepted and agreed by the Strategic Planning Group, that if possible, strategy making should involve representatives of all company activities so that all opinions could be heard. However, getting everyone to discuss their beliefs and understand those of other people was seen as being problematic in itself as 'strategy development', company performance or indeed any problem situation facing the company were issues that had not previously involved anyone other than the Senior Management Team and/or Strategic Planning Group. The Strategic Planning Group was unsure whether consultants would want to openly discuss these issues, or indeed participate in discussing these issues.

During the rest of the Strategic Planning Group meeting the Action Researcher learnt that all strategy making activities had to be concluded by the end of March 2000. A company-wide communications meeting was planned for April 2000 and the Strategic Planning Group wanted to present the newly developed strategy to the rest of the company at that time. It was also decided that no 'formal' stakeholder analysis or scenario planning would be undertaken (see Figure 22), as the Strategic Planning Group perceived that these activities may not be undertaken robustly within the anticipated timescale. At this time the Action Researcher asked members of the Strategic Planning Group whether there was anyone else, or any group of people that they felt should be contacted to provide information for inclusion in the strategic plan, without this being seen as a 'stakeholder analysis'. The Strategic Planning Group had stated earlier that 'if possible part of the Collaborative Research Programme should involve representatives of all company activities so that all opinions could be heard' (see page 117), without defining who these people and/or groups would be. Several people were then discussed; bank manager, clients, suppliers, and ex company directors, but it was decided not to include anyone at this time. The Strategic Planning Group explained that they would be prepared to involve people and/or groups external to the company the next time they engaged in strategy making activities. As this was to be the first time that JOURNEY Making type activities would be used at the company, the Strategic Planning Group believed that the task would be more manageable for them if it only involved additional internal employees. The Action Researcher left the Strategic Planning Group meeting in the late afternoon, reiterating to the Strategic Planning Group that he would reflect on all of the information that had been provided and establish whether the problem situation faced by the company was relevant to the research programme. The Action Researcher stated that JP would be contacted the next day to discuss whether the company's offer to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme would be accepted, and if so what the next steps would entail.

*During the evening of 20th September 1999 and the following morning the Action Researcher evaluated the data gathered during the Strategic Planning Group meeting, and the information in SI Ltd's 1995 Business Plan. A conclusion was reached that the **data gathering method utilised** was valid and had been correctly undertaken and that the **validity of the data** was sufficient for the decision the Action Researcher needed to make. The Action Researcher concluded that his interpretation of the gathered data indicated that the perceived problem situation could be classified as strategic in nature (see page 122 for more detail regarding how this conclusion was reached). However, the Action Researcher also considered a number of other factors before deciding whether to involve SI Ltd. in the Collaborative Research Programme. It appeared to the Action Researcher that the Strategic Planning Group were confident that the Action Researcher had the necessary skills and competencies to help them with their problem (see page 100), the Strategic Planning Group were genuinely committed to solving what they believed was a group problem (see page 115) and finally, from the situation as perceived by the Strategic Planning Group, the Action Researcher believed that JOURNEY Making type activities could be used to help SI Ltd's strategy making efforts (see page 119). From this deliberation the Action Researcher decided to accept SI Ltd's offer to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme (see page 102).*

OBSERVING (Action Research Approach)

From observing what happened during this step in the Action Research Approach, the Action Researcher identified two issues that had not been fully considered when planning this step. These are identified below and are discussed further in the REFLECTING section.

- *A company had agreed to allow physical access to the Action Researcher to conduct a Collaborative Research Programme, yet, if the particular problem situation was not similar to what the Action Researcher set out to research then physical access might be declined. This could create an interesting dilemma. On the one side there could be the temptation to amend the research objective (see page 42) to suit a potential client's specific problem situation, because physical access has been so hard to gain. On the other side there could be the temptation to decline the offer and start the process of seeking physical access elsewhere.*
- *As stated on page 113, the Action Researcher had not anticipated being provided with in-depth information regarding the perceived problem situation during attendance at the Strategic Planning Group meeting, therefore, had not made a decision regarding how Churchill's (1990) criterion would be used to gather information. The Action Researcher had briefly considered several options earlier in the research programme but, given the urgency of the situation, quickly decided to use a copy of the criterion as an aide-mémoire, during the rest of the Strategic Planning Group meeting. To ensure that a robust decision was made by the Action Researcher after evaluating the gathered data, the validity of the data collection method used needs to be further examined, along with the validity of the interpretation placed on this data.*

REFLECTING (Action Research Approach)

A 'Real World' Research Dilemma.

Mumford (2001:15) has stated that, "Ideally the subject chosen for study should be something in which the researcher has a considerable interest, believes to be important and hopes that it is an area where it will be possible to make a contribution to knowledge. Unfortunately, compromises may be necessary. His or her choice of subject may be influenced by what the organization that has agreed to the research may consider important or, if he or she is working for a higher degree, by the interests of his/her university or supervisor." In this research programme a company had agreed to become involved in a proposed Collaborative Research Programme before the Action Researcher had learnt enough about the perceived problem situation to establish whether the nature of the problem was the same as that which the Action Researcher had set out to research; one which was 'strategic' in nature (see page 21). The Action Researcher was then faced with making a very important decision about whether he was prepared to compromise his initial research subject, and if so, by how much, or else not compromise it at all and decline the offer from the company to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme. To help with the decision being faced, the Action Researcher considered how important the subject to be researched was to him personally. The subject was very important to the Action Researcher as he had consciously set out to research strategic problems (see page 21), and after an extensive literature search and review, a criterion for establishing whether a perceived problem could be described as strategic in nature (Churchill, 1990 - see page 24) had deliberately been identified by the Action Researcher. No influence was being placed on the Action Researcher by University or supervisor with regard to research topic. By considering this issue the Action Researcher concluded that he was not prepared to compromise the initial research subject, and if SI Ltd's perceived problem situation could not be classified as 'strategic in nature', then physical access would be declined.

From researching this issue it was learnt that the dilemma of attempting to seek access to organizations to research a specific subject of interest to an Action Researcher, or compromising the original research subject because a potential Client has agreed to allow access to research something that is not exactly the same as the Action Researcher set out to research, may need to be considered by most Action Researchers. Understanding that this may happen during a research programme will help future Action Researchers in considering solution options for this dilemma in advance of it materializing.

Qualitative Data Gathering and Interpretation

Determining the validity of a qualitative data collection method and the interpretations made from the resultant data is not easy (Cassell and Symon, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Bryman, 1995; Robson, 1995). Yet the Action Researcher considered it essential that it was attempted during this step in the Action Research Approach, as an important decision needed to be made; that of involvement of a company in the Collaborative Research Programme, based on the Action Researcher's interpretation of data gathered during an unplanned event. The data collection method used during this event, unstructured group interviews, has been widely used in qualitative organizational research programmes and extensively documented in literature (Gouldner, 1954; Whyte and Hamilton, 1965; Smircich and Morgan, 1982, Stewart, 1967, 1982; Burgelman, 1985; Lowe and Nilsson, 1989). Discussing the validity of qualitative research interviews, King (1994) suggests that the goal is to see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee(s), and to understand how and why they come to have this particular perspective. To meet this goal, qualitative research interviews will generally have the following characteristics: a low degree of structure imposed by the interviewer, a preponderance of open questions and a focus on specific situations, and action sequences in the world of the interviewee.

In this research programme event the Action Researcher asked the Strategic Planning Group to describe the inherent features of the problem situation as they believed them to be in a conversational manner (see page 114). The Action Researcher only asked criterion questions as such at times during the conversation that they did not appear to be out of context with the conversation taking place. If, during the conversation, the Strategic Planning Group went off at a tangent, or chose to speak about issues that they believed to be important, the Action Researcher went along with the drift of discussion. The group conversation never became stilted or slow and the Action Researcher was rarely questioned as to the reason why particular questions were being asked, or why the Action Researcher was asking for clarification of issues (see page 113). This demonstrated that a low degree of structure was imposed by the Action Researcher. The criteria questions used could also be described as 'open', because Strategic Planning Group members had considerable latitude over the kind, length and breadth of response given.

With regard to a focus on specific situations and action sequences in the world of the interviewees, the Action Researcher asked Strategic Planning Group members to describe the inherent features of the problem situation as they believed them to be in a group conversational manner, and to try not to discuss potential solutions. The reason given for this was that the Action Researcher was attempting to develop an understanding of why the Strategic Planning Group believed there was a problematic situation at SI Ltd., and whether this situation was perceived as being strategically important to the company. This demonstrates that the Action Researcher attempted to focus the Strategic Planning Group conversation on specific situations and action sequences in the world of the Strategic Planning Group. The evidence provided establishes that the data collection method used during this particular event was a valid approach for gathering qualitative data and was correctly executed, therefore the data gathered can also be said to be valid.

According to King (1994) the validity of interpretations of qualitative data; whether a researcher's conclusion that 'x' is the main theme to emerge from an interview, is difficult to achieve. However, the involvement of other people – colleagues, interviewees, and so on – is crucial to considerations of validity in interpreting data from qualitative research interviews. Feeding back conclusions to interviewees for verification has also been identified by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991) as a method of ensuring the validity in qualitative data interpretation. Burgelman (1985), Bryman (1995) and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003) also consider the use of additional documentation to cross check interview data as essential. In this research programme, the Action Researcher accumulated information relevant to particular criterion questions while listening to the Strategic Planning Group conversation, and often asked clarifying questions to establish whether the Action Researcher's interpretation of an issue was accurate (see page 113). This demonstrates that the Action Researcher sought approval from the Strategic Planning Group for the accuracy of recorded information and the interpretation placed on it by the Action Researcher. The 1995 Business Plan was also used as a means of validating certain aspects of data both during the Strategic Planning Group meeting and following it (see page 115).

From this the Action Researcher concluded that his choice of criterion questions, data collection method, the validity of the data collected and the validity of the interpretation made from the gathered data was sufficient for the type of decision that needed to be made. However, the activity of examining this validity needed to be explicitly made to ensure that the subject that the Action Researcher had initially set out to research; strategic problems, as detailed in theme two on page 42, had not been compromised, and that recommendations drawn during the rest of the research programme would have a high correlation to the stated research subject.

Step 4 - Agree Organizational Framework for Research

PLANNING (Action Research Approach)

The Action Researcher planned to telephone JP during the late morning on 21st September 1999, as agreed, to communicate the decision to accept SI Ltd's offer of involvement in the Collaborative Research Programme, and to arrange a brief meeting with the Strategic Planning Group to discuss the way forward for both parties. If the Action Researcher failed to contact JP in person, by telephone, an email would be sent to him containing the relevant information and a voice mail message would be left at SI Ltd. asking for JP to contact the Action Researcher when convenient.

ACTING (Action Research Approach)

*Following the Action Researcher's departure from the Strategic Planning Group meeting, on 20th September, a **draft project plan** detailing, the JOURNEY Making type activities the Strategic Planning Group wanted to undertake was developed by the Strategic Planning Group. This was then emailed to the Action Researcher by JP for comments (Appendix B14). The plan had individual cognitive mapping interviews occurring with the five Strategic Planning Group members between 24-27th September 1999. Following this the Action Researcher would develop, correlate and analyse the maps to provide initial and brief feedback to the Strategic Planning Group on 13th October. On 20th October two groups of employees would be involved in workshops utilising the Oval Mapping Technique (Oval Mapping Workshops), with a maximum of ten people per group. Information would again be correlated and analysed by the Action Researcher and presented to the Strategic Planning Group on 8-9th November. Further Strategic Planning Group meetings would be arranged to explore this information at a later date when a more clear idea had been gained of how many meetings would be needed. A Collaborative Research Programme report should be completed by the end of January to mid February 2000, and implementation plans for the new strategic plan should be completed by 1st April.*

When providing the Strategic Planning Group with an overview of JOURNEY Making the previous day (see page 100), the Action Researcher had indicated approximate timescales within which certain activities could be completed, and these timescales had been used in the development of the draft project plan. No discussions had so far taken place between the Action Researcher and Strategic Planning Group regarding whether or not JOURNEY Making type activities should be undertaken on a staged basis (Eden and Ackermann, 1998), or concerning aspects such as the total number of people who could become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme, the time frame that would be needed for them to be made available (given that consultants' time was usually committed to client work several months in advance), or even when it would be convenient to assemble the Strategic Planning Group again to discuss possible next steps.

The production of the draft project plan surprised the Action Researcher because in the meeting the previous day the Action Researcher had consciously decided not to make any decision about involving SI Ltd. in the Collaborative Research Programme until such a time as it could be determined whether the situation being faced was similar to that which the Action Researcher wanted to research. The Action Researcher had informed the Strategic Planning Group of this at the start of the afternoon session of the Strategic Planning Group meeting (see page 114). Also, just before the Action Researcher left the meeting the Strategic Planning Group were informed that JP would be contacted the next day to discuss whether the Action Researcher would accept the company's offer to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme or not and if so what the next step would entail (see page 118).

In the morning of the 21st September, the Action Researcher communicated the decision to accept SI Ltd's offer of involvement to JP via email as he could not be contacted via telephone. In the email the Action Researcher also voiced concerns regarding the overall scope of the JOURNEY Making type activities to be undertaken, in particular the organization of facilitated group workshops using the Oval Mapping Technique (Oval Mapping Workshops) and the length of time between certain JOURNEY Making type activities.

Within an hour JP responded by email (Appendix B15), stating that the Strategic Planning Group were attempting to reach a compromise of having employees devoted to working for clients and collaborating in Oval Mapping Workshops. The Action Researcher challenged JP with regard to the number of Oval Mapping Workshops and the number of participants per Oval Mapping Workshop, via email, and it was eventually agreed that two Oval Mapping Workshops would take place, the first involving the Strategic Planning Group on 13th October and the second on 20th October, involving approximately fourteen 'Operational Consultants' (Appendix B15). In a subsequent telephone conversation, JP and the Action Researcher negotiated an agreement regarding the overall scope of JOURNEY Making type activities to be undertaken, and decided that all individual cognitive mapping interviews would be scheduled to last two hours. A further discussion took place regarding the time span between JOURNEY Making type events, in particular the 16 days between the end of the individual cognitive mapping interviews and the Oval Mapping Workshop, where feedback would be provided to the Strategic Planning Group, and the 19 days between the last Oval Mapping Workshop and feedback again being provided to the Strategic Planning Group. Eden and Ackermann (1998:302) suggest "Designing the intervention to avoid too much time elapsing between the interviews and subsequent work on the group map will ensure that participants have not forgotten what they had talked about and that the organizational context has not been changed too drastically... A period of 10 working days from Monday of one week to Friday of the next week should be taken as a maximum time gap – a 'psychological week'."

*JP stated that the pressure of work was being felt by everyone at SI Ltd. and members of the Strategic Planning Group were expected to undertake client based/fee earning activities as well as all other consultants, therefore the Strategic Planning Group could only physically met once per month. JP further stated that while it would not be possible to rearrange any of the current activity dates as they had been scheduled as close together as possible, given current Strategic Planning Group member work commitments, there might be some flexibility with regard to future Strategic Planning Group meeting dates, and where applicable, he would attempt to schedule these within a 'psychological week' of an activity being undertaken. However, he could not provide a guarantee that this would always be possible as it was **a company policy that client based/fee earning work took priority over all other activities.** The Action Researcher decided to ensure that JP was always contacted within a 'psychological week' of any work being undertaken to provide feedback for the Strategic Planning Group and to remind JP that where possible **future 'feedback' meetings needed to be scheduled within ten days of a JOURNEY Making type activity being undertaken.***

*JP and the Action Researcher then agreed that the sequence of JOURNEY Making type activities should remain as the Strategic Planning Group had indicated on the original project plan (see page 125), with the negotiated amendments regarding Oval Mapping Workshops. However, if following any specified activity the Strategic Planning Group or Action Researcher felt that no further JOURNEY Making type activities should be undertaken, then involvement in the Collaborative Research Programme would end. This was a compromise between the Strategic Planning Group wanting to be able to withdraw from the Collaborative Research Programme if they perceived that the work being undertaken was becoming more of a purely academic exercise rather than the development of a very practical strategy (see page 90 and page 102), and the Action Researcher wanting to undertake the proposed work on a **'phased or staged basis'**, as recommended by Eden and Ackermann (see page 126).*

Towards the end of the telephone conversation JP offered to update the existing project plan to accommodate the agreed Oval Mapping Workshop changes and distribute copies to Strategic Planning Group members and the Action Researcher. JP stated that a detailed project plan covering all JOURNEY Making type activities was considered essential by Strategic Planning Group members as it provided them with an indication, months in advance, of when to allocate diary time to strategy development work. The ability to allocate time this far in advance was also considered essential by Strategic Planning Group members as they were often involved as delivery consultants working on clients' premises, and this work was also allocated months ahead. JP then offered to ensure that 'invitations' were sent out to all Oval Mapping Workshop participants to ensure their attendance, and to arrange venues for the events so that work related interruptions would be minimised. Given that SI Ltd. was a consultancy company and that JP had performed similar activities many times before for his clients, the Action Researcher agreed to this and trusted that they would be performed satisfactorily.

OBSERVING (Action Research Approach)

Observing happenings during this Collaborative Research Programme sub-step, the Action Researcher identified two issues that had not been considered during their planning activities. These are briefly discussed below and will be further discussed in the REFLECTING section.

- *As a practicing business consultant the Action Researcher was aware of the emphasis and importance placed by many consultancy companies on the development of detailed project plans for proposed client work (also see Margerison, 1989; Markham, 1993; McLarty and Robinson, 1998). However, the Action Researcher was unsure on this occasion whether or not the development of a project plan was something that should have been undertaken, as this was not undertaken during a 'typical' JOURNEY Making application.*

The Action Researcher was also concerned about whether or not a framework document needed to be produced for the overall Collaborative Research Programme. The Action Researcher's rationale was that by making everyone's role explicit rather than implicit, any ambiguities which might arise in terms of expectations, measures to achieve expectations, activities to be undertaken, time allocated to complete individual activities and the elapsed time from Collaborative Research Programme commencement to finish, would be reduced, and that may have a significant effect on the failure of the Collaborative Research Programme (Schein, 1969; Cropper and Bennett, 1985). This step in the Action Research Approach, in particular the concept of whether or not to produce a framework document, is the first to highlight a 'grey area' that exists between the way in which Eden and Ackermann (1998) suggest JOURNEY Making should typically be undertaken, and what can happen when JOURNEY Making type activities are incorporated within an Action Research Approach. Therefore, to understand more about when framework documents should be developed, and the type of information they may contain, the Action Researcher decided to undertake a literature search and review and reflect on what had been learnt.

- The Area of Interest 'A' (Checkland and Holwell, 1998; West and Stansfield, 2001) (see page 40), can now be further defined as more information is known about this issue.

REFLECTING (Action Research Approach)

Production of a Collaborative Research Programme Framework Document

Discussing SODA, Eden and Simpson (1990:43) state that “All projects are unique, and professional judgment in designing the programme of the consultancy [intervention] is always necessary. To attempt to apply the contents of this chapter as a ‘precise formula’ in other circumstances would be to court disaster”. This concept of project uniqueness has also been restated more recently with regard to SODA/JOURNEY Making (Ackermann and Eden, 2001). The Action Researcher contends that the belief in the uniqueness of individual projects is one of the reasons why Eden and Ackermann (1998) now recommend undertaking JOURNEY Making activities in a ‘staged or phased’ basis. In Eden and Ackermann (1998) JOURNEY Making is also described as a ‘contingent’ approach where activities are often undertaken dependent upon what a client’s needs are. Eden and Ackermann (1998:375) state that “Clients are often uncertain about what the entire process involves and, at the beginning, find it difficult to grasp all the concepts (Yeats, 1996). Given the overall design of the journey can rarely be established until many of the contingencies begin to surface there is a danger of proposing something which is too all encompassing.” Therefore, when using JOURNEY Making in a contingent and staged/phased manner a client only needs a brief understanding of the particular JOURNEY Making activity to be undertaken, for example an individual cognitive mapping session. Applying JOURNEY Making in this manner negates the necessity to produce a detailed project plan or framework document.

However, Bryant (1989) has written about the production of a formal written document during generic problem management. He states that “In order to summarise the shared understanding of the intended intervention, it is usual for the parties to generate a form of contract which sets down for future reference their understanding of what is to be done. Formally, this may be expressed in an initial proposal, which will contain a working definition of the problem and identification of its owner, an outline of the main stages of the planned intervention, a confirmation of the proposed financial arrangements, and a process by which the arrangement may be terminated” (p.133).

Bryson (1995) also includes the concept as one of his process guidelines for planning strategy development. He states that "someone should prepare a written memorandum that outlines the content of the agreement, including a statement of the following items: the purpose and worth of the effort; organizations; units; groups; or persons who should be involved; steps to be followed; format and timing of reports; the role and membership of a strategic planning coordinating committee; the role and membership of the strategic planning team; the commitment of necessary resources to begin the effort. The agreement might be summarised in a chart and distributed to all planning team members" (p.58).

The subject has been discussed more recently by Mumford (2001) with regard to providing advice for Action Researchers. She states that "A very important aspect of 'getting in' [gaining physical access] is to ensure that both the researcher and all contacts in the company have a clear, specific and agreed knowledge of what is to take place. There should be no ambiguity or uncertainty. This means that a formal 'action' document should be created with a precise specification of processes, objectives and outputs. This should be signed by both management and researcher and given to all interested parties. The reality of most research is that what actually happens in the project may deviate from what is written in the document and final objectives may differ from initial ones. But the existence of a starting document will make it easier to discuss why changes have occurred and the reasons for these" (p.20).

With regard to producing a written 'formal action document' during an Action Research project, Avison, Baskerville and Myers (2001) state that "Formal control structures are typically defined in written agreements, such as a contract or letter of agreement. These agreements may describe the immediate problems situation and the scope of the research. These may also prescribe the mechanisms of researcher entry into the organization (engagement), the collaborative team composition, the warrants for action, mechanisms for renegotiating the agreement, and termination of the project" (p.35).

Finally, this issue has been discussed with regard to 'mode 2' research. Tranfield and Starkey (1998:346) suggest that "it might be expected when undertaking trans-disciplinary work that a research agenda would be defined collaboratively between researchers and users, including both managers and policy makers." The subject has been further elaborated in Starkey and Madan (2001) where it was stated that "... there is a need to increase the stakeholding that users have at various stages in the research process. The scope of the engagement should be determined by knowledge networks involving practitioners from the beginning of the process."

From reviewing information regarding the development of framework documents the Action Researcher learnt that when undertaking JOURNEY Making in the contingent and staged manner described by Eden and Ackermann (1998), a typical application, it may be not be beneficial to produce a project plan/framework document. This is in agreement with Eden and Ackermann (1998). However, in a research programme where a Collaborative Research Programme is to be undertaken in the 'real world' as a discrete step in an Action Research Approach, and where problem solving activities (in this research programme a non-typical application of JOURNEY Making) are to be utilised within the Collaborative Research Programme, a framework document needs to be produced that contains information relevant to the Collaborative Research Programme (including problem solving activity), detailing expectations of both client and Action Researcher. This is a contrasting view to that of Eden and Ackermann (1998). An Action Researcher should negotiate the specific contents of the document during a face-to-face meeting with a potential client, rather than it being dictated to either party. The document should evolve when it is found that what actually needs to happen during the intervention deviates from what is written in the document, and when it is agreed that the document needs to be 'formally' updated.

Redefining the Area of Interest (A) for the Research Programme.

The Area of Interest 'A' (Checkland and Holwell, 1998; West and Stansfield, 2001) was described on page 39 as a person entering the social practice of a real world situation in which the research themes, 'F' and 'M', are relevant, and where the person becomes involved as both participant and researcher. Later, on page 40, it was stated that for this research programme, 'A' had been partly defined in the research subject discussed on page 31, and subject/themes discussed on page 42, 'during a real world intervention'; however precisely which specific real world intervention could not be stated until an organization has agreed to participate in the research programme. Following this on page 76, it was further stated that a judgment of the validity of the Action Research Approach would be to provide evidence that changes to the elements of 'F', 'M,' and 'A' have been identified and documented during the application of the Action Research Approach. The Area of Interest 'A' can now be further defined, from that discussed on page 42, as the Action Researcher entering the social practice of the Strategic Planning Group at SI Ltd. where he will be involved in both practical (strategy making) and research based (the testing of an Action Research Approach) activities. This is an identified and documented change to the element 'A' as suggested by Checkland and Holwell (1998) and West and Stansfield (2001).

In identifying and documenting this change at this time, it confirms Checkland and Holwell's (1998:14) notion that 'A' can only be fully defined once a real world problem situation has been identified, while the elements 'F' and 'M' may be identified in advance of this happening, (see Figure 6 on page 39).

Summary

Contributions to knowledge in the 'research' community

- Compromises between the specific subject an Action Researcher has set out to research and what eventually is to be researched may need to be made if an Action Researcher is experiencing difficulties in attempting to gain access to organizations to undertake a 'real world' Collaborative Research Programme (see page 121). Action Researchers who do not want to compromise their original research subject can identify and employ a 'criterion' to assess the similarity between the subject they originally intended to research and that presented in a potential research situation. However, Action Researchers should be able to provide evidence that any decision made, with regard to this issue, through the application of the criterion and the interpretation of the gathered data, is robust. This is a generalistic issue that could be faced by most real-world researchers, whether or not they are Action Researchers. Yet it is an important issue that will help to enhance to the validity of the overall research programme and to ensure that an original research programme subject/theme(s) has not been compromised (see page 122).
- When undertaking a real world research programme, where a Collaborative Research Programme is to be undertaken as a discrete step in an Action Research Approach, and where real world problem solving activities are to be utilised within the Collaborative Research Programme, an Action Researcher needs to produce a formal framework document containing information relevant to the Collaborative Research Programme expectations (including problem solving activity expectations) of both client and Action Researcher. This is assuming that a typical application of the problem solving method does not encourage this, as is the case with JOURNEY Making. This is a generalistic rather than context-specific issue that could be faced by most Action Researchers, given that problem solving is an integral part of Action Research (see Process Characteristics 1 and 3 on page 62). The importance associated with producing this framework document is in helping to reduce any misunderstandings and/or ambiguities which could arise and that may have a significant effect on the later failure of the research intervention (Schein, 1969; Cropper and Bennett, 1985) (see page 131).

- The approach used to gather qualitative data relevant to the ‘strategic problem’ criterion questions in this research programme proved to have additional and unexpected benefits for the client. During group interaction and conversation it is envisaged that individuals will experience a shift in emotional attitude, as well as a cognitive shift in the problem situation, as ideas are explored and better understood and a group attempts to negotiate a shared perspective (Weick, 1979; Eden and Ackermann, 1998). Changes in emotional attitude reflect, in part, the role of intuition and hunch which leads to a feeling of comfort about the path ahead (Agor, 1989). Cognitive shifts are about ‘individuals changing their mind’, changed beliefs, changed values, and changes in the salience of particular values (Eden, 1987; Larson and Christensen, 1993; Bowman and Daniels, 1995). However, for cognitive shifts to take place it is first necessary for critical pieces of problem-related information to be recalled from memory. This recall serves to make previously stored information available for further scrutiny. During the scrutiny undertaken within the unstructured group interview at SI Ltd (see page 114), detailed, elements of intersubjectivity (Eden, Jones, Sims and Smithin, 1981) between group members that had not been previously debated, or had only been superficially debated, were identified and briefly discussed by all group members. The unstructured interview/conversational approach to information gathering utilised by the Action Researcher helped the Strategic Planning Group to establish that members held more conflicting views about the problematic situation facing SI Ltd. than they originally thought (see page 116). A generalistic effect that may be seen in any research programme where this type of activity is utilised.

- Where Eden and Ackermann (1998) suggest that a ‘psychological week’ should be taken as a maximum time gap between JOURNEY Making type activities (see page 127) this may not always be possible. When the scope of JOURNEY Making type activities to be undertaken is greater than would typically be considered if a contingent and staged approach to JOURNEY Making was being applied, arranging meetings within a psychological week of each other might not always be possible. There could be a number of reasons; initiated by either client or Action Researcher, as to why this may not be achieved, for example, illness, natural disaster, pressure of work, unexpected events, client refusing to schedule meetings within this timeframe, etc. Eden and Ackermann also discuss the concept of building trust and developing a personal relationship with a client (p.480) and suggest that one way of ensuring that this happens is to keep in regular contact with a client. Adhering to the timeframe recommendation between JOURNEY Making activities is one way of ensuring that clients are regularly contacted and that they see work being completed. When it is not possible to schedule JOURNEY Making activities within the recommended timeframe, clients may still be contacted by the Action Researcher and provided with feedback information, within the timeframe period, to ensure that a trusting relationship is developing. On page 84 the Action Researcher stated that he wanted to develop a trusting relationship with prospective clients from the initial contact and, in the Action Researcher’s opinion, dictating to JP that all JOURNEY Making type activities had to be completed within a psychological week of each other, when JP had provided the Action Researcher with substantial reasons why this could not happen, would not have helped in the development of a trusting relationship. However, negotiating an agreement as close as possible to the recommended timeframe might help in the development of a trusting relationship between client and Action Researcher (see page 127); an important issue that may influence all Action Research and JOURNEY Making practitioners.

PART C

Undertaking Collaborative Research Within an Action Research Approach

CHAPTER 5

INFORMATION GATHERING, MODELLING AND MAPPING

Notes for the Reader

- On page 14 and page 81, the structure of this document was discussed and it was decided that all individual steps within the Action Research Approach and Collaborative Research Programme sub-steps would be documented under the headings of PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING. On page 82 OBSERVATIONS were described as thoughts the Action Researcher has regarding a particular situation that are noted but given little in-depth consideration at that time, and therefore, would appear in this document as short bullet pointed paragraphs of text. REFLECTIONS were described as being made over a longer time, and would produce more in-depth understanding of OBSERVATIONS following a literature search and review of relevant material. **It is now proposed that all future OBSERVATION sections be omitted from the main document to enable the reader to move directly from reading about actual ACTIONS undertaken, to reading about why differences between PLANNED and actual ACTIONS occurred (REFLECTIONS) without reading the ‘duplicated’ information within the OBSERVATION sections. All OBSERVATIONS from this point onwards can now be found in Appendix D.**

The concept of changing the document structure to improve the readability of it was originally discussed on page 81

Introduction

This chapter had been split into a number of Collaborative Research Programme sub-steps (see page 79). Each sub-step involves the application of a JOURNEY Making type activity. Two individual Collaborative Research Programme sub-steps are detailed within this chapter. They relate to the gathering of data using individual cognitive mapping interviews and group workshops utilising the Oval Mapping Technique (Oval Mapping Workshops), and the modelling of the resulting data using Decision Explorer software.

Cognitive mapping is a technique designed to capture the thinking of an individual about a particular issue or problem in a diagrammatic, rather than linear format. Therefore, it is a technique that can be used to capture the rich thinking of each of the key people within an organization about their views of strategic issues – their causes and consequences (Ackermann, Eden and Brown, 2002). The ‘map’ produced during an individual, one-on-one, interview is designed to focus on the values, beliefs and assumptions that an individual has about a particular issue. The theoretical basis of the technique owes its origins to Kelly’s (1955) theory of personal constructs.

According to Eden and Ackermann (1998:303), the Oval Mapping Technique was *“designed to enable a map of aspirations, beliefs and assertions to be created”* by a wide range of participants across an organization working at group workshops, and enables them to experience being involved in their company’s strategy development work. Eden and Ackermann (1998:100) state that the *“group mapping process is guided by the same considerations as for individual interviews, but with a full recognition that it will not be possible to collect the richness of individualism that can be so helpful in creating ownership and creativity.”* The group work which produces ‘cause maps’ (strategy maps) generally uses a combination of ‘nominal group techniques (Delbecq et al, 1975), the use of oval ‘sno-cards’ (Backoff and Nutt, 1998; Bryson et al, 1996; Eden et al, 1983).

Decision Explorer is used to record, analyse and display the large amount of material generated during the individual cognitive mapping interviews and the group Oval Mapping Workshops. All data can be collated into a single holistic organizational model, a composite group map, where cross linkages are maintained between all collected data.

Step 5.1 - Cognitive Mapping and Information Modelling

PLANNING (Collaborative Research Programme)

As agreed with JP on 21st September 1999, three individual cognitive mapping interviews, with RH, EP and JP, were planned for 24th September, and a further two with CR and DT for the 27th September. The lessons learnt, regarding unstructured interviewing techniques and qualitative information gathering and interpretation, from the group interview undertaken during Step 3 of the Action Research Approach (see page 113), were still fresh in the Action Researcher's mind as he planned for the individual cognitive mapping interviews. In preparation the Action Researcher practiced his cognitive mapping skills while listening to radio or television debates or news items and during interactive discussions with friends and colleagues, as it was felt that these would provide good simulations for real world sessions. The Action Researcher also ensured that he had an abundant supply of unlined A4 paper, automatic pencils, eraser, and **a checklist of things to remember**. The checklist was created after viewing the sections entitled 'Before you do it' and 'How to do it – building a cognitive map', pages 286-293, in Eden and Ackermann's (1998) book, and reading Ackermann, Cropper and Eden (1990) and Ackermann, Eden and Cropper's article entitled "Getting Started with Cognitive Mapping." As the Action Researcher had previously only held a small number of cognitive mapping interviews with clients it was felt that producing a checklist of things to remember would help him to undertake the task more easily (Appendix C1). Following the individual cognitive mapping interviews the Action Researcher planned to have all Decision Explorer models developed within five working days of their being created. The Action Researcher wanted to input the hand drawn cognitive maps into Decision Explorer whilst the information was still fresh in his mind, rather than having to rely on remembering interpretations of what had been said by interviewees. Having only used Decision Explorer sporadically in the past, the Action Researcher decided to again read the manuals that accompany the software and the relevant chapters in the JOURNEY Making book, and undertook several exercises to familiarise himself with the software.

ACTING (Collaborative Research Programme)

JP was telephoned a few days prior to the sessions to confirm that plans were still on schedule and that the individual interviews were going ahead. The Action Researcher also asked JP if he could be available for a brief meeting before the start of the first interview so that he and the Action Researcher could develop an opening question, often called a 'Trigger Question', that would be used during all interviews. JP agreed to this.

JP then informed the Action Researcher that cognitive mapping interviews would have to be limited to one and a half hours duration rather than the two hours previously agreed, see page 127. Eden and Ackermann (1998) suggest that each interview needs to run between one and one and a half hours but, as the Action Researcher considered themselves a novice JOURNEY Making practitioner and not as skilled at drawing cognitive maps as an experienced 'mapper', extra cognitive mapping time would have been welcomed. The Action Researcher explained to JP that the quantity and quality of information gathered would be impacted by reducing the interview duration. However, JP informed the Action Researcher that the time constraint was unavoidable and interviews were re-scheduled at one and half hour intervals.

On 24th September, the Action Researcher and JP met to prepare a Trigger Question and to establish if there were any specific issues that JP believed needed to be explored by the group. JP stated that there were no specific issues he wanted to be covered and that he was happy for participants to discuss anything they felt was relevant to the problematic situation. Next the Trigger Question was developed, mainly by JP but with guidance from the Action Researcher. The question was *"In your personal opinion, what business issues do you think the company will need to face in the next five years to ensure corporate success."* JP believed that this was relevant to the information and 'theories in use' that Strategic Planning Group members needed to share. Eden and Ackermann (1998:91) suggest this type of question *"attempts to lock the interviewee into a focus for the future but with a crisis or firefighting frame of reference. The issues need not be disaster oriented, they could be issues that arise from problems in attaining positive outcomes ... they provide a mandate for the interviewee to express concerns about negative outcomes."* Next, the Action Researcher chose SI Ltd's board/conference room for the three **individual cognitive mapping interviews**. This choice was made because the room had plenty of space for several people to work in while not being overly large, the room had natural light and work related interruptions would be minimised as the room was not normally utilised. The Action Researcher also wanted to evaluate the suitability of the room for the forthcoming Strategic Planning Group workshop planned for 13th October. The Action Researcher placed seats so that interviewer and interviewee would be working at right angles to each other, or as close to right angles as possible around the elliptical boardroom table. The Action Researcher agreed with Eden and Ackermann (1998) that in this position an interviewee would be able to see the cognitive map as it developed and that this may help reassure the interviewee that his or her statements had been captured, thereby building confidence and trust in the Action Researcher's work. This position also allowed the interviewee to easily validate the cognitive map when asked by the Action Researcher.

The Action Researcher started each interview by asking interviewees if they had any **expectations for the session**. Several interviewees stated that they had not considered this issue but then explained that they felt that this would provide them with a way of explaining what they believed needed to happen or had happened at SI Ltd. in their own words, without being interrupted and without having to justify themselves to other Strategic Planning Group members. The Action Researcher explained to all interviewees that information gathered during this activity would be treated anonymously. Only the Action Researcher would be able to establish where a specific piece of information originated. The Action Researcher then explained to interviewees that the Action Researcher's expectation was to develop a cognitive map, in a hierarchical format, based on the information provided by the interviewee as to why things were as they seemed to them and why situations might matter for the future of the organization. The result at the end of the interview would be a cognitive map that had been validated for its accuracy by the interviewee.

Once an interviewee was sitting comfortably and felt relaxed the Action Researcher asked the prepared trigger question. Several interviewees declared that they had not previously considered activities five years into the future in any great depth and that they would have been more prepared to provide information covering this time period had they received the trigger question before the interview. Brown (1999) also discusses this issue. The Action Researcher informed interviewees that JP had decided to cover this time period as it was the timescale used in the 1995 Business Plan that had guided the company's strategic direction to date (see page 115). After a short period of reflection, interviewees started to provide the Action Researcher with information in response to the trigger question. Each presented statement from an interviewee was written down as a distinct block of text, a 'construct', thereby providing an easy way of linking constructs. Occasionally the Action Researcher would pause the information gathering and ask interviewees to clarify or elaborate a point or to show the developing cognitive map to the interviewee for approval. Although several interviewees initially declared that that they had not previously considered activities five years into the future the eagerness of the interviewees to provide information, and the Action Researcher's limited competence in drawing cognitive maps in 'live' interviews resulted in the Action Researcher struggling to keep up with the flow of information. Breaks to ask the interviewee to clarify or elaborate a point or to show the developing cognitive map to the interviewee for approval did not significantly slow the flow of information being provided. They did provide the Action Researcher with a small amount of time to 'catch up' with the mapping before interviewees again started talking. Extracts from actual cognitive maps developed at SI Ltd. can be seen in Figure 24 and Figure 25.

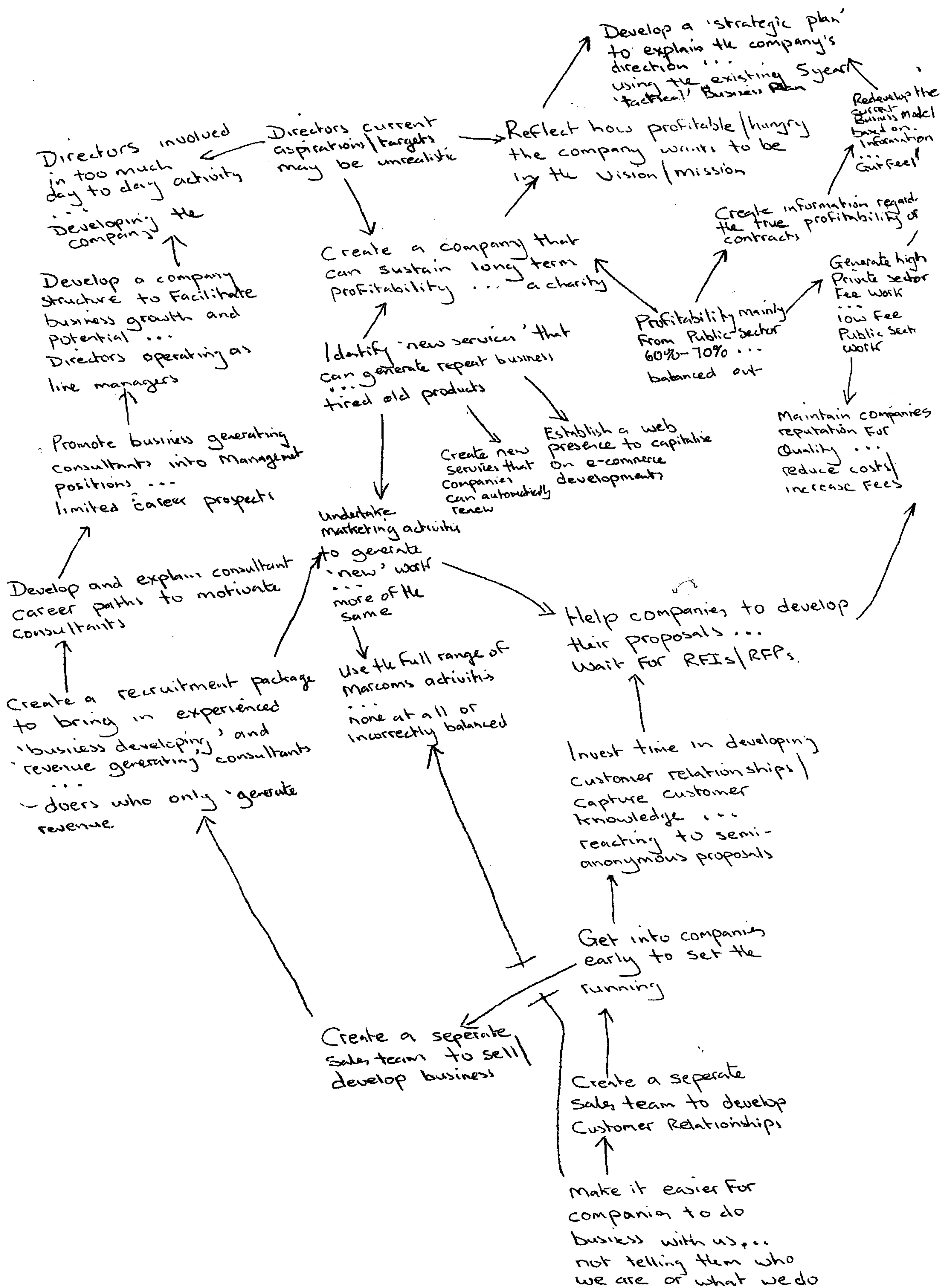


Figure 24. Extract 1 from a Cognitive Map at SI Ltd.

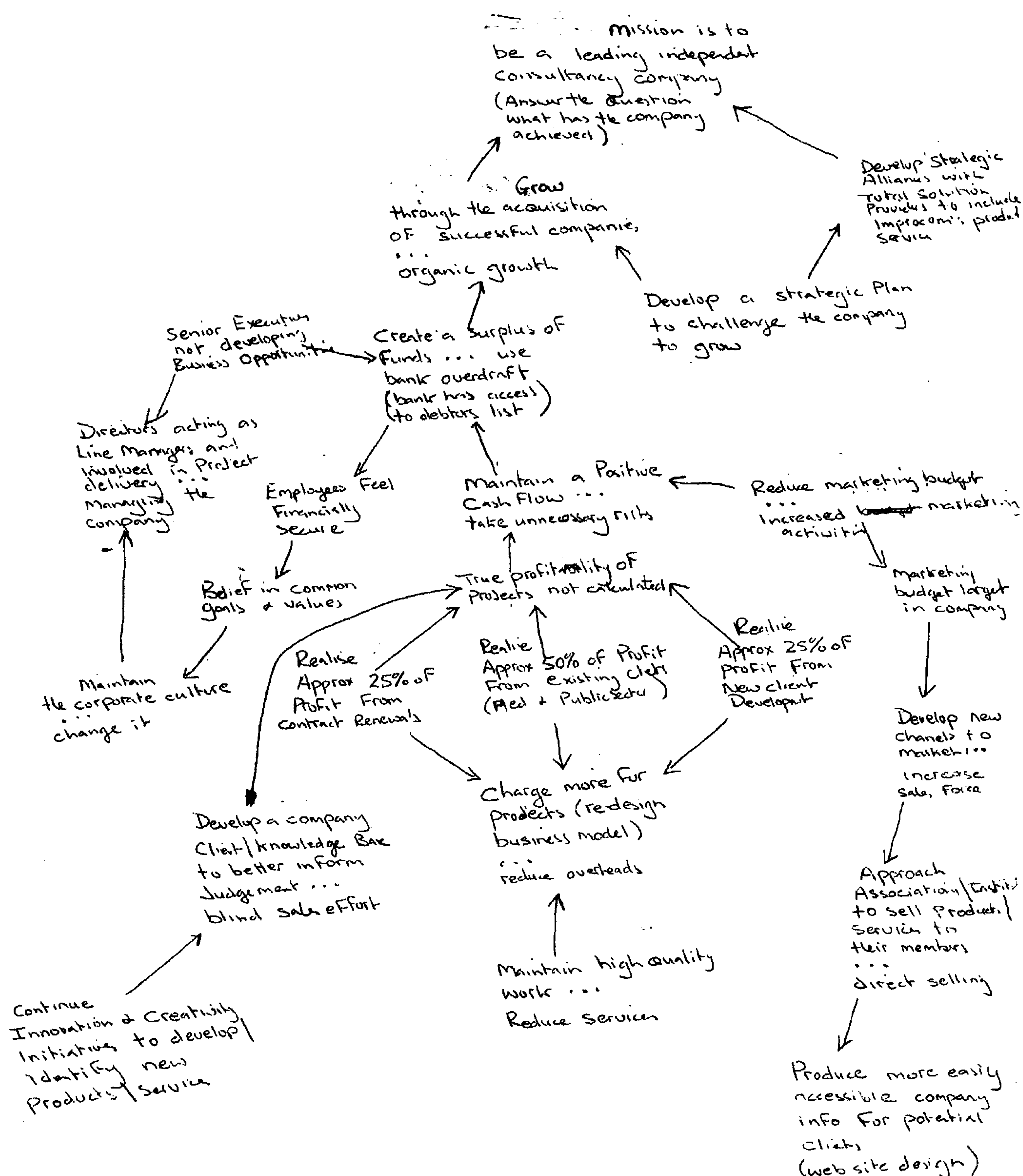


Figure 25. Extract 2 from a Cognitive Map at SI Ltd.

On 27th September 1999 the Action Researcher returned to SI Ltd. to complete a further two individual cognitive mapping interviews. The participants at this time were CR and DT, and the same approach was used to that used during the first cognitive mapping sessions, with similar effects.

The Action Researcher spent the weekend between the two sets of individual cognitive mapping interviews, 25th-26th September, working in Germany for his full-time employer. The Action Researcher had little time to reflect in-depth on the first three cognitive mapping interviews before undertaking the last two individual cognitive mapping interviews. However, over the weekend the Action Researcher entered the first three individual cognitive maps into Decision Explorer. The information from the final two individual cognitive mapping interviews was entered into Decision Explorer the day following the last interview. Once all individual cognitive maps had been input a quick analysis of each was undertaken using the 'SIZE' command. While there are no set figures regarding how many constructs should be produced in an individual cognitive map, the Action Researcher had read of instances where between 40 and 100 (Eden, 1990), 65 (Eden and Simpson, 1990) and 100 (Eden, 1994, Brown, 1999) constructs had been discussed. Eden and Ackermann (2001:26) now state that *"often cognitive maps are reasonably large – over 100 nodes on a map."* The SIZE analyses indicated that maps varied in size between 30 and 50 concepts, with link-to-concept ratios varying between 1.18 and 1.25. The number of concepts was lower than what should be expected, confirming the Action Researcher's earlier concerns that his limited competence in using cognitive mapping in a live situation would result in a reduction in the amount of information captured. However, the Action Researcher consoled himself that more information would be gathered during the Oval Mapping Workshops on 13th and 20th October. However, the link-to-concept ratio was compatible to that indicated by Eden and Ackermann (1998) of 1.15 - 1.20, providing the Action Researcher with an indication that he was linking concepts within maps in a way comparable with other mappers. Next, cognitive maps built with each Strategic Planning Group member were combined into a **draft composite group map** to identify any similar, dissimilar or emergent issues. It was found that the most efficient way of creating a draft composite group map was to copy all of the individual cognitive maps in the same software workspace and weave them together. Merging maps also entailed identifying two themes, within different maps, that related to the same activity, overlaying them (Eden, 1990) and then linking concepts elsewhere within the two maps. Then, unless there was a reason for doing otherwise, the concept that contained 'less rich' information was removed. Care was taken when doing this, so that the meaning of the 'removed' concept was not lost. As themes and concepts from different maps are linked, an Action Researcher needs to use judgment to maintain the hierarchical relationships within the final merged map. This judgment is not to be treated lightly as the Action Researcher will be beginning a process of negotiating his/her own view of the problem on to the model by inserting new links between 'owned' maps (Eden, 1990; Eden and Ackermann, 1998).

The use of a whiteboard proved useful during this activity. When a problematic section of an individual cognitive map was to be linked into the draft composite group map it was often sketched onto a whiteboard in the first instance. This allowed the Action Researcher to look at several possible ways of linking information and enabled the Action Researcher to consider the overall hierarchical structure of the map before physically incorporating data into the developing draft composite group map. A representation of the hierarchical structure of the completed map can be seen in Figure 26.

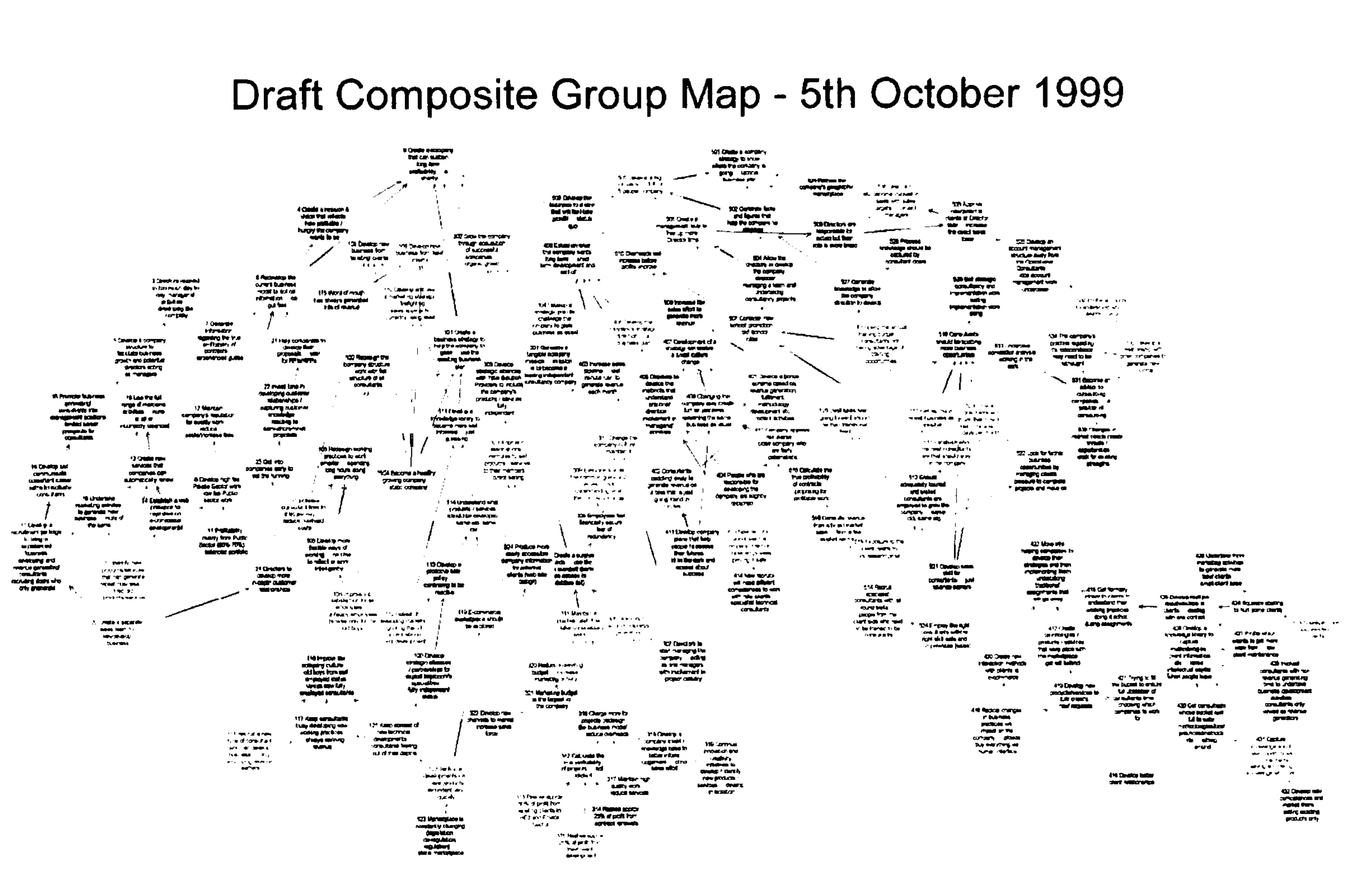


Figure 26. Structure of SI Ltd's Draft Composite Group Map

When individual cognitive maps have been merged, the resulting draft group composite map should contain fewer concepts than the total number of concepts from the individual cognitive maps combined. In this case there was a combined total of approximately 150 concepts within the individual cognitive maps, and after creating the draft composite group map approximately 140 concepts remained. Although there are no 'set' figures for how many concepts there should be in a merged map, there are instances where many hundreds of concepts (2000, Eden, 1991; 1000-1500, Eden and Ackermann, 1992; 600-900, Eden, 1994; 800-2000, Eden and Ackermann, 1998; 800, Brown, 1999) have been identified. The draft composite group map had a link-to-concept ratio of 1.34. The link-to-concept ratio was higher for the draft composite group map than for the individual cognitive maps, as expected, due to new links being identified while individual maps were being merged.

REFLECTING (Collaborative Research Programme)

The Length of Individual Cognitive Mapping Interviews

The Action Researcher had initially agreed to the scheduling of individual interviews at two hour intervals (see page 127). The reason for this was that the Action Researcher wanted to spend approximately one hour developing a cognitive map, and fifteen minutes towards the end of the interview to explain the developed cognitive map to the interviewee, highlighting emerging themes and gaining approval of their accuracy. Eden and Ackermann state that providing this 'value added feedback' *"produces confidence and trust from the interviewee and demonstrates that the interviewer has listened well. Often during this review process, the interviewee notices something that they consider key has not been mentioned and so further elaboration/extension is provided"* (p.293). A further fifteen minutes would be used for reworking the map to include new information and/or amend information incorrectly reproduced, or where the interviewee had changed their mind about an issue. The additional half hour would provide the Action Researcher with an overrun period, if needed, and allow him to collect his thoughts before starting another cognitive mapping interview. When the individual interviews were rescheduled for one and a half hours' duration, the Action Researcher decided to lose the thirty minutes overrun period. The reason for this was the Action Researcher's concern that he might not be able to gather information and represent it in a cognitive map as quickly or accurately as an experienced mapper. The Action Researcher perceived that the success of this form of cognitive mapping was dependent upon the amount and quality of information provided by the interviewee, the skills of the 'facilitator' in eliciting information from the interviewee, and the facilitator's ability to reproduce the information into a drawn cognitive map. The Action Researcher was concerned with regard to his ability to produce maps of a comparable size to those published in the literature, and when faced with reducing the duration of cognitive mapping interviews from two hours to one and a half hours, decided to maximise the information gathering time and lose the overrun period.

The Action Researcher has now learnt that dedicating time to an overrun period is essential for all novice mappers, as this time is needed to assess their application of the cognitive mapping technique and readjust it if necessary, and to allow time to prepare for the next interview. Not scheduling an overrun period in order to maximise the time devoted to information gathering during an individual cognitive mapping interview may not always be the correct decision to make, as established in this Collaborative Research Programme activity.

Setting Expectations for Individual Cognitive Mapping Interviews

Eden and Ackermann (1998:293-294), state that *"Nearly everyone, when trying to learn cognitive mapping ... has found learning the technique very demanding and interviews more difficult. Novice mappers feel overwhelmed, believing that they cannot remember and implement all the guidelines whilst at the same time capturing an accurate record. One way of dealing with this is to gain experience in low risk environments such as mapping the news on TV, mapping a colleague during an informal interview and practicing at meetings... Learning to map is no more complex than learning to drive a car, and in the same way it initially appears that there are just too many actions required but gradual (and often imperceptibly) the process becomes internalized."* This Action Researcher totally agrees with this statement, but believes that before a novice mapper starts a live cognitive mapping interview, regardless of how much low risk expertise they may have accumulated, they should consider setting two types of expectations, as this may help reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed during interviews.

The first expectation relates to what a novice mapper wants as an outcome from the cognitive mapping interviews. This can be partly expressed to interviewees prior to commencing individual interviews and can influence the amount of information that needs to be gathered (see page 142). For example, if the information from the resulting individual cognitive maps is merged into a larger map and then analysed in order to create a written report, a careful and rigorous analysis of the information produced will be needed. In this situation it is possible that two individual cognitive mapping interviews per interviewee may be required, if a novice mapper feels that insufficient information has been gathered to enable an analysis to be undertaken to the required level. However, if the information from the resulting individual cognitive maps is to merged into a larger map, analysed, and the results of the analysis used for the purpose of informing a group workshop, then the analysis may be less involved. In this situation single individual cognitive mapping interviews, where less information is gathered, may still provide a novice mapper with sufficient information to surface emerging issues to be discussed, added to and negotiated during a group workshop.

The second expectation relates to a novice mapper's personal expectations of what they want to achieve with regard to adhering to cognitive mapping guidelines. These will not be expressed to interviewees. An example of this would be those aspects of the cognitive mapping technique which will be attempted during individual cognitive mapping interviews and those which will not be attempted. For the individual cognitive mapping interviews undertaken within this JOURNEY Making type activity the Action Researcher developed a one page checklist of things to remember (see page 140 and Appendix C1), as it was felt that this would help in undertaking the task more easily. The Action Researcher now believes that doing this did not help during the individual interviews because even the briefest of referral to the list to check guidelines diverted the Action Researcher's attention from intensively listening to what the interviewee was saying and reproducing the information onto the developing cognitive map. Trying to implement too many guidelines, regardless of how good an interviewer a novice mapper perceives themselves to be, or how long has been spent practicing cognitive mapping or, whether a checklist of things to remember is produced, can result in 'mapper frustration', which in turn may result in a reduction in the amount and/or quality of information captured.

In conclusion, placing too much emphasis on the amount of information captured, number of nodes/constructs, rather than the quality of the information captured, and attempting to adhere to too many technique guidelines, can contribute to the overwhelmed feeling experienced by novice cognitive mappers. Therefore, realistic expectations of what is to be achieved need to be set by novice mappers before utilising the technique in a real world situation.

Step 5.2 - Mapping in Groups

PLANNING (Collaborative Research Programme)

As previously agreed with JP, the Action Researcher planned to undertake an Oval Mapping Workshop, in as close a manner as possible to that described by Eden and Ackermann (1998:303-320), with the Strategic Planning Group on 13th October 1999. Following this, on 20th October a further Oval Mapping Workshop involving approximately fourteen 'Operational Consultants' and/or any other people JP felt should participate would be undertaken. The Action Researcher telephoned JP on 6th October to ensure that the Oval Mapping Workshops were taking place and to discuss the trigger question to be used at the start of the workshops. JP felt that the question should be similar to that used during the cognitive mapping interviews as this adequately represented the situation about which information needed to be generated. JP suggested that the initial question be slightly reworded to read, *"What do you feel are the strategic issues facing the company that will either help or hinder them in their attempt to achieving a sustainable future?"* The Action Researcher wrote this on a flip chart sheet for use during the Oval Mapping Workshops. The Action Researcher also prepared a flipchart sheet containing several 'Oval Mapping Workshop rules-of-engagement' (taken from Bryson, 1995, and Eden and Ackermann, 1998) for use during the workshops (Appendix C2).

ACTING (Collaborative Research Programme)

On 13th October the Action Researcher arrived early at SI Ltd's premises, having flown directly from Paris where he had been undertaking work on behalf of his full-time employer, so that the boardroom could be prepared for the Strategic Planning Group's Oval Mapping Workshop. Prior to the workshop JP and the Action Researcher met to discuss both of the forthcoming Oval Mapping events. JP stated that for the forthcoming workshop all five of the Strategic Planning Group members would be present, and for the second workshop, an invitation had been sent to all Operational Consultants, and other attendees, informing them that the activity originally planned for 20th October, a full day reviewing operational issues, had been replaced by a 'company strategy making workshop' during which they could contribute freely to the strategic plan of the company. Also, that the second Oval Mapping Workshop would be held at a nearby external training facility, as previously agreed, which could easily cater for the increase in participant numbers.

To start the **Strategic Planning Group Oval Mapping Workshop** the Action Researcher overviewed what had been taking place since the last meeting with the Strategic Planning Group, and after answering a few brief questions proceeded to inquire whether the Strategic Planning Group had any expectations regarding the Oval Mapping Workshop. These were noted and written on a flip chart sheet in full view of everyone. The Action Researcher then stated that from a brief review of the information gathered during the individual cognitive mapping interviews there appeared to be three major 'themes' emerging. These were identified as

1. Extend the business development model (sales/marketing channels)
2. Creating new products and services
3. Develop the company's strategic planning capabilities

The Strategic Planning Group decided to use these three themes as triggers for themselves during the Oval Mapping Workshop. The three themes were written on a whiteboard so that everyone could see them and use them as a stimulus. The Action Researcher introduced the prepared Trigger Question at this time and also wrote it on the whiteboard. Next the Action Researcher provided a brief introduction to the Oval Mapping Workshop process during which the 'Oval Mapping Workshop rules-of-engagement' were disclosed and discussed. To start information gathering, Strategic Planning Group members were asked to write any issues, assumptions, assertions, statements and beliefs that they felt were important to them, regarding the trigger question(s), onto 'ovals' provided by the Action Researcher. Participants were reminded by the Action Researcher not to limit themselves to the identified themes but to write about any subject they felt was important. All completed ovals were then stuck onto the walls by the participants. After a period of time ovals were clustered around emerging themes by the Action Researcher ensuring that ovals that appeared to be the most super-ordinate were at the top of each cluster, and the ovals that supported it were further down. Thus the shape of the structure was similar to a teardrop, with most detailed contributions at the bottom. When it appeared that more than one theme was emerging from within an existing cluster, a smaller cluster was developed to cover each 'new' theme. This was done either after being identified by the Action Researcher and following discussion with participants or after participants had identified potential emerging themes and informed the Action Researcher. When all participants had decided that they could not produce any more ovals, a period of reflection was taken, followed by lunch.

During the lunch break the Action Researcher and JP reviewed the developing clusters and the material on the wall set aside from the clusters, awaiting the Strategic Planning Group's return. The Action Researcher also tidied up the developing 'map' by providing more space between clusters and slightly spreading out ovals within clusters.

After lunch participants were then asked if anyone had anything to add to the information produced, or if anyone felt that any ovals were in the wrong cluster, or incorrectly placed (hierarchically) within a cluster. Moving ovals within and between clusters created a considerable amount of conversation and debate. Several clusters changed characteristics and some clusters were split into still smaller clusters to allow individual themes to emerge. During this period RH was heard to comment *"How did we get it so wrong the first time, just look at how the clusters have changed shape and now have more definition."* The Action Researcher informed the Strategic Planning Group that it wasn't a case of getting things wrong the first time, just that after debate, negotiation and agreement the themes of the clusters had become more tightly defined. The model developed was a representation through which the Strategic Planning Group *"could dialogue, with each other and with themselves, to construct an evolving intersubjective definition of the situation"* (Eden, Jones, Sims and Smithin, 1979) that would **complement the existing intersubjective information already developed** by Strategic Planning Group members (see page 116 and page 136). Following this activity the Action Researcher facilitated the group in the development of 'cluster labels' for all represented clusters. Finally, with input from the Strategic Planning Group, the Action Researcher started to draw causal links between individual ovals in a particular cluster. The Action Researcher started 'linking' ovals this way, to ease the Strategic Planning Group into the activity. Once participants were comfortable with the activity it was widened to start linking whole clusters to other clusters. Through linking the material both within and across clusters, participants began to gain a sense of shared understanding, and the activity also surfaced new contributions as the linking highlighted differences in interpretation. These new contributions were then written onto new ovals, 'clustered' and 'linked'. Reviewing the Oval Mapping Workshop at the end of the day, JP commented that *"the amount of diverse information we have collected in such a short space of time is staggering and I'm sure that the same amount will be collected in other sessions. I'm a little concerned whether we can handle all of this but we will wait and see."* Feelings from participants were that they were glad to have taken part in an Oval Mapping Workshop and that negotiated issues regarding the future of SI Ltd had been accurately represented by the Action Researcher. This oval mapping session developed a total of 195 ovals, in 25 clusters of varying size, creating an average of 8 ovals per cluster (Appendix C3-11).

On 20th October the Action Researcher again returned to SI Ltd. to undertake **the second Oval Mapping Workshop** with a selection of SI Ltd's employees. This time a large room had been arranged at a nearby external training facility. The Action Researcher arrived a comfortable time before the expected start time and inspected the room. It was found to be spacious, with flat bare walls that allowed flipchart sheets to be easily attached to them. There were windows that allowed natural light into the room without causing distraction and the furniture was comfortable, without being too comfortable. Unfortunately, the number of people attending this workshop had been reduced to eight rather than the fourteen or more previously expected. Several Senior Operational Consultants had been called away to undertake client work, some participants had called in sick, and some had just forgotten to turn up. JP, who attended the start of the workshop to introduce the Action Researcher, apologised for the reduced number of attendees, again explaining that it was company policy for client based/fee earning work to take priority over all other activities, as earlier stated to the Action Researcher (see page 128). Following JP's departure, the event started in the same way as the first Oval Mapping Workshop, with regard to trigger question(s), however, attendees were not shown the output from the first oval mapping workshop as it had not yet been written up. This was due to the Action Researcher compromising this work in order to complete work, on time, for his full-time employer. The Action Researcher started the workshop by informing everyone that this was their chance to influence (not decide) the strategic direction of SI Ltd, and that all information captured would be used during the decision making process of the Strategic Planning Group. Information generated would be incorporated with other information already generated and therefore, would become anonymous. The Action Researcher then invited participants to detail their expectations for the Oval Mapping Workshop and these were written on a whiteboard at the front of the room full view of everyone. Next the Action Researcher provided a brief introduction to the Oval Mapping Workshop process during which the 'Oval Mapping Workshop rules-of-engagement' were disclosed and discussed. During this discussion the first questions to the Action Researcher were to ask for an explanation of why a new strategic plan was being developed, why oval mapping activities were taking place, and whether these two activities complemented each other or not. This group stated that they were ignorant of any of this information.

The Action Researcher spent a considerable amount of time explaining these things to the group and answering other miscellaneous questions, some of which were fairly hostile. Being unaware of the **internal memorandum** sent by JP, soliciting their participation, the Action Researcher was unsure of how much information to expose to the assembled group. JP had volunteered to undertake this task (see page 129), and the Action Researcher had trusted that it would be performed satisfactorily, given that SI Ltd. was a consultancy company, and similar activities had been performed many times before by JP during projects for his clients. Therefore, the mood of the group was mixed from the start of the workshop, with some people willing to collaborate, others unable to see the benefit of collaboration, and others wondering why they had been asked to attend as they were only 'administration assistants'.

This Oval Mapping Workshop proved far harder to facilitate than the original workshop with the Action Researcher constantly having to motivate and engage the group. However all activities undertaken during the first Oval Mapping Workshop were eventually completed. Reviewing the Oval Mapping Workshop at the end of the day, feelings from attendees were that they were happy to have been involved in the Oval Mapping Workshop, they had worked hard and surprisingly produced more information than they had expected. Yet, they were also **skeptical about how much notice would be taken of their information contribution**, but were assured by the Action Researcher that all information gathered, regardless of who provided it or where it came from, would be merged together without any loss of meaning. A total of 120 ovals had been created during this Oval Mapping Workshop, and these were incorporated into 12 clusters at an average of 10 ovals per cluster (Appendix C12-17).

REFLECTING (Collaborative Research Programme)

Seemingly Trivial Aspects of Workshops can have Far Reaching Effects

Eden and Ackermann (1998:380) state that *"... it becomes important to construct carefully the memorandum inviting participants to a workshop. This must, obviously, clearly state the purpose, venue and timing of the event and provide no more than a provisional agenda."* If this happens participants will turn up ready and willing to work with a sense of purpose, and this may reduce hostility towards an Action Researcher and reduce the amount of time lost at the start of the workshop explaining issues that were not been clearly explained in the memorandum (see page 153). With regard to Oval Mapping Workshops, Eden and Ackermann (1998:383) further note that *"It is important to get off to a good start. Phillips and Phillips (1993) note that the first 10 minutes can have a fundamental effect on the group's performance throughout the remainder of the meeting."* Within ten minutes of starting the second Oval Mapping Workshop the Action Researcher realised that he should have insisted on helping the client to draft the memorandum, or even drafted it himself, in his client's name (Brown, 1999), but the importance of jointly producing the 'invitation to participate' had been overlooked by the Action Researcher due to international work commitments for his full-time employer. The consequences of this action were much more severe than could have been anticipated as it took the Action Researcher approximately one hour at the beginning of the second Oval Mapping Workshop to explain everything to the group and to gain their confidence, trust and willingness to collaborate in the Oval Mapping Workshop.

