

# Remote Employment as an Emerging Mode of Personnel Engagement

## An Investigative Study in a Forestry Organisation.

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2002

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Commerce in Organisation and Management Systems - Leadership Centre,  
University of Natal, Durban.**

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Stan Hardman for giving me the support, space and confidence in this endeavour.

Much gratitude goes to fellow work colleagues, without whom inspiration for this study would not have been possible.

Thank you to Carmen Brunette for her painstaking editing.

Lastly I thank the Good Lord for granting me a loving family in Ann, Anton, Graeme and Peter. In times of trial, “my cup runneth over.”

## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the emergent understanding of the dynamics of Remote Employment in an organisation. It reflects on the workings of value adding employment where individual employees operate from home and away from the “office environment”. In so doing, it hopes to raise within organisations new levels of awareness that will make this employment form meaningful and fruitful.

Within the body of the dissertation, relevant theoretical constructs are outlined. These form the basis on which emergent understanding using Systems Thinking is discussed. These theoretical constructs are placed upon an underlying foundation that focuses upon Systems of Meaning and the influencing factors that both encourage relationships and best accommodate participant stakeholders.

Meaningful relationships are explored from a cognitive perspective. Such an approach also serves as a proposition for sustaining all forms of employment relationships irrespective of the participants particular work locality.

## **Declaration**

Except where otherwise specified in the text, this dissertation is my own work.

Andre Boshoff, January 2003.

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# Chapter 1

## 1.1 Introduction: Understanding the Context, the Question and Why it is Important

I work for a corporate company in the forestry industry, where my area of expertise is as a change agent and internal consultant. As a consequence of my work, I participated in a project that examined Remote Employment practices at a central level. The rationale was that as the company diversified and remote employment practices grew, the same considerations that applied in the organisation's outlying plantations could work for centrally located administrative and support personnel. I wanted to understand whether Remote Employment would allow for greater flexibility as the organisation strove towards becoming fully networked. My quest was to engage in learning about Remote Employment in the context of the project that had just been completed. In terms of Action Research I was not trying to make changes to the organisation through Remote Employment but rather to develop my understanding of Remote Employment within the forestry environment.

With the advent of the Information Age, opportunities have been created for new forms of organisational arrangements that include Remote Employment. Cell phones, Satellites and Computer networks such as the Internet allow people inside and outside an organisation to meet in what has been termed "virtual space" where inter acting parties meet screen to screen rather than face to face. In so doing, technology has made powerful inroads in reconfiguring social space and social interaction. (Nohria & Guss, 1994: 114) A sense of Boundrylessness now pervades the workplace and people can now "meet" in real time across national and international boundaries. Technology's contribution is and continues to be the extent to which interpersonal accessibility can be advanced. Currently it has given rise to the 24/7 phenomena where people can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week - by virtue of their cell phone or internet connection.

Much of what has become possible revolves around the term "Virtual" which by straight definition remains an adjective that relates to an object. In terms of computing though it refers to something, "not physically existing as such but made by software to appear to do so" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 1991: 1371).

Technology has been the means of making available to many, virtually anything including virtual organisations and virtual employees. Hartman and Guss (1996) described the virtual organisation as one that consists of individuals that work towards a common goal but without

centralised buildings, physical plant or other unique characteristics of a traditional organisation. (Staples & Hullah, 1999: 258)

Remote Employment is a very loose term, which is inclusive of other terms such as Teleworker employment and virtual employment. They all form part of a broader movement which Agpar calls the “Alternate Workplace”. Enabled by technology, Agpar considers the Alternate Workplace the new frontier to the workplace. He defines the Alternate Workplace as, “The combination of non-traditional work practices, settings and locations that are starting to supplement traditional offices.” (Agpar, 1999: 155)

Included under this banner one finds: Open plan Offices; Office Hotelling; Cluster or small satellite offices; Telecommunication and supplementary services; Home officing and lastly a mixture of all the above. The focus of this study is home officing, which for ease of use will be referred to as Remote Employment.

