

**A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS IN A TERTIARY  
INSTITUTION – A CASE STUDY AT MANGOSUTHU UNIVERSITY OF  
TECHNOLOGY**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

I, Andrew Thamsanqa Sbusiso Mchunu declare that, except for the aspects that are indicated in the text, this dissertation is my original work. I further declare that this thesis has not been submitted, in part or in full, at any other university.



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I reserve special thanks for my friends and my family for being there when I needed them. Their words of encouragement have always been a source of inspiration to me.

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to explain the dynamics of the interaction between the different stakeholders at Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) from a student development point of view. The study is conducted in order to develop an effective communication system that can assist in the management of relationships.

The literature review presents an analysis of key documents. It focuses on the management of relations as well as the role that is played by communication in this regard. The systems approach provides a theoretical framework that guides the views of the researcher.

Chapter Three outlines the design and procedure of the study. The research approach adopted by the researcher is qualitative and is based on a case study, which is Mangosuthu University of Technology. The following research methods are applied in the study; that is, the analysis of documentation, observations and a focus group, together with the application of questionnaires.

Chapter Four presents a combination of qualitative and quantitative research data. The first part of the chapter focuses on observations that were made by the writer over a period of six months. This is followed by the analysis of the questionnaire. The last part discusses the responses that were elicited from the focus group.

Chapter Five leads to the conclusive section of the whole study and it is an extension of Chapter Four in which the results of the research carried out are presented. The findings reveal that a systems approach has a significant role to play in assisting an organisation in managing relations. This approach recognises the existence of inter-relations between different parts of an organisation. The study concludes that MUT needs to take steps to create a knowledge-based institution where there is flexible learning, available anywhere, anytime and on any topic.

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## **GLOSSARY**

<b>MUT</b>	<b>: Mangosuthu University of Technology</b>
<b>SRC</b>	<b>: Student Representative Council</b>
<b>NAAC</b>	<b>: National Assessment and Accreditation Council</b>
<b>HEI</b>	<b>: Higher Education Institutions</b>
<b>ICT</b>	<b>: Information and Communication Technology</b>
<b>FET</b>	<b>: Further Education and Training</b>
<b>SAUVCA</b>	<b>: South African Universities Vice-Chancellors' Association</b>
<b>UN</b>	<b>: United Nations</b>
<b>NCHE</b>	<b>: National Commission on Higher Education</b>
<b>NQF</b>	<b>: National Qualification Framework</b>
<b>CHE</b>	<b>: Council for Higher Education</b>
<b>DOT</b>	<b>: Department of Education</b>
<b>SDU</b>	<b>: Student Development Unit</b>

## CHAPTER 1

### **1.1 Background to the problem situation and statement of research problem**

The Student Development Unit (SDU) is responsible for both the development and implementation of student development programmes at Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT). These development programmes have as their goal the preparation of students for the world of work, and for life in general. Student development is a dynamic area which focuses on inter-relationships between different aspects of student life at the institution.

New practices keep emerging, and the Student Development Unit is expected to keep abreast of the changing circumstances in order to continue to add value to student life. In order to achieve this goal, communication plays an important role in transmitting new ideas and ensuring that students are kept informed. In this regard, the Student Development Unit provides a useful 'translator' service. However, providing this service is not an easy task because tertiary education is like a web of complexity. Bossomaier and Green (1998:73) state that "when you put lots of things together, such as subsystems in an airliner, the interactions between them can be extremely complex indeed. It is these interactions that turn something from being merely complicated (having many elements) into something truly complex". Mangosuthu University of Technology reflects such complexity.

Given that there is a flux of complex interaction of activities at the MUT, a systems approach plays an important role in enabling one to understand the dynamics of the student world. Describing a systems approach, Lockett (2004:1)

asserts that all systems approaches have in common the assumption that everything is or can be connected to everything else. This is referred to as the holistic perspective. He further states that a system may be defined as a collection of things and/or activities which are interrelated and which can be regarded as a single, whole entity that has a purpose and that can adapt and survive in a changing environment such that the purpose continues to be met.

The Student Development Unit is an integral part of the MUT's web of relations. In other words, the SDU is one of the interconnected components that include students, the management, the administrative staff, the Department of Education, the parents and the private sector. All these components collectively contribute towards serving a specific purpose, which is preparing the students for the world of work and life in general through education. As a system, it is important for the SDU to adapt and survive in changing environments. The Student Development Unit is at the core of the attempts of the Management to facilitate the adaptability of the University.

Normally, the Student Development Unit communicates with students through the Student Representative Council (SRC). There are incidents on campus, such as matters related to student fees, which suggest that the SRC appears not to be effective enough in relaying important messages to students. There is also a tendency by students to filter messages that are coming through so that they hear only what they want to hear. A case in point is the transport arrangement to residences in the Durban Central Business District. There was a lack of accommodation for students on campus and, as an alternative arrangement, a hotel in the Durban Central Business District was hired. The University paid the transport costs at the beginning of the year as an interim arrangement, and the students were, eventually, supposed to shoulder the responsibility for the transport costs themselves. However, rumours to the effect that the University was providing 100% subsidy started circulating. When the SRC made an effort to correct this misconception, the reaction of the student body was intense and

aggressive. The SRC was labelled as 'sell-outs' and lackeys of the management of MUT. There was one incident where the SRC was even locked out of the student residences in the Central Business District because a certain group of students felt that it was not representative of the student interests. The undermining of an important structure like the SRC could have dire consequences for the whole institution. Given that the SRC is the highest decision-making body of students, perceived lack of effectiveness could lead to disruptions at the institution.

According to Section 32 of the Government Gazette, vol. 390 (1997), the following are some of the functions of the Student Representative Council:

- ❖ liaison with the council, the senate, the management, the general public, other institutions, national or international student organisations, unions and news media;
- ❖ co-ordination and supervision of the use of students' facilities and all matters pertaining thereto, in conjunction with the institution management; and
- ❖ being the umbrella organisation for all student committees, clubs, councils and societies, granting or withdrawing recognition of such student committees, clubs councils and societies as it deems appropriate.

If the role of such an important stakeholder is effectively undermined, there is a possibility of turbulence within the institution. In terms of the Higher Education Act, 1997 ( Act No 101 of 1997), it should be noted that Student Representative Councils have largely been transformed into organs that participate fully in the governance of tertiary institutions. Once elected, these student leaders negotiate on behalf of their fellow students on various issues that affect student life and communicate the results of these deliberations. The effectiveness of this communication determines, in many ways, the mood on campus. Any breakdown in communication can result in the emergence of different interest

groups, such as the concerned group of residence-based students, which tends to emerge during crisis situations. The exclusion of students for academic or financial reasons is one of the potential problem areas which a concerned group of students could exploit. The most likely students to belong to that group are those who do not make progress, either through non-payment of fees or poor academic performance. They generally become disruptive, which could have a bearing on the stability of Mangosuthu University of Technology.

## **1.2 The problem**

The interrelationships among parts of the MUT system do not necessarily align themselves with the existing structures. For example, at MUT, the staff members and the students have developed a network of relationships which would make it difficult to manage the institution without the active involvement of both. The problems arise because of the gap between what is on paper, or rather the structures that have been set up by management, and what actually transpires. The interrelationships between stakeholders at MUT are not necessarily in line with the structure of the institution.

In view of the issues described, it would seem that relationships between the stakeholders at MUT need to be examined properly. According to Ryan (1995:3), each stakeholder influences the behaviour of the system and that the effect of its influence will depend on its interaction with other stakeholders. In other words, all the components of the system (Mangosuthu University of Technology) have a bearing on the behaviour of the institution. The question, therefore, is whether the adoption of a systems approach will enable the institution to develop an effective communication system for the management of relationships.

MUT is structured in such a way that the Council becomes the highest decision-making body at the Institution. The Executive Management of the University reports directly to the council of the University and is responsible for

the management as well as day-to-day activities at the institution. The academic faculties perform the core functions of the University, which are: teaching, research and community engagement. There are departments that provide support services, for example, the Library and the Clinic. The students, who are represented by the Student Representative Council, are the main recipients of the services rendered by the University. Finally, the University is located in the Umlazi Township community and it receives subsidies from the government as well as funding from the private sector.

### **1.3 Purpose statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore the dynamics of the interactions between the management, the Student Representative Council, the students and staff members at Mangosuthu University of Technology from the Student Development point of view. The study is conducted in order to contribute towards the development of an effective communication system that could assist in the management of relationships at MUT.

#### **1.3.1 Sub-aims**

To be able to achieve the above, the researcher considered the following four sub-aims:

- ❖ The first sub-aim is to identify the management's mode of operation regarding students within the parameters of the University statute, for the purpose of identifying its capacity for creating the basis for relationship management.
- ❖ The second sub-aim is to learn about student life in view of the SRC constitution, for the purpose of establishing how the students experience student governance at MUT.



- ❖ The third sub-aim is to understand staff interaction with students, with reference to the SRC constitution and the National Education Department's Policy on Higher Education, for the purpose of identifying the ability of staff to anticipate and to recognise potential conflict areas.
- ❖ The fourth sub-aim is to integrate the knowledge the researcher has of the management of the institution and the SRC in order to contribute to relationship management. This is coupled with the staff's potential to anticipate potential conflict areas. Finally, this study would enable the development of an effective communication system for the management of relationships at Mangosuthu University of Technology.

#### **1.4 Issues to be explored**

The following are the specific issues that will form the core of this investigation:

- ❖ **The expression of student life on campus.** This would be constituted by a student-friendly learning environment with participation in social, occupational, cultural, spiritual, academic and physical activities, as well as making maximum use of technology in service provision.
- ❖ **The SRC mode of operation.** This refers to the relationships that the SRC has developed with different stakeholders on campus. The question is how effective the SRC has been in taking advantage of these relationships in its operation.
- ❖ **Whether staff interaction with students recognises all the dynamics of student life.** The academic staff members tend to focus on the academic aspect of the institution. On the other hand, the students that they are dealing with have a multifaceted student life which goes beyond academic activities.

- ❖ **The interrelations between various components of the systems.** The management, the SRC, the SRC constitution, the National Department of Education, the National Policy on Higher Education and the staff members.

## **1.5 Assumptions**

The success of the study depends on the following assumptions:

- ❖ In past years, many staff members at Mangosuthu University of Technology have actively participated in different research projects. They should, therefore, be willing to participate honestly as respondents in this project.
- ❖ In the past, the management of the institution has encouraged a constructive approach to resolving problems. It is, therefore, assumed that they are ready to provide practical support for the project.

## **1.6 Motivation for the project**

Organisations tend to be mired in a situation where rigid plans are regarded as one-size-fits-all solutions. The tendency is to assume that the wider environment is either unchanging or unpredictable. This would be fine if all the forecasts hold true, but we live in a world that is increasingly shaken by discontinuities and sudden changes. The way an organisation communicates has to change accordingly. This applies to MUT as well. The dynamism of a systems approach makes it appropriate for an organisation that is in a state of change. It enables an organisation to remain adaptable to changing circumstances.

In order to be effective in the management of relationships between relevant stakeholders, a new approach to planning that takes into account the uncertainties of the future needs to be formulated, and hence the need for an adoption of a systems approach.

### **1.7 Limitations of the study**

Since this is a case study at MUT, the other institutions of higher learning will not be represented in the sample of respondents that will participate in the study. This implies that it might therefore be difficult, in some cases, to extrapolate beyond MUT, owing to differences that could exist in the internal environments of tertiary institutions in South Africa.

The issues of reliability and validity seem to be elusive concepts in the context of an unstructured focus group, though they are implicit in the researcher's desire to present facts. The writer notes that, though a focus group tends to provide more qualitative evidence compared to questionnaires, it might be that because of such a face-to-face setup, they may not yield objective answers and this could have a bearing on the reliability and validity of the findings.

Despite every attempt by the researcher to remain objective, the fact is that he is an employee of MUT where the case study is based. As a result of this relationship, his impartiality could be compromised.

## **1.8 The structure of the study**

The study consists of five chapters:

**Chapter One** outlines the background of the study as well as the research problem. It is important to present this information in order to enable the reader to understand the point of view of the researcher.

**Chapter two** will provide a review of the relevant literature. In this chapter an analysis of key documents is presented. The thread that runs through the chapter is the management of relations and the role that is played by communication in this regard.

**Chapter Three** surveys the design and procedure of the study that is carried out by the writer. The research approach adopted by the writer is qualitative in nature and is based on a case study, which in this case is the Mangosuthu University of Technology.

**Chapter Four** presents the findings, which are also summarised into graphical presentations.

**Chapter five** leads to the conclusion of the study and presents a summary of the findings. The findings of the study are reviewed, together with a discussion of the limitations of the study. The conclusion forms the last part of the chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on how a systems approach can assist in managing relationships. The following areas receive attention: The first part is an attempt to draw a clearer picture of what a systems approach is all about. The systems approach provides a broad theoretical framework which guides the views of the researcher. The second part focuses on communication and its role in the management of relationships at Mangosuthu University of Technology. An outline of the theory of communication and what it entails is provided. This ties in with the crucial role that communication plays in higher education in South African. The third part refers to MUT as a cybernetic system. Given that MUT is self-organising and dynamic, it is therefore important to view it as an example of a cybernetic system. The final part advocates exploring different approaches to the challenges that the University faces, hence a multi-paradigm approach to understanding the MUT problem situation.

#### **2.2 Systems approach**

A systems approach is a good way to view a business for the purposes of understanding communication as a social system. According to Lewis (1987: 42), the idea of a system arises from the need to be able to investigate complex situations in a holistic way that takes account of the possibility of emergent properties. Therefore, the word 'system' denotes any set of interrelated elements that forms a unified or complex whole. A systems approach stands for a shift

from a traditional approach to strategy. The traditional approach seems limited in its response to the complex problems that are faced by organisations, which provides insight into how they interact with their environment.

This concept of holism suggests that the whole is not just the sum of the parts. The system can only be explained as a totality because a system by definition requires interrelationships among parts to constitute a whole (Checkland, 1993:16). This theory therefore views organisations as made up of components or parts that interact with one other. These components exist in states of relative balance, consistency, or fit with one another. The different parts of an organisation can fit well together and function effectively, or fit poorly and lead to problems, dysfunctions, or performance below potential.

Theorists have created various analogies to explain the interrelationships among the parts of a whole. For example, the organisation is an emerging and evolving system of interpersonal roles, norms and rules that govern the cooperative organising behaviour. Communication is therefore the means people use in order to establish role expectations and standard operating procedures. According to van der Walt (1999:60), an organisation is also seen as a system of organising behaviour and communication that consists largely of a set of symbolic actions, which participants understand and perform because they have shared a common rhetorical culture. These shared symbols and dramas provide the common environment in which they need to work, cooperate and integrate their efforts. The organisational saga provides missions, goals, objectives, self and group identification and prescribes ways of arguing, evaluating, problem-solving and decision-making.

An organisation as a system is in continual interaction with its environment. Should the system fail to adapt to its environmental changes, it tends to move toward entropy, which is a state of severe conflict (van der Walt, 1999:45). That is why it is inconceivable to have an efficient organisation without effective

communication. Van der Walt (1999:49) refers to the following advantages of effective communication:

- ❖ It recognises the important interaction between the organisation and its environments. In other words the organisation does not exist in isolation. It is, in actual fact, a product of its environment. MUT, for example, was established owing to the urgency of the demand for technicians amongst Africans, particularly in the then KwaZulu territory in 1979.
- ❖ It focuses on the interrelationships of students, staff and management in the organisation to create a whole, in which ineffectiveness in one part will affect all the other parts. If staff members are ineffective in communicating their plans to students, the students won't be able to understand their intentions. This could result in unnecessary acrimony between the two. There seems to be a striking difference between residence life and academic life at the University. Some staff members do not seem to take the residence life of students seriously, whereas the behaviour of students in residences has a *direct bearing on their academic life*.
- ❖ Communication is seen as the important component in relating the parts of the organisation to form a whole. It is therefore the means people use to establish role expectations and standard operating procedures.

### **2.2.1 Barriers to strategic thinking**

According to Thomas et al (1986:317), human beings are natural learners, and learning brings satisfaction. But a question mark remains on why large organisations do become institutions of eager learning. One assumption is that they want to enhance their reputation and ensure their survival. This also applies to institutions of higher learning. Unfortunately, higher education institutions tend to be very rigid when it comes to their approach to solving environmental and internal challenges.

When trying to explain this, Senge (1990:129) states that, “unfortunately, the primary institutions of our society are oriented predominantly toward controlling rather than learning, and for rewarding individuals for performing for others rather than cultivating their natural curiosity and impulse to learn...” He goes on to identify five disciplines that learning organisations must possess:

### **1 Systems thinking**

This is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and uses tools to clarify patterns of problems, issues and situations and facilitates changing them effectively. Systems thinking would enable MUT to recognise the existing interrelationships between different components of the organisation.

### **2 Mental models**

These are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalisations, pictures or images that influence our behaviour and understanding of the world around us. They also focus on the openness needed to unearth shortcomings in our present ways of seeing the world and the personal motivation to continually learn how our actions affect our world. For example, the centralisation of authority at MUT tends to hinder a free flow of ideas. There are now those who wait for instructions before carrying out relatively straightforward tasks.

### **3 Personal mastery**

This is the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies of developing patience and seeing reality objectively.

### **4 Building shared vision**

It is that discipline in which people are bound together around a common identity and sense of destiny which motivates them to excel and learn, and fosters commitment to the long-term. In spite of many upheavals that the institution has faced, it has managed to instil a common identity amongst its stakeholders.

### **5 Team learning**



Through dialogue, team members suspend assumptions and enter into genuine 'thinking together'. Team learning develops the skills of groups of people for the larger picture that lies beyond individual perspectives. This kind of development became apparent in 2004 when there was a debate around the issue of merging institutions. Different people began to express opinions that indicated their ability to see the larger picture.

Under the right conditions, tools like the scenario planning process (which is discussed later) can be a learning experience for the entire organisation. This would happen because scenario planning challenges the comfortable conventional wisdom of the organisation by focusing attention on how the future might be different from the present. One may, therefore, assume that by encompassing scenario planning into its decision-making process, the management of MUT would encourage decision-makers to develop strategies that would be successful even in the event of radical changes in tertiary education.