From this the Action Researcher learnt that seemingly trivial aspects of workshops, such as that described, can have a major impact on the success of a JOURNEY Making type activity (Huxham, 1990; Hickling, 1990), therefore attention to detail needs to be seen as an essential part of preparing for these activities.

Facilitating Group Productivity

Many theories and models have been developed on group effectiveness and productivity (see, for example, McGrath, 1991; Poole and DeSanctis, 1990; Gladstein, 1984; Hackman and Morris, 1975; McFadzean, Briggs, Bulcock and Berry, 1996; Pinsonneault and Kraemer, 1990). These models, however, tend to describe an infinite number of variables. Hackman and Morris (1975) suggest that variables at both the group and individual levels influence group productivity. The group level could include factors such as structure, composition, dynamics and size. Likewise, group composition could be broken down into variables such as leadership, team roles, expertise etc. and these variables could also be broken down into sub-variables, and so it goes on. Therefore, the number of variables etc. that can influence group effectiveness can be huge and can leave the group productivity problem unbounded and difficult to measure or transform. In an attempt to combat this, and thereby put a boundary around the problem, Briggs and Nunamaker (1996) have developed a model (shown in Figure 27) and a theory (which they call the Team Economics of Attention Management (TEAM)) Theory.

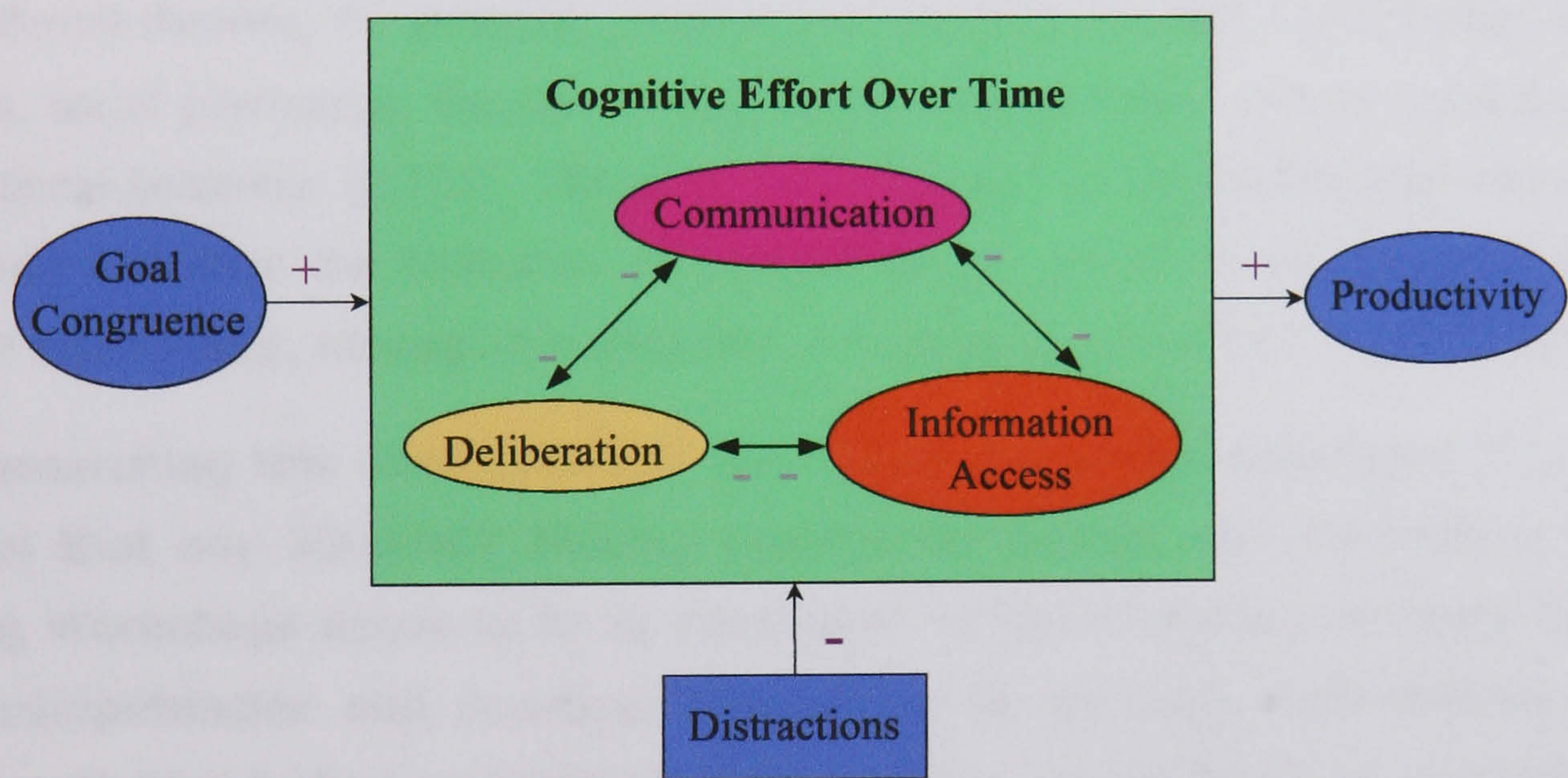


Figure 27. The Constructs of TEAM Theory Source: Briggs and Nunamaker (1996)

They suggest that at the fundamental level, the group accomplishes its goal by deliberating, accessing and communicating/exchanging information in a cooperative conversational manner. Each of these three processes demands attention. Since attention is not an unlimited resource, when participants undertake an activity, the other two will be limited. In other words, if group members are accessing information, they cannot be communicating and/or deliberating as well. Briggs and Nunamaker (1996:4) therefore suggest that *"the limits of attention become a fundamental limit of group productivity."* Thus, in order to be productive, the group must focus its attention on cooperatively achieving group goals and not be distracted by other issues.

The role of the Action Researcher during an Oval Mapping Workshop is to act as a facilitator to assist all group members to deliberate, access and communicate/exchange information (conversation) in a cooperative manner (**content management**) and help the group manage the process of the meeting, and provide, in some cases, structure in order that the group can achieve its productivity goals (**process management**) (Eden, 1990c; Ackermann, 1996; Eden and Ackermann, 1998). According to Hunter, Bailey and Taylor (1996) one of the main beliefs behind the facilitation of groups is that full cooperation between all participants is both possible and desirable - values of equality, shared decision making, equal opportunity, power sharing and personal responsibility are basic to full cooperation and full cooperation should increase the productivity of the group. A good facilitator is an important element for group productivity (VanGundy, 1992; Ackermann, 1996), indeed Offner, Kramer and Winter (1996) have found that groups supported by a trained facilitator outperformed groups that did not have a facilitator. McGoff and Ambrose (1991) state "... our experience continues to confirm that the quality of the group session is predominantly dependent upon the facilitator." Eden and Ackermann (1998) acknowledge that successful facilitation during JOURNEY Making type activities must take into account many different theories, for example, personal psychology, occupational psychology, group dynamics, social psychology, decision making (particularly strategic decision making), and organizational behaviour (p.372). However, the range or type of competencies needed to successfully undertake the facilitation of problem solving groups is not discussed in the JOURNEY Making book, although it is discussed in Ackermann (1996) with regard to SODA.

From researching this OBSERVATION the Action Researcher concluded that it is essential that any JOURNEY Making practitioner tasked with facilitating Oval Mapping Workshops needs to be in possession of the necessary multiple theory based competencies and practical experience to manage both content and process activities before undertaking this activity. An example of the types of competencies needed by 'group problem solving' facilitators can be seen in Figure 28. However, this is a generic example of possible facilitator competencies and not specific to JOURNEY Making. Further research could be undertaken to establish whether all identified competencies, or just a selection of the identified competencies, are needed to successfully utilise the JOURNEY Making method, or whether there are other yet unidentified competencies that may need to be considered.

<p>(1) Understanding Context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of problem solving theories, methodologies and techniques • Understanding of business environments • Understanding of the ‘particular problem situation’ and why it is so. • Understanding of learning processes • Understanding of group and human dynamics 	<p>(2) Technical Competences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time management. • Planning and preparation • Management and use of visual aids • Managing the physical environment • Management and use of computer based group decision support tools • The use of integrated software packages to feedback/present information and produce post-group session reports
<p>(3) Rational Competences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectivity • Judgement • Make rapid and quality decisions • Be specific 	<p>(4) Interpersonal Competences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication (verbal and non-verbal) • Active listening and hearing • Clarifying • Questioning • Summarising • Persuasiveness • Empathetic • Respectful • Elicitation of information • Observation • Presentation • Feedback
<p>(5) Task Process Competences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a structured group problem solving agenda • Guidance and support throughout the whole problem solving process • Flexible - going with the flow • Process intervention management • Action and results orientation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing expectations • Maintaining focus • Pacing • Congratulating people 	<p>(6) Human Process Competences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing trust • Conflict resolution and Mmanagement • Management of internal group relations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating ppeople as equals • Recognising and respecting differences • Addressing people’s fears • Positively confronting difficult issues
<p>(7) Personal Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to learn • Friendliness • Tact • Sensitivity • Sincerity • Intellectual agility • Genuineness 	<p>(7) Personal Characteristics (Cont)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of humour • Self awareness • Modesty • Emotional stability • Humanity • Integrity

Figure 28. Facilitator Competences

Source: Nelson and McFadzean, 1998:78

Summary

Contributions to knowledge in the ‘research’ community.

- Trust is mentioned by Eden and Ackermann (1998:475) when discussing the relationship between the intervention, the facilitator and the client: *“A close working relationship, based on mutual trust, will assist in understanding the organization, its culture and the personalities of key actors ... the facilitator must be able to develop a trusting and trusted relationship with the client.”* Trust is further mentioned on page 480 where it is stated that building trust and developing a personal relationship with the client *“is probably the most important guideline of all, as it will influence the extent and flavor of the JOURNEY making process.”* However, it appears that when discussing trust Eden and Ackermann are emphasizing more the accumulative build up of trust in the JOURNEY Making practitioner/Action Researcher from the client and/or strategy making participants rather than trust in the client from the Action Researcher. In this Collaborative Research Programme it was agreed that JP would ensure that ‘invitations’ were sent out to all Oval Mapping Workshop participants to ensure their attendance (see page 129). The Action Researcher had trusted that it would be performed satisfactorily, however, the activity failed to achieve its objective (see page 153). After considering this issue the Action Researcher concluded that although trust is an important aspect of the client/Action Researcher relationship, clients and/or third parties should not be encouraged to assist in the preparation for JOURNEY Making type activities without Action Researcher input/supervision, where it may be possible for the Action Researcher to lose trust in the client and/or third parties. Action Researchers need to ensure that they are aware of everything that is happening with regard to a JOURNEY Making type activity to be undertaken, while respecting the client’s need to feel in control of the process (Eden and Ackermann, 1998; Ackermann and Eden, 2001).

The Action Researcher believes that building a lasting relationship with the client based on mutual trust is a very important aspect of JOURNEY Making, but further research needs to be undertaken to establish, from both the client and Action Researcher viewpoint, how trust can be eroded or lost. This will help novice Action Researchers not to place themselves in situations where they are disappointed in client actions, where these actions influence the JOURNEY Making type activity in a negative way, resulting in clients losing trust in the Action Researcher and the overall JOURNEY Making process. The creation of a destructive, self-reinforcing feedback loop. Developing trust between client and Action Researcher is an important aspect with relevance within any real world research programme. However, the way the issue materialised in this Collaborative Research Programme may be seen as content specific, as other Action Researchers may not make the same 'trivial' mistake (see page 155), that this Action Researcher did.

- The role of the Action Researcher during an Oval Mapping Workshop is to act as a facilitator to manage both process and content, thereby helping the group in their overall productivity. Eden and Ackermann (1998) suggest that to successfully facilitate a group during an Oval Mapping Workshop many different theories need to be taken into account, for example, personal psychology, occupational psychology, group dynamics, social psychology, decision making (particularly strategic decision making), and organizational behaviour. Given the breadth of expertise needed to be successful as a JOURNEY Making facilitator, a certain amount of practical expertise needs to be developed by novice Action Researchers before undertaking this task in 'live' situations, because the quality and productivity of group sessions can be directly linked to the competence of the facilitator to perform the task (see page 157). This can be viewed as a generic statement with relevance to any Action Research programme where the Collaborative Research Programme step involves the application of facilitation techniques. Poor facilitation may not lead to the termination of a Collaborative Research Programme, but it will result in group productivity and the quality of the data captured being compromised.

Contributions to knowledge in the ‘practitioner’ community

- Clients may attempt to reduce the time needed for individual cognitive mapping interviews. In these circumstances the importance of scheduling and structuring the activity needs to be explained to the client as they are important aspects of the success of this activity (see page 141). Ensuring there is a balance between the length of time devoted to introducing the process, information gathering activities and the time devoted to an overrun period (to assess the application of the cognitive mapping technique and readjust it if necessary and to allow time to prepare for another interview) is essential. Planning an overrun period is just as important as any other aspect of individual cognitive mapping interviews and the time devoted to this activity should not be sacrificed by novice mappers in order to maximise information gathering time (see page 147).
- Novice mappers attempting to develop cognitive maps of a comparable size to those in published literature (see page 145) may place more pressure on themselves to perform than is necessary. To help reduce this pressure, novice mappers can consider setting two types of expectations before attempting individual cognitive mapping interviews in ‘live’ situations. The first expectation relates to a novice mapper understanding what they want as an outcome from the cognitive mapping interviews (information for a documented report or information to carry forward to a group workshop) (see page 148). The second expectation relates to a novice mapper’s personal expectations with regard to adherence to cognitive mapping guidelines, given that it may prove an overwhelming experience to adhere to all guidelines. Placing too much emphasis on the amount of information captured, number of nodes/constructs, rather than the quality of the information captured, and attempting to adhere to too many technique guidelines can contribute to the self-induced pressure experienced by novice mapper and a resulting lack of quality data captured.

CHAPTER 6

**MODELLING, IDENTIFYING, AND NEGOTIATING, GOALS,
STRATEGIES, STRATEGIC PROGRAMMES AND ACTIONS**

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to establish how sense is made of the information gathered during individual cognitive mapping sessions and Oval Mapping Workshops. **Two individual sub-steps involving the application of JOURNEY Making type activities are detailed within this chapter.**

During the first step the information gathered will be primarily analysed by the Action Researcher using Decision Explorer's analytical commands to help identify emerging strategic issues. This analysis aims to support the facilitator and group, by providing ways of representing the knowledge and wisdom of the individual and/or group in a format that helps manage, rather than reduce complexity.

In the second step the results from this action will be presented to the Strategic Planning Group who will explore it further through discussion, debate and negotiation. Their task will be to identify strategic goal(s), strategies and strategic programmes (to be implemented), along with an agreement regarding ownership of each strategic programme.

Step 5.3 – Modelling and Analysing the Composite Group Map

PLANNING (Collaborative Research Programme)

The Action Researcher planned to develop a composite group map by weaving into the existing draft composite group map all of the information created during the Oval Mapping Workshops. In a similar manner to that used during the development of individual cognitive maps, information on each oval would be turned into a construct and incorporated into the draft composite group map. The resulting composite group map would then be analysed and findings presented back to the Strategic Planning Group during a two day workshop, 8th–9th November 1999.

ACTING (Collaborative Research Programme)

On 1st November 1999 the Action Researcher was unexpectedly informed by his full-time employer that he would be assigned to an office in Brussels for three weeks commencing the 8th November, **making him unavailable for the scheduled workshop with the Strategic Planning Group.** The Action Researcher emailed and telephoned JP to inform him about not being able to attend the event (Appendix C18). During the telephone conversation the Action Researcher offered JP several alternative solutions with the intent of keeping the timescale between JOURNEY Making type activities as close as possible to that initially agreed, as timescales for this event were already longer than recommended by Eden and Ackermann (see page 127). Firstly, the workshop could take place during the current week, 2nd-7th November, when the Action Researcher would take two days personal holiday to attend. Secondly, the workshop could be held on any weekend, as the Action Researcher would be travelling back from Brussels every Friday night and travelling to Brussels every Monday morning. Finally, the workshop could be re-scheduled for any time after 29th November. JP informed the Action Researcher that there would not be enough time to rearrange Strategic Planning Group members' diaries to enable the workshop to take place between 2nd-7th November and he did not feel it would be fair to ask people to give up their free time to work at weekends. This resulted in the Action Researcher and JP agreeing to reschedule the workshop for 2nd-3rd December as these were the first dates that all Strategic Planning Group members would be available. The Action Researcher maintained weekly contact with JP during the period 9th November until 1st December (see page 128) to ensure that the relationship continued to develop between them, and to enable JP to ask questions that may arise concerning the JOURNEY Making type activities undertaken.

On 7th November the Action Researcher sent JP a **paper based copy of the composite group map**, covering multiple A4 sheets, to distribute to the Strategic Planning Group. This was to provide feedback to the Strategic Planning Group, as agreed, with regard to the information gathered and to show how it was to be represented. During the next regular communication JP asked the Action Researcher not to send any further information regarding the map as he was concerned that Strategic Planning Group members might misinterpret the information without the Action Researcher being present to provide an in-depth explanation.

Unfortunately, the Action Researcher was taken ill with a viral infection a week before the workshop, scheduled for 2nd-3rd December resulting in it again being rescheduled. JP stated that the next suitable date for all Strategic Planning Group members would be 21st-22nd December and that nothing could be arranged sooner, due to the pressure of work. During one of the weekly telephone communications between the Action Researcher and JP, 10th December, the Action Researcher was informed that CR had left the company and his position in the Strategic Planning Group would be taken by a Principal Consultant and shareholder (GS). Also, that one of the original members of the Strategic Planning Group (EP) would not be able to make the next scheduled workshop due to personal circumstances and that RH would not be able to attend the event following major surgery. On 15th December the Action Researcher again received an email from JP stating that he would like to reschedule the workshop of the 21st-22nd December until 18th-19th January 2000 as there were various sickness problems at SI Ltd. This was reluctantly agreed to by the Action Researcher.

On 5th January 2000 the Action Researcher contacted JP, via telephone, to establish that the workshop of 18th-19th January was going to proceed as planned. JP confirmed this and also explained that several members of the Strategic Planning Group had individually approached him, after reviewing the copy of the composite group map distributed to them, with concerns regarding the amount of diverse information that was being collated and utilised and wanted to discuss this with the Action Researcher prior to the scheduled workshop. The Action Researcher readily agreed to attend a meeting at SI Ltd. on 7th January to discuss this issue. Not all members of the Strategic Planning Group attended this meeting, some were still on holiday and others were away working on client projects. The Action Researcher voiced concerns to JP about holding a strategy making meeting without all Strategic Planning Group members but was assured that they had all agreed that this meeting should take place and had informed JP that they would be agreeable with any actions that resulted.

The meeting started with the Action Researcher explaining that he had originally planned to undertake a full analysis of the composite group map (one iteration of all the analysis approaches described by Eden and Ackermann, 1998:400-414) and produce relevant documentation for the Strategic Planning Group workshop on 8th-9th November 1999 but now planned to undertake this closer to the scheduled workshop on 18th-19th January, after learning the outcome from the unscheduled meeting. Next the Action Researcher provided attendees with a brief overview of the information sources used, how the map had been developed by linking similar concepts, and how it had started to become structured around emerging 'themes'. This was undertaken by drawing diagrams on whiteboards and/or flip charts. Finally, the Action Researcher presented several smaller maps produced from basic analytical commands, and when these had been discussed the full content of the composite group map was disclosed, with the Action Researcher explaining to attendees how it could be 'read'. The Action Researcher chose to present information in this way to avoid the cognitive overload that Strategic Planning Group members may have experienced, if the full composite group map had been presented first.

Following intense debate the Strategic Planning Group decided there was 'irrelevant information' within the composite group map that they felt would lead to implementation difficulties at a later date. The Strategic Planning Group decided that the composite group map should now be **amended so that it only contained information they considered relevant to the development of a 'practical' strategic plan.** At this time the Action Researcher explained that one important characteristic of JOURNEY Making was making a serious attempt to pay attention to individual wisdom and perspectives by working with subtle detail, and therefore, the complexity of a map must be retained but its potential debilitating effect countered, and that there were other ways of countering the debilitating effects than deleting information. The Action Researcher also explained the dangers of removing information from a composite group map that had been provided by other participants who had been invited to provide their perceptions of what the company should be doing, and who may be expecting to identify their particular input at a later date. This specific issue had been raised by participants of the second Oval Mapping Workshop (see page 154). One consequence of this was that it could be viewed as a **covertly political act** by the Strategic Planning Group, inviting employees to participate in strategy making work and then disregarding their contributions and even removing some of their work. This action itself could result in strategy implementation problems.

However, the Strategic Planning Group still agreed to reduce the composite group map to what was termed a 'manageable size', from approximately 400 concepts to approximately 100 concepts. Information was deleted in 'real time' from the 'master diagram' stored on the Action Researcher's laptop, but as the Action Researcher had made a backup copy, he was confident that the master diagram could be analysed at a later date, and findings between this analysis and the analysis of the amended composite group map could be compared and contrasted. Unfortunately, this did not happen as the floppy disk containing the backup copy of the master diagram was later found to be corrupted and unreadable. However, from observation it can be said that the deleted information was not from one specific information gathering activity or group of participants but from a mixture of all activities. The Strategic Planning Group were more interested in removing 'impractical strategies'; strategies that could not be implemented with the minimum of disruption, than with concerns regarding who had provided the information within the strategies. At the end of the meeting the Action Researcher agreed to tidy up and analyse the remaining composite group map (Appendix C19-24) before the meeting of 18th-19th January.

Bearing in mind the point learnt earlier by the Action Researcher about attempting to adhere to more cognitive mapping guidelines than was practical for a novice mapper (see page 148), and the fact that the composite group map was now very small, the Action Researcher decided not to apply the full array of analytical commands detailed by Eden and Ackermann (1998). The analysis would only involve the main commands. The reduced composite group map was first analysed by testing for 'ORPHANS'; concepts that are unlinked, none of which were found. Next the 'LOOP' command was used, and no loops were present. The 'SIZE' command was then applied; it was found that there were 99 concepts with 124 links, giving a link-to-concept ratio of 1.25, similar to that recommended by Eden and Ackermann (1998) for an individual cognitive map. It could be said that at only 99 concepts this composite group map was similar in size to one of the individual cognitive maps produced. Following this the structural domain of each concept was analysed. The 'DOMAIN analysis' calculates the 'total number' (DOMT command) of 'in' arrows (DOMI command) and 'out' arrows (DOMO command) which can be viewed as possible explanations and consequences for each concept – it's immediate domain (Eden and Ackermann, 1998:505). Finding the concepts with the highest number of 'in' and 'out' arrows also helped to identify the concepts that were cognitively central to the map and in general busy concepts can be found at the core of emergent themes or issues in a map.

Next, the 'centrality of concepts' was explored. The CENTRAL analysis works alongside the DOMAIN analysis in confirming, or suggesting, possible themes or strategic issues. The analysis takes account of the wider context of the strategic issue. Instead of focusing only on the first level of elaboration, the analysis expands its search to as many levels of 'reachability' as desired (the default level of reachability, *three*, was used during the Collaborative Research Programme to analyse the composite group map, as it could now be classed as being of a small size). In order to pay greater attention to concepts whose reach is small (closer to the concept being analysed), each subsequent layer is given a weighting which diminishes exponentially. The standard routing available in the software commences with a weighting of 1 for each concept directly related to the concept being evaluated (equivalent to the domain), 0.5 for those two levels out, 0.33 for those three levels out, and so on (Eden and Ackermann, 1998:405), (see Figure 29 for a comparison between domain and centrality).

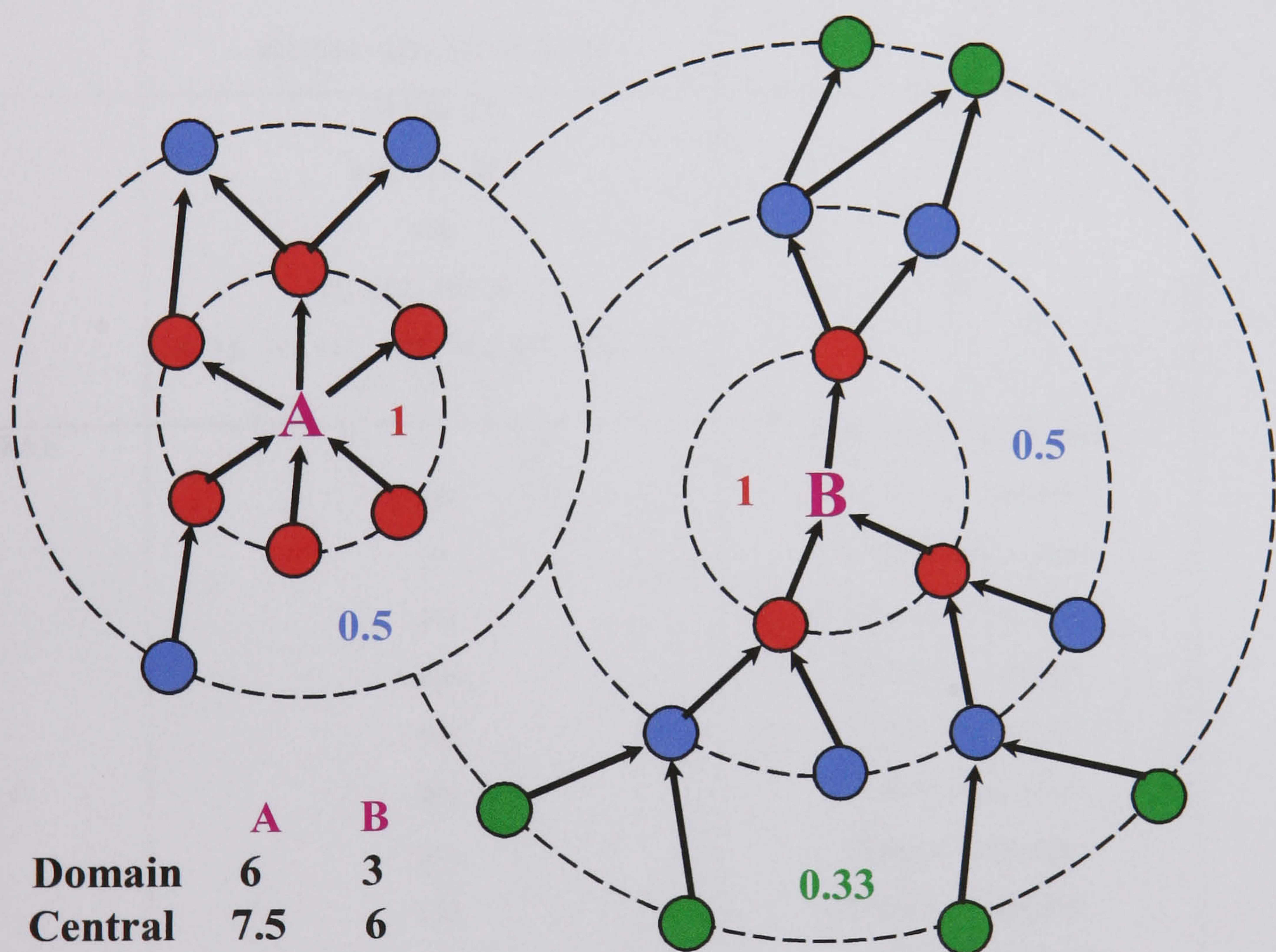


Figure 29. Comparing Centrality and Domain Scores

Source: Eden and Ackermann (1998:406)

Through this analysis it is possible to identify those concepts which are central to the map but may not have extensive elaboration immediately linked to them, and vice-versa.

By detecting similarities and differences between the results of the DOMAIN and CENTRAL analysis a form of triangulation can take place. If an issue appears in both lists, it suggests that it is both locally and globally significant, confirming its position at the core of a potential key issue. From the analyses undertaken, information was compiled and written on a flipchart sheet for use during the next Strategic Planning Group meeting, if the Action Researcher considered it necessary (see Figure 30).

ANALYSIS	CONSTRUCT NUMBER	TOTAL ARROWS
DOMO	114	6
	24	5
	504, 113 & 516	4
	7, 405, 407, 412, 521, 103, & 524	3
DOMI	318, & 4	6
	9	4
	411, 504, 112, 15, 16 & 24	3
DOMT	318 & 24	8
	504, 114 & 4	7
	516	6
	411, 412, 103 & 113	5
	9, 15, 16, 112, 302, 403, 405, 407, 513, 521, 524, & 7	4
CENTRAL		CENTRALITY SCORE
	504	18 from 34 concepts
	24	15 from 26 concepts
	501	14 from 33 concepts
	516	13 from 24 Concepts
	406	13 from 31 concepts
	405	13 from 26 concepts
	304	13 from 31 concepts
	113	13 from 27 concepts
	4	13 from 26 concepts
	114	12 from 22 concepts
	103	12 from 24 concepts
	518	11 from 23 concepts
	7	11 from 25 concepts

Figure 30. Software Analysis of the Amended Composite Group Map

The final analysis undertaken was to explore the 'clustering' of concepts. The CLUSTER analysis compares pairs of concepts along with their immediate context to determine link similarities (using the Jaccard Coefficient – Gower and Ross, 1969). This is a measure of similarity of context (and so meaning) of each construct. If the concepts have sufficient context they are placed in the same cluster; if not, they form the basis of a new cluster. Thus, an attempt is made at creating clusters where each construct within it has a relatively high degree of similarity. Using this command, concepts in each cluster are closely interlinked and the number of 'bridges' between the different clusters kept to a minimum (Eden and Ackermann, 1998). The identification of clusters also provides another useful means of identifying emergent themes, with each cluster potentially representing a theme or emergent issue. Four clusters were identified from the composite group map, and these can be seen in the following figures.

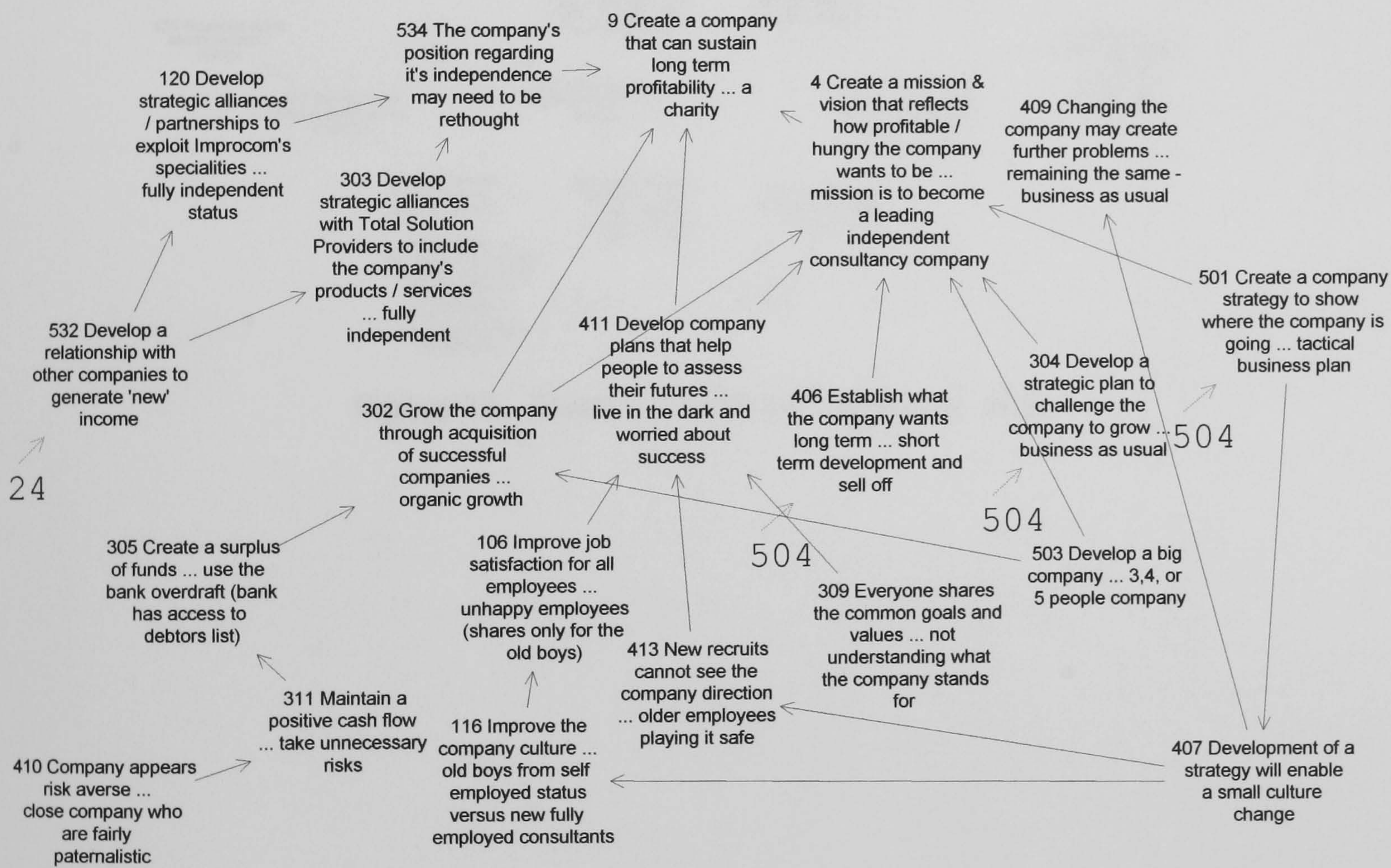


Figure 31. Cluster 1 – 10-18th January 2000

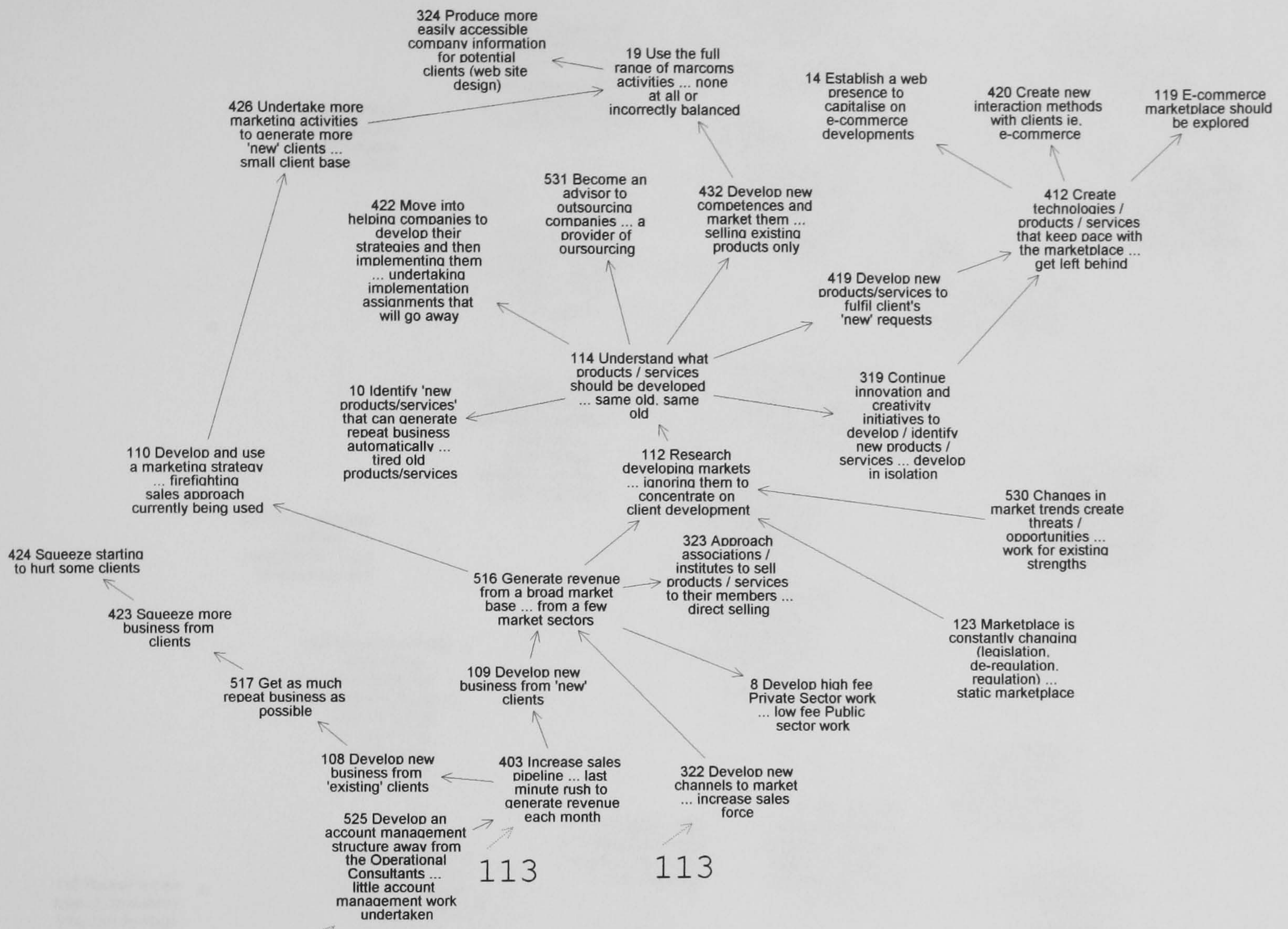


Figure 32. Cluster 2 – 10-18th January 2000

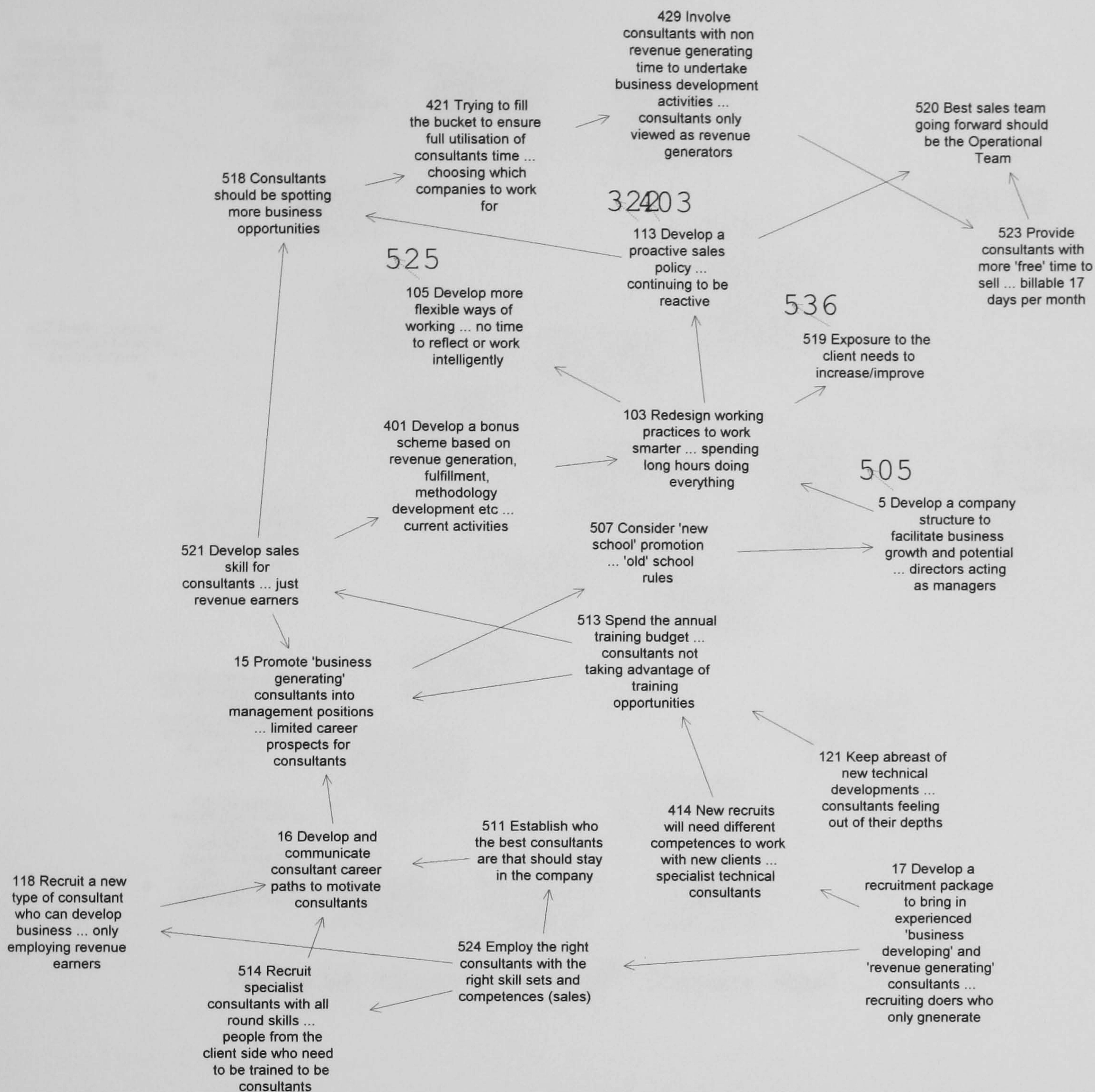


Figure 33. Cluster 3 – 10-18th January 2000

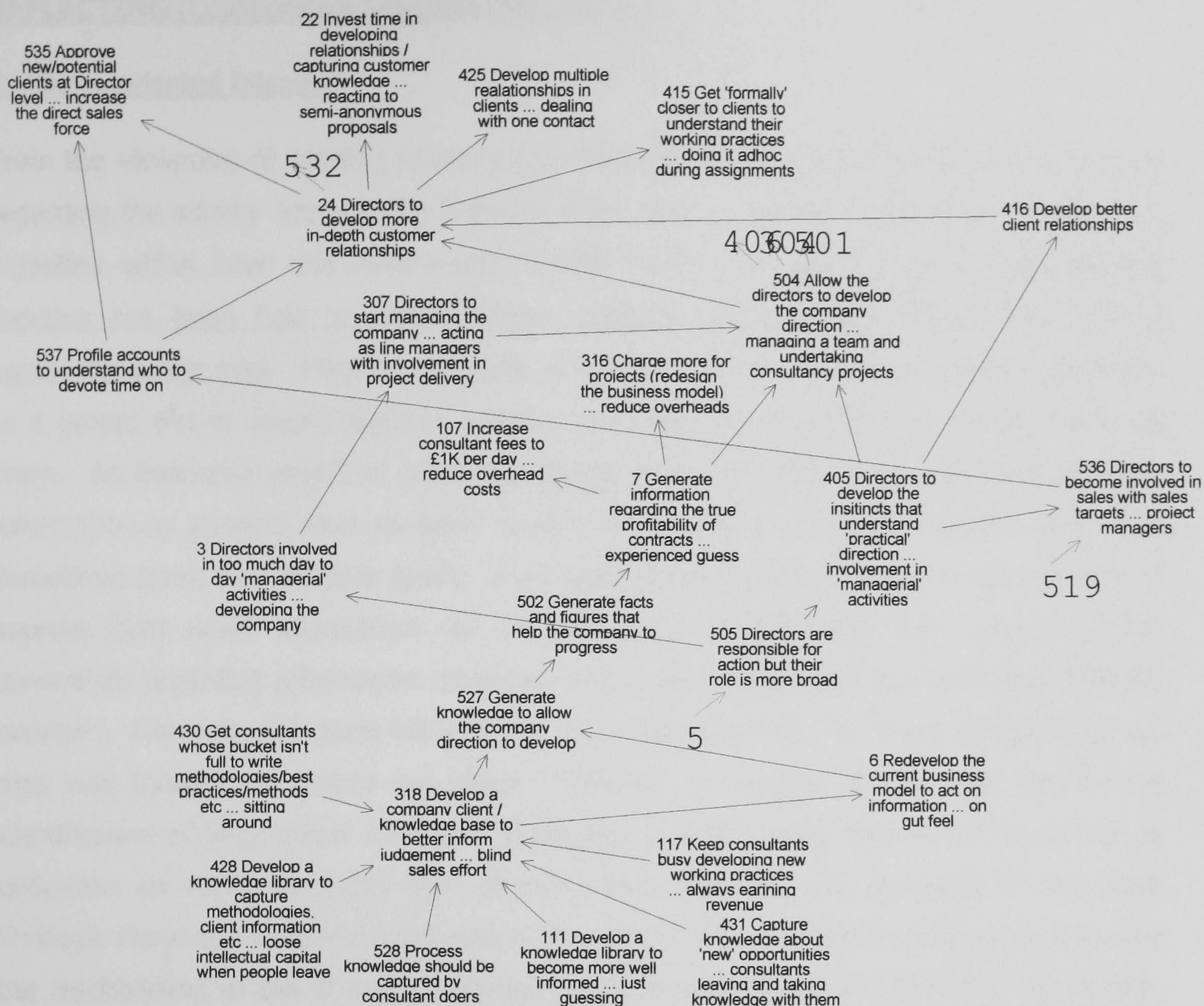


Figure 34. Cluster 4 – 10-18th January 2000

Finally, having completed a limited analysis of the composite group map the Action Researcher produced handouts detailing the outcomes from the analysis commands performed on the composite group map and cluster diagrams as detailed earlier (Appendix C25-55). These would be provided to all Strategic Planning Group members at the next workshop on 18th-19th January.

REFLECTING (Collaborative Research Programme)

An Unprecedented Dilemma

From the viewpoint of wanting to undertake a specific activity robustly, the documentation regarding the activity needs to be followed in as close a manner as possible. Reading the vignettes within Eden and Ackermann's (1998) book there are no occurrences where a meeting has been held to remove three quarters of the information content from a composite group map. Maps are sometimes thinned out as information becomes irrelevant to a group; this is usually done by 'graying' out concepts rather than physically removing them. An important aspect of JOURNEY Making is the gathering and analysis of as much information as possible from as many diverse sources as is practically feasible, given that sometimes there may be time and/or geographic constraints that impact on the number of sources from which information can be gathered. In this case there had been few constraints regarding information gathering and a considerable amount had been willingly provided. However, the client felt that this was a concern; the developing composite group map was thought to contain too much 'irrelevant' information which could lead to the identification of 'impractical' emergent strategies, and instructed the Action Researcher to undertake an action to rectify this concern (see page 165). In providing JP and other Strategic Planning Group members with a copy of the draft composite group map, following the rescheduling of the Strategic Planning Group workshop planned for 8th-9th November, the Action Researcher expected that this would provide the Strategic Planning Group with an indication of the information gathered to date and the way in which it was being represented (see page 164) and that this would help in the development of a relationship with JP. Eden and Ackermann discuss the concept of staying in regular contact with the client, before, during and after workshops as helping to build trust in the relationship. Also, documentation is often sent to clients as a means of providing feedback regarding the work that has been undertaken. However, in providing the Strategic Planning Group with a full copy of the draft composite group map rather than an overview, a road map of the model where only the goals and key issue labels/themes and their major relationships are seen, the Action Researcher had provided the Strategic Planning Group with information they were not comfortable with and which helped to create the dilemma now being faced. Not complying with the client's instructions to remove information from the draft composite group map would probably mean the end of the company's involvement in the Collaborative Research Programme., and complying with the client's instructions had no documented precedent, leaving the Action Researcher unsure as to how this would affect the rest of the Collaborative Research Programme or the overall research programme.

The Action Researcher considered two issues in solving this dilemma. Firstly, would there be enough information within the amended draft composite group map to facilitate reflection, discussion, debate and negotiation at the forthcoming Strategic Planning Group workshop. The answer to this question was that there was, suggesting that forthcoming JOURNEY Making type activities could still be undertaken, albeit with limited information. While the composite group map no longer possessed the *"deep knowledge, wisdom and aspirations relating to proposals about strategic direction"* that it originally had, it could still be used as a "transitional object in negotiating strategy by being a flexible and changing artifact belonging to all and seen by all" (Eden and Ackermann (1998:399). Secondly, this Collaborative Research Programme was about undertaking real world research and the request appeared to be of genuine concern to a client in a real world situation. In reality, all any Action Researcher can do when faced with this type of situation is talk a client through the consequences of their actions and accept the client's final decision, as JOURNEY Making was developed to be 'client oriented' throughout. After considering these issues the Action Researcher decided to comply with his client's instructions and continue with the Collaborative Research Programme, and resolved not to send full copies of draft composite group maps to clients again; another seemingly trivial aspect that had a far reaching effect on the Collaborative Research Programme (see page 155 for more discussion about trivial aspects).

At this point the Action Researcher considered Miles and Huberman's (1994:295) statement that *"... the typical research experience is full of dilemmas. You often have to face a choice between two goods, when choosing one means, to some degree, forgoing the other."* Applying JOURNEY Making in a non-typical manner, for example as part of a Collaborative Research Programme within an overall Action Research Approach, an Action Researcher will be faced with a number of dilemmas, paradoxes, unexpected events etc. (see page 95, page 121, page 155 and page 173), that may not usually occur during a typical application of JOURNEY Making. However, in this research programme these dilemmas were specifically what the Action Researcher had set out to learn about when defining the second research theme - understanding what happens when a novice practitioner attempts to use JOURNEY Making to solve an organizational strategic problem during a real world intervention (see page 42). Solving these dilemmas should also be seen as a decisive part of 'getting in and staying in' a research environment where Action Research is to be utilised (Mumford, 2001).

Using Software to Analyse a Composite Group Map

It needs to be acknowledged that there is a learning curve associated with doing everything for the first time, and working with Decision Explorer is one of those activities. A low competence level will affect the elapsed time taken to produce deliverables on time; therefore it is important that Action Researchers become competent in the use of Decision Explorer before producing information to be provided to a client. Brown (1999:33) has described the activity of creating and analysing a composite group map as *"by far the most difficult part of the intervention to work on from the book. I believe that this was because you have to get a feel for the data in order to analyse it properly and this is not possible unless you have a good understanding of what you are trying to achieve."* During this Collaborative Research Programme the Action Researcher had started to practice with Decision Explorer early enough for him to produce an analysis of the draft composite group map for the Strategic Planning Group meeting scheduled for 8th-9th November 1999, as planned, and in learning how to use the software realised the importance of 'playing around with a dynamic view of the map'. During an attempt to better understand the software commands the Action Researcher created a second copy of the original draft composite group map to try commands and see what they did before using them on the 'master copy' of the draft composite group map. This experimentation was undertaken at the same time as reading the user manual and Eden and Ackermann's (1998) book, which give brief narratives of what commands are supposed to do. Experimenting with the use of software commands is very important and its importance should not be underplayed for people who have not previously analysed composite group maps. Eden and Ackermann (1998) discuss the need to 'understand the contents of the map' and experimenting with software commands is one way of gaining a better understanding of the content of the map before starting more formal analysis.

From this experience the Action Researcher learnt that reading about and experimenting with Decision Explorer analytical commands can only partly prepare a novice Action Researcher for analysing a composite group map. Neither are substitutes for having previously acquired or been taught the necessary practical abilities needed to undertake this task. Even when an Action Researcher has developed the necessary practical abilities, 'playing around' with a dynamic view of a composite map, prior to starting formal analysis, can provide a valuable insight into understanding a map's structure and contents.

Time Management for Part-time Researchers

While JP had always been aware that the Action Researcher had a full-time employer and that he was undertaking the Collaborative Research Programme part-time, the situation where work for the employer took priority over Collaborative Research Programme work had not materialised until now. By emailing and telephoning JP to inform him that the Action Researcher would not be able to make the workshop scheduled for 8th-9th November (see page 163), the Action Researcher had inadvertently let JP know which work had the higher priority. This may in some way explain JP's reluctance to quickly re-schedule the workshop planned for 8th-9th November and subsequent strategy making workshops. The Action Researcher had not given JP's work his highest priority, and JP may have reciprocated in not giving it his. It was never established whether this was true or not but it led the Action Researcher to realise that this was a difficulty that only a part-time Action Researcher would experience. Balancing the activities of full-time employment and part-time researcher may lead to an Action Researcher having to make compromises in either or both activities, for example, taking longer than normal to complete a planned strategy making activity for the client, or taking personal holidays from their full-time employment to complete strategy making activities, resulting in work-related activities taking longer than expected.

The months between October 1999 and January 2000 proved to be the most difficult research period up to that date and the Action Researcher was beginning to feel as though this was becoming a Collaborative Research Programme undertaken under duress. Client workshops had been rescheduled due to lack of time because of full-time work commitments and illness on the part of the Action Researcher, and to illness, pressure of work and unwillingness to hold strategy making workshops other than on predetermined monthly dates on the part of the client, as well as public holidays covering Christmas and the New Year. Face-to-face contact with the client had become sporadic because of client work pressures, although telephone and/or email communications had occurred weekly. The Action Researcher had briefly considered the difficulties associated with being a full-time employee and part-time doctoral student undertaking real world research earlier (see page 94). The Action Researcher again reflected on this issue, considering whether combining part-time doctoral research using Action Research/JOURNEY Making in a real world intervention and working full-time were activities that should be undertaken simultaneously, because real world research of this type may need full-time commitment from an Action Researcher to avoid disappointing clients or creating 'priority issues' between an Action Researcher and their client.

Three particular conflicting issues were identified that contributed to this consideration. Firstly, as doctoral research was being undertaken personally by the Action Researcher it was seen by the Action Researcher's employer as secondary in nature to his employment commitments, and as such, the Action Researcher's employer believed that they had priority over the Action Researcher's available time. Secondly, the 'practical' JOURNEY Making type activities within the Collaborative Research Programme were seen by the client as assisting in SI Ltd's 'long-term strategic planning activities', that in turn were needed to achieve the company's growth aspirations, and as such were his primary consideration. It was of high importance to the client that all JOURNEY Making type activities were completed within the expected timeframe and with the minimum disruption to SI Ltd's normal pattern of business. The client's priority was the practical application of JOURNEY Making type activities, with involvement in a Collaborative Research Programme as a secondary consideration. As indicated on page 90, the client did not want an 'unprofessional researcher' - someone they described as 'not a practicing business consultant' - involved in the strategic development of their company. The feeling was that a purely academic exercise would be of little use to them as they needed a very practical strategy in which they participated during the development and that could be implemented smoothly at a future date. Thirdly, the Action Researcher's first priority (full-time) was to his employer, with his secondary priority (part-time) to undertake doctoral research.

This difference of priorities between full-time employer, Action Researcher and client can also be linked into the debate regarding research relevance (Gibbons et al., 1994; Pettigrew, 1995; Tranfield and Starkey, 1998; Starkey and Madan, 2001; Huff and Huff, 2001; Weick, 2001). To the Action Researcher's employer the research programme had no relevance other than it might affect the Action Researcher's full-time commitments to them. To the client the relevance of the strategy making work being undertaken was of high practical importance. To the Action Researcher the relevance was more theoretically important, with the realisation that this would not be achieved if the Collaborative Research Programme was not completed satisfactorily from a practical perspective, in that his objective was the attainment of an academic qualification, and to achieve this, a thesis backed by theoretical considerations/extensions needed to be produced (Starkey and Madan, 2001; Huff and Huff, 2001). Tranfield and Starkey (1998) describe what the Action Researcher was attempting as 'theory-led research', and what the client was expecting as 'practice-led research'.

Theory-led research is normally *"the choice made by researchers pursuing an academic agenda. Accumulated findings are assumed to rise ahead of practice. Any influence on practice will occur through the mechanisms of 'trickle up' over an indeterminate and sometimes protracted time-period"* (p.350). **Practice-led research** concerns *"focusing on and prioritizing a research agenda set by practitioners and policy makers... The research agenda here is subject to political priorities and processes, managerial fads and fashions, and can, as a result, be over-influenced by the desire of practitioners to obtain immediately implementable results"* (p.350). Tranfield and Starkey (1998) suggest that steering a course between the twin dangers is critical for management researchers and that incorporating sensitivity to both user and academic agendas is a key challenge in all applied areas of work. The Action Researcher established first hand the difficulties associated with steering this course, and also saw how this became even more difficult when the priorities of both Action Researcher and client were not aligned. Undertaking doctoral research as a part-time Action Researcher may have a limited impact when non-real world research is attempted but it will have a large impact on a real world research programme; even more so when the problem solving method used is normally applied within strict time guidelines and for very important reasons, amongst them the building trust and developing a meaningful personal relationship with the client.

From this reflection the Action Researcher concludes that combining part-time doctoral research using Action Research/JOURNEY Making in a real world intervention and working full-time are activities that *should not be undertaken simultaneously* when a Collaborative Research Programme is being undertaken, within an independent company. Brown (1999) successfully undertook an MBA research programme involving Action Research and JOURNEY Making at the company where he worked. An Action Researcher's full-time commitment to a research programme will enable them to avoid any work 'priority' issues that may arise and devote more time to balancing the demands associated with 'theory-led research' and 'practice-led research'; two elements intertwined within Action Research.

Step 5.4 – Identifying and Negotiating Goals and Strategies

PLANNING (Collaborative Research Programme)

For this two-day workshop the Action Researcher planned to feed back the analysis of the composite group map so that it could be further discussed, debated and agreed. Following this the Action Researcher would engage the group in identifying, strategic goal(s), strategies and strategic programmes (to be implemented), along with an agreement regarding ownership of each strategic programme.

ACTING (Collaborative Research Programme)

The workshop on 18th January 2000 was held in SI Ltd's boardroom. The Action Researcher was unsure how the group would perform with a new member present but had been informed that GS was used to working with members of the Strategic Planning Group. The workshop commenced with the Action Researcher explaining briefly what had happened from his first visit to SI Ltd. to the present time. This was mainly for the benefit of GS, but was also a reminder for everyone else. A prepared agenda was produced listing all of the expected activities for the two days, and before the workshop started the Strategic Planning Group were invited to introduce any new activities to the agenda. The only issue discussed was that Strategic Planning Group members wanted to know how the map had been analysed, rather than just seeing the results from the analysis. The Action Researcher agreed to overview the analysis when applicable. Following this the Action Researcher demonstrated the content of the composite group map in a similar manner to that undertaken during the unscheduled meeting on 7th January (see page 165). During this activity DT and GS commented that there appeared to be "**little operational information**" in the map. The group discussed this situation and agreed that there were three causes of this; the first being that only one Oval Mapping Workshop had been held where Senior Operational Consultants could attend because of their long term work commitments, and the second being that at that Oval Mapping Workshop only one Senior Operational Consultant actually participated. Several had been invited but for a variety of reasons had failed to appear (see page 153). This meant that the Oval Mapping Workshop was attended by a mixture of administration staff and Junior Operational Consultants. Thirdly, some of the information removed from the composite group map on 7th January had been operational information.

These causes were debated in great detail and an agreement was reached by the Strategic Planning Group that the composite group map represented very good 'top' and 'bottom' company information but 'middle' company information was minimally represented. The Action Researcher enquired whether individual cognitive mapping interviews or an Oval Mapping Workshop should be held with Senior Operational Consultants to redress this discrepancy, stating that the JOURNEY Making method was cyclic in nature, thereby allowing a return to information gathering. However, following an **inability to resolve this issue** and not wanting to expend more time than was necessary in debating it, the Strategic Planning Group agreed that they would make a decision regarding what action to take at the end of the two-day workshop.

To start a discussion regarding the analysis of the composite group map, the Action Researcher informed the group members of the commands that had been used during the analysis. This was undertaken using the prepared flipchart sheet of Figure 30 and a whiteboard to draw examples. Handouts of the material relevant to the command being discussed were given out (Appendix C25-C55). When all Strategic Planning Group members were content with the Action Researcher's explanations of the analysis undertaken the Action Researcher stated that there were more analytical commands that could be undertaken, for example HIESET, POTENT. It was decided to consider the application of these commands while viewing the prepared analysis results. Next, the Action Researcher introduced the Strategic Planning Group to the concept of identifying potential 'Goals', 'constructs that are good in their own right'. Eden and Ackermann (1998) suggest that all Goals should appear at the top part of the hierarchy in a map and will usually comprise a system or network of Goals (see Figure 35).

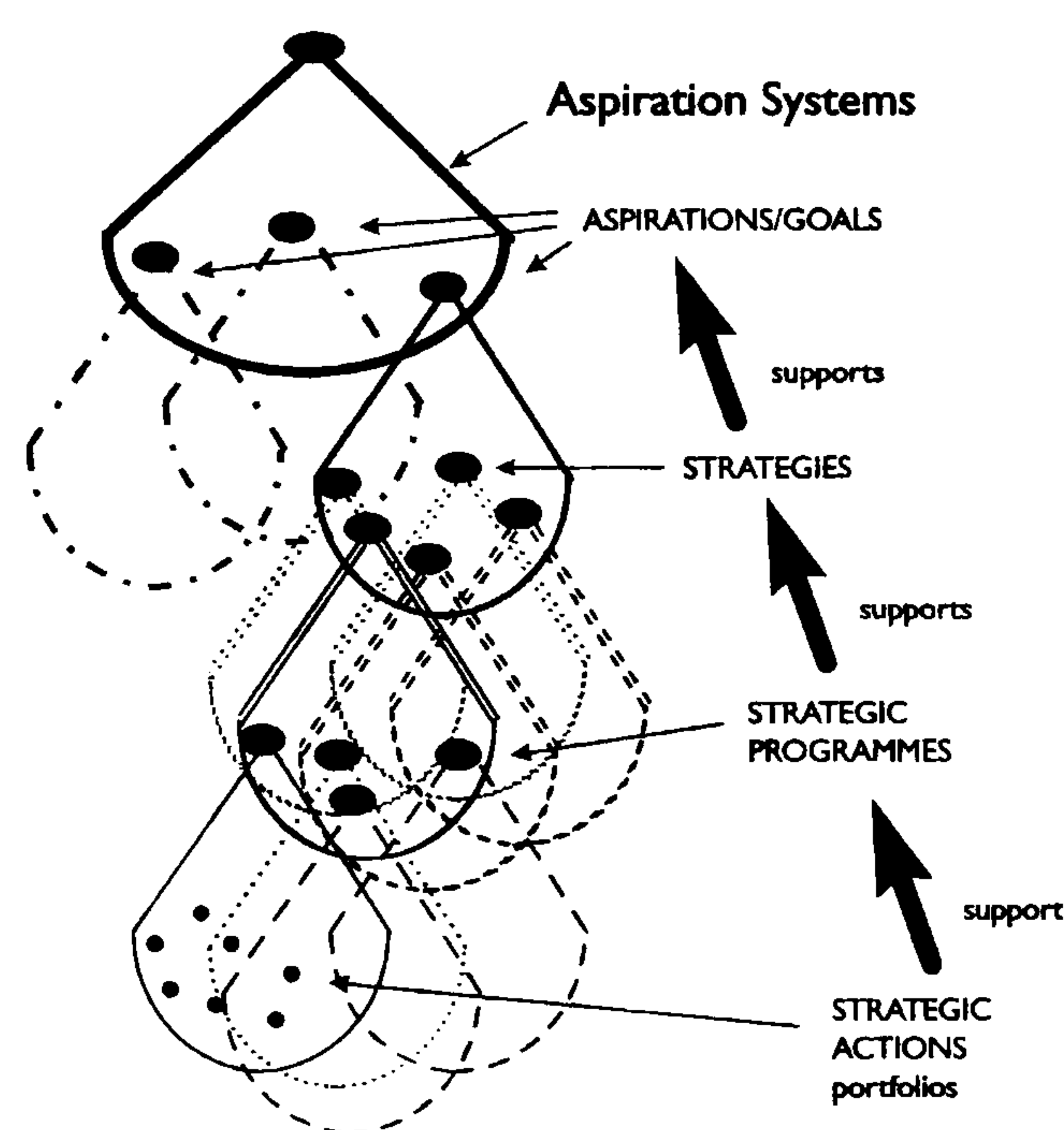


Figure 35. The Composite Group Map as a Hierarchy or 'Teardrops'

In an attempt to identify potential Goals the Strategic Planning Group started to evaluate the composite group map. The group felt that the constructs that had the most arrows going into them with few arrows going out were highly important and potential Goals, while those constructs that had the most arrows going out of them with few arrows going in were probably 'feeders' to other activities. Following discussion the group decided that constructs numbered 318, 9, 504, 24 and 4 were 'highly important' from the analyses. These constructs were input into a 'seed set' and a HIESET analysis was undertaken. This analysis explores all of the chains of argument supporting each member of the given seed set, stopping only when it encounters another member of the seed set. The analysis produces 'teardrop' shaped clusters whose contents are mutually exclusive. Each teardrop represents an integrated body of argument supporting one member of the seed set (Eden and Ackermann, 1998). The results can be seen in the following diagrams.