### **1.1.1 The Forest Industry in South Africa**

Remote Employment is the focus of this study but more particularly it should be seen in the context of a particular organisation that operates in the South African Forestry Industry. Forestry is an important player in the South African commercial and labour Markets. R.Godsmark deputy director and economist to Forestry South Africa (personal communication, November 20, 2002) reported that commercial forestry operations in South Africa were located predominantly in Mphumalanga, the Northern Province, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western and Eastern Cape. The total plantation area owned is 1 351 760 hectares. In the period 2000/2001 the value of Sales from primary processing plants related to the industry amounted to R 11,866.5 million. These sales included products such as Sawn Timber, Pulp (for paper and other manufacturing applications), Mining Timber, Panel products, Poles, Charcoal, Chips and Mill residue as well as other by products. In terms of contribution Forestry’s Gross Domestic Product in 2000/2001 was R 2,712.4 million which represents 9.9% of the country’s Agricultural GDP. While the aforementioned R 11,855.5 million Forest Products GDP represents 7.2% of the Manufacturing GDP and 1,2% of the countries total GDP.

In terms of the labour market, the Forestry Industry makes a significant contribution to employment. Last year (2001) economists, pegged the number of direct employees to the industry at 73 936 employees - excluding a multitude of small growers. With further

extrapolation it is estimated that total dependants, number 295 744 people. Furthermore the industry estimates that the number of people who depend on the Forestry Industry (either directly or indirectly) for their livelihood amount to some 1 626 592 dependants. .

### **1.1.2 Traditional Forestry Context of Remote Employment and The New Context**

From an operational perspective and borne of necessity, Forestry companies have from the outset, operated from a small cluster of remotely situated satellite offices. With plantations dotted throughout the rural countryside, forestry has always had in terms of its definition, provided alternative workplaces to a substantial part of its employees. Technology has significantly minimised communication barriers allowing for greater co-operation between clusters as well as their head office.

A clear distinction must be made however to clarify that our point of reference is something different. By way of explanation it should firstly be acknowledged that both home officing and cluster officing form part of the definition of the Alternate Workplace but in different environments, these terms have different applications. Forestry companies operate both in rural and urban environments and while they have a wealth of knowledge and experience of remote employment in a rural environment, the same can not be said of remote employment (i.e. home officing) in an urban context.

Remote employment in a rural environment is part of an accepted vocational calling where employees aware of being engaged at a distance nevertheless choose to become foresters. In an urban environment, remote employees are not necessarily foresters and their remote placement is ideally part of a negotiated process rather than an operational imperative (i.e. working where the job is). The effects of the information age impact on both rural and urban environments. In summary the study of remote employment in an urban as opposed to a rural context is not driven by a change in the business but by developments in technology that give employers wider employment options. This is considered particularly in relation to the flexibility allowed by the information age and the social consequences of rapidly changing employment patterns.

### **1.1.3 The Focal Question**

The focal question, given that there are certain advantages to emerging modes of personnel engagement (e.g. remote employment), is the need to experiment and learn about their

implications in particular contexts. The assumption is that the work they are doing is not just reorganisation (e.g. outsourced piecework), but that the need to recreate meaning to keep people engaged is strategically and operationally important to the organisation.

There are several reasons why this should be so.

1. Human Resources remain a valued resource particularly since there are both tangible and intangible costs attached to a) under utilising the organisation's existing employee base and b) Having to recruit and train replacement employees to become competent value adding employees in the organisation.
2. Recreating meaning to keep people engaged requires workers to be attracted by a sense of "belonging", where employees can willingly give of their time, service and talents and be adequately appreciated in the process.
3. Full employment is more conducive to nurturing these aspirations and building relationships for purposes of networking and synergy than is the case for other part time or contract employment arrangements.

Any study of Remote Employment should be a proactive pursuit, not with the intention to be faddish but rather as preparation to building it into the business model for purposes of competitive advantage. This study was considered with the assumption that Remote Employment is good and can make a positive contribution to a business.