Higher Education Institutions in South Africa are an extension of what is called a learning society. This is emphasised by the high expectations that the country has for the institutions to produce relevant knowledge, which will assist in its development. Miller (2004:2) refers to a knowledge society as one where there is a significantly higher level of learning intensity to daily life. It means that when, where, how and why we learn becomes much more generalised and intensive. The society in which tertiary institutions are situated is in a period of rapid change where a lot of learning has to be done.

The learning process is best illustrated by Kolb (1994:67) through his learning cycle (Figure 1):

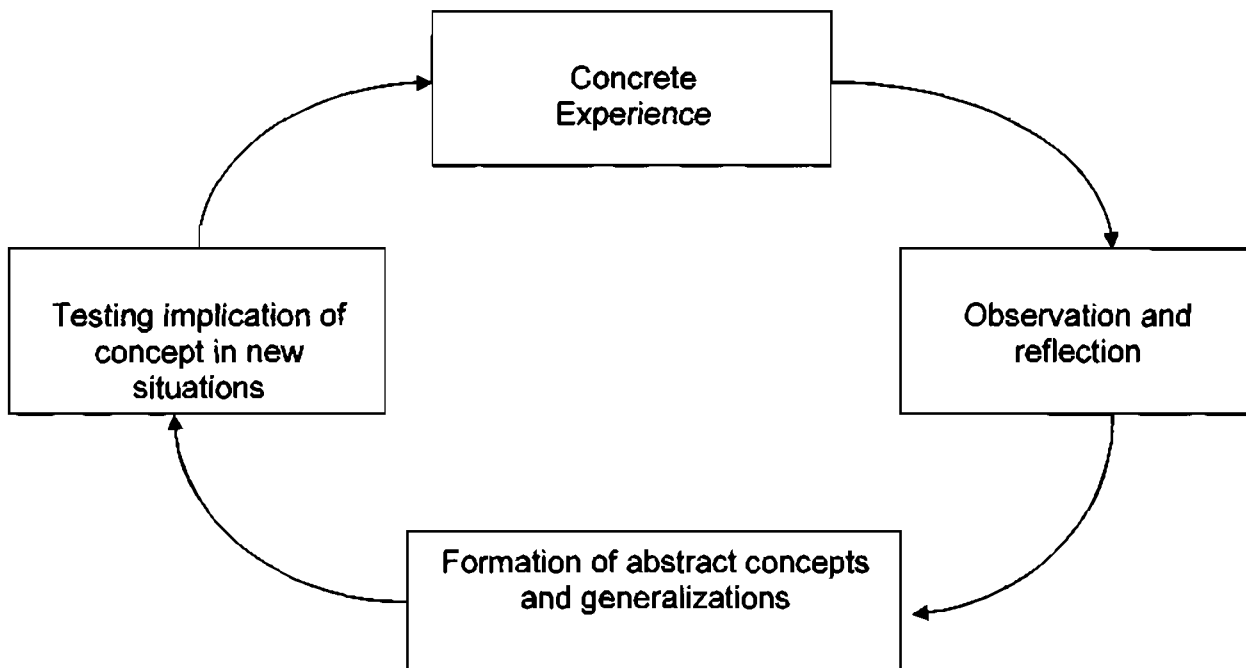


Figure 1. Kolb's Learning Cycle

The cycle suggests that learning is an ongoing process. An organisation that intends to sustain its activities needs to be aware of this. Organisational learning becomes effective when it is done collectively. It begins with observation and reflection. That is when questions about the organisation are asked, as well as the attempt to find out what the organisation needs to know in order to be able to deal with existing challenges. Once the nature of the problems has been explored, it is important to conceptualise it. In other words, the experience of the problem has to be placed in a general context.

It then becomes necessary to test the implication of a particular concept in a new situation. The testing of concepts, if successful, tends to implant the concept more firmly in one's mind. Otherwise, the concepts remain just remote theory. The final stage is concrete experience. This is the time when concepts are internalised. For MUT, this could be the start of a new exploration, a fresh cycle of understanding. The management of the University has a responsibility to ensure that the efforts of both staff members and students are focused on a common goal. It has to help the movement forward in a given direction, through the efforts of individuals which complement and enhance one another.

### **2.2.2 Benefits of a systems approach for leaders**

A systems approach could play an important role in enhancing the effective leadership in an organisation. As a leader, one could be tempted to look at parts of a system as separate entities and disregard the interconnections which contribute to the whole. According to McNamara (1999:1), there are many benefits to leaders who adopt a systems approach to viewing their organisations:

- **More effective problem solving** – It becomes easier to identify and resolve the “real” of the problem and not the symptom.
- **More effective leadership** – Leadership must work “smarter” rather than “harder”. Having a clear understanding of the overall nature and needs of an organisation, the leader can plan the organisation's overall direction and manage the organisation's resources more effectively.
- **More effective communication** – Organisations become less effective when communication problems and inefficiencies prevail. Without a clear understanding of the parts of an organisation and how they relate to one another, it is difficult to know what to communicate and to whom.

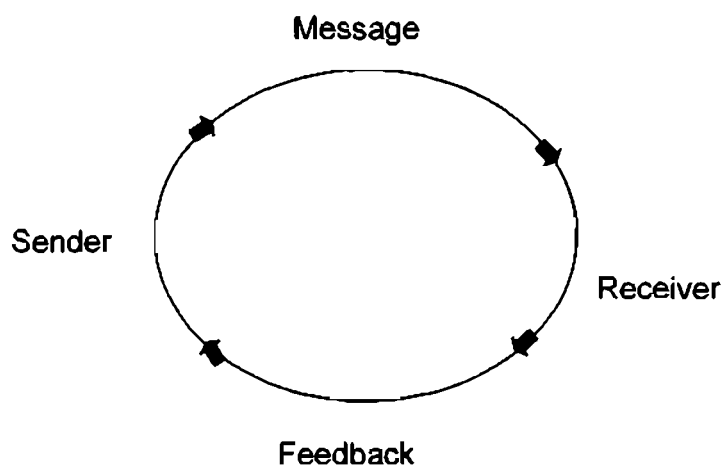
- **More effective planning** – According to McNamara (1999:3), the planning process is ‘basically working one’s way backwards through the system of an organisation and identifying desired results (goals and outcomes), what outputs will indicate that those results have been achieved, what processes will produce those outputs, and what inputs are required to conduct those processes in the system’.
- **More effective organisational development** – The most effective form of organisational development results from the use of various strategies, including strategic planning, management, and leadership development, team-building, supervisory development, organisational and group employee performance management. Any leader would be hard-pressed to employ these various strategies in an effective fashion without a good understanding of the overall systems in their organisations, including its major functions, departments, processes, teams and individual employees. Consequently, having a systems view is critical to accomplishing effective organisational development.

### **2.3 The communication process**

Communication can be thought of as a process or flow. Communication problems occur when there are deviations or blockages in that flow. This tends to happen when the message sent by the communicator is not received by the recipient. There is enormous competitive advantage for those institutions that can rev up their communication to build relationships with their students and also their employees.

According to Berlo (1960:30-32), before communication can take place, a purpose, expressed as a message to be conveyed, is needed. It passes between a sender and a receiver. The message is encoded (converted to symbolic form) and is passed by way of some medium to the receiver, who translates (decodes) the message initiated by the sender. The receiver, thereafter, responds to the message and gives feedback to the sender. This is referred to as feedback. The result is a transference of meaning from one person to another and the process is cyclical until common understanding is reached.

The following cyclical feedback model represents a typical communication process (Berlo, 1960:30-32):



*Figure 2. Cyclical feedback model*

### **2.3.1 Cyclical feedback model**

People tend to hold predisposed ideas on numerous topics, and the way they communicate is affected by these attitudes. Furthermore, they are restricted in their communicative activities by the extent of their knowledge of the particular topic. It is impossible to communicate what one does not know and, should the

knowledge be too extensive, it is possible that the receiver will not understand the message. At Mangosuthu University of Technology, most conflict situations are a result of miscommunication between different parties involved. For example, at the beginning of each year students raise objections about the academic exclusion of non-performing students. They fail to understand that the revenue of the institution is dependent on the through-put rate. Therefore the non-performing students have a negative impact on the financial standing of the University. It is possible that they fail to understand this basic rationale.

According to Berlo (1960:30-32), the **message** is the actual physical product from the source encoding. It is usually affected by the code or group of symbols that are used to transfer meaning, the content of the message itself and the decisions that are taken in selecting and arranging both codes and content.

The **channel** is the medium through which the message travels. It is selected by the source, which must then determine which channel is formal and which is informal. Formal channels are established by the organisation and transmit messages that pertain to the job-related activities of members. They traditionally follow the authority network within the organisation. Other forms of messages, such as personal or social, follow the informal channels in an organisation.

The **receiver** is the object to whom the message is directed. But before the message can be received, the symbols in it must be translated into a form that can be understood by the receiver. One's knowledge, attitude, and cultural background influence one's ability to receive, just as they do the ability to send. The receiver interprets the message and then gives **feedback** to the sender. Based on the feedback that is received, the sender then takes a particular action.

### **2.3.2 Barriers to effective communication**

Research indicates that poor communication is probably the most frequently cited source of interpersonal conflict (Thomas and Schmidt, 1986:317). Because individuals spend nearly 70% of their waking hours communicating – writing, reading, speaking, listening – it seems reasonable to conclude that one of the most inhibiting forces to successful group performance is a lack of effective communication.

No group can exist without communication; that is the transference of meaning among its members. It is only through transmitting meaning from one person to another that information and ideas can be conveyed. An idea, no matter how great, is useless until it is transmitted and understood by others. The strike that took place at the University of KwaZulu-Natal is one example. It was reported in the *Daily News* that “Hundreds of University of KwaZulu-Natal students who were expecting to start lectures for the 2006 academic year were turned away yesterday (13 February 2006) because of a massive combined strike involving staff and students. Yesterday students rejoined the strike after the university management went back on an agreement it had made with students last week. “ (*Daily News Correspondent* , 2006:3)

According to a *Sowetan Reporter* (2006:2), the Vice-Chancellor of the University of KwaZulu-Natal is quoted as having said, “They (the workers) know the institution’s financial difficulties.” What he might be failing to understand is that there is a possibility that they do not understand what he is talking about. As the head of the institution, he has a responsibility to ensure that staff members and students understand the financial position of the institution. This could be done through deliberate attempts to elicit feedback from both staff and students in matters that have a bearing on their future.



### **2.3.3 The terrain of higher education**

Every stakeholder (students, staff members, parents, donors, the Department of Education) at Mangosuthu University of Technology has a role to play in ensuring that the institution provides quality education. Of all the stakeholders mentioned, students have a unique role to play in ensuring the quality of education. Some of the upheavals that are faced by tertiary institutions could be stemming from a failure by some students to demonstrate their commitment to education.

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (2006:3) outlined two main areas of focus that could enable students to play a significant role in the provision of quality higher education. Firstly, students should realise that quality education is their right and that it is the responsibility of higher education institutions (HEI) to provide quality education for learners. Secondly, students should be equally aware that they have significant responsibilities in assisting institutions to provide quality education. Unless students demand quality education and demonstrate their commitment to it by accepting their responsibilities, HEIs will have no obligation to prepare a document highlighting these rights and responsibilities.

*Student development practitioners need to realise that there can be no effective student development without proper communication. This becomes more pronounced during policy formulation, when all the stakeholders have to be brought on board. Given that students are such important stakeholders, there has to be a good relationship with them in order to ensure that they make a meaningful contribution. This plays an important role in enhancing student satisfaction and managing reputations.*

According to Maqubela (2005:2), student development practitioners have to do away with a fragmented and reactive response to student protests, demands and needs. One of the reasons for this kind of response could be that student

services have been operating at the peripheries of institutions. It is high time they moved to the core of institutional life, thereby positioning themselves to create a caring, responsive experience to the developmental needs of students. In other words, student development practitioners should be catalysts and champions of sound student experience.

### **2.3.4 Communication in higher education**

Internal communication plays a crucial role in the dissemination of information in higher education and also in the decision-making process. There is at times a tendency to put more emphasis on external communication (communication with the public, service providers, etc.) than on communication with internal stakeholders. According to Cutlin (1994:23), the most important relationships of an organisation, irrespective of its goals, should be with personnel (and students) at all levels.

The extent to which an institution can attract, keep and motivate quality staff members will therefore influence its capability to offer a quality service to its students. The quality of the service in an institution is determined mostly by the skills and attitudes of the people producing the services. As the most tangible asset for the self-expression of an organisation, corporate visual identity must be viewed as an important strategic instrument within corporate communication. According to Goldman (2002:121), "Given the impact of shifting social paradigms and the corresponding shift in human value systems, real success, for both big business and the public, lies in the large enterprise conducting itself in the public interest in such a way that the public will give it sufficient freedom to serve effectively."

Organisations appear to be willing to make large investments in the development and implementation of their corporate visual identity, and it is generally acknowledged that it is important to reach a considerable degree of consistency

in the way a corporate visual identity is applied. Given that Mangosuthu University of Technology is regarded as a historically disadvantaged institution, it has a responsibility to ensure that the negative images that are associated with such institutions are eliminated. For example, some of these institutions tend to be associated with mismanagement of funds. Corporate visual identity can be seen as the visual common thread that runs through the way an organisation expresses itself. Both the students and the staff members should convey a common message about the institution.

Mersham et al (1995:85) assert that systems theories emphasise the importance of equilibrium, balance and interdependence of the various subsystems that make up society. This approach regards society as an integral whole whose components work together in such a way that the whole is kept in balance. In other words, this means that the organisation studies a wide variety of messages, from the internal grapevine to media reports, and studies the behaviour of stakeholders. All this is done in order to interact with both the internal and the external environment.

Furthermore, it is important that Mangosuthu University of Technology communicates the strategic aspects of the corporate visual identity. Students and employees need to have knowledge of the corporate visual identity of their organisations – not only its role in enhancing the visibility and recognisability of the organisation, but also aspects of the story behind the corporate visual identity. The story should explain why a particular design fits the organisation and what the design – in all of its elements – is intended to express.

#### **2.3.4.1 The role of Information and Communication Technology in higher education**

The use of information technology to facilitate communication in tertiary institutions has begun to have an impact but the impact, has not been as

extensive as in other fields. According to Adam (2003:17), Information and Communication Technology refers to tools for communication and access to information that seamlessly integrate into open Internet standard. If one were to consider medicine, tourism, travel, banking, engineering and architecture, the impact of ICT across the past two or three decades has been enormous. The manner in which these fields operate today is vastly different from the ways they operated in the past. The same cannot be said about education. It has experienced far less change than these other fields. At Mangosuthu University of Technology, for example, most staff members have access to what is termed the 'intranet', which allows them to interact consistently whenever they wish to do so. Students, on the other hand, do not seem to be taking advantage of this development. Two reasons are often cited for this: lack of skills and shortage of computers.

Many Information Systems researchers have pointed out that the broader social and organisational context within which information technology is implemented has a profound influence on the way in which Information Technology is used, (Olesen and Myers, 1998:4). The University is at present more of a bureaucratic hierarchy and is funded directly by the government. In the same breath, one does find a hybrid form of structure with multiple reporting channels and intersecting areas of authority and accountability. As Applegate (1994:80) notes, hybrid organisational forms demand intense vertical and lateral coordination, negotiation and collaboration to manage day-to-day operations. Hence the need for an Information Technology management system in order to enable co-ordination, communication and collaborative activities. On the other hand, Mangosuthu University of Technology, like most other higher education institutions, faces a steadily increasing demand for a highly trained and specialised labour market. A need for institutions to ensure that graduates are able to have appropriate levels of information literacy has emerged.

The drive to promote such developments stems from general moves among institutions to ensure that their graduates demonstrate not only skills and knowledge in their subject domains, but also general attributes and generic skills (Oliver, 2002:2). Traditionally, generic skills have involved such capabilities as an ability to reason formally, solve problems, communicate effectively, be able to negotiate outcomes and to manage, as well as having collaboration and teamwork skills. The growing use of ICT has seen the pool of generic skills expanded in recent years to include information literacy, and it is highly probable that future developments and technology applications will see this set of skills growing even more.

At a management level institutions could be encouraged and assisted to formulate sound ICT policies and sustainable strategies for their implementation, as well as to establish an ICT unit that operates at a strategic level.

#### **2.3.4.2 The impact of when and where students learn**

Institutions of higher learning have provided little choice for students in terms of the manner in which programmes have been delivered. Most institutions in South Africa require students simply to attend lectures in order to access particular programmes. Students generally accept what is delivered, and institutions have tended to be quite traditional in terms of the delivery of their programmes.

The applications of Information and Communication Technology, on the other hand, provide many options and choices to such an extent that many institutions are now creating competitive edges for themselves through the choices that they are offering to students. At MUT this would create a different environment where students would feel that the University adds more of value to their educational experience. This approach enables students to provide constant feedback regarding their academic progress.

### **2.3.4.3 Any place learning**

The idea of flexibility in the delivery place of educational programmes has been around for many years. The University of South Africa, for example, has been offering programmes at a distance for many years. According to Moore and Kearsely (1996:53), there has also been a vast amount of research and development associated with establishing effective procedures in off-campus teaching and learning. The use of technology has, however, extended the scope of this activity and, whereas previously off-campus delivery was not an option for students who were unable to attend campuses, today, many more students are able to make this choice through technology-facilitated learning settings.

Over a period of 28 years, the student population at Mangosuthu University of Technology has grown from about 15 students in 1979 to about 10 000 students in 2007. This exponential increase in the number of students has far outpaced the physical development of the campus, to such an extent that the institution is facing a serious student accommodation problem. At present, about 3 500 students are accommodated in the University residences. This seems to be the case in other institutions in South Africa as well. SAPA (2005:4) quoted Ms N Jappie, from Student Services at the Durban University of Technology as having said, "We currently accommodate 3 000 students who constitute at least 15% of our student population. Student accommodation is always oversubscribed, the demand exceeds supply. Unfortunately the institution is not in a position to build or buy any new residences at this time because it faces many constraints including finance, human resource capacity and space."