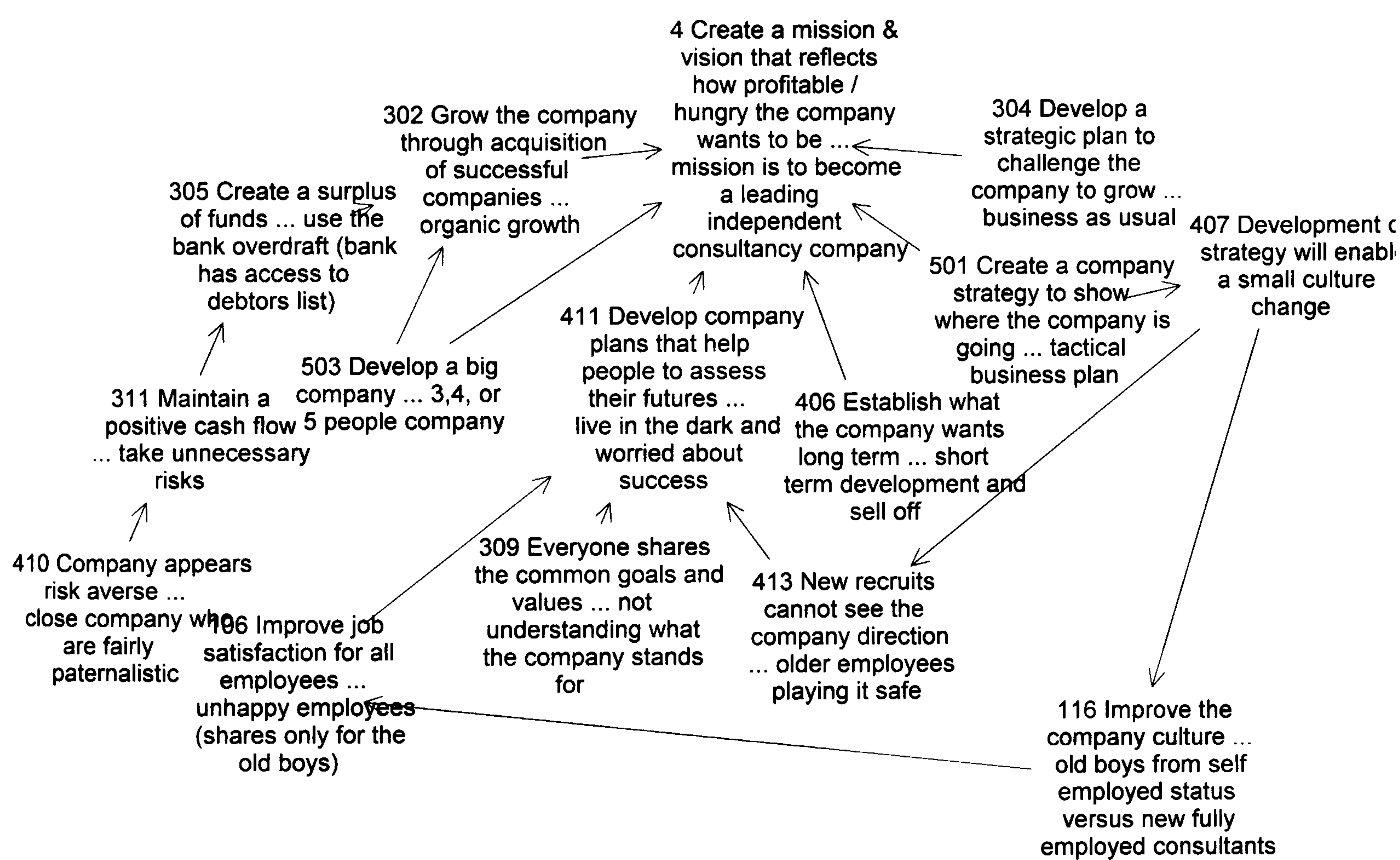


Figure 36. Hieset1 – 18th January 2000

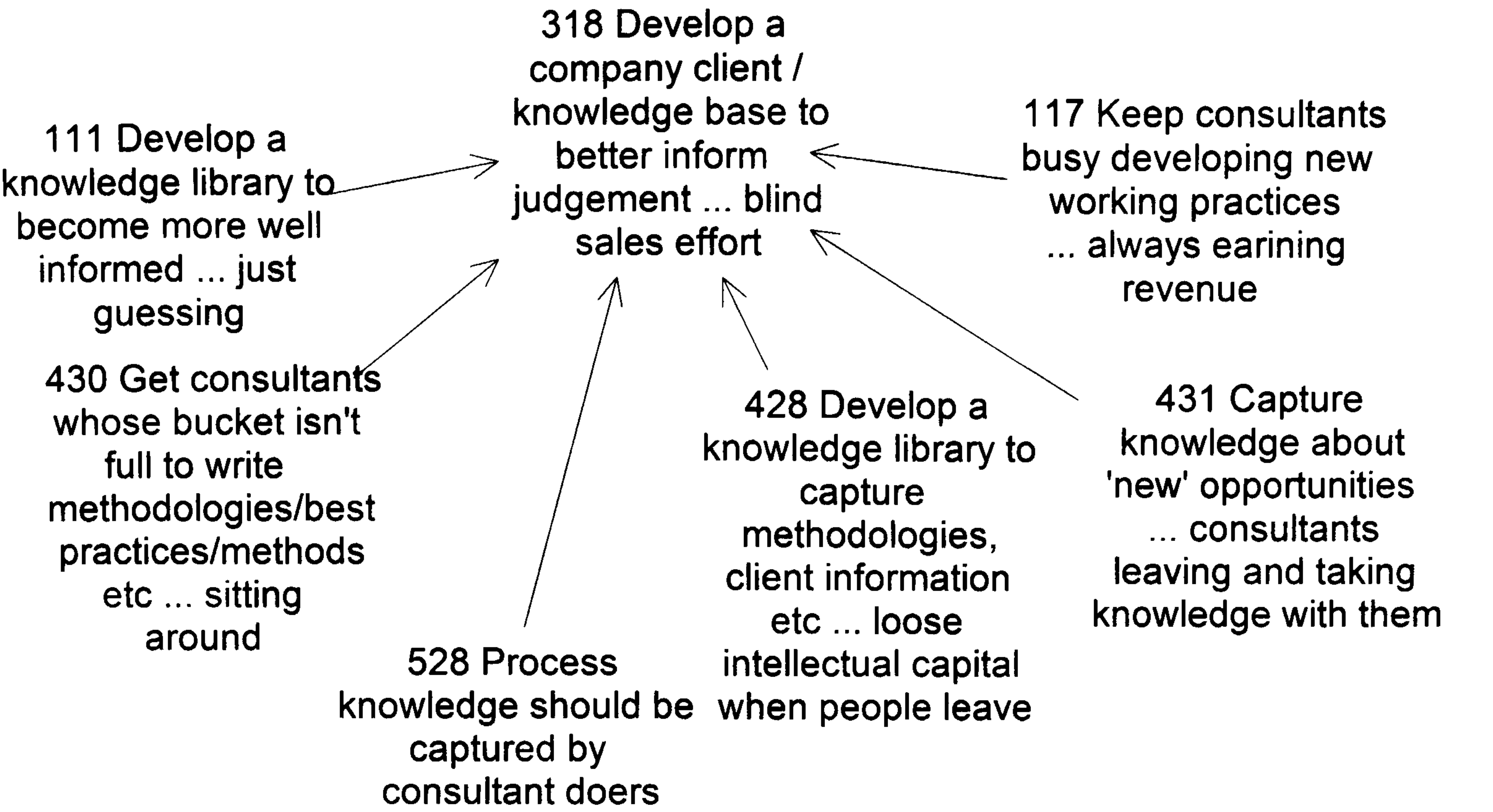


Figure 39. Hieset4 – 18th January 2000

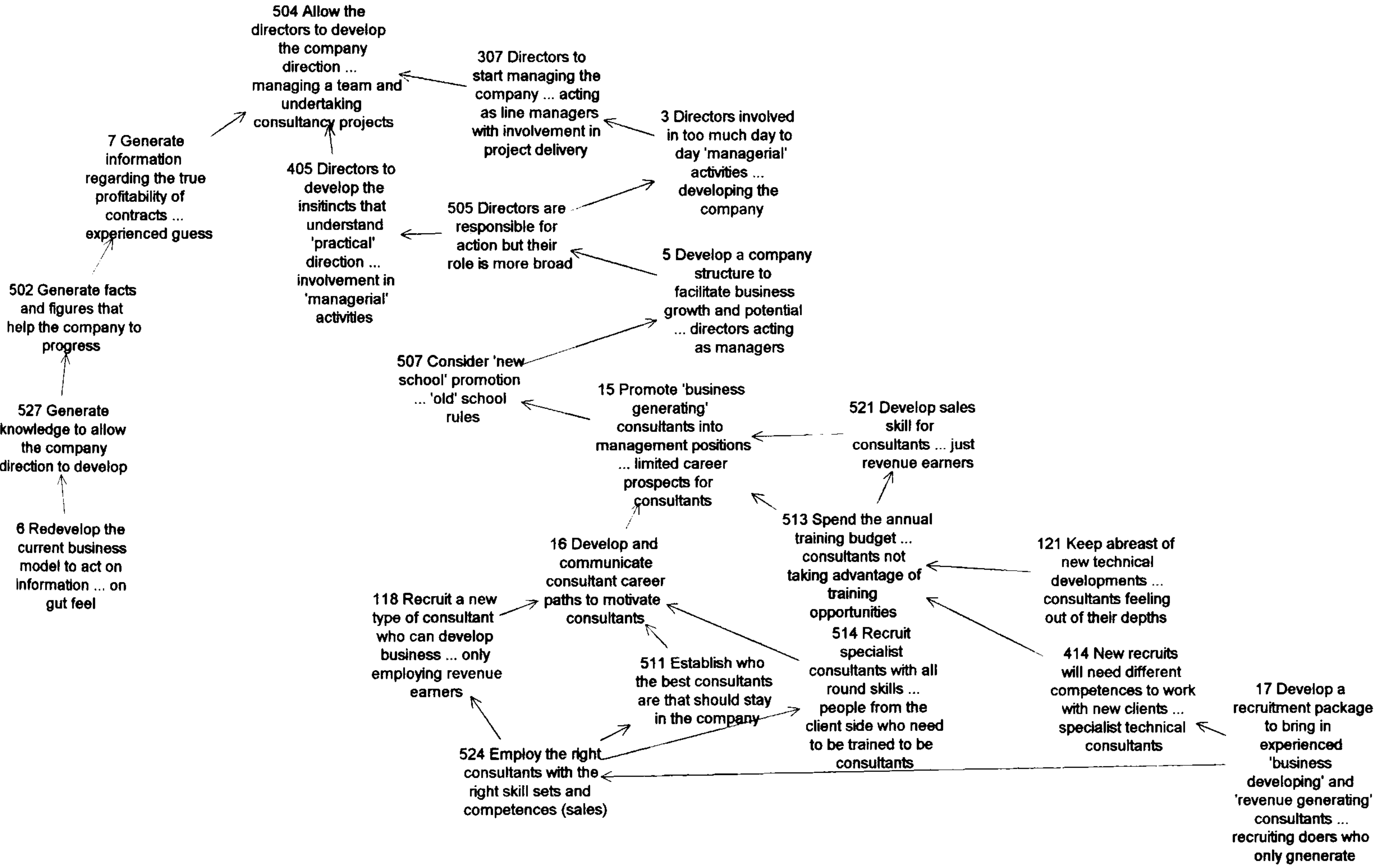


Figure 40. Hieset5 – 18th January 2000

Next the group started to evaluate the content of the cluster and hieset diagrams. The Strategic Planning Group decided that they preferred to work with the cluster diagrams rather than the hieset diagrams, although there was a similarity between both sets of diagrams, because it was perceived that the cluster diagrams contained 'more information'. Following a period of debate the Strategic Planning Group decided that amendments were needed to the cluster maps. It was agreed that Cluster 2 and Cluster 3 were correct, that Cluster 4 should be split into two separate clusters, and that constructs 3, 307, 405, 504, and 505 should be taken out of Cluster 4 and placed in Cluster1. The first day of this workshop concluded with the Action Researcher agreeing to undertake the re-clustering work and present the new cluster maps back to the Strategic Planning Group the next day.

On 19th January the Strategic Planning Group reformed, minus GS, who had been called away to work on a client project. The Action Researcher discussed the importance of continuity of involvement with JP who was not unsympathetic, but again stated that to the company 'billable' work had priority over everything else. JP further stated that at future workshops he would try as hard as possible to have at least four of the five Strategic Planning Group members present. The day started by reflecting on what had been achieved the previous day and the Action Researcher asked if there was anything that anyone wanted to change, given that they had had time to reflect on the situation. The group decided that they did not want to change anything but remembered that they still had a decision to make regarding whether to hold an Oval Mapping Workshop for Senior Operational Consultants. The first item on today's agenda was to review the five new clusters.

Observing Cluster1, the Strategic Planning Group agreed that the contents of the cluster were correct (see Figure 41 and Appendix C56-58).

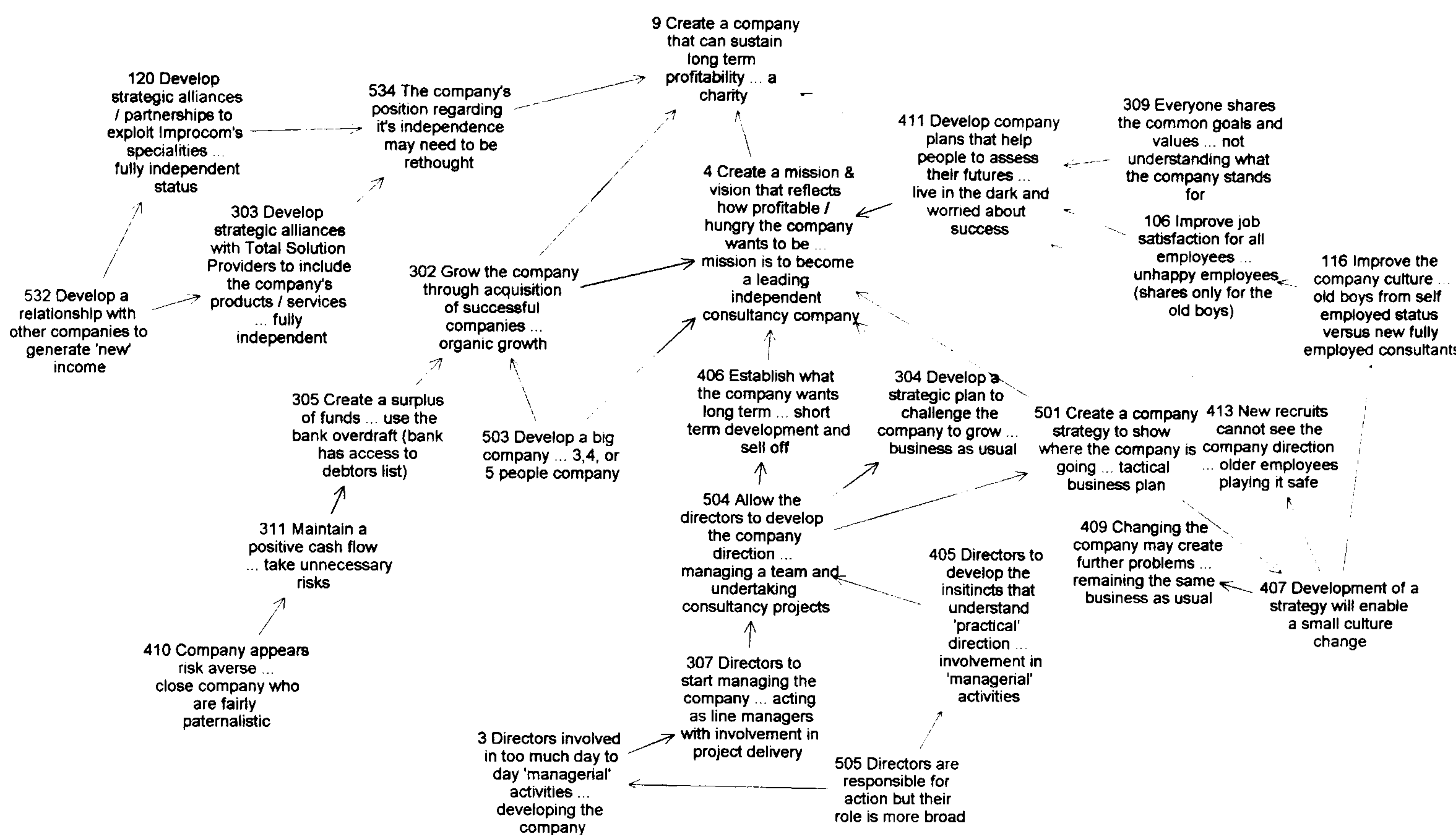


Figure 41. Cluster1 – 19th January 2000

It was then debated whether there was a Goal within the cluster. The group felt that there was only one goal within the whole composite map and that it was Construct 9 '*Create a company that can sustain long term profitability...a charity.*' All participants agreed that everything else was about identifying strategies to achieve this goal. However, they also decided that they wanted to rename the construct to read '*Directors to create a company strategy aimed at sustaining long term profitability.*' The group then agreed that Construct 501 '*Create a company strategy to show where the company is going...a tactical business plan*' should be regarded as the strategy within Cluster1 for reaching this Goal. This meant that Construct 4 '*Create a mission and vision that reflects how profitable/hungry the company wants to be...a mission is to become a leading independent consultancy company*' would become subordinate to Construct 501. The reason for this was that it was felt that developing a mission and vision was an integral part of creating a company strategy, rather than vice versa.

With regard to Cluster2, the group decided that the contents of the cluster, with regard to constructs, were as expected (see Figure 42 and Appendix C59-61).



Figure 42. Cluster2 – 19th January 2000

The group identified that none of the 'highly important constructs' that they had identified the previous day were present in this cluster. After discussing this cluster in depth, the group decided to incorporate Construct 112 '*Research developing markets...ignoring them to concentrate on client work*' with Construct 114 '*Understand what products / services should be developed...same old, same old*' and rename it '*Research developing markets to understand what products and services should be developed.*' This construct became the strategy for Cluster2 that would help to achieve the overall Goal of '*Directors to create a company strategy aimed at sustaining long term profitability.*'

Following this Cluster3 was discussed (see Figure 43 and Appendix C62-64).

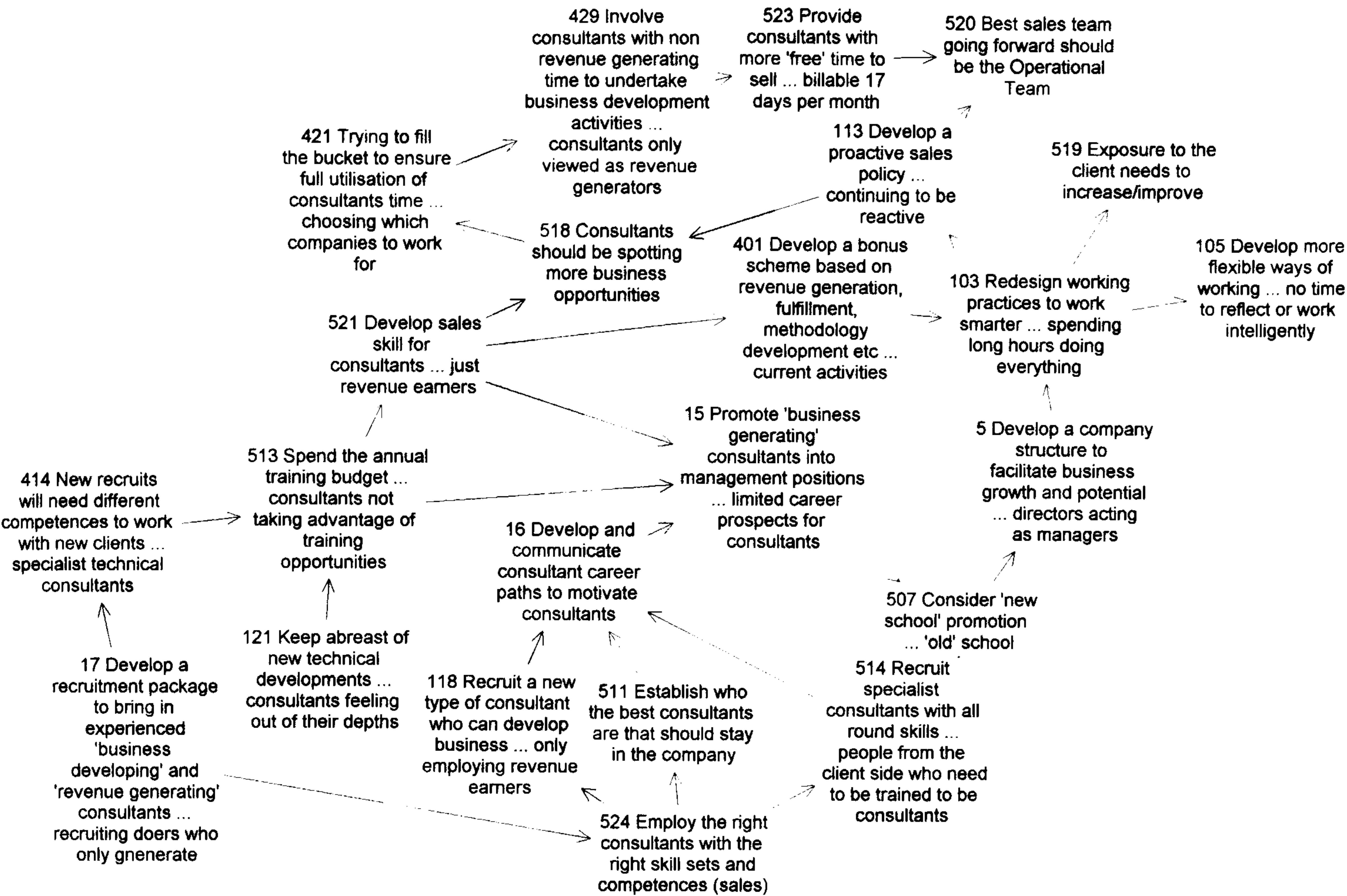


Figure 43. Cluster3 – 19th January 2000

It was agreed that the contents of the cluster, with regard to constructs, were as expected. None of the highly important constructs were present in this cluster. The group agreed that Construct 103 *'Redesign working practices to work smarter ... spending long hours doing everything'* encapsulated everything that this cluster had to say. It was agreed to create a strategy, using the title of Cluster 103, which would help to achieve the overall Goal of *'Directors to create a company strategy aimed at sustaining long term profitability'*. Also, it was decided that there should be two sub-strategies within this cluster, the first concerning consultant recruitment, and the second, consultants selling products/services, as these were the two sub-themes within this cluster.

Within Cluster4 all constructs were as expected (see Figure 44 and Appendix C65-66).

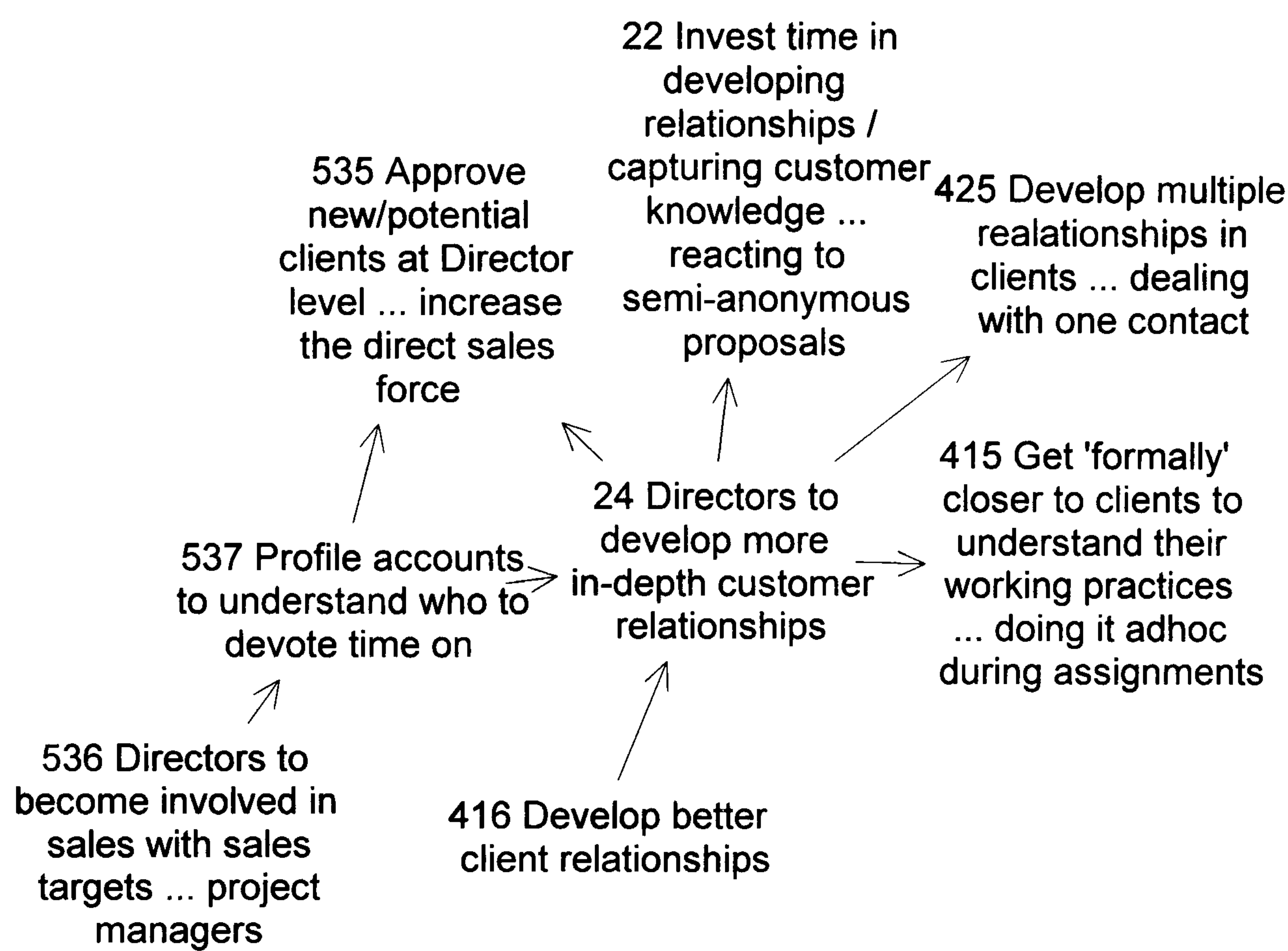


Figure 44. Cluster4 – 19th January 2000

Construct 24 '*Directors to develop more in-depth customer relationships*' was present in this cluster, and it was one of the highly important constructs identified the previous day. It was agreed that a strategy should to be developed using the title of this construct that would help to achieve the overall Goal of '*Directors to create a company strategy aimed at sustaining long term profitability.*'

For Cluster5 all constructs were as expected (see Figure 45 and Appendix C67-68).

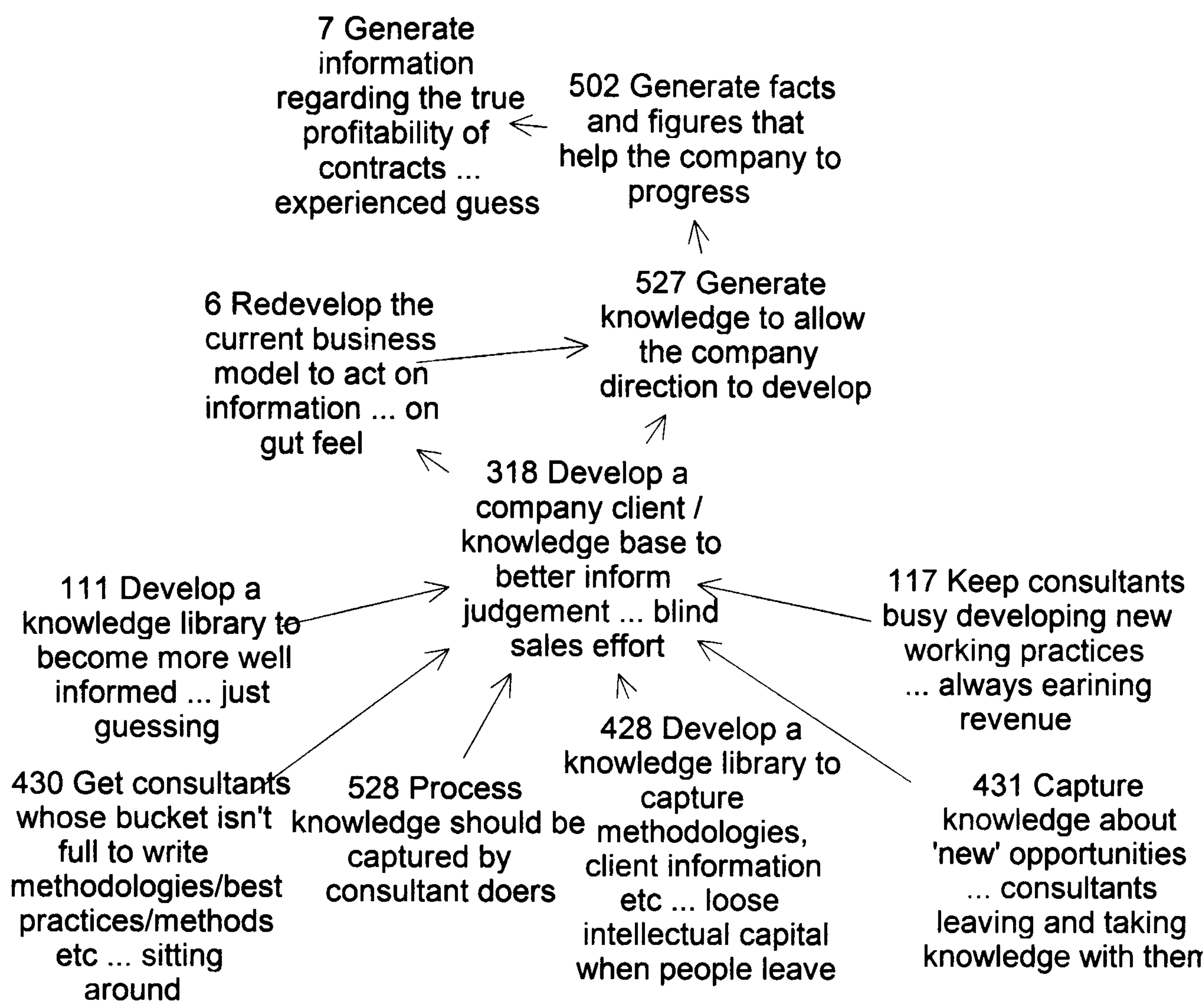


Figure 45. Cluster5 – 19th January 2000

One of the highly important constructs was present in this cluster. Construct 318 '*Develop a company/client knowledge base to better inform judgment*' was seen as the major theme of this cluster. Following debate and discussion it was then decided that the major theme of this cluster was also about 'Using knowledge intelligently', therefore it was decided to rename Construct 318 to '*Use knowledge intelligently: develop a company/client knowledge base to better inform judgment*' and to use this as the cluster strategy. This strategy would help to achieve the overall Goal of '*Directors to create a company strategy aimed at sustaining long term profitability*'. At the end of this intense workshop the Action Researcher again reviewed the information for the Strategic Planning Group. The group agreed that everything was as they had stated.

The Action Researcher then asked the group whom they felt should '**own**' the **individual strategies**. After a brief discussion it was decided that the Strategic Planning Group would collectively own the Goal "*Directors to create a company strategy aimed at sustaining long term profitability*" and that only members of the Strategic Planning Group would own individual strategies. However, all strategy owners would seek support from company employees for the ownership of strategic programmes. It was decided that owners for the individual strategies were to be:

1. **JP** – '*Create a company strategy to show where the company is going...a tactical business plan*'
2. **EP** – '*Research developing markets to understand what products and services should be developed*'
3. **DT** – '*Redesign working practices to work smarter...spending long hours doing everything*'
4. **JP** – '*Directors to develop more in-depth customer relationships*'
5. **GS** – '*Use knowledge intelligently: develop a company/client knowledge base to better inform*'

Before the workshop ended the question of whether individual cognitive mapping interviews or an Oval Mapping Workshop should be undertaken for Senior Operational Consultants was again raised by the Action Researcher. The group was still split on this subject, with several people directly involved in 'operational matters' for the idea, while others were against it. As it appeared, after intense debate, that **no decision was going to be made regarding this issue**, JP informed the Action Researcher that the group would make this decision at a later date and inform the Action Researcher of the outcome.

At the close of the workshop the Strategic Planning Group asked the Action Researcher to amend the '**strategy map**', as it had now become known, and cluster diagrams to reflect the changes they had agreed. These changes were to be ready for the next workshop, between 3rd–4th February 2000, when the group would become involved in negotiating, agreeing and project planning strategies.

Planning Contingencies During Information Gathering Activities

Hunter, Bailey and Taylor (1996) suggest that a purposeful group should not be thought of as just a collection of individuals, because a group is an entity in itself. A group can have its own physical form, its own personality, its own potential and its own limitations. A group facilitator therefore needs to be aware of each group member's need for autonomy, of the collective need for cooperation, of the group as a collective with a particular culture and personality, and that the relationships between group members can often be complex and form a web of interactions, each strand with its own unique character (see Figure 46).

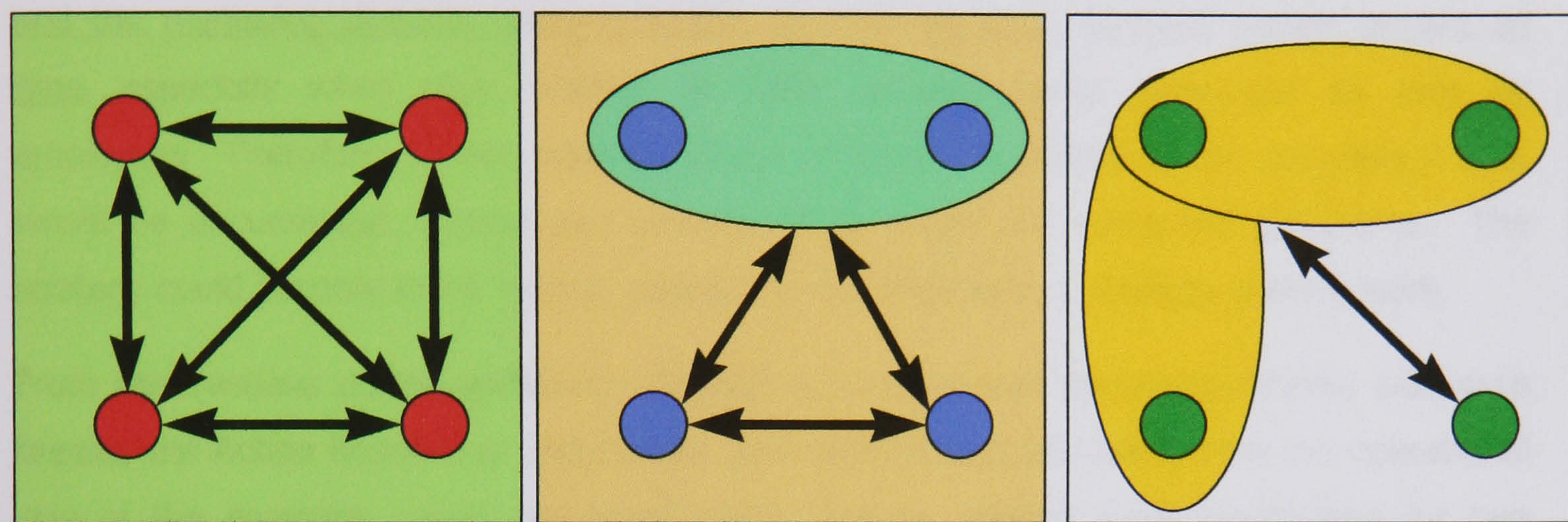


Figure 46. A Web of Interaction

Source: Hunter, Bailey, and Taylor, (1996), *The Facilitation of Groups*, Gower, pp.32

The complex relationships between Strategic Planning Group members and the resulting web of interaction was evidenced during the interactions between DT, GS and JP with regard to whether or not strategy making proceedings should be paused while more information was gathered from Senior Operational Consultants. While DT and GS wanted proceedings to pause, JP wanted to push ahead without the information. This debate twice resulted in a stalemate between Strategic Planning Group members (see page 180 and page 190). After the occurrence of these stalemates the Action Researcher attempted to get a better understand of the situation by discussing the reasons for them with individual Strategic Planning Group members and thereby establishing why the stalemates had arisen, and what could be done to avoid this happening when undertaking future JOURNEY Making type activities.

From discussions with JP, in the feedback sessions at the end of each day of the workshop, and observations during the workshop, the Action Researcher learnt that JP, as client and sponsor of the Collaborative Research Programme, perceived that he and the Action Researcher were responsible for the successful conclusion of the Collaborative Research Programme and the subsequent delivery of the company strategy. As most people in the company knew about the work being undertaken and were expecting results to be made public during the company wide communications meeting in April, JP believed that the strategy making activities must be completed by then. JP was also concerned about the 'message' that would be received by employees if it appeared that the group responsible for the future development of a consultancy company, that included several functional directors and the managing director, were incapable of completing a 'relatively simple' project on time, especially when they insisted on client projects being completed on time by employees. Therefore, JP was adamant that a strategy, regardless of how complete it was, would be documented, owned and communicated within the expressed timeframe. The strategy could become more 'robust' during the next iterations of strategy making work.

From observations during workshop discussions and informal discussions during workshop breaks, the Action Researcher established that both DT and GS, being from the operational side of the company, were concerned about strategy making work progressing for two reasons. Firstly, they believed that buy-in to a strategy would be difficult to obtain from Senior Operational Consultants as most of them had not been involved in the Oval Mapping Workshops, and only a few Junior Operational Consultants had been involved. However, DT and GS did concede that as the last company strategy had been developed without any 'employee' involvement of any kind this might or might not be a concern. However, one of the reasons why consultants left SI Ltd, established from exit interviews, was that they could not see any sense of direction within the company and were therefore concerned about their own long-term employability within SI Ltd. The second reason why DT and GS believed that more operational information should be gained was that practical strategies were about to be developed based on a very limited view of the problematic situation. They believed that if a company strategy was going to be developed then it should be something that had been robustly developed rather than one rushed to meet a time deadline. There was no reason why a communication could not be distributed to employees stating that the strategy making work would take longer than planned so that more people could become involved in the project.

Discussion with EP resulted in the Action Researcher realising that he had no distinct preference about what to do; he only wanted to see something developed that the company could follow, rather than remain in fire fighting mode. Whether or not strategy making activities were paused to gather more information did not seem to concern EP as long as something actionable was forthcoming at the end of it all, given the amount of time and effort that had been devoted to JOURNEY Making type activities.

From this investigation the Action Researcher learnt that a contingency plan should have been employed during 'Step 4 Agree Organizational Framework for Research' which would have been to add 'spare' information gathering dates. If, for example, an additional individual cognitive mapping interview or Oval Mapping Workshop was needed, it could easily take place, and if not, these contingency dates could easily be cancelled. Building in contingencies is essential when undertaking JOURNEY Making type activities, due to the unpredictable nature of real world interventions (see page 174) regarding dilemmas, paradoxes and unexpected events. The Action Researcher also learnt that more care could have been taken at the beginning of the Collaborative Research Programme to identify groups and/or individuals who needed to be involved in contributing information, although the question of who to involve had been asked by the Action Researcher (see page 118), and ensuring that these groups and/or individuals were involved at the appropriate time, rather than relying on those whom the client believed should be involved in information gathering activities (see page 127).

Summary

Contributions to knowledge in the 'research' community

- On page 48 Eden and Huxham's (1996:85) contention "*that Action Research is likely to be a problematic research methodology for doctoral students*" was discussed. Eden and Huxham state that the uncertainty and lack of control will create anxiety for anyone other than confident and experienced researchers, and doing action in Action Research demands experience and understanding of methods for consultancy and intervention. Another reason for suggesting that Action Research is likely to be problematic for doctoral students has been identified in this real world research programme; however, this may only relevant to part-time doctoral students. During this Collaborative Research Programme the Action Researcher identified three individual parties (the Action Researcher, the client and the Action Researcher's full-time employer) who could be said to be influential in the successful completion of the doctoral research programme. Two of these three parties had conflicting priorities with regard to 'work' they wanted the Action Researcher to undertake, and the time that the Action Researcher could devote to this work. Balancing the activities of full-time employment and part-time research may lead to a doctoral student having to make compromises in either or both activities, for example, taking longer than normal to complete a planned research task for a client, or taking personal holidays to complete planned research tasks, resulting in work-related tasks taking longer than expected to complete (see page 163). These compromises should not result in a reduced quality of work for either activity because if this was found to be happening than a doctoral student may be forced to make a decision about which single activity to pursue full-time to avoid these priority issues. Getting the balance between full-time employment and part-time research wrong could have serious consequences for a doctoral student undertaking a 'real world' research programme. It could end it.

- Care needs to be taken when providing clients with feedback during Collaborative Research Programmes. Providing too much information may lead to a client instructing an Action Researcher to undertake an unprecedented activity that he/she may not agree with, or which may not have any precedent in the problem solving method being used (see page 165 and page 173). In this type of situation all an Action Researcher can do is talk a client through the consequences of their actions and accept the client's final decision and continue with the Collaborative Research Programme, or not accept the client's decision and risk them withdrawing from the Collaborative Research Programme (see page 174). In this research programme this dilemma was caused by a situation specific to this research programme, but one which could easily be repeated by other novice JOURNEY Making practitioners. It was also a situation that could bring a premature end to the Collaborative Research Programme and/or overall research programme.

Contributions to knowledge in the 'practitioner' community

- As all individual JOURNEY Making projects can be described as unique (Eden and Simpson, 1990), Eden and Ackermann (1998) suggest that JOURNEY Making activities be undertaken using a 'contingent' approach dependent upon what a client's needs are (see page 131). The Action Researcher now fully agrees with the concept of building in 'contingency' during JOURNEY Making, especially during information gathering activities. Additional information gathering activities/dates can easily be added into a Collaborative Research Programme (see page 193), or can easily be abandoned if not required. This will ensure that information is gathered from all relevant individuals/groups, thereby reducing the chance that during a later stage in the Collaborative Research Programme it has to be paused to gather specialist/crucial information which was overlooked earlier.
- When amending composite group maps in 'real time', ensure that more than one backup copy is made of the original master map, because if one becomes corrupted the other may still be usable. A sensible and practical suggestion but one with a very limited impact on this research programme.

CHAPTER 7

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROGRAMME CLOSURE

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to cover the final two Collaborative Research Programme sub-steps involving JOURNEY Making type activities, and thereby complete ‘Step 5 – Collaborative Research’ of the Action Research Approach. The first sub-step details what happened during the development of the company’s ‘strategic intent’, and the second, how the Action Researcher affected a somewhat protracted closure to his work with SI Ltd.

Having identified and negotiated potential goals and strategies, a group needs to explore, discuss and debate these further until they finally agree a ‘Goal(s) System’. Once this ‘strategic intent’ has been developed activities can then be moved closer to implementation by the production of project plans detailing the timeline, cost and resources for all strategic programmes and strategic actions. *“Agreement of the Goals System is an appropriate place to start the whole process of closure. This is because it is pivotal to all other analyses and agreements”* (Eden and Ackermann, 1998:425). However, intervention closure itself cannot always be predicted, and therefore, it can be difficult to plan for.

Step 5.5 - Negotiating, Agreeing & Project Planning Goals & Strategies

PLANNING (Collaborative Research Programme)

Four activities were planned for this two-day workshop. The first was to establish that a decision had been made concerning whether or not strategy making activities should be paused to gather information from Senior Operational Consultants (see page 180 and page 190). It had been agreed that the Strategic Planning Group would make a decision about this issue after the previous Collaborative Research Programme workshop. During their regular communications the Action Researcher had reminded JP of this issue and was assured that it would be resolved for the forthcoming event. The second activity was to review the information generated during the last workshop and discuss, debate and finally agree each strategy. The third was to decide how to produce a project plan that linked all strategies together, while identifying the time it would take and the resources that would be needed to implement the strategies. The fourth was to develop a mission statement for SI Ltd. In preparation for the forthcoming workshop the Action Researcher produced handouts for Strategic Planning Group members, detailing changes to the 'strategy map' and cluster diagrams. The Action Researcher also developed an agenda containing the four planned activities mentioned.

ACTING (Collaborative Research Programme)

Between 19th January and the 4th February 2000, the Action Researcher communicated with JP on a weekly basis. On 24th January the Action Researcher received an email from JP informing him that two members of the Strategic Planning Group could not attend the scheduled workshop and asking if it could be condensed into one day, 4th February, when the full Strategic Planning Group would be present (Appendix C69). The Action Researcher telephoned JP and informed him that trying to condense a two-day workshop into one day could result in people feeling pressured to perform, decisions being made without being fully debated and rushed actions being authorized. However, JP stated that it may be a further month until all Strategic Planning Group members could again reassemble to undertake strategy making activities, and the deadline for the completion of the Collaborative Research Programme was approaching. The Action Researcher, mindful of what happened the last time a workshop had been rescheduled and the subsequent extended delay that resulted (see page 163 and page 176), reluctantly agreed to the one-day event.

Starting the workshop, the Action Researcher produced the prepared agenda and explained what his expectations were for this event. Strategic Planning Group expectations were also noted. The Action Researcher then enquired whether an agreement had been reached regarding whether strategy making activities should be paused to gather more information from Senior Operational Consultants. At that moment JP announced that due to the time pressures of completing the Collaborative Research Programme for the company's communications meeting in April (see page 118), it would not be possible to gather more information from Senior Operational Consultants as it would mean re-evaluating most of the work that had been done to date. This statement produced **a brief, heated, conflicting and intense debate** between DT, GS and JP that at times looked as though it would result in people leaving the workshop. During this period of conflict several potential solutions to this difficulty were quickly identified, discussed, debated and ultimately dismissed for a variety of reasons. It became apparent to the Action Researcher that this issue had not been further discussed and JP had made a **unilateral decision** regarding this action from his position of company Managing Director.

JP then asked if it would be possible to spend most of the time developing the mission statement and suggested that once a brief overview of the work so far had taken place, this agenda item could be undertaken. He explained that once a mission statement had been developed the workshop could again return to discussing and agreeing the strategy map and establishing how to produce a project plan for strategy implementation. The Action Researcher reminded the group that a mission statement should be a statement of the aims and values of a company and that it was sometimes called a statement of '**strategic intent**'. Therefore, before developing a mission statement SI Ltd. needed to decide what it intended to do, and this was why it was important to agree the company's goal(s) and strategies before attempting to develop a mission statement. GS, who had not attended the last day of the previous workshop because of client project work (see page 184), agreed with this comment and wanted to be informed of any decisions made during her absence. The Strategic Planning Group agreed that this should be the first workshop activity undertaken. The Action Researcher produced a prepared handout (Appendix C70-74), detailing the changes that had been made to the strategy map and the cluster maps and reviewed the goal and five supporting strategies with the group (Figure 47 and Appendix C75).

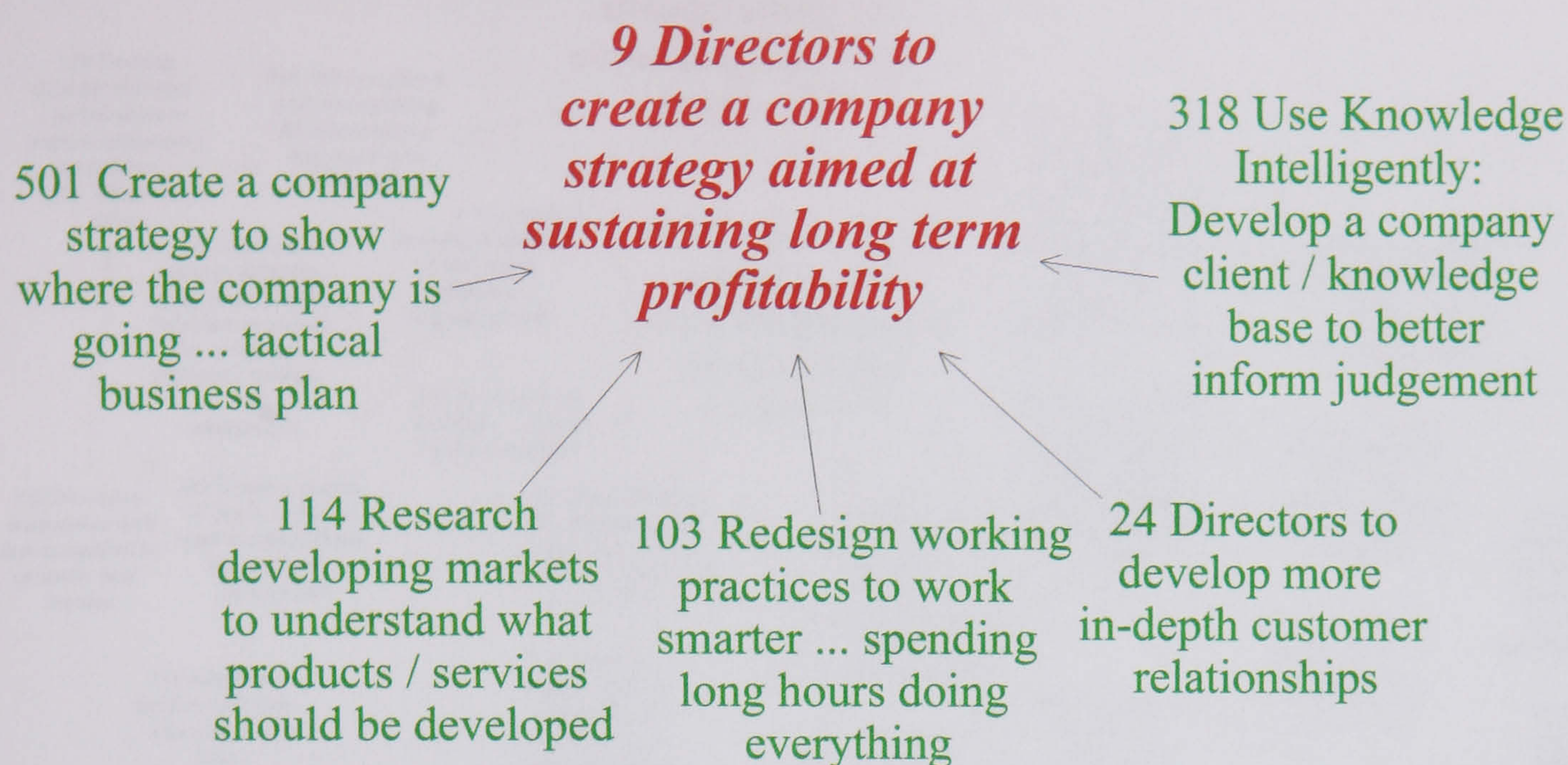


Figure 47. Single Goal with Supporting Strategies – 4th February 2000

GS then stated that she would like to discuss the overall goal and each individual strategy in depth as she wanted to fully understand the company's strategic intent before trying to identify strategic programmes and strategic actions or developing a mission statement. DT also asked that this be done as he was somewhat *"uncomfortable with moving close to action and setting a strategy based on information gathered by an 'unknown' quantity of people."* A debate ensued regarding whether what had been developed so far was in fact an actual strategy for implementation or the strategic intent of the company. The conclusion was that the information developed represented the strategic intent of the company but as this information progressed into individual strategic plans that moved ever closer to becoming implemented, it would transform into the company's overall strategy. The Action Researcher stated that the last stage for determining a company's basic strategic intent was agreeing and prioritizing a portfolio of strategies to be implemented, and this is what this workshop was attempting to do.

Next, the Strategic Planning Group's conversation returned to the issue of whether developing a mission statement should be the first activity undertaken. EP identified that this activity was covered by Construct 4 *'Create a mission and vision that reflects how profitable/hungry the company wants to be...mission is to become a leading independent consultancy company'* and that Construct 4 was a part of the strategy *'Create a company strategy to show where the company is going...tactical business plan'* owned by JP (see Figure 48).

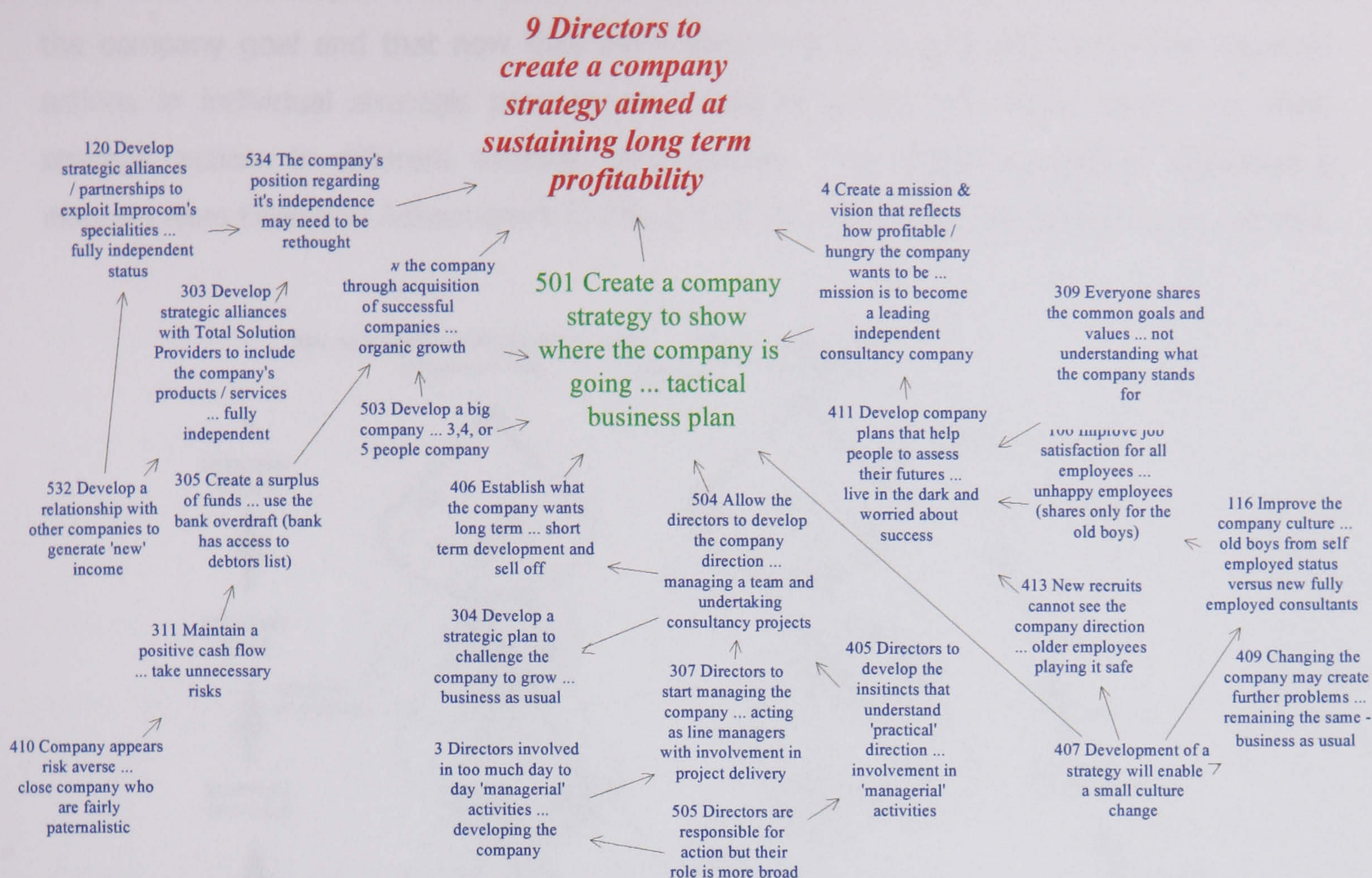


Figure 48. Cluster1 – 4th February 2000

A discussion regarding whether or not JP should undertake this activity alone ensued. This resulted in JP stating that he did not want to be seen as have an unfair advantage over other Strategic Planning Group members regarding work to be undertaken, and because this workshop was being condensed into one day instead of the two originally planned, he would complete this activity outside of the workshop and before the next strategy making workshop. He suggested that input would be solicited from all Strategic Planning Group members during the development of a draft mission statement that would be presented to Strategic Planning Group members at the next scheduled workshop for discussion and/or amendment. Strategic Planning Group members agreed to empower JP to undertake this action.

The group then decided to concentrate on discussing, debating and agreeing each strategy in depth. The first strategy '*Create a company strategy to show where the company is going...tactical business plan*' was discussed. It was agreed that this strategy contained a number of discrete strategic programmes e.g., company size; developing, understanding and agreeing what the directors' roles were; and the company's position regarding its independent status and company ethos, ethics and values. After debating this strategy several members of the Strategic Planning Group stated that they were now becoming aware of how strategic actions, strategic programmes and strategies were interlinked.

They stated that they had understood how all the strategies had been connected to achieve the company goal and that now they were beginning to understand how many strategic actions in individual strategic programmes could be connected and/or reliant on other strategic actions in different strategic programmes. The Action Researcher displayed a diagram from Eden and Ackermann’s (1998, p.439) book to clarify this point (see Figure 49).

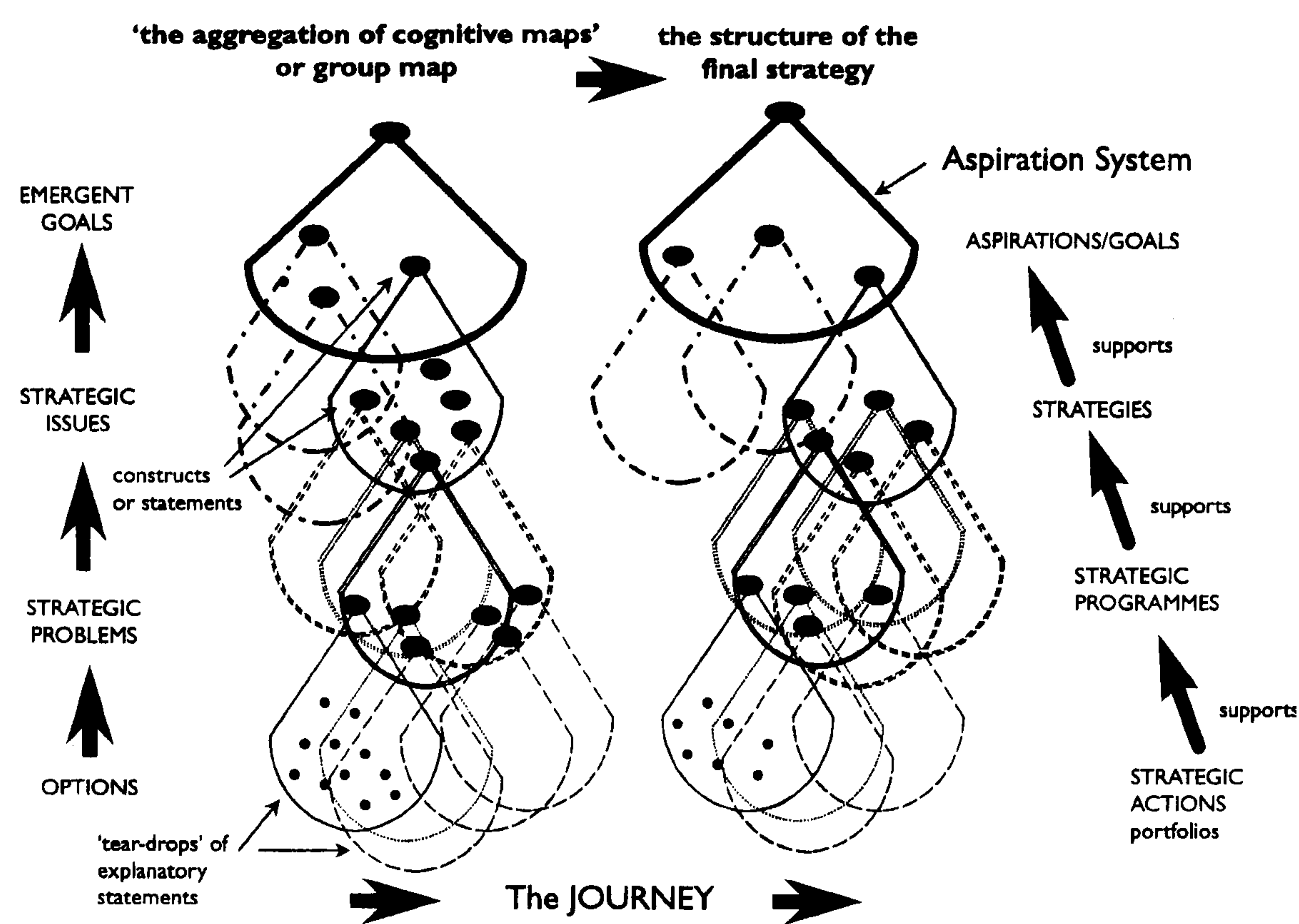


Figure 49. Strategy Map as Part of the Strategy Making Process

All individual strategies were then discussed in depth by the Strategic Planning Group. Following debate the group decided that the following changes should be made to all the relevant diagrams.

- Strategy 1, the title amended to *'Create a company strategy to show where the company is going'.*
- Strategy 2, the title amended to *'Research markets to understand what products/service should be developed'.*
- Strategy 3 the title amended to *'Review working practices to work smarter'.*
- Strategy 4 the title amended to *'Develop customer relationships'.*
- Strategy 5 the title amended to *'Develop and use a knowledge base to better inform judgment'.*

Next the group decided that the strategy owners would not be changed.

Discussion then turned towards the magnitude of the work that would need to be undertaken to practically implement the strategies. Several group members expressed concern regarding the subject, as well as the amount of physical resources and cost to the company to undertake the work. JP stated that once the group knew exactly what the scale of the overall strategic implementation would be, strategy owners would be able to pass some of their detailed implementation planning work onto consultants who were not working on client-based projects. JP then continued by stating that the scale of the overall strategic implementation would not be known until **detailed project plans were completed for each identified strategy**, and the Strategic Planning Group had reviewed these and decided which of them would be implemented, and in what priority. Then the Strategic Planning Group could decide who else needed to be involved in implementation planning, and how time would be allocated to this activity.

Next, the project planning of the strategies was discussed. It was decided that for each strategy a full project plan would be developed, using Microsoft Project, detailing the timeline, cost and resources for all strategic programmes and strategic actions needed to ensure successful implementation. The Action Researcher explained that he would have liked to have identified potential action programmes and portfolios for each of the strategies through analysis of existing information, **using Decision Explorer as a Strategy Delivery Support System**, during this workshop, but as everything was being condensed into one day instead of two this now appeared impossible. Participants felt that they had already developed enough information to produce project plans as the handouts they had been provided with throughout the Collaborative Research Programme contained extensive information. Strategy owners were then tasked with producing detailed project plans at the next strategy making workshop for discussion and agreement. At this stage a further realisation occurred within the group regarding the integration of all the strategies and the interdependencies of the strategy owners. Where a 'boundary' strategic programme or action, an activity affecting more than one strategy owner, was identified, then the development of the activity needed to incorporate all interested parties. This would mean that strategic programmes or actions would need to be coordinated across strategic plans, and not developed in isolation. This concept of having to work more closely together appealed to all members of the Strategic Planning Group, until they realised that this would also utilise more time from a scarce resource, themselves.

After reviewing Strategic Planning Group expectations, the Action Researcher closed the workshop by informing the Strategic Planning Group members that the next workshop would be about discussing the draft mission statement developed by JP, reviewing the individual strategy 'project plans', deciding which would be practically implemented, and detailing the timeline, cost and resources for all strategic programmes and strategic actions needed to ensure their successful implementation.

REFLECTING (Collaborative Research Programme)

Politics and Strategy Making

At some point after starting on a strategic journey participants will begin to realise that the strategy making process is 'for real' and might actually have some consequences for the future of the organization. Then some or all participants in the process will begin to make judgments about whether they will gain or lose from the process. During this Collaborative Research Programme the Action Researcher believes that this occurred during the workshop on 4th February (see page 198). Sometimes, organizational change may be seen by managers involved in strategy making as an opportunity for self-aggrandizement and the acquisition of power (Frost, 1987; Mangham, 1978; Perrow, 1986). Eden and Ackermann (1998:46) acknowledge this and state that *"Strategy making is usually expected to change, sometimes by large amounts, the way an organization works. Change of any sort will always be seen to have winners and losers by those that are the recipients of change. Indeed most of the key players in designing change will see themselves as potential winners or losers. As soon as strategy is believed to be influential then the process of developing strategy will generate significant organizational politics."* The politics that the process of anticipation creates will be the result of each participant's personal understanding of the impact of the strategy being developed. Riker (1986:52) notes that *"Politics is winning and losing, which depends, mostly, on how large and strong one side is relative to the other. The action of politics consists in making agreements to join people in alliances and coalitions."* Finding ideas (visions, goals, strategies) that people can support and that further their interests is a large part of the political process, but so is making deals in which something is traded in exchange for additional support. According to Mintzberg (1994), Whitehead (1967:164) suggested that deciding on goal trade-offs *"can have the effect of sharpening the differences participants perceive between themselves and others, thereby increasing the conflict in the organization"* and this can bring to light *"a lot of currently repressed conflict."*

Reflecting on occurrences throughout all strategy making events, the Action Researcher concluded that he had been witnessing a bout of power broking and political infighting within SI Ltd. in which many different political actions had been undertaken, and in which repressed, and therefore unmanaged, conflict between two influential company directors, JP and DT, played a major part. JP had been the activist of most observed political activities. Examples of these would be:

- a. JP's request during the initial meeting with the Action Researcher, that he should be regarded as the Action Researcher's client and that all subsequent requests for information about SI Ltd. should go directly to him to be distributed to the correct person to handle the query could be viewed as an overtly political act, altercasting to the Action Researcher who held the most power within SI Ltd (see page 99).
- b. JP's emailing of a draft project plan to the Action Researcher, before the Action Researcher had considered whether to invite SI Ltd. to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme, could be viewed as a political act to influence the Action Researcher's decision (see page 125).
- c. JP's insistence, on behalf of the Strategic Planning Group, that information be removed from the draft composite map, could be described as a covertly political act in that Oval Mapping Workshop participants who had provided information during the development of the draft composite map would never be informed that some emergent strategies, possibly containing information they had provided, had been removed from the composite group map (see page 165).
- d. JP's decision that strategy making activities were only undertaken during periods scheduled for Strategic Planning Group meetings, except when he identified a need to hold unscheduled, or more or less frequent or condensed meetings, could also be perceived as a power broking act between JP, the Strategic Planning Group and the Action Researcher. The Action Researcher had inadvertently let JP know that his work had a lower priority than JP's Collaborative Research Programme work (see page 176) and JP was letting everyone know that he was in control of the strategy making process and that activities would only be undertaken when he arrange them.
- e. JP's unilateral decision not to gather more information from Senior Operational Consultants after two previous group discussions had ended in stalemate (see page 180 and page 190). Here JP demonstrated his perceived power as Managing Director to make a decision that affected the whole Strategic Planning Group without discussing the subject with them (see page 198).

The differences of opinion regarding the last political act brought about the first authoritative vocalization of this repressed conflict between DT and JP. In later feedback to the Action Researcher both JP and DT acknowledge the conflict that existed between them. JP stated that he believed that DT *"told you [the Action Researcher] that he felt we should focus on our operational resources rather than too much administrative work because it earned revenue... This was an old bone of contention between us"* (Appendix C85), while DT stated that *"the core/mission statement developed [overall goal] was felt to be too theoretical/academic and this was because JP was the primary source of this information. This reflected the feeling that JP was too influential in the overall process"* (Appendix C91). Eden and Ackermann (1998:425) state that *"the process of learning which is a part of agreeing strategic direction will also result in helping participants see things differently (evidenced by cognitive change) and from this position start moving towards a degree of cooperation and coordination."* However, during this period the Action Researcher observed the emergence of a division within the Strategic Planning Group, rather than a movement towards a degree of cooperation and coordination. The information generated throughout the Collaborative Research Programme served to increase the intersubjectivity between Strategic Planning Group members (Eden, Jones, Sims and Smithin, 1981) (see page 116, page 136 and page 152), and thereby, to sharpen the differences JP and DT perceived to be between them, resulting in increased unmanaged conflict (Gluntz, 1971).

From this reflection the Action Researcher learnt that 'political' activity will always be present during strategy making activities. Some occurrences will be simple to identify and some will be invisible to Action Researchers (the conflict between DT and JP had not been previously identified by the Action Researcher and therefore had been allowed to grow). To develop an understanding of what is happening and why it is happening an Action Researcher needs to be constantly vigilant for political activities and work towards developing a group environment where truthful and interactive conversation between participants about individual and/or group expectations and outcomes can occur. Then an Action Researcher may be able to assist in the negotiation of an agreement to resolve political differences, rather than have them suddenly appear and disrupt a Collaborative Research Programme, or individual strategy making activities.

Step 5.6 – Closure

PLANNING (Collaborative Research Programme)

During weekly communications between JP and the Action Researcher, JP was asked whether he required assistance in the development of the mission statement. However, JP stated that *"this was a task that he wanted to personally complete."* To help JP in his task the Action Researcher sent him information regarding the development of a mission statement. These were mainly photocopied pages from Eden and Ackermann's book (1998: 110, 161-162 and 429-431) and the Action Researcher loaned JP a copy of Campbell and Nash's (1992) book entitled 'A Sense of Mission'. Between 4th February and 1st March 2000 the Action Researcher amended the overall strategy map and individual cluster/strategy maps, as decided by the Strategic Planning Group (see Appendix C76-81), and prepared handouts for the strategy making workshop on 8th March. At this event the Action Researcher planned to gain final agreement for goals, strategies, strategic programmes and strategic actions, and gain commitment for their implementation. Implementation project plans should have been completed by strategy owners and JP should have completed the draft mission statement so these could also be reviewed and approved by the Strategic Planning Group. Finally, the Action Researcher would start to bring his involvement with SI Ltd. to a close.

ACTING (Collaborative Research Programme)

On 2nd March the Action Researcher received a telephone call from JP asking to postpone the scheduled workshop. JP mysteriously explained that the strategy making work undertaken had identified some *"very important internal issues"* that the Strategic Planning Group agreed should be resolved before participating in any further activities. JP stated that he would again contact the Action Researcher when he felt the time was right for the next workshop to take place.

On 28th March the Action Researcher received an email from JP stating that **he had decided to retire** as Managing Director of SI Ltd. and that this would become effective in three days' time. JP informed the Action Researcher that DT would be in contact in due course about continuing the Collaborative Research Programme (Appendix C82).

After **numerous attempts by the Action Researcher to contact DT**, to establish whether or not the Collaborative Research Programme was to continue, a brief telephone conversation took place between them on 22nd May during which DT informed the Action Researcher that he had been appointed Managing Director of SI Ltd. and that he should now be viewed as the Action Researcher's client. He further stated that he would shortly be holding a Senior Management Team meeting, to which the Action Researcher would be invited, and that this could be used to restart the Collaborative Research Programme.

As the Action Researcher had not received any further communication from DT by 24th June an email was sent to him enquiring if the date for the Senior Management Team meeting had been decided upon and whether DT wanted to progress further with the Collaborative Research Programme. The Action Researcher also asked DT if he and the rest of the Strategic Planning Group would provide feedback regarding the work undertaken by the Action Researcher. Not having received a reply from DT by 24th July the Action Researcher again sent an email to him requesting feedback regarding the strategy making activities undertaken to date (Appendix C87). DT replied the next day by email stating that he would discuss the situation with his colleagues.

At the end of July an unexpected serious illness in the Action Researcher's immediate family meant that very little time could be devoted to working with SI Ltd. until early October, although the Action Researcher continued to attempt to contact DT throughout this time without any success.

As a last effort, on 9th October, the Action Researcher again emailed DT asking if he and the rest of the other Strategic Planning Group members would provide the Action Researcher with feedback regarding the strategy making work undertaken to date. DT replied the next day enquiring whether it would be possible for the Action Researcher to attend SI Ltd. for a short two-hour meeting with himself, GS and EP to gather the feedback in person. The Action Researcher arranged to visit SI Ltd. on 15th November and also suggested to DT that if Strategic Planning Group members could provide individual feedback before the visit, this could be used as a basis for further discussions during the meeting. There followed several emailed communications between DT and the Action Researcher during which DT alone provided the Action Researcher with individual feedback (Appendix C88), and informed the Action Researcher that only GS and himself would be able to attend the meeting on 15th November.

Arriving at SI Ltd. for the agreed meeting the Action Researcher was informed that only DT would be available as GS was working at a client site. DT and the Action Researcher agreed that the meeting would be held informally. DT suggested that all information generated, and his earlier emailed feedback, which DT stated was from all Strategic Planning Group members rather than just himself, should then be compiled by the Action Researcher and returned to him for approval of the accuracy before being used in any manner. The meeting lasted approximately ninety minutes, during which the Action Researcher took notes. The Action Researcher used DT's original brief feedback in an informal conversational manner to enable DT to elaborate on his earlier responses (Appendix C89-94). Towards the end of the meeting the Action Researcher and DT discussed the Collaborative Research Programme in general. The Action Researcher informed DT that following the workshop on 4th February he began to suspect that certain things were not right within SI Ltd. Competing and conflicting views between members of the Strategic Planning Group had started to be voiced more authoritatively as strategy making work progressed. The Action Researcher suggested that a group of people who had worked collectively during earlier strategy making activities appeared to becoming fragmented during the final steps. It appeared to the Action Researcher that the fragmentation was mainly over the identification, negotiation and agreement of emergent company goals, strategies, strategic programmes and actions (see page 204). Bryson (1995) suggests that identifying virtually every strategic issue involves conflicts: what will be done, why it will be done, how it will be done, when it will be done, where it will be done, who will do it, and who will be favored or disadvantaged by it, and that these conflicts may draw people together or pull them apart. The Action Researcher wanted to better understand whether undertaking this strategy making activity had pulled the Strategic Planning Group apart. DT informed the Action Researcher that the conflict between himself and JP regarding the future development of SI Ltd. had been ongoing before the Collaborative Research Programme started and had eventually become important enough for **radical action** to be taken to solve it. The information generated during the Collaborative Research Programme had served to provide DT and other Strategic Planning Group members with a very clear understanding of the situation at SI Ltd.; something they had not previously held. DT stated that he had consulted with other Strategic Planning Group members and with a former company founder/director and existing shareholder (a covert political act aimed at making an arrangement with the 'shareholder' to join DT in an alliance or coalition – Riker 1986) regarding concerns about JP's perception of the future of SI Ltd., before approaching JP with a solution aimed at solving their differences, and bringing an end to the power broking and political infighting between them. The solution was the replacement of the Managing Director (JP).