Given the complexity involved, this dissertation focuses largely on systems of meaning, getting to some form of agreement so that remote employment is considered holistically. Since mental models and cultural forces are so prominent in shaping people's cognitive processes (i.e. what they think), they will be looked in greater detail - before commenting on their interrelatedness to other issues and dilemmas. Systems thinking would have it that interrelated issues are debated for in so doing it is hoped that fuller appreciation of peoples' mental models are developed.

#### 1.1.4 The Process for Emergent Understanding

##### **BOX 1.1 WHAT IS DOUBLE LOOP LEARNING?**

The following definition of double loop learning is extracted from Argyris, C. & Schon, D. (1995) *Organizational Learning II*. Harlow: Pearson High Education.

Double Loop learning refers to the learning that results in a change in the values of theory –in-use, as well as in its strategies and assumptions. The double loop refers to the two feedback loops that connect the observed effects of action with strategies and values served by strategies. Strategies and assumptions may change concurrently with, or as a consequence of change in values. Double loop learning may be carried out by individuals, when their inquiry leads to change in the values of their theories-in-use or by organisations, when individuals inquire on behalf of an organisation in such a way as to lead to change in the values of organisational theory-in-use.

The outline of this dissertation is best explained within the context of double loop learning. A diagram of double loop learning is featured (see Figure 1) and used as a map to explain my progress whilst reflecting on the Remote Employment issue. Figure 1 should be read in conjunction with Table 1, the latter explains the process steps of Double Loop Learning and relative to that, my emerging understanding of Remote Employment and where it is discussed in the body of the dissertation. Mention is made of the theory and models used which ultimately culminate and contribute to Flood's work (1999) on deepening systemic appreciation. A Time Line completes the table and indicates when significant milestones were reached.