A technology-facilitated learning setting would go a long way towards addressing such problems, and the higher education institutions wouldn't have to deal with student riots that result from shortage of accommodation. The following are

some of the opportunities that technology-facilitated learning offers to students (Oliver, 2002:4):

- The communication capabilities of modern technologies provide opportunities for many learners to enrol in courses offered by external institutions rather than only those situated locally. These opportunities provide such advantages as extended course offerings and eclectic cohorts comprising students of different backgrounds, cultures and perspectives.
- The freedom of choice provided by programmes that can be accessed at any place also supports the delivery of programmes with units and courses from a variety of institutions. There are now countless ways for students completing diplomas or degrees.

It is clear that higher education institutions that have the capacity to adapt and lead benefit from the fact that their management processes assist all staff to have the necessary competence. The attraction of the Internet and its effective use as a component of institutional organisational communication could play an important role in managing relationships at MUT. The challenge that the institution now faces is to make this accessible to all students on a continuous basis.

According to an article that was written by Mhlongo (2006:4) which appeared in the *Daily News* of 15 May 2006, students at KwaZulu-Natal Further Education Training Colleges would, for the first time, be able to access the Internet and have personal e-mail addresses, a service the students have never had before. Furthermore, it states that each student who registers at an FET college will be given an e-mail address and will also have access to the Internet. There is a need for a similar approach at the University, owing to a great need for higher education institutions to ensure that graduates are able to have appropriate levels of information literacy.

### **2.3.5 The use of mobile phones in student support**

The use of mobile phones for student support is complementary to access to the Internet. Mobile phones are an integral part of Information and Communication Technology. The advantage that mobile phones might enjoy over computers is that they are accessible even to people who are in remote rural areas. It is safe to deduce that seven out of ten students who are registered at MUT have access to a mobile phone.

From a communication point of view, this offers endless opportunities. Banks and some chain stores are already ahead of most organisations with regard to communicating with customers by means of a short messaging system (sms). Tertiary institutions are expected to be on the cutting edge of such technological advancements. MUT is well positioned to be one of the first institutions in South African to use bulk sms to communicate with students, even during holidays.

Because the sms goes straight to the individual concerned, it may be used to facilitate communication in a number of ways:

- One may use bulk sms to convene student meetings; for example, students who reside in different student hostels could be easily accessed.
- It may be an ideal medium for communicating short announcements; for example, the bookshop opens at 09h00 on Wednesdays.
- It may also be used to send reminders about certain University procedures; for example, the registration timetable.
- Residence officials may use it to issue instructions; for example, that all Astra residence students should return their keys immediately.
- Information about examination timetables and results could reach students faster.



- The system may also be used to conduct satisfaction survey amongst students.

The possibilities are simply endless and, given that the equipment that is required for this purpose is relatively cheap, there is no clear reason why it cannot be used.

### **2.3.6 The globalisation of higher learning**

The transitional period in South Africa coincides with the emergence of a global economy. This includes changes in the world that have been captured by the concept of 'globalisation'. According to Wikipedia (2005) - the free Internet encyclopaedia - globalisation is a modern term used to describe the changes in societies and the world economy that result from dramatically increased international trade and cultural exchange. It describes the increase in trade and investment owing to the falling of barriers and the interdependence of countries. There are a number of trends with which globalisation has become associated, including the development of a global telecommunications infrastructure and greater trans-border data flow, using such technologies as the Internet, communication satellites and telephones.

"Information and communication technology has not only increased opportunities for the rapid information exchange that facilitates teaching, research and lifelong learning, but they also led to the globalisation of higher learning", (Adam, 2003:17). In most education circles, ICTs are regarded as a solution for the problem of having to do more with less, providing access to increasingly diverse demography of students and faculty and improving both the quality and quantity of educational content. According to Till (2003:3), recent increases in the number of students entering colleges, matched by declines in the number of qualified teachers, the mounting demand for accountability, and apprehensions about the social and economic roles of higher education, have compelled

academic institutions to work towards “successful, self-sustaining client oriented providers of education in a rapidly changing borderless education world”. But in the case of Mangosuthu University of Technology, the benefits of ICT have not been fully realised. The institution still faces the challenge of reacting to new ways of knowledge creation, management and distribution. It seems to lack research on what ICTs mean to the reform process, their students, the staff members and its evolving organisational structures.

ICT is still isolated from the transformation process at the institution. Apparently, it is added on as an extra by a few technology-oriented departments like electrical engineering and information technology. Most recently, it has become obvious that the transformation of higher education institutions cannot take place without paying attention to the application of ICT in education management and administration and access to knowledge in support of teaching, research and lifelong learning.

### **2.3.7 Funding of higher education**

In a presentation to the Parliamentary Committee on Education, the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA) (2004) stated that the South African higher education institutions contribute to the development of our national skills and human resources pool by producing more than 75 000 graduates a year. In recent years, the same institutions have become a significant contributor to the development of human resources for the region and the continent, signalled by the increased enrolment of students from neighbouring countries in South African institutions to 32 000 during 2002.

Given the policy issues, the sector has identified three priority areas for funding in the short term:

1. implementation of a sustainable funding framework;

2. adequate resources for student financial aid; and
3. recapitalisation of institutions, including infrastructure for research.

The higher education sector has increasingly come under financial pressure over the past years owing to the government failure to maintain former levels of funding to the sector and increasing student numbers. According to the National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa (2001), the participation rate in higher education should be increased from 15% to 20% in the long-term; that is fifteen years. This brings to the fore the issue of equity and redress funding in addressing the legacy of the past and in establishing the sustainability of historically black institutions.

The introduction of the National Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has been helpful in addressing, particularly, the financial constraints faced by young students from impoverished homes, but often even these students drop out of their studies because of additional financial burdens. (See Appendix A, which is extracted from the "NSFAS means test guide (2007)". While the scheme may provide for particular fees, total fees have been fairly high. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the average cost per year of pursuing a four-year undergraduate programme at a South African university ranges between R14 000 to R18 000 plus residence fees of R22 000.

Debetle and Pretorius (12-11-2007) of the *Mail and Guardian* reported that "a special task team representing South African Universities is expected to report to the Education Minister Naledi Pandor early next year (2008) about the feasibility of government regulation of tuition fees". The matter was brought to the fore as a result of the student protests that broke out at the University of Witwatersrand as well as University of Johannesburg over student fee hikes. For example, the University of Witwatersrand's council had proposed an upfront registration fee of about 25% of the total tuition fees for 2008. In other words, students would be expected to pay R5 500 upfront.

Although many students may want to pursue their studies after school, they simply cannot do so because of the pressure they are under to find employment to support the family when they finish school. So, even though a student may be academically suitable of undertaking higher education, he is forced to abandon that dream owing to financial concerns. Distance learning is one option that could be considered by the University in order to accommodate those students who cannot afford to study on a fulltime basis. The fact that the largest institution in South Africa is the one that offers distance learning could be an indication of the need for such learning in other institutions like MUT.

### **2.3.8 The role of communication systems in building relations**

Different management styles in an organisation function to create structure and order in the organisation, and these styles are characterised by formal or informal systems of communication, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. From the point of view of Wilson, Goodall and Wagen (1986:123), communication is not simply the means of doing organisational work, it is also the process by which the organisation is brought into existence and given personal, social and professional meanings. Communication therefore produces the organisation, creating the nature of the organisation and influencing the way the organisation is perceived by its members and also by society. The challenge faced by Mangosuthu University of Technology is the one of approaching communication from a systemic point of view. By doing so, one becomes aware of the existence of inter-relationships that were not recognised before.

Organisations following the formally structured approach are usually created by setting up formal systems of responsibility and explicit delegations of duties that are necessary for the performance of the group. Formal communication is required by the organisation and follows the accepted pattern of hierarchical structure. Delegated authority and responsibility determine the path

communication should take, whether it should be upward or downward. Basic communication principles in the formal communication system should entail the following (van der Walt and Scriven, 1999:16):

- Communicating through formal (downward) basic media of communication such as oral, written, both oral and written, and visual communication. The different components of MUT would therefore feel that they are recognised as an important part of the system.
- Establishing and using opportunities to make the long and short-term goals of the company clear. Usually these goals have been determined by management without the participation of any employee. For example, the cleaners should be able to understand the motives behind those decisions which have a direct bearing on the work that they do.
- Changing 'unacceptable' attitudes and opinions by moulding new ones through manipulation. There are individuals at MUT who are so disgruntled that they use every opportunity to make unpleasant comments about the University.
- Preventing or correcting misunderstandings that have arisen from lack of information and to preparing for, and adjusting to, change in a manner decided by management.

According to van der Walt and Scriven (1999:9), communication in informal communication systems is characterised by the two-way communication and active participation in most areas of the organisation. Because most problems in an organisation are the result of, or will result in, conflict among personnel and/or management, communication is perceived as a prerequisite to problem-solving. This communication system supports face-to-face interaction and meetings because it is believed that group gatherings tend to share ideas and build on them as open discourse progresses. It perceives problem-solving and brainstorming both to work better where open communication and free participation are encouraged. Creative contributions and participatory decision-

making are supported as staff members and students are seen as the sources of the institution's success.

In a more personal interaction between management and personnel, formalities are often eschewed, and management tends to share personal understandings and appreciation with the personnel (Neher, 1997:167). This is very easy to notice in respect of the way the management of Mangosuthu University of Technology interacts with the Student Representative Council. The registration process, for example, is negotiated on a continual basis, depending on the problems that arise. This ensures that most of the difficulties that are presented by the process receive the attention they deserve. Personal familiarity is encouraged which breeds more open, un-intimidated and well-purposed exchanges of beliefs, opinions and experiences. Basic principles in the informal communication system are the following (van der Walt and Scriven, 1999:11):

- The flow of communication most appropriate in this system will be the downward, upward and horizontal flow. It therefore flows through the network of relations.
- Formal and informal channels of communication are known and used by both management and personnel. Upward, downward, horizontal and grapevine channels occur.
- The competence of the persons communicated to must be adequate. Therefore, information given to personnel in a specific department, for example, should be relevant and familiar to them. Only then can they contribute and participate.
- Participatory decision-making can occur only when sufficient information is provided. This communication provides each member of the group with a lot of the information, assumptions, goals and attitudes that enter into his/her decisions.
- Proper communication in the organisation considers the goals of management, the process of change, innovation and growth.

- It allows for both formal and informal, internal and external, message flow.
- It attempts to place communication within an open system with both the internal and external environments.

The encouragement of informal communication tends to contribute towards the development of a collaborative culture. One-way communication and limited access of information has in recent times given way to processes of involvement, participation and collaboration. Ownership of decisions is reinforced by such an approach. The interactions of student leaders and the management of Mangosuthu University of Technology play an important role in creating stability on campus, which could explain why, from 2003 to 2007, the Institution has not experienced major disruptions of academic programmes because of strikes.

#### **2.3.8.1 Campus relations**

The students, as well as staff members are at times referred to as the Mangosuthu University community. This brings to mind Granovetter's (1973:1360-1380) suggestion of a network of ties comprising a community to see whether aspects of its structure might facilitate or block organisation. He prods us into imagining a community completely partitioned into cliques, such that each person is tied to every other in his clique and to none outside. In such a situation organisation would be severely inhibited. Enthusiasm for an organisation in one clique, then, would not spread to others, but would have to develop independently in each one in order to ensure success. At Mangosuthu University of Technology this would mean that the different stakeholders - the staff members, the student formations, etc. - operate as separate entities without developing ties with other stakeholders. One indication is that staff members do not normally attend student social gatherings.

There is the problem of trust that has also been raised by Granovetter (1973:1360-1380) in this section. He proposes that whether a person trusts a

given leader depends heavily on whether there exist intermediary personal contacts who can, from their own knowledge, assure him that the leader is trustworthy, and who can, if necessary, intercede with the leader or his lieutenants on his behalf. Trust in leaders is integrally related to the capacity to predict and affect their behaviour. Leaders, for their part, have little motivation to be responsive or even trustworthy toward those to whom they have no direct or indirect connection.

Yeung (1998:123) asserts that internal communication can be a powerful management tool, but to be really effective it must be done in such a way that it accommodates the needs of the staff members and students on one side as well as the institution's needs on the other side. More progressive organisations may be able to make greater use of more innovative communication channels, but businesses with a more conservative approach towards new technology may find a reluctance amongst its members to use high-technology channels. At MUT, the use of the 'intranet' seems to be confined to staff members. A majority of students have no access to the intranet, yet they are the ones who need exposure to new technologies.

#### **2.3.8.2 The role of communication systems in building relations**

Information and communication technologies (ICT) play a major role in globalised and knowledge-based societies of a new world era. These developments have a profound effect on the management of tertiary institutions as well the maintenance of working relations. South Africa is moving towards being a knowledge-based society where there will be a greater demand for continuing and life-long education. This implies that there is an increasing demand for flexible learning, available anywhere, any time and on any topic. From a management point of view the Internet offers a number of opportunities.



According to Borzo (1997:11), intranets and the use of e-mail are rapidly becoming the preferred media for internal communication with personnel, especially within very large businesses. The businesses usually set up internal communication networks that use Internet technology. Intranets provide secure internal communication as only authorised users can access the information. They can vary in sophistication from those providing basic, general information to those that provide total interactivity. When students and staff members can access the intranet of a tertiary institution, it becomes easy to transmit information and therefore establish good relations within the organisation. Intranets tend to do more than link people and data. They also make information readily available and in addition encourage personnel to react to information sooner. More often than not, the intranet at MUT is used for giving updates and making announcements. The challenge faced by the University is to make it more interactive for the sake of generating a culture of debate. This could include creating chat-rooms where issues of current interest are debated.

### **2.3.8.3 Communication networks and relationships within organisations**

According to Koehler (1981:81-82), the term 'communication network' is used to denote the existence of specific patterns by which messages are transmitted among three or more individuals. A number of networks exist in all organisations. The shape of the network usually affects the process of communication and the behaviour of individuals in the network, as well as job satisfaction.

Communication networks are patterns of communication channels within formal and informal communication systems as they occur in an organisation (Van der Walt and Scriven, 1999:12). These networks will also be characterised and determined by the communication system involved in the organisation. The various communication channels, such as newsletters and Internet meetings, are all integrated into the existing communication networks, and the effectiveness of any organisation is indeed dependent upon the management of formal and

informal communication channels. Apart from the vertical and lateral flow of communication, it takes place through these networks. One way of identifying a net is by establishing who communicates with whom, and who the central figures are in the communication process.

Van der Walt and Scriven (1999:13) identify five different kinds of networks or patterns of communication. Those are: the chain, the y, the circle, the wheel network and all channels network. All of them function within the formal and informal communication systems. In an organisation like MUT, it is always important to make decisions with regard to who needs to know what, when and how. From a student development point of view, it is important to transmit clear and complete messages. It is therefore imperative for the student services officials to be aware of the existence of different communication networks at the University, as well as of the role that they play.

### ***The circle network***

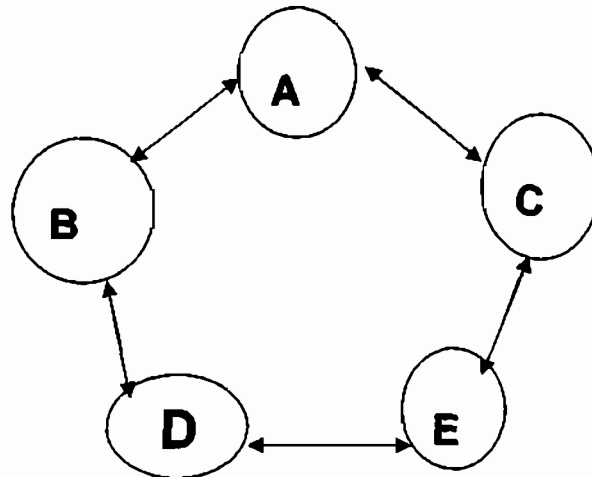


Figure 3

In this system every member has equal communication opportunities. Each can communicate with the person to the right and left. Members have restrictions, but the circle is a less restricted condition. At MUT, a typical example is a situation where someone in a management position needs to communicate with members of particular student structures. He first has to approach the SRC, which consults the executive of that organisation before the matter reaches the ordinary members of that student organisation. To solve problems in the circle network, members typically pass information around to all members who act as their own decision-making centres. According to Lewis, P.V. (1987:42), groups following the network often experience frustration as communication is slow and it is difficult to move messages from one part of the line to another. Each member has to communicate any ideas and opinions to only two other members who have to distribute this information to two more members who in turn will take it further.

### The Y network

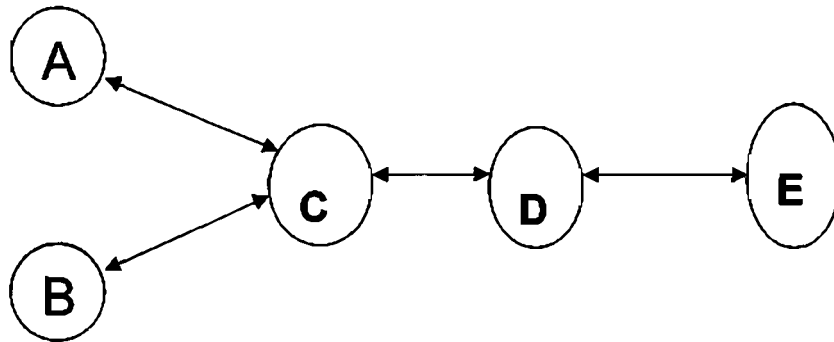


Figure 4

The centralised person ( c ) serves as a bridge between members, and therefore, he/she connects two groups in the network by being a member of both. The communication style is formal, and communication takes place via the bridge. Members can communicate with one another only through the person serving as the bridge, not directly with each other. A typical situation at the University, which resembles this kind of network, is the role of the Dean of Student Affairs, who serves as a bridge between different student formations and the management of the institution.