The meeting on 15th November 2000 proved to be the last face-to-face contact of the Collaborative Research Programme between the Action Researcher and any representative of SI Ltd. Collaborative Research Programme closure had been achieved, but not in any expected manner. The Action Researcher emailed the collated information to DT on 16th January 2001. DT emailed his approval for the accuracy and use of the information on 4th February (Appendix C89-94).

REFLECTING (Collaborative Research Programme)

Impact on the Research Programme of the Action Researcher Unexpectedly Losing his Client

Two major impacts on the Research Programme were identified by the Action Researcher with regard to JP unexpectedly leaving SI Ltd. The first concerned whether becoming involved in the Collaborative Research Programme contributed to this occurrence in any way, and the second, whether or not the Collaborative Research Programme would/should continue with a 'new' client, given that the Action Researcher had lost his main collaborator.

- 1) The influence of power in MD/CEO dismissal and succession decisions is a major focus in current succession and governance research (Boeker, 1992; Boeker and Goodstein, 1993; Cannella and Lubatkin, 1993; Cannella and Shen, 2001; Ocasio, 1994; Zajac and Westphal, 1996). Often theories of organizational politics highlight conflicts of interest and power struggles within organizations, especially among senior executives (Lazear and Rosen, 1981; Pfeffer, 1981). However, little research has focused on power/political contests within top management as an important cause of MD/CEO dismissal (see page 204) for details of political actions within this Collaborative Research Programme. According to Shen and Cannella (2002), a primary cause of conflicts of interest and competitions among top executives lies in their desire for power and career advancement. Senior executives are ambitious individuals who have high needs for power and achievement (McClelland and Burnham, 1976). As they move up the corporate hierarchy, their desire to become MD/CEO and 'run their own show' becomes even stronger (Pfeffer, 1981; Vancil, 1987). The conflicts of interest and competition between a MD/CEO and other senior executives may put an MD/CEO at risk of power contests with other senior executives (Lazear, 1989; Ocasio, 1994). Although such contests are not easily observable to outsiders, Shen and Cannella (2002) argue that the power dynamics within top management will affect the occurrence of MD/CEO dismissal, as well as choices of successors.

When senior executives successfully challenge a MD/CEO, particularly in companies where corporate performance is declining (as SI Ltd's was – see page 98) and gain the support of outside directors/stakeholders (as DT did – see page 208) the MD/CEO will be dismissed, and one of the contending executives will likely be promoted as the successor (as occurred at SI Ltd.) (Pfeffer, 1981; Sonnenfeld, 1988).

During the Action Research Approach, 'Step - 2.0 Meet with Client', it had been decided that no formal stakeholder analysis would be undertaken as part of the Collaborative Research Programme (see page 118). However, had even a shallow internal and external stakeholder analysis been undertaken the former company founder/director and existing shareholder, who played an important role in events at SI Ltd, may have been identified. Alternatively, if during discussions with JP the Action Researcher had attempted to openly establish who he believed would be 'winners' and 'losers', or just key actors in the future development of SI Ltd, then the former company founder/director and existing shareholder may have been identified. Being aware of the importance of this person and involving him in the strategy making work at an early stage may have afforded JP a small amount of protection from ensuing action. Literature regarding strategy development often discusses the importance of identifying and protecting a client (Bryson, 1995, Schein, 1995). In this particular case a client was identified but unfortunately the strategy making activities undertaken may have served as a vehicle to expedite his departure from the company. The Collaborative Research Programme served to provide a forum where internal differences, not previously voiced strongly within SI Ltd., could be discussed and debated openly, and where the Strategic Planning Group would be able to establish what was needed to secure the company's future. Understanding what needed to be done prompted the Strategic Planning Group, indirectly, and DT directly to take political action (see page 208). Schein (1995) identifies this situation and states *"that once several employees discover ... they share a concern, it becomes more of an issue that it may have been when each thought they were alone in their view. The survey then becomes, unwittingly, a tool stimulating 'revolution' rather than problem solving."* From this discussion, it can be implied that becoming involved in the Collaborative Research Programme directly contributed to JP's departure from SI Ltd., although the decisions made and actions undertaken by DT were not parts of any JOURNEY Making type activities to be undertaken and the Action Researcher was not made aware of any of these decisions and actions until they had concluded.

Had the company not become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme it can be assumed that JP may not have left the company at this time. Given that SI Ltd. did become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme, if even a shallow internal and external stakeholder analysis been undertaken, the former company founder/director and existing shareholder may have been identified and involved in the strategy development work, thereby reducing the opportunity for DT to form a political alliance/coalition with him (Riker, 1986). Furthermore, had the JOURNEY Making type activities undertaken not served to increase the intersubjectivity between members of the Strategic Planning Group, and thereby create a 'very clear understanding of the situation at SI Ltd.', then they would not have collectively decided that 'radical' action needed to take place to rectify the situation being faced (see page 208).

From this reflection, the Action Researcher learnt that identifying stakeholders (internal and external) is an essential and highly important activity that needs undertaking, in some format, during JOURNEY Making. In this intervention, an external stakeholder proved to be a powerful influence on the company. If a client does not want to undertake an in-depth stakeholder analysis, involving power/interest grids, star diagrams, etc., an Action Researcher, at the very minimum, should discuss potential problems that could arise if stakeholders are not identified, and suggest the alternative action of undertaking a shallow stakeholder analysis, possibly by undertaking stakeholder workshops. Failure to identify powerful stakeholders can result in unexpected consequences with severe effects, as this Action Researcher and his client, JP, found out.

- 2) Events concerning JP had occurred so quickly and unexpectedly that the Action Researcher was unable to discuss the Collaborative Research Programme with him face-to-face before he left SI Ltd., or indeed whether or how the Collaborative Research Programme would/should continue at SI Ltd. JP had been the initial client and Collaborative Research Programme sponsor and was involved in activities that nobody else in the company had been involved in, for example, the initial approach by the Action Researcher and multiple post workshop briefings with the Action Researcher. The Action Researcher would have liked to have gained JP's opinions of how to proceed with the Collaborative Research Programme and help in understanding how to work with DT, the Action Researcher's 'new' client, given that JP and DT had worked closely for a number of years.

Having failed to contact JP by telephone, it later materialised that JP had taken an extended holiday; an email was sent to his home address asking if he could provide some independent feedback regarding the Action Researcher's involvement with SI Ltd. and any suggestions about working with DT. The Action Researcher was concerned that JP may move away from the area after finding a new company to work with, without leaving contact details, and it would prove impossible to communicate with him in the future. A major reason for this concern was that the interpretation of the qualitative information gathered during the Collaborative Research Programme that would be used during the production of a doctoral thesis could be said to be subjective to the Action Researcher's viewpoint and supporting documentation (Burgelman, 1985; Bryman, 1995). Rather than based on both of these and feedback from actual people involved in the Collaborative Research Programme (King 1994) (see page 122). Furthermore, if it later proved that DT did not want to continue strategy making activities, then the Action Researcher would still have some feedback from his initial client. Aware that JP might not provide as comprehensive feedback as the Action Researcher would like, a number of questions were hurriedly created by the Action Researcher covering activities that he hoped JP might elaborate upon (Appendix C83). JP replied to this request on 15th May (Appendix C84-85). A comment made by JP concerning the continuance of the Collaborative Research Programme, *"In fact I suggest that you may find it difficult to recommence the process. You may wish to chase them up, if you have not done so already"* appeared to be coming true, as the Action Researcher experienced great difficulty in contacting DT after JP's departure, to discuss whether the Collaborative Research Programme would continue (see page 207).

Shen and Cannella (2002) suggest that new MD/CEOs confront significant challenges upon taking office, especially after 'insider' succession. Promotion to the MD/CEO position typically leads to significant changes in both an executive's responsibility and tasks environment (Kotter, 1982). New MD/CEOs must adjust to their new roles and quickly develop good working relationships with other members of their top management groups, and powerful outside stakeholders (Vancil, 1987). The learning process is stressful and time consuming (Kotter, 1982). At the same time, new MD/CEOs are charged with specific strategic mandates (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991) a change that further increases the difficulty of their tasks.

During the Action Researcher's interview with DT on 15th November 2000 (see page 208 and Appendix C90-94), it was identified that DT had already been tasked with implementing some of the initiatives from the Collaborative Research Programme. At this time, DT stated that that *"Some of the strategic objective 'headlines/titles' were correct but needed flexing around with honesty before being implemented... Some of the headline statements, particularly those not pushed by JP, were now being implemented at SI Ltd... On reflection we are implementing against the headline strategy."* Finally, and perhaps the most crucial for new MD/CEOs, is the need to establish their authority in a top position (Gabarro, 1987). The challenges facing new MD/CEOs leave them vulnerable to power contests with rival executives. The fact that new MD/CEOs need time to establish their authority in the top position (Selznick, 1957) provides an opportunity for other ambitious senior executives to challenge them early in their tenures. Once incumbent MD/CEOs have proven their leadership capacity and established their authority in office, the chance for senior executives to mount a challenge successfully is greatly reduced (Ocasio, 1994). Given this information, it is not surprising that the Action Researcher had trouble contacting his 'new' client to establish whether, or not, he would like to re-start the Collaborative Research Programme, as it may not have been one of DT's major priorities as a new MD/CEO.

Discussing what to do if a client moves on during a JOURNEY Making project
Eden and Ackermann (1998: 483) suggest that it needs to be determined *"how well established the JOURNEY Making process is within the organization. If there are many champions then transfer will be relatively painless. However, the choice of client from among the many champions needs to take account of power as well as interest. Building trust between the new client and facilitator can often be forgotten when the facilitator already feels comfortable with the key actors and the organization"*. In this Collaborative Research Programme, the Action Researcher learnt that when an existing client moves on, it is not always possible to arrange to physically meet or start to develop a relationship with a 'new' client, even when they were a member of the original Strategic Planning Group. Therefore, ending the JOURNEY Making process at this time has to be a very real consideration.

Ethical Issues/Dilemmas Associated with Action Research

Following all of the 'ethical' dilemmas identified and overcome during this research programme (see page 174), and the Action Researcher's belief that becoming involved in the Collaborative Research Programme directly contributed to JP's unexpected departure from SI Ltd. (see page 210), an in-depth literature search and review was undertaken to understand more about how ethical considerations could be incorporated into the overall Action Research Approach, and whether ethical frameworks exist for Action Researchers to utilise.

Discussing ethics for business researchers, Hair, Babin, Money and Samouel (2003:104) suggest that they are relevant *"because ethical issues occur through many phases of a research programme."* They describe ethical dilemmas as situations where a person faces courses of actions that have differing ethical implications and suggest that they often arise from questions of fairness or justice, potential conflicts of interest, responsibility issues, power discrepancies and honesty issues. All of these can occur in business research situations, and such dilemmas require sound ethical judgments. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, (2003:129) state that *"The nature of business and management research means that ... this will inevitably lead to a range of ethical issues. As Wells (1994:290) puts it: "In general the closer the research is to actual individuals in real world settings, the more likely are ethical questions to be raised."* Yet, while there is literature that indicates an awareness of the ethical challenges for the researcher in social and community research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001), Walker and Haslett (2002:525) suggest, *"ethical issues in business and management research appear to have been neglected (Churchman, 1982; Flood, 1999; Plane, 2000; Wells, 1994)."*

Discussing ethics for business consultancy, Sutton (2002:126) states that the term 'business ethics' is *"difficult and has led to many musings on the possibility and impossibility of its existence. This is, in a way, because the subject itself is seen to originate within the tension between moral philosophy and pragmatic managerial practice. Even if we move from possibility to reality, there is still the challenge to identify and agree on what constitutes unethical business behaviour. Furthermore, in the process of identification, where is our stance? Does it exist in the highly persuasive area of nostalgic values, or modernisation challenging our nostalgic and inherited value sets? ... The term business ethics is slippery and subject to ongoing discussion. Some reject the discussion in the face of real world activity: 'We are too busy worrying about real problems to take this academic sophistry seriously.' It is the case of the ivory tower meets the law of the jungle."*

Action Researchers face the dilemmas both of the researcher and of the consultant and they face dilemmas which are 'sui generic' (Morton, 1999). These dilemmas often arise out of the dual role an Action Researcher has to perform. In their capacity as 'consultant', an Action Researcher is ethically bound to provide a client with a service that meets acceptable professional standards throughout the term of their engagement. In their capacity as 'researcher', however, an Action Researcher must ensure that the research has *"implications beyond those required for action or generation of knowledge in the domain of the project"* (Eden and Huxham, 1996:530 and Action Research Framework Output Characteristic 2 (see Figure 12). All Action Researchers constantly need to balance the ethical considerations of the consultant and researcher (Gummesson, 1991). However, Action Researchers who undertake a research programme with the intention of 'gaining the relevant qualification for which the research is being taken' (as this Action Researcher was, see page 24) will certainly need to understand and demonstrate in their work an awareness of ethical issues/dilemmas for 'academic' research programmes. According to Miles and Huberman (1994:288) *"any qualitative researcher who is not asleep ponders moral and ethical questions: Is my project really worth doing? Do people really understand what they are getting into? Am I exploiting people with my innocent questions? What about their privacy? Do respondents have a right to see my report? What good is anonymity if people and their colleagues can easily recognise themselves in a case study? When they do, might it hurt or damage them in some way? What do I do when I observe harmful behaviour in my study? Who owns the data and who owns the report? The qualitative literature is full of rueful testimony on such questions, peppered with sentences beginning with 'I never expected ...' and 'If I had only known that ...' and 'I only belatedly realised that ...'. We need to attend more to the ethics of what we are planning and doing. As Mirvis and Seashore (1982:100) say '... Naivety [about ethics] is unethical'."*

It has become obvious during the application of this Action Research Approach that ethical dilemmas often arise unexpectedly, indicating that Action Researchers need to pay ongoing attention to an ethical framework of Action Research throughout the entire lifecycle of a research programme. With increased attention to this aspect of Action Research, Lincoln (2001) suggests that ethical codes need revising on a daily basis by Action Researchers and participants to meet the issues that arise. This is similar to the views of Churchman (1982:6) who suggests that the dynamic and emergent nature of Action Research raises ethical issues over time and that these need addressing at regular intervals during a research programme. Importantly the decisions about ethical behaviour are constantly being negotiated rather than contracted at the beginning of a research programme.

It is the responsibility of Action Researchers to involve themselves in the continuing debate and discussion of what their ethical framework(s) should be. Walker and Haslett (2002) suggest that in a 'problematic situation' being investigated the application of ethical principles to an Action Research process is essential. They suggest that questions regarding possible and actual ethical issues within the research programme need considering before the PLANNING stage. This is based on the assumption that **Action Research is a single cycle methodology** that runs through the four discrete stages of PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING during its lifecycle. However, in this research programme the Action Research Approach developed can be described as a number of individual steps, where the relationship between all sequential steps in the Action Research Approach is cyclic, allowing the researcher to move backwards and forwards between each step (see page 69 and Figure 50).

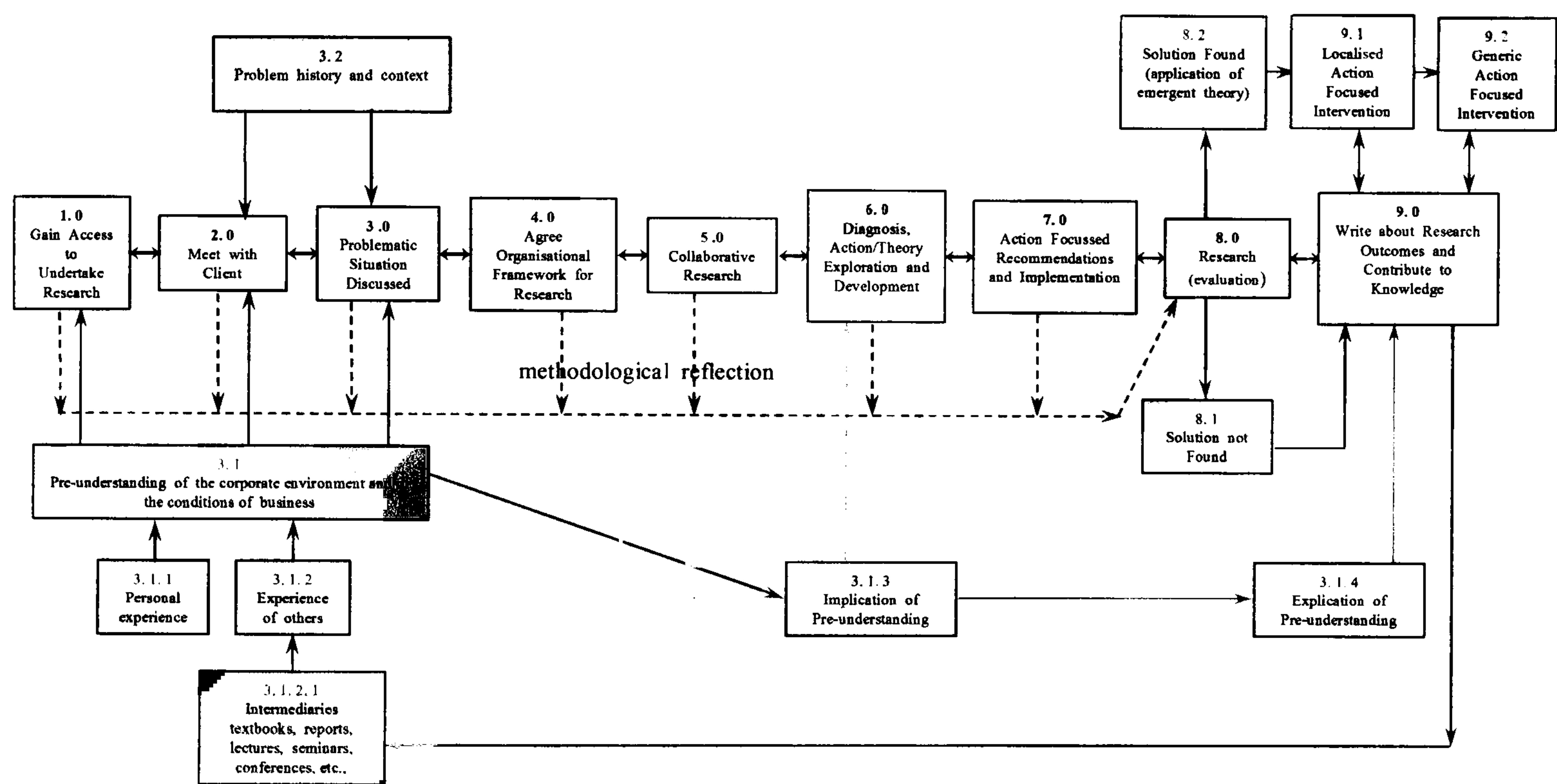


Figure 50. The Action Research Approach

Within each individual step in the Action Research Approach and Collaborative Research Programme sub-step, the activities of PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING are undertaken (see Figure 51).



Figure 51. Activities Undertaken During Each Action Research Approach Step

In contrast to Walker and Haslett's (2002) contentions about considering ethical questions before the PLANNING stage, this Action Research suggests that ethical questions need to be asked during each PLANNING activity. On page 81, it was stated that "Under the heading PLANNING the question will be asked: What should be achieved during this step?" This can now be amended to include a further question "What possible ethical issues may arise if this planned course of action is followed?" Then an Action Researcher may consider whether the ethical issues associated with planned actions are acceptable, or whether planned actions need revising. This will enable Action Researchers to undertake the revision of ethical codes at regular intervals throughout the entire research programme, as detailed by Churchman, 1982; Miles and Huberman, 1994 and Lincoln, 2001. **On page 76 it was stated that a judgement of the validity of the Action Research Approach will be to provide evidence that changes to the elements of 'F', 'M,' and 'A' have been identified and documented during the application of the Action Research Approach. This is an identified and documented change to the element 'M'.**

However, when considering **ethical frameworks for Action Researchers** to utilise, Wells (1994) suggests that Action Research is primarily a process of exploration and represents an open system and therefore any traditional ethics 'approval' process is inadequate due to the nature of the theories and strategies underpinning Action Research methodology in the context of management research. Traditional ethical structures provide a framework for conducting the research rather, than a clear-cut prescription, and as such represent a closed system. The active involvement of participants, normally called subjects, creates a need for different and more comprehensive ethical frameworks. Morton (1999:219) declares, *"In developing such conceptual models for dealing with the distinctive ethical dilemmas of Action Research, the work that has already been done on ethics in consulting (MacLagan, 1989; and Tacket, 1994) and research (Miles and Huberman, 1994, Chapter 11) will no doubt be valuable. For example, Miles and Huberman (1994), mention half a dozen dilemmas which can face researchers doing social research (validity versus causing harm; anonymity versus visibility; scientific understanding versus individual rights; detached inquiry versus help; help-giving versus confidentiality; freedom of enquiry versus political advantage)."* The issues of causing harm and risk were very relevant to this Action Researcher in light of the decision that participation in the Collaborative Research Programme directly contributed to JP (the client and main collaborator) unexpectedly leaving SI Ltd. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that two questions always need asking by researchers with regard to this issue – What might the study do to harm people involved? How likely is it that such harm will occur?

Their contention is based on the work of McCall and Simmonds (1969) who believe that real or feared harm will always occur to someone involved in a qualitative study. McCall and Simmonds state the question bluntly *"To whom shall harm be done in this study and in what magnitude?"* (p. 276). Harm in participants can come in many varieties: from blows to self esteem or 'looking bad' to others, to threats to one's interests, position or advancement in the organisation, to loss of funding for a programme, on up to being sued or arrested. Miles and Huberman (1994:292) also state that *"the information from a qualitative study is never value free, and it may have **negative consequences** (as an extreme example, take Garfinkel's [1981] comment about the morality of the 'descriptive statement', 'Anne Frank is in the attic' if made in the presence of a Nazi search party). Setting risk levels for potential harm is very difficult – perhaps impossible – in qualitative studies."*

In accordance with Miles and Huberman's earlier statement about qualitative research being peppered with sentences beginning 'I never expected ...' and 'If only I had known that ...', in this research programme if the Action Researcher had considered possible ethical issues that could arise when PLANNING actions at the start of each Action Research Approach step, rather than waiting for them to materialise, then JP might still be working at SI Ltd., and the closure of the Collaborative Research Programme may have occurred differently. Yet, as little has been written on the subject of ethical frameworks that may be used by Action Researchers, a topic of further research could be to establish whether an ethical framework(s) can be developed for Action Researchers to utilise, and if so, what it would look like, and how it could map onto the Action Research Approach.

From this reflection, the Action Researcher learnt that ethical dilemmas could occur throughout an entire research programme when an Action Research methodology is utilised. Also, rather than waiting for them to unexpectedly occur it may be better to consider their possible occurrence during each step of an Action Research Approach and/or each sub-step of a Collaborative Research Programme. In particular, ethical issues with regard to causing harm and risk need considering because *"it is wise to assume that the chances of some type of harm [during qualitative research] are better than ever [and qualitative researchers need] to consider in advance some way of reducing the likelihood"* (Miles and Huberman, 1994:292). However, there are no specific ethical framework(s) in existence for Action Researchers to utilise, making ethical judgments difficult to undertake. However, observing established 'qualitative research' ethical frameworks and 'professional' consultancy standards might provide 'novice' Action Researchers with guidance, until they can define their own ethical guidelines through practice.

Summary

Contributions to knowledge in the 'research' community

- The role of the Action Researcher and the participants and the process of Action Research have the potential to highlight different perspectives and assumptions on the problematic situation being addressed (Walker and Haslett, 2002). As Churchman (1982:2) has stated “... *once you dig for facts or coins, you change a lot of other things as well and these may not be the ones you want.*” In this Collaborative Research Programme the increased intersubjectivity of the Strategic Planning Group led to them develop a very clear understanding of the situation at SI Ltd., something they had not previously held (see page 208). This led to them, and in particular, DT, disagreeing with JP about his perspective regarding the future development of SI Ltd, which in turn led to DT making an arrangement with a previously unidentified company founder/director and existing shareholder to join him in an alliance aimed at replacing JP as Managing Director. As detailed on page 218, Miles and Huberman (1994:292) state that “*The information from a qualitative study is never value free, and it may have negative consequences.*” Two highly important issues that all Action Researchers need to be aware of are that (1) they are working in the 'real world' and (2) that information being 'innocently generated' may be used for political purposes by ambitious individuals (Shen and Cannella, 2002), resulting in negative consequences for other Collaborative Research Programme participants, including the Action Researcher. Although an Action Researcher may be undertaking a research programme for the attainment of an academic qualification, which involves attempting to follow a specific problem solving methodology as closely as possible, the consequences of actions on Collaborative Research Programme participants can have a very serious real world effect. The events described in this document that led to the Action Researcher losing his client and main collaborator can be said to have had a fundamental impact on the Collaborative Research Programme; in effect they ended it. The sequence of events could also be said to be content specific to this Collaborative Research Programme.

- In the context of research, “ethics refers to the appropriateness of your [the researcher’s] behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work, or are affected by it. ... You will therefore need to consider ethical issues throughout the period of your research and to remain sensitive to the impact of your work on those whom you approach to help, those who provide access and cooperation, and those affected by your results” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003:129). Contemplating ethical issues that may occur with every planned action, throughout the entire research programme, may help an Action Researcher to preempt their, occurrence rather than waiting for them to occur unexpectedly (see page 217). An issue generic to all Action Researcher is that “the closer the researcher is to actual individuals in real world settings, the more likely are ethical questions to be raised” (Wells, 1994:290) and the ramifications of not considering potential ethical dilemmas early enough may lead to ‘harm’ being innocently caused to Collaborative Research Programme participants (see page 218).
- On page 43 the Action Researcher considered his own ‘novice’ proficiency in the theory and practice of JOURNEY Making, while accepting that these would be ‘relative measurements’ that would change as the research programme progressed. Following the Collaborative Research Programme it can be stated that the Action Researcher has now acquired a considerable amount of ‘theoretical and practical’ knowledge about JOURNEY Making and can no longer be considered a novice in either area. Figure 52 below details the researcher’s assessment of his changing proficiency in JOURNEY Making.

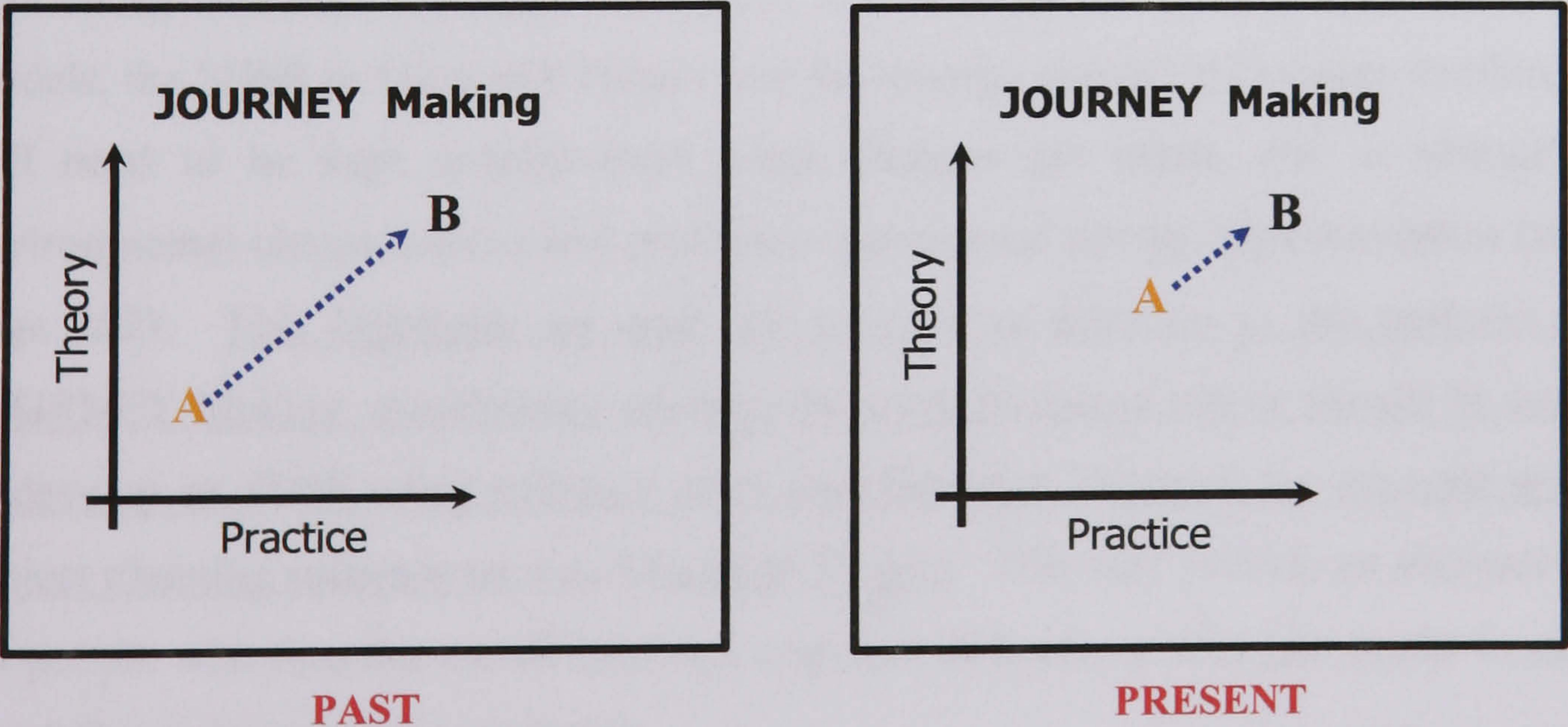


Figure 52. The Researcher’s Changing Proficiency in JOURNEY Making

Contributions to knowledge in the 'practitioner' community

- Identifying stakeholders (internal and external) needs to be a mandatory action for anyone undertaking strategy making or JOURNEY Making type activities. If a client does not want to undertake an in-depth stakeholder analysis, an Action Researcher should at the very minimum undertake a shallow stakeholder analysis, possibly by undertaking stakeholder workshops. Failure to identify stakeholders can result in totally unexpected consequences, for example people with specific knowledge being omitted from information gathering activities (see page 179 and page 191) and influential and powerful stakeholders who may have a bearing on the work being undertaken not being identified (see page 208).
- Political activity will always be present during strategy making. Some occurrences will be simple to identify and some will be invisible to Action Researchers. To develop an understanding of what is happening and why it is happening during strategy making workshops, Action Researchers needs to be constantly vigilant for political activities and work towards developing a group environment where truthful and interactive conversation between participants about individual and/or group expectations and outcomes can occur. Then an Action Researcher may be able to assist in the negotiation of an agreement to resolve political differences rather than have them suddenly appear and disrupting strategy making work (see page 203).
- One aspect that the Strategic Planning Group at SI Ltd. was considering was the use of Microsoft Project to develop a Strategy Delivery Support System (SDSS), rather than using Decision Explorer. However, if this is attempted then both software models, the SDSS in Microsoft Project and the strategy map(s) in Decision Explorer, will need to be kept synchronized when changes are made, due to changing environmental circumstances and problems encountered during implementation (see page 202). This highlights an area that may be an addition to the practice of JOURNEY Making; establishing whether the work produced can or should be used to develop an SDSS using software other than Decision Explorer, for example with project planning software such as Microsoft Project. This may provide an alternative for people who find the use of Decision Explorer difficult, or who just prefer to use specialist project planning software.

PART D

Reflections About Action Research and
JOURNEY Making

CHAPTER 8

IN-DEPTH REFLECTIONS ABOUT ACTION RESEARCH and JOURNEY MAKING

Notes for the reader.

- a) Before progressing with this chapter, the author would like to acknowledge the works of McKay (2000) and McKay and Marshall (2001). It appears as though we have all been travelling on the same learning journey and reached similar destinations around the same time, albeit via different routes. Certain aspects of their work will be detailed here and then expanded upon.
- b) As stated on page 82, the cyclic nature of Action Research and of the developed Action Research Approach will be discussed in this chapter. A point to note regarding cyclicity is that although an approach, process or method may be described as cyclic, it does not mean that more than one cycle needs to be undertaken. If during one cycle of an approach, process or method all planned objectives are achieved then further cycles need not be undertaken. For example, if during one cycle of the Action Research Approach, used during this research programme, sufficient information has been generated to enable the production of a doctoral thesis, then there will be no need to undertake another cycle of the Action Research Approach. Or if during Step 5 ‘Collaborative Research’, sufficient information is generated to fulfill all practical strategy making objectives, then there will be no need to undertake further JOURNEY Making cycles. The same can be said with regard to any cyclic step within any approach/process/method. If all the objectives associated with a particular step are achieved during one cycle then further iterations need not be undertaken. For example, in this research programme four activities were undertaken within each Action Research Approach step, PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING. If during the ACTING phase it was found that planned objectives were not going to be achieved then further PLANNING, followed by further ACTING, could be undertaken. Similarly, the Action Researcher’s finding that planned approaches for gaining physical access to companies had not worked resulted in the Action Researcher having to plan a different approach for gaining physical access and then implementing this plan (see page 89). The iteration between activities within an Action Research Approach step, or between Action Research Approach steps, may be undertaken just once or a several times before planned objectives are achieved.

Introduction

On page 70 the Action Researcher wrote that this step in the Action Research Approach would be included because “*Having undertaken collaborated/co-operated research and collected data the next stage is to synthesize and explore the data while attempting to detect and develop any emergent actions and/or theories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Gummesson, 1991; Eden and Huxham, 1993, 1995, 1996).*” Following this on page 80 the Action Researcher then wrote, that to ensure that all events were recorded and reported accurately a diary of events containing details of what the Action Researcher perceived to have happened during every individual step and/or sub-step undertaken would be kept. The use of the diary has enabled some ‘detection and development of emergent actions and/or theories’ to already occur within the REFLECTING section of each Action Research Approach step and Collaborative Research Programme sub-step. Further use of the diary, and the introduction of previously unidentified information, will enable a deeper level of reflection to be developed than those already documented. The purpose of this chapter is to look further into Action Research and JOURNEY Making than has already occurred.

Mumford (2001:13) suggests that there are three problems associated with research that is not totally document based; namely, ‘getting in’, ‘staying in’, and ‘getting out’ of an intervention. While accepting that in a ‘typical’ JOURNEY Making intervention, the use of a strategy making method by a variety of practitioners, where a contingent approach is often undertaken in a phased or staged manner, dependent upon what a client’s expectations/needs are (see page 79 and page 105), does not necessarily incorporate an element of research, it can be said that JOURNEY Making practitioners still need to consider how to ‘get in’ to an intervention, what they need to accomplish to enable them to ‘stay in’ the intervention, and when the time is right, how they can ‘get out’ of the intervention. JOURNEY Making issues associated with these three activities will be detailed in the relevant Reflection section.

Step 6.0 - Diagnosis Action/Theory Exploration and Development

PLANNING (Action Research Approach and JOURNEY Making)

To gather relevant information the Action Researcher planned to undertake another literature search to locate recently written articles, book chapters, working papers, etc. relevant to Action Research and JOURNEY Making. This material and any older material of relevance, already collected, will be collated and reviewed along with the contents of the Action Researcher's research diary. Also, attempts will be made to talk to people regarded as 'knowledgeable' about Action Research and/or JOURNEY Making for verbal input. These will be people who have written about and/or practiced these subjects. The Action Researcher wanted to contact these people to listen to their different perspectives of these subjects in an attempt to establish whether other people held similar or conflicting views to those of the Action Researcher. Finally, the Action Researcher planned to draw conclusions regarding Action Research and JOURNEY Making from the practical work undertaken so far and all collated written and verbal material.

ACTING (Action Research Approach & JOURNEY Making)

Initially, the Action Researcher undertook an online literature search using facilities provided by the library at the University of Strathclyde. This enabled the Action Researcher to remotely locate and print out full-text versions of articles that were identified as relevant. Next, the Action Researcher contacted several local academic/university libraries, namely the Open University, Cranfield, Luton, De Monfort, and Henley Management College to establish whether they held hard copies of articles, book chapters, working papers etc., identified using the online facilities, but which could not be printed out. Access was granted at several universities and relevant material was collected. While undertaking the literature search the Action Researcher also noted the names of several knowledgeable people. Telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for these people were identified and they were contacted to see if they would be prepared to talk to the Action Researcher about their experience and understanding of Action Research and/or JOURNEY Making.

However, communicating with people about these subjects proved to be problematic. Many telephone calls from the Action Researcher went unanswered while some of the people contacted explained that they were simply too busy to enter into in-depth verbal discussions about the subjects. However, several people were prepared to discuss one or both subjects with the Action Researcher via telephone. The Action Researcher also established email contact with other knowledgeable people, but unfortunately communication became sporadic as the time these people were prepared to devote to this activity became limited for a variety of reasons. The implication to this research programme of the limited contact with knowledgeable people was that the following reflections are primarily based on published literature and findings from this research programme.

REFLECTING (Action Research Approach)

The Dual Cyclic Approach to Action Research

“As the name indicates, this [Action Research] is concerned both with action (solving concrete problems in real situation) and research (trying to further the goals of science)” (Rapoport, 1970). “Action Science/Research always involved two goals: solve a problem for the client and contribute to science. That means that you must be both a management consultant and an academic researcher at the same time” (Gummesson: 1991:103). “Friedlander and Brown (1974) observed that Action Researchers suffer a tension between ‘action’ (change implementation) and ‘science’ (knowledge generation). Their comments suggest that Action Researchers need to alternate the change agent and the researcher roles” (Aguinis, 1993:420). According to McKay and Marshall (2001:47) “There is a sense in which the very essence of Action Research is encapsulated within its name: it represents a juxtaposition of action and research, or in other words of practice and theory.”

However, the usual representation of Action Research at a high (meta) level is as a single cycle consisting of a number of activities, as earlier detailed by Walker and Haslett (2002) (see page 216). Various authors suggest different activities but the ones used during this research programme were PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING (Lewin, 1946, 1947; Robson, 1995) (see Figure 53).



Figure 53. Action Research as a Single Cycle

*This cycle can be passed through once, referred to by Baskerville and Wood-Harper (1998) as linear Action Research. Alternatively, a similar process can be applied in a number of different sites, called multiple iteration Action Research (Kock et al., 1998). A concern the Action Researcher has regarding this 'meta level' description of Action Research is that given the duality of the roles identified earlier and the duality of primary activities within this research programme, **Action** (helping someone solve a real-world problem) and **Research** (knowledge generation/theory enhancement/development), at the very least there appears to be two major cycles within Action Research operating in tandem.*

The first relates to a researcher's **'problem solving interests and responsibilities'**; during this research programme, the JOURNEY Making type activities undertaken within the Collaborative Research Programme during Step 5 of the Action Research Approach, and the second, a researcher's **'research interests and responsibilities'**; during this research programme, all other Action Research Approach steps. McKay and Marshall (2001) describe the cycles as "one overlaid on the other" (p.50) or "superimposed" (p.52) (see Figure 54).

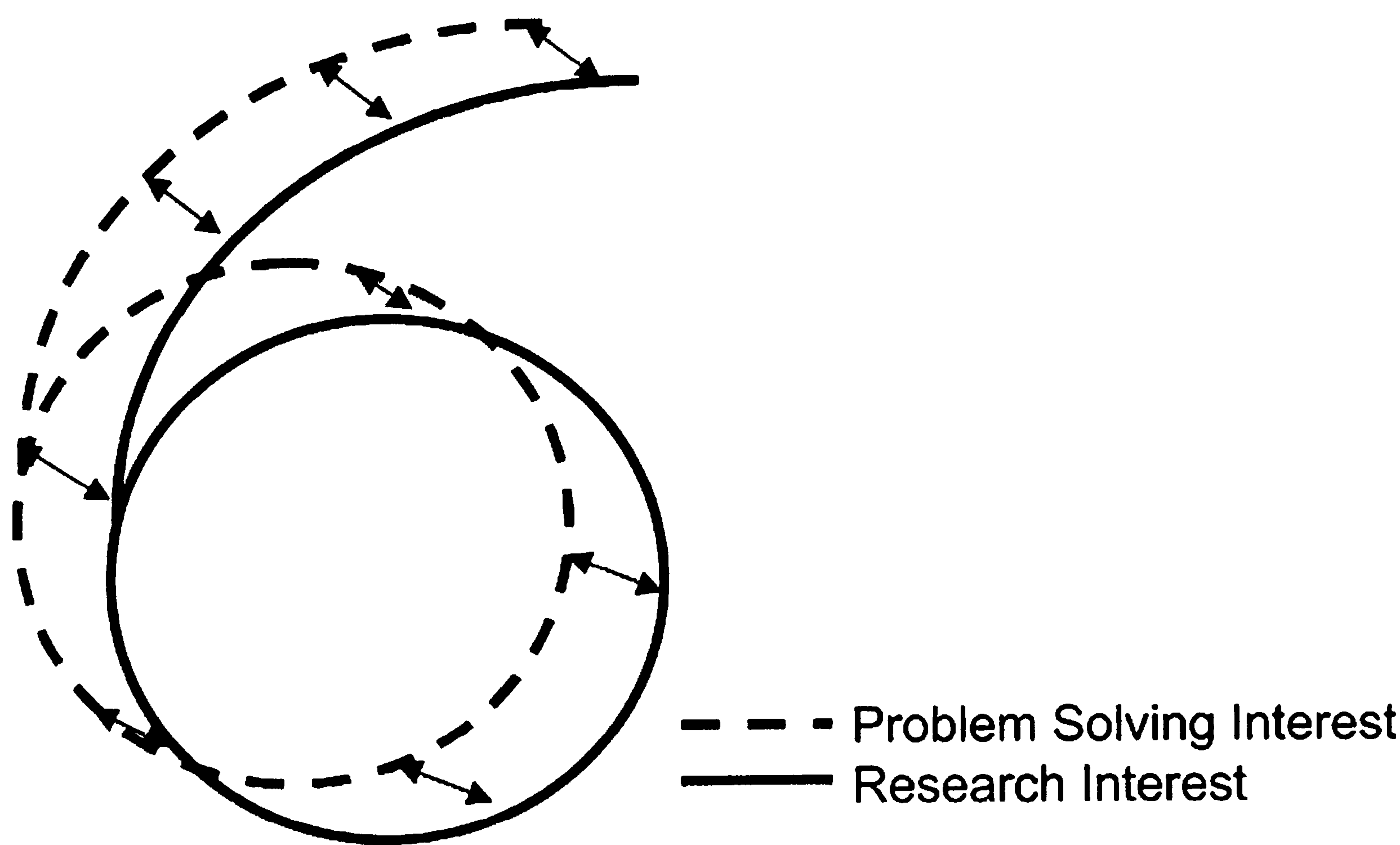


Figure 54. Action Research as a Dual Cycle Approach *Source: McKay and Marshall, 2001*

However, it is the contention of this Action Researcher that at a meta level the two cycles are not independent of each other as initially depicted by the Action Researcher in Figure 7 and reproduced in Figure 55.

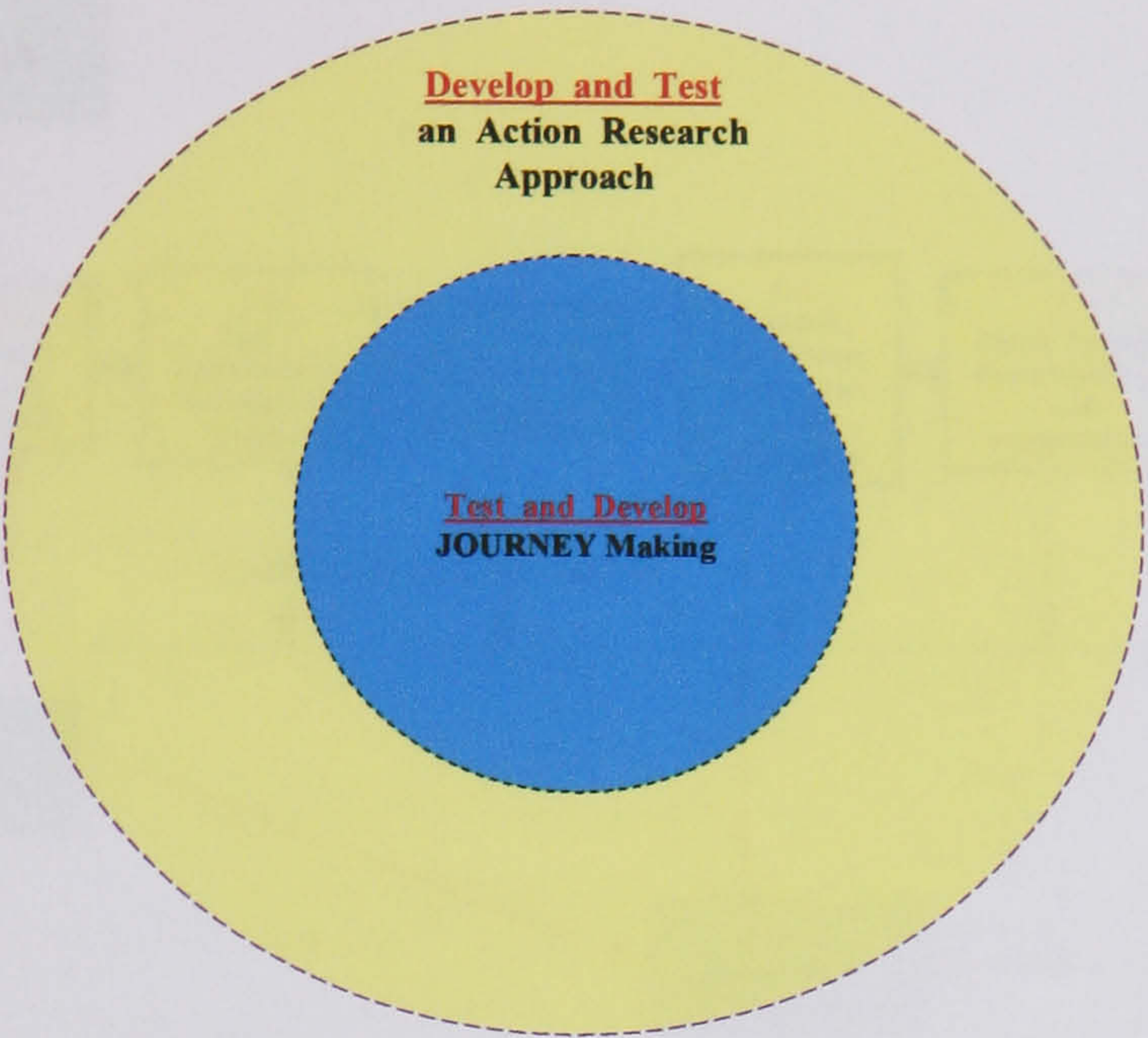


Figure 55. JOURNEY Making at the Centre of the Action Research Process

They are highly interconnected and highly dependent on each other, as depicted in Figure 56. Action Research consists of two interwoven, rather than superimposed or overlaid, cycles.

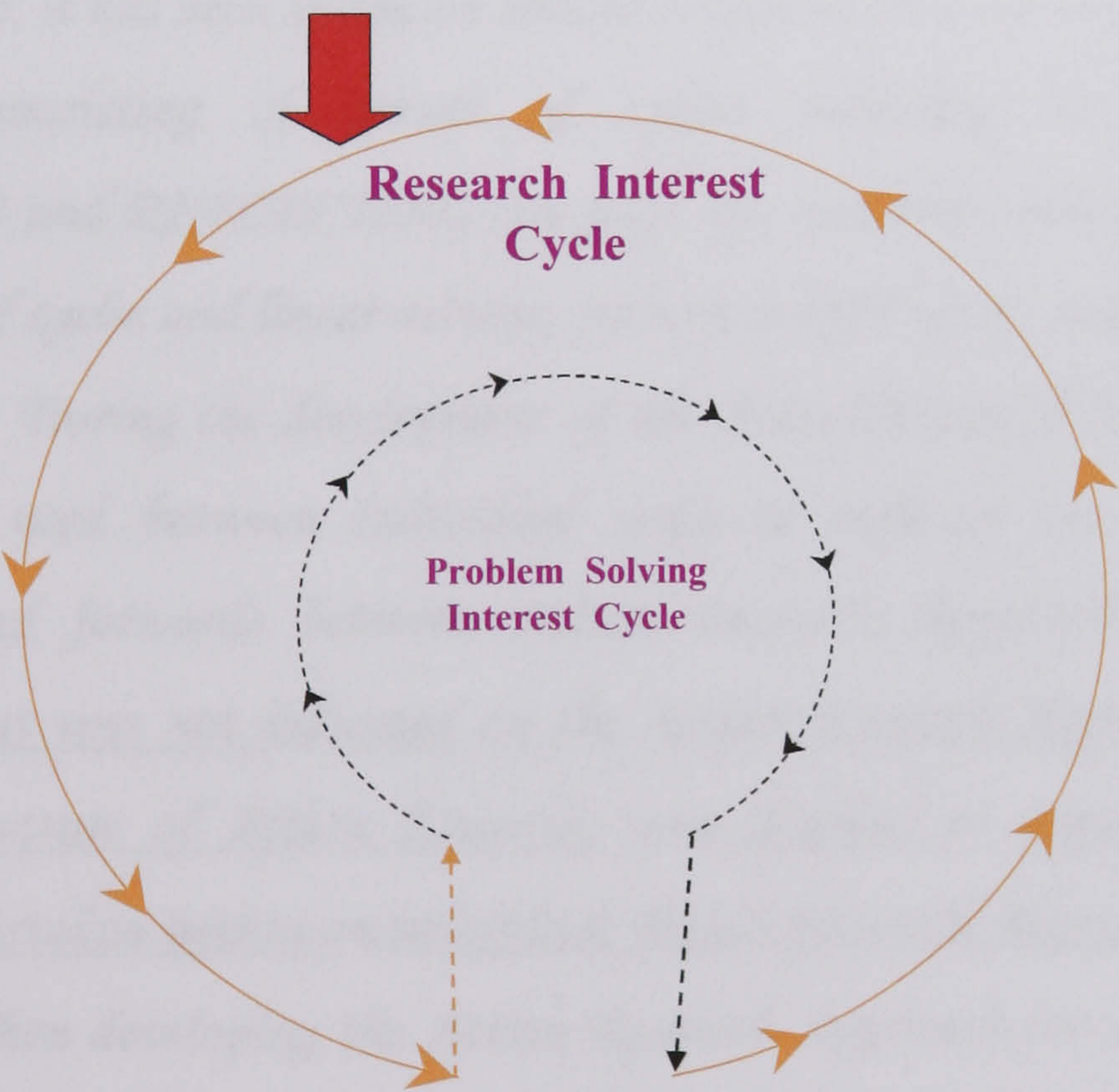


Figure 56. Action Research as a Dual Cycle Approach

In this research programme the Action Researcher established that the Action Research Approach to be used could be broken down into a number of interconnected 'micro level' steps (see Figure 57).

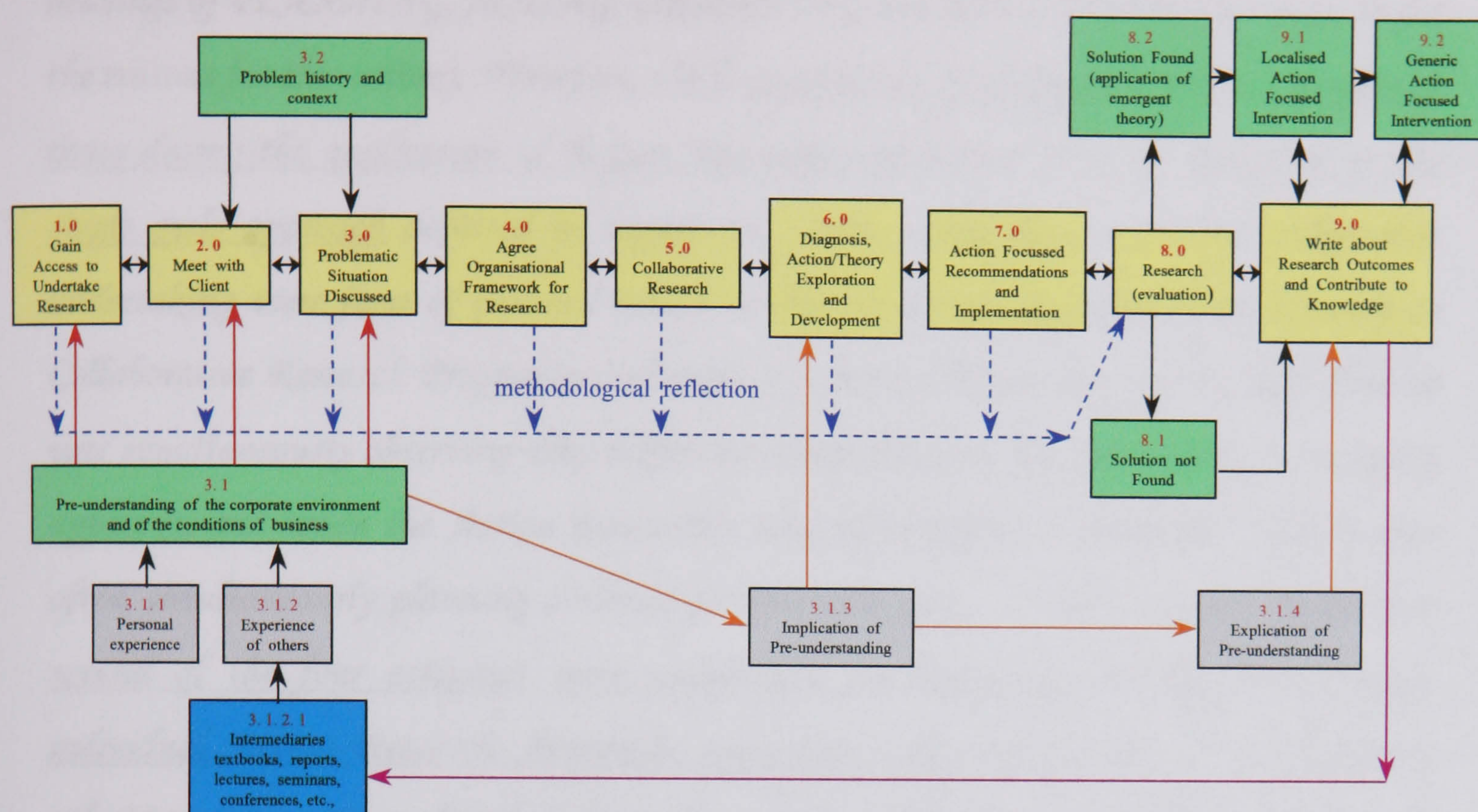


Figure 57. Action Research Approach

Although it appears that the Action Research Approach is intended for application in a 'linear' manner, it has been stated on several occasions that Action Research itself is cyclic in nature, consisting of spirals of cycles involving PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING (see page 36), and that 'real-life' thinking is often a combination of cyclic and linear actions, making it difficult to model real world activities (see page 66). During the development of the Action Research Approach double headed arrows were used between individual steps to indicate the possibility of cycling backwards and forwards between Action Research Approach steps (see page 69). However, what was not indicated on the Action Research Approach diagram was the Dual Cyclic nature of Action Research, now detailed in Figure 56, or whether the activities undertaken within an individual Action Research Approach step could be cyclic in nature. When developing the Action Research Approach for use during this research programme these issues were unknown and therefore were unconsidered.

When applying the developed Action Research Approach, the Action Researcher established that information could be recorded for each individual Action Research Approach step and Collaborative Research Programme sub-step under the four activity headings of PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING (see page 81 for the reasons for this action). Therefore, the four activities could be undertaken a number of times during the application of Action Research, rather than once, as suggested in the single cycle approach depicted in Figure 53. Also, when the Action Researcher was undertaking some form of planned action within an Action Research Approach step or Collaborative Research Programme sub-step, the Action Researcher often found that he was simultaneously observing why differences from what he had planned were becoming apparent, and when the Action Researcher was reflecting on a particular step he was often simultaneously planning action(s) for the next step. In this research programme several of the four activities were undertaken simultaneously, within and between individual Action Research Approach steps and Collaborative Research Programme sub-steps. None was undertaken discretely as indicated in the aforementioned single cycle approach. This is a similar concept to that detailed by Eden (1987, 1992a, 1992b) where he argues that aspects of strategy implementation cannot be viewed as totally separate from the rest of a strategy development process, indeed he feels that all stages are inextricably linked. Eden argues that 'in the real world' individuals think about, discuss and consider the practicalities of possible actions at the same time as problems are formulated; they do not leave implementation issues for consideration at a later time. The fact that several of the four activities occurred simultaneously at a micro level suggests that this may also happen at the meta level, therefore the description of Action Research as single cycle activity where the four activities, PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING, occur once and discretely may be invalid.

Given this information the Action Research Approach of Figure 57 can be redrawn to include the concepts that there are dual interwoven cycles within Action Research, that individual steps within Action Research are also cyclic in nature, and that within individual Action Research steps, the activities of PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING are undertaken simultaneously rather than discretely (see Figure 58).

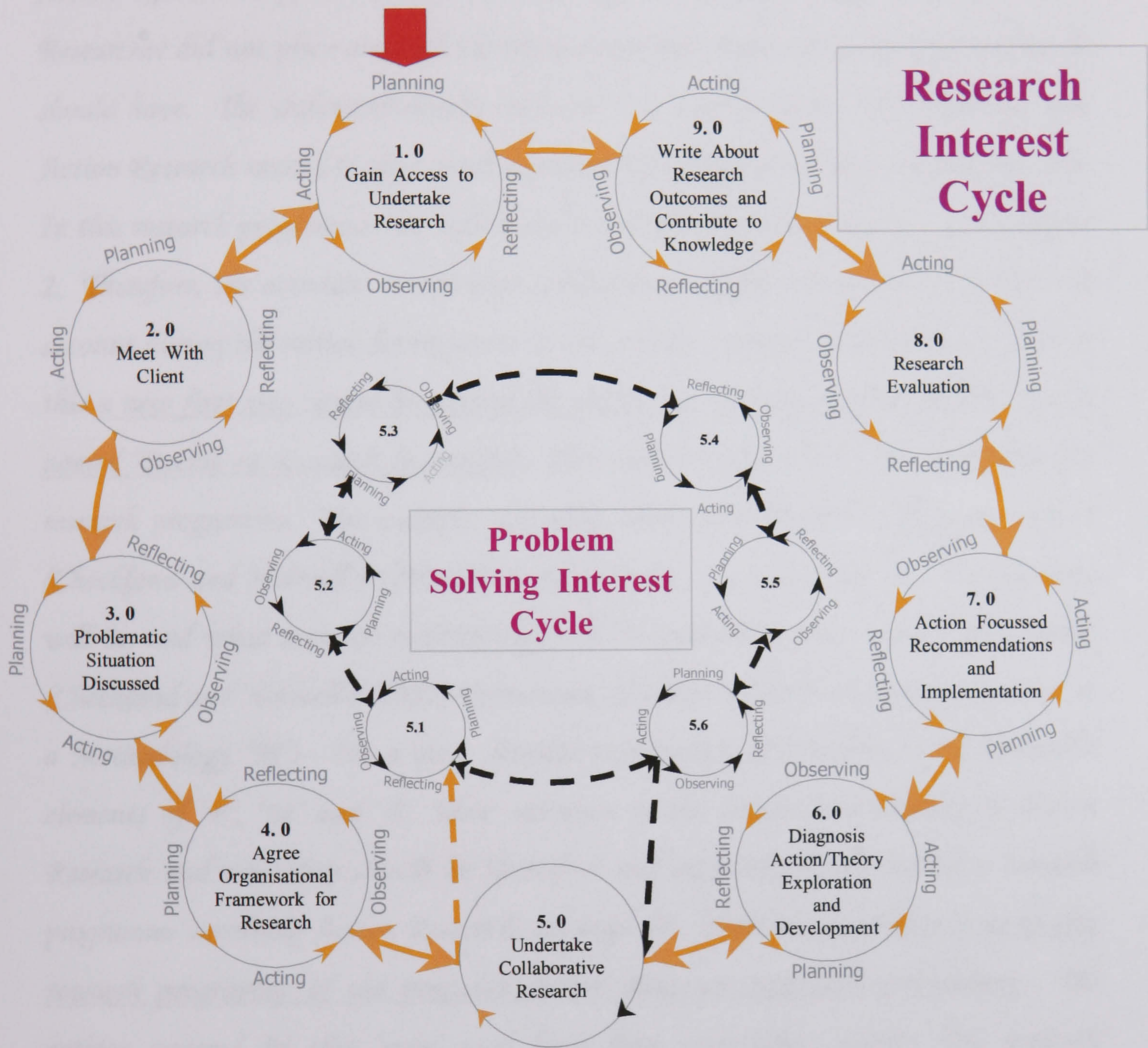


Figure 58. A Dual Cycle Action Research Approach

Two further reflections from this research programme indicate how this dual cycle Action Research Approach can be further amended.

- a. On page 36 of this document it was reported that according to Robson (1995:438), Lewin viewed Action Research as "... starting with a general idea. For one reason or another it is thought desirable to reach a certain objective..." When developing the Action Research Approach to be used during this research programme the Action Researcher did not place as much significance on this statement as he now realises he should have. The statement clearly indicates that Lewin (1946, 1947) believed that Action Research needed to start with a general idea about reaching a certain objective. In this research programme this information was developed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. Therefore, the activities undertaken during these chapters needed to be taken into account during the initial development of the Action Research Approach. In view of this a new first step can to be created for the Action Research Approach that can be named 'Decide on Research Activities'. This step describes the 'What' of a proposed research programme. For example, detailing what specific topic will be researched (Checkland and Holwell's (1998) Area of Interest 'A'), what the research objective will be, and what research methodology will be used during the research programme (Checkland and Holwell's (1998) Framework of Ideas 'F' used in the Development of a Methodology 'M'). For a more detailed explanation of Checkland and Holwell's elements of 'F', 'M' and 'A', their relevance to the nature and validity of Action Research and why they should be identified and explicitly stated within a research programme involving Action Research, see page 38. There are no implications to this research programme of the proposed Action Research Approach amendment. The actions covered by this 'new' step have been undertaken within this research programme, but unfortunately they were not considered for inclusion within the Action Research Approach during the initial development.*

6. *When developing the initial Action Research Approach the Action Researcher stated on page 70 that “the next stage is to synthesise and explore the data while attempting to detect and develop any emergent actions and/or theories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Gummesson, 1991; Eden and Huxham, 1993, 1995, 1996). Next, action focused recommendations and their implementation must be considered (Eden and Huxham, 1995).” From this statement Step 6 ‘Diagnosis Action/Theory Exploration and Development’ and Step 7 ‘Action Focused Recommendations and Implementation’, were created. However, Step 7 was created before the Action Researcher established that the activities of PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING could be undertaken within each individual Action Research Approach step and Collaborative Research Programme sub-step (see page 81 for the reasons for this action). Within the ‘REFLECTING’ section of each Action Research Approach step and Collaborative Research Programme sub-step, action-focused recommendations have already been made with reference to established theory. This was in accordance with the ‘Output Characteristic’ (page 62), attributed to Lewin (1946, 1947) and Eden and Huxham (1993, 1995, 1996) that states that “if the generality drawn out of Action Research is to be expressed through the design of tools, techniques, models and method then this alone is not enough – the basis for their design must be explicit and shown to be related to the theory.” Finally, with regard to the implementation of action-focused recommendations, these can only be applied during the next cycle of the Action Research Approach. As the Action Research Approach has not yet progressed through a full cycle, action-focused recommendations cannot be implemented at this time. Given this information, Step 7 of the Action Research Approach can be viewed as a redundant step in the Action Research Approach, and one that can be removed. Once again there are no implications for this research programme of the proposed Action Research Approach amendment as the actions to be undertaken have been achieved elsewhere within the Action Research Approach and have been recorded during this research programme.*

An updated Dual Cycle Action Research Approach, taking into account the aforementioned considerations can be seen in Figure 59.

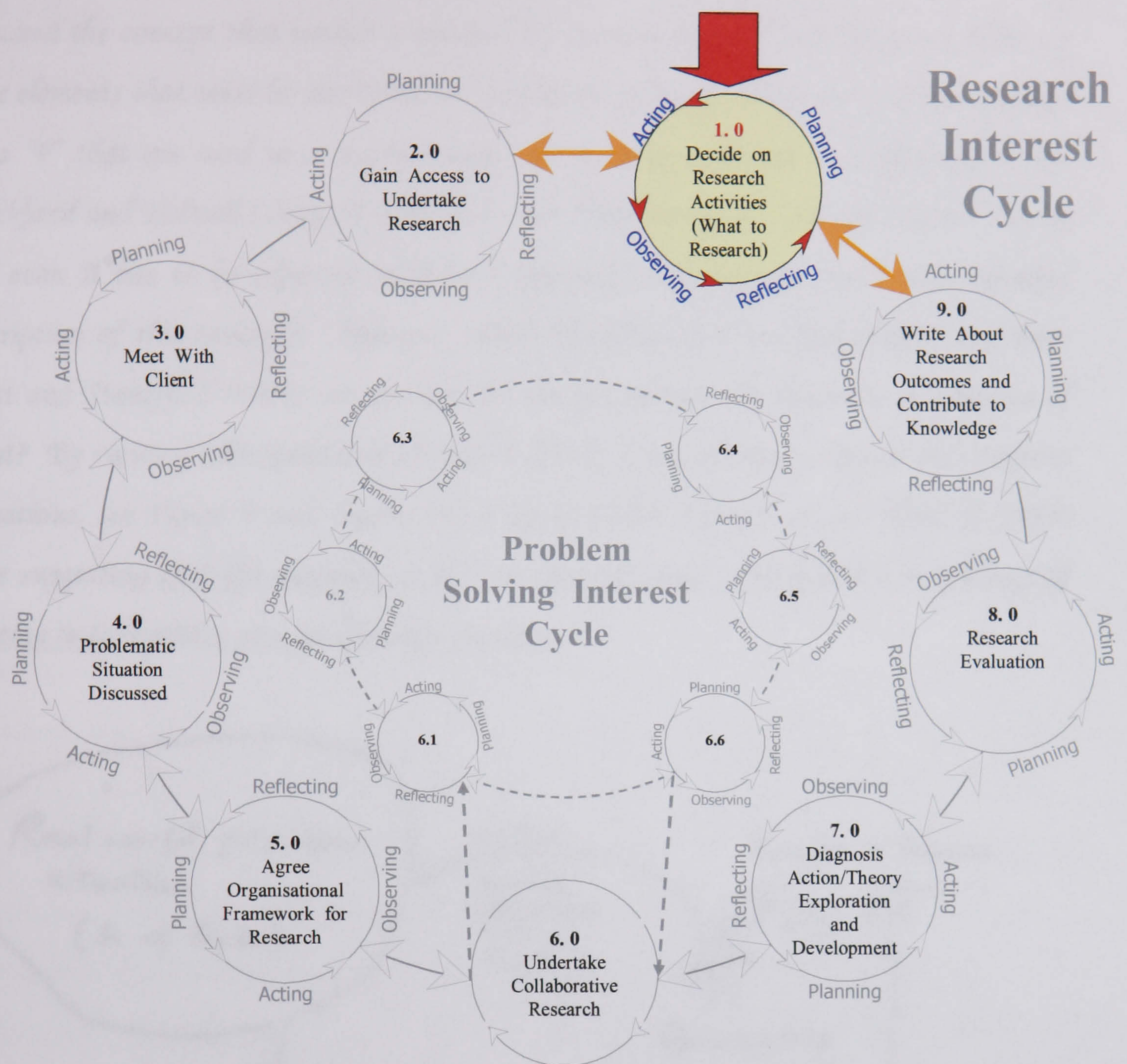


Figure 59. Amended Dual Cycle Action Research Approach

On page 76 it was stated that a judgment of the validity of the Action Research Approach will be to provide evidence that changes to the elements of 'F', 'M,' and 'A' have been identified and documented during the application of the Action Research Approach. This is an identified and documented change to the element 'M'.