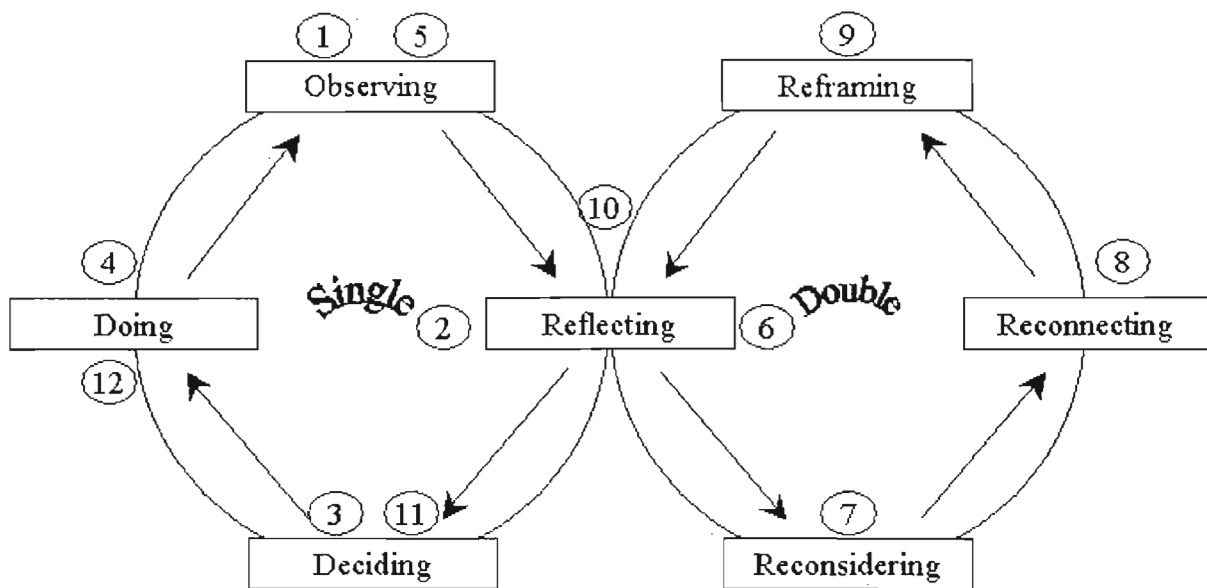


Figure 1: Single and Double Loop Learning with Numbered Process Stages

Table 1: Double Loop Learning and Dissertation Outline with Time Line

	<b>Process Stages</b>	<b>Issues and dilemmas on Remote Employment – guideline to their discussion in the text</b>	<b>Time Line with personal comments</b>
1	<p><b>Observing</b></p> <p>Current Practices in Remote Employment. Focusing attention on an action. How well did we do? Where did we go wrong? What assumptions were we working on?</p>	<p>I was part of an investigative team that looked at the issue of Remote Employment.</p> <p>This is outlined in chapter two of the dissertation where the project origin, its outline and initial reflections are discussed</p>	<p>The project, of which I was a member, was commissioned in March 2000 scheduled to run for 100 days.</p>
2	<p><b>Reflecting on Current Practices</b></p> <p>– considering observations and drawing conclusions from them. What new ideas and possibilities exist?</p>	<p>There was an assumption that because a form of Remote Employment was and is practised in the organisations rural arena, the organisation had gained some headway in adapting to Remote Employment to its Urban context. The project team I was involved with proposed to investigate Remote Employment both internally and externally (as in other organisations).</p> <p>The investigative project had been prompted primarily by the prospect of reduction in overhead cost. At the time this formed part of an organisation wide change programme. The rationale behind the project was prompted by Japanese work improvement strategies that encourage multi-disciplinary teams to jointly realise improvements in one or more areas.</p>	

	<b>Process Stages</b>	<b>Issues and dilemmas on Remote Employment – guideline to their discussion in the text</b>	<b>Time Line with personal comments</b>
		The Operational Efficiency “Kaizan” areas are Cost, Quality, Delivery, Environment, Safety and Employee Morale. Chapter Two and the attached project report, relates to this stage of the process	
3.	<b>Deciding</b> Making a decision on the way ahead and explaining reasons for the choice.	The project team benchmarked other South African companies that had incorporated Remote Employment. They established two Remote Employee experimental sites and monitored responses from both the incumbents and their immediate superiors. Finally the concept of Office Hotelling was investigated.	
4.	<b>Doing</b> Performing the task with as experimental a mindset as possible.	A report and power point presentation outlining findings and recommendations for implementation was finalised and presented by the project team to members of executive management. In terms of the project team’s mandate, they had completed their job.  For the organisation, the process ended at Boardroom level when the executive committee though appreciative of the thrust did not respond to a proposed follow-up implementation project. (They did not take ownership of the process for further learning and implementation).	The project team completed its brief by the end of May 2000 but had to wait several weeks before its findings and recommendations could be presented to Senior Management.

	<b>Process Stages</b>	<b>Issues and dilemmas on Remote Employment – guideline to their discussion in the text</b>	<b>Time Line with personal comments</b>
		<p>The experimental Remote Employees left the organisation for personal reasons and the impetus to institutionalise Remote Employment in the urban context did not materialise.</p>	
5	Observation	<p>On reflection, I felt the initial investigative project's assumptions needed to be revisited. Though some employees from forestry organisations operate from a small cluster of remotely situated satellite offices, the context for application to the organisation's urban Cascades Divisional Office is different. Secondly the notion that popular response to the concept of Remote Employment be taken as a cue for implementation is questionable. The third consideration dealt with the longevity of the position. Could remote employees once installed, contribute meaningfully to the organisation whilst being assured of career development?</p>	<p>For me, this process of Double Loop Learning was triggered in September 2000, while writing up the year report on projects completed activities. I contemplated the Remote Employment project; it's findings, recommendations and current status. In light of my recent Systems Think exposure I concluded that the traditional approaches my project team had adopted were limited.-As mentioned these were based on Japanese Work Improvement</p>