### The chain network

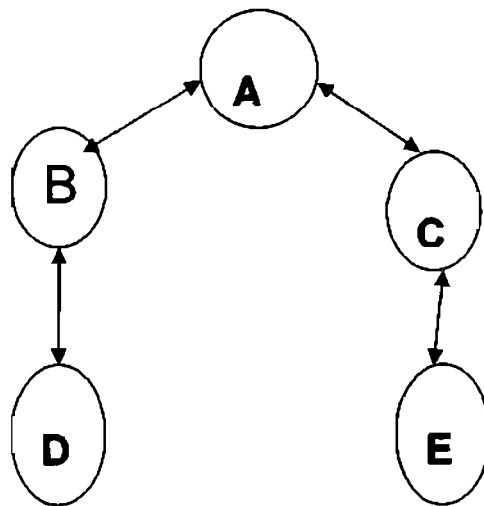
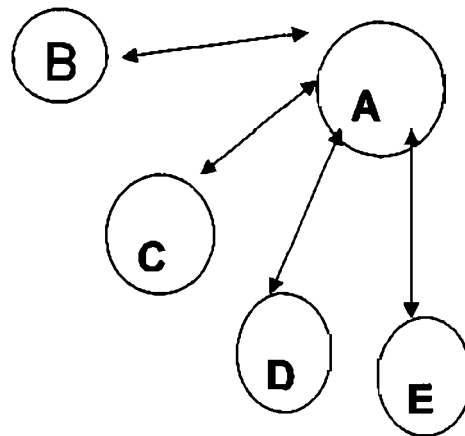


Figure 5

In this pattern, no pair of individuals can exchange messages, though in reality this could be difficult to stop. It therefore makes coordination of thought or action virtually impossible. Next to the wheel network, it ranks highest in centrality. For example, the operations of the bus company that transports Mangosuthu University of Technology students from the campus to external residences is centrally controlled by a dispatcher who ensures that he is the only one who regulates the number of trips to be undertaken. In this network, two people serve as end persons, having only one other person with whom they can communicate directly. They typically send information to this other individual who serves as relay person, sending their messages along with those of their end people to the fifth person who collects the information (Lewis, 1987:43). This central person then formulates an answer and sends it back to the relay person who then sends it on to their respective end persons.

## The wheel network

Figure 6



This pattern occurs within the formal communication system. In this pattern no pair of individuals can exchange messages except through the central figure. It therefore makes coordination of thought or action virtually impossible. Problems are solved by the members' sending messages to the top or central member who makes the decisions and sends the information back.

The way the intranet is applied at MUT serves as an example of the network of communication. There is one webmaster through whom all messages to all staff members have to be sent for editing before they are disseminated. If there is something that is deemed to be 'unacceptable', the message is not sent through. Like all organisations that follow the wheel network, control is very centralised and members can communicate with one another only through one member located at the centre.

***The all-channels network***

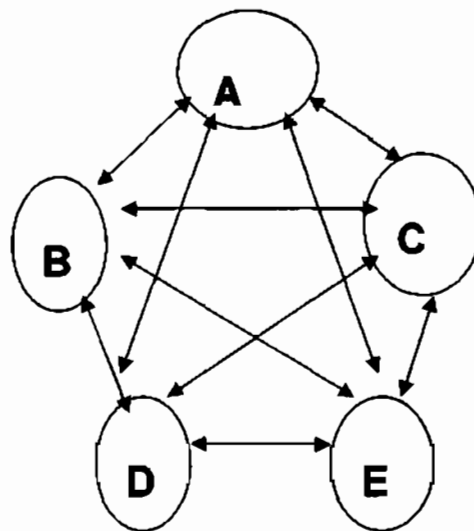


Figure 7

In a completely connected network, no communication restrictions are placed on any members. Each person communicates information to others directly. All members formulate their own answers in a problem-solving format. The Student Affairs Department resembles this kind of network. The people attached to different units within Student Affairs are encouraged to communicate freely with one another. This all-channels system maximises opportunities for feedback and results in greater accuracy because messages do not have to be distributed through various levels, but are presented directly.

The mentioned networks of communication do exist at Mangosuthu University of Technology. The significant factor that has a bearing on a successful communication programme is whether the management of the University is committed to the notion that communication with staff members and students is essential to the achievements of the organisation's goals. If the management of

the University is committed to communication through words and actions, that will trickle down to the rest of the organisation. That includes taking advantage of the existing networks to talk with the staff members, respond to questions, listen to their concerns and convey the vision of the University.

#### **2.3.8.4 How crisis communication can contribute to the management of relations**

In 2006, MUT faced a particular crisis which was related to articles that created the impression that students had died at a party that had taken place at the University. According to a report which was issued by the *Daily News* on 18 September 2006, "The death of a school pupil at a campus party turned a weekend night of revelry into one of shock and horror for thousands of students. Now parents of students at Mangosuthu University of Technology have raised several concerns about security at the institution and around the residences after a shooting which claimed the life of Xolani Cele, 20." (Mhlongo, 2006:1) This excerpt, as well as other articles that appeared in South African newspapers, created a crisis which had a direct bearing on the relationship between the students and other stakeholders on campus. Rumours to the effect that there were students that had died began to circulate and created panic.

According to Lukaszewski (1998:18), the most challenging part of crisis communication is reacting – with the right response – quickly. This is because behaviour always precedes communication. Non-behaviour or inappropriate behaviour leads to spin, not communication. In emergencies, it is non-action and the resulting spin that cause embarrassment, humiliation, prolonged visibility and unnecessary litigation. At MUT there was a temporary paralysis which emanated from the fact that the information that was published in newspapers had not been verified. The University had a responsibility to establish first whether the rumours were true before assembling a Crisis Communication Team.



Given the damaging effect that the news had on the name of the University, a Crisis Communication Team had a responsibility to try to regain the confidence of the public in order to restore confidence in the institution and to rebuild relationships with the students. However, the Institution's reaction tended to be hostile and reactionary. An excerpt from a statement that was issued by the Institution read: "It is regrettable that only a few members of the media commented positively about the level of elegance at the Beauty Pageant, while a large contingent of vultures and news hounds descended on our campus with the intention of destroying this good image! Nevertheless, we have become accustomed to this deplorable attitude and we have ceased to expect otherwise from this crowd." (Mangosuthu Technikon, 2006:1)

In accordance with the operations dimension of crisis communication as advocated by Lukaszewki (1998:21), there are particular operational actions that should have been taken:

- a) Candour: There should have been an outward recognition through promptly verbalised public acknowledgement that a problem existed; that people or groups of people, the environment, or the public trust was affected; and that something would be done to remediate the situation.
- b) Explanation: The University should have explained briefly why the problem had occurred and should have provided the reasons for the behaviour that had led to the situation. It was also important to refer to what had been learnt from the situation and how it would influence the organisation's future behaviour.
- c) Declaration: There should have been a public commitment and discussion of specific, positive steps to be taken in order to resolve the situation.
- d) Contrition: The University could have made an attempt to verbalise empathy, sympathy and even embarrassment. Moreover, it should have

taken responsibility for having allowed the situation to occur in the first place, whether by omission, commission, accident, or negligence.

- e) Consultation: It was important to involve those directly affected and request their participation in order to help develop more permanent solutions and more acceptable behaviour, and to design principles and approaches that would prevent similar problems from occurring.
- f) Commitment: The institution was supposed to commit itself publicly to a promise that to the best of its ability it would endeavour to ensure that similar situations would not occur again.
- g) Restitution: It was also supposed to have gone beyond community and students' expectations and what would be required under normal circumstances to remedy the problem. It is possible that if the adverse situation had been remedied quickly, it would have cost far less and remained controversial for a much shorter period.

One has observed that there is the expectation on the part of the public that tertiary institutions should perform in a more open and socially caring way. It is, therefore, important for organisations to respond effectively to shifting public values and the increasingly intrusive news media.

#### **2.4 Mangosuthu University of Technology as a cybernetic system**

Cybernetics is concerned with the general patterns, laws and principles of behaviour that characterise complex, dynamic, probabilistic and open systems (Clemson, 1984:41). A cybernetic system places a lot of emphasis on the issues of communication and control. These are the two concepts which are discussed in this section.

### **2.4.1 The inter-relationships between communication and control**

Tertiary institutions possess unique purposes, structures and traditions within a society that places a high value on freedom, the unfettered pursuit of truth, and competition among organisations (Appleton, 1991: 35). They differ from commercial enterprises in the sense that they cannot be treated as if they were primarily a business, although they are expected to adopt sound business practices. Owing to pressures from the central government, the reaction of top management to any challenge has been to resort to the structural and mechanistic approach when dealing with employees. There has not been enough recognition of the interactive nature of the system.

According to Mauch (2000: 25-26), the importance of higher education is to prepare citizens for the future. It helps to develop students with the technical capacity to support economic growth. It is expected to provide professionals and leaders with high-level technical skills in the hope that economic development will follow. Higher education is also expected to contribute to capacity building by training and educating future leaders of business, government and the professions. Institutions of higher learning are expected to produce knowledge by supporting research which will help the economy to grow and develop in positive ways, and to disseminate the knowledge to others so that it can be widely useful.

The fragility of tertiary institutions because of being vulnerable to criticism is well documented. MUT's top management has shown the courage to stand up to unwarranted attacks from commerce and the public, as well as the government, in order to provide the protection critical to institutional success. The management, at times, finds itself under a lot of pressure from external forces, so it must keep its attention focused on strategic issues and the long-term needs of the institution. In the long run, each institution will flourish or flounder as a

consequence of management standards and the quality of the academic staff it has attracted, developed and retained (Balldridge, 1971:67). Usually problems arise because of the gap between what is on paper, or rather the structures that have been set up by management and what actually transpires. The interrelationships between parts of the system do not necessarily align themselves with the existing structures. For example, at Mangosuthu University of Technology, the students have developed a network of relationships, which would make it difficult for any one to run the institution without their active involvement. It is, therefore, imperative to seek feedback from students in most matters that concern them. It is almost impossible to have effective control measures without any feedback.

#### **2.4.2 Cybernetics and the transformation process**

A cybernetic system is self-organising and dynamic (Clemson, 1984:42). A classic example is the issue of the transformation of tertiary institutions. The term 'transformation' has been hotly contested at higher education campuses across the land. Initially, it was seen narrowly in terms of institutional democratisation. Consequently it became a frequent cause of confrontation between students demanding full participation in institutional governance and resistant institutional administrations seeking to protect their exclusive management turf. At Mangosuthu University of Technology, for example, students have a say in regard to setting fees as well as the admissions policy.

At some point, the government recognised the importance of open communication on the representation of students in decision-making bodies. Subsequently, the establishment of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) presented a unique opportunity for an extensive national debate on higher educational transformation (Education White Paper 3, 1997). It permitted the emergence of a national consensus on this and other higher education issues. As a result of this, the essence of transformation was articulated, and the boundaries defined. It has recently become clear that

transformation goes well beyond institutional governance and includes student financing, curricular reform, academic research and institutional culture, as well as equity and gender issues.

### **2.4.3 The role of students, staff and other stakeholders**

The behaviour of human beings often changes and as part of a system, they develop self-organising tendencies. It is also important to note that this self-organisation is not necessarily associated with goals, but it takes place whether goals are achieved or not. This emphasises the role of 'representation' of relevant stakeholders on councils as part of the transformation of higher education governance structures. This has created much confusion in a number of institutions. It is important to assume that student, staff and stakeholder members are highly responsible persons who come to the council with the aim of advancing the institution and who bring useful insights and perspectives to the council.

The National Department of Education spokesperson, Tommy Makhode, said: "Student leaders must 'sit down and talk' in order to resolve the issues sparking a series of student protests around Gauteng. The view of the Department is that these incidents can be resolved through dialogue", (Makhode, 2005:3). Makhode was speaking after a series of student uprisings around Gauteng and unrest at a school in the North West Province.

An ideal situation is where all members of certain committees meet the same expectations to fulfil their fiduciary and other responsibilities. It should be rare that differences of opinion in councils divide along lines of the 'constituencies' reflected in council membership. Staff, students or any other group of stakeholders rarely vote in blocks. Indeed, were this to become commonplace, it would destroy the council's effectiveness as an objective, independent, deliberative body.

There are several traps facing councils that see themselves as legislative bodies designed to 'represent' all stakeholder groups. One trap is to become complacent in the false belief that they are 'in touch' with stakeholders because of the council's broad leadership composition (Appleton, 1991:27). For example, the council may be tempted to feel it is communicating effectively with student sentiment on issues that should concern the student body because there are Student Representative Council members who serve on the council. The feedback that might emerge as a result of certain steps being taken could cause even more confusion. In other words such bodies should not focus just on input but should take note of the crucial role that is played by feedback. Disruptions that take place in tertiary institutions almost every year could be a direct result of the inability to appreciate the crucial role of feedback from students. There is an indication that the institution should create more forums for students to air their views on issues that has a bearing on their future.

The bottom line is that councils, with and through management, should find ways of consulting with key constituent leaders on appropriate issues and of keeping them informed about the reasons for certain council decisions. This should include the economic facts of decisions affecting their institution's health and future. Councils should seek ways of educating well-intentioned but misguided individuals and groups about the harm that can be done to Universities if shrill voices prevail and institutional representation is ignored.

#### **2.4.4 Regulating the Student Representative Council: the SRC constitution, its interpretation and administrative implications**

A document like the SRC constitution creates the impression that the behaviour of human beings can be structured in a particular way as the constitution prescribes. For example, the Mangosuthu University of Technology SRC Constitution stipulates that the SRC President shall be "*an ex-officio member of any SRC committee, sub-committee, standing committee, special committee, executive committees, commissions, organisations, and societies under the*

*jurisdiction of the SRC in terms of its constitution*" (MUT SRC constitution, 1993:4). However, if one considers the enormous responsibilities that are shouldered by the SRC, it is simply impossible for a student to meet some of the above obligations.

The main purpose of the constitution is to regulate the principal organs of the student body. The constitution gives clear description as to their composition, power, duties and procedures. It further regulates relationships among societies, clubs, organisations and all other student formations when they come to exercise their powers. Despite this, a set of inter-relationships tends to develop outside the constitution, and those relationships usually have a bearing on the smooth running of the institution. For example, at the University there is a student organisation which is affiliated to the Student Representative Council, but its influence on campus tends to compete with that of the SRC.

The SRC constitution is a cornerstone in student governance in that its clauses identify the law-making bodies like Student Parliament and the general student body. The constitution is viewed as a supreme law in matters pertaining to students and all other constitutions from clubs, societies and organisations that are subordinate to the SRC constitution. No student or body is recognised as having a right to override the constitution. The essence of the constitution is that the power of the SRC should be defined and limited by law in order to protect the interest of the student body and the Institution. Examples of limitations could apply in:

- restricting the range of things which the SRC can do. For example, the SRC members should not have unlimited access to the University vehicle.
- prescribing the procedures the SRC must follow in doing those things within its competence. This could be done through procedural manuals that should be made available to the SRC by the University.

In all matters pertaining to student governance, there is nobody within student organisations who can constitute a source of law superior to the constitution. The constitution also outlines certain structures, e.g. the Student Parliament, which serves as the advisory body of the SRC. The management of the institution is, at times, invited by the members of the Student Parliament to come and clarify certain issues that are of concern to student leaders. This provides the management of the institution with an opportunity to elicit feedback from students regarding how they feel about any development at the University. A problem develops when there is a reluctance to talk openly about existing problems and it becomes difficult to deal with real issues that affect students.

#### **2.4.5 The inter-relationships between the student development unit and constituent groups**

An effective working relationship with constituent groups cannot be expected in an environment where there are members who feel that they are not respected or are not taken seriously. This is likely to antagonise them, create unnecessary barriers, and perhaps doom discussions before they begin. Taking the time to understand the characteristics and power sources of constituent groups will facilitate discussions and secure relationships. Appleton (1991:25) suggests three steps that may be taken in order to foster a better working relationship:

- *Secure feedback.* This strategy helps to keep a high level of interest in the issue and gives groups an opportunity to take part in the decision-making process. Securing feedback involves both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Not only will important information be collected, but also the constituents will have been provided with a documented opportunity to participate, e.g. at Mangosuthu University of Technology, there is a Student Support and Development Committee in which different stakeholders, including students, participate.
- *Hold briefings.* Once an issue arises, constituents should be kept informed and involved in its development. Constituents have to be provided with



data that they need in order to assist them in their decision-making and to educate them on the scope of the issues involved. Trust is usually built on openness, and a group will quickly distrust the Institution if it believes it is withholding information. Student structures, including House Committees and the Sports Union, expect open communication.

- *Seek advice.* Should one have an upcoming decision that he knows will interest or affect one or more constituencies, then seek their advice. One may have to mediate disputes, but the situation can sometimes be defused by allowing the groups to have input, or feel that they have input, before the decision is made. After the fact, it is impossible to include the opinions and interests of the differing constituencies.

In addition to the above, it would be important to view the relationships in a holistic manner. In other words, one should recognise that the inter-connectedness with the system is so complex and dynamic that the responses have to remain relevant at all times. The flow of information should be encouraged with a view to learning more about the system in question.

#### **2.4.6 Three interlocking needs in group life**

According to Adair (1987:60), needs of a group can be summarised into three: the task, the group and the individual. These needs are important in developing good working relations within a group.

The **task** refers to the need to accomplish something. At Mangosuthu University the task refers to the provision of quality, technologically advanced educational programmes and services in the field of engineering, natural and management sciences. The need of the group is to try to accomplish this task. As long as this task remains incomplete, there will be tensions in the group and an urge to complete the task. In the case of education, the task is obviously an ongoing process which has to recognise the dynamism that is associated with the field.

The **group** refers particularly to the need to develop and maintain working relationships among the members so that the group task can be accomplished. If one considers the whole University to be a group, the different stakeholders who are the components of the group are compelled to have good working relations in order to see to it that the task at hand is accomplished. The management of the institution, therefore, has a responsibility to be concerned about how people relate to one another as they focus on the group task.

The needs of **individuals** tend to come with them into groups. For example, not everybody joins MUT with the sole purpose of seeing to it that the provision of education is accomplished. There are also those who join the institution because they think that it will fulfil their various needs.