Identifying When and What Action Research Elements Need to be Declared

Checkland (1991), Checkland and Holwell (1998) and West and Stansfield (2001), have discussed the concept that within a research programme using Action Research there are three elements that must be identified and explicitly declared. These are particular linked ideas 'F' that are used in a methodology 'M' to investigate an area of interest 'A'. Checkland and Holwell (1998:13) also state that "The change to or modification of F, M and even A has to be expected in Action Research" (see page 38 for a more detailed description of this concept). However, what Checkland and Holwell (1998), and later West and Stansfield (2001) are not specific about concerns the question, **in advance of what?** By viewing Checkland and Holwell's (1998) 'Cycle of Action Research in Human Situations', see Figure 6 and Figure 60, it appears that Checkland and Holwell (1998) were suggesting that the elements of 'F', 'M' and 'A' need to be declared in advance of starting to take action in a problematic situation.

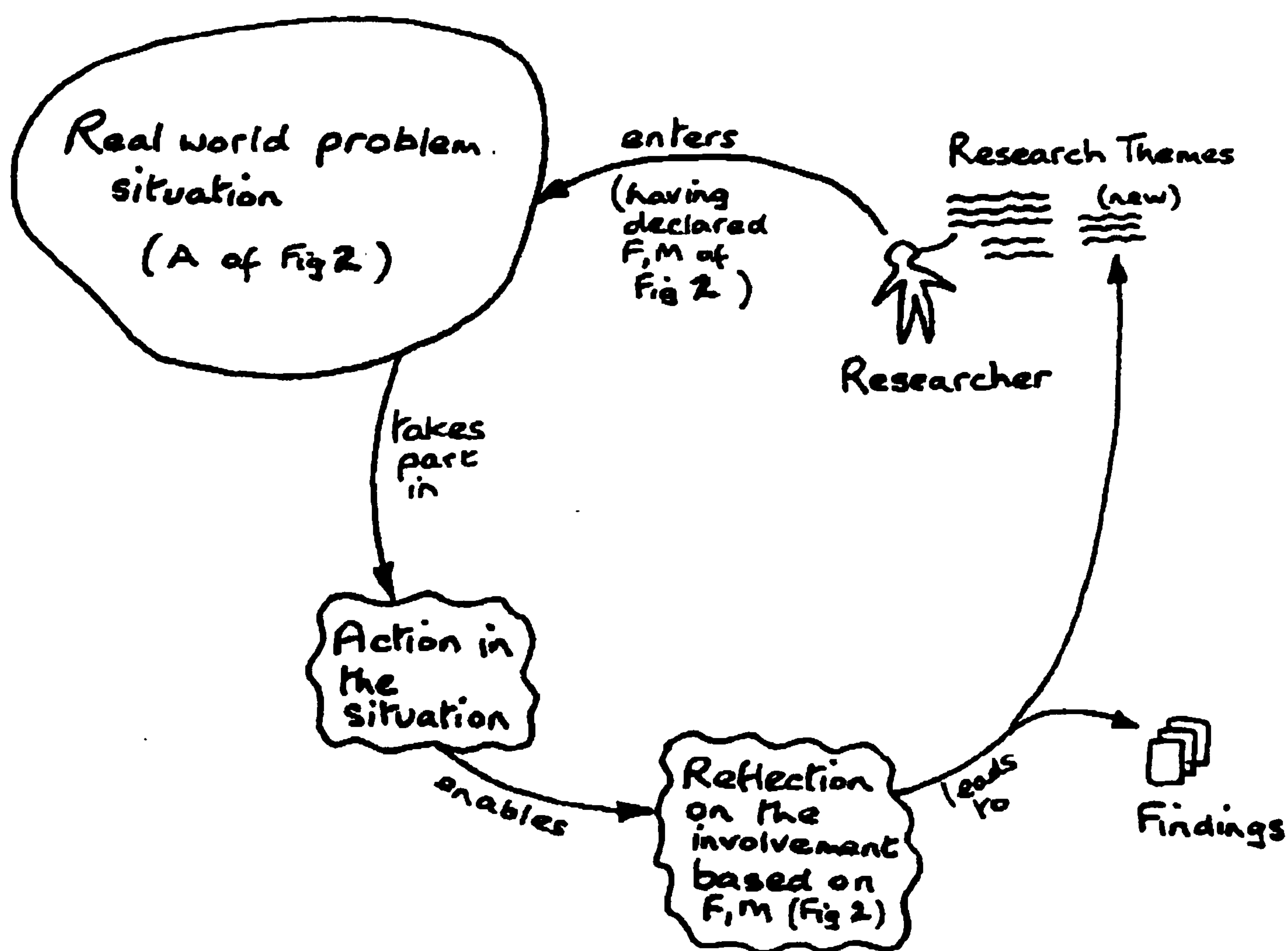


Figure 60. The Cycle of Action Research in Human Situations

Nearing the completion of this research programme, and having declared the elements of 'F', 'M' and 'A' and documented changes and/or modifications to them, enables this Action Researcher to conclude that these elements cannot be declared in advance of starting a research interest cycle, assuming that this starts at 'Step 1 - Decide on Research Activities' (see Figure 59), which would equate to Chapters 1 and 2 of this document. However, 'F', 'M' and 'A' need to be identified and declared as early as possible during a research interest cycle. Therefore, they need to be identified and declared during 'Step 1 - Decide on Research Activities', a concept similar to that applied during traditional theory-based research. This is far earlier than Checkland and Holwell (1998) suggest. The reason for this is that it allows an Action Researcher a broader timescale during which changes to the elements of 'F', 'M' and 'A' can be identified. Changes may start to occur as soon as they are identified and probably will occur as soon as a dialogue is established with potential clients. As Schein (1995:15) states "we must assume that the way in which we enter a relationship with a client is in itself a major intervention that must be evaluated as an intervention ... Or, to put it bluntly we start intervening when we first pick up the phone and answer an enquiry from a potential client." Changes to 'M' within this research programme started to be identified and documented very early during the application of the Action Research Approach, for example, on page 97 when a new 'first' step entitled 'Gain Access to Undertake Research' was identified, and on page 108, where the concepts of 'Pre-understanding the Corporate Environment of Action Research' were linked to both of the first two Action Research Approach steps. This can bring about another change to the validation criterion that may be used during Action Research. The initial criterion (see page 38), stated that a judgment of the validity of Action Research will be to provide evidence that changes to the elements of 'F', 'M,' and 'A' have been identified and documented during the application of the Action Research Approach. The new criterion will be that the judgment of the validity of an Action Research Approach will be to provide evidence that the elements of 'F', 'M', and 'A' were declared **during** 'Step 1 - Decide on Research Activities' and that changes to them have been identified and documented during the application of the Action Research Approach.

If there are two interconnected meta level cycles incorporated within Action Research, as discussed earlier (see page 227), this indicates that two frameworks (F) and two methodologies (M) can be identified and declared during 'Step 1 – Decide on Research Activities', and changes to them documented during the rest of the research programme. The first 'F' and 'M' concern the framework of ideas and subsequent methodology which the Action Researcher believes is in the research interest cycle of Action Research. These can be termed '**FR**' (research framework) and '**MR**' (research methodology). The second 'F' and 'M' concerns the framework of ideas and subsequent methodology which is employed to guide the problem solving intervention. These can be termed '**FPS**' and '**MPS**' (problem solving methodology) (see Figure 61).

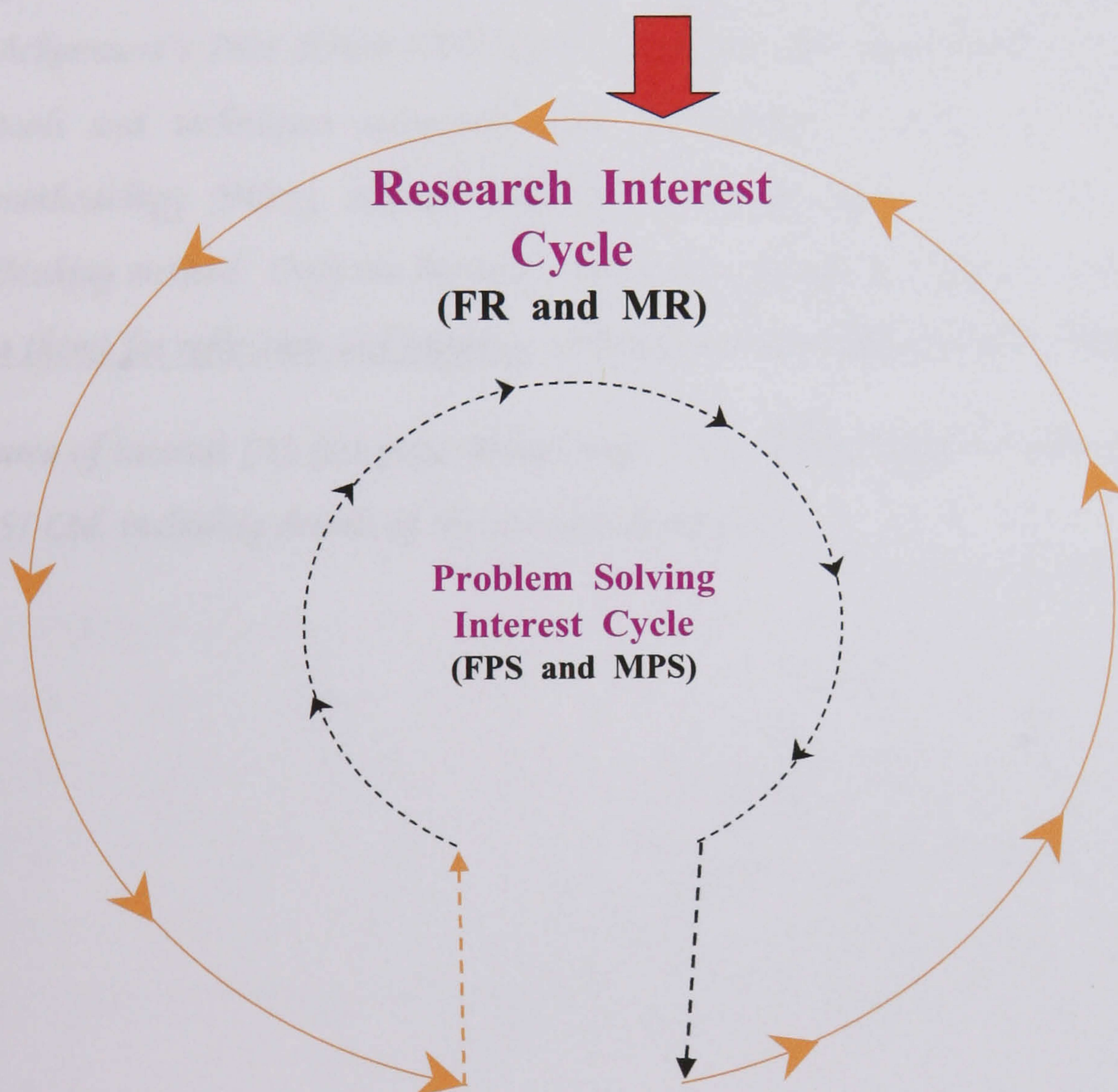


Figure 61. Potential Activities for Reflection During Action Research

McKay and Marshall (2001) only indicate the existence of multiple M's to be reflected upon, but this Action Researcher agrees with Checkland and Holwell (1998) that changes to or modifications of 'F's' should also be expected and documented when using an Action Research methodology. Therefore, within this research programme, reflection and learning could have taken place about the:

- *'research interest cycle' framework of ideas (FR), aligned with the Action Research Framework on page 62, and the methodology (MR) aligned with the Action Research Approach on page 74. These are the original 'F' and 'M' detailed on page 41 of this document.*
- *'problem solving interest cycle' framework of ideas (FPS) aligned with Eden and Ackermann's 1998 JOURNEY Making book and other associated texts regarding the tools and techniques associated with JOURNEY Making, and the subsequent methodology (MPS), aligned with the practical application of the JOURNEY Making method. Only the latter of these was originally identified in this document as a theme for reflection and learning, although not formally declared as MPS.*
- *area of interest (A), (see page 40 and page 134). What happened when working with SI Ltd. including details of the strategy developed?*

These reflection points are shown in Figure 62 which is an amendment to Checkland and Holwell's original diagram (see Figure 60).

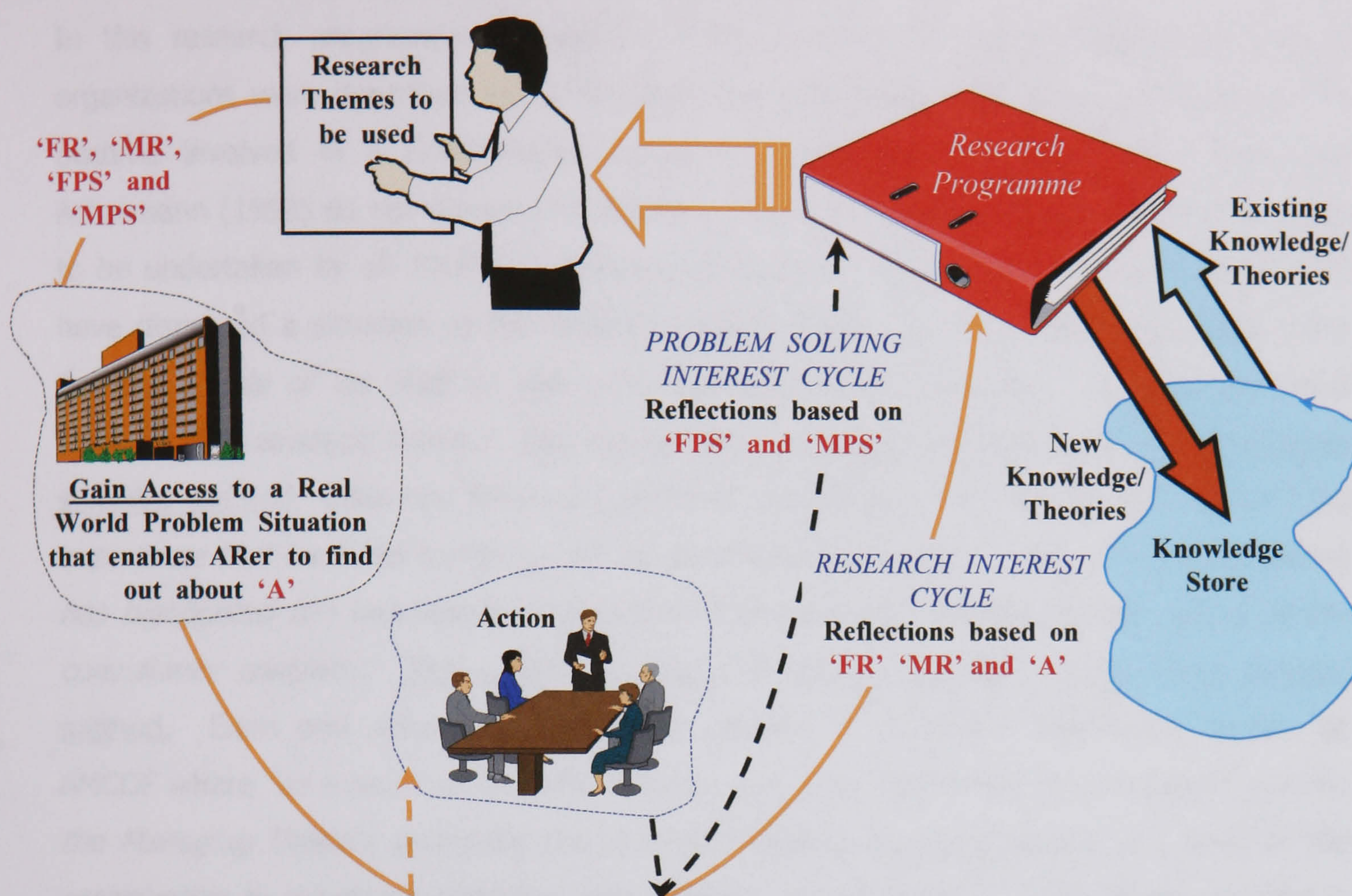


Figure 62. Reflections for this Research Programme

This brings about yet another change to the criterion that may be used when validating Action Research (see page 38 for the original text and page 236 for the revised version). The judgment of the validity of an Action Research Approach will be to provide evidence that the elements of 'FR', 'MR', 'FPS', 'MPS' and 'A' were declared during 'Step 1 - Decide on Research Activities' and that changes to them have been identified and documented during the application of the Action Research Approach. This would be a totally unique criterion for validating future Action Research programmes.

REFLECTING (JOURNEY Making)

Gaining Physical Access to Organizations – 'Getting In'

In this research programme Conway's (1987) methods for gaining physical access to organizations were described as being useful for attempting to find an organization(s) to become involved in a Collaborative Research Programme (see page 92). Eden and Ackermann (1998) do not discuss this activity as part of JOURNEY Making, yet it does need to be undertaken by all JOURNEY Making practitioners. Eden and Ackermann (1998:223) have discussed a situation at the Northern Ireland Prison Service where a potential client *"sent a couple of his staff to visit a number of outfits who helped organizations think through their strategic future."* This access method is similar to Conway's (1987) 'external stimulus' method. Eden and Simpson (1990:44) have stated that with regard to SODA *"The experience that we have had in a wide range of situations with a variety of potential clients has highlighted the importance of personal relationships in establishing the nature of the consultancy contract."* This access method is similar to Conway's (1987) 'close linkage' method. Eden and Ackermann (1998:247) discuss a JOURNEY Making intervention at AMCOF where *"as a result of involving a number of other Directors in the Division's journey, the Managing Director promoted the JOURNEY making approach to the next level of the organization to develop a company wide strategy and IT strategy."* This access method is similar to Conway's (1987) 'external or internal linkage method'. More recently Ackermann and Eden (2001:44) have discussed a JOURNEY Making intervention where *"the initial interest for the work came about when one of a series of presentations to promote the potential for using Management Science/Operational Research method in the NAO coincided with the 'client' considering the best way to proceed with a particular piece of work."* This access method is similar to Conway's (1987) 'selling and investing' method, also detailed on page 92. **All of Conway's (1998) access methods have been utilised to secure JOURNEY Making interventions, suggesting that the activity of gaining access could be considered as the logical starting point in a JOURNEY Making intervention.** As identified earlier, Schein (1995) contends that a potential client can be influenced by a consultant from the moment of the first interaction, and that this and subsequent consultant influences will have a bearing on how an intervention progresses (see page 236). This suggests that JOURNEY Making practitioners need to understand about physical access methods in more detail and be aware that what they discuss with potential clients, from their first interaction onwards, may influence the way any resulting JOURNEY Making activities are perceived by the client.

Preparing for a 'First Meeting' with a Potential Client – 'Getting In'

If an invitation from an organization to discuss a possible application of JOURNEY Making has been received by a JOURNEY Making practitioner, regardless of how the invitation was initiated, what can be done to prepare for this first meeting needs to be considered. For example, establishing who else from the potential client's company needs to be invited to the 'first face-to-face meeting'. In any organization of any size, there may be different individuals or a variety of committees who may need to be involved in deciding whether to work with a consultant (Markham, 1993). Ensuring that the correct people are at an initial client meeting is as essential to a JOURNEY Making practitioner as it is to a consultant. The first meeting this Action Researcher had was with JP alone, and when invited to 'sell' the concept of Collaborative Research Programme involvement at a first meeting with the Strategic Planning Group, thoughts about who should attend the meeting and who would be needed to authorize involvement in 'strategy development activities' were not considered. It was a distinct possibility that nobody in the Strategic Planning Group could have approved involvement although all would be contributors to it. Miller and Heiman (1989) have identified the following key prospect roles:

- the user(s) of the service,
- the technical buyer, whose approval is needed, and who could act as a gatekeeper and
- the economic buyer, whose authority is needed to release the funds.

If these people have been identified as needing to be present at an initial meeting(s) then invitations can be sent to them. Failure to establish who should be present at initial and subsequent meetings and ensuring that these people are invited may result in a delayed decision regarding strategy development activities while further presentations are given to people who may feel overlooked by not being invited to the original meeting and, therefore, have become negatively disposed towards working with the JOURNEY Making practitioner and/or JOURNEY Making method.

Meeting Potential Clients for the First Time – 'Getting In'

Eden and Ackermann (1998) consider the issue of how a client may 'evaluate' JOURNEY Making before agreeing to its application. They state *"Evaluation also focuses upon the client's confidence in the process. For the client, the overall credibility of the approach may be as crucial a criterion as the reputation of the facilitator. After all, the credibility of the facilitator may lie as much with the extent of professional symbolism associated with the approach to be used as with the professionalism of the facilitator... Typically, other softer issues are considered: for example, can the client understand the approach (in our case JOURNEY making) to be employed. If the approach appears too opaque, or potentially 'magic', then the client is likely to be uneasy and, more importantly, feel as though he or she is unable to retain control of the process"* (p.476-477). Eden and Ackermann (1998) do not directly discuss the breadth and depth of information regarding JOURNEY Making that needs to be disclosed to potential clients in order for them to 'understand the approach'. A possible explanation for this is that JOURNEY Making as described by Eden and Ackermann (1998) is a 'contingent' approach where activities are often undertaken in a phased or staged manner dependent upon what a client's expectations/needs are. In this way a client only needs a brief understanding of the particular JOURNEY Making activity to be undertaken, for example a workshop using the Oval Mapping Technique, not an in-depth understanding of all possible JOURNEY Making activities. Eden and Ackermann (1998) recommend that it is better to *"undersell rather than oversell the process. It is often tempting to promise more than can be delivered and therefore disappoint a client"* (p.480). During this research programme the presentation given to the Strategic Planning Group provided them with an overview of the Collaborative Research Programme, as suggested by the client. However, the Strategic Planning Group requested more in-depth information about certain subjects than the client had anticipated (see page 100). Luckily the Action Researcher had over-prepared presentation information with the result that he was able to confidently answer the in-depth questions posed by the Strategic Planning Group, to the required level, when they arose (see page 100). From this the Action Researcher concluded that when JOURNEY Making is being evaluated that is incorporated within a Collaborative Research Programme, the evaluation criteria may be more comprehensive than when JOURNEY Making is being evaluated during a 'typical' application. Action Researchers attempting to 'sell' the concept of Collaborative Research Programme participation need to be prepared to answer any questions put to them in the breadth or depth of subject(s) required because failure to do this may result in a potential client deciding not to participate.

When detailing the action of developing a client consultant relationship during SODA, Eden and Simpson (1990) suggest that attention to establishing realistic and explicitly stated client–consultant expectations throughout a project is always important. Even though each party may have hidden agendas, it is still important that everybody's expectations are stated in a richer format than in traditional 'terms of reference' as it had been found that the practice of 'setting expectations' provided direction and clarity for both the client and consultant alike. Eden and Ackermann (1998:372) state, with regard to JOURNEY Making, that *"It is our experience that the first few meetings with the client can be significant for both client and facilitator. Initial meetings demonstrate professionalism, set expectations, and build trust and credibility."* During a typical application of JOURNEY Making the expectations of both the potential Client and the JOURNEY Making practitioner need to be identified and expressed for the particular JOURNEY Making activity being considered. For example, *"expectations about what has to be done, why this is appropriate, how long it will take and what the stages are on the way – process stages as well as content agreements"* (procedural rationality expectations - Eden and Ackermann, 1998:56) and *"clarifying the client-facilitator expectations about the way of working"* (Eden and Ackermann, 1998:480). Also, the practical 'problem helper' competency expectations of a potential client that a JOURNEY Making practitioner needs to fulfill in order to work with the potential client (Eden and Sims, 1979) (see page 100). There is no reference to these expectations being produced in a written format within the JOURNEY Making book. The reason for this is that when JOURNEY Making is undertaken in a contingent manner where activities are dependent upon understanding what a client's needs are, JOURNEY Making will progress in a staged manner and expectations will be identified for each new JOURNEY Making activity. However, exchanging expectations verbally can leave the action open to message distortion when message recipients do not always automatically attribute the same meanings to specific words carefully chosen by a message sender. Many people practice selective perception and distortion in what is heard, taking into account previous experiences and expectations about the future (Ericsson and Simon, 1984; Stohl, 1986; Huff and Schwenk, 1990).

When undertaking JOURNEY Making type activities within a Collaborative Research Programme where more substantial work is being planned, than during a typical JOURNEY Making application, the possibility of both parties remembering all issues and/or expectations discussed, correctly, will be low and message distortion will be high. Therefore, in this type of situation it will be beneficial to produce a framework document/memorandum to reduce the possibility of message distortion occurring and to ensure that both potential client and Action Researcher have the same understanding of espoused expectations. This framework document can then be used throughout the intervention to help both parties remember what had been initially agreed, thereby reducing any ambiguities which could arise and which may have a significant effect on the failure of the intervention (Schein, 1969; Cropper and Bennett, 1985).

Following the most recent literature search and review a further issue has been identified that needs to be included within this framework document, examples of previously identified information that could be included within a framework document can be seen on page 131. This relates to there being an identified **sense of urgency** for an organisation to change what they are currently doing. Eden and Ackermann (1998:476) state that *"it is rare for any major strategic change to be initiated without its being prompted by some form of strategic crisis."* Kotter (1995) identifies the concept of organizations not establishing a great enough sense of urgency about the need to change, as the most important step in undertaking successful organizational change. He states that well over 50% of the companies that he has personally worked with failed at this first step. The reasons he provides for this are that sometimes executives underestimate how hard it can be to drive people out of their comfort zones, sometimes they grossly overestimate how successful they have already been in increasing urgency, sometimes they lack patience, and sometimes they become paralyzed by the downside possibilities of change. He suggests that the urgency rate to contemplate organisational change is high enough when 75% of a company's management are honestly convinced that business-as-usual is totally unacceptable. Although the problem situation with SI Ltd was fully discussed with the Strategic Planning Group (see page 114), it is now realised that a sense of urgency for change was not explicitly identified, stated or established for JOURNEY Making activities to be undertaken.

On reflection it appears that JP initially had a sense of the urgency for change as he approached the Action Researcher about becoming involved in the Collaborative Research Programme (see page 90), and he stated that a new five year strategic plan needed to be developed because the strategic plan was coming to an end (see page 98). However, because this sense of urgency was not understood or appreciated by all strategy making participants, several did not fully engage with the JOURNEY Making type activities being undertaken. This can be validated to some degree by the number of times that people failed to attend workshops when expected, for example, Senior Operational Consultants not attending the group Oval Mapping Workshop after confirming they would, and JP's insistence that 'fee earning' work had priority over any strategy making activities. The difference of opinion within the Strategic Planning Group with regard to urgency for change could also be observed when individually discussing the issue of pausing/not pausing strategy development activities to gather more information from Operational Consultants, with the Action Researcher (see page 192). Here JP was insistent that a strategy, regardless of how complete it was, would be documented; owned and communicated within the expressed timeframe and that the strategy could become more robust during the next iterations of strategy making work. JP was demonstrating a sense of urgency. DT and GS believed that if a company strategy was going to be developed then it should be something that had been robustly developed rather than rushed to meet a time deadline. They saw no reason why a communication could not be distributed to employees stating that the strategy making activities would take longer than planned so that more people could become involved in the project. DT and GS were more concerned with robustness of strategy than urgency for change. EP had no distinct preference about what to do; he only wanted to see something developed that the company could follow rather than remaining in firefighting mode. A sense of urgency was not of concern to EP. Kotter and Cohen (2002:15) state that *"In successful change efforts, the first step is making sure sufficient people act with sufficient urgency – with on-your-toes behavior that looks for opportunities and problems, that energizes colleagues, the beams a sense of 'let's go'. Without enough urgency, change can become an exercise in pushing a gigantic boulder up a very tall mountain."* Had a sense of urgency to change the company been established greatly enough within SI Ltd, involving at least 75% of Strategic Planning Group members, then the strategy making activities would have been given a greater priority than other work-related topics, full engagement would have been achieved and the Collaborative Research Programme may have been easier to facilitate.

Managing Group Conflict – 'Staying In'

After it was identified that little information had been gathered from Senior Operational Consultants at SI Ltd., it was considered whether strategy development activities should be paused to re-visit information gathering activities. During normal JOURNEY Making type activities, group discussions regarding this issue had often resulted in a stalemate situation with no decision being made. This later resulted in JP unexpectedly announcing that due to the time pressures of completing the Collaborative Research Programme it would not be possible to gather more information from Senior Operational Consultants as it would mean re-evaluating most of the work that had been done to date (see page 198). JP had made a unilateral decision regarding this action from his position of company Managing Director. Having observed that the resulting short but intense period of conflict between JP, DT and GS appeared to 'stimulate' the Strategic Planning Group into quickly identifying, discussing, debating and ultimately dismissing, for a variety of reasons, several potential solutions with regard to the issue of, the Action Researcher decided to research this issue further. In a series of carefully conducted academic studies, Schweiger, Sandberg and Ragan (1986) and Amason (1996) found that high conflict in problem solving groups led to the consideration of more alternatives, better understanding of the choices, and overall, significantly more effective decision making. Similar work by Tjosvold (1991) revealed that high substantive conflict was related to superior performance. These findings and their own in-depth study of twelve top management teams led Eisenhardt, Kahwajy and Bourgeois (1997) to conclude that conflict is not only likely in teams during strategy development, it is extremely valuable. They further stated that conflict surrounding appropriate paths of action, what others term 'substantive', 'cognitive' or 'issue-oriented' conflict, at senior levels, is essential for effective strategy development choice (Amason, 1996). While conflict arising from team members not being allowed to have their say about the problem should be avoided, conflict between team members while discussing substance or issues can be encouraged but must be effectively managed. Eisenhardt, Kahwajy and Bourgeois (1997) suggest a number of tactics for deliberately creating conflict in executive teams. For example, firstly building heterogeneous teams that have members who differ in demographic characteristics such as education, gender, functional background, ethnicity and socioeconomic origin.

Particularly powerful are age differences. High conflict top management teams often include executives with age spreads of twenty years or more. Secondly, ensuring that the intersubjectivity of group members is high. Where group members do not have sharp views of their own opinions and those of their colleagues, conflict is ineffective or even non-existent. A third tactic for creating conflict is the cultivation of a symphony of distinct roles, almost caricature positions, with individual behavioral traits. This is one aspect of group/team conflict that is briefly discussed by Eden and Ackermann (1998) who state that *"for strategy making groups some of the ideas promoted by de Bono (1982) may be helpful [during the creative generation of new options], but prescriptive; for example, the role of provocation to provide 'a whack on the side of the head' (von Oech, 1982) within the group may appropriately encourage lateral thinking which is within the flow of substantive work. Indeed, encouraging provocative ideas can help maintain social order and emotional commitment, because of its being fun ... Although provocation is not always fun."* (p.70). A topic for further research could be to establish whether deliberately introducing conflict into problem solving groups during JOURNEY Making type activities would have a negative or positive effect on group productivity or effectiveness.

Eden and Ackermann (1998) suggest that decision makers typically cycle through the various stages of problem solving (Eden, 1987; Hickson et al, 1986; Mintzberg et al, 1976; Nutt, 1984), often repeating stages and going deeper into the substance of each stage, thereby increasing intersubjectivity (Eden, Jones, Sims and Smithin, 1981) (see page 116, page 136 and page 152 with regard to accumulated intersubjectivity). This problem solving cycle moves from problem construction to making sense, as the structuring process provides the building blocks for shared understanding. This shared understanding in turn helps participants define the issues relating to the problems – an effort that subsequently assists the generation and agreement upon options and further construction (see Figure 63).

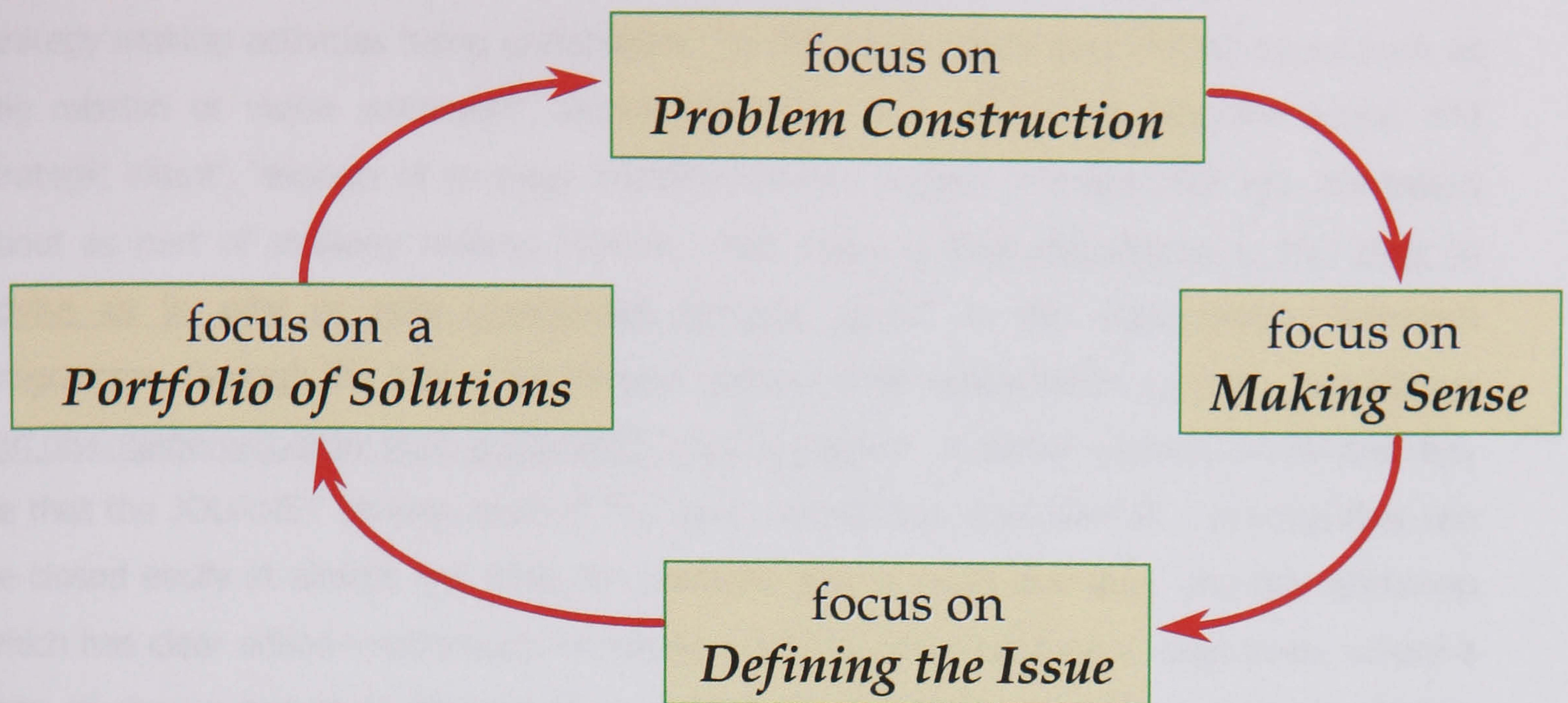


Figure 63. The Cycle of Group Problem Solving: Source Eden (1987)

Therefore, an addition to the proposed topic for further research, mentioned earlier, could be to establish when conflict could be introduced into the group problem solving cycle. High intersubjectivity has been identified by Eisenhardt, Kahwajy and Bourgeois (1997) as being one of the aspects needed for deliberately creating conflict in executive teams, therefore, should conflict during group problem solving be avoided until high intersubjectivity has been established, e.g., during the 'focus on a portfolio of solutions', when the generation and agreement upon options and further construction is undertaken, or should managed conflict be considered for use during any stage in the group problem solving cycle? More can be learnt about this issue than has been touched upon in this Collaborative Research Programme.

JOURNEY Making Closure – 'Getting Out'

At the end of the Collaborative Research Programme there was no 'formal' closure for the strategy making activities being undertaken. In Eden and Ackermann (1998) issues such as 'the mission or vision statement', 'action planning', 'the relationship between action and strategic intent', 'aspects of strategy implementation', 'project management' etc. are talked about as part of strategy making closure. Yet, there is little information in the book to advise as to why or how unexpected closures occur; in this Collaborative Research Programme, through the loss of the project sponsor/main collaborator, or how a practitioner can disengage/withdraw from a JOURNEY Making project. A partial explanation for this may be that the JOURNEY Making method has been deliberately contrived as a process that can be closed easily at almost any time, for example after a 'quick and dirty' one-day workshop which has clear action implications, or where work has proceeded on a stage basis, where a form of closure occurs at the end of each stage (see Ackermann, Eden and Brown, 2002). This can be related to Eden and Ackermann's (1998) contention that closure is not related to the end of a process or an analysis, but rather more related to the psychological needs of the group and the need to agree to act. Eden (1987) has explored the nature of 'problem finishing' in some detail and suggests that when a person's anticipations about the future change from being an 'unknown worry' and become a 'conscious dream', and when they feel that a messy problem has become an agenda of things to do, then a problem is finished and a person is ready to act. Similarly this can happen with problem solving groups. The essence of these ideas is that the process of closure is such that it is related not to an analysis of the situation but to the owners of the problem. The end point of such an intervention must correspondingly be defined by changes in the meanings which the situation has for all those involved. It could be taken to represent the point where continued joint work on the problem is felt to be unnecessary, and where the joint interests which have held the group together are overwhelmed by their individual wishes to proceed. As Ackermann, Eden and Brown (2002:107) suggest *"... it is better to have a strategy which is less well thought through but will be delivered, than a strategy that has been fully developed but which will not be delivered because there is no commitment to it from those who must deliver it."* This may have been the point that DT and other Strategic Planning Group members reached in the strategy making work following the departure of JP. A point had been reached where a messy problem had become an agenda of things to do, the problem was 'finished' and Strategic Planning Group members were ready to act and implement less than perfect strategies.

This previous section of text discussed *why unexpected Collaborative Research Programme closure may occur* but the question of how an Action Researcher should disengage/withdraw from a real world intervention has not yet been covered, and it is important for all Action Researchers to understand how to disengage/withdraw from real world research programmes. Mumford (2001:24) suggests that *"getting in and staying in research situations is not easy but 'getting out' has its own particular problems."* Action Researchers implementing JOURNEY Making type activities, or indeed any strategic problem solving method within a Collaborative Research Programme, need to understand about affecting closure for the work being undertaken and withdrawing/disengaging from a company after this has been achieved. Bryant (1989) states that there can be real difficulties if the issue of withdrawal/disengagement is not tackled responsibly by those involved. Since the problem-helper is usually in the business of writing himself out of a job by enabling the problem-owner to become more resourceful and autonomous, there are delicate matters of independence and self sufficiency to be confronted in the relationship between the key players. There may also be important emotional ties to be loosened among all concerned when an intervention runs towards its close, and the business of allowing the working group to 'die' is one that has to be taken seriously. Indeed, just as French and Bell (1984) suggest in the context of organizational change, so too in the context of problem handling interventions, a way must be found of facilitating a process of mourning for and creating a memorial to the cooperative venture. Formal adoption of a fully or partially developed strategic plan, goals, strategies, strategic programmes and actions, can provide a natural occasion for developing such a sense of closure and Action Researcher withdrawal/disengagement. But even without a strategic plan, some sort of ceremony and celebration is helpful to give participants in the process the sense that the strategy making efforts are finished for the present and that the time for sustained implementation, without the problem-helper's intervention, is at hand (Bryson, 1995; Bryson, Van de Ven and Roering, 1987).

Markham (1993) identifies the withdrawal stage as having three aspects:

(a) Transfer – when a client is left, they should have an ongoing capability to maintain and support the changes and improvement introduced as a result of the problem-helper's work.

Methods for effecting transfer can include:

- Providing training,
- Writing manuals and programmes,
- Establishing systems and procedures,

Key points of transfer are that:

- Transfer is seen to be part of the project. If consultants and other resources are not contracted for transfer, it won't happen. Transfer should be included, where appropriate, in the terms of reference, and provisions should be made in the project costing for carrying it out.
- Transfer should include follow-up. Follow-up visits by the consultant can be used to ensure that transfer has been successful, and can be used to deal with any problems that might have cropped up.

(b) Evaluation – It is also important to carry out some sort of evaluation of the assignment once it has been completed. This is important not only for quality assurance purposes, but also to ensure that the consultancy practice gets value from the experience of the consultancy team who have carried out the job, for example by capturing:

- The experience of having carried out the work,
- Any new operating techniques that have been developed during the project,
- The experience of credibility of working in a particular business sector.

(3) Disengagement - the end of the project may mean the end of this particular piece of work, but there may be extension work – other projects that can be carried out to the benefit of the client, or the continuation of the existing project to further levels. In any event, the experience of having worked together will have effected a change in the relationship between consultant and client, which should provide a good basis for further work in future.

It is the Action Researcher's conclusion that the activities of Collaborative Research Programme withdrawal/disengagement should be planned for and included in the framework document negotiated and agreed during 'Step 4.0 Agree Organizational Framework for Research' (see page 125). All parties will then be aware of the need to formally end the Collaborative Research Programme (regardless of how this comes about), what will be involved in this closure, and how long it will take to complete it, rather than undergoing a long protracted closure where nobody is sure whether closure has been effected or not, as happened in this Collaborative Research Programme. Bryson's (1995) 'Ten-Step Strategic Change Cycle' starts with the first step of developing an 'Initial Agreement' that details what strategic planning activities are to be undertaken. Here Bryson suggests that there is a need to 'Plan for Planning'. However an aspect that Bryson does not cover is the need to 'Plan for Closing'. Yet, the last step on a long JOURNEY can be just as important as the first.

SUMMARY

Contributions to knowledge in the 'research' community

On page 48 the Action Researcher wrote that Eden and Huxham (1996:85) had stated “*that Action Research is likely to be a problematic research methodology for doctoral students*” because the uncertainty and lack of control creates anxiety for anyone other than confident and experienced researchers, and doing action in Action Research demands experience and understanding of methods for consultancy and interventions. The Action Researcher further stated that unless this statement was tested and the difficulties associated with applying Action Research during doctoral research were identified and detailed, whether Action Research is suitable for doctoral research programmes or just for the ‘confident and experienced researchers’ could not be established. On page 43, the Action Researcher described several types of people who may use an Action Research approach in their work; amongst those detailed were part/full-time ‘academic’ researchers. Given Eden and Huxham’s statement above it can be seen that there may be a number of permutations that can be applied to researchers who may be considering the use of Action Research during a doctoral research programme. For example, part/full-time researchers who have both the necessary research and consultancy expertise, part/full time researchers who have the necessary consultancy/intervention expertise, but not the necessary research expertise, and part/full time researches who have the necessary research expertise but not the necessary consultancy/intervention expertise. The application of Action Research undertaken in this research programme was by a full time professional business consultant (Appendix A2-5) and ‘novice’ JOURNEY Making practitioner, but part-time doctoral student and ‘novice’ Action Researcher, see page 44. Several times during the application of the Action Research Approach the Action Researcher described difficulties associated with simultaneously working full-time and undertaking part-time doctoral research, for example, the Action Researcher only dedicated himself ‘part-time’ to the activity of finding a company to become involved in the Collaborative Research Programme instead of the ‘professional/full-time’ dedication the activity demanded (see page 94), or the Action Researcher not preparing work for an Oval Mapping Workshop that should have been prepared, because he compromised this work in order to complete work on time for his full-time employer (see page 153).

Also, the Action Researcher being assigned to work in a foreign country and needing to re-schedule strategy making workshops that led to JOURNEY Making activities not being undertaken within the recommended timescales (see page 163). On page 176 the Action Researcher reflected on all these issues and also considered the different priorities and expectations placed on the 'real world strategy making activities' being undertaken, by all involved parties - the client, the Action Researcher's full-time employer and the Action Researcher. From this the Action Researcher concluded that combining part-time doctoral research using Action Research/JOURNEY Making in a real world intervention and working full-time were activities that should not be undertaken simultaneously when a Collaborative Research Programme was being undertaken within an independent company.

The permutation of full-time researchers who have both the necessary research and consultancy expertise can now be considered. Researchers who can demonstrate that they have both the necessary research and consultancy expertise may be people who have worked in business for a number of years; possibly attaining a postgraduate research-based qualification during that time, who have now been involved in full-time academic research programmes for a number of years, and are considering undertaking doctoral research. These are the people that Eden and Huxham (1996) may be referring to as confident and experienced researchers who have an experience and understanding of methods for consultancy and interventions. The rigours of Action Research may not prove to be difficult for these people, but it is this Action Researcher's recommendation that a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and practical implications associated with Action Research per se, the dual cycle approach to Action Research, and how research programmes involving Action Research can be validated, are still needed by these people before using Action Research in a doctoral research programme. This is similar to the work undertaken by this novice Action Researcher before starting this research programme (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2).

For people who only possess one of the two areas of expertise mentioned; full-time researchers who have the necessary consultancy expertise but not the necessary research expertise, and full-time researchers who have the necessary research expertise, but not the necessary consultancy expertise, the model promoted by Eden and Huxham (1996:85), *“an apprenticeship’ model for learning how to do action research is probably essential. This means that team research where a member of the team is an experienced action researcher should be promoted”*, may be a way of attaining the competencies needed to use Action Research successfully. The subject of team research has also been discussed with regard to ‘mode 2’ research. Tranfield and Starkey (1998:347) state that *“The mode 2 knowledge production system requires trans-disciplinarity in which team working rather than heroic individual endeavor becomes the established norm.”* Tranfield and Starkey (1998:351) take the issue of team research further as they also consider how this type of research programme may be found *“For a soft, applied discipline, themed areas of work focused on actual or virtual research centers of excellence provide an important potential vehicle for mode 2 knowledge production... centers can act as intermediary bodies between sponsors, academic communities and other interested and contributing groups in the knowledge production process.”* From this statement it appears that Tranfield and Starkey are discussing the creation of actual or virtual ‘research brokerages’ (see page 94), to service real-world research communities. This approach may have implications for the way Universities and/or business schools operate in the future, and several articles in a special edition of the British Journal of Management have discussed some of these issues (Grey, 2001; Hodgkinson, Herriot and Anderson, 2001; Starkey and Madan, 2001). The success of these research brokerages will also be dependent upon organizations having a ‘formal’ process and/or appointed person responsible for dealing with ‘research proposals’. From this research programme the Action Researcher concludes that at present this is not so (see page 94). Organizations will also need to be convinced to take this step and will need to be educated, “about the potential benefits of closer research relationships with academics” (Starkey and Madan, 2001:4).

Practical aspects of team research that neither Eden and Huxham (1996) nor Tranfield and Starkey (1998) have discussed, but which would need to be considered before team researching during Action Research and/or mode 2 research is undertaken, concern the way in which individual team members' contributions will be validated (Hatchuel, 2001) as a team member may want to use information relevant to their involvement in the team research programme in an attempt to attain a doctoral qualification, or team/individual goal setting (Wilts, 2000), or the metrics to be used for measuring the overall success/failure of a team research programme from the viewpoints of both research team and client (measuring the impact of research on practice – Starkey and Madan, 2001). This Action Researcher considers the team research model an essential method for all full-time researchers to acquire the necessary competencies to undertake Action Research and/or mode 2 research. An understanding of methods for consultancy/intervention and how to apply research methodologies in real world research situations can be learnt by researchers when becoming involved as apprentices during a team research programme. Therefore, the Action Researcher concludes that Action Research is suitable for use by all full-time doctoral researchers, but only following an apprenticeship period. However, a greater understanding of the practicalities of this issue needs to be developed, making this an interesting subject for post-doctoral research.

On page 28 of this thesis, the researcher detailed several reasons why he decided to only use one ‘soft’ problem solving method in this research programme. In brief, the rationale behind this was that according to Tomlinson (1990), there were four separate elements that could be identified during the resolution of problems; a methodology, a method, models and tools. He argues that there are two major problems associated with the practical application of any particular method. The first is that many of the current methods used had been developed from scratch based on a personal methodological approach to the subject by the creator. Therefore, if the underpinning methodology associated with the method was not fully understood, anyone attempting to use the method would not be able to do so as effectively as someone who fully understood the underpinning methodology. He also suggested that learning in depth the methodological underpinnings of a method and how to practically apply that method could take a considerable length of time. Secondly, while a person could practice and compare ‘hard’ problem solving methods at a desk in the absence of a critical customer, soft problem solving methods could not easily be acquired in the same way. They need either supervised study or learning on the job, which are painful ways of learning, risking the exposure of one’s incompetence to a client.

The JOURNEY Making problem solving/strategy making method was chosen for use during this research programme, although difficulties associated with learning and applying SODA/JOURNEY Making had been identified (Eden, 1990a; Eden and Ackermann, 2001) (see page 49). It was explained that for this research programme the researcher wanted to identify ‘practical’ difficulties associated with the application of JOURNEY Making by a novice practitioner during a real world intervention (see page 42). Many difficulties regarding the application of JOURNEY Making type activities have been documented throughout this thesis and can now be considered with regard to Tomlinson’s two problem areas.

1. The methodological underpinnings of initially SODA, and now JOURNEY Making, have been extensively documented over many years (Eden, 1982, 1987, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1992a, 1992b, 1993; Eden and Ackermann, 1992; 1995; 1998, 2001; Ackermann, 1990, 1992; Ackermann and Belton, 1994; Bryson, 1995; Ackermann and Eden, 2001), therefore, there is considerable literature available that can be used to gain an understanding of the methodological underpinnings of JOURNEY Making. Incorporated within the method are tools and techniques, such as cognitive mapping, oval mapping, modelling and analysis using Decision Explorer, the facilitation of groups, stakeholder analysis, scenario planning etc. (see Eden and Ackermann, 1998:1-181). Each of these tools and techniques has its own methodological underpinnings, as explained by Eden and Ackermann (1998:2) *“Although most of the techniques have been developed by the authors, some of them draw on the practice of management scientists, management consultants, community leaders, organizational development facilitators and of course strategic planners.”* Having now attempted to apply several JOURNEY Making type activities, while ‘learning on the job’ in a research-based real world intervention, this practitioner concludes that before utilising JOURNEY Making, regardless of whether it is a research-based activity or a typical application of JOURNEY Making, a holistic overview of JOURNEY Making methodological underpinnings does need to be developed. Without this understanding a practitioner will only be going through the motions, a bit like painting by numbers, without knowing why the sky has to be coloured blue or grass has to be coloured green. A practitioner will have little idea of why something is happening, or why specific actions need to be undertaken in a specific sequence, or why something unexpected may occur. This practitioner agrees with Tomlinson in that to effectively apply a problem solving method the underpinning methodology associated with the method needs to be understood. However, because of the number and variety of theories associated with JOURNEY Making, this may well take a considerable amount of research and time, but it will be time well spent.

2. Many difficulties have been documented throughout this thesis regarding the application of JOURNEY Making type activities while ‘learning on the job’ from the JOURNEY Making book and texts regarding the associated tools and techniques. Readers only need to randomly turn to a page of this thesis to reveal something that didn’t go according to plan or something that happened differently from the way it is explained by Eden and Ackermann (1998). Many of the difficulties faced can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, the fact that the research programme and strategy making activities were undertaken in a part-time rather than full-time manner (see page 94 and page 253), and secondly, applying JOURNEY Making type activities is far more demanding than is perceived. A myriad of skills needs to be learnt to apply JOURNEY Making successfully, for example, **interviewing skills** (unstructured with a group (see page 114), semi-structured with an individual (see page 208) and during individual cognitive mapping interviews (see page 140), **facilitation skills** during cognitive mapping interviews (see page 147), facilitating group workshops using the Oval Mapping Technique (see page 158 and Figure 28), and during the ‘manual’ identification of goals, strategies (see page 166), **data modelling skills** during the development of a composite group map (see page 145), **data analysis skills**, computer-based during the analysis of the composite group map (see page 165), or manually during the analysis of qualitative data gathered during group and/or individual interviews (see page 122). Reading about how to apply JOURNEY Making is relatively simple, however, applying this learning is fairly demanding. Earlier (see page 253), the concept of an apprenticeship model for learning ‘how to do Action Research’ was discussed. It is now recommended that this apprenticeship model be extended to include the specific problem solving/strategy making method to be used during a doctoral research programme involving Action Research, because a researcher wanting to use a particular method needs to have developed both an understanding of the methodological underpinnings and acquired a level of practical competence in the application of the method before using it as part of a doctoral research programme.

CHAPTER 9

EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to “*undertake a major period of methodological reflection (Eden and Huxham, 1995) into what happened during application of the Action Research Approach*” (see page 71). Here the Action Researcher will revisit how the research programme was initially set up and establish what has/has not been achieved. The chapter will also include discussion regarding the issue of the generalizability of the research undertaken.

Step 7.0 - Research Evaluation

Identification of Action Research ‘Themes’ and Validation Criteria

On page 31, it was stated that ‘a practical aspect to the research subject would involve the application of JOURNEY Making during the development of a ‘solution’ to a strategic organisational problem during a real world intervention. Also, that the researcher would be the person attempting to use JOURNEY Making. At that time the research methodology to be used had not been considered. During this consideration, Action Research was identified as a research methodology that had been developed to use the principles of normal science to solve specific real world/social problems (see page 35). Several concerns regarding the theoretical principles, practice and application of Action Research were also discussed at this time (see page 37), as were the nature and validity of Action Research, according to Checkland and Holwell (1998). Checkland and Holwell suggest that any research in any mode may be thought of as entailing three major elements. Particular linked ideas ‘F’ are used in a methodology ‘M’ to investigate an area of interest ‘A’ and using ‘M’ may then teach us not only about ‘A’ but also about the adequacy of ‘F’, ‘M’ and even ‘A’ (see page 38). They further stated that “*The change to or modification of F, M and even A has to be expected in action research.... The susceptibility to change F, M and A in research in which the researcher becomes involved in the flux of real-world social situations leads to a (or probably the) most important principle in Action Research. It is a principle that is totally neglected in the literature of this area. In keeping your intellectual bearings in a changing situation in which the adequacy of F and M and the appropriateness of A are likely to be tested, it is essential to declare in advance the elements F, M and A. This is the intellectual structure which will lead to findings and research lessons being recognised as such. Without that declaration, it is difficult to see how the outcome of Action Research can be more than anecdotal*” (p.13-14).

Describing their ‘ideal type’ model of Action Research (see Figure 6 and Figure 60), Checkland and Holwell state that it has to be accepted that **a researcher will deal not in hypotheses but in research themes within which lessons, which have been elicited from the experience of the overall Action Research process, can be sought.** Research themes are not static but are revised, and new ones developed at the end of the cycle. A researcher interested in particular themes then enters the ‘social practice’ of a real world problem situation in which the themes are relevant, ‘A’, and becomes involved as both participant and researcher. Work to effect change and improvement (as judged by people in the situation) can then ensue, with the researcher also committed to continuous reflection on the collaborative involvement and its outcomes. This will entail trying to make sense out of the unfolding experience using the declared ‘F’ and ‘M’. Finally since real world situations continuously evolve, the researcher must negotiate an exit from the situation and **tease out the serious lessons learnt** (see page 39).

Following a decision to use Action Research for this research programme the researcher decided to identify and explicitly declare the elements of ‘F’, ‘M’ and ‘A’ (see page 40). Recognizing that although there were many methodological variations of Action Research (see page 37) there were no existing declared ‘Fs’ or ‘Ms’ for use with these methodologies, the researcher considered developing those needed for use during this research programme. The development of ‘F’ and ‘M’ would be done by:

- c. Identifying what the characteristics were that would ensure that the research was classified as Action Research and developing them into an Action Research Framework. The Action Research Framework would be used as a declaration of ‘F’.
- d. Developing a **diagrammatic** Action Research Approach based on the identified characteristics, because this would help to ensure the delivery of valid/robust research results. Also, although several high level ‘meta’ diagrams have been produced about Action Research (Appendix 1) these diagrams do not describe Action Research at a more useful lower ‘micro’ level (Lau, 1997). The Action Research Approach would be used as a declaration of ‘M’.

This led to the researcher amending the research subject, as described earlier, to involve the creation of an Action Research Framework (Checkland and Holwell's 'F'), from which an Action Research Approach (Checkland and Holwell's 'M') would be developed. This Action Research Approach would become the overall methodology used in understanding what happens when the researcher attempts to use JOURNEY Making to solve an organizational strategic problem during a real world intervention (Checkland and Holwell's 'A'). Two research 'themes' were then generated from this research subject; the **first**, of more *research/academic* interest, concerned the development and testing of a diagrammatic Action Research Approach, as this would help to ensure the delivery of valid/robust research results. Also, most existing diagrams do not describe Action Research at a more useful lower 'micro' level. The **second**, of more *practical* interest, concerned understanding what happened when a 'novice' practitioner (the Action Researcher) attempted to use JOURNEY Making to solve an organizational strategic problem during a real world intervention (see page 42).

Following the creation of the Action Research Framework (see page 62), and the development of the Action Research Approach (see page 74), the **validation criterion** for the Action Research Approach was discussed (see page 75). Here it was stated that a research programme using Action Research should be judged on the robustness of the Action Research model it professed to use and the adherence to the validity criterion identified for use with the model. In this research programme the model to be used would be the Action Research Approach, which was consistent with the Action Research Framework created (Checkland and Holwell, 1998; West and Stansfield, 2001). The validation criterion would be Checkland and Holwell's (1998) statement that "*in a changing situation in which the adequacy of 'F', 'M', and the appropriateness of 'A' are likely to be tested, it is essential to declare in advance the elements of F, M and A. This is the intellectual structure that will lead to findings and research lessons being recognised as such.... The change to or modification of F, M and even A has to be expected in Action Research*".

In summary, to ensure that the research could be considered to be Action Research an Action Research Framework would be created ('F') from which an Action Research Approach ('M') would be developed, that would be used during a real world problem situation ('A'). The elements of 'F', 'M' and 'A' would be declared and explicitly stated before engaging in the real world problem situation/intervention, and changes to them documented during the research programme because *"this is the intellectual structure which will lead to findings and research lessons being recognised as such"* (Checkland and Holwell, 1998:13-14). During the real world intervention, two research 'themes' would be investigated, from which *'serious lessons could be teased out'* and documented. The first research theme, of more research/academic interest, concerned the development and testing of a diagrammatic Action Research Approach because this would help to ensure the delivery of valid/robust research results. Also, most existing diagrams do not describe Action Research at a more useful lower 'micro' level. The second research theme, of more *practical* interest, concerned understanding what happened when a 'novice' practitioner attempted to use JOURNEY Making to solve an organizational strategic problem. In attempting this, the research programme would be one of the first to contribute additional knowledge about the application of JOURNEY Making in a real world intervention by a novice JOURNEY Making practitioner/researcher, and to identify and detail the problems associated with using Action Research during a doctoral research programme. Also, the research programme would be one of the first to apply Checkland and Holwell's (1998) 'FMA' model when researching organizational strategic problem solving, and probably would be the first to involve the combination of Action Research, JOURNEY Making and the 'FMA' model (see page 49). These aspects would provide a high degree of originality for this research programme.

What Was Achieved During the Research Programme?

The element of ‘F’, the Action Research Framework, was declared on page 62 (see Figure 12). A change to ‘F’ was documented during the application of the Action Research Approach when the concept of Action Research involving the activities of participation and/or collaboration was discussed (see page 106). Here the Action Researcher concluded that Action Research will not always be collaborative but it will always be participative, and that an overall research programme will involve a number of individual Action Research Approach steps, during which participation, and at times collaboration, between an Action Researcher and a client will occur.

The element of ‘M’, the Action Research Approach, was declared on page 74 (see Figure 17). Changes to ‘M’ were documented during the application of the Action Research Approach. For example, on page 97, when a new ‘first’ step entitled ‘Gain Access to Undertake Research’ was identified, and on page 108, where the activity of ‘Pre-understanding the Corporate Environment of Action Research were linked to both of the first two Action Research Approach steps rather than just being linked to the third step ‘Problematic Situation Discussed’. On page 214, the concept of asking ethical questions during each PLANNING activity was discussed, as this would enable Action Researchers to undertake the revision of ethical codes at regular intervals throughout an entire research programme. Another change to ‘M’ was documented on page 234, after a period of in-depth reflection, when yet another ‘first’ step entitled ‘Decide on Research Activities’ was identified for the Action Research Approach. The final change to ‘M’ was the identification that the Action Research Approach should reflect a dual cycle approach where the four activities of PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING often occurred simultaneously during each individual approach step, rather than a single cycle approach where the four activities occurred once and discretely, as suggested by many authors (see page 230),

The element of ‘A’, the area of interest, was initially declared on page 40. Here it was stated ‘A’ had been partially identified and declared, ‘during a real world intervention’, and that it would be more precisely defined and declared when a specific organization agreed to become involved in the research programme. The final change to ‘A’ was documented during ‘Step 4 – Problematic Situation Discussed’ (see page 134). Here it was stated that the Area of Interest ‘A’ could now be further defined, from that discussed on page 40, as the Action Researcher entered the social practice of the Strategic Planning Group at SI Ltd., where they would be involved in both practical (strategy making) and research-based (the testing of an Action Research Approach) activities.

There is sufficient evidence to establish that during the research programme the elements of ‘F’, ‘M’ and ‘A’ were explicitly declared and that changes to them were documented during the application of the Action Research Approach. Therefore, the ‘research lessons’ elicited from the research themes should be recognised as such.

The first research theme, of more research/academic interest, concerned the development and testing of a diagrammatic Action Research Approach, because this would help to ensure the delivery of valid/robust research results. Also, most existing diagrams do not describe Action Research at a more useful lower ‘micro’ level. With regard to the Action Research Approach, the initial version developed can be seen below in Figure 64.

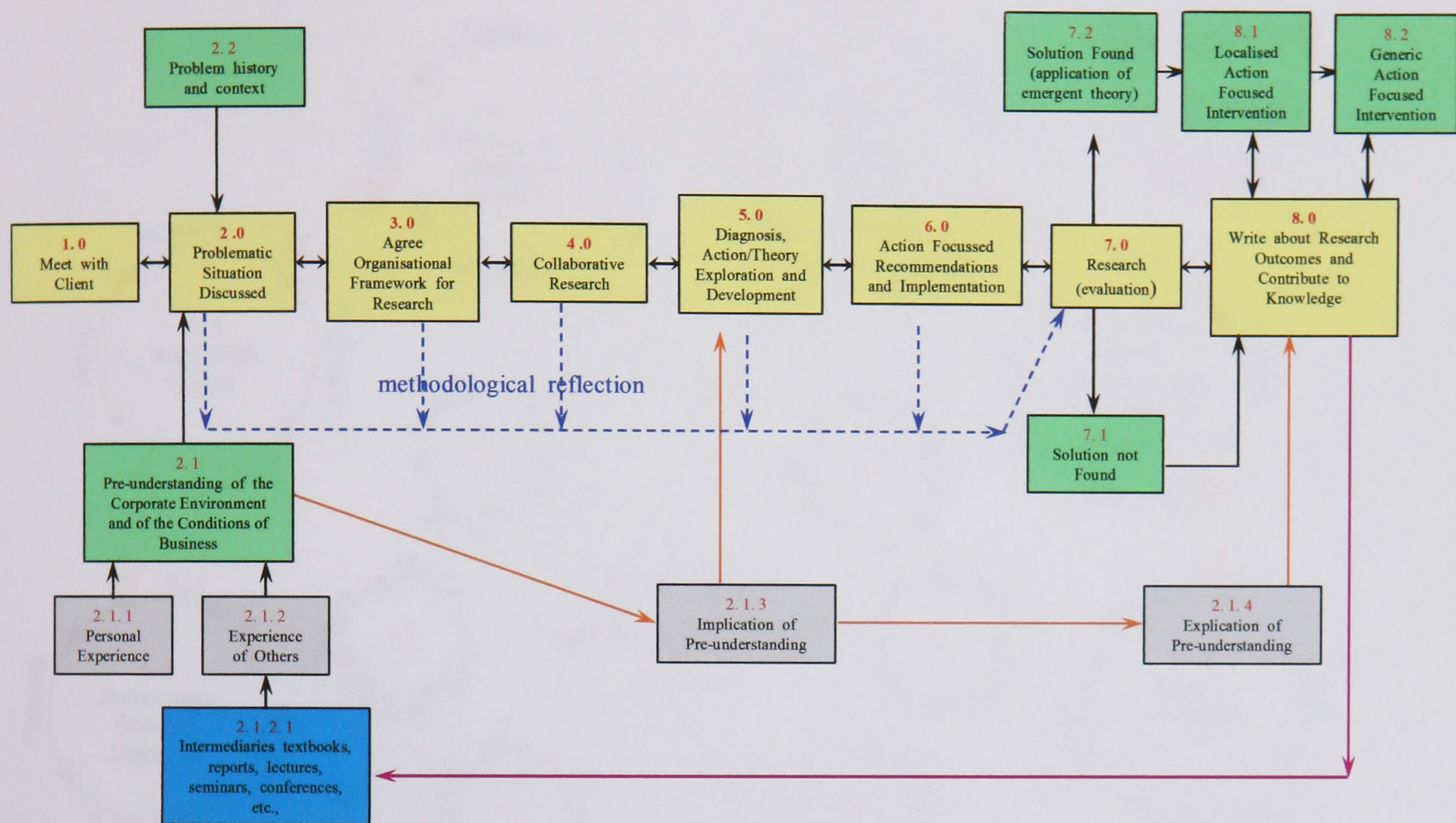


Figure 64. The Initial Version of the Action Research Approach

The Action Research Approach was tested by applying it one step at a time in a real world situation. For this research theme, lessons were learnt and documented throughout all individual steps in the approach. On page 81 it was stated that all individual steps within the Action Research Approach and Collaborative Research sub-steps would be documented from the four viewpoints, PLANNING, ACTING, OBSERVING and REFLECTING. The OBSERVING viewpoint should be thought of as *identifying the ‘research lessons’* that have been elicited from the experience of applying the Action Research Approach and the REFLECTING viewpoint should be thought of as *describing in detail the identified ‘research lessons’* possibly following a literature search and review (see page 39).

Detailed descriptions of these lessons can be found in the REFLECTING sections at the end of each Action Research Approach step. In Chapter 8, those REFLECTIONS were used as a basis to look still further into the development of the Action Research Approach. It was during this period of in-depth reflection that the final ‘dual cycle’ Action Research Approach was developed (see Figure 65).

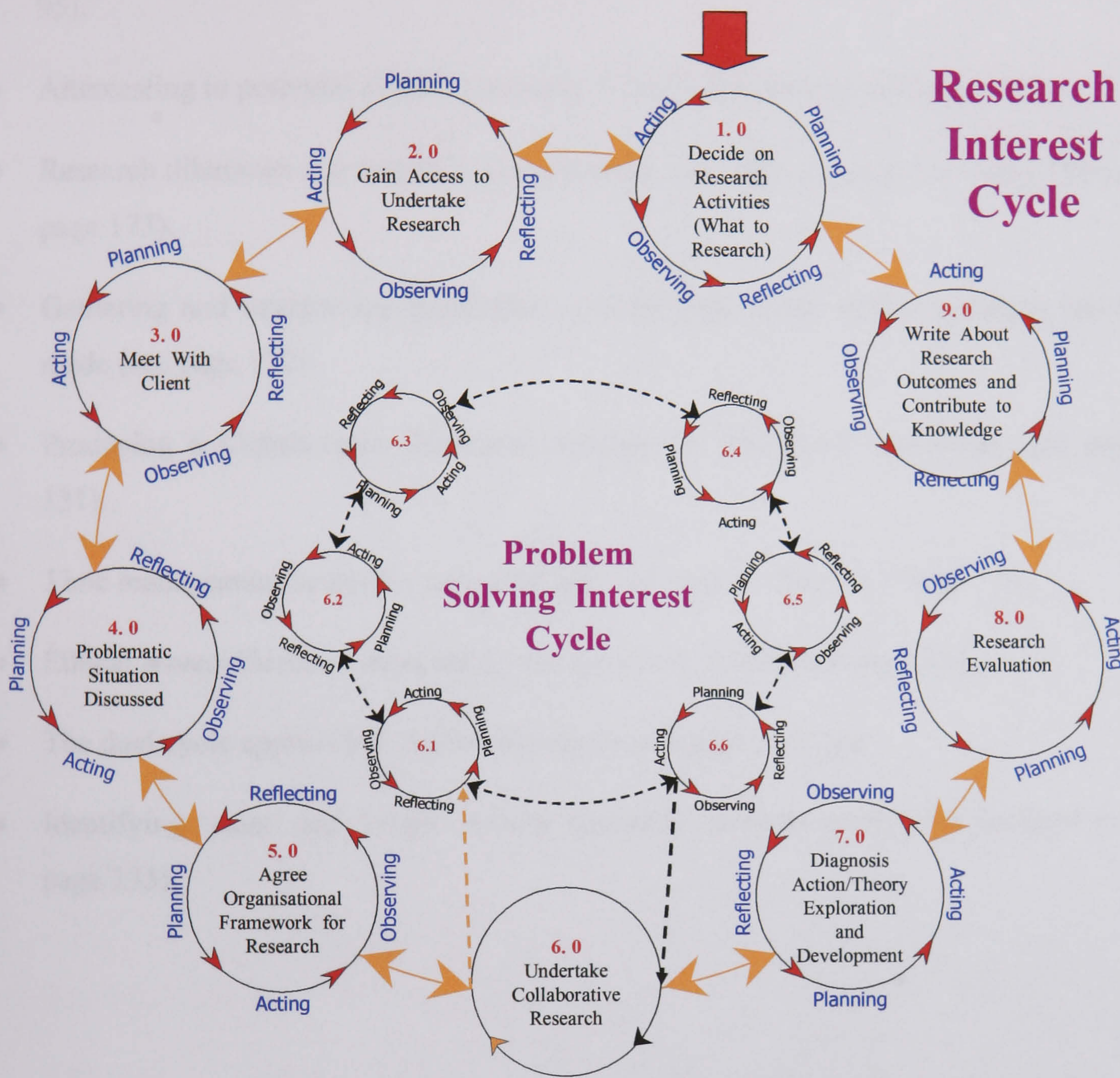


Figure 65. The Final Version of the Action Research Approach

With regard to identifying lessons learnt during the application of the Action Research Approach, examples of these were:

- Methods for gaining access to organizations (see page 92).
- Developing and communicating a research programme value proposition (see page 95).
- Altercasting to potential client's (problem helper) expectations (see page 105).
- Research dilemmas that can unexpectedly arise (see page 95, page 121, page 155 and page 173).
- Gathering and interpreting qualitative research data, about which decisions can be made (see page 122).
- Producing a Collaborative Research Programme framework document (see page 131).
- Time management issues for part-time real world researchers (see page 176).
- Ethical issues/dilemmas associated with Action Research (see page 214).
- The dual cycle approach to Action Research (see page 228) and
- Identifying 'what' and 'when' Action Research elements need to be declared (see page 235).