	<b>Process Stages</b>	<b>Issues and dilemmas on Remote Employment – guideline to their discussion in the text</b>	<b>Time Line with personal comments</b>
			Strategies which I now believed were narrowly applied to mainly focus on Remote Employment as a cost cutting consideration)
6.	<b>Reflection</b> – Consideration of all observations and conclusions drawn from them. Search for new ideas and possibilities	These 3 considerations above were sufficient to bring into question the validity of the original recommendations. In chapter 3, some theoretical constructs are raised. They contribute by adding to what shapes the mental models of those role-players involved in Remote Employment. A vignette is included pointing to the reality of the Remote Employment experience.	
7.	<b>Reconsidering</b> - Basic assumptions and conclusions and the reasons that led me to them. Appropriateness of approach. Collective views of reality that underpin choices. The consequences of doing thing differently.	Remote Employment proved a popular concept and advances in the information age have certainly added to its popularity. Nevertheless Remote Employment’s value beyond the scale of mere novelty and media hype has to be seriously questioned for organisations to find accommodation with it. (i.e. if it is to rightfully assume its position as a new frontier of the workplace.)  This proposition is posted at the conclusion of chapter two and also in Chapter three – under the heading the stakeholders.	

	<b>Process Stages</b>	<b>Issues and dilemmas on Remote Employment – guideline to their discussion in the text</b>	<b>Time Line with personal comments</b>
8.	<p><b>Reconnecting</b> – Looking for approaches/perspectives outside the normal frame of reference.</p>	<p>Awareness that there is no future in the job but rather in the person, who holds the job directs attention to cognitive and relationship matters within the employment arena. Systems of Meaning help distinguish levels of agreement and levels of engagement.</p> <p>Reconnection therefore takes the form of exposure to Systemic Approaches and perspectives because they take me beyond the normal frame of reference, creating new possibilities for a more holistic consideration of Remote Employment.</p> <p>This is presented in chapter one where the focal question on engagement is asked. Chapter one also gives a general overview to systems thinking and through Flood’s model emphasises the interrelatedness of issues relevant to the topic. Chapter 4 represents other theoretical constructs, which though not necessarily systems orientated are at the heart of surfacing systems of meaning. They also hint at the significant role of team based learning for optimising stakeholder participation and contribution.</p>	<p>Reconnecting was experienced as an interrelated activity for the integration of Work and Study, particularly as I sought to blend my work experience with Systems Thinking. In January 2001, with the requirement of a dissertation to conclude the Master’s Programme, Remote Employment seemed an ideal issue to pursue.</p>

	<b>Process Stages</b>	<b>Issues and dilemmas on Remote Employment – guideline to their discussion in the text</b>	<b>Time Line with personal comments</b>
9.	<b>Reframing</b> – Articulation of New Ideas and reflection on whether they will expand possibilities through new mental models	<p>Reframing, which represents an attempt to articulate new guiding ideas in the hope that they will extend possibilities for organisations and their strategists by equipping them with new mental models. These are dealt with primarily in chapters four and five.</p> <p>Chapter five also provides my evaluation of how the focal question was tackled as well as my recommendations on how to proceed further.</p>	<p>In October 2002, I had concluded that a Learning approach to strategic decision-making was a management imperative. Several models indicated how greater awareness could be generated as preparation for thrusts such as Remote Employment. What was still required was an underlying theoretical foundation to synergise and reflect the interrelatedness between logic-based analysis and social analysis. Exposure to Flood’s model on four systems for organisational improvement helped me to reframe a Systems Thinking approach to the issue.</p>
10	<b>Reflection</b>	<p>The executive team has made overtures that Remote Employment is reconsidered. In the fullness of time, I in my capacity as a change agent hope to influence their reflection</p>	<p>December 2002, I believe that I will be able to contribute in making the issue of Remote</p>

	<b>Process Stages</b>	<b>Issues and dilemmas on Remote Employment – guideline to their discussion in the text</b>	<b>Time Line with personal comments</b>
		on the issue. Facilitating Deeper Reflection will allow the organisation to exercise double loop learning. These thoughts and the researcher’s personal learning are brought together in chapter five.	Employment meaningful to my organisation in a more holistic and interrelated way.
11	<b>Deciding</b> Making a decision on the way ahead and explaining the reasons for the choice	The decision is to complete the dissertation to ensure that my understandings of the issues surrounding Remote Employment are captured on paper as a possible resource for future inquiries.	
12	<b>Doing</b> Perform the task with as experimental a mindset as possible	Dissertation completed and submitted. The anticipated evaluation and observations will consolidate my learning on the subject and may point to further approaches to be reflected on.	Dissertation submitted January 2003.