In order to meet the above needs, Gibb and Gibb (1955:34) suggest five broad categories of leadership functions that should be performed:

**Initiating:** It is important to keep the group action moving or to get it going; for example, by ensuring that there is a strategic plan for the institution.

**Regulating:** A leader needs to influence the direction and tempo of the group's work. This will take place when, for example, time-limits are imposed on the accomplishment of certain tasks; for instance, the residence registration of the students.

**Informing:** The availability of the intranet as well as regular meetings do play a role in keeping stakeholders informed about developments within Mangosuthu University of Technology.

**Supporting:** It is also important to create an emotional climate which holds groups together and makes it easy for members to contribute to the task at hand.

For example there should be team building which allow members to voice their feelings and relieve tensions.

**Evaluating:** It is also important for organisations to evaluate their decisions, goals or procedures. This could happen through departmental reviews and surveys that involve students.

The above-mentioned functions are very important if the organisation is to achieve its goals and maintain cohesiveness.

#### **2.4.7 How certain issues can contribute towards strategic planning**

One needs to point out that the way we think about systems could be one of the most difficult obstacles that we have to face before we even begin to solve our problems (Ackoff, 1999:17). If one has adopted a mechanistic approach to problem-solving, it would be too optimistic to expect an effective response to the challenges that we face. Given the pressures on higher education institutions to ensure access, success, diversity and transformation, it is vitally important that institutions create well-designed strategic plans tied to institutional financial plans. Strategic planning is vital for the institution to benefit effectively from State funding in the context of governmental policies. Other imperatives for strategic planning include the requirements of the National Qualification Framework (NQF), the requirements of the Council for Higher Education (CHE), and the South African Education Act's directive to seek ways to rationalise services and academic performances in the context of regional institutional co-operation. These are cybernetic questions, which would play an important role in providing one with insight into what one is supposed to do.

***One of the questions that could be asked is the purpose of the plan.***

Strategic planning should be carried out by the head of the institution working together with leaders within the academic staff, administration, and the student body. One relevant purpose could be to reposition the institution in the face of

transformation of higher education. One needs to consider the issues of mission and overall goals, to state clearly what it expects the planning process to address, to participate willingly in the process where appropriate, and to ask relevant questions along the way. By participating in the process, council members will more fully understand and be more likely to assume ownership of the final plan's priorities and goals.

***The meta-language used is another question that begs attention.*** It is important for the planners to have a similar mental framework when embarking on a planning process. This could mean exposing the relevant parties to the basic concepts of systems dynamics.

Even in difficult times, a strategic plan should allow for growth in priority areas as well as cuts in redundant or less successful programmes. If this does not happen, strategic planning becomes synonymous with retrenchment rather than with creativity and change.

#### **2.4.7.1 A planning process at student affairs**

Lindi Broadbent (personal communication, September 2003) said that the biggest barriers to rethinking the organisational structure are our imbedded ideas and familiarity with pyramidal and hierarchical organisation structures. This is going to be clarified by a cited example within the Student Affairs Department at MUT. The idea emerges from a problem with the transportation of students to and from the University. Students who reside in external student accommodation have been identified as commuters. Their contact with the University is determined by their needs. Their most frequent interactions on campus are with faculty in the classroom, food service, bookstore employees and administration staff.

Critical steps in planning the programme of transporting the students involved engaging each affected staff member in the conceptualisation of the guidelines and bus timetable. Separate meetings were held with bus staff members and with the representatives of the students.

The principle of extensive staff involvement in programme planning had to be followed in implementation. Regular meetings of team leaders permitted balancing of workload and shifting of people to best advantage. The residence officials needed rigorous training in referral and information skills. This helped in coordinating the whole transport schedule, resulting in better relations as well.

#### **2.4.8 A case for a multi-paradigm approach to the understanding of the Mangosuthu University of Technology problem situation**

According to Morgan, (1992:14), the identification of new paradigm candidates has for many signalled a state of crisis, the orthodoxy being 'critics' who claim to solve problems which proponents of a generic systems approach are incapable of solving, mainly concerning change and the study of organisations .

Paradigm diversity offers greater potential for understanding organisational problems because, unlike a simple 'mono-methodological approach', it offers more opportunities to explore different approaches to the problems that we face. Midgely (1996:11), identifies three commitments which form the core of critical systems thinking:

- Critical awareness – examining and re-examining taken-for-granted assumptions, along with the conditions that give rise to them. For example, it is easy to assume that staff members and students at Mangosuthu University of Technology have access to information because the institution seems stable and did not experience a major conflict from 2003 to 2006.
- Emancipation – ensuring that research is focused on 'improvement', defined temporarily and locally, taking issues of power into account. There should be clear commitment to a better and much more improved university.

- Methodological pluralism – using a variety of research methods in a theoretically coherent manner and becoming aware of their strengths and weaknesses and to address a corresponding variety of issues. This is at the core of a multifaceted approach to dealing with challenges at Mangosuthu University of Technology.

#### **2.4.8.1 Multiple paradigms that can assist in the analysis of the Mangosuthu University of Technology**

Four paradigms have been defined by Burrell and Morgan (1979:29) for organisational analysis. This has been achieved through intersecting subject-object debates in the 'theory of social science' with consensus-conflict debates in the 'theory of society'. The four paradigms produced are the functionalist, the interpretive, the radical humanist and the structuralist. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979:29) the four paradigms can be described as follows, and these have been paraphrased below from the original source material.

*The functionalist paradigm rests upon the premises that society has a real, concrete existence and a systematic character and is directed towards the production of order and regulation. The social science enterprise is believed to be objective and value-free. The paradigm advocates a research process in which the scientist is distanced from the subject-matter by the rigour of the scientific method. It possesses a pragmatic orientation, being concerned with analysing society in a way that produces useful knowledge.*

*In the interpretative paradigm, the social world possesses a 'precarious ontological status'. From this perspective, social reality, although possessing order and regulation, does not possess an external concrete form. Instead, it is the product of inter-subjective experience. For the interpretive analyst, the social world is best understood from the viewpoint of the participant-in-action.*

The *radical humanist paradigm* shares with the interpretive paradigm the assumption that everyday reality is socially constructed. However, for the radical humanist, this social construction is tied to a 'pathology of consciousness', a situation in which actors find themselves the prisoners of the social world that they create. The radical humanist in particular is subject to attack in the humanist's concern to link thought and action as a means of transcending alienation.

In the *radical structuralist* one finds a radical social critique, which seems to be at odds with that of the radical humanist paradigm in being tied to a materialist conception of the world. In this paradigm, social reality is considered a 'fact'. It possesses a hard external existence of its own and takes a form which is independent of the way it is socially constructed. The paradigm views the social world as characterized by intrinsic tensions and contradictions. These forces serve to bring about radical change in the social system as a whole.

Bowen (1998: 169), defines methodology as a structured framework that provides essential guidelines for assisting people with the 'messes' they face. It is interesting to note that he also asserts that it will not provide all that is needed by the analyst or facilitator in any individual study. In other words, he acknowledges that there are gaps that can be filled by other ideas and models.

Methodologies normally develop from certain paradigms. Given that they are created by those who develop them, they represent a certain personal worldview. There seems to be an agreement between the assertion by Bowen (1998:173) that "it seems reasonable to assume that each (methodology) will explore only a part of the multidimensional problem situation that is of interest", and Morgan (1992:14) where he says that "an understanding of the different paradigms also opens up the possibility of engaging in dialectical modes of research which attempt to counter-pose the insights generated from competing perspectives".

### 2.4.8.2 The paradigm problem

According to Midgley (1997:275), it is impossible to transcend the paradigm debate: each attempt to do so must inevitably involve researchers in making new paradigmatic assumptions. Every time one person listens to another whose thinking is based in another paradigm, he or she can only interpret what they are saying through his or her own terms of reference. This, however, does not mean that communication is impossible – just that care is needed not to be either dismissive or to think that full understanding has been achieved. If care is taken to appreciate the other, in the knowledge that full understanding in the other's own terms is impossible, then one's own knowledge is enhanced.

As far back as the 1960s, the idea of employing different paradigms to solve problems started a debate on whether there is any possibility of communication between paradigms. As Kuhn (1970:85) states, during periods of revolutionary science, "scientists do not see something as something else; instead, they simply see it." He went on to argue that a change of paradigm allegiance cannot be based on open debate as there are no logical arguments to demonstrate the superiority of one paradigm over another. This argument is made more interesting by the fact that there is no logical demarcation of the supremacy of one paradigm over another, for their advocates hold fast to separate sets of standards and metaphysical beliefs. Being a proponent of a particular paradigm means one can never concede to the premises of another. Rival paradigms tend to cut up the world with different standards, different assumptions and different language.

This, however, has led to a contradiction. While some analysts argue that paradigms are exclusive, and that scientists tend to remain locked within their paradigm-learned perceptions, many also claim that we need people who are specialists in more than one paradigm (Pondy and Boje, 1981:33). This has



meant that in virtually all paradigm models there is confusion over the issue of incommensurability.

Popper (1970: 86) on the other hand says, *"I do not admit that at any moment we are prisoners caught in the framework of our theories; our expectations; our past experiences; our language. But we are prisoners in a Pickwickian sense; if we try we can break out of our frameworks at any time. Admittedly, we shall find ourselves again in a framework, but it will be a better and roomier one; and we can at any moment break out of it again."*

In Popper's view, a comparison of frameworks, and thus critical discussion, always remains possible. What in Kuhn is regarded as an impossibility should be regarded as a difficulty. It should be noted that a major watershed in this debate was the withdrawal of Kuhn in 1977 from the exclusivist incommensurability thesis and his tentative adoption of the possibility of communication (Kuhn, 1970:83). He qualified this by speaking of partial communication because he felt that there are crucial differences in meaning that are beyond access. Popper (1970:62), on the other hand, vigorously argued that even the most incongruous languages can be translated.

### **2.4.8.3 The advantages of paradigm diversity**

Apparently, diversity is most often interpreted as a threat by those organisational scientists committed to well-established models and methods for understanding organisations. This is not new in organisational theory. Most people feel comfortable in situations that seem logical and easy to understand. One example is the reaction of Professor W Kahan from the University of California at Berkeley to the idea of fuzzy logic: "Fuzzy theory is wrong, wrong and pernicious. What we need is more logical thinking, not less. The danger of fuzzy logic is that it will encourage the sort of imprecise thinking that has brought us so much trouble. Fuzzy logic is the cocaine of science" (Kosko, 1994:3). This should not be

construed as meaning that one associates paradigm diversity with fuzzy logic, but one is fascinated by the reaction to the idea. This could be a concern by someone who simply does not want to dare venture out of his frame of reference.

It seems obvious that some organisational theorists are bound by the presuppositions that they hold. Morgan (1992:14) implores one to adopt the role of a constructive opportunist and focus on the possibilities, prospects and challenges that paradigm diversity poses for the development of organisational studies. The presuppositions that one has, tend to provide the rules that are used when there are perceived problems and solutions. In such cases, language tends to erect the boundary encircling what one thinks and therefore does. But one has to note that human activity does produce language. The middle ground is actually forged through Wittgenstein's thesis that language is both a product of human activity and a producer of meaning (Morgan, 1992:16).

Ideas that form part of organisational theory are essentially European or, rather, 'Western'. Individualism seems to be at the centre of European culture, and that seems to cut across the thinking of most social scientists. Our ability to take effective collective action is at times impeded by individualism which puts stress on agreements before any action can be taken. Senge (1992:112) quotes a war council of an Indian band, a colloquy at which opinions are exchanged but nothing is decided. Later, the band goes out to hunt buffalo, the hunters collaborating with flawless, almost instinctive precision. The lesson from this is that the accommodation of different ideas can be a powerful tool to be used in tackling the problems that we face.

#### **2.4.9 Applying professional standards in student affairs programmes**

Professional standards for student affairs have been developing for more than twenty-five years. During this time there has been an ever-increasing thrust towards professionalism in student affairs practice. The field of student affairs

has also become widely recognised as an essential partner in the higher education enterprise, and its professionals have gained greater competency and credibility on the modern-day college campus.

A critical systems approach, the purpose of which is to understand the complex interactions that occur among elements of a system, can be especially helpful when an institution embarks on a progressive and highly participatory development for student affair professionals. Critical systems thinking is based on three tenets which can be summarised as follows (Jackson, 1991:27):

- **The theoretical perspective of the different methodologies.** These methodologies include the unitary perspective type, which serves the technical interest of mankind by developing techniques for the control of natural processes and social processes. Some are of the pluralist perspective type, which are concerned with the guiding of human interaction and the promotion of mutual understanding. Others are of the critical perspective type, concerned with freeing people from 'unhealthy' constraints imposed by power relations. Student Services in South Africa seem to be characterised by a lack of theoretical framework that provides guidance for what they do. At Mangosuthu University of Technology one of the challenges is to shape good working relationships with other stakeholders. However, it is imperative to view these relationships from a particular theoretical perspective.
- **Sociological awareness:** This seeks to 'liberate' illegitimately suppressed methodologies. It is meant to counter the tendency to popularize the use of certain types of methodologies. This tendency could be due to organisational or social pressures. Tertiary institutions have within themselves the idea of academic freedom which seeks to encourage the flourishing of different ideas.
- **Human well-being and liberation:** This seeks to achieve the maximum development of the individuals working in organisations and in society.

This tenet could help in cultivating a culture of open communication which seems to be curtailed at the moment.

Student affairs professionals usually come from different disciplines within human sciences, and some of them have an education qualification. This diversity of the personnel, on its own, creates opportunities for collaborative work by student affairs leaders. These can be explored during workshops or planning sessions that we normally have. The critical systems thinking, directly and indirectly, prompts problem-solvers into discovering more about the situation under study. The various facets of reality are uncovered by interrogation and by addressing the various concerns and issues from all the perspectives: unitary, pluralist and critical. Jackson (1991:32) asserts that the issue of the subjectivity of critical systems thinking does not arise because critical systems thinking asserts that any view of reality must necessarily be subjective, and that the ultimate view adopted will emerge from well-informed debates. Critical systems thinking encourages the use of different perceptions as important inputs for discussion, leading to a continuous learning of the problem situation.

According to Crowfoot and Chester (1976:37), keeping the student clientele's concerns central, an institution could come to healthy resolution of difficult problems while moving toward a goal. As problems themselves are social constructs, effective problem-solving by management can be conducted only after the problem context embodying the individual problems has been understood.

The exercises that are embarked upon during workshops should be an approach to the comprehension of the problem context or the life-world surrounding the various problems. This involves the participation of all concerned and is based on the conscious employment, in a guided manner, of many management concepts. One hopes that this would help to improve organisational competence

in dealing with problems, especially those problems where the various parties are at odds and the situation involves human relations.

There are several implications for student affairs managers. They need to acquire competence in the following aspects (Block, 1987:47):

- Develop an ability to step back from the specific scene and to reflect on the various facets of the problem situation from different perspectives; that is, from unitary, pluralist and critical viewpoints. The issue of financial aid for needy students, for example, remains a thorny issue at the institution. It is therefore important to refrain from adopting a rigid approach to dealing with the problems that students have.
- Develop a willingness to challenge and be challenged on the various propositions underlying managerial proposals, policies and organisational arrangements, regardless of the hierarchical status of the persons concerned. The Student Support and Development Committee at the University provides a platform for different stakeholders attached to the Student Affairs Department to engage in open discussions on different issues.
- Develop a willingness to share information with others and to promote an open atmosphere within the organisation. The stability that exists at present could be a direct result of an open atmosphere that characterises discussions between the management of the institution and student leaders.
- Develop a willingness to treat people, including subordinates, as total persons, not just as instruments to serve the organisation. This applies particularly to relationships between Student Affairs officials and students.

### **2.4.10 Paradigmatic shifts that inform working relations**

The idea of a paradigm shift sounds uncomfortable for those who hold a linear worldview. One can speculate that the origin of such a linear world view has its basis in Fundamental Pedagogics. This educational philosophy has dominated teacher training in South Africa for the last four decades. It embraces the notion that teaching is a scientific and objective endeavour, and being different is considered to be a pathology (De Jong, 96:73). The products of this system tend to be people who see the world in a very linear way. Making a paradigmatic shift from a reductionist and linear way of seeing the world to a systemic worldview poses an exceptional and complex challenge. Historically, apartheid ideology magnified this worldview, particularly through its pedagogy of transmission teaching whereas a culture of thinking that embodies flexibility in problem-solving challenges rigidity in the way the world is viewed. It includes within it the celebration of diversity, especially in terms of perceptions, and questions the positivistic notion of objective reality.

#### **2.4.10.1 Multi-paradigm research**

An attempt to operationalise multiple paradigm research involves a study of work behaviour in the Student Affairs Department at MUT. Separate issues related to work and relations within an organisation can be analysed using each paradigm. The four main subjects of aspects of work in organisations that have been studied are: job motivation (functionalist paradigm), work routines (interpretive paradigm), management training (radical humanist paradigm) and employment relations (radical structuralist paradigm) (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:23). The choice of topics and their pairing is based on pragmatic considerations as well as the fact that there already existed examples of organisational analysis from different perspectives.

### ***The functionalist paradigm***

For all the studies, the main concern is to choose a theory and a method consistent with the work of the paradigm. In the main, Burrell and Morgan (1979:32) asserts that the approaches listed as representative of the functionalist paradigm are social system theory, objectivism and pluralism. By far, the most of work cited in the functionalist paradigm falls under system theory. The aim in this case is to define relationships between organisation structure, work motivation and performance. Work motivation at Mangosuthu University of Technology may be studied as part of the functionalist investigation.

### ***The Interpretive paradigm***

The interpretive paradigm can involve an ethno-methodical analysis of Student Affairs professionals at MUT. The study should examine the main activities of the working day and, in particular, how Student Affairs officials communicate with students from different cultural groups. In conducting the analysis, one has to accept that it is only through the speech, gestures and actions of competent participants that we can understand the essence of their work. The aim should be to let participants structure their conversations, descriptions and analyses.