The **second research theme**, of more *practical* interest, concerned the understanding of what happened when a ‘novice’ practitioner attempted to use JOURNEY Making to solve an organizational strategic problem. Lessons learnt within the ‘Collaborative Research’ step of the Action Research Approach can be considered to be relevant to this research theme. The Collaborative Research step was further broken down into a number of smaller sub-steps (5.1-Cognitive Mapping and Information Modelling, page 140 to 5.6-Closure, page 206). Detailed descriptions of the lessons learnt can be found in the REFLECTING sections at the end of each Collaborative Research Programme sub-step, and in Chapter 8 where these REFLECTIONS were used as a basis to look still further into JOURNEY Making. With regard to identifying lessons learnt during the real world application of the JOURNEY Making, examples of these were:

- The length of individual cognitive mapping interviews (see page 147).
- Setting expectations for individual cognitive mapping interviews (see page 148).
- Seemingly trivial aspects of workshops having far reaching effects (see page 155).
- Facilitating group productivity (see page 157).
- Using software to analyze a composite group map (see page 175).
- Planning contingencies during information gathering activities (see page 191).
- Politics and strategy making (see page 203).
- Impact on the Collaborative Research Programme of the Action Researcher unexpectedly losing his client (see page 209).
- Preparing for a first meeting with a client (see page 241).
- Meeting potential clients for the first time (see page 242).
- Managing group conflict (see page 246) and
- JOURNEY Making closure (see page 249).

What Was Not Achieved During the Research Programme?

On page 235, the Action Research considered the issue of ‘when’ and ‘what’ Action Research elements needed to be declared during a dual cycle approach to Action Research (see page 225 for more information regarding Action Research as a dual rather than single cycle approach). From this discussion the Action Researcher concluded that that the elements of ‘F’, ‘M’ and ‘A’ could not be declared in advance of starting a research interest cycle, assuming that this started at the Action Research Approach ‘Step 1 - Decide on Research Activities (see Figure 65). Yet, ‘F’, ‘M’ and ‘A’ needed to be identified and declared as early as possible during a research interest cycle. Therefore, they need to be identified and declared during ‘Step 1 – Decide on Research Activities’, a concept similar to that applied during traditional theory based research. The Action Researcher further concluded that if there were two interconnected meta-level cycles incorporated within Action Research (see page 227), this would indicate that two frameworks (F) and two methodologies (M) could be identified and declared during ‘Step 1 – Decide on Research Activities’, and changes to them documented during the rest of the research programme. The first ‘F’ and ‘M’ concern the framework of ideas and subsequent methodology which the Action Researcher believed was in the research interest cycle of Action Research. These could be termed ‘FR’ (research framework) and ‘MR’ (research methodology). The second ‘F’ and ‘M’ concerns the framework of ideas and subsequent methodology which was employed to guide the problem solving intervention. These could be termed ‘FPS’ (problem solving framework) and ‘MPS’ (problem solving methodology) (see Figure 61). **Therefore, within this research programme, reflection and learning, *could* have taken place about the:**

- ‘Research Interest Cycle’ framework of ideas (FR), aligned with the Action Research Framework on page 62 and the methodology (MR), aligned with the Action Research Approach on page 74. These are the original ‘F’ and ‘M’ detailed on page 41 of this document. Reflection and learning did take place about both of these elements, as described earlier, and both elements were declared during ‘Step 1 - Decide on Research Activities’.

- ‘Problem Solving Interest Cycle’ framework of ideas (FPS), aligned with Eden and Ackermann’s 1998 JOURNEY Making book and other associated texts regarding the tools and techniques associated with JOURNEY Making, and the subsequent methodology (MPS) aligned with the practical application of the JOURNEY Making method. Only the latter of these was originally identified and declared during ‘Step 1 - Decide on Research Activities’, as research theme two. **The element of ‘FPS’, the problem solving interest cycle framework of ideas, was not declared** as the existence of ‘FPS’ was not identified or considered until Chapter 8 of the research programme (see page 239). ‘FPS’ can be aligned to Eden and Ackermann’s (1998) JOURNEY Making book and other associated texts regarding the tools and techniques associated with JOURNEY Making. In this instance changes to these texts are taken to mean the production of documented information detailing changes to the fundamental principles of JOURNEY Making, for example, a change to the theoretical basis of the cognitive mapping technique (Kelly’s 1955 Theory of Personal Constructs), or a change to the theories regarding the schools of thought about strategy making considered by Eden and Ackermann (1998:24) during the development of JOURNEY Making. This highlights an issue identified very early in the research programme (see page 34), where differences between ‘mode 1’ and ‘mode 2’ research were discussed. Mode 1 was described as following a more traditional research model, whereby knowledge production occurs largely as a result of an academic agenda, predominately driven through, and categorised by developing knowledge stocks largely residing in universities, guarded by ‘elite gatekeepers’. Knowledge dissemination occurs downstream of knowledge production, as in this research programme. Mode 2 was described as being of immediate or short-time-to-market dissemination, and exploitation in that knowledge is produced in the context of application. Typically, discovery occurs in contexts where knowledge is developed for, and put to use, while results – which would have been traditionally characterized as applied – fuel further theoretical advances (Gibbons et al., 1994). Mode 2 suggests the dissemination of knowledge, possibly by writing articles about research findings, for journals, magazines etc, during a research programme.

For this research programme issues relating to ‘FPS’ will be produced post doctoral research, as the first concern of the Action Researcher is to complete his doctoral research by producing and having approved a doctoral thesis containing findings/lessons from the research programme. Following this the Action Researcher may consider publishing articles relevant to ‘FPS’ (see page 24 as an early explanation of this issue). However, during Action Research programmes where the attainment of an academic qualification is not being considered there is no reason why this information could not be produced and disseminated during the research programme, thereby fulfilling this criterion.

- Area of interest (A) was initially declared during ‘Step - 1 Decide on Research Activities’ of the Action Research Approach (see page 40), and finally detailed during ‘Step 4 – Problematic Situation Discussed’ (see page 134).

The Issue Regarding the Generalizability of the Research Undertaken

A concern that researchers have in the design of their research is the extent to which their research results are generalizable (also see external validity - Campbell and Stanley, 1963) that is, whether their findings will be equally applicable to other research settings, such as other organizations (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003:103). However, for Action Research it is frequently argued that it has a limited capacity to produce generalized knowledge because it is totally concerned with the study of single unique cases rather than with population samples (Robinson 1993). Checkland and Holwell (1998:17) suggest that *"Since any organisational situation at a particular time, with its particular participants having their own individual and shared histories, may be unique, it cannot be guaranteed that results can be made richly meaningful to people in other situations."* Also, Avison, Baskervill and Myers (2001:443) have stated that *"Action Research is highly situational – each Action Research project is unique. This makes it difficult to write with authority on Action Research. Further, it also makes it difficult for Action Research to be assessed and perhaps, impossible, for us to make general laws for the conduct of Action Research projects"*. Yet Cook (1991) held the view that the generalization of Action Research findings could be achieved through causal explanation (a view shared with Cronbach), *"Cronbach assumes that extrapolation is best achieved through causal explanation rather than sampling. He wants evaluators to learn why a treatment is or is not effective rather than identifying whether it is effective"* (p.130).

Checkland and Holwell (1998:18) discuss the generalizability of Action Research at considerable length, suggesting that if there was *"an 'ideal-type' spectrum of processes of knowledge acquisition, from experimental natural science at one end to telling stories at the other, then along the spectrum we shall have very different criteria for judging the 'truth value' of their outputs or claims."* For laboratory experiments in natural science the in-principle public **'repeatability'** of the experimental happenings, no matter who conduct the experiments, is the basis of the strong criterion which has made natural science the common model of knowledge acquisition (Bryman, 1995; West and Stansfield, 2000). At the other end of the spectrum there will be a much weaker criterion that the (research) story is **'plausible'**. The problem for Action Researchers knowing that the strong criterion of 'repeatability' may be beyond their reach is to do better than simply settling for 'plausibility'.

Checkland and Holwell argue that the aim in Action Research should be to enact a ‘process of doing Action Research’ in such a way that the process is ‘recoverable’ by anyone interested in subjecting the research to critical scrutiny; an issue supported by West and Stansfield (2000), who state that “*In Action Research studies we seek to validate our findings in such a way that others would be able to follow our interpretations and conclusions*” (p.227). The desirability of using the ‘recoverability’ criterion makes it important to declare in advance the epistemology in terms of which piece of Action Research will acquire what counts as knowledge. “*The absence of insistence in this is the greatest lacuna in the literature of social science*” Checkland and Holwell (1998:19). For example, Phillips (1992:108) argues that if findings are to be taken seriously, they must be supported by appropriate arguments (similar to Cook’s 1991 notion of ‘causal argument’) and/or evidence. There must be, in the language of Toulmin’s account of reasoning (Toulmin et. al., 1979), an adequate ‘warrant’ in conjunction with a particular framework which supplies ‘backing’ for the warrant and, ultimately, the claims. “*The claims involved ... are ... well founded only if sufficient grounds of an appropriate and relevant kind can be offered in their support. These grounds must be connected to the claims by reliable, applicable warrants, which are capable in turn of being justified by appeal to sufficient backing of the relevant kind*” (Toulmin et. al., 1979:27). This is similar to the ‘output characteristic’ earlier attributed to Lewin (1946, 1947) and Eden and Huxham (1993, 1995, 1996) (see page 57), that stated that “*if the generality drawn out of action research is to be expressed through the design of tools, techniques models and method then this, alone is not enough - the basis for their design must be explicit and shown to be related to the theory*” (p.79).

These arguments suggest that Action Researchers should not routinely accept claims that Action Research does not yield generalizable knowledge. **Whether it does or not may depend on the extent to which the researcher links research findings and lessons (through challenge or confrontation) to already generalized knowledge/theory (Lewin, 1946, 1947; Robinson 1993; Eden and Huxham, 1993, 1995, 1996 and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003) and to the extent that the ‘process of doing Action Research’ is ‘recoverable’ by anyone interested in subjecting the research to critical scrutiny (Checkland and Holwell, 1998; West and Stansfield, 2000).**

During both the application of the Action Research Approach and JOURNEY Making type activities within the Collaborative Research Programme the Action Researcher attempted to explain how occurrences that actually happened during the intervention could be linked to generalized theory/knowledge. If an existing theory was found to explain an occurrence the Action Researcher then argued for its inclusion into the specific Action Research Approach step or Collaborative Research Programme sub-step. If a single existing theory could not be located to cover the occurrence, the Action Researcher turned to existing multiple sources in an attempt to justify his recommendations/conclusions. One of the main design activities undertaken during this research programme was the development of an Action Research Approach (see Figure 17 on page 74) that has been shown to be firmly related to Action Research theory, the Action Research Framework (see Figure 12 on page 62). Other examples of the use of generalized theory/knowledge would be the use of:

- Conway's (1987) model regarding methods of gaining physical entry to organizations (see page 93).
- King's (1994) theory about the validity of interpretations of qualitative data (see page 122).
- The writings of Bryant (1989), Bryson (1995), Mumford (2001) and Avison, Baskerville and Myer (2001) with regard to the development of a Collaborative Research Framework Document (see page 131).
- Briggs and Nunamaker's (1996) theory of team economics of attention management, (see page 156) and
- McKay and Marshall's (2001) theory of dual cycle Action Research (see page 222).

In this research programme, the final version of the Action Research Approach (see Figure 65 on page 268) provides the element of recoverability. Future researchers will be able to establish how a dual cycle Action Research Approach was developed, utilised in a real world intervention, and validated, by reading this thesis. For future researchers interested in *'repeating'* this research programme, the elements of 'FR', 'MR', 'FPS' and 'MPS' have already been declared. All they will need to do is to identify and declare the element 'A' for their research programme during 'Step – 1 Decide on Research Activities', apply the Action Research Approach in a similar manner to that employed by this Action Researcher, and finally, identify and document changes to all elements during the application of the Action Research Approach (see page 239). **However, the process may be followed in a similar manner, but the 'lessons' and 'findings' recorded may not be the same.** This presents a final opportunity for an undergraduate, doctoral or post-doctoral research project, in establishing the recoverability of this research programme and re-evaluating everything that occurred there.

Additionally, What Was Achieved During the Research Programme?

While undertaking this research programme, several other issues regarding Action Research and JOURNEY Making have been discussed, which although relevant to the research themes, do have a more general relevance.

The first issue concerned the development and testing of various validation criteria. On page 24, it was decided that for the purposes of this research programme, Churchill's (1990) criterion would be used to establish whether an organizational problem was 'strategic in nature'. This criterion was used ('Step 3 – The Problem Situation Discussed') as an aide-mémoire during an unstructured information gathering activity. From this activity the Action Researcher concluded that the choice of criterion questions, data collection method, and the validity of the data collected were sufficient to determine that the perceived problem was of a 'strategic nature', and therefore relevant for use in this research programme (see page 122). This set of criterion questions could now be utilised during other research programmes to assist in the identification of strategic problems. A second validation criterion was initially identified on page 55. Here the Action Researcher discussed the concept of there being Action Research Approach '*input characteristics*', i.e., they need to be understood, accepted and demonstrated by a researcher before starting a real world research programme using Action Research, because failure to achieve this should result in the researcher reconsidering their use of Action Research, and considering the application of another research methodology (see page 63). This criterion was applied to this researcher during 'Step 2.2 – Validation of the Action Research Input Characteristics', before the development of the Action Research Approach. From this it was concluded that the 'input characteristics' had been observed and that further Action Research Approach development should continue. This validation criterion could now be used by all researchers and/or supervisors of researchers contemplating the application of Action Research to establish the suitability of the methodology with regard to researcher and proposed research subject.

The second issue concerned the debate regarding whether Action Research was a suitable methodology for doctoral research. On page 48, it was stated that Eden and Huxham (1996:85) had written “*that Action Research is likely to be a problematic research methodology for doctoral students*” because the uncertainty and lack of control creates anxiety for anyone other than confident and experienced researchers and doing action in Action Research demands experience and understanding of methods for consultancy and intervention. The researcher decided that unless this statement was tested and the difficulties associated with applying Action Research during doctoral research were identified and detailed, whether Action Research was suitable for doctoral research programmes or just for the ‘confident and experienced researcher’ could not be established. Several times during this thesis the Action Researcher has provided an insight into this issue from personal experience. The first time the Action Researcher considered this issue was after attempting to gain physical access to companies to undertake a Collaborative Research Programme (see page 94). Here the Action Researcher failed to fully comprehend the amount of ‘physical’ effort needed to complete this activity successfully because as a part-time doctoral researcher he only dedicated himself ‘part-time’ to the activity, instead of the ‘professional/full-time’ dedication, the activity demanded. Next, the Action Researcher considered the priority issues that had arisen between his academic research work, his client’s strategy development work (within the Collaborative Research Programme), and work for his full-time employer (see page 176). The delicate time management balancing act the Action Researcher had to undertake to effectively manage these priority issues again brought forward thoughts concerning the application of Action Research by part-time doctoral students. After reflection the Action Researcher concluded that combining part-time doctoral research using Action Research/JOURNEY Making in a real world intervention and working full-time were activities that should not be undertaken simultaneously when a Collaborative Research Programme was being undertaken, within an independent company.

Finally on page 254, the Action Researcher considered the application of Action Research by various permutations of full-time students, and recommended that for those researchers who had both the necessary research and consultancy expertise needed to undertake Action Research, a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and practical implications associated with Action Research per se, the dual cycle approach to Action Research and how research programmes involving Action Research can be validated, was still needed by these people before using Action Research in a doctoral research programme. For those researchers who only possessed one of the two areas of expertise the Action Researcher suggested that the apprenticeship model promoted by Eden and Huxham (1996) and Tranfield and Starkey (1998) could be a way of attaining the competencies needed to successfully use Action Research, because understanding methods for consultancy/intervention and how to apply research methodologies in real world research situations could be learnt by researchers who became involved as apprentices during a team research programme. **Overall, the Action Researcher concludes that Action Research is suitable for use by all full-time doctoral researchers, but only following a suitable apprenticeship period (see page 256).**

The third issue concerned an Action Researcher's personal development from 'novice' Action Researcher and JOURNEY Maker to accomplished practitioner. At the start of the research programme the Action Researcher considered his own proficiency in the practical application and theoretical knowledge of Action Research and JOURNEY Making, while accepting that these measures would be 'relative measures' that could change as the research programme progressed (see page 44). The Action Researcher produced two charts (Hampden-Turner, 1994) that indicated the position he felt he currently occupied (A) and the position he hoped to attain at the end of the research programme (B). Updating these charts at selected times during the research programme would provide a pictorial representation of the Action Researcher's proficiency development. Figure 66 represents the Action Researcher's initial assessment of his proficiency.

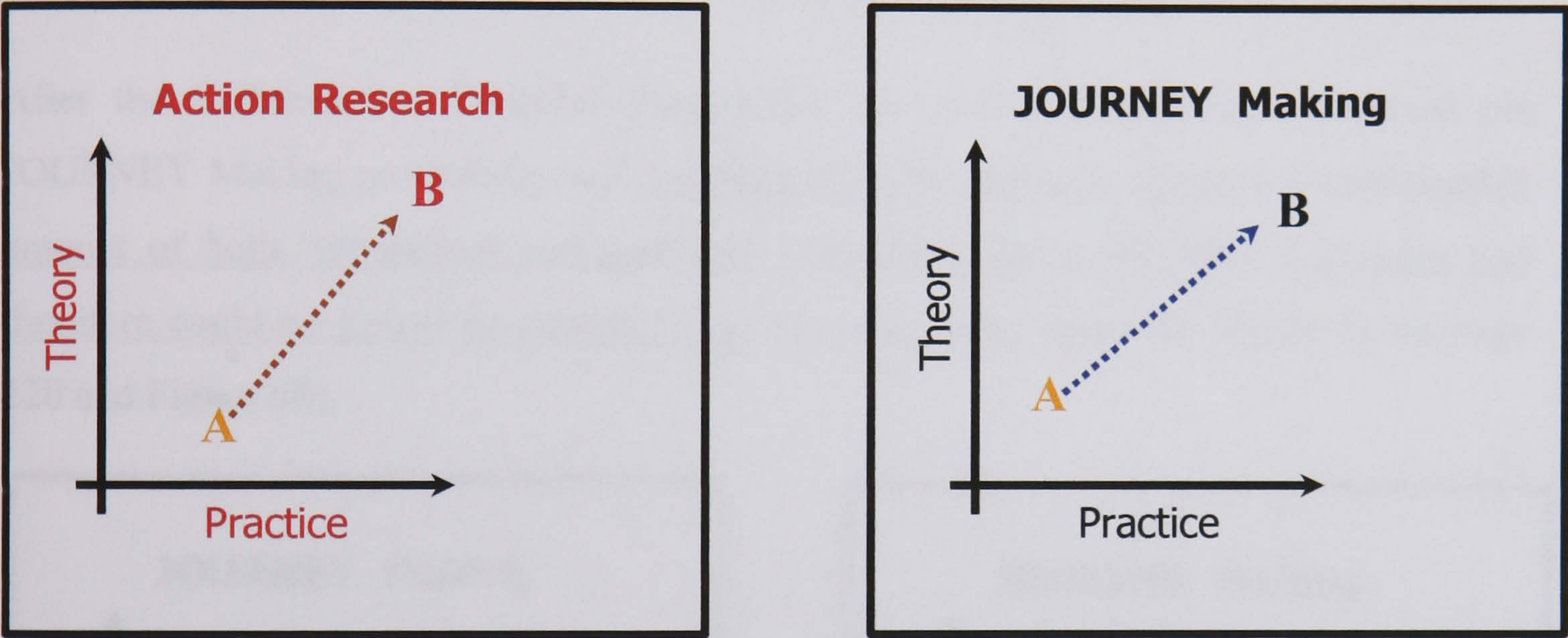


Figure 66. The Action Research's Starting Proficiency

Following the in-depth 'theoretical' research required to produce the Action Research Framework and the Action Research Approach, the Action Researcher concluded that he had now acquired a considerable amount of 'theoretical' knowledge about the subject and therefore could no longer be considered a novice in the area of Action Research theory (see Figure 18 on page 78).

This is reflected on the chart produced in Figure 67

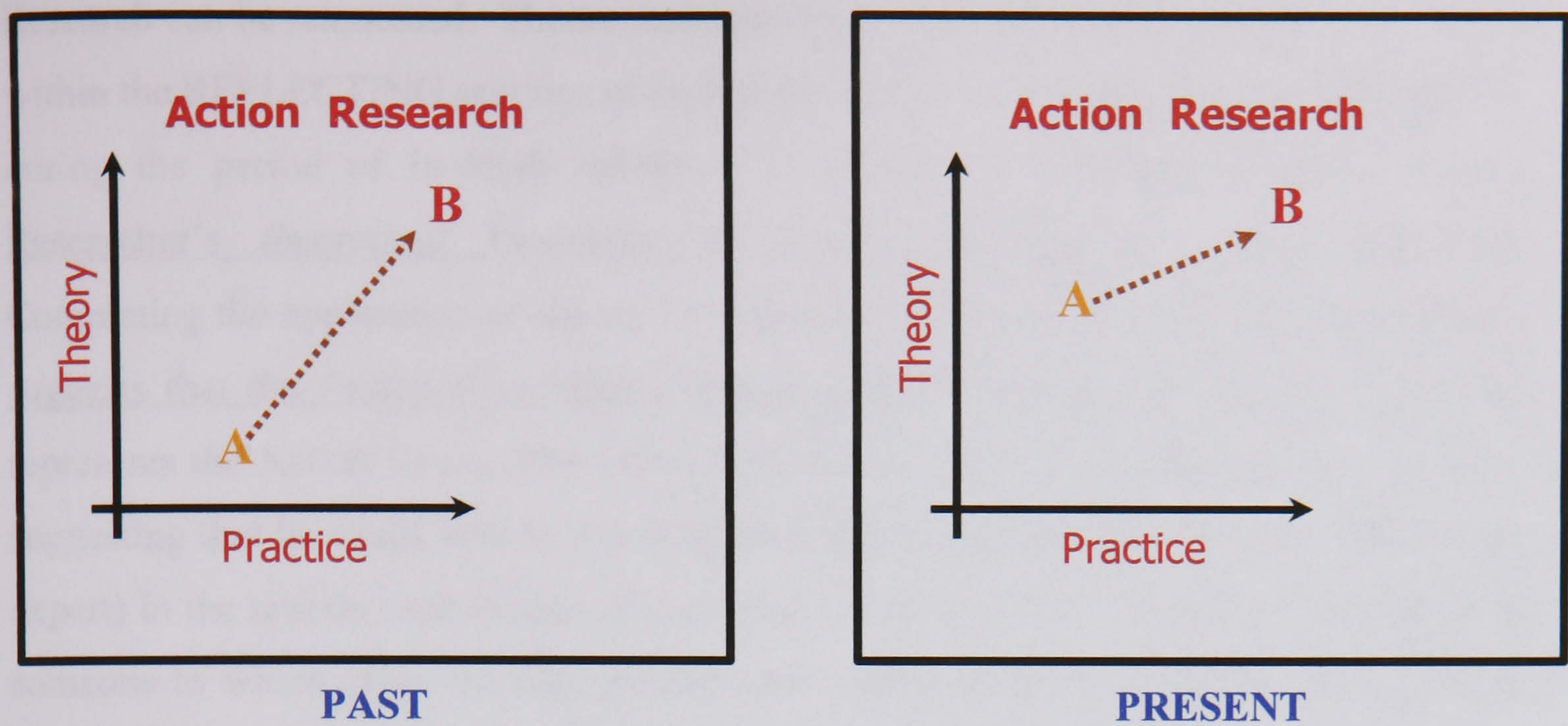


Figure 67. The Action Research’s Changing Proficiency in Action Research

After the Collaborative Research Programme the Action Researcher reassessed his JOURNEY Making proficiency and concluded that he had now acquired a considerable amount of both ‘theoretical and practical’ knowledge about JOURNEY Making and therefore could no longer be considered a novice in either area (see Figure 52 on page 220 and Figure 68).

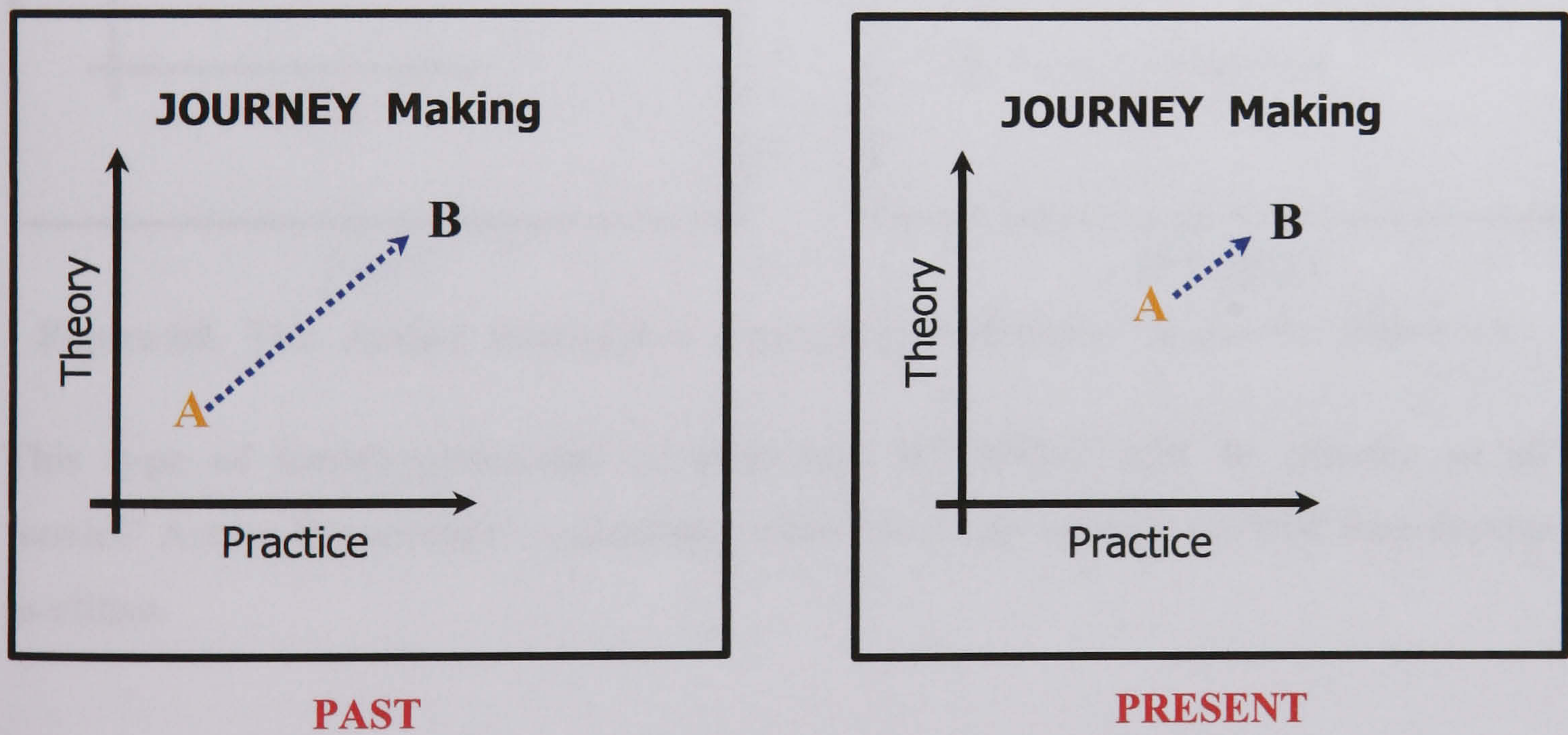


Figure 68. The Action Research’s Changing Proficiency in JOURNEY Making

Now, the researcher’s proficiency in both theoretical and practical aspects of Action Research can be reassessed. Theoretical aspects of Action Research have been discussed within the REFLECTING sections of each individual Action Research approach step and during the period of in-depth reflection in Chapter 8, suggesting that the Action Researcher’s *theoretical knowledge* of Action Research has again improved. Completing the application of the Action Research Approach in a ‘real world’ situation suggests that the Action Researcher’s *practical ability* has also improved. Figure 69 represents the Action Researcher’s final assessment of his Action Research proficiency, suggesting that he could now be regarded as a ‘knowledgeable person’ (although not an expert) in the practice and theory of both Action Research and JOURNEY Making, and someone to whom other ‘novice’ practitioners, considering the application of either or both activities for the attainment of an academic qualification, may like to talk.

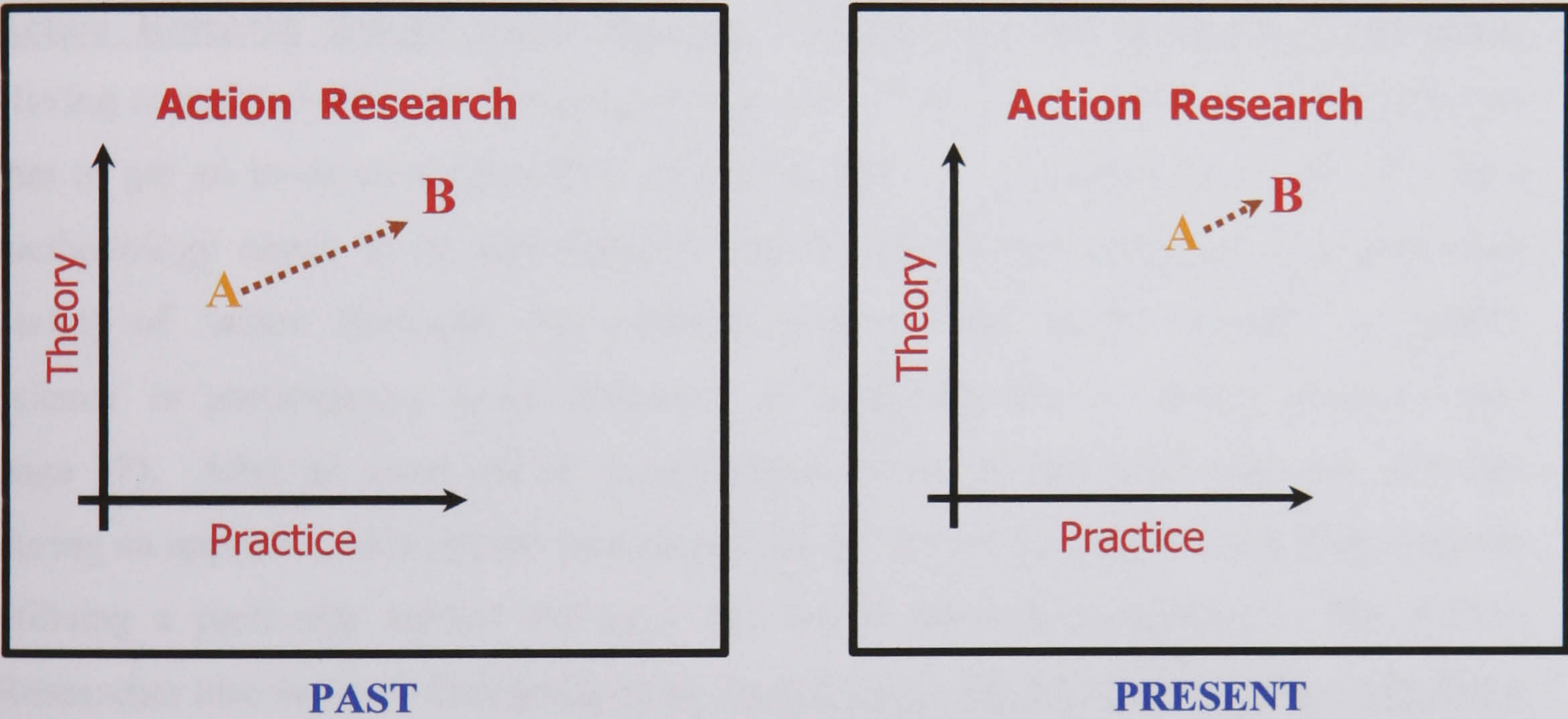


Figure 69. The Action Research’s Changing Proficiency in Action Research

This type of learning/personal development JOURNEY will be generic to all ‘novice’ Action Researchers regardless of the ‘problem solving’ method they choose to utilise.

SUMMARY

Discussing Action Research validity on page 75, the Action Researcher stated that a large part of the problem regarding the validity and robustness of Action Research was that researchers could draw upon many different Action Research models to guide their work (see page 37), and that an Action Research approach could be used by a variety of people from both within and outside the academic community, for both research and practical reasons. In undertaking this research programme the greatest theoretical problem faced by the Action Researcher has been having to constantly consider what using Action Research was really about, because it can be defined in so many ways and used by so many different people (see page 76). A full appreciation of Action Research, for this Action Researcher, was not gained until after developing and applying the final validation criterion to this research programme. Something new has been learnt about Action Research during every step and sub-step of this research programme. Having completed this research programme, the Action Researcher now firmly believes that to get an in-depth appreciation of Action Research, a generic overview of it as a methodology needs to be developed before developing an overview of a particular variety of Action Research, for example, ‘experimental action research’ or ‘action science’ or participatory action research’ or ‘action inquiry’ or ‘action learning’ (see page 37). After an overview of Action Research per se has been achieved, possibly during an apprenticeship period (see page 256), an Action Researcher may then consider utilising a particular variety during a real world research programme. The Action Researcher also believes that when using Action Research it is not enough to state that a particular Action Research variation is to be used without fully declaring the framework of ideas that are associated with it, the particular Action Research model that will be used, a detailed description of how this model is linked to the framework of ideas, the area of interest to be investigated, the research themes to be investigated there, and the validation criterion that will be used to classify the research as Action Research. This is the intellectual structure that will lead to findings and lessons being recognised as such (Checkland and Holwell, 1998; West and Stansfield, 2001).

NICOLA: "Write about something new, Philip. You should write about something else."

MARLOW: "Oh? Like what?"

NICOLA: "Like this – what has happened to you? Like real things."

MARLOW: "Pooh."

NICOLA: "Use your talent, Philip."

MARLOW: "Bugger that!"

NICOLA: "Write about **real things in a realistic way** – real people, real joys, real pains – Not these silly detective stories. **Something more relevant.**"

Dennis Potter – The Singing Detective

Source: Bryant, J. (1998), Problem Management a guide for producers and players.

This thesis has been the Action Researchers attempt at writing something more relevant about realistic things, in a realistic way - warts and all, while still attempting to adhere to the rigors of academic research. In the opinion of this Action Researcher, there is no reason why these issues should not be combined but considerable enthusiasm, perseverance, care and attention to detail is required to ensure the information presented is balanced for both academic and practitioner audiences.

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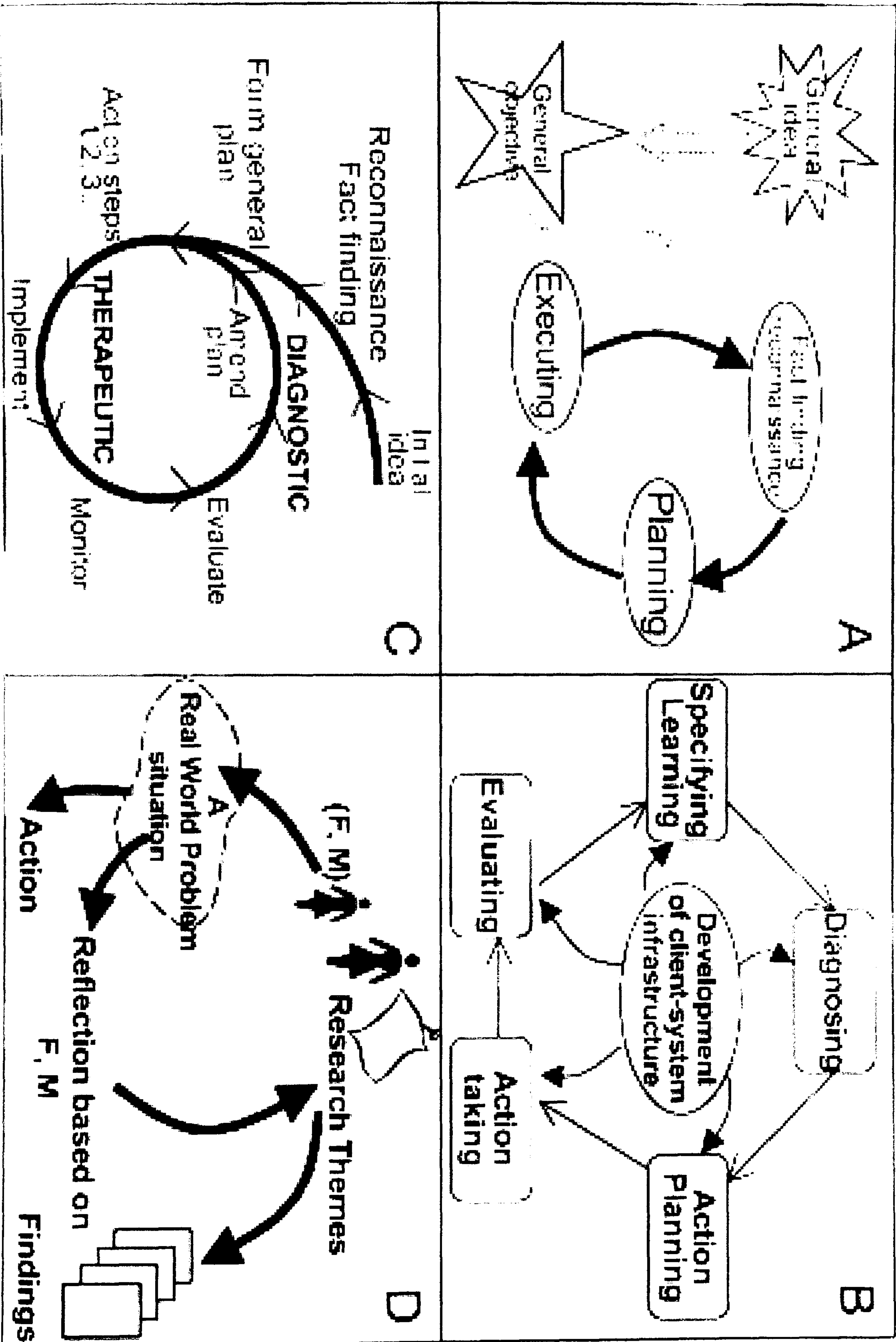
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A



Terence Nelson. BSc., B.A. (Hons), B.A., A.Dip. M.C.

64 North 12th. Street, Milton Keynes, MK9 3BT

Tel. 01908-696669 (Answer phone & fax) 0370-396496 (Mobile)

Email terrynelson@stratint.powernet.co.uk

BACKGROUND

Terry Nelson is a highly qualified Business Executive with a successful career spanning 23 years within such industry sectors as Management Consultancy, Information Technology, Mechanical Engineering, Management Training & Development and Public Sector. He regularly interfaces directly with Board Level Directors while skilfully managing projects in the areas of Strategic Customer Relationship/Value Management, Business Strategy, Multi-future Scenario Planning, Organisational Transformation, Culture Change, Customer Service Orientation, Market and Marketing Planning.

As a Business Executive, Terry has worked with organisations of all sizes who were about to become involved in, or who were already involved in the various guises of Strategic Change. Projects have been undertaken within the public and private sectors in the UK, and in Belgium, Germany, America, Dubai, The Netherlands, Hong Kong and Singapore.

SPECIALISATION

- ⇒ The facilitation of senior executive teams to establish the issues and actions needed to solve complex organisational problems.
- ⇒ The development of corporate strategic plans for organisations and the project management of their effective conversion into operational reality.
- ⇒ The development of specific 'fully integrated' Customer Relationship/Value Management strategies that include
 - ❑ customer retention/loyalty/value segmentation and modelling
 - ❑ lead generations activities e.g., precision marketing communications
 - ❑ direct and indirect sales/distribution channel development and
 - ❑ communication centre building, enhancement or consolidation.
- ⇒ The project management of large scale 'Organisational Change' programmes that incorporate
 - ❑ cultural change issues
 - ❑ the development and facilitation of multi-disciplinary improvement teams and
 - ❑ identification and measurement of performance targets.

QUALIFICATIONS AND MEMBERSHIPS

- Ph.D. Management Research (part time)
- Advanced Diploma-Management Consultancy,
- Post Graduate Diploma in Marketing,
- BA Open - Organisational Development & I.T.
- BA (Honours) - Business Studies,
- BSc. Mechanical Engineering,
- HND Computer Studies (Distinction)

Strathclyde University (CURRENT)
Henley Management College
Chartered Institute of Marketing
Open University
University of Huddersfield
Bishop Auckland College
Sunderland Polytechnic

- Member of the Institute of Directors.

PERSONAL INTERESTS.

Physical Development, runs (4 miles), swims (1 mile) cycles (6 miles) and weight/circuit trains twice weekly. Enjoys wide reading of fictional novels and academic texts.

CAREER HISTORY.

VICE PRESIDENT **SITEL Corp.** **1999 -**
Customer Relationship Management through Communication Centres
World-wide turnover U\$515,318m (1998).
Within SITEL World Wide, Terry works for the Global Business Development (GBD) Business Unit based in Brussels. Here he is responsible, along with other members of the GBD team, for the further development of SITEL's 'strategic' and 'named' clients. These are clients who have an annual multi-million pound relationship with SITEL and for whom SITEL already provides global services. Terry is responsible for assisting these clients to develop their Customer Relationship Management strategies. This includes all aspects of strategy formulation, development and implementation (covering E-commerce, 1:1 marketing, sales, direct/indirect distribution channels development, customer service, organisational restructuring, and culture change) and Communication Centre set-up/development/rationalisation. These strategies are then converted into practical business solutions that encompass and compliment existing Communication Centre activities being undertaken by SITEL.

CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT STRATEGIST **The Merchants Group** **1998 - 1999**
Communication Centre Development, Insourcing and Outsourcing
World-wide turnover £60m p.a.
Within The Merchants Group, Terry was responsible for providing strategic consultancy to clients in the IT and Telecommunications sectors. He was also responsible for the project management of several consultancy teams working on various sizes of Communication Centre consultancy projects covering activities such as infrastructure development, information systems design, business modelling and business to business & business to consumer direct marketing.

DIRECTOR & STRATEGY CONSULTANT **Strategic Interventions Ltd.** **1991 - 1998**
Long term projects undertaken have included
⇒ **Strategic Change Consultant (Associate)** *(part time 1996, full-time 1997 - 1998)*
PERA Consulting Ltd. - Business to Business Consultancy
□ Assisted MOD sites with the development of the 'business' strategies needed to ensure their future success during the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering.
⇒ **Public Conference Director** *(part-time 1995 - 1997)*
The Strategic Planning Society - Membership Driven Charity
⇒ **Corporate Development Director** *(full-time 1993-1994)*
MCA Ltd. - Business to Business Consultancy.
□ Helped this company to become recognised as the leaders in Internal Communication Process Reengineering. Fulfilment of contracts for *P.E International, Inland Revenue and Novell/WordPerfect* resulted in turnover doubling to £1,000,000 in 1994
⇒ **Corporate Strategy Consultant** *(full-time 1991 - 1993)*
Frost & Sullivan Ltd. - Management & Professional Training.
□ Developed empowered teams that provided a core skill base to meet any current or future business demands. This reduced overheads by £100k, p.a. and resulting in the company becoming profitable for the first time in 3 years.

Short-term projects undertaken have included
⇒ Strategic Multi-Future Scenario Planning **Heineken Breweries.**
⇒ Strategic Benchmarking **Marks & Spencer.**
⇒ Business Process Development and Redesign **Wellcome Research Laboratories**

MARKETING MANAGER\CONSULTANT	The P&P Group	1989 - 1991
SYSTEMS ANALYST	Holset Engineering Ltd	1986 - 1989
SALES MANAGER	The James Neill Group	1979 - 1984
QUALITY CONTROL INSPECTOR	British Coal Plc.	1970 - 1979

CURRENT RESEARCH

“Assisting Senior Executives to undertake a ‘Strategic Journey’ using an Action Research Methodology: Aligning mental models to develop a common understanding and perspective of Strategic Change Problems.”

PUBLICATIONS

Nelson, T. (1990), “A Typology of Applied Computer Based Information Systems and the Corresponding Influence on Decision Making”, B.A. Dissertation, University of Huddersfield.

Nelson, T. (1990), “Workstation sales up as processing power grows”, *PC Dealer*, 7th. March 1990, pp. 14-15.

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McFadzean, E & Nelson, T. (1998), “Identifying the competences needed to progress from manager to facilitator”, *Leadership & Organisational Development Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 1.

Nelson, T. & McFadzean, E. (1998), “A conceptual model for facilitating group problem solving sessions”, *Leadership & Organisational Development Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 2.

Nelson, T. & Dale. M. (1999), “Managing Successful Radical/Transformational Change Programmes”, Currently under review by the *Business Process Re-Engineering & Management Journal*.

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

Conference Title: **Business Process Re-engineering.**
Location & Dates: **Dubai, 26 - 28th November 1995.**
Presentation Title: ***Getting Started: Creating a flexible vision for radical change.***

Conference Title: **ISO 9000 & Total Quality Management.**
Location & Dates: **Dubai 25 - 26th March 1996.**
Presentation Title: ***Understanding Cultural Change: Issues on making continuous quality an integral part of your company's culture.***
Workshop Title: **Preparing Your Organisation for Cultural Change.**

Conference Title: **Human Resources Management.**
Location & Dates: **Jeddah, 25 - 27th May 1996 & Dubai 28-30th. May 1996.**
Presentation Title: ***Developing and Implementing Performance Measures.***
Workshop Title: **Delivering Integrated Performance Measures to Your Business.**

Conference Title: **Benchmarking for Performance Improvement in Telecoms.**
Location & Dates: **Singapore, 17 - 18th March 1997.**
Presentation Title: ***Life After Benchmarking: Towards business process reengineering.***
Workshop Title: **Planning and Realising a Successful Benchmarking Study.**

Conference Title: **Competitive Advantage through Customer Services in Telecoms.**
Location & Dates: **Hong Kong 27 - 28th May 1997.**
Presentation Title: ***Developing a Customer Driven Culture for Competitive Advantage.***
Workshop Title: **Developing a Customer Driven Culture for Competitive Advantage.**

Conference Chairman

Conference Title: **Performance Management of Call Centres.**
Location & Dates: **London 28 - 29th April 1998.**

Conference Chairman

Conference Title: **Strategic Planning in Call Centres.**
Location & Dates: **Dublin 29th June - 1st July 1998.**

Conference Title: **Utilising Call Centres to Achieve and Measure Customer Satisfaction**
Location & Dates: **London 8 - 9th September 1998.**
Presentation Title: ***Personalising Customer Contact by Utilising Accurate Client Profiles.***

Conference Title: **Developing Call Centre Employees**
Location & Dates: **Milton Keynes 8 - 9th December 1998.**
Presentation Title: ***The Evolution of Customer Management Centres: The Changing Role of Call Centre Employees.***

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APPENDIX B

PRIVATE and CONFIDENTIAL

20th April 1999

Mr. N. E. Body
Title
Company Name
Address 1
Address 2
Town
County
Post Code

Mr. T. Nelson,
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Dear Sir,

I am writing to inquire whether your company would be interested in participating in a project that is part consultancy and part researched based. I am currently undertaking a part-time Ph.D. with Strathclyde University Graduate Business School (SGBS) while working full-time for [Redacted], as a Strategy Consultant, see attached CV.

For my Ph.D. research programme I would like to combine both the aforementioned elements, academic research and practical 'strategic consultancy'. I firmly believe that the output of a research programme should have practical benefits for a participating company. With this in mind I have set out to undertake a form of research termed Action Research. This entails a consultant/researcher working with a company to solve a specific strategic problem, while observing and reflecting on how well the work progresses and developing theories as to why things happened the way they did, during the course of the research programme.

This type of research presents two major problems for me. Firstly, the work has to be of practical benefit for the company involved in the research, in my case it has to be equal to or better any other type of strategic consultancy assignment that I have undertaken, and secondly, it has to pass academic rigor for the award of Ph.D. Working with the right company will reduce part of this problem as will working with SGBS. At this time I am attempting to locate the right company, somewhere that will benefit from the type of consultancy work that I will be undertaking. The amount of time that I will devote to the chosen company is considerable, up to 23 days.

If you feel that your company has a particular strategic problem that needs to be professionally solved, using a tried and tested strategy development method, please contact me at the address above or call on [REDACTED] and we can discuss it further.

Your Sincerely

Mr. T. Nelson

Fax

TO: CAROLINE ENGLISH

FROM: Mr. T. NELSON [REDACTED]

FAX: [REDACTED]

PAGES: 2

PHONE:

DATE: 06/06/99

RE: HELPING BUSINESS IN MILTON
KEYNES

☐ Urgent

Caroline,

We spoke briefly on Thursday regarding something that I think may be of interest to Business in Milton Keynes and something that will help me personally.

Allow me to explain.

I am currently undertaking a part-time Ph.D. with Strathclyde University Graduate Business School (SGBS) while working full-time for [REDACTED], as a Strategy Consultant, see attached CV.

For my Ph.D. research programme I would like to combine both the aforementioned elements, academic research and practical 'strategic consultancy'. I firmly believe that the output of a research programme should have practical benefits for a participating company. With this in mind I have set out to undertake a form of research termed Action Research. This entails a consultant/researcher working with a company to solve a specific strategic problem, while observing and reflecting on how well the work progresses and developing theories as to why things happened the way they did, during the course of the research programme.

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I was wondering if some form of small advertorial could be written about my research in your newspaper, so that any companies in the Milton Keynes area who are interested in participating could contact me. Hopefully, this will allow me to find a company who need to undertake and are willing to undertake the type of activity my research will cover, faster than me trying to seek them. The biggest time constraint that I have at the moment is finding the time to gain access to companies to inform them of what I am attempting to do and this is seriously slowing up my research work. Holding down a demanding full time job and attempting academic study is a very demanding challenge.

The amount of time that I will devote to the chosen company is considerable, up to 23 days, which at my normal consultancy charge out rates would equate to approx. £35,000. I can also personally guarantee that the professionalism of the work will be of the highest standard using leading edge consultancy methods.

If you feel that this offer may be of interest to your readers please give me a call on [REDACTED] (mobile) and we can discuss this further.

Many thanks

Terry Nelson

Bee, we spoke briefly last week regarding something that I think may be of interest to Strategic Planning Society (SPS) members and something that will help me personally.

Allow me to explain.

I am currently undertaking a part-time Ph.D. with Strathclyde University Graduate Business School (SGBS) while working full-time for [REDACTED], as a Strategy Consultant, see attached CV.

For my Ph.D. research programme I would like to combine both the aforementioned elements, academic research and practical 'strategic consultancy'. I firmly believe that the output of a research programme should have practical benefits for a participating company. With this in mind I have set out to undertake a form of research termed Action Research. This entails a consultant/researcher working with a company to solve a specific strategic problem, while observing and reflecting on how well the work progresses and developing theories as to why things happened the way they did, during the course of the research programme.

The work I have elected to undertake for a company and as my research theme revolves around developing a 'business strategy' using 'Strategic Journey Making'. This is a strategy development methodology that has been around for a number of years but which has become more prominent during 1998 when Prof. Colin Eden and Dr. Fran Ackermann, my supervisors at Strathclyde, published their book "Making Strategy: The Journey of Strategic Management."

This type of research presents two major problems for me. Firstly, the work has to be of practical benefit for the company involved in the research, in my case it has to be equal to or better any other type of strategic consultancy assignment that I have undertaken, and secondly, it has to pass academic rigor for the award of Ph.D. Working with the right company will reduce part of this problem as will working with SGBS. At this time I am attempting to locate the right company, somewhere that will benefit from the type of consultancy work that I will be undertaking. The amount of time that I will devote to the chosen company is considerable, up to 23 days.

A few years ago, while working for the (SPS), I asked Tom Haddon if it would be possible to advertise the fact that I was looking for a company to participate in this research programme in one of the SPS's free publications. Tom provisionally agreed provided it was approved by the relevant committee but our conversation never went any further as I was not in a position to start any practical work. I am now in that position and actively seeking a company to work with. My time deadlines are now fairly tight as I have wasted time on companies who were not suitable, as mentioned previously.

I was wondering if some form of small advertorial could be written about my research in one of the SPS's publications, so that any company interested in participating could contact me, either directly or through the SPS. Hopefully, this will allow me to find the a company who need to undertake and are willing to undertake the type of activity my research will cover, faster than me trying to contact them individually. The biggest time constraint that I have at the moment is finding the time to gain access to companies to inform them of what I am attempting to do and this is seriously slowing down my research work as is holding down a demanding full time job while attempting this academic study.

The amount of time that I will devote to the chosen company is considerable, up to 23 days, which at my normal consultancy charge out rates would equate to approx. £35,000. I can also personally guarantee that the professionalism of the work will be of the highest standard using leading edge consultancy methods.

If you feel that this offer may be of interest to your members please give me a call on [REDACTED] (mobile) and we can discuss this further.

Terry Nelson

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 26, 1999 09:52 AM
To: Terry Nelson
Subject: IoD

Terry

Just after we spoke on Friday, I received a last minute article for the branch newsletter. Unfortunately, the only way I could create space was to remove the piece on yourself. As the next newsletter is 4 months away I doubt if an entry would help within your timescale.

Sorry about this but I will pass your details to the other members of my committee.

May I suggest you also send a copy to Richard Joyce, Head of Director Development, IoD, 116 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5ED.

Regards

This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error please notify the system manager.

This footnote also confirms that this email message has been swept by MIMESweeper for the presence of computer viruses.

www.mimesweeper.com

Terry Nelson

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, August 12, 1999 11:49 AM
To: Terry Nelson
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Involvement in development of company strategies



LIMITED1999.doc

Terry

Thanks for the phone call yesterday and update on your contact with Pall Mall.

As I explained, I obviously need to be sure I am seen to be demonstrating a fair policy when dealing with enquiries directed to the IoD. It would be unethical if I used my position to the disadvantage of our members. Therefore, having passed your information on to Pall Mall and by providing a (faxed) list of Regional IoD contacts as suggested by Pall Mall, I now feel comfortable in pursuing discussions with you on a personal basis. (The list of contacts provided is in total confidence and cannot be used for purposes other than for your personal introduction to the IoD regions).

My company is a telecoms consultancy which is falling short of its revenue targets for the first time in a number of years, despite a good reputation, operating in a niche market and a rising, buoyant IT market.

I attach some brief company information.

To address this issue, we are about to review our 'marketing plan and sales strategy' with the objective of delivering an immediate improvement in sales performance ie from September.

I have arranged a Board Meeting on the morning of 18 August to review our strategic direction and a sales meeting for 3.00 pm that day to discuss what needs to be done to improve the situation and in particular, to focus on a clear strategy for sales focus over the next 7 months to end of our financial year.

Having reflected on our conversation yesterday, I would like to invite you to join us for our sales meeting to offer us the benefit of your knowledge and experience, and, if as a result, you are interested in helping us develop a short and medium term strategy, we could discuss how this could be achieved outside this meeting.

If this is attractive to you and you are available, perhaps we could meet me for lunch at say 1.00 pm on 18 August so I can give you some background before the meeting.

Any involvement would obviously be based on your offer and subject to your signing a simple confidentiality agreement.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Regards

[REDACTED]

13 September 1999

Terry Nelson
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear Terry

I found our meeting on 7 September very productive and as a result I would like to invite you to present your thoughts to members of our Strategy Planning Group on Monday 20 September at 2.00pm. I suggest an hour would be sufficient time to give some background on yourself and the experience you could bring to our team.

Our team comprises:

[REDACTED] - Operations Director
[REDACTED] - Client Support and Research Director
[REDACTED] - Sales Manager
[REDACTED] - Marketing
Myself

As we discussed, our main aim is to develop a 3 year Sales Strategy, which we would commence implementing on 1 April 2000. This would require us to be in a position to prepare a budget forecast for year 2000/2001 by February next. The sales strategy is seen by us as the foundation on which to carry out a review of our 1996 business plan.

We agreed that no fees or expenses would be chargeable by either party and that you would form part of our team which will be chaired by myself. The only right you would have to the resultant information is in the preparation of an Action Research report for your PhD at Strathclyde University.

I enclose a non-disclosure agreement which I would like you to sign and return to me.

I look forward to meeting you again on 20 September and to your joining us for lunch at 1.00pm.

Yours sincerely


[REDACTED]

Managing Director

Enc.

Copy for Terry



NONDISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

This Nondisclosure Agreement ("Agreement") is entered into effective as of 20 September 1999 ("the Effective Date"), between [REDACTED], and Terry Nelson, [REDACTED] ("Recipient"), for the purpose of protecting and preserving the confidential and/or proprietary nature of information to be disclosed or made available by [REDACTED] under this Agreement.

The parties agree as follows:

1. Confidential Information

"Confidential Information" means all information, whether written or oral, and in any form (including, without limitation, engineering documents, research and development, manuals, reports, designs, drawings, plans flowcharts, software (in source or object code), programme listings, data file printouts, printed circuit boards, processes, component part listings and prices, product information, new product plans, sales and marketing plans and/or programmes, pricing information, customer lists and other customer information, financial information and employee files or other employee information) relating to [REDACTED] business or technology which is disclosed by [REDACTED] either directly or indirectly to the Recipient. In addition, Confidential Information shall also include information received or offered from third parties in connection with any work on behalf of [REDACTED] Ltd.

2. Limited Use of Confidential Information

Recipient agrees to use of Confidential Information received solely for the purpose of carrying out the development of a [REDACTED] Limited and in the preparation of the Recipient's Action Research PhD learning project with Strathclyde University on the condition that [REDACTED] name will be removed from all text and there will be no reference to [REDACTED] by name or inference in the Action Research documentation. Recipient will be responsible for ensuring this condition is met by Strathclyde University.

3. Obligation of Confidentiality

Recipient agrees that for a period of five (5) years from receipt of Confidential Information from hereunder, it shall use the same degree of care and means that it utilises to protect its own information of a similar nature, but in any event not less than reasonable care and means, to prevent the unauthorised use or the disclosure of such Confidential Information to third parties. Recipient may not alter, decompile, disassemble, reverse engineer, or otherwise modify any Confidential Information received hereunder and the mingling of the Confidential Information with information of Recipient shall not affect the confidential nature or ownership of the same as stated hereunder.

4. Ownership of Confidential Information

All Confidential Information is, and shall remain, the property of [REDACTED]. Nothing herein shall be construed as granting or conferring any rights by license or otherwise in the Confidential Information except as expressly provided herein. Recipient acquires hereunder only a limited right to use the Confidential Information solely for the purpose set fourth in Section 2 above, subject to the terms and conditions of this Agreement.

5. Term and Termination

- 5.1 This Agreement becomes effective as of the Effective Date and shall continue in effect for a period of 5 years thereafter. The obligations of confidentiality set fourth hereunder shall survive such expiration or any earlier termination.
- 5.2 [REDACTED] may also terminate this Agreement immediately by written notice to the other upon any breach by such party of any term or condition of this Agreement.
- 5.3 Upon the written request of [REDACTED], or upon the expiration or any earlier termination of this Agreement, Recipient shall promptly return all copies of the Confidential Information, in whatever form or media, to [REDACTED] or, at the direction of [REDACTED] destroy the same. Recipient shall certify in writing to [REDACTED] such return or destruction within ten (10) days thereafter.

6. No Warranty

[REDACTED] makes no warranty, express or implied, as to any Confidential Information that it may provide hereunder, including without limitation as to the accuracy of the Confidential Information, as to whether any new products will be produced as disclosed, or as to the availability of product(s), on any specific date. [REDACTED] may, at its sole discretion, offer such products for sale and may modify them or discontinue sale at any time.

7. **Exceptions to Obligation of Confidentiality**

This Agreement shall impose no obligation of confidentiality upon Recipient with respect to any portion of the Confidential Information received hereunder which is: (i) now or hereafter, through no unauthorised act or failure to act on Recipient’s part, becomes generally known or available; ii) known to the Recipient without an obligation of confidentiality at the time Recipient receives the same from [REDACTED] as evidenced by written records; iii) hereafter furnished to the Recipient by a third party as a matter of right and without restriction on disclosure; iv) furnished to others by [REDACTED] without restriction on disclosure; or (v) required to be disclosed pursuant to a requirement of a governmental agency or law, so long as Recipient provides reasonable notice to [REDACTED] of such requirement prior to any such disclosure.

8. **Equitable Remedies**

The parties agree that there can be no adequate remedy at law for any breach of the obligations hereunder and upon any such breach or any threat thereof by either party the other shall be entitled to appropriate equitable relief, including injunctive relief in addition to whatever other remedies it might be entitled.

9. **Attorney’s Fees**

In any action to enforce this Agreement, the prevailing party shall be entitled to recover its reasonable attorney’s fees, court costs and related expenses.

10. **Miscellaneous**

This Agreement is intended as the complete and exclusive agreement as to the protection of the Confidential Information disclosed hereunder regarding the work undertaken in connection with the purpose set forth in Section 2. This Agreement may only be modified in writing by authorised representatives of the parties.

This Agreement shall be construed in accordance with, and all disputes hereunder shall be governed by, the laws of England.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have caused this Nondisclosure Agreement to be signed by their duly authorised representatives on the date(s) shown below.