### **1.1.5 A Serious Consideration**

Our focal question is not a trivial one because if Remote Employment is not given fuller consideration, it will remain an ad-hoc short-term arrangement of limited utility. To be meaningful for employees there should be some promise of fulfilment towards self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as the judgement an individual makes about his or her ability to execute a particular behaviour (Bandura 1978). According to self-efficacy theory, if organisations can encourage employees to learn how to increase their self-efficacy, their judgements about their abilities to complete relevant remote work tasks would lead to improved performance. (Staples & Hulland, 1999: 758) Management for their part might find Remote Employment meaningful if it proves to have value adding utility and possibilities for capturing and retaining knowledge for competitive advantage.

Ethical considerations apply throughout and there is a need for stakeholders to be transparent about the level of need at which they are prepared to engage one another. The employees in question are specialists rather than clerical personnel and their knowledge of the forestry environment combined with years of experience clearly emphasise their value to the organisation. Therefore stakes are high because the risk of losing good calibre Remote Employees through inept management must be juxtaposed with the opportunity cost of not exploring this employment form. At the same time, if Remote Employment relates to the nature of the emergent organisations where employees can work away from the office, it is worthwhile investigating the issue as holistically as possible.

### **1.1.6 The Nature of the Emergent Organisation**

Part of the nature of the emergent organisation seems to lie in network/ information based organisations rather than industrial ones. Aggar explains the difference as follows: -

- An Industrial based organisation is characterised by structures, systems and processes that are designed for face to face interaction that has employees firmly rooted to specific workplaces.
- An Informational context is one where organisations whilst not necessarily “hi-tech” are moving in the direction of information literacy and as such their organisations are characterised by
  - flexibility

- informality
- respect for personal time and priorities and
- A commitment to using technology to enhance performance. (Agpar, 1999: 162)

The challenge that Organisations should embrace is to a greater or lesser extent, a transition leading to the accommodation of both.

## 1.2 Using Systems Language and Perspectives to Illustrate the Above

When defining employment, diverse meanings of employment are appreciated. Although it may be felt that the employment contract binds employees to working at the locale the organisation prescribes; stakeholders in remote employment can by devising a new employment relationship, show otherwise. They could negotiate their working arrangements, while retaining the familiar principle of employment that allows organisations to, “use the services of (a person) in return for payment.” (“Employ”. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 1991: 383).

Secondly, working within the employment relationship requires not only the application of physical or mental effort towards a Purpose but also a Process composed of tasks, roles, rules, communication, resources and relationships. Individuals, department members and multi-disciplinary teams engage in work from both operational and service perspectives with the purpose of contributing either or all, to an organisation’s profits systems and people.

Few people would dispute that the effective and purposeful operation of organisation enterprises is a tough challenge. Regardless of whether enterprises are commercial, non-governmental organisations (NGOs’) or government agencies, the challenges remain considerable, including issues from Corporate Governance to Globalisation. Environmental and Social issues have also escalated and consumers are demanding their rights on an increasing scale. In a nutshell the World has become more complex and we have limited ability to know what will happen next.

In response to this complexity managers must find coping strategies and skills that will ensure that strategies once devised are effectively implemented. Yet there is more at stake for inextricably linked with the notion of survival is the prerequisite to remain competitive Both

are synonymous with the other and. Systems Thinking has presented a refreshing approach to this paradox.