### **The radical humanist paradigm**

In terms of research contributions, the radical humanist paradigm is the least developed of Burrell and Morgan's four paradigms. They have cited Clegg's (1975) *Power, Rule and Domination* as characteristic of a nascent "critical theory" approach to organisational analysis. Clegg has also expressed the view that a function of management education is the "reproduction of ideology as well

as middle class careers". This ideology is produced through learning "modern management techniques" at training institutions; the radical humanist research can explain how such processes are accomplished in the Student Affairs department.

### **The radical structuralist paradigm**

*A labour process study of fire-fighting might be chosen as the research topic for the radical structuralist paradigm. The focus could be on the development of employment relations in the Student Affairs department, and especially the struggle for a normal working day. The student affairs professionals work until late in the evening at times and they do not get paid overtime because 'it is in the line of duty'.*

It is clear that there is merit in adopting a multi-paradigm approach in order to solve problems that one observes at MUT. Paradigm diversity offers greater potential for understanding organisational problems because, unlike a simple 'mono-methodical approach', it offers more opportunities to explore different approaches to the problems that we face. What seems to be one of the main constraints in human development is the futile attempt to be 'correct' all the time. As a result, some people end up avoiding taking initiative in order to avoid failure. It is important to note that failure is one of the important contributors to success.

#### **2.4.11 The challenge of change at Mangosuthu University of Technology**

Section 32 of the Higher Education Act (1997) of South Africa states as its vision the establishment of a single co-ordinated higher education system which promotes co-operative governance and provides for programme-based higher education. It also aims at restructuring and transforming programmes and



institutions to respond better to the human resources, economic and development needs of the country (*Government Gazette*, 1997).

The vision of the University appears to be in line with the vision of the Higher Education Act. The institution aims at being a leader amongst institutions of technology whose management, students, staff, and alumni are committed to the advancement and application of knowledge through teaching and research. By engaging in research, community service and development, the University envisages the creation of a more prosperous and self-sufficient society for South Africa in particular and for other Southern African countries in general.

The founding spirit of Mangosuthu University of Technology was vocational education and training for disadvantaged students in engineering, natural and management sciences. While remaining committed to that spirit, Mangosuthu University of Technology now pursues the ideal of providing equal opportunities to all students. It also focuses on the application and creation of meaningful new ideas, methods and opportunities.

According to MacFarlane (2004:17), "the past decade or so did indeed see an unprecedented intensity of debate, contestation and policy development as the country struggled to transform a society and an education system, disfigured and crippled by apartheid." Certainly, higher education institutions are now in the thick of implementing transformation – the most visible example being the mergers of tertiary institutions. The first set locked into place legally on 1 January 2004, and the second batch of mergers took effect on 1 January 2005. Implementation should not exclude an ongoing debate about the future, beginning with the very definition of 'higher education'. Other fierce contests have recently erupted, especially over institutional autonomy, academic freedom, tertiary leadership and student fees.

A major challenge for Mangosuthu University of Technology is how to galvanise the core academic culture of the University to realign to in order to meet the challenges that lie ahead. The main stakeholders at Mangosuthu University of Technology - the students, the parents, the staff members, the community members, the government and the world of work - play a crucial role in the planning process. The views of all the stakeholders are therefore important in ensuring the success of implementation. Sewart (1993:46) states that management theory looked to the analogy of the machine; in the second half of the twentieth century it looked to the analogy of the organism or the brain. This is the systems approach to organisation and management which defines the organisation as interrelated sub-systems.

These sub-systems are cells or organs of the body and might be complex in themselves. For example, where the classical and scientific management theory defines closed systems which exist in themselves as part of the perfect design, these new theories define open systems in which there is continuous exchange with the environment in terms of input, process, output and feedback.

#### **2.4.11.1 How the planning process can contribute to building relations**

Miller (2004:5) asserts that people think about the future all the time. This starts in the morning when they wake up and begin planning the day ahead. Most of these reflections are short-term, a few hours, days or months (Bryson, 1995:38). Such conversations naturally mix together what people hope for with a wide range of expectations – from the probable to the improbable. Degrees of probability are handled more carefully by professional forecasters trying to predict tomorrow's weather or the new year's economic growth. Professionals tend to focus on getting to the highest probable prediction that available data and models can provide. They steer away from considering the broader, less

predictive question of what might be possible as well as more normative question of what is desirable. This could be the reason why Wack (1995:15) states that “mental models become a dangerously mixed bag; rich detail and understanding can co-exist with dubious mixed assumptions and selective inattention to alternative interpretations of evidence, and projections that are pretence”.

The search for greater predictive accuracy involves certain trade-offs. On the one hand, there is a risk of adopting forecasting methods and models that depend too heavily on what happened in the past. Yesterday's parameters may do a good job at tracking events, but experience shows that this approach consistently misses major inflection points and transformative changes. The following concerns raised by Van der Heijden et al (2002:11) are aimed at addressing those issues:

- The models are seldom exposed and subjected to scrutiny. While this may not be a problem in times of stability, as there may be a match between the mental models of the decision-makers and the unfolding reality, in times of rapid change the mental models will break down as complexity is factored in.
- Biases ensure that the models are enduring. Individuals and organisations will retain their established theories and assumptions about their customers, markets and competition. In times of change this can condemn the organisation to obsolescence.
- There may be excessive integration of the models leading to group-think. Individuals forming part of a cohesive group tend to suppress any ideas that do not accord with the ideas favoured by the group or by powerful and influential members in the group. As such, critical ideas are inhibited and only ideas and courses of action favoured by the group are examined.
- Alternatively, there may be a complete fragmentation of the mental models. In this situation, there is little or no sharing of ideas and the organisation cannot function or act as a cohesive team. There are so

many factions that it becomes impossible to start a coherent strategic conversation, and paralysis takes over.

- The models include expectations of what will happen in a given situation, the sequence in which things will happen, possible alternative courses of action, and the information required to decide. Because of these assumptions, the models develop within a limited and rigid information domain. The effects of such framing biases makes it difficult to introduce and integrate new information and different perspectives into the information set.

According to Van der Heijden et al (2002:13), an effective strategic conversation would therefore need to make sure that all mental models are made explicit; a balance between commonality and variety of models is established; and a wide range of quantitative and qualitative information is introduced into the conversation.

Scenarios or stories about distinct futures have the potential to overcome some of the pitfalls of predictive approaches. What scenarios lose in terms of accuracy can be made up for by a greater openness to initially unlikely but nevertheless possible outcomes. Libury and Sunter (2001:27) refer to them as multiple pathways into a future that is unknown.

It is important at this stage to stress the importance of thinking of institutions of higher learning as systems comprising of several divisions which include: academics, student affairs or student services, the administration and the management. While some educational professionals acknowledge these structured silos, today's students see a different configuration. Students experience higher education ultimately as multifaceted and inclusive of academics and campus services. Academic affairs top the priority list of higher education. However, campus services, the melding together of student affairs,

support services and even some academic services, are critical components of the educational process.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the design and procedure of the study. The research approach adopted by the researcher was qualitative in nature and was based on a case study, which was Mangosuthu University of Technology. Creswell (1994:1-3) describes a qualitative study as “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting.” Yin (1993:41) describes a case study as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. In order to develop an adequate description of the organisation in question, the following characteristics were embedded in the study:

- ❖ Both primary and secondary data were used.
- ❖ The data was empirical and contextual.
- ❖ Both exploratory and descriptive questions were asked in a natural setting, resulting in low control and structure for data acquisition.
- ❖ It was accepted that reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by the participants in the research, and the writer interacted extensively with both the participants and the organisational system in building the picture (Creswell, 1994:1-3).

In order to counter some potential weaknesses of theory-building from the case study, the findings were arrived at after being tested by means of a variety of data analysis. According to Creswell (2003:55), the thinking behind a case study is that sometimes a full picture of the actual interactions of variables or events can be obtained only by looking carefully at a practical, real-life instance. Mangosuthu University of Technology, being one of the tertiary institutions in South Africa, provided an ideal environment that could be seen as a microcosm of a broader higher education environment despite the fact that there are environmental differences that exist between different institutions. Being an employee of the institutions provided the researcher with a close-up of the actual interactions of the variables and made it possible for the researcher to use observations as one of the main sources of data in the study.

The following were the research methods that were applied in this project; that is, the analysis of documentation, observations and focus group, together with the application of questionnaires.

### **3.2 Design of the research framework**

The study looked at the management of relationships in a tertiary institution and the focus was on examining the application of a systems approach in organisational communication.

This project adopted a case-study approach. Such an approach provided an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited range. Evidence was collected systematically, and the relationships between variables were studied. Remenyi et al (1998:172), assert that a case study could be used to develop a framework for the collection of data, and, finally, may be used as a research tactic. These two applications of a case study formed the foundation of the research.

Though the methods of data collection were mainly literature review, observations and a focus group, it should be noted that various methods of data collection were included. This eventually led to the application of a multi-method approach, which is known as triangulation. The Open University course E811 describes it as “cross-checking the existence of certain phenomena and the veracity of individual accounts, by gathering data from a number of informants and a number of sources and subsequently comparing as contrasting one account with another in order to produce a full and balanced a study as possible.” (OU course E811 Study Guide 1988: 54) In order to strengthen data collection, the focus group was formed by students and staff members at Mangosuthu University of Technology.

The attempt to employ the method of triangulation aimed at enhancing the ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’ of the study, since it gathered evidence from different points of view. The aim was to compensate for the deficiencies of different instruments. Bell (1993:63) refers to reliability as “the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions or all occasions” and validity “tells whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe”. Details about the administering of research instruments, which helped to enhance the reliability and validity of the study, were described.

### **3.3 Description of components in the research framework**

After introducing the framework of the research in terms of general ideas, the study was explained in greater detail by means of an illustration of how the components of the research framework were selected and arranged, and how they contributed to providing answers to the investigated issues. The components were mainly divided into two groups: that is the instruments used, and the subjects involved in the programme.



### **3.4 Choice of instruments**

This section describes the major instruments that were employed in the research, accompanied by the evidence that was collected with the instruments and how these could answer the key questions and sub-questions mentioned in the introductory chapter. It also illustrates what measures were employed in order to increase the reliability and validity of the instruments when the research was carried out.

#### **3.4.1 Sampling**

A focus group enabled the researcher to access a small sample from which data was received. The composition of the sample was determined by using proportional stratified sampling. That meant different strata, each different and each a proportionate ratio in terms of numbers were selected to take part in the focus group. Each stratum was represented by respondents who came from different stakeholder groups within Mangosuthu University of Technology. These included the students, the management of the University, and the academics.

The main objective was to elicit the opinions of the respondents in matters relating to the following aspects: facts, attitudes, perceptions, knowledge and behaviour. Those aspects were broadly related to the expression of student life on campus; the SRC mode of operation; whether the staff interaction with students does recognise all the dynamics of student life and the interrelations between various components of the system, which are the management, the SRC, National constitution, the National Department of Education, the National Policy on Higher Education, staff members and the University management.

### **3.4.2 Size of the sample**

Two factors influenced the decision about the size of the sample: the degree of the relationship between the sample population and the general population, and the variability of the population.

The focus group was formed by eleven participants and who comprised of six students, two support staff members, two academics, and one staff member who represented the management of the institution. The researcher, however, understood that the general assumption was that the larger the sample, the narrower the margin of error and the more precise the inferences made from the sample. The maximum sample size of the study was determined by practical considerations related to the study, which included the fact that the case study and the approach to the study were qualitative rather than quantitative. In such a study, a clearer picture of the problem studied was likely to emerge in a closer interaction with a small group of respondents who represented different interests at the institution. Moreover, the focus group was meant to play a complementary role to the other data collections methods. That meant that even if numerical values were attached to categories, their significance was going to be minimal.

### **3.5 Focus group**

The focus group, as has been indicated, had a complementary role in the data collection process. Eleven participants took part in the focus group in which unstructured interviews in the form of a discussion were conducted with student leaders, staff members and a representative of the management of the institution. Those stakeholders formed the focus group to whom questionnaires were also distributed. All the data collected informed the researcher about the

perceptions of key stakeholders involved at Mangosuthu University of Technology.

The group met in a committee room that had a built-in recording device, which assisted in providing a continuous recording of the discussion. The discussion, which took place over a period of one hour thirty minutes, was transcribed and analysed by the researcher. The interactions within the focus group took the form of both a discussion and a question and answer session. In order to avoid the possibility of influencing the discussions, the writer had employed the services of an independent interviewer who was briefed about the problem situation, the expectations and the purpose of the focus group. The person identified was a lecturer in the Department of Communication and was a *doctorate student*. Given the close working relationship that the researcher had with most participants, his role in the focus group was to introduce the whole session by outlining his expectations and emphasising the importance of expressing ideas or opinions freely.

The questionnaire was piloted, and its evaluation was guided by the attempt to find out whether the respondents understood the questions and how best to phrase the questions in order to ensure that they elicited relevant responses. There was also a possibility that participants in the focus group might be influenced by how they perceived the subject and how safe they felt about discussing in the presence of other participants. The issues of anonymity and confidentiality were therefore emphasised.

### **3.6 Observations**

According to Remenyi, D et al (1998:177), all evidence other than observation is essentially hearsay, and its reliability needs to be examined. Observation was thus one of the most valuable ways of collecting reliable evidence. By being at the case study site, the researcher had an opportunity to observe directly the

surroundings, as well as relevant interaction and behavioural and environmental conditions. Given that triangulation was used in the research, observations formed an important source of evidence.

The observations were both casual and field in nature. This was less challenging for the researcher, because he was involved in the situation as an employee of MUT. The real challenge, though, was to determine what the most important variables were and what specific features to observe. This was guided by the fact that the observations themselves were preliminary to more serious methods. Secondly, they were recorded in the form of notes as soon as possible. With regard to field observations, accurate record keeping was an important consideration. The field notes were updated regularly in writing because the accuracy of conclusions depended on the accuracy of the field notes.

### **3.7 Pilot stage**

Before the research stage, a pilot study was conducted to find out whether the questions in the questionnaire were understandable, sensible and precise enough. A group of three students and three staff members was requested to respond to the questions. The researcher paid particular attention to the techniques of tape recording and interviewing.

On the whole, the pilot research informed the writer on four aspects: the clarification of some concepts in the focus group, the number of questions that needed to be asked during the discussion, the sound quality of tape recording, and the impact of the researcher's presence. It was at this stage that the researcher decided to involve an independent facilitator for the focus group. The participants had appeared to be uncomfortable about discussing aspects of work that pertained particularly to the researcher.

### **3.8 Data analysis**

#### **3.8.1 Observations**

The analysis of the observations was primarily qualitative, which meant that both the data and the analysis were non-numerical. Some statistical analysis formed part of the final report but they played a relatively minor role. The data was in the form of prose summaries of what the researcher observed.

The data analysis consists of the researcher reading and re-reading the field notes, looking for valid generalisations about how the Mangosuthu University of Technology system works.

#### **3.8.2 Questionnaire**

The analysis of questionnaires was quantitative, therefore, the responses were coded. According to Herzog (1996:136), coding refers to the process of establishing objective response categories for open responses to a given survey item. Coding leads to a score for each item and each respondent. At the same breath, it should be noted that the emphasis was on identifying particular patterns of thoughts from a qualitative point of view.

#### **3.8.3 Focus group**

The focus group, which played a complementary role during data collection, was also analysed. The analysis was based on both the original record of the discussions as well as the transcript of the discussions.

### **3.8.4 Review of literature**

The study made it necessary for the writer to read extensively on what had been written on the subject at hand and to gather relevant data for a critical review. This served as a demonstration of some awareness of the current state of knowledge on the subject, its limitations, and how the research topic aimed to add to what was known. A deliberate attempt was made to provide an insightful evaluation of what was known and the way in which the study fitted into the broader context. Mouton (2001:30) adds that literature review can be seen as either a study on its own or as the first phase of an empirical study.

The emphasis of this study was on the empirical aspect of literature review. The review enabled the writer to decide on the other aspects of the methodology to be used and it also provided a context for the research. It also went on to lay a foundation for the research analysis. One of the main objectives of the literature review was to create space for ideas, theories and perceptions about the management of relationships within the context of organisational communication. The sources were books, journals, students, members of the academia, management staff and officials of the Department of Education.

This chapter has described the design and procedures of the research. It has also illustrated the researcher's choice of instruments and methods, and the way he conducted his research when collecting data from respondents.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Analysis and discussion of the results**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In the preceding chapter, the procedures and design of the research were discussed. The discussion pertained particularly to the components of the research, which were summarised into instruments used and the subjects selected in the research. An outline of the identification of the population or sample of the study was also presented. That was followed by the introduction of procedures to collect data.

In this chapter, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research data will be presented, accompanied by tables or graphic presentations. The first part of this chapter focuses on observations that were made by the writer over a period of six months. This is followed by the analysis of the questionnaire. Finally, the last part discusses the responses that were elicited from the focus group.

#### **4.2 The analysis of observations**

Observations were made based on the personal experiences of the researcher. He had been involved in student development activities for more than four years and this enabled him to record his experiences over a period of six months. Moreover, the researcher kept notes of the salient features of the relationships within the Institution which he deemed to be relevant to the study. Written communication within MUT provided valuable data and enabled the researcher to form an opinion about issues discussed in the study.

#### **4.2.1 Relationships between statutory bodies at the institution**

The Council is the highest governing body at MUT and this also applies to other Higher Education institutions in South Africa. The Academic Board is the highest decision-making body regarding academic matters. Besides the Academic Board, there is also the Institutional Forum which, according to the Statute of Mangosuthu University of Technology of July 1999, serves as an advisory subcommittee of Council and deals with issues relating to transformation. The Institutional Forum deliberates and subsequently advises Council on issues relating to national policy for institutions, the negotiation of the agenda for institutional transformation, and the mediation of conflicts among campus stakeholders.

The layer of management that is responsible for day-to-day management and administration of the University is the Executive Management. This takes place under the control and supervision of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor. The relationship between the Executive Management of the institution and the Council plays a crucial role in ensuring that the institution becomes successful. From 2003 to 2007 there has existed a good working relationship between the executive management of the Institution and the Council. Such a relationship has contributed to the stability that has been associated with the institution during the indicated five years. The indication has been that both the Council and the Executive Management of the institution understand their respective roles in relation to the governance of MUT.