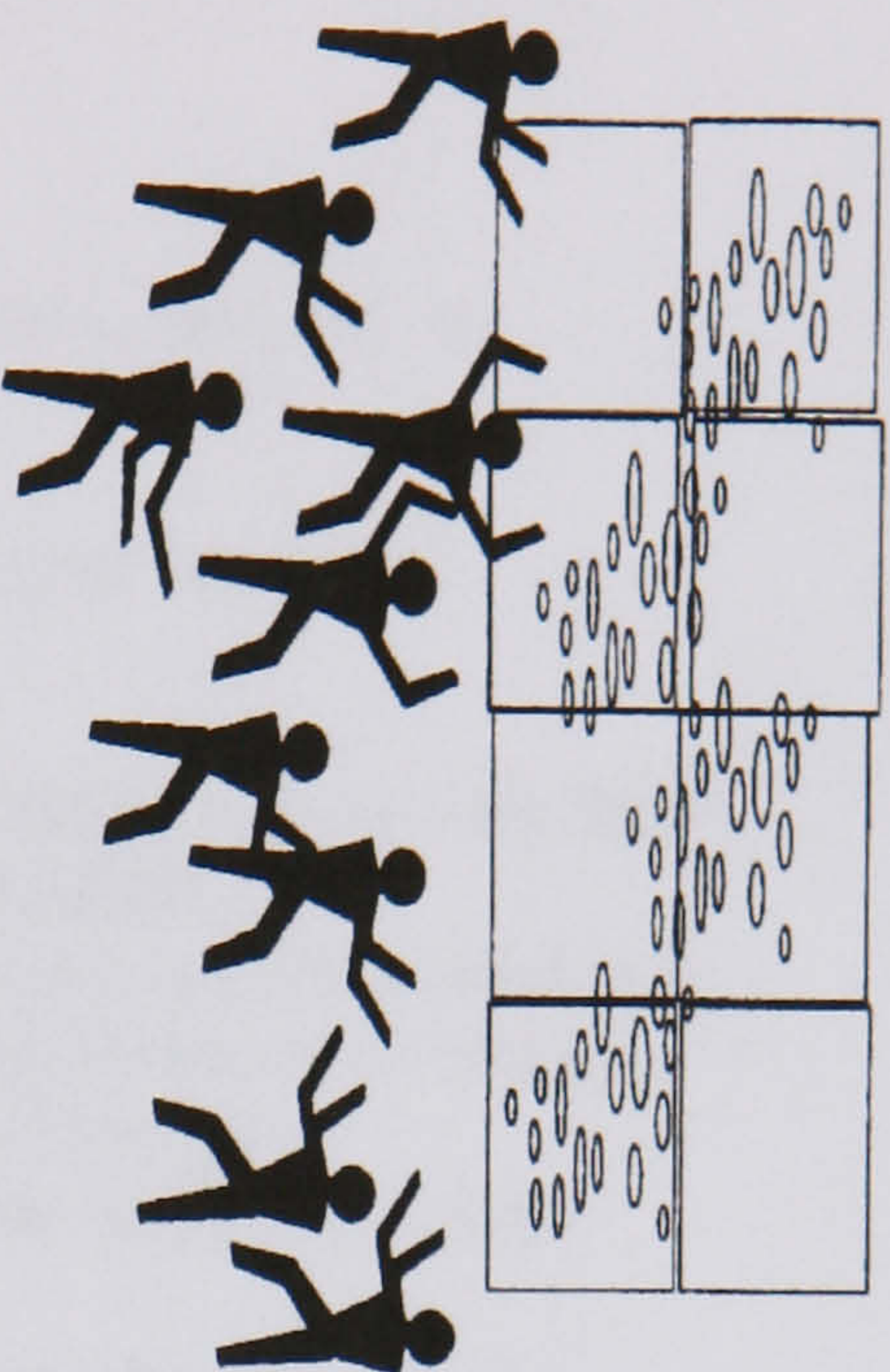
For Recipient

Signature: T. Nelson
Printed: T. NELSON
Title: _____
Date: 20-9-99

For [REDACTED] Ltd

Signature: [Signature]
Printed: [REDACTED]
Title: MD
Date: 13.9.99

Step 1a
Oval Mapping in Groups

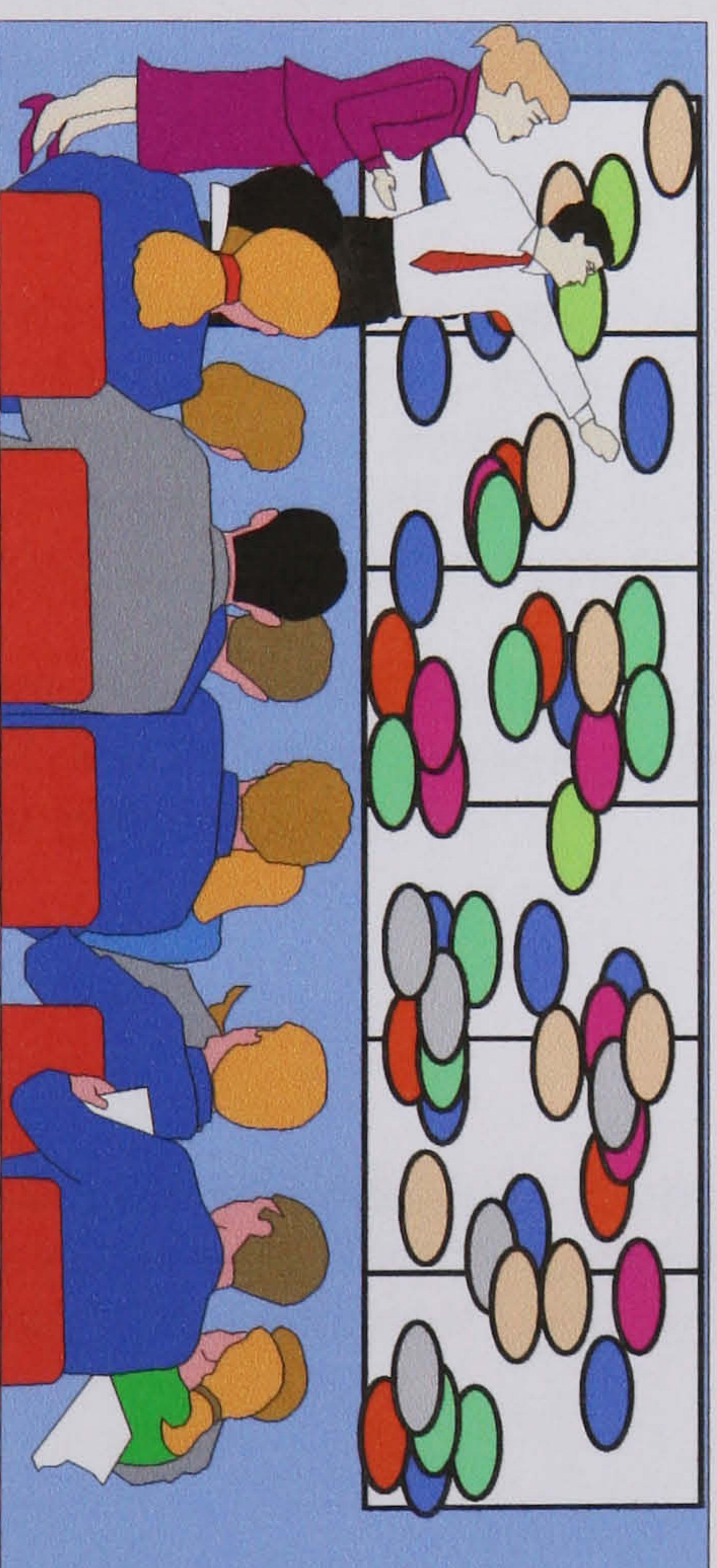


Step 1b
Individual Interviews &
Cognitive Mapping

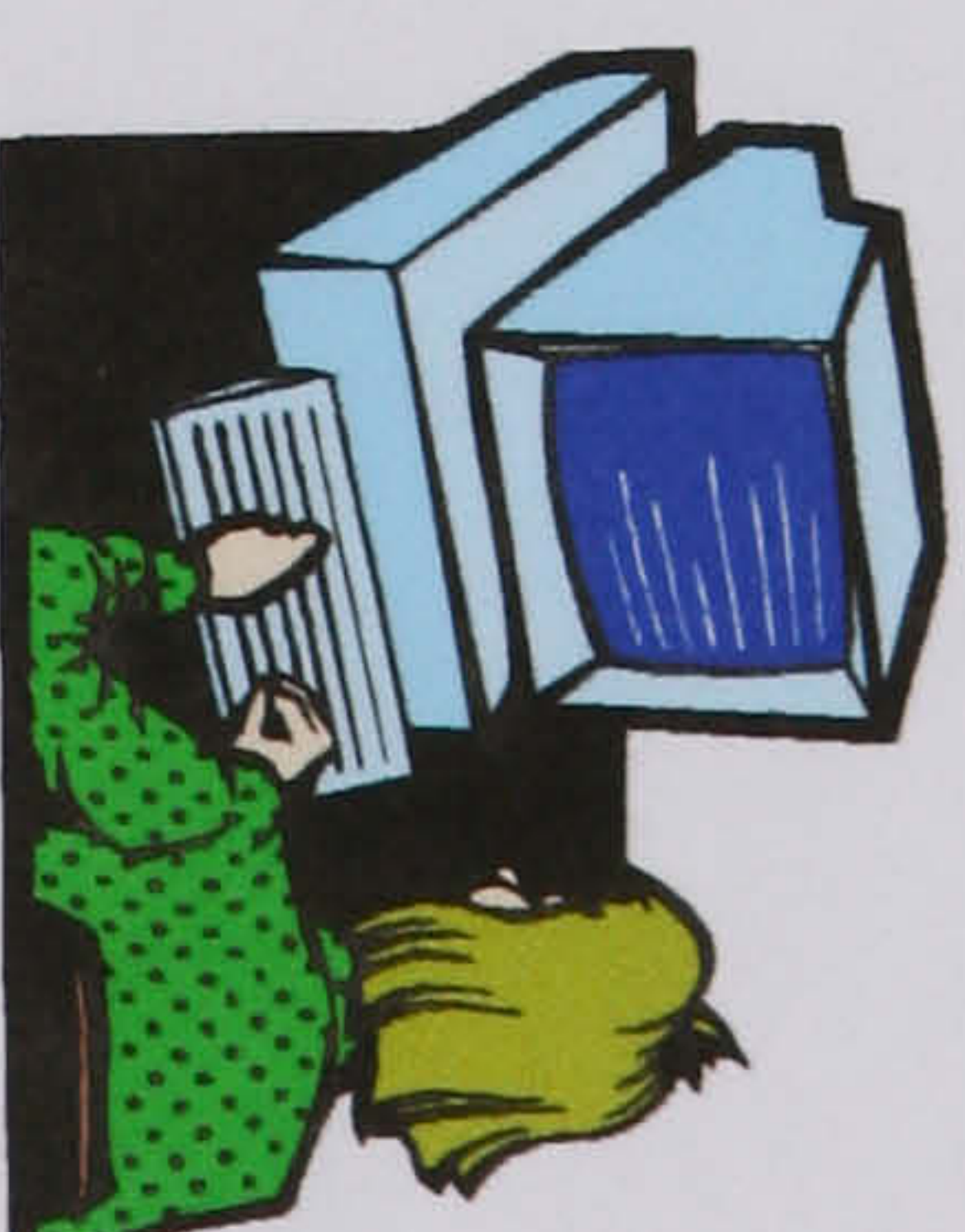


AND/OR

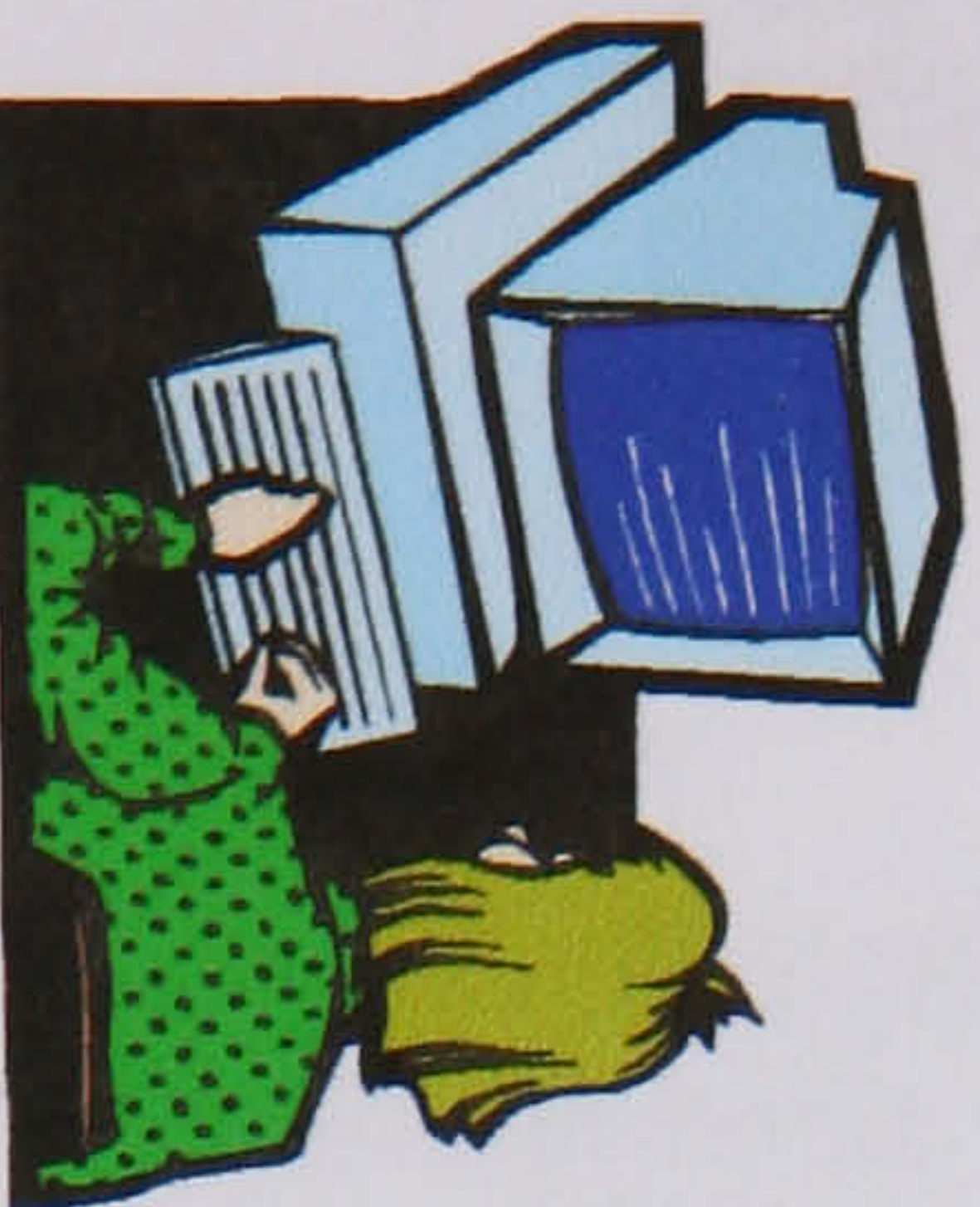
Step 5
Identifying and Negotiating Goals and Strategies



Step 3
Modelling Cognition and a
Draft' Composite Group Map



Step 4
Modelling and Analysing
the Composite Group Map



Step 6
Negotiating, Agreeing and
Project Planning Strategies



Step 7
Strategy Development Closure

Terry Nelson

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, September 20, 1999 07:53 PM
To: Terry Nelson
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Strategic Direction project

Terry

I felt we made a good start to the project. I don't think we can quite see the wood yet but vision is improving.

We have decided on the following and we would like your feedback.

Dates

* 24 Sep 10.00 to 12.00 [REDACTED] 12.00 to 2.00 [REDACTED] 2.00 to 4.00 [REDACTED]

* 27 Sep 10.00 to 12.00 [REDACTED] 12.00 to 2.00 [REDACTED]

To take place in our Conference room. Some refreshments will be available in the room to those involved at 1.00 each day so that interviews may continue.

* 13 October - 10.30 to 5.00 (or later) - Terry's feedback

To take place in our Conference room. We would prefer to deal with this stage in a single day.

* 20 October - 10.00 to 5.00 with 2 open groups each of max 10 employees.

To take place in Castle Management, two rooms.

* 8/9 November - Scrutinising sessions with the 6 of us from 10.00 to 5.00 in Castle Management. Further dates to be arranged as necessary.

* End January - completion of report on the project

* 1 April - roll out of implementation

I trust you are still interested and the above is acceptable to you. We now look forward to working with you as a team and to the mutual enjoyment of developing our strategy.

Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] please arrange for bookings at Castle Management on dates shown. It is important to get adjacent 2 rooms (adjacent if possible) on 20 October. Can you also arrange for some sandwiches, etc for 2 on 24 and 27 September. Thanks.

Terry Nelson

From: Terry Nelson [terrynelson@stratint.powernet.co.uk]
Sent: Thursday, September 23, 1999 11:41 AM
To: '[REDACTED]'
Subject: RE: Strategic Direction project

[REDACTED]

Working two groups at once is something that I would prefer not to do and everyone does need a full day to participate. If the 20th is the only day that we have then I suggest that we go for one large group of 14 people on that day. It will not be magic but I will get through it some way. We will lose some of the group dynamics and the people may not feel that they have had enough attention paid to their ideas, a consequence of too many people trying to input information at once. However, we will have allowed them all to participate and input. The amount of information that we will collect will also be diluted, a consequence of me not being able to pay as much attention to smaller groups as I would like to but again we will collect a lot of useful information.

If one group of 14 is OK for you then please go ahead and book the accommodation.

see you tomorrow

Terry

-----Original Message-----

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 22 September 1999 09:01
To: terrynelson@stratint.powernet.co.uk
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Strategic Direction project

Terry

Thanks for your quick response.

I'm trying to reach a compromise here. I can't give you 2 days in October for open group meetings. The people we really wish to participate are our consultants who book their diaries 2 months in advance and are stretched at present. How about 2 groups of people. The reason for the 20th is that the 14 Operations consultants already have this date in their diaries for a team meeting and I know I will get a fairly good turnout. Any alternative date that week would mean a risk of poor turnout as we have a policy of client comes first when allocating resource.

Could you let me know asap if 20th and 2 groups of 7 is OK so I can book the accommodation.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

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APPENDIX C

ARer Checklist for the Individual Cognitive Mapping Sessions

Use the interviewees language or intended language to increase ownership

Separate presented constructs into distinct phrases

- ❑ Ensure each construct contains only one phrase
- ❑ Spit statements up where there are two or more possible actions implied

Build up the hierarchy.

- ❑ Identify which is **the option, the valued outcome, the means and the end**.
- ❑ If in doubt ask the interviewee which is which
- ❑ Where appropriate, use opportunities to gain confirmation of the emerging map. Use natural breakpoints for feedback and clarification
- ❑ Use the feedback time to down-load material not yet captured or not fully understood.

Watch for Values, Aspirations, Final Outcomes and Goals

- ❑ Often interviewees start by surfacing issues that are key concerns to themselves rather than goals
- ❑ Mark identified goals on the map with an asterix

Watch for those constructs that act as labels for key strategic issues

- ❑ Examine the extent of the elaboration presented
- ❑ Monitor the interviewees non-verbals and general sense of concern
- ❑ Place small circles next to identified key issues

Hold onto contrasting poles (rather than ...)

- ❑ Listen for opposite poles, use shorthand to identify bi-polar issues

Write each construct in an imperative form to give the map an action orientation

Rules of Engagement for the Oval Mapping Sessions

Please do not write in block capitals only, a mixture of upper and lower is more easily read.

Only use the bullet tipped felt pens provided

Write one statement per oval

Do not number/initial or put any identifying marks on the ovals

Contributions should be written up even if first spoken or thought

Be concise, 8-10 words per statement is OK, 1-3 words may be too brief

Ideas should be expressed in actions terms, preferably starting with a verb such as do, buy, get, formulate, implement, achieve, or some other imperative.

Consensus is not necessary, constructively disagreeing with statements is OK. Each oval is an individual's perspective and therefore is neither right or wrong.

Ovals can not be removed or edited. Existing statements can be 'built upon' or they can be cloned to create new ovals

The contents of an Oval can appear in more than one cluster.

Statements should be placed upon the wall as soon as they are written

Use the blu tack provided, sparingly, to stick the Ovals onto the wall

Output from the Strategic Planning Group's 'OMW'

Cluster Label - Effective Recruitment is a Priority?

Re-instigate a company wide teamwork approach
Set specific recruitment profiles to meet specific gaps in skills
Develop competence matrix to identify skill base
Recruitment development to include company development contributions
Recruiting and retaining staff is a key objective
Maximise skills/knowledge in shorter windows of opportunity
Recruit the right people with the relevant skills
Build awareness of our achievements to attract future recruits
Retaining a high market profile and reputation through innovative recruitment

Cluster Label - Job Satisfaction/Retention

Develop our people to meet company and personal goals
Understand people's aspirations and assist them to meet them
Make sure we don't lose sight of keeping the job enjoyable
Set 'new ideas' objective into everyone's appraisal criteria
Do not over commit people so as to improve job satisfaction and company loyalty
We need to look after the health of our people
Consult with staff to identify aspirations and issues
Train staff on new skills and approaches
Maintaining the appropriate skills and motivation
Train staff on new technologies.
Train staff on new skills and approaches
Maintaining the appropriate skills and motivation
Train staff on new technologies.

Cluster Label - Harnessing Human Resources

Increase efficiency of cost base via increased operational resources

Have contingency for resource shortage or loss of staff

Recruit clients on part-time basis to supplement resources

Develop staff into 'all-rounders' to offer flexibility

Build slack into resources to allow for ongoing training

We must never overlook the fact that our people are our main asset

Cluster Label – Understand the Markets we Work in

Define target markets to identify appropriate channels for these

Use right marketing mix to approach the markets

Understand what we are selling and why

Respond faster to changing market place

Expand sales capability

Identify opportunities to move into new markets

Develop a unique selling proposition to 'rise above' our competitors

Protecting existing market positions in LG, HE and Health

Maintain the right image in the marketplace

Dealing with speed of change in markets

Seeking opportunities to strengthen our position in current markets

Cluster Label – Broaden the Existing Business Model

Try to identify larger business opportunities

Focus sales on long term opportunities

Focus particular market strengths to gain niche leader status

Research government contract opportunities (MOD ?)

Get our name into S-Cat plus other government framework contracts

Cluster Label – Challenging the Existing Business Model

Try to balance time and cost to client requirements

Investigate workflow management

Managing cash flow via type of work

Carry out an internal BPR review

Try to balance time available with client requirements

Challenge conventional approach to projects

Use 'Goldmine' throughout company

Increase profitability

Charge expenses as extra cost

Ensure that work is profitable and achievable

Increase fee rates to £850 per day

Get clients to physically visit us – and reduce costs of time and travel

Pick and choose most profitable work to do

Work with less paper – total electronic operation

Cluster Label – Partnership Relationships/Alliances etc

Research large organisations to establish long term business relationships

Develop alliances with companies to share knowledge and prospects

Form consortiums with like companies to jointly market and differentiate

Cluster Label – Technological Applications

Challenge direction of technology and market – is it right?

Predict technology changes and their effect on users

Focus on applications not technologies

Stimulate demand for company by showing how technology can be used

Cluster Label – Explore Business Expansion

Open European offices

Open offices around the world

Become European in outlook

Open regional offices

Open offices in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales

Become global in outlook

Ensure we have right accommodation and operational facilities

Research value of opening more offices

Cluster Label – Increasing and Protecting our Existing Client Base

Retain a large client base to reduce risk/threats

Develop more ‘channels’ for leads to allow selective client development

Continue to offer good value for money

Keeping reputation for excellence and VFM

Increase our present client base

Cluster Label – Improve Market Awareness

Undertake fastest project completion and satisfaction to gain publicity

Hold open days for supplier to get to know us

Improve market awareness

Enhance image and presence among large corporations

Hold seminars for clients and non clients to let them know us better

Become, slightly, controversial to generate PR

Create a company annual award scheme

Promote the corporate brand and enhance our profile

Develop an award winning web site

Fly balloon around the world for max publicity

Give annual award for best client use of e-commerce

Cluster Label – Competitor Analysis

Research our and competitor's client satisfaction with consultancy work done

Identify our competition and undertake SWOT analysis on them

Research competitor organisations

Possess knowledge of what our competitors are doing

Benchmark costs and performance against peer companies

Cluster Label – Understanding Clients Better – Business Continuity

Optimise business possibility from existing clients

Re-introduce sales person to project completion visit (account management)

Handle project completions better

Maintain high quality to ensure repeat business

Develop more effective procedure for project completions

Focus on cross-selling to existing /past clients

Provide resource to forecast market growth areas and develop services for these

Maintain a continuous stream of business leads

Understand clients processes and their internal constraints

Understand clients needs better to develop services they need

Undertake survey to identify client issues

Provide product champions to be responsible for success of new product sales

Encourage consultants to sell – perhaps use direct incentives £££

Identify staff motivation requirements and adapt to suit

Cluster Label – Getting Closer to Our Clients

Be proactive in client contacts to maintain a warm relationship

Create more interaction with clients

Maintain close contact with all current and past clients

Consult clients when we lose bids to review our performance

Maintain regular contact with clients

Build upon personal level relationships

Manage client relationships better-more structured

Cluster Title – Improving the Quality of our Work

Provide closer monitoring of quality of output

Check all output prior to dispatch to improve quality

We must maintain the quality of our work and improve it

Introduce sign-off procedure for reports in, Quality Assurance

Cluster Title – Sharing Information Throughout the Company

Ensure a constant stream of data for analysis

Reward those who input knowledge of value to company

Encourage ongoing flow of development ideas from all employees

Attend more LG, HE and Health seminars to gather competitive information

Become recognised as industry gurus by publishing information

Optimise intellectual property that already exists

Hold regular internal technology reviews to update staff

Develop stronger team approach to exchange knowledge better

Maintain high knowledge base by regular update/briefings

Obtain specialist knowledge of client sectors and maintain

Cluster Title – Intelligent Product/Service Development

Extend our product range in a focused manner

Introduce only products that can be supported properly

Understand IPs and VPNs, become experts

Create an Internet based consultancy service – seek investors

Using skilled foresight to choose/develop our services

Understand ‘the next big thing’

Analyse how we can benefit from e-commerce and sell services to others

Understand how new technology will effect our services positively and negatively

Develop own e-commerce capability to learn skills to sell to clients

Falling behind on e-commerce and the Internet is not acceptable

Cluster Label – Product Application Testing

Become ideas innovators not followers

Establish more products with repeat business opportunities

Open systems test labs – produce reports

Offer ‘free’ projects in new service areas to test new skills/approaches

Create ‘Which’ style reports for systems, suppliers and services

Work with clients at applications level

Become a systems integrator

Sell software, e.g., Betta

Set up autonomous new business areas with own resources and objectives

Develop products and services for SMEs

Provide realistic resource to test and develop new services

Influence industry developments to suit us and our clients

Cluster Label – Making it Easy for Companies/People to do Business with Us

Allow clients to buy our services from our web site

Deliver services via Internet as market requirements

Consider new service delivery methods vs. our capability to deliver

Use video conferencing kit to improve links with clients

Get clients to visit us electronically and reduce the costs

Accept electronic e-commerce payments

Make it easy for people to do business with us

Accept credit card payments

On demand telecomm consultancy by phone

Cluster Label – Reviewing our Strategic Framework

Set aside fixed times as priority to review strategic plans

Ensure that strategic plan covers all aspects of the business

Check any company decisions against the strategic criteria

Develop functional plans all aimed at defined company goals

Communicate strategy to all in company to gain synergy of understanding

Cluster Title – External Influences

We need to monitor and predict changes in the economy

Forecast changes to our environment that will impact on the business

Dealing with competitive pressures

Recognise regional government development plans

Understanding of relevant company legislation

Take out insurance against likely/unlikely events

Cluster Title – Financial Resources

Maintain sufficient funds to remain solvent

Continue to satisfy our shareholders by acceptable profit levels

Realise that we may need financial backing to achieve our goals

Establish sound financial base

Identify funding sources for expansion

Look for external shareholder investments

Consider investment from existing shareholders

Put cost of long term company development into cost budgets

Cluster Title – Operating an Open Strategy Development Process

Involve everyone in strategy development

Provide strategic planning responsibilities to others rather than management teams

Get external input to strategic decisions from clients/suppliers

Openly review successes and failures of strategic plan to all

Involve everyone in developing the business strategy

Develop ‘bottom up’ and ‘top down’ objective setting

Encourage all staff to be involved in corporate development

Allow sufficient opportunities for our stakeholders to give feedback.

Cluster Label – Company Leadership Considerations

Maintaining a balanced Board of Directors

The Directors need to be seen to lead the company towards its vision

Don't be reluctant to take measured risks to improve success

Develop an awareness of target markets without expecting an immediate return

Cluster Label – Developing an Effective Company Culture

Induct our people so that established values are maintained

Ensure that we employ the right attitude

All work together for joint benefits

Retain an acceptable culture to existing stakeholders

Total of ovals	= 195
Total number of clusters	= 25
Average ovals per cluster	= 8

Output from Employees' 'OMW'

Cluster Label – Sharing Information

Develop a team work approach to the sharing of information

Consultant should actively offer support to other consultants

Share information on clients and projects between consultants

Hold regular meetings to share information

Consultants should be provided with video conferencing facilities

Company/Directors should communicate targets and performance against targets

The company should communicate more regularly

Company information needs to be more freely available

Access to information needs to speed up

There needs to be a company Intranet

Information spread will be a key driver for success

Cluster Label – Improve Company Image through Effective Marketing

Change client perceptions of company as a 'voice' only consultancy

Increase marketing within the private sector

Advertise existing services through the web to reach new sectors etc.

Put together brochures to show clients complete services etc.

The company should communicate its successes through marketing activities

We need to market the company both through normal and web based channels

There needs to be a regular flow of corporate information to our clients

The company needs to develop a brochure which markets the image

The company needs to create a forum for its client base (user groups)

Must capitalise on its marketing department's skill and experience

There is a need to market of the company as a brand name

Cluster Label – Building a Different Company

Need to look at the company as a whole not as separate departments

Departments must be able to integrate with each other, not them and us

All parts of the company need to interact, intelligently

Management to structure departments and appoint head to supervise

Directors not to manage departments, have staff to supervise departments

Company needs to increase its links with other sectors through partnerships

We need to start to think globally

The company needs to bring in more global business projects

Seek to develop partnerships with consultancy companies in other countries

Need to form stronger links with the Private Sector

Cluster Label – Developing New Working Practices/Procedures

Create better working procedures

Must be consistent when setting up new procedures

Listen to staff when input is given regarding new procedures

Directors to involve staff when making changing existing procedures

The company should look towards all employees working from home

Homeworking to be introduced 2/3 times per week

Create a VPN for homeworkers to log onto

Introduce homeworking as an alternative working arrangement

Re-engineer working practices

New model will need to encompass all aspects of the company

Cluster Label – Improving Customer Services

Improve use of telephone system to give better service to customer

Add voice mail/cueing to telephone system to increase customer service

Apply interactive help desk for ICS/ACAS

Handle work enquiries via email

Use Intranet as another comm. channel

The ICS should be delivered over the Internet

Cluster Title – Technological Enhancements/Updates

Make better use of technology to improve efficiency

Make sure existing equipment can cope with increase in workload

Update current hardware, e.g., printers, servers

Remote workers need faster communications

Improve remote access to allow fast/efficient retrieval of information

Provide an interface on the internet that provides access to relevant information

Cluster Title –Product and/or Service Improvements/Additions

Develop own software, i.e., database to offer to existing clients or sold separately

Develop consultancy skills in value added solutions

Company to train new and existing clients in project management consultancy

Once experts in a certain field train staff to present knowledge – teacher training

Develop consultancy skills in outsourcing

Develop skills in call centre solutions

Develop skills to implement BPR through technology

Talk to individual staff about making them experts in certain fields, data IP, web

The company should move into e-commerce as a product/service

Company to recommend computers, an independent view

Diversify ICS services to include other activities

Develop web based services to deliver existing and new products/services

Design web pages for existing/new clients

Teach existing/new clients Internet skills such as searching for information

Plan and pilot ‘new products’ before including in budgeted sales targets

Offer web based services to new/potential clients to increase Internet presence

We should offer a consultancy service over the WWW

Cluster Label – Building an Effective Knowledge Base/Library

There should be templates developed for specific services

Develop a consultants 'kit box' to aide selling products services

All of the past reports/specs etc. need to transcribed into a RDBMS

Create an electronic library to replace poorly used current library

Actively search for new library documents/information through the Internet

All product information needs to be categorised and stored

Disseminate information through Intranet, collect information via Internet

Improve storage of information that is regularly used, crate library facility

There should be a search engine for archived information

The company need to have a web based server to hold all company information

Consultants need to access past information quickly

Cluster Label – Ensuring We Produce Quality Work

Ensure that consultants are aware of their financial targets (revenue)

All employees should be provided with targets individually

Not to over commit consultants, quality of work suffers

Must ensure that written documentation is of high quality and presentation

Must analyse project completion for both timescale, cost and customer satisfaction

Cluster Label – Getting Everyone Involved in Developing the Company

There needs to be more brainstorming of ideas when looking at options

Completely understand the abilities of existing staff

Actively encourage new ideas, have an ideas box

Staff must feel able to present their views to management without recriminations

Management should not intimidate its staff and should be approachable

Motivate staff through involvement and communication

Company to have a clear 'pecking order' to ensure effective decision making

Cluster Label – Recruiting the ‘Right’ People

Working for the company should be considered fun – not a drag

Must create a friendly atmosphere and team spirit, a place people want to be

New recruits must be given ongoing assistance, supervisory or induction process

Sponsor staff to take academic courses, fees could be taken out of bonuses

Meet the expectations given to new staff, rather than over exaggerate prospects

Keep alive the team spirit, a team that plays together stays together

Company needs to have a mission statement which is memorable to everyone

The company needs to communicate a vision to its employees

There needs to be a recognised company way of doing things

Introduce an induction process to advise people what the company way is

Develop staff on a quarterly basis and appraise bi-annually

New starters within the company should be given a share allocation

Company needs to recognise the strength of its people

Develop or buy consultancy skills to meet changing markets

Identify consultancy skills required in changing markets

Recruit more experienced consultants with different perspectives and experiences

Cluster Label – Selling On

Be more pro-active with existing clients

Consultants to be more involved in the sales process

Encourage all consultants to ‘sell on’ further projects/services

The sales process should be deliverable from anywhere through a laptop

Make sure the employees understand the existing products and services

Give client video conferencing facilities during projects

Introduce techniques to improve communication with client to reduce site visits

Video conferencing to allow interaction with clients

Reduce the time spent travelling to clients sites

We need to be a more efficient sales based company

Total of ovals	= 120
Total number of clusters	= 12
Average ovals per cluster	= 10

Terry Nelson

From: Terry Nelson [terrynelson@stratint.powernet.co.uk]
Sent: Tuesday, November 02, 1999 10:06 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Next Week

[REDACTED]

I'm sorry to say that I won't be able to make the strategy meetings scheduled for next week. I am going to work in Brussels for three weeks at the end of this week and won't be back until the week commencing 29th. November. I have tried to get out of this assignment but unfortunately I can't.

Can we move our two day strategy meeting, scheduled for next week, to sometime in the week commencing 29th. I will be free all of that week, except Thursday, so you can pick any two days that suits everyone. If Thursday is the only day that everyone is available then I will be able to work but will have to leave early, I have a previous engagement on the evening.

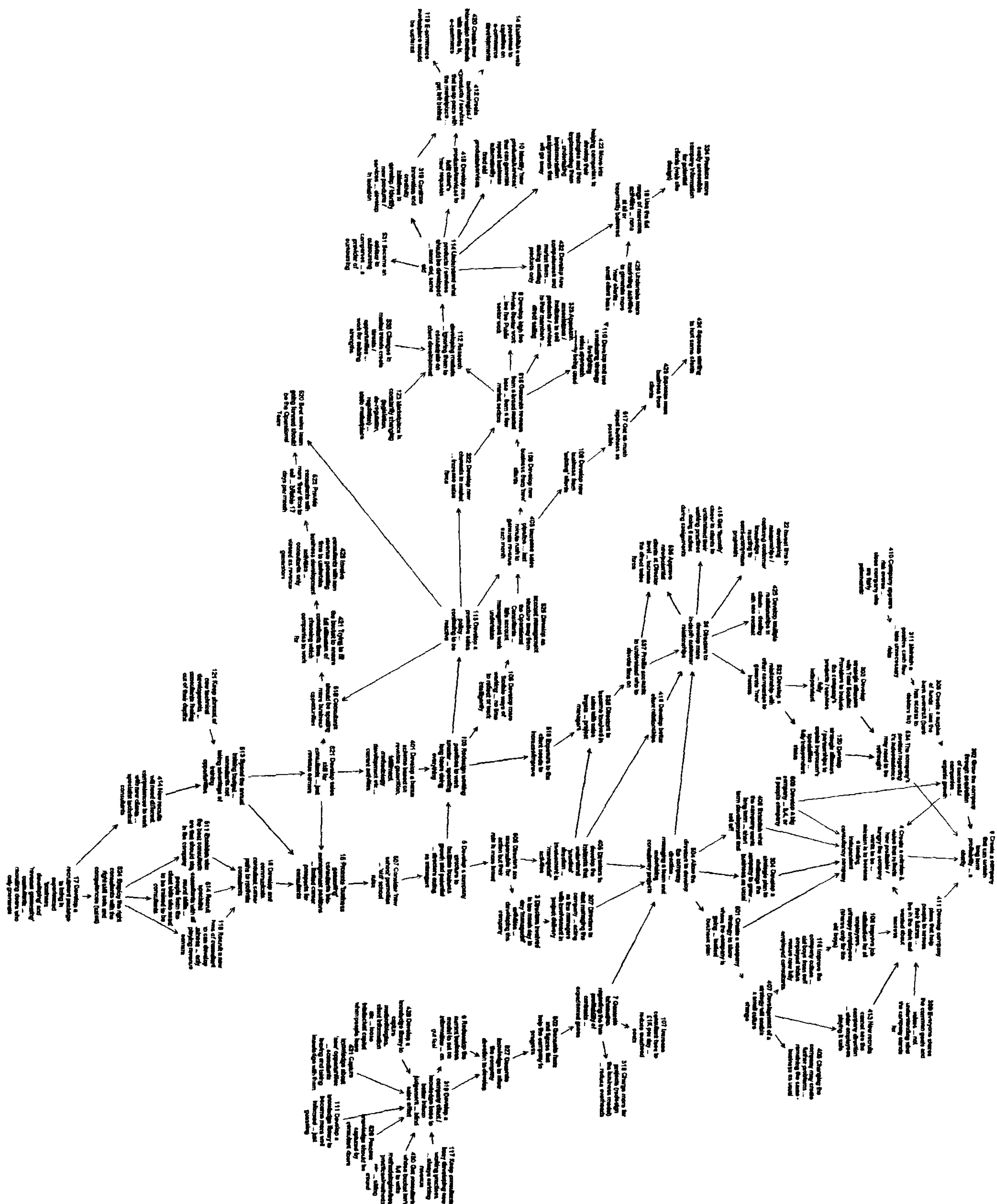
Sorry for the inconvenience this will cause.

I have now completed all of the individual cognitive maps, input the data from them into the software and have combined all of the maps to make a 'group strategy map'. I now need to add all of the data from the group mapping sessions that we did. I was really surprised at the amount of work that we got out of those two days and the quality and quantity of the information that was generated. Suffice to say that I will be travelling with the rolled up flip charts to Brussels and look forward to spending many a long night inputting the data into the group strategy map (only joking). In fact I am very please that we have such good data to work from. At the moment I can not say what the output will look like as I haven't attempted to do any initial analysis, I would rather wait until I have all of the data input and then play about with it. When we next meet I will bring along my laptop and show everyone what the map looks like and we can start manipulating the data on-line.

Once again sorry about having to rearrange our scheduled meeting, just let me know what dates are convenient to you all. I still think that we will complete on time as we left ourselves some spare time in the new year which I will now have to take advantage of.

Terry

Composite Group Map 10th January 2000



- 3 Directors involved in too much day to day 'managerial' activities ... developing the company
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- 5 Develop a company structure to facilitate business growth and potential ... directors acting as managers
- 6 Redevelop the current business model to act on information ... on gut feel
- 7 Generate information regarding the true profitability of contracts ... experienced guess
- 8 Develop high fee Private Sector work ... low fee Public sector work
- 9 Create a company that can sustain long term profitability ... a charity
- 10 Identify 'new products/services' that can generate repeat business automatically ... tired old products/services
- 14 Establish a web presence to capitalise on e-commerce developments
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- 16 Develop and communicate consultant career paths to motivate consultants
- 17 Develop a recruitment package to bring in experienced 'business developing' and 'revenue generating' consultants ... recruiting doers who only generate
- 19 Use the full range of marcoms activities ... none at all or incorrectly balanced
- 22 Invest time in developing relationships / capturing customer knowledge ... reacting to semi-anonymous proposals
- 24 Directors to develop more in-depth customer relationships
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 112 Research developing markets ... ignoring them to concentrate on client development
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 116 Improve the company culture ... old boys from self employed status versus new fully employed consultants
 117 Keep consultants busy developing new working practices ... always earining revenue
 118 Recruit a new type of consultant who can develop business ... only employing revenue earners
 119 E-commerce marketplace should be explored
 120 Develop strategic alliances / partnerships to exploit Improcom's specialities ... fully independent status
 121 Keep abreast of new technical developments ... consultants feeling out of their depths
 123 Marketplace is constantly changing (legislation, de-regulation, regulation) ... static marketplace
 302 Grow the company through acquisition of successful companies ... organic growth
 303 Develop strategic alliances with Total Solution Providers to include the company's products / services ... fully independent
 304 Develop a strategic plan to challenge the company to grow ... business as usual
 305 Create a surplus of funds ... use the bank overdraft (bank has access to debtors list)
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409 Changing the company may create further problems ... remaining the same - business as usual

410 Company appears risk averse ... close company who are fairly paternalistic

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412 Create technologies / products / services that keep pace with the marketplace ... get left behind

413 New recruits cannot see the company direction ... older employees playing it safe

414 New recruits will need different competences to work with new clients ... specialist technical consultants

415 Get 'formally' closer to clients to understand their working practices ... doing it adhoc during assignments

416 Develop better client relationships

419 Develop new products/services to fulfil client's 'new' requests

420 Create new interaction methods with clients ie, e-commerce

421 Trying to fill the bucket to ensure full utilisation of consultants time ... choosing which companies to work for

422 Move into helping companies to develop their strategies and then implementing them ... undertaking implementation assignments that will go away

423 Squeeze more business from clients

424 Squeeze starting to hurt some clients

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431 Capture knowledge about 'new' opportunities ... consultants leaving and taking knowledge with them

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- SIZE Analysis - 100
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 - 537 Profile accounts to understand who to devote time on

SIZE Analysis - 10th January 2000

Model Group Analysis V2B

Concepts	99
Causal Links	124
Connotative Links	0
Temporal Links	0

DOMO Analysis - 10th January 2000

All concepts in descending order of value

6 links around

114 Understand what products / services should be developed ...
same old, same old

5 links around

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DOMI Analysis - 10th January 2000

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1 link around

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 420 Create new interaction methods with clients ie, e-commerce
 422 Move into helping companies to develop their strategies and then implementing them ... undertaking implementation assignments that will go away
 424 Squeeze starting to hurt some clients
 425 Develop multiple relationships in clients ... dealing with one contact
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 528 Process knowledge should be captured by consultant doers

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309 Everyone shares the common goals and values ... not understanding what the company stands for

316 Charge more for projects (redesign the business model) ... reduce overheads

323 Approach associations / institutes to sell products / services to their members ... direct selling

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121 Keep abreast of new technical developments ... consultants feeling out of their depths

123 Marketplace is constantly changing (legislation, de-regulation, regulation) ... static marketplace

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10 Identify 'new products/services' that can generate repeat business automatically ... tired old products/services

14 Establish a web presence to capitalise on e-commerce developments

22 Invest time in developing relationships / capturing customer knowledge ... reacting to semi-anonymous proposals

CENT Analysis - 10th January 2000

Cent Scores Calculated...

504 Allow the directors to develop the company direction ...
managing a team and undertaking consultancy projects
18 from 34 concepts.

24 Directors to develop more in-depth customer relationships
15 from 26 concepts.

501 Create a company strategy to show where the company is going
... tactical business plan
14 from 33 concepts.

516 Generate revenue from a broad market base ... from a few
market sectors
13 from 24 concepts.

406 Establish what the company wants long term ... short term
development and sell off
13 from 31 concepts.

405 Directors to develop the insitincts that understand 'practical'
direction ... involvement in 'managerial' activities
13 from 26 concepts.

304 Develop a strategic plan to challenge the company to grow ...
business as usual
13 from 31 concepts.

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13 from 27 concepts.

4 Create a mission & vision that reflects how profitable / hungry the
company wants to be ... mission is to become a leading independent
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13 from 23 concepts.

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303 Develop strategic alliances with Total Solution Providers to include the company's products / services ... fully independent
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423 Squeeze more business from clients

2 from 4 concepts.

324 Produce more easily accessible company information for potential clients (web site design)
2 from 5 concepts.

424 Squeeze starting to hurt some clients
1 from 3 concepts.

410 Company appears risk averse ... close company who are fairly paternalistic
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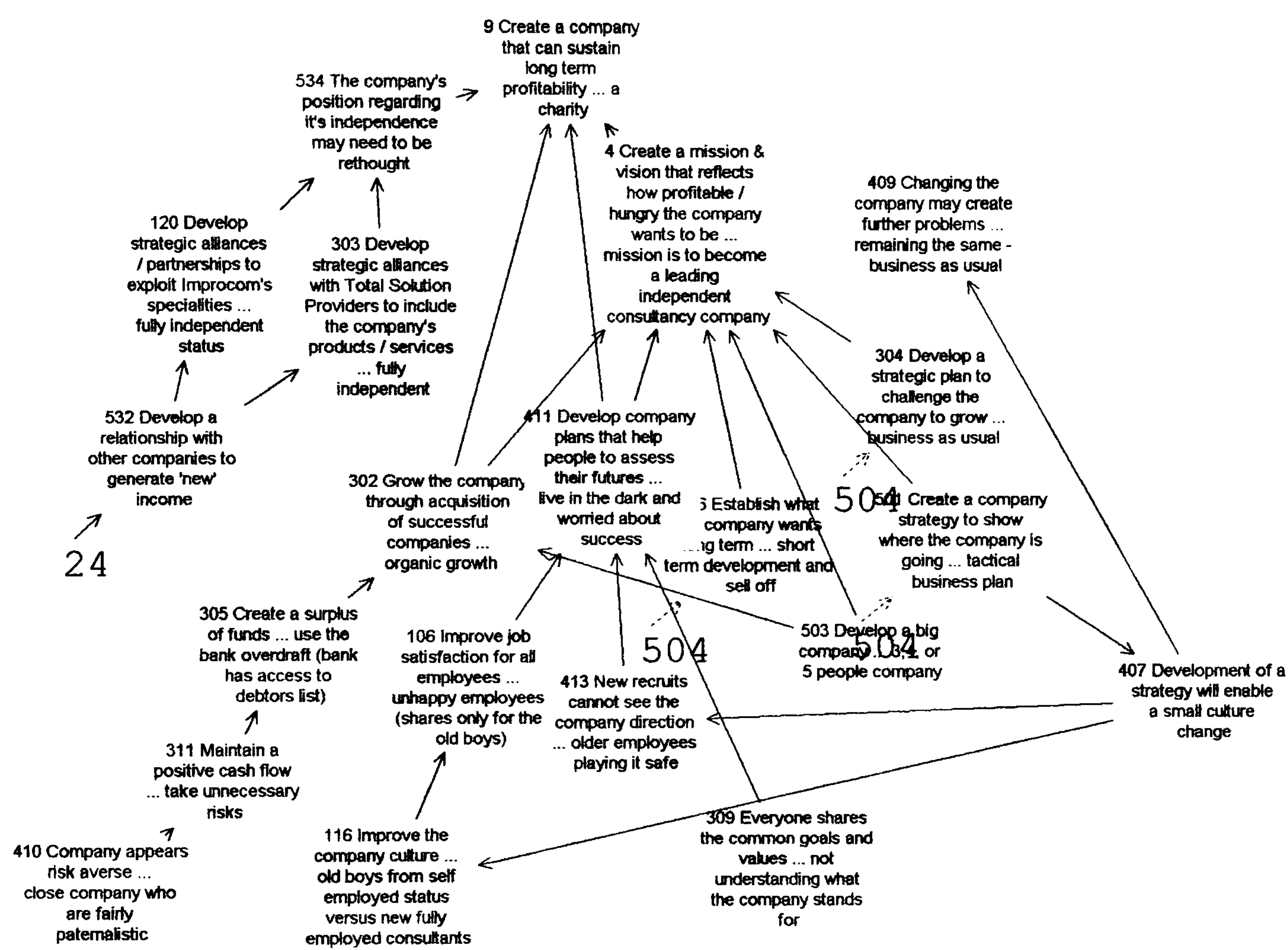
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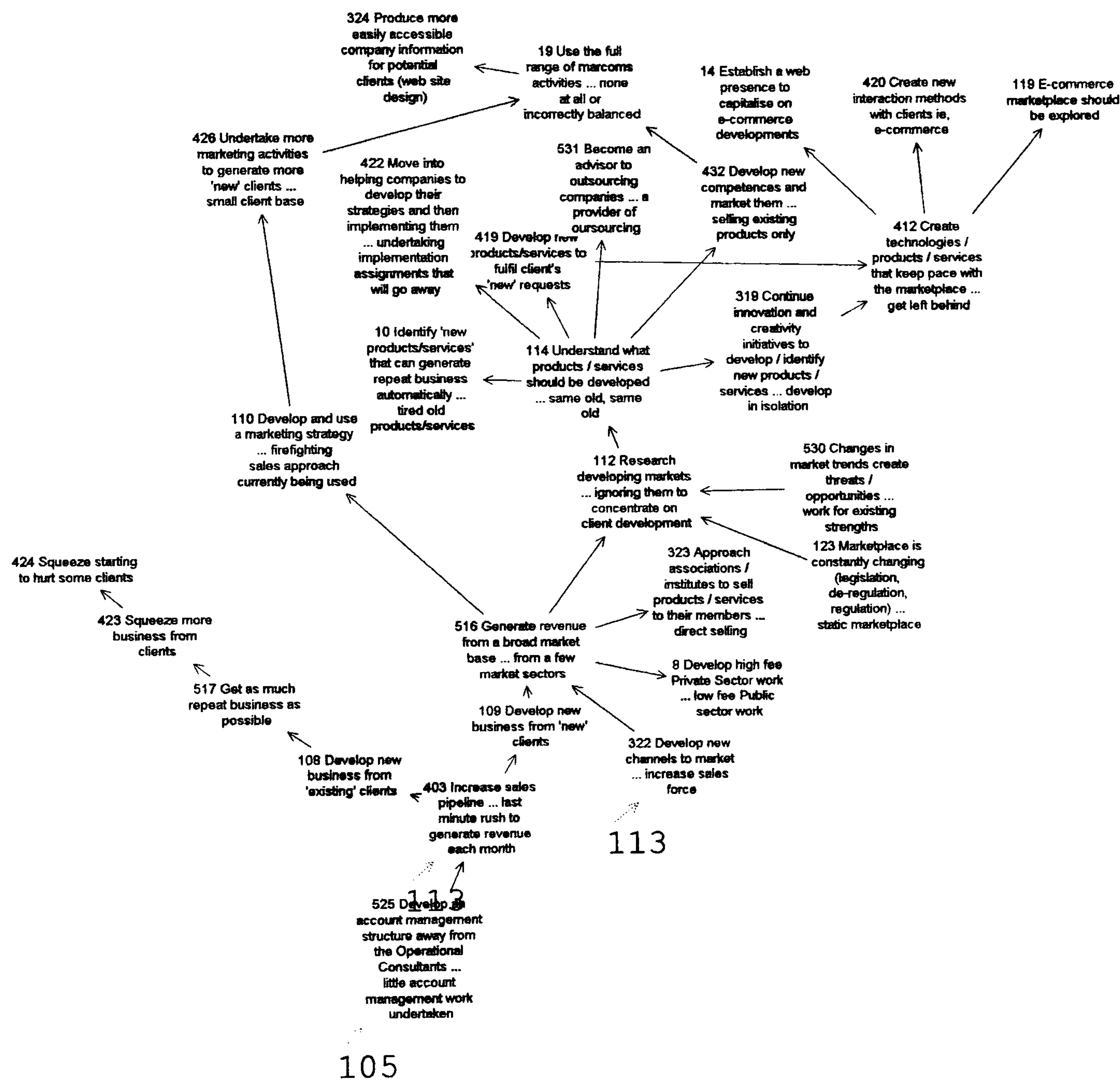
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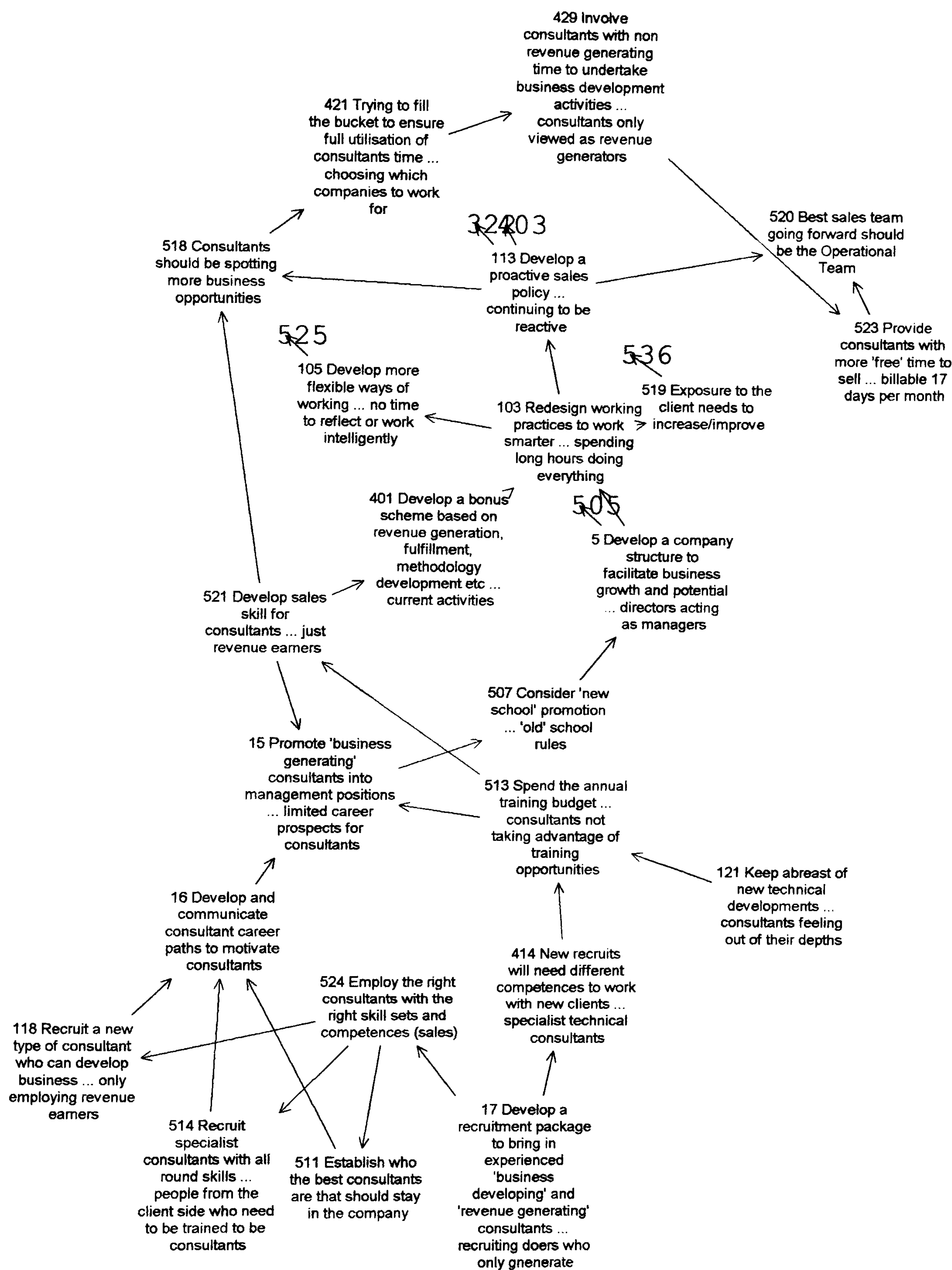
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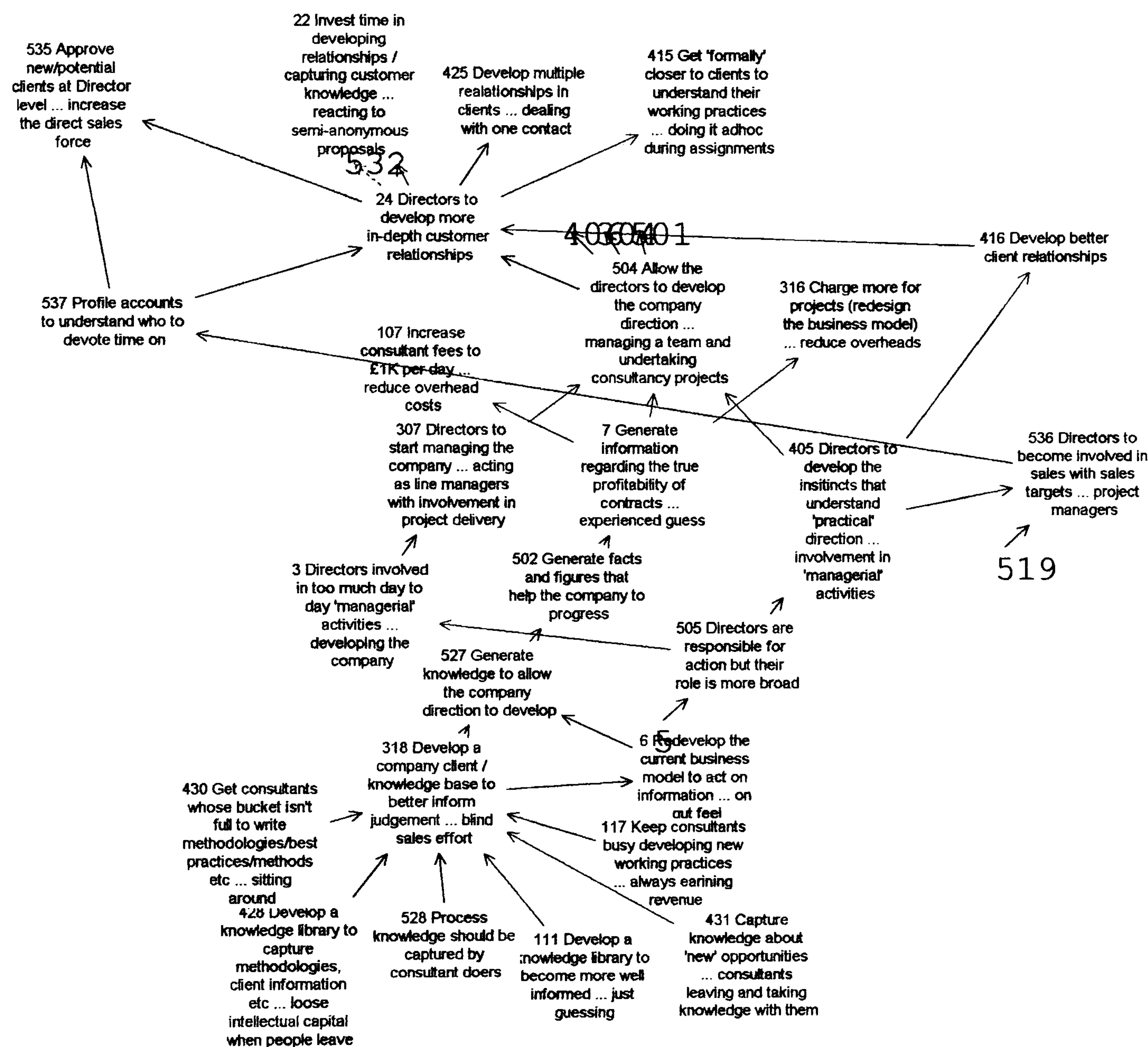
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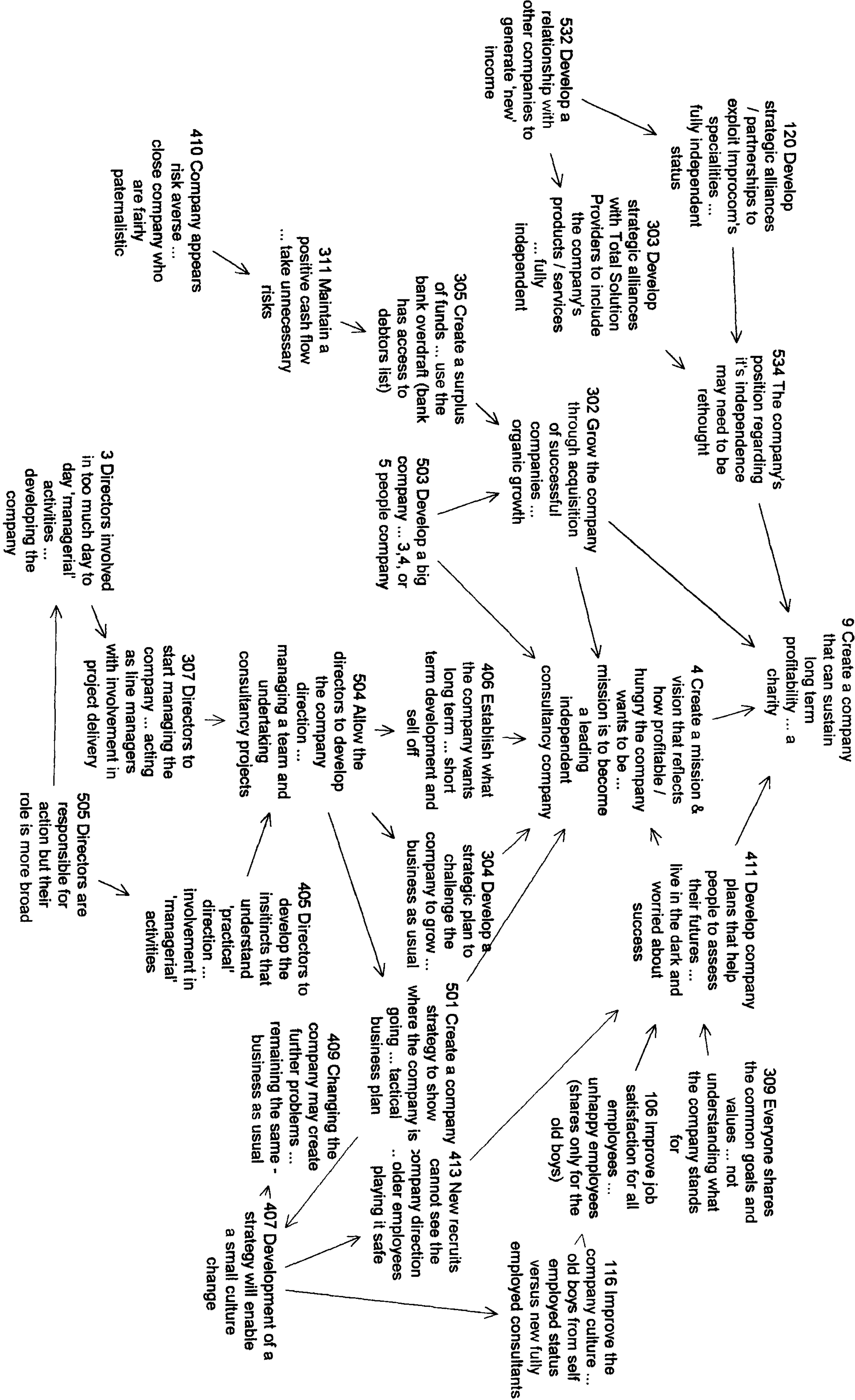
Cluster3 - 10-18th January 2000



Cluster4 - 10-18th January 2000



Cluster1 - 19th January 2000



Cluster1 - 19th January 2000

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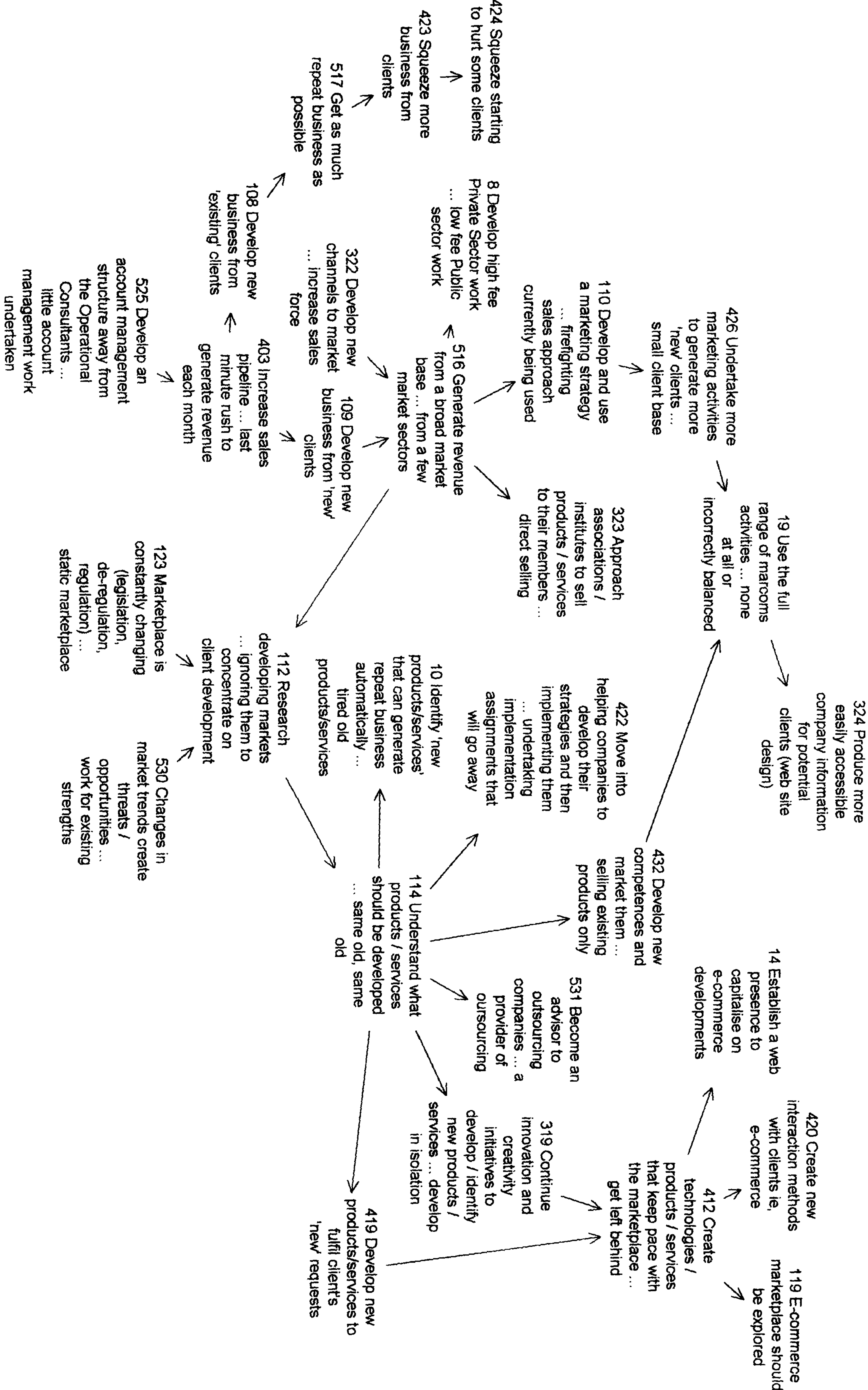
505 Directors are responsible for action but their role is more broad

532 Develop a relationship with other companies to generate 'new' income

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26 concepts

Cluster2 - 19th January 2000



Cluster2 - 19th January 2000

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- 108 Develop new business from 'existing' clients
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517 Get as much repeat business as possible

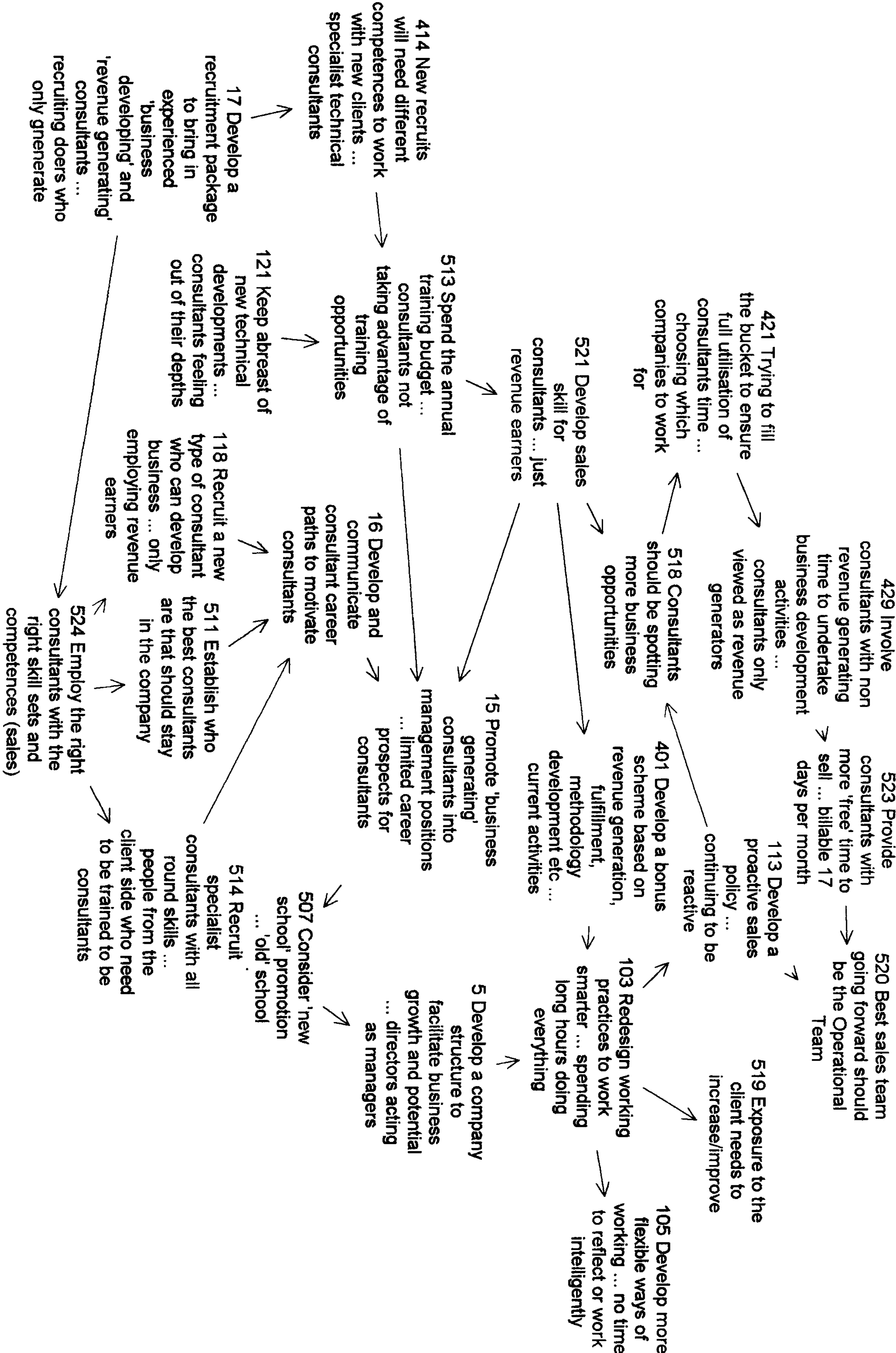
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29 concepts

Cluster3 - 19th January 2000

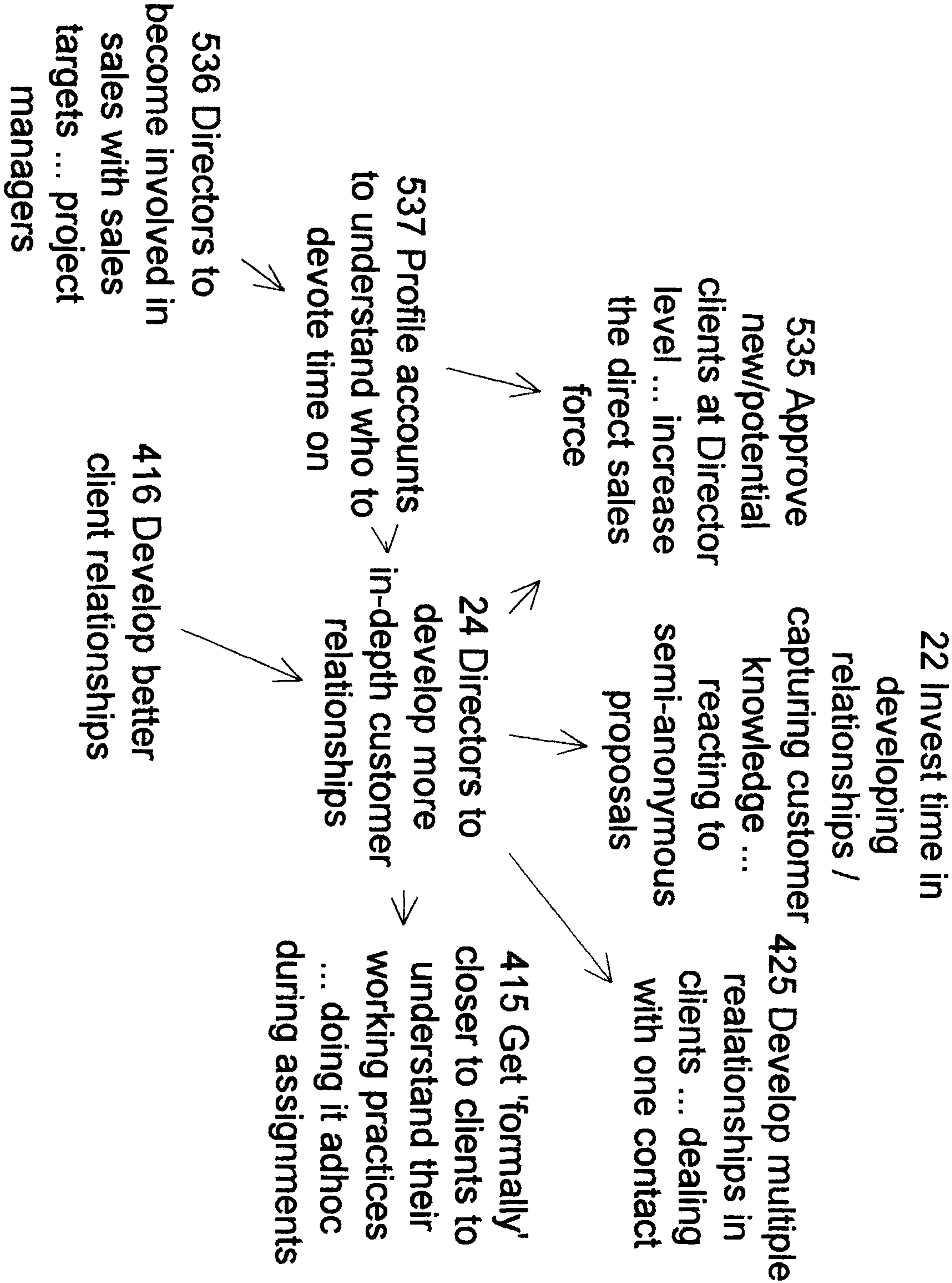


Cluster3 - 19th January 2000

- 5 Develop a company structure to facilitate business growth and potential ... directors acting as managers
- 15 Promote 'business generating' consultants into management positions ... limited career prospects for consultants
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- 105 Develop more flexible ways of working ... no time to reflect or work intelligently
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524 Employ the right consultants with the right skill sets and competences (sales)
23 concepts

Cluster4 - 19th January 2000



Cluster4 - 19th January 2000

22 Invest time in developing relationships / capturing customer knowledge ... reacting to semi-anonymous proposals

24 Directors to develop more in-depth customer relationships

415 Get 'formally' closer to clients to understand their working practices ... doing it adhoc during assignments

416 Develop better client relationships

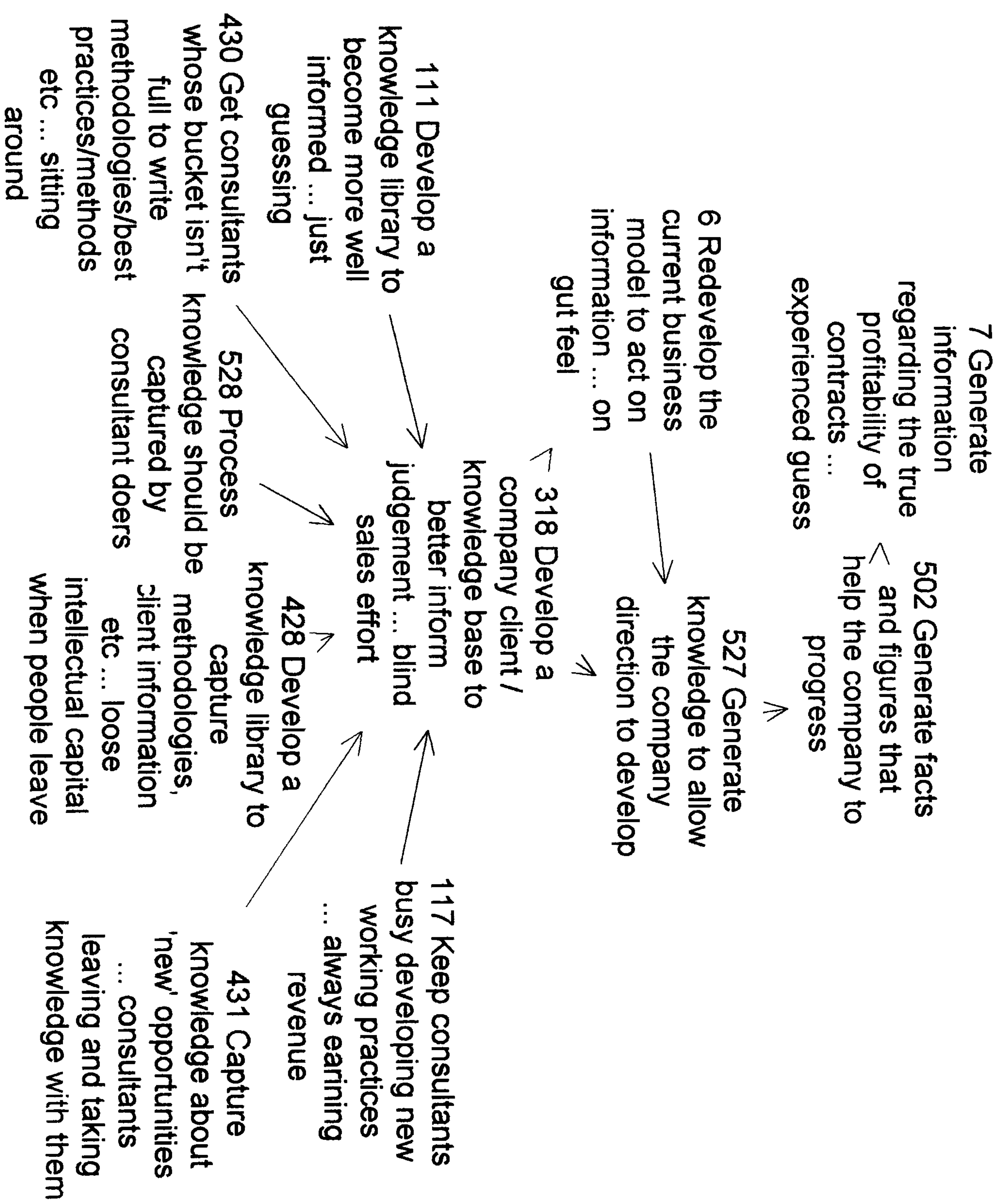
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9 concepts

Cluster5 - 19th January 2000



Cluster5 - 19th January 2000

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431 Capture knowledge about 'new' opportunities ... consultants leaving and taking knowledge with them

502 Generate facts and figures that help the company to progress

527 Generate knowledge to allow the company direction to develop

528 Process knowledge should be captured by consultant doers

11 concepts

Terry Nelson

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, January 24, 2000 11:25 AM
To: Terry Nelson
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Next meeting

Terry

Is it possible to concentrate the next meeting actions into one day?