In the 1990's Peter Senge's book *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) popularised the concept of Learning Organisations. Part of the ongoing attraction to this concept seems to lie in its response to the complexity of modern day enterprises. The wider implication being that organisations intent on surviving into the future would be those that assumed the characteristics of a learning organisation.

*The Fifth Discipline* is Senge's account of the Learning Organisation, which outline five disciplines considered necessary for creating a learning organisation. The five disciplines are personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking - which Senge refers to as systemic thinking. As the title implies it is the fifth discipline, Systemic Thinking that actually provides substance to the other four, making as one all the other disciplines mentioned. Systemic thinking is the discipline that makes evident that our actions are interconnected to other peoples actions in patterns of behaviour and are not merely solitary events. More specifically, it helps us sense and appreciate our connection to a wider whole showing that we can only meaningfully understand ourselves when we contemplate the whole of which we are an integral part.

In his account of Systems Thinking, Senge confined himself to only one aspect of systems thinking called systems dynamics but other accounts about the systemic character of our social and natural worlds are also to be found. Complexity theory, Open Systems Theory, organisational cybernetics, interactive planning, soft systems approach, and critical systems thinking are examples of other accounts. Thinkers like Beer, Ackhoff, Checkland and Churchman have contributed in aspects such as planning, structure, recurrence and ethical issues providing a rich kaleidoscope of issues to augment systems dynamics. Taken together, comments Flood,

“They represent a diversity and strength that is vital to our ability to be able to cope with a complex world” (Flood, 1999: 2).

Another approach that should be taken in conjunction with systems thinking is Complexity Theory. In organisations complexity is a growing reality and anything that promises new and challenging ways for understanding the social and natural world is a welcome addition. Like Systems Thinking, Complexity Theory (Flood, 1999: 3) acknowledges the interrelated nature

of things yet also recognises a special form of emergence called spontaneous self-organisation. Here the world is a whole comprising of many interrelationships that are expressed in endless occurrences of spontaneous organisation. The consequences of such an emergence is that humankind can only handle some of the things, namely those that are “local” to us in terms of space and time. Local refers to those that we are immediately involved with and time is seen more in terms of the immediate future.

In essence this theory is an acknowledgement of humankind’s limitations in knowing what is going on around it as well as its limitation of knowing what will happen next. The incorporation of this approach into systemic thinking thus follows in expressing scepticism at strategic planners who think in global terms of creating a better future. On the other hand it also fosters the belief that organisations can be proactive and strive for mastery of local issues – including in this case remote employment as an alternative employment place for a given place and time.

Both the Fifth Discipline and complexity theory are tools in explaining our complex worlds. Realistically we wouldn’t be able to learn about all things that affect us, there will always be doubt. Instead systems thinkers try to operate in conscious recognition of three important paradoxes (Flood, 1999: 3)

- We will not struggle to manage over things - we will manage within the unmanageable.
- We will not battle to organise the totality – we will organise within the unorganisable.
- We will not simply know things – but we will know of the unknowable.

In Flood’s Book, “Rethinking the Fifth Discipline”, Senge’s work is revisited in the light of the comparisons with the works of other systemic thinkers. The critique that is put together points to aspects, which Senge did not take fully into account. By bringing together Senge’s insights along with those of the aforementioned we have a whole that promises more potential than if the same were to be taken in isolation. It also opens the way to introduce complexity theory and thus deepen systemic appreciation.

### **1.2.1 Systems Thinking**

Flood contextualises Systems Thinking by introducing and juxtaposing Reductionism (conventional wisdom) with Systems Thinking. Briefly Reductionism breaks things into parts and attempts to deal with each part in isolation. While this approach has and

continues to make contributions to traditional science and technology, it has definite deficiencies if considered for application to organisations. In organisational and social settings Reductionism has not been applied as easily, mainly it is argued, because social settings are different and display spiritual and systemic qualities (interrelatedness to a whole). Spiritualism appreciates the wholeness of the human being while systemic thinking builds holistic pictures of social settings. (Therefore looking at an issue like