According to Section 32 of the Higher Education Act (1997), the Student Representative Council is the highest decision-making body of students. It is represented in all the statutory committees at MUT. It is almost impossible to direct an institution to its set goals without the co-operation of this structure. The working relationship between this structure and the Executive Management of



the institution has been commendable. This is probably a result of an open dialogue that exists between the two structures. The SRC participates fully in the decisions that are made in the institution. This, in turn, enables the Executive Management to keep the Council informed about developments regarding student governance at the institution.

#### **4.2.2 Programmes aimed at facilitating better working relations between the executive management and the student representative council**

The functioning of the SRC begins when its members are inaugurated at the beginning of their term. The inaugural SRC luncheon has become a very important function which has afforded the Vice-Chancellor, as well as the other members of the management, an opportunity to meet the new SRC members. Furthermore, the luncheon has become an effective platform for outlining expectations. It also helps in harmonising relations between the incoming Student Representative Council and the other stakeholders at MUT. During the first week or two of the term of office of a new SRC, there is usually disharmony between members of the structure. This is brought about by misunderstandings about the roles that the new SRC members are supposed to play.

In a situation like this, it is difficult even to refer to the SRC as a team. In some cases, these differences, if not properly managed, have the potential to degenerate into open conflict, which may disrupt the normal functioning of the institution. The induction workshop which follows the inauguration of the SRC, assists in enabling the student representatives to work together by generating effective team-work. Similar situations have surfaced in previous years, and the induction workshops help to steer the SRC in the right direction. The induction workshop is, throughout the year, followed by the following workshops that aim at empowering student structures:

- ❖ capacity-building workshop for the house committees;

- ❖ capacity-building workshop for executive committee members of structures;
- ❖ capacity-building workshop for class representatives; and
- ❖ team-building workshop for the Sports Union.

### ***4.2.3 The student representative council elections***

The lack of student civic engagement could be detrimental to the future of the budding South African democracy. There is an obvious decline in political participation and interest among young people, which doesn't bode well for an attempt to produce South Africans with democratic aspirations. For example at the Durban University of Technology, the 2007 SRC elections could barely attract 20% of student voters. Mangosuthu University of Technology, being an extension of the South African society, has a responsibility to allow students to experience democracy at first hand. The SRC elections provide an ideal opportunity to instil ideas such as personal freedom and tolerance of divergent views.

The 2004 SRC elections were precedent-setting in the sense that they attracted a record number of voters. More than 4000 students voted out of a total number of 9879 students. Furthermore, it was the first time in the history of the institution that such an election produced four female SRC members out of twelve, which has not yet tallied well with the fact that the majority of the institution's students are females. According to the 2007 registration records, 55% of the MUT student population is made up of females. Debates about gender imbalances that were facilitated by certain lecturers in their respective lecture halls had an impact on this development, and was one indication that academic life should not be separated from the social life of a students. Furthermore, any debate about the suitability of candidates should be applauded, because they encourage staff members to develop an interest in student life.

#### **4.2.4 SRC elections and the stability of institutions**

There is a groundswell of opinion that academic performance should be used as one of the criteria for the screening of candidates for student elections. The University has, in the past, had to contend with 'bridging-course' students as well as those who were not interested in their studies, but who had taken an interest in participating in elections. This tended to devalue SRC elections and makes a mockery of the institution's *raison d'être*, which is the provision of education. The disruptions in tertiary institutions tend to stem from the fact that some of the student leaders perform poorly at academic level. They therefore lose faith in a stable academic environment and use their influence to disrupt academic activities. For example, in the years preceding 2003, SRC members had no restrictions in terms of the number of years that they could serve in the SRC office. This allowed a few members who had poor academic records to remain in the SRC for years on end.

In 2004, this matter was deliberated at student parliament level – a structure where all student formations discuss policy issues - and there was an agreement that the following criteria needed to be introduced as part of a policy that should govern the facilitation of elections:

- ❖ A candidate should have been a student at MUT for at least 12 months. This would ensure that he/she is familiar with the internal environment.
- ❖ Every candidate should have passed at least 50% of his or her registered courses in the previous year. The student parliament felt that having such a condition was not an ideal situation, but was better than having no such condition.
- ❖ Pre-tech or Foundation students should not take part in elections. They had to prove themselves in terms of academic performance first.

- ❖ The maximum term of office for SRC members should be two years, provided they were re-elected.

#### **4.2.5 The high failure rate at the University and the bearing it has on its development**

It is difficult to discuss the high failure rate at Mangosuthu University of Technology without referring to the broader environment that interacts consistently the institution. In the late 1990's the central government exerted lot of pressure on tertiary institutions to expand in order to admit an increasing number of school leavers. The 'massification' of higher education targeted the disadvantaged communities particularly. Moreover, the tertiary institutions had to make an effort to overcome the distortions and inequalities that had been brought about by the apartheid era. (See Appendix B)

##### **4.2.5.1 Government funding**

In 2005, the Department of Education allocated over R300 million to the Durban University of Technology and recently added about R150 million as part of its efforts to facilitate the restructuring of DUT. MUT was allowed to take over the former University of Zululand campus, but it has not received any financial assistance from the government. Owing to enrolment capping, there were close to 3000 students who were not subsidised by the government. This brings with it the attendant challenges of providing academic support, more residences and unpaid fees. Owing to uneven funding by the government, the resources of the institution are stretched almost to breaking point. The existing resources, therefore, can hardly match the total number of students that are enrolled at the institution.

The assistance that the institution extends to students who need funding is one aspect that that has contributed to a stable academic environment. In the year

2007, a figure of R39 million was spent on providing assistance to needy students. Other funding programmes that are made available by the institution include: the Dean's Commendation, the Named Scholarship Programme, the Matric Symbols Awards and the Zenzele Endowment Fund.

#### **4.2.5.2 The schooling system**

The South African schooling system draws large numbers of pupils into a system that is fundamentally dysfunctional. The government has failed to provide the promised free education, and some schools do not receive textbooks and other supporting material. The products of this system apply to MUT at the beginning of each year with the intention of being admitted to the institution despite of their less than credible grades. There is at present an outcry over condoned passes in high schools. It is a fact that an overwhelming majority of Mangosuthu University of Technology students come from a poorly resourced and managed high school system which militates against the preparedness of these students for higher education. In this regard, the institution has responded by introducing the Language Centre, which aims at supporting students towards achieving their academic success.

#### **4.2.5.3 Class sizes**

The increasing number of students is not matched by the number of staff members that are employed at the institution. The 2007 student population stands at 9858, which is a dramatic increase from the 2000 enrolment of 6121. The average student/teacher ratio is 54 to 1. Such large class sizes tend to limit the level of interaction between lecturers and students. The students, therefore, do not derive maximum benefit from attending classes.

#### **4.2.5.4 Social pressure**

The average socio-economic background of a MUT student is one of disadvantage. Despite of this, the life of most students, before joining the University, is more or less structured in accordance with the particular norms of a black society; for example, despite many flaws in our society, the life of a high school student is structured in accordance with the wishes of his or her parents. The environment that they encounter when they enter University comes as a shock to some of them. They develop a false sense of borderless freedom, which contributes a lot to the development of various social ills such as alcoholism, pregnancy and lack of a set of priorities. Immediate imperative drives tend to take precedence over education; for instance, there are students who hardly miss a party thrown in the Durban area, but fail to attend classes regularly.

#### **4.2.6 The role that has been played by the student development unit**

The Student Development Unit seeks to contribute to the preparedness of students for the world of work, as well as for life in general. The approach of the unit is multifaceted, but the main thrust of our programmes is leadership development. In a nutshell, the unit works closely with student leaders from various student formations with a view to developing their potential. This is based on the assumption that a ripple effect will take place and benefit the rest of the student population. The period between 2003 and 2007 was one of the most stable at the University. One of the major contributors was the Student Representative Council (SRC). It succeeded in building a strong relationship between student formations and different management structures of the University.

Virtually no aspect of governance fails to affect students or alumni, either directly or indirectly. Student development personnel, by virtue of the environment that

they are exposed to, have a greater appreciation for both intended and unintended consequences of actions and decisions. They, therefore, always play a pivotal role in keeping discussions based on institutional imperatives. The student development services serves as barometer of the social climate of any institution. It is through the different units within student services that one can detect what happens in the lives of students.

#### ***4.2.7 Student residences as a springboard for transformation at the institution***

The year 2004 marked the beginning of fascinating changes within campus residences. The introduction of the idea of House Committees and Residence Development Officers by the Student Development Unit took root this year. The House Committees and Residence Officers were to play a crucial role in regulating life within the residences. Their role was made even more important by the fact that they would comprise students who were familiar with the conditions in the student residences. The future of a loosely regulated environment, as it once existed in the residences, had to be addressed.

It should be noted that in 2004 the number of student at MUT were 6121. The number of beds available at the institution were 1045. The increase of student enrolment which reached 9879 in 2007 led to overcrowding in student residences. This compelled the institution to enter into lease agreements with owners of private buildings such as Astra Hotel, Lonsdale Hotel and Drummond House. The development contributed a great deal lot towards eliminating overcrowding in residences, and the house committees had an important role to play in forming strong linkages with the officials of the institution regarding the management of residences.

#### **4.2.7.1 Objectives of house committees**

- To promote a culture of tolerance and equality amongst residence students.
- To encourage and promote academic, leadership, social, sporting and cultural activities in residences.
- To create a link between residence students and the residence management.
- To create and maintain a conducive learning environment in residences.

#### **4.2.7.2 Objectives of Residence Development Officers**

- To co-ordinate all residence students' activities and programmes of individual House Committees.
- To liaise with various structures that promote student development.
- To foster, promote and protect residence traditions and the good name of the residences.
- To promote and encourage a culture of respect and discipline amongst residence students.
- To create a link between students and their immediate community.
- To ensure that students were being housed in an area/location conducive to healthy living and learning.
- To provide a link between residence students and various management structures of Mangosuthu University of Technology.

It should also be noted that the chairpersons of the various committees formed a central forum which worked closely with residence officials. That on its own facilitated a good working relationship among different stakeholders.



### **4.3 Analysis of the questionnaire**

The questionnaire was completed by a group of eleven respondents who also formed part of the focus group. This, obviously, is not a quantitative sample, but it, however, assisted in providing supporting data in relation to the analysis of the focus group. For the sake of the analysis, the respondents were divided into staff members and students. Staff members represented different stakeholders at the institution; for instance, student support services, academics and the management.

For the first four sections, because the rating was numerically based, the assessment of the responses was measured against what would be viewed as an indication of the most positive response compared with what would have been the most negative response. The quantitative aspects of the questionnaire were summarised graphically, and the aim was to elicit particular quantifiable data in order to support the views that followed. The unstructured section is also analysed based on the responses provided. The questionnaire was divided into personal details, structured as well as unstructured questions. (See Appendix C)

**Section 1. Staff members (5)**

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE INSTITUTION					
Question	NEGATIVE		NEUTRAL		POSITIVE
	Not at all	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent
Positive about the institution	0	0	1	1	3
Opinions taken seriously	1	0	2	2	0
Support services improved	0	1	0	4	0
Participation in decision making	2	1	0	2	0
Good relationships	0	0	2	1	2
Environment conducive to learning	0	1		3	1

**Section 1. Students (6)**

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE INSTITUTION					
Question	NEGATIVE		NEUTRAL		POSITIVE
	Not at all	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent
Positive about the institution	0	2	1	1	2
Opinions taken seriously	2	2	1	1	0
Support services improved	0	2	1	2	1
Participation in decision making	1	4	1	0	0
Good relationships	0	3	2	1	0
Environment conducive to learning	0	2	1	2	1

An overall positive attitude towards the institution is displayed by the staff members, but there is a strong belief that students do not participate adequately in decision-making processes. This might be an indication that students are not satisfied with the manner in which their views are being communicated to the officials and the management of the institution. Furthermore, there is a perception that students' opinions are not taken seriously by officials in the institution. Interestingly, staff members seem to perceive the relationship between staff and student leadership to be good.

Student services are viewed by the respondents as having improved. This could be an acknowledgement of the changes that have taken place at the institution and that were aimed at adding value to student life.

## Section 2. Staff members

COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK					
Question	Not at all	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent
Clarity about expectations	1	0	3	1	0
Joint vision of the future	0	3	1	1	0
Students and staff members kept informed	0	1	2	2	0
People act on others' suggestions	1	0	4	0	0
Communication upward and downward	0	1	2	1	1

## Section 2. Students

COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK					
Question	Not at all	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent
Clarity about expectations	0	0	2	1	3
Joint vision of the future		3	1	1	1
Students and staff members kept informed	1	4	0	0	1
People act on others' suggestions	2	1	2	1	0
Communication upward and downward	1	2	1	1	1

The staff members seemed to doubt that communication was effective in the institution. They also did not seem to think that a joint vision of the institution's future was shared by staff members and students. The staff members also do not seem to believe that people actively seek each others' suggestions.

Students are more positive with regard to clarity about expectations, sharing of joint vision and two-way communication. Both groups do not seem to think people are kept informed adequately about what is happening at the institution.

### Section 3. Staff members

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE					
Question	NEGATIVE		NEUTRAL		POSITIVE
	Not at all	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent
Structure leads to effectiveness	0	0	2	3	0
Staff members part of a team	0	1	1	3	0
Change critical to development	0	0	4	1	0
Systems and procedures adequate	0	1	3	1	0
Opportunities for career development	0	0	2	1	2

The staff members seemed to accept that the way the institution is structured enhances its effectiveness and that there are opportunities for career development at the institution. Systems and procedures are perceived to be adequate. The non-committal response to the third question is difficult to understand. This could mean that they were not sure about the changes to which the question was referring. On the other hand, the response could be a reflection of how apprehensive the staff members become whenever the issue of change is raised. There does not seem to be enough of a conviction on the part of staff members that they are part of a team, and this differs from the fact that they see career development opportunities at the institution.

#### Section 4. Staff members

EFFECTIENESS OF LEADERSHIP					
Question	POSITIVE		NEUTRAL	NEGATIVE	
	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Effective information system	0	0	4	1	0
Contribution to shared goal	0	1	1	3	0
Departments complement one another	0	2	2	1	0
Commitment to continuous learning	0	0	1	1	3
Team work flows	0	0	3	1	1
Access to mentors	0	0	2	3	
Employees provided with resources	0	0	3	1	1

Staff members do not seem to think that departments complement one another but strongly believe that the institution is dedicated to continuous learning. Moreover, staff members seem not to be convinced that team-work does flow down the institution. This confirms the earlier responses in Section 3 that staff members do not consider themselves to be part of a team.

#### **4.4 Analysis of the focus group**

The focus group was formed by eleven participants who represented different stakeholders at the University. Six were students who were active in student structures. Two of them were first-year students and four were senior students. The staff members were made up of two support staff members, two academics and one staff member who represented the management of the institution. The facilitator was an independent person who was not directly involved in the study. Given that the researcher had a close working relationship with mainly the students and the support staff members, his role in the focus group was simply to introduce the whole session and outline expectations. The discussion revolved around the questions that were contained in the questionnaire.

Regarding the question as to whether the students had a positive attitude towards the institution, one suggestion was that the incremental increase in the number of students that joined the University was an indication of a positive attitude towards the institution. However, the other view expressed was that there were students who perceived the institution to be located in a problem-ridden area, as far as reported criminal activities were concerned. Some students did not have a positive attitude towards the institution because, as one participant put it, "They don't feel ukuthi lana eMangosuthu they are being heard as ama-students...they don't feel that they are part of the institution ungathi nje bazele for academic purposes kuphela and then they leave." In other words, they did not feel accommodated at the institution, and that created the impression that they were there just to engage in academic activities.

*Question : Do students feel that their opinions are taken seriously by the officials of the institution?*

According to the respondents, the students expressed their opinions through student structures such as the SRC, the Student Parliament, the Student Affairs Department, and class representatives. One participant explained that he thought that their opinions were taken seriously. If they were not, the institution would have strikes every year. At Mangosuthu University of Technology there had not been a major strike from 2003 to 2007, which indicated that the SRC was playing a mediating role between students and staff members. Another participant pointed out that the students were represented in all decision-making structures of the institution. For example, when there were decisions to be made about fee increment they were represented, and that also applies to interviews where staff appointments are made. There was a possibility that some students might not be aware of certain structures that they had to approach in order to be assisted. For example, if there was a particular concern that students had about their lectures, there were class representatives who reported to faculty representatives, who in turn reported to the Student Representative Council.

A counter-argument was that one should not conclude that the students were well represented in different structures if those student representatives did not seek a mandate from the students whom they purported to represent. With regard to some decisions that were made, it seemed obvious that the SRC simply represented itself instead of representing the students. Because of this fact, an impression might be created that the relationship between the management and students was good when it was not. This has a potential of creating conflict within the institution.

The students who responded expressed unhappiness with the fact that the visitors to their residences were at times denied access because they did not carry identity documents. The students also faced restrictions regarding where



they should go and where they should not go. Their feeling was that the introduced access guidelines were not negotiated with the students first but were simply imposed on them. Another student countered that there were some good developments that were not negotiated with students, but which contributed much to the wellbeing of the students; for example, the introduction of peer helpers, the appointment of a new cleaning company, and the improvement of the Resource Centre.

One could also identify particular improvements in the performances of sports clubs. For example, the Aerobics Club and the Dance Club have won accolades at national level. Regarding financial support, the respondents agreed that there were very few institutions that allowed their students to register despite owing fees. They also alluded to a bursary that was referred to as a Dean's Commendation. That financial support was made available to those students who had scored an overall percentage of 75% in their respective programmes. This indicated the level of support that the institution was ready to provide to needy students.

With regard to a question about the joint vision of the future of the institution, participants agreed that there were cases where one received the impression that particular staff members *just wanted to receive their salaries at the end of the month*. There were participants who felt that there were no signs of a collective vision of the future of the institution. One participant referred to a staff member who said he wanted to work at the institution for two years in order to gain experience and then move on to greener pastures. He went on to suggest that there should be an ongoing programme where different departments or staff members were compelled to evaluate themselves at certain intervals.