I have been forced to release Dave and Gill on Thursday 3 Feb due to client pressures, so that leaves just two of us plus you. We are all four available for Friday 4 Feb.

Could we maybe start earlier on the Friday and cover everything in one day?

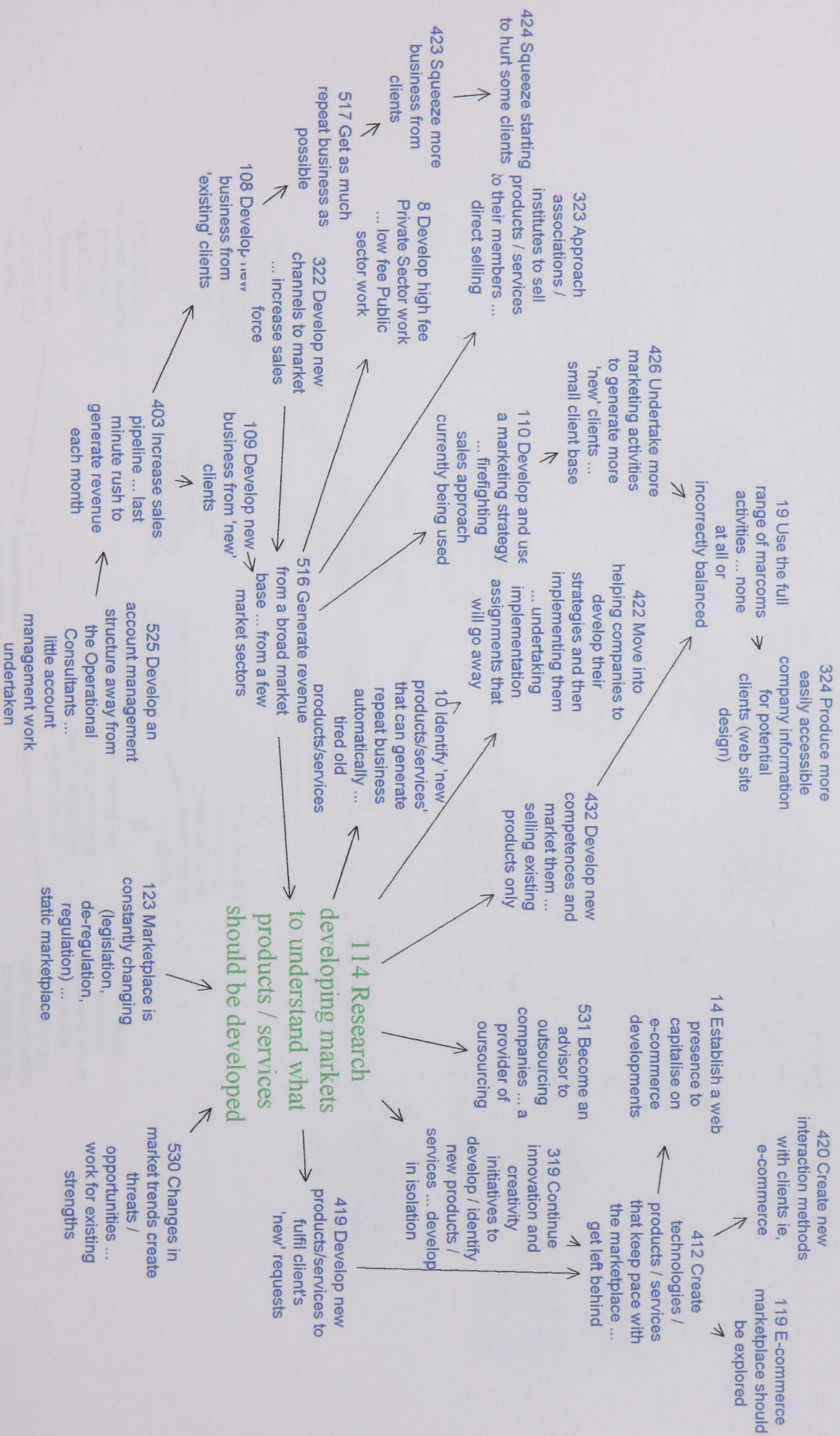
I am conscious of your need to plan input regarding your PhD.

Regards

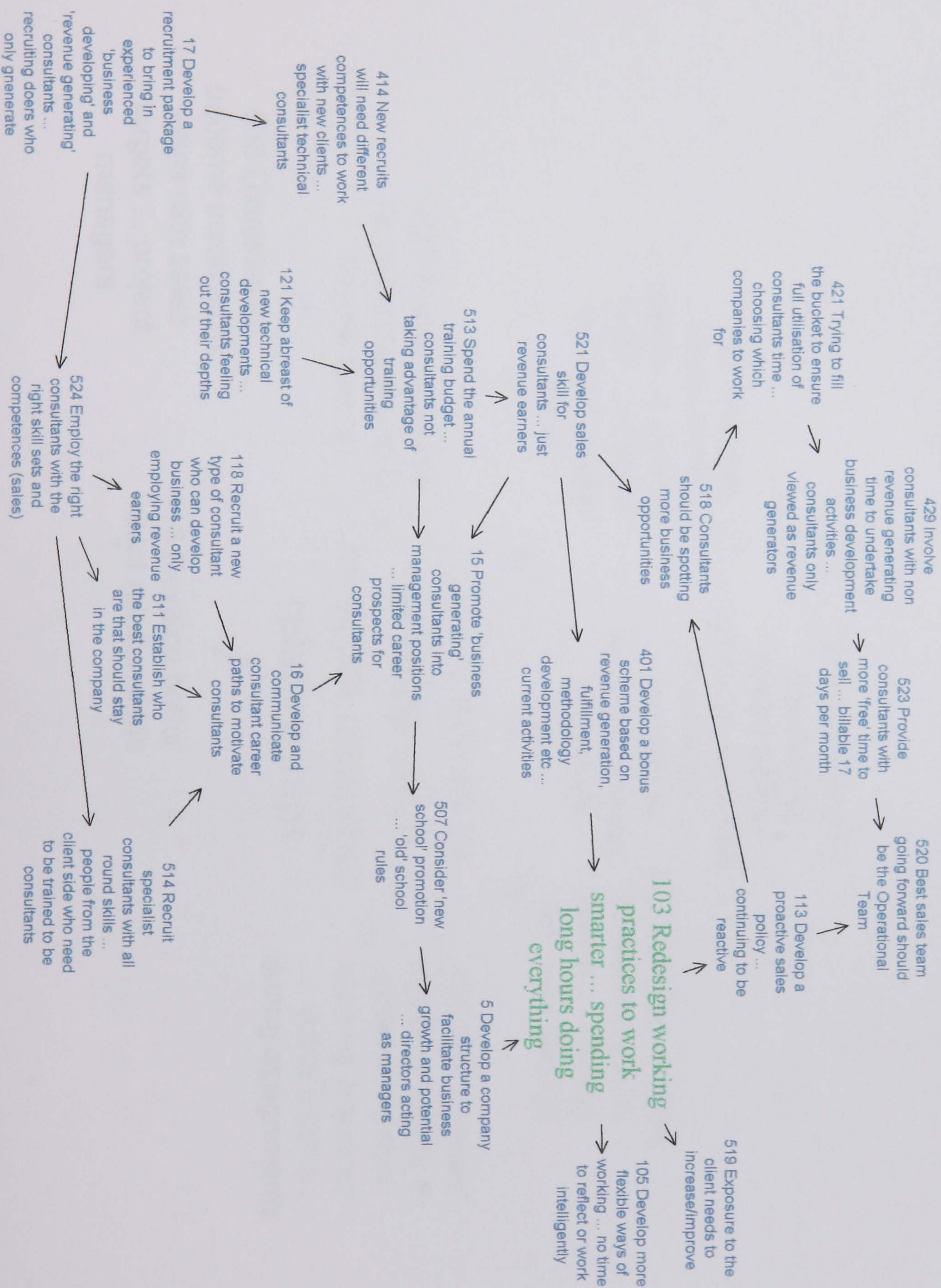
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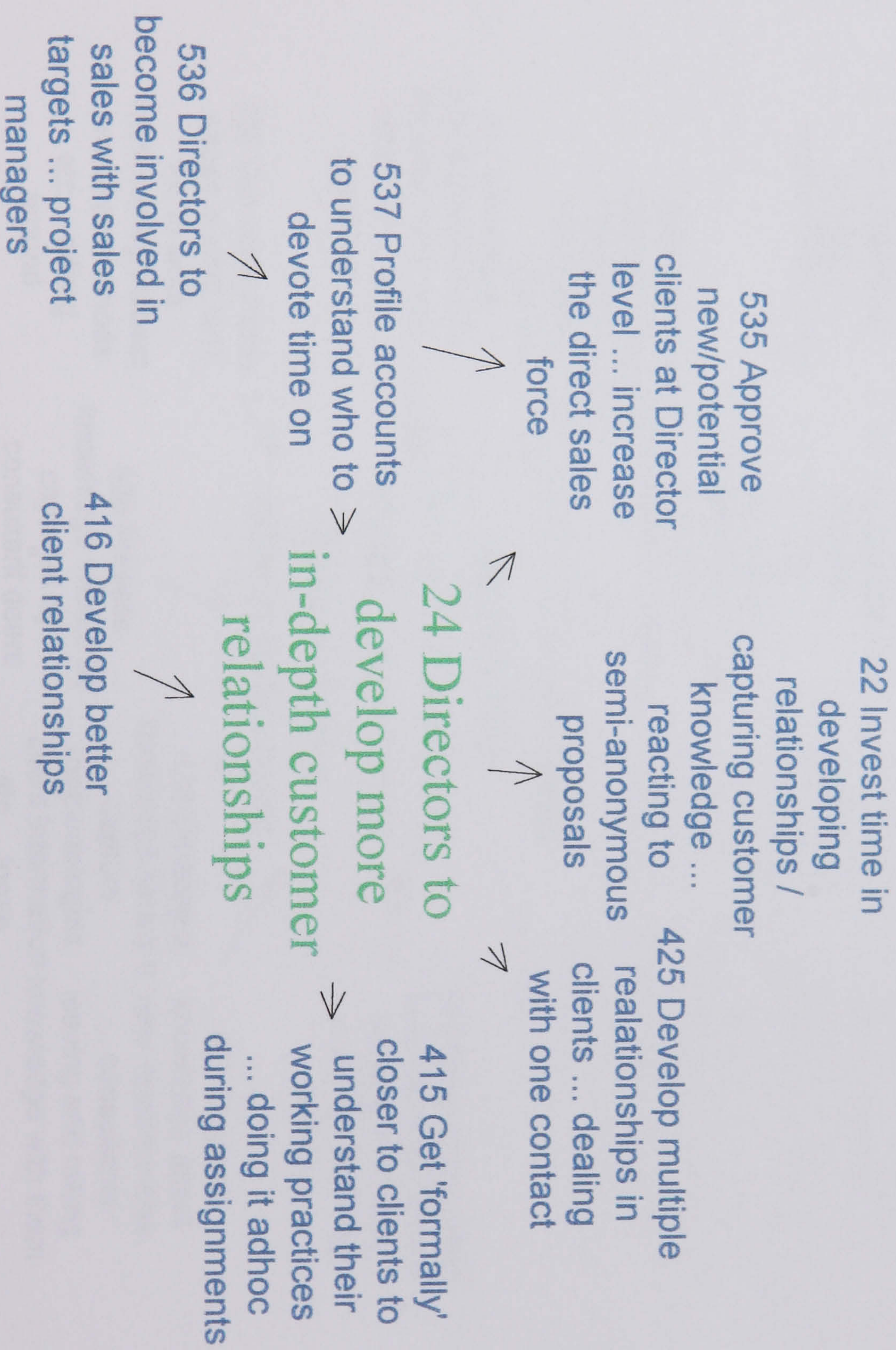
Strategy2 - 4th February 2000



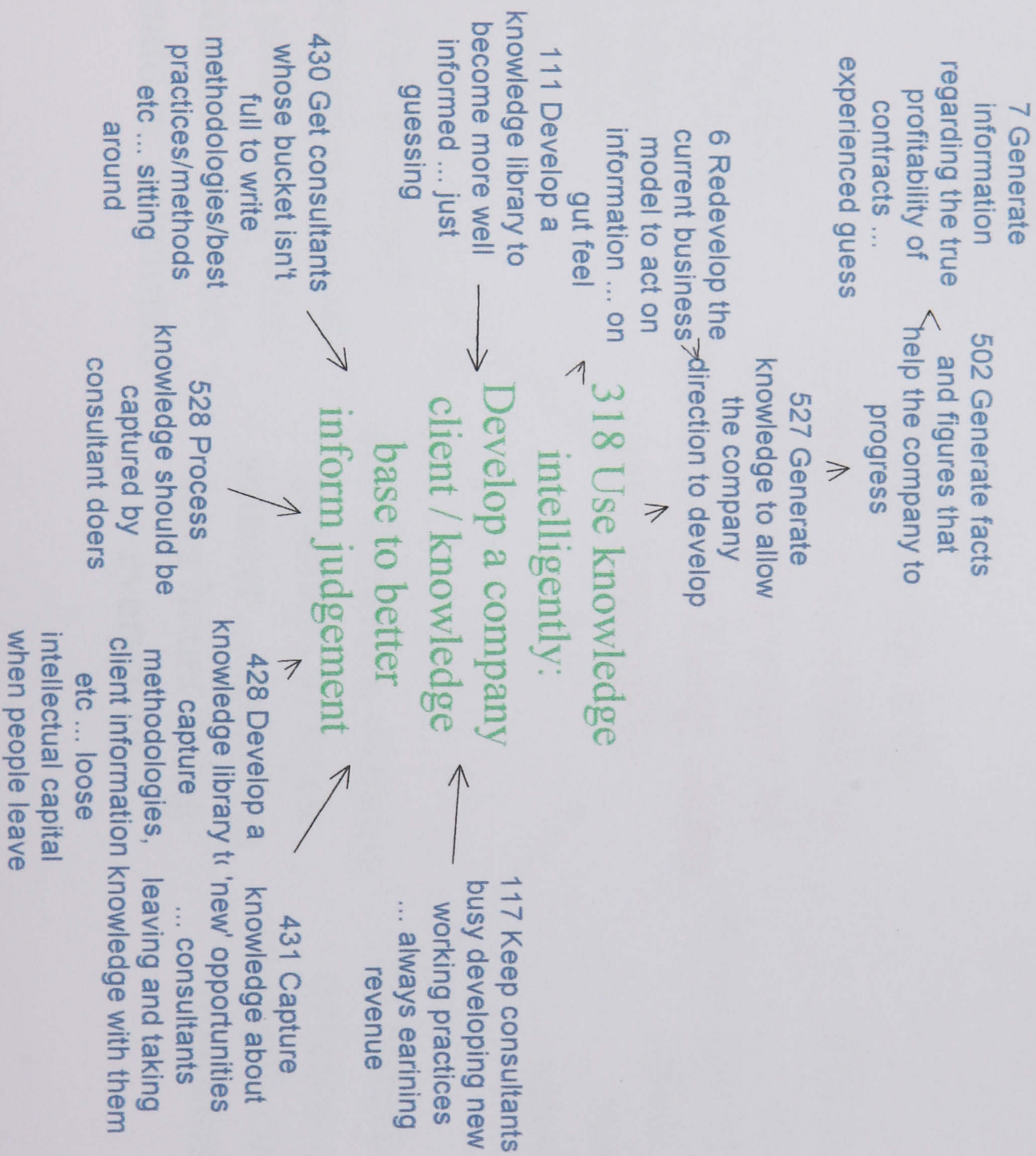
Strategy3 - 4th February 2000



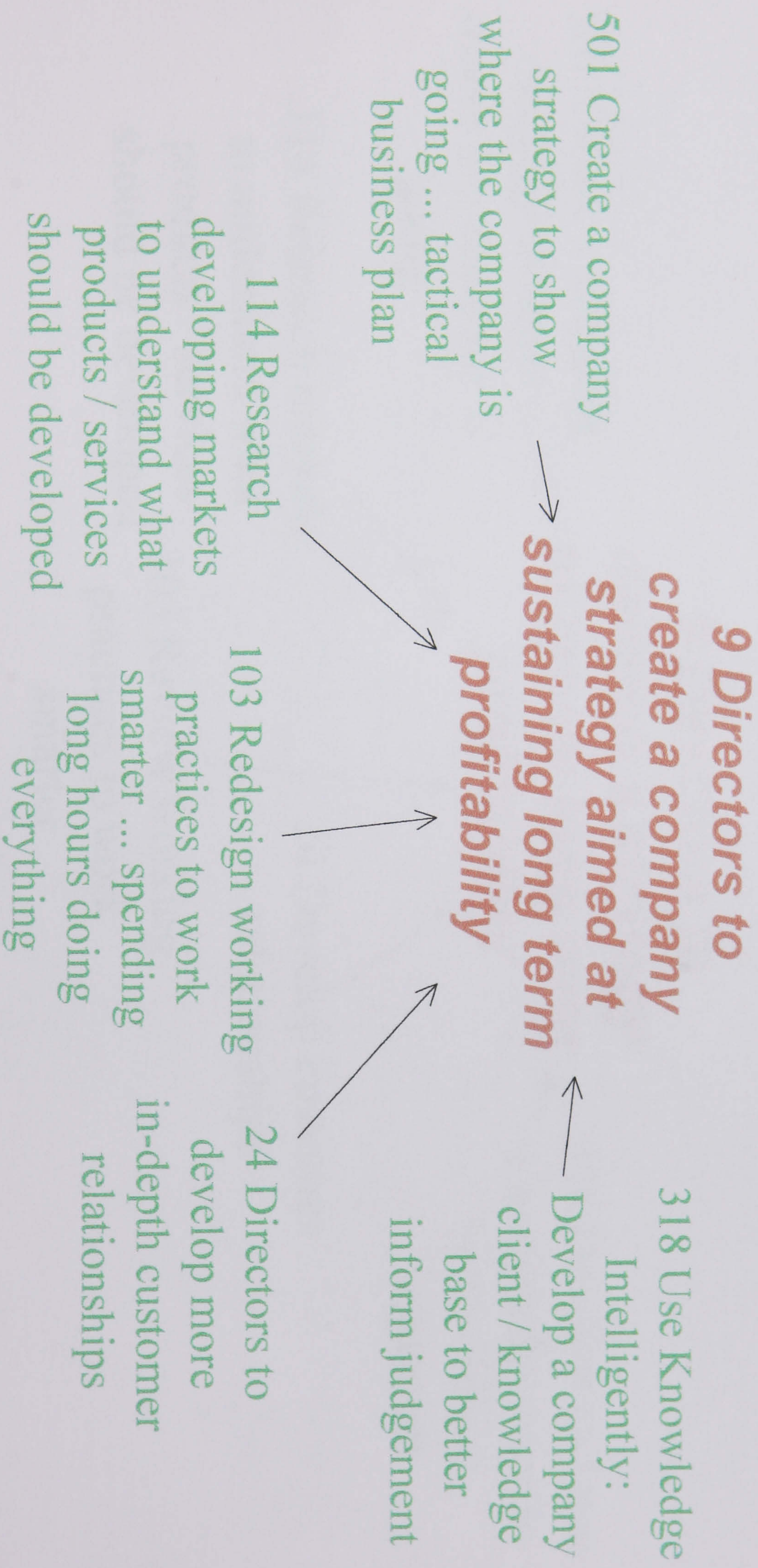
Strategy4 - 4th February 2000



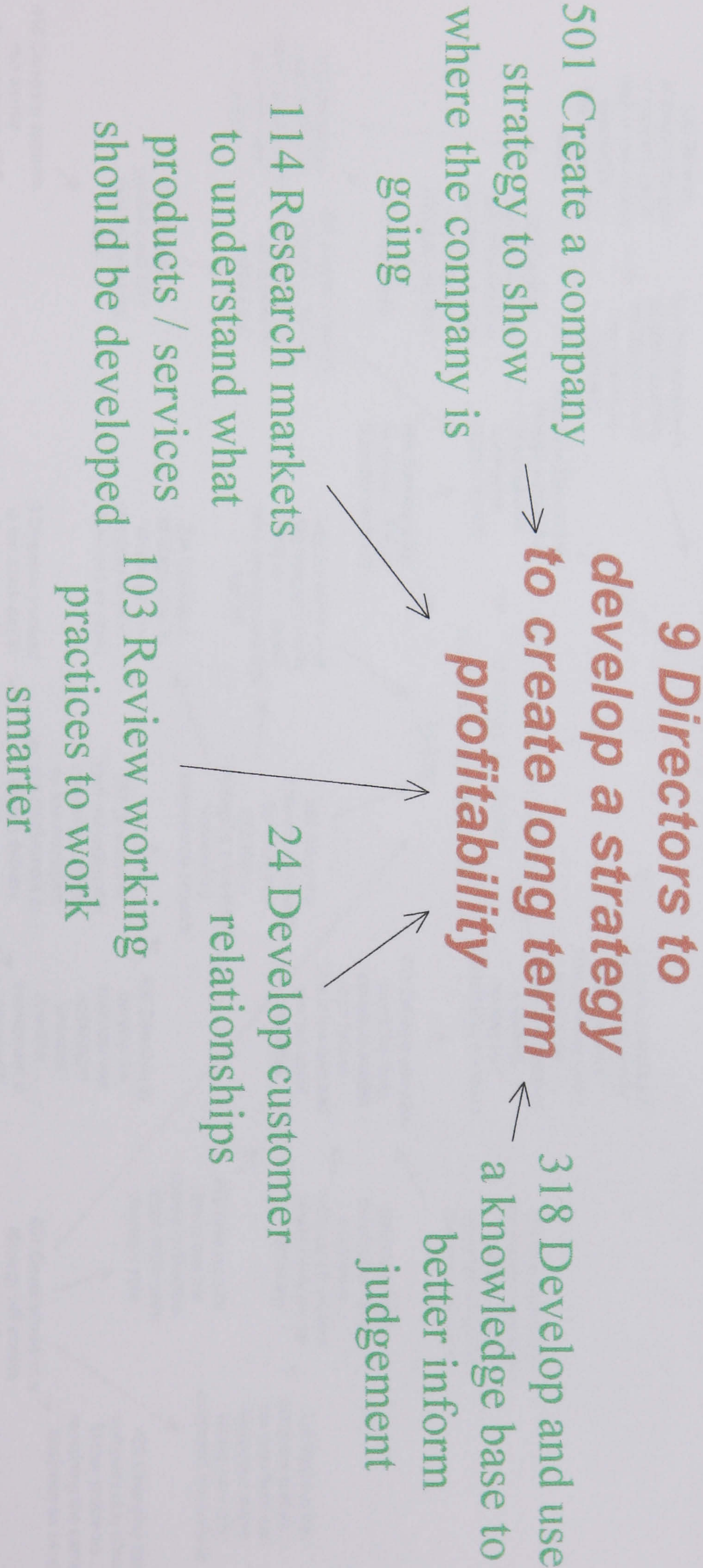
Strategy5 - 4th February 2000



Goal & Strategies - 4th February 2000

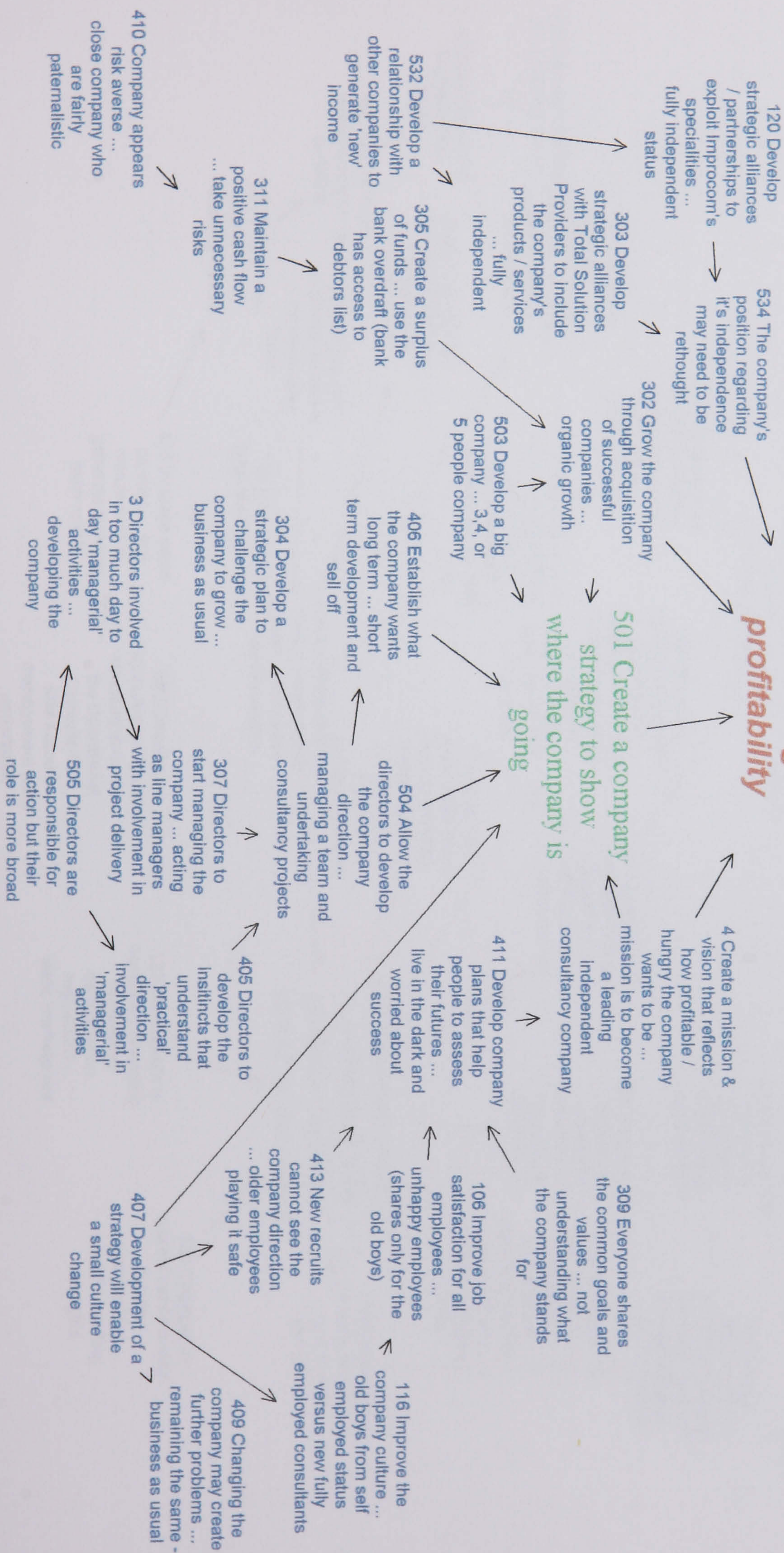


Single Goal and Supporting Strategies - 1st March 2000

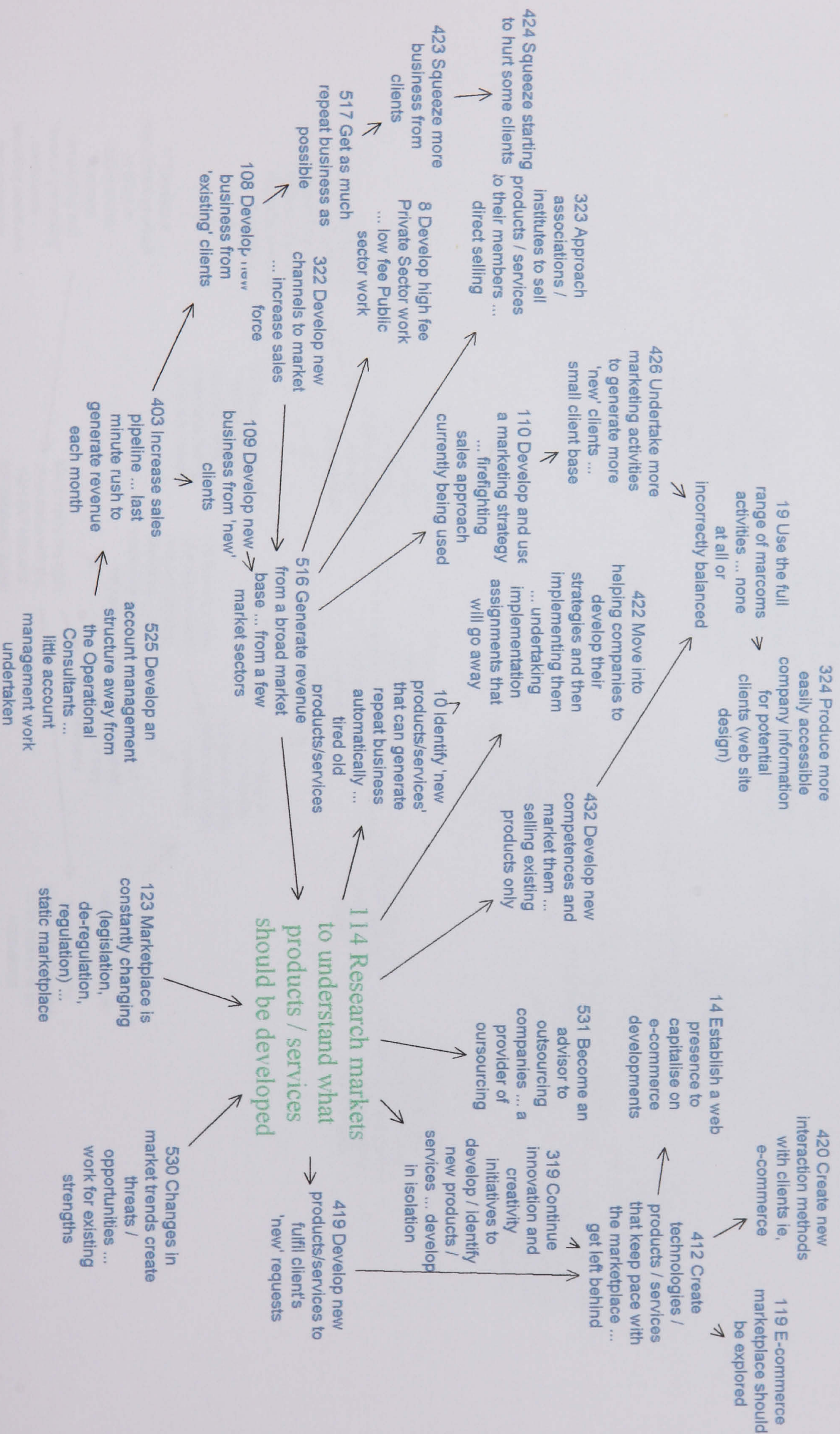


Strategy1 - 1st March 2000

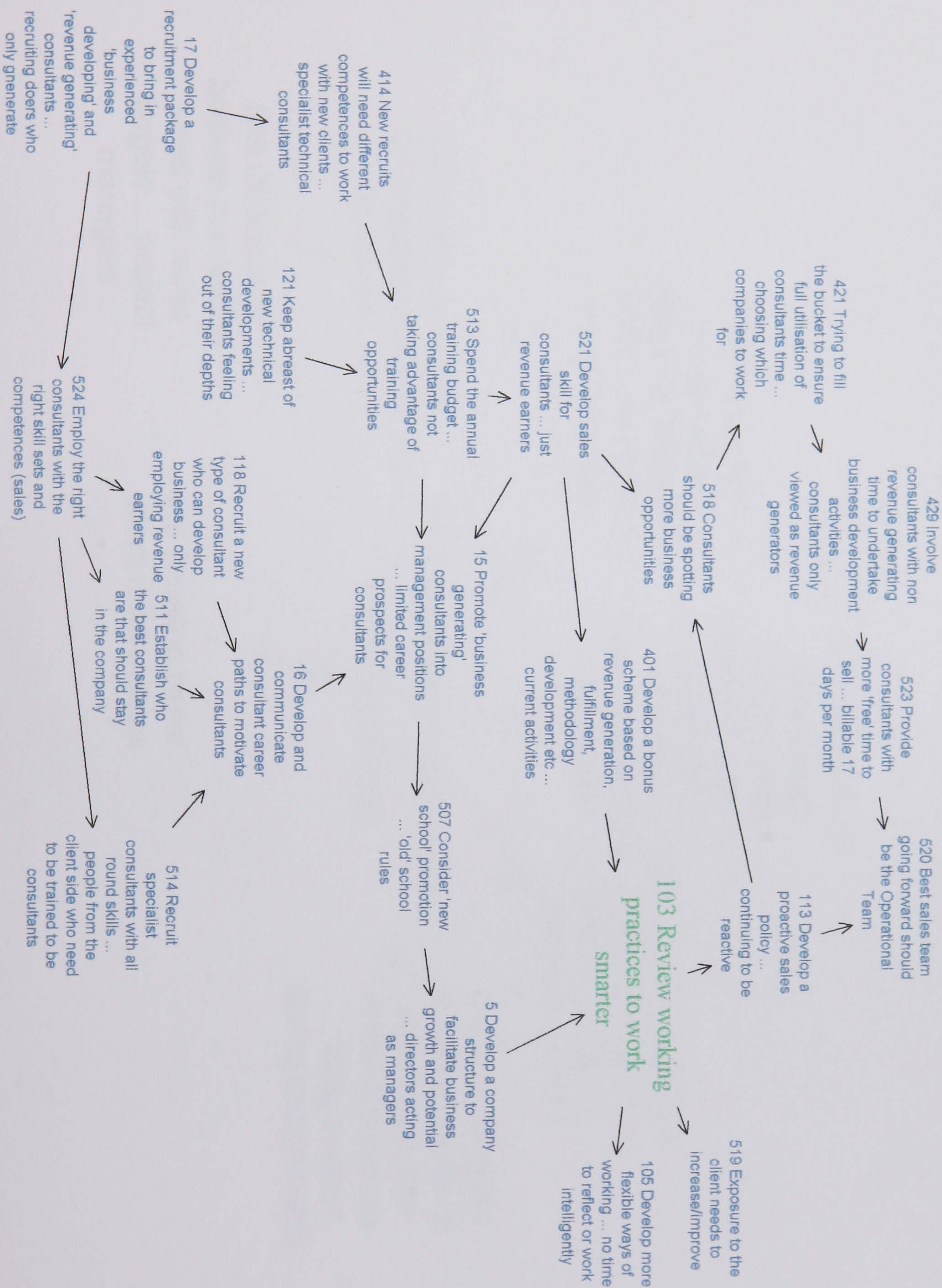
9 Directors to develop a strategy to create long term



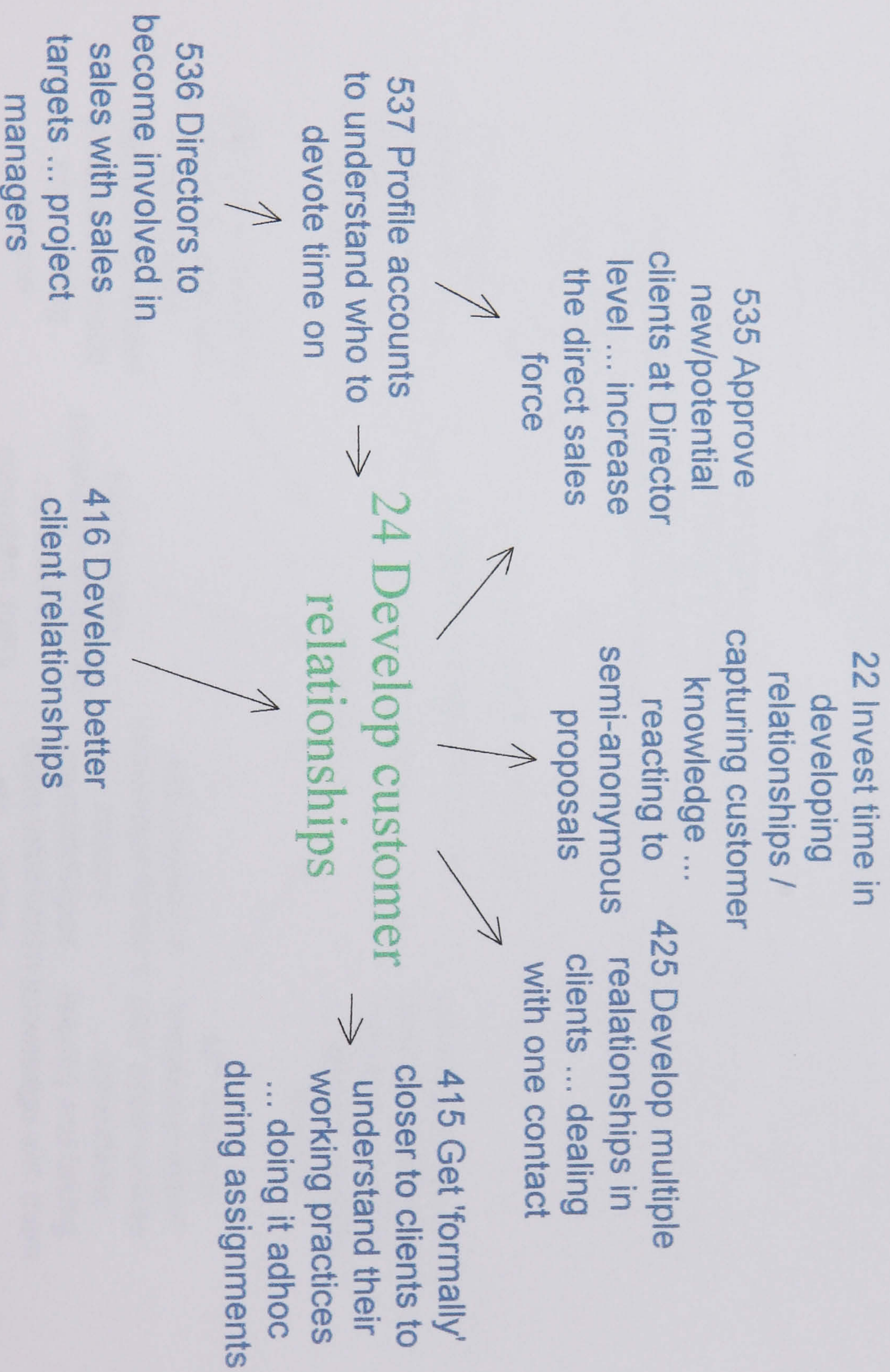
Strategy2 - 1st March 2000



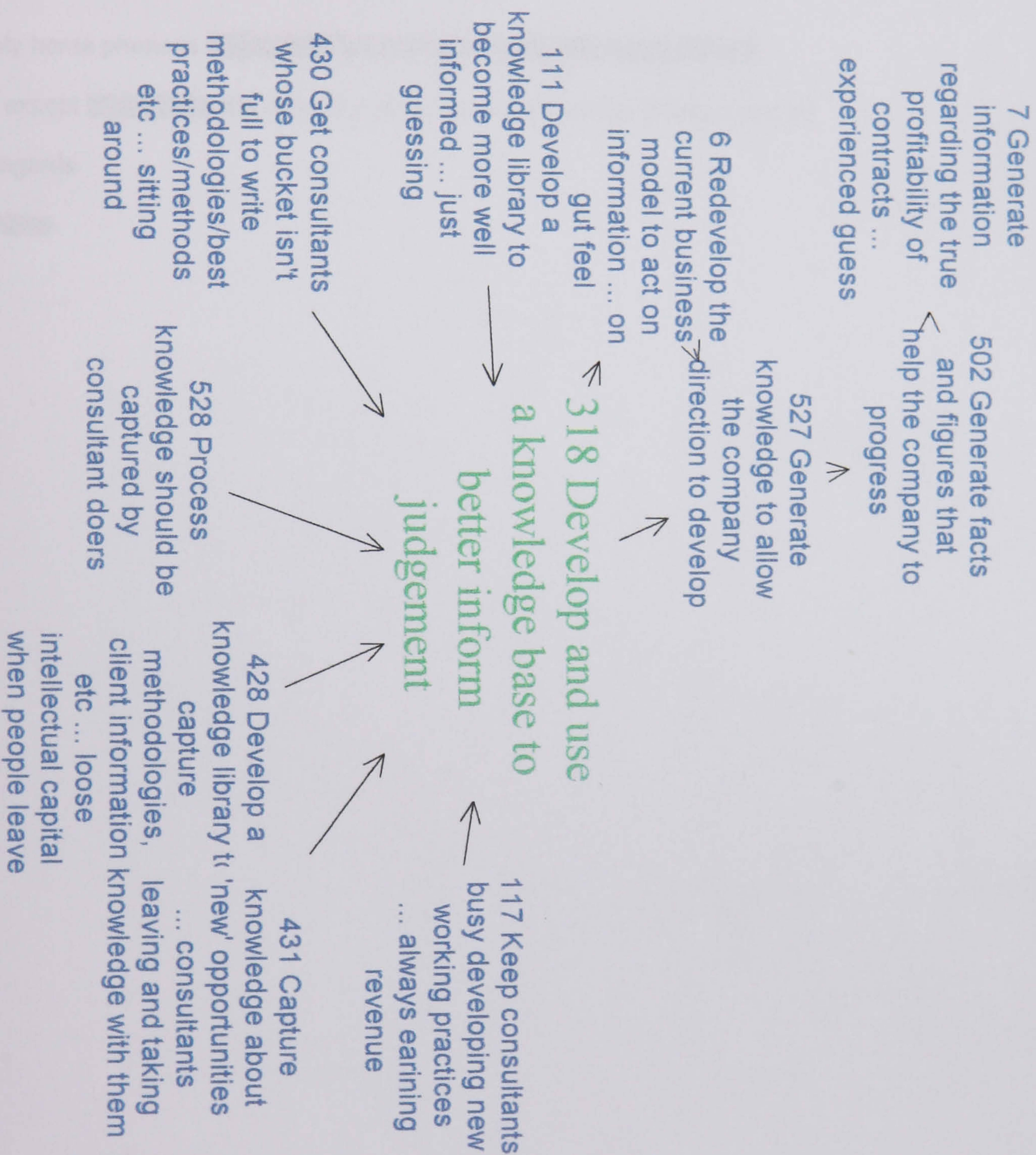
Strategy3 - 1st March 2000



Strategy4 - 1st March 2000



Strategy5 - 1st March 2000



Terry Nelson

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, March 28, 2000 11:29 AM

To: Terry Nelson

Hi Terry

I have decided to retire from [REDACTED] on 31 March.

I have been contemplating this move for a short while and find after 17 years I need to slow down a bit.

I will be taking on ad hoc consultancy and if you hear of any opportunities, telecoms or management, I would like to hear from you.

Perhaps we can meet up for a coffee in April.

My home phone is [REDACTED]

I expect [REDACTED] will contact you in due course ref the strategy project.

regards

[REDACTED]

Terry Nelson

From: Terry Nelson [terrynelson@stratint.powernet.co.uk]
Sent: Sunday, April 16, 2000 05:59 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Research Feedback

Hi [REDACTED]

I hope things are going well for you. I am writing up a few bits of my research and having talked to my supervisors at Strathclyde, I was wondering if you could help me with a small piece of work.

One of the things that I would like to include in my research is an overview of what people thought of what we did, how we did it, the results we achieved etc. I will ask all of the other guys once I have completed my work for them, but at present I can ask you to provide me with some individual information as you have now left Improcom. You participated in 90% of the process and I would appreciate some individual feedback from you before completing my work at [REDACTED]

Could you please write me a couple of pages, approx. covering the following topics.

- What did you feel about the manner in which I approached you to participate in this research?
- What made you want to participate in the research?
- Did you feel comfortable with the competence/skill level of the researcher/consultant?
- What did you think of the process that we used to develop [REDACTED] strategy? e.g., the Strategic Journeymaking Process, working together as a group and negotiating (through discussion/conversation) the strategic direction, the facilitation approach used, the skill/competence of the facilitator etc.
- Were there any 'critical milestones' for you during the process?
 - If so what were they and could you describe them?
- Did you feel that everyone was an active and willing participant in the strategy development process?
- Did you feel that the strategy developed was robust/correct for [REDACTED]
- Anything else you would like to comment about?

There is no immediate panic to get this information to me but I would appreciate it as soon as possible as I would like to include it in a piece of work I am writing at the moment. I haven't been contacted by [REDACTED] yet but I'm sure I will be shortly, in the mean time I am writing an account of how we developed the strategy for Improcom so that I can hand it over when applicable. I will give you a call when I next go to [REDACTED] and we can meet for a drink.

Terry

15 May 2000

To Terry Nelson

Feedback

Your approach was to the IoD and myself as chairman of the M Keynes branch. This was perfectly acceptable and the topic was unique in my experience.

My initial feelings were that you had a financial angle and once we met this would be revealed. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find that I was wrong and that the obligations were all on you.

My immediate reaction was to introduce you to a larger company, as I thought [REDACTED] would be too small for you to achieve the scale of experience and depth of research.

As time passed and you had no other responses, I suggested to my fellow directors that we could at least try out your approach and see how it fitted in with our objectives to review our business plan. They agreed and we gave you the go ahead.

The most enjoyable, and I felt concrete experience, was the oval post-it brainstorming session. This exercise drew out the inner feelings of those participating and started to build me a picture of the areas we needed to focus on.

My criticism here is that, due to our size, we needed to include everyone in this exercise. As it was, due to problems getting everyone together, we obtained input from less than half our people. We did not deal sufficiently with the operations side of the business because they were unfortunately too busy to attend. Should we have included some selected clients? This would have added a stakeholder perspective. Maybe we ended up by realising individual's goals rather than those of [REDACTED].

In hindsight, I would suggest that, as difficult as it may be, you ought to be firmer in your approach to an organisation and agree a tight timescale up front. This needs to be formalised such that there is a clear commitment from all parties before commencing. We lacked this project programme. I felt it was in our hands and I took advantage of this position to change dates during the project, to allow other tasks to take priority.

This had the effect of reducing the importance of the project and subsequently the degree of interest from the directors.

After a couple of sessions, probably where we looked at the results of the mind mapping for the second time, I noticed a lack of active involvement from the group. I believe this was mainly due to the fact that we all felt that we could identify who had said what and started to disagree with the direction this was taking us.

For example, I know [REDACTED] had told you that he felt we should focus on our operational resources rather than too much administrative work because it earned revenue (I forget the exact words). This was an old bone of contention between us and when this was added to some other similar areas obviously raised by [REDACTED], it created a high score and became an important issue. Therefore, I saw that one person could exert undue influence on the results of the mind mapping simply by focussing a high proportion of their input on one specific area.

Similarly, we could all start to identify each others preferences by the wording used.

This was my main criticism of the project methodology. Is there not a way of concealing the exact words used, perhaps by categorising phrases or issues into numbers or letters?

At this stage we felt that the process was becoming artificial and not relating to [REDACTED]. It also started to become bogged down with science rather than common sense. It had the feeling of some abstract tutorial session which looks at a non existent organisation. In the end I could not see where we were going. I started to question whether we should continue.

Initially, I had imagined that the conclusion of the project would be a master 'revelation' and we would be handed the strategy on a plate. A bit like feeding numbers into a computer and receiving the answer. I now saw this would not happen and that we were required to absorb the numbers and produce the answer.

I know my colleagues had a similar view. In fact I suggest that they may find it difficult to recommence the process. You may wish to chase them up, if you have not done so already.

Terry, please do not take this personally, but as I reflect on the project, I can clearly see the academic influence and approach rather than the entrepreneurial, practical approach of a small business; ie let us talk plainly to each other and debate the pros and cons rather than spend time skirting around the issues. It could be that your approach is only advantageous to larger organisations where face to face communications is difficult to achieve. Or, it could be that [REDACTED] did not contribute to the project in the appropriate way.

That is all. I trust it helps.

If you still fancy a drink give me a call. [REDACTED]

Regards

[REDACTED]

Terry Nelson

From: Terry Nelson [terrynelson@stratint.powernet.co.uk]
Sent: Saturday, June 24, 2000 04:14 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: [REDACTED] Strategy

Hi [REDACTED],

We are a week away from the end of June and I haven't heard from you regarding any Management Meetings that are planned for June. The last time we spoke you were considering inviting me to a meeting in June so that we could discuss what further actions [REDACTED] should be considering to complete the strategy development work we started. Have you any idea when that meeting will place? The holiday season will soon be upon us and my availability will become erratic to say the least.

If you want the session to go ahead please let me know, alternatively if you feel that [REDACTED] do not want to participate in any further strategy development work, please also let me know.

Shortly, I will send you a brief questionnaire to complete and to forward to everyone else involved in the strategy development group. I want to gauge what we have accomplished so far and what people feel about the manner in which we have done it. This won't stop us progressing further, I just want some interim feedback about what we have achieved.

take care

Terry

Terry Nelson

From: Terry Nelson [terrynelson@stratint.powernet.co.uk]
Sent: Monday, July 24, 2000 10:52 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: [REDACTED] Strategy

Hi [REDACTED]

As I haven't heard anything from you since my last email, copied below, I assume that [REDACTED] do not want to complete the strategy development work we started. As I stated in my last email, I have a short list of questions that I would like you and the rest of the team who were involved in the strategy work to complete. Can you please send a copy of this email to them. Even if you decide that you do want the work to continue, I could do with some feedback to date for my research and would still welcome the answers to the questions below.

Could you please write me a couple of pages, approx. covering the following topics. I appreciate that time is tight for everyone but I really would appreciate the feedback

- What did you feel about the manner in which I approached [REDACTED] to participate in this research?
- What made [REDACTED] want to participate in the research?
- Did you feel comfortable with the competence/skill level of the researcher/consultant?
- What did you think of the process that we used to develop [REDACTED] strategy? e.g., the Strategic Journeymaking Process, working together as a group and negotiating (through discussion/conversation) the strategic direction, the facilitation approach used, the skill/competence of the facilitator etc.
- Did you feel that the strategy developed was robust/correct for [REDACTED]?
- Were any critical activities identified during the process that were not already known to [REDACTED]?
- Were there any 'critical milestones' for you during the process?
 - If so what were they and could you describe them?
- Did you feel that everyone was an active and willing participant in the strategy development process?
- Did you feel that everyone was an equal member of the group or did one or more individuals have more than an equal part in identifying issues within the process?
- Anything else you would like to comment about?

There is no immediate panic to get this information to me but I would appreciate it as soon as possible as I would like to include it in a piece of work I am writing at the moment.

Many thanks for this info

Terry

Feedback from DT

Terry

Responses in numerical sequence:

1. We have no input here as this was all handled by [REDACTED].
2. We had previously and were again about to attempt some strategic thinking about our company direction without much success. Your timing was just right.
3. No problem here at all.
4. This is a complex one, lets take it in parts, we were happy with the general approach, indeed the personal mind maps and the convergence of these seemed quite useful. However, I do believe that one individuals thoughts could have too higher impact on the direction, maybe [REDACTED] voice was too loud at the time. We also felt that the software tool appeared to be a little inflexible.
5. I don't think that we completed the strategy sufficiently and I am not sure that it was shaping up in the right direction for [REDACTED]. However, this was largely to do with other activities going on in the background, which you will of course now be aware of. I guess the strategic process did have some significant benefit here as it perhaps highlighted some of our internal differences.
6. No
7. No I'm not sure there were.
8. Yes, but others also wanted to be involved.
9. No, [REDACTED] views seemed to be too prevalent.

Sorry the above is a bit close to our meeting, hope it is useful.

See you on Wednesday.

regards

[REDACTED]

Terry Nelson

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, February 04, 2001 10:53 PM
To: terrynelson@stratint.powernet.co.uk
Subject: RE: Meeting of 15th November 2000

Terry

Sorry for the delay in responding.

I am happy with the notes etc.

I trust that all is well with work and that your academic tasks are progressing and nearing completion.

Please do not hesitate to call if we can assist any further.

good luck and kind regards

[REDACTED]

Below, the Action Researcher has arranged specific answers provided by DT, during the meeting with the Action Researcher on 15/11/00, to the individual questions posed, direct quotations appear in italics.

What did you feel about the manner in which I approached [REDACTED] to participate in this research?

JP organised your introduction to [REDACTED]. What you wanted to do was not fully known or understood even though JP had briefly discussed it with members of the Senior Management Team. It became more understood after you had given some initial briefings during Management Meetings at [REDACTED], however everything was not fully clear before the strategy development approach got under way. JP's intentions for undertaking the strategy development approach had [REDACTED] benefit at heart but there may have been an alternative reason why he was interested in attempting this work. Possibly to do with his own MBA. JP may have seen some cross benefit from this academic work to his own.

What made [REDACTED] want to participate in the research?

[REDACTED] were already about to undertake some strategic thinking as it was time to update a previously developed business plan. The idea was that this project would widen the scope of the activity and might find out things that [REDACTED] might not have discovered during their review.

Did you feel comfortable with the competence/skill level of the Action Researcher?

There were no concerns about the competence levels/skills of the researcher

What did you think of the process that we used to develop [REDACTED] strategy? e.g., the Strategic Journey Making approach, working together as a group and negotiating (through discussion/conversation) the strategic direction, the facilitation approach used, the skill/competence of the facilitator etc.

There were several responses because the process undertaken was fairly large

- *"The personal (one-to-one) mapping, the group work, and the bringing together of the composite group map were good."* However, more people should have been involved in this process. Other consultants, stakeholders etc, should have been involved to provide a more broader and balanced outlook. It was acknowledged that several of these sessions involving Senior Consultants had been planned but had to be cancelled due to work commitments of the consultants concerned. Also, that a decision not to involve 'Stakeholders' had been taken at the beginning of the project by JP.
- The core/mission statement developed [overall Goal] was felt to be too theoretical/academic and this was because JP was the primary source of this information. This reflected the feeling that JP was too influential in the overall process.
- The software modelling was something that did not work very well. It is a complex activity to keep track of all the data on a small projected screen. Also, the interconnectivity of all the data was complex to understand. More data from other groups would also make this activity even more complex. A suggestion was proposed that this stage of the methodology should be accompanied by some flip chart work so that more complex activities could be understood and if the flip chart sheet were constantly visible this would help to manage the model's complexity. As this was the first exposure to this methodology it was expected to be difficult to understand and accepted that the learning curve would be less complex during later repetitions of the process.

- The overall process used felt comfortable, other than the issues mentioned above, and the 4-5 strategic objectives/projects produced were enough to handle. However, the supporting statements of the strategic objectives would have been more robust with more/varied input. More buy-in could have been gained for the composite group map before starting to identify the strategic objectives. The composite group map was not fully understood and therefore buy-in was low.
- At the end of the process the reality of the situation became frightening in terms of time & cost to implement. Senior Management at [REDACTED] are expected to concentrate on fee-earning activities to keep the business working. Implementation of these strategic initiatives would distract from this time. *"The size of the group map was enormous. What threw us was the enormity of what we had created and the implementation issues associated with it."*
- The overall methodology should be developed so that it could be applied in different ways for different sizes of company. The overall approach used at [REDACTED] was too large and complex for a small company but may not be that way for a much larger company.

Did you feel that the strategy developed was robust/correct for [REDACTED]?

In terms of the robustness of the strategy developed the feeling was that *"a solid first step had been achieved towards the development of [REDACTED] strategy."* Some of the strategic objective 'headlines/titles' were correct but needed flexing around with honesty before being implemented. Some of the headline statements, particularly those not pushed by JP, are now being implemented at [REDACTED]. *"On reflection we are implementing against the headline strategy."* Two sets of activities had been combined and they are about to be implemented, other activities may be added to these at a later date and a project plan for implementation is about to be created. Other lessons in strategy development had been learnt, for example, there is now an open door policy at [REDACTED] with regard to strategy development. Once per month all Senior Managers are invited to attend strategy development sessions. Senior consultants are also invited to attend these sessions once per quarter. It is anticipated that soon all people in the company will be involved in Strategic Thought & Action activities. Another example is that proactive marketing activities are now being undertaken with a telemarketing company obtaining appointments for sales staff so that we can take a longer term view of revenue development.

Were any critical activities identified during the process that were not already know to [REDACTED]

Most of what came out of the strategy development work was already known but had not been expressed for various reasons. The approach used made these issues become explicit and then they had to be dealt with accordingly.

Were there any 'critical milestones' for you during the process? If so what were they and could you describe them?

No I'm not sure there were.

Did you feel that everyone was an active and willing participant in the strategy development approach?

I'm not sure that everyone was a willing participant.

Did you feel that everyone was an equal member of the group or did one or more individuals have more than an equal part in identifying issues within the process

Everyone was a equal participant but it would have been beneficial to have more equal participation. As stated earlier JP's views appeared to be louder than anyone else's.

Anything else you would like to comment about?

No.

APPENDIX D

OBSERVING (Step 5.1 - Collaborative Research Programme)

From observing what happened during this sub-step in the Action Research Approach, the Action Researcher identified two issues that occurred differently from what had initially been planned. These are identified below and discussed in more detail in the REFLECTING section.

- Individual cognitive mapping interviews were initially set to a two hour duration which was then changed to one and a half hours duration by JP. This concerning the Action Researcher who felt that the eagerness of the interviewees to provide information and the Action Researcher's limited competence in using cognitive mapping in a live situation would result in a reduction in the amount of information captured from what the Action Researcher felt should have been captured.
- The difficulties associated with learning the cognitive mapping technique can lead to a novice mapper feeling overwhelmed during an individual cognitive mapping interview. Setting realistic expectations about what needs to be achieved may help reduce this feeling for novice mappers.

OBSERVING (Step 5.2 - Collaborative Research Programme)

From observing what happened during this sub-step in the Action Research Approach, the Action Researcher identified three issues that they had not fully considered when planning actions to be undertaken. These are identified below and further discussed in the REFLECTING section.

- The Action Researcher felt that the first Oval Mapping Workshop was easier to facilitate and that participants had more 'fun' than those who attended the second event. Participants at the first Oval Mapping Workshop demonstrated that they wanted to be there and knew in advance why they were there and could see the importance of the work being undertaken. Participants of the second Oval Mapping Workshop were unsure of what they were expected to do or of the importance of what they were being asked to do. The reason for this was that the contents of the memorandum inviting participants to the second Oval Mapping Workshop, sent out by JP, did not explain in sufficient detail why the Oval Mapping Workshop was being undertaken or why participants were being invited to attend.
- It is accepted that providing a good physical environment where people can work is an essential part of oval mapping, see Eden (1985) regarding the provision of rooms for a creativity workshop and an action workshop. Yet following this Oval Mapping Workshop, the Action Researcher felt that just as essential were the practical facilitation skills needed to ensure that attendees do participate in group activities, that useful information is collected and that the productivity of the group is such that the outcome of the Oval Mapping Workshop is as expected by the Action Researcher.

OBSERVING (Step 5.3 - Collaborative Research Programme)

From observing what happened during this sub-step in the Action Research Approach, the Action Researcher identified three issues that they had not fully considered when planning actions to be undertaken. These are identified below and discussed further in the REFLECTING section.

- The Client had insisted that an activity be undertaken that had no documented precedent in the application of JOURNEY Making, the removal of a large amount of information from a composite group map. This presented the Action Researcher with yet another dilemma to be solved. On the one hand not complying with the Client's instructions would probably mean the end of the company's involvement in the Collaborative Research Programme. On the other hand complying with the Client's instructions and seeing what happened would leave the Action Researcher unsure how this would affect the rest of the Collaborative Research Programme and the overall research programme.
- The analysis of the composite group maps, in particular learning how to apply the analytical commands within the Decision Explorer software by just reading relevant literature, had proven harder than originally thought by the Action Researcher.
- At this stage in the Collaborative Research Programme time management had become a major problem for the Action Researcher. The Action Researcher had unexpectedly obtained an International consultancy role with their employer and this resulted in them working late evenings and weekends in foreign locations, leaving little time for personal activities such as academic research. This was also partly to blame for the rescheduling of Strategic Planning Group meetings resulting in the timescale between JOURNEY Making type activities becoming further removed from those recommended by Eden and Ackermann (1998). The Action Researcher now realised that the time devoted to developing a career in business consultancy and the time devoted to undertaking academic study needed to be constantly monitored and balanced if an Action Researcher wanted to succeed in both.

OBSERVING (Step 5.4 - Collaborative Research Programme)

Observing happenings during this Action Research Approach sub-step the Action Researcher identified an issue that had not been considered during their planning activities. This is briefly discussed below and further discussed in greater detail in the REFLECTING section.

- The fact that not as much information was solicited from a particular group of people, Senior Operational Consultants, as certain Strategic Planning Group members felt should have been become visible and important during this workshop. These people had not intentionally been omitted from information gathering activities, but because of a variety of reasons only one had attended an Oval Mapping Workshop on the appointed day. Some Strategic Planning Group members were prepared for strategy making activities to pause in order to gather more information from these people, while others wanted to push ahead without the information. The ensuing debate resulted in a stalemate between Strategic Planning Group members leaving the Action Researcher wondering how to avoid this situation when undertaking future strategy making activities.

OBSERVING (Step 5.5 - Collaborative Research Programme)

Observing occurrences during this Collaborative Research Programme sub-step the Action Researcher identified two issues that had not been considered during their planning activities. These are briefly discussed below and will be further discussed in the REFLECTING section.

- At this point in time the Action Researcher believed that for the first time the Strategic Planning Group fully appreciated that what they were undertaking was not just an exercise as part of an academic Collaborative Research Programme. It was felt that certain Strategic Planning Group members were becoming painfully aware that they would have to participate in developing and implementing 'real' strategies, strategic programmes, etc., and this appeared to concern them. This workshop had a sobering effect on all members of the Strategic Planning Group and to the Action Researcher it appeared that a group who had previously shown no problems in reaching agreement and moving forward now seemed incapable of doing so. The Action Researcher observed that at the end of this event the Strategic Planning Group, after realising how much work they had to complete, could just as easily continue with the Collaborative Research Programme as stop it and do nothing at all.

OBSERVING (Step 5.6 - Collaborative Research Programme)

Observing happenings during this Collaborative Research Programme sub-step the Action Researcher identified two issues that had not been considered during their planning activities. These are briefly discussed below and will be further discussed in the REFLECTING section.

- In discussing the issue of 'Managing the Facilitator's Relationship with the Organization', Eden and Ackermann suggest there is a need to be prepared for changes in the Client during JOURNEY Making. Here they talk about what happens when a JOURNEY Making project remit widens due to increased interest in the work being undertaken by managers in other organizational departments/divisions etc. When this happens clear demarcations often needs to be drawn, as loyalties between the original Client and the new, may conflict. However, the change to the Action Researcher's Client, during this Collaborative Research Programme, happened in a manner not covered in the JOURNEY Making book, leaving the Action Researcher considering what impact this would have on the Collaborative Research Programme and the *overall* Research Programme.
- Given that the Action Researcher's Client had left SI Ltd., possibly as a direct result of activities undertaken within the Collaborative Research Programme, this left the Action Researcher considering ethical issues/dilemmas associated with undertaking Action Research programmes and how ethical considerations could become incorporated within the Action Research Approach being utilised.

OBSERVING (Step 6 - Action Research Approach)

With regard to information learnt during the literature search and review and information learnt while undertaking this research programme, the Action Researcher identified two issues regarding Action Research that had not been fully considered during the development and/or application of the Action Research Approach. These are identified below and how they effect the first research theme 'the development and testing of an Action Research Approach' will be further discussed in the REFLECTING section.

- *Action Research may be a dual rather than single cycle approach. Little has been written in-depth about the differences between and the interconnections of the two activities (Action - helping someone solve a real-world problem and Research - knowledge generation/theory enhancement/development). Exploring this issue may help in the further development of the Action Research Approach.*
- *When using an Action Research methodology, activities that can be reflected upon and therefore tested need to be identified and declared as early as possible during the research programme.*

OBSERVING (Step 6 - JOURNEY Making)

- **Most literature regarding the JOURNEY Making method describes the application of tools, techniques etc., that are associated with undertaking JOURNEY Making activities during an intervention, for example, cognitive mapping or oval mapping or the development of a strategy map or the Identification and negotiation of Goals, strategies etc. These can be loosely regarded as activities associated with 'staying in' an intervention. Some attention has been paid to activities that can be associated with 'getting in' and 'getting out' of a JOURNEY Making intervention but they have not been explicitly described as such. To enhance the JOURNEY Making method further, in the REFLECTING section the Action Researcher will discuss findings from this research programme that can be applied during the holistic JOURNEY Making intervention, regardless of whether it is a typical JOURNEY Making intervention or not.**