*Question: Are students and staff members are kept informed about what is happening in the institution?*

Various communication channels that are available at the institution, including e-mails, notice boards and meetings. A majority of students did not have access to the e-mail facility because of to few computer rooms and tended to rely on notice boards or meetings convened by the SRC. However, there were cases where certain departments did not seem to know what the other departments were doing. For example, some students were sent from the Registrar's office to the heads of departments, and consequently it took a long time to find relevant information or to have applications approved on time.

A respondent who was a former SRC member referred to a period in 2004 when students gave the SRC a mandate to resist the attempt by the institution to eliminate squatting on campus. Intensive consultation took place between the management of the students and the management of the university with regard to the suggestion that some students had to be transferred to external residences. The other issue was that they had to pay for transport from those external residences to the main campus. This was a difficult period for the institution, largely because of the resistance from students that the institution encountered, and there were also certain staff members who were opposed to the decision.

This chapter has presented both qualitative and quantitative data for analysis. The focus areas were observations, the questionnaire and the focus group. It leads to the last chapter, which outlines findings and conclusions.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter leads to the conclusive section of the whole study, which is an extension of Chapter Four in which the results of the research carried out are presented. Firstly, the findings of the study will be reviewed, and this will be followed by the discussion of the limitations of the research, which will account for the validity and reliability of the study.

#### **5.1 Summary of the findings**

##### **5.1.1 A systems approach**

A systems approach has a significant role to play in assisting an organisation to manage relations. This approach recognises the existence of inter-relationships between different parts of an organisation like Mangosuthu University of Technology. These inter-relationships are dependent on communication, which relates the parts of an organisation in order to form a whole. The interaction between the organisation and its environment is one aspect that requires the organisation to keep adapting in order to ensure that it survives and remains effective. Adaptability is, to a larger extent, dependent on the ability of the organisation to learn, and organisational learning is an ongoing process, which becomes more effective when it is done collectively.

When dealing with the issue of organisational development, one needs to employ various strategies that include scenario-planning, strategic planning, leadership development, team-building and employee performance development. It therefore becomes imperative for a leader to understand the overall system in an organisation, which includes its major functions, departments, processes, teams

and individual employees. This indicates quite clearly that having a systems view plays an important role in achieving effective organisational development.

### **5.1.2 The role of information and communication technology**

The exponential growth in student population at Mangosuthu University of Technology indicates that it has to re-consider its approach to delivery of educational programmes. The growth in number has outpaced growth in the physical development of the institution. The new developments in the area of Information and Communication Technology provide many options and choices in the delivery of programmes. Technology-facilitated learning can assist institutions in delivering programmes that can be accessed at any place. Some students might not need to travel to a physical structure called a lecture hall in order to access a particular learning programme, as long as they have access to the internet.

Information and communication technology has opened opportunities for tertiary institutions to take advantage of the interdependence of countries which has been brought about by globalisation. It also assists in improving both the quality and quantity of educational content.

### **5.1.3 Working relationships**

A majority of staff members sounded more positive about working relationships than did students, and the following issues were raised:

- Insufficient feedback on tasks undertaken by staff members and students might be a result of the perception that communication is not optimally effective. If staff members are ineffective in communicating their plans to students, the students will not be able to understand their intentions. In an environment where there is a perception that communication is not as

effective as it is supposed to be, there is the likelihood that particular stakeholders might not fully understand all developments that unfold within the institution; for example, its progress from the time when it had only 15 students in 1979 to the more than 9000 students that it had in 2007.

- The institution is mainly populated by students who come from disadvantaged communities. The approximately 5000 applications for financial assistance that the Financial Aid Office receives at the beginning of each year bear testimony to this fact. There is, however, a concern that some staff members do not know or do not care enough about student backgrounds and that there is therefore lack of understanding of the realities surrounding the students.
- The culture of debate at the institution has to be encouraged or strengthened. Given that this is a tertiary institution, it is important to ensure that students are made aware of the idea of academic freedom, which has within it the right to express one's opinion without fear. The students should understand that there is a distinction between participation in decision-making and mere co-operation. At the moment, it seems as if active participation is viewed negatively, because it has a potential to challenge the established ideas.

## **5.2 Limitations of the research**

This section provides a brief outline of the research. The aim is to determine the extent to which the aims of the study have been fulfilled. In this study, the limitations emanated mainly from the instruments that were used and the sample of the respondents.

### **5.2.1 The instruments that were used**

It should be noted that 'reliability' and 'validity' seem to be elusive concepts in the context of observations, though they were implicit in the writers desire to establish facts. The focus was on gathering valid facts even though there appeared to be certain human factors that had a bearing on the findings. For example, the writer is an employee at Mangosuthu University of Technology and this on its own has a possibility of tempering his impartiality.

The writer also notes that although the focus group tended to provide more qualitative evidence compared with the questionnaires, it should be treated with caution. This is in view of the fact that in such a face-to-face set-up the respondents might not provide answers that really indicate how they feel about a particular situation. Given the presence of other students and staff members during the discussions, the respondents might end up 'going with the flow' instead of expressing their own independent views.

The questionnaire was filled in on the day of the focus group. Owing to the fact that the respondents filled in the questionnaire in the presence of other respondents, it is possible that this might have interfered with their objectivity.

### **5.2.2 The sample of respondents that formed the focus group**

The sample of staff members and students who filled in the questionnaire numbered only eleven, which cannot be viewed as a representative number. The writer would have liked to interact with representatives from the National Department of Education as participants in the focus group. Unfortunately, he was compelled by circumstances beyond his control to accept their absence and to proceed with the focus group.

### 5.3 Conclusion

The study considered a systems approach to managing relationships in a tertiary institution. The purpose of the study was to explore the dynamics of the interactions between the top management, the Student Representative Council, the students and the staff members at Mangosuthu University of Technology from the Student Development Unit point of view. The study afforded the writer the opportunity to reflect on relationships at MUT which could contribute to the development of a communication system that could assist in the management of relationships at Mangosuthu University of Technology.

The culture of debate at the institution is at an unacceptably low level. It needs to be developed. Given that this is a tertiary institution, it is important to ensure that students are made aware of the idea of academic freedom, which has within it the right to express one's views without fear. The students should understand that there is a distinction between participation in decision-making and mere co-operation. At the moment, it seems as if active participation is viewed negatively, for it has the potential of challenging the established ideas. This leads to simmering tensions that have a potential of manifesting themselves in destructive action, as the violent protest action that took place in March 2008 indicated. The strike action was symptomatic of an environment where feedback from students was not taken seriously. The students therefore resorted to a violent strike action in order to put certain issues on the agenda.

Meetings between the institution's staff and students should be broadened in order to involve a larger section of the student population. This should happen through a more conscious involvement of different student structures, as well as the general student population, through suggestion boxes, surveys and Internet discussion forums. In the case of staff members, they want to be made to feel that they are valued by the organisation. There should, therefore, be a concerted effort to provide them with positive feedback, particularly when they have made a

contribution that adds value to the institution. Platforms should also be created where students can express their views about developments within the institution without feeling intimidated. There should also be an understanding that students tend to be energetic and express themselves in ways that might not endear themselves to the management of the institution. Despite their exuberance, they still expect the Institution to provide a stable environment, which is conducive to learning. Therefore, MUT should be seen to be accommodating to the interests of students.

The compartmentalisation of the institution into silos is inimical to the realisation of inter-relationships between the different components of the MUT as a system. There are departments that do not recognise the fact that their success is dependent on the success of other departments. An adoption of a systems approach by the institution would play a significant role in tackling and ameliorating this situation.

In order to entrench this system, MUT needs to take deliberate steps towards using Information and Communication Technology to create a knowledge-based institution where there is flexible learning, available anywhere, any time and on any topic. The existing intranet could be made more interactive by, for instance, creating chat-rooms where issues of current interest are discussed. These chat-rooms provide a platform for ordinary students to provide feedback about any development within the Institution. Furthermore, the Institution should begin to use the short messaging system (sms) to communicate with its students throughout the year.



The following are the reasons why the short messaging system should be employed:

- It may be used to convene student meetings; for example, students who reside in different student hostels could be easily accessed.
- It may be an ideal medium for communicating short announcements; for example, the bookshop opens at 09h00 on Wednesdays.
- It may also be used to send reminders about certain University procedures; for example, the registration timetable.
- Residence officials may use it to issue instructions; for example, that all Astra residence students should return their keys immediately.
- Information about examination timetables and results could reach students faster.

The possibilities are simply endless and, given that the equipment that is required for this purpose is relatively cheap, it is strongly recommended that the MUT should consider using this method to communicate with students throughout the year.

Communication networks do exist at Mangosuthu University of Technology and they offer an ideal opportunity to receive feedback about how the University operates or should operate. Creating opportunities for feedback would indicate a desire by management to access the knowledge that staff members and students have about the institution. It also gives management an idea of how they feel about a direction that the Institution takes. The significant factor that has a bearing on a successful communication programme is whether the management of the University is committed to the notion that communication with staff members and students is essential to the achievements of the organisation's goals. If the management of the University is committed to communication through words and actions, that will trickle down to the rest of the organisation. The application of the five different kinds of networks: the y, the circle, the wheel

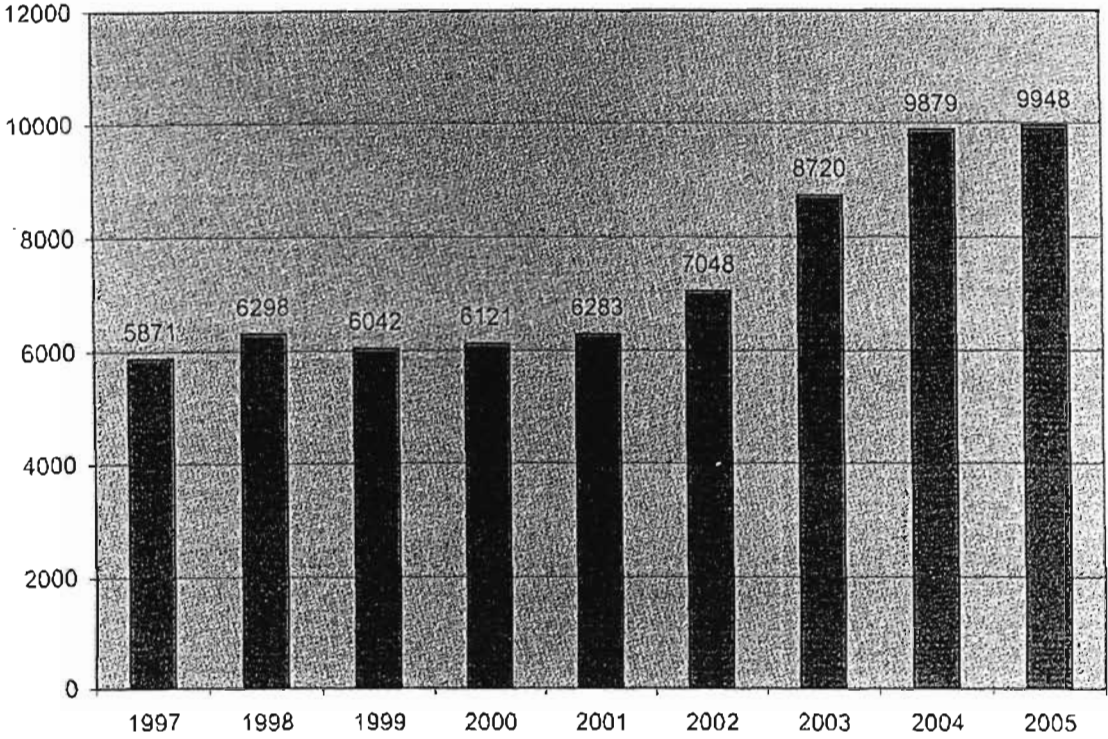
and the all channels network, will assist the management of the institution to talk to staff members, to respond to questions or concerns and to convey the vision of the University.

# 2007 STUDENT ALLOWANCES FOR FOOD AND ACCOMMODATION

## APPENDIX A

INSTITUTION	FOOD ALLOWANCE		FOOD AND ACCOMMODATION ALLOWANCE		
	SELF CATERING RESIDENCE	STAYING AT HOME	FROM OUT OF TOWN STAYING OFF CAMPUS	FROM THE TOWN IN WHICH THE INSTITUTION IS LOCATED WHO CHOOSE NOT TO STAY AT HOME	
CAPE PENINSULA Univ of Tech (Belville)	R 3,752	R 4,346	R 8,056	R 4,346	R 4,346
CAPE PENINSULA Univ of Tech (Cape Town)	R 3,752	R 4,346	R 8,056	R 4,346	R 4,346
CAPE TOWN, Univ of	R 3,752	R 4,346	R 8,056	R 4,346	R 4,346
CENTRAL Univ of Tech	R 3,653	R 4,305	R 8,011	R 4,305	R 4,305
DURBAN Univ of Tech	R 3,717	R 4,920	R 8,079	R 4,920	R 4,920
FORT HARE, Univ of	R 3,689	R 4,872	R 7,971	R 4,872	R 4,872
FREE STATE, Univ of the	R 3,653	R 4,305	R 8,011	R 4,305	R 4,305
JOHANNESBURG, Univ of	R 3,818	R 4,606	R 8,128	R 4,606	R 4,606
KWAZULU NATAL, Univ of	R 3,717	R 4,920	R 8,079	R 4,920	R 4,920
LIMPOPO Univ (Medunsa)	R 4,057	R 5,449	R 8,430	R 5,449	R 5,449
LIMPOPO Univ (Turffloop)	R 3,774	R 4,460	R 8,070	R 4,460	R 4,460
MANGOSUTHU Tech	R 3,717	R 4,920	R 8,079	R 4,920	R 4,920
NELSON MANDELA Metro Univ	R 3,772	R 4,837	R 8,202	R 4,837	R 4,837
NORTH WEST Univ (Potchefstroom)	R 3,829	R 4,917	R 8,188	R 4,917	R 4,917
PRETORIA, Univ of	R 4,057	R 5,449	R 8,430	R 5,449	R 5,449
RHODES Univ	R 3,689	R 4,872	R 7,971	R 4,872	R 4,872
SOUTH AFRICA, Univ of	R 3,866	R 4,560	R 7,787	R 4,560	R 5,192
STELLENBOSCH Univ	R 3,752	R 4,346	R 8,056	R 4,346	R 4,346
TSWANE Univ of Tech	R 4,057	R 5,449	R 8,430	R 5,449	R 5,449
Vaal Univ of Tech	R 3,849	R 4,991	R 8,195	R 4,991	R 4,991
VENDA Univ	R 3,774	R 4,460	R 8,070	R 4,460	R 4,460
WALTER SISULU Univ (Berlin)	R 3,630	R 4,636	R 8,018	R 4,636	R 4,636
WALTER SISULU Univ (Butterworth)	R 3,610	R 5,001	R 7,893	R 5,001	R 5,001
WALTER SISULU Univ (Mkthatha)	R 3,610	R 5,001	R 7,893	R 5,001	R 5,001
WESTERN CAPE, Univ of the	R 3,752	R 4,346	R 8,056	R 4,346	R 4,346
WITWATERSRAND, Univ of the	R 3,818	R 4,606	R 8,128	R 4,606	R 4,606
ZULULAND, Univ of	R 3,713	R 4,822	R 8,139	R 4,822	R 4,822
AVERAGE:	R 3,774	R 4,744	R 8,092	R 4,767	R 4,767

MUT Student Population



## Appendix C

### QUESTIONNAIRE

#### INSTRUCTIONS

1. The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain your views about relationships at this institution. Your answers will be treated as confidential and no respondent's names will be recorded. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible.
2. Please read every question carefully before you answer it and make sure that you answer all the questions.
3. Answer the questions in Section B by circling the appropriate number which best reflects the degree to which you agree to each statement.

#### A. ABOUT YOU

1. Are you: Male [ ] Female [ ]
2. Your occupation: .....
3. How long have you been involved with the University.....

#### B. RATE YOUR CHOICE USING THE FOLLOWING SCALE:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

1.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE INSTITUTION					
The students have a positive attitude towards the institution.	1	2	3	4	5
Student feel that their opinions are taken seriously by the officials of the institution.	1	2	3	4	5
Student support services have been improved.	1	2	3	4	5
Students participate in decision making processes.	1	2	3	4	5
The relationship between student leadership and officials of the institution is good.	1	2	3	4	5
The environment is conducive to learning.	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5

2.

COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK					
Students and staff members are clear about what is expected of them.	1	2	3	4	5
Students and staff members share a joint vision of the future of the institution.	1	2	3	4	5
Students and staff members are kept informed about what is	1	2	3	4	5

happening in the institution.					
People throughout the institution actively seek and act on others' suggestions.	1	2	3	4	5
Communication is upward as well as downward.	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5

3. (For staff members)

<b>ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE</b>					
Staff members believe that the way the institution is structured helps them to be effective in their jobs.	1	2	3	4	5
Staff members believe that they are part of a team	1	2	3	4	5
Staff members perceive change as critical to the development of the institution.	1	2	3	4	5
Staff members believe the systems and procedures are adequate.	1	2	3	4	5
There are opportunities for career development throughout the institution.	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5

4. (For staff members)

<b>EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP</b>					
There is an effective information system to support employees	1	2	3	4	5
Most employees contribute to achieving a shared team goal.	1	2	3	4	5
Departments complement each other and are mutually supportive	1	2	3	4	5
The institution is dedicated to learning continuously.	1	2	3	4	5
Team work flows down the institution.	1	2	3	4	5
Employees have ready access to mentors in order to ensure continued learning.	1	2	3	4	5
Employees are provided with resources they need in order to perform their duties.	1	2	3	4	5

5. Are you happy with the existing working relationships at Mangosuthu University of Technology? YES OR NO (Please explain)

.....  
 .....  
 .....

6. What could be done in order to build better working relationships within the institution?

.....  
 .....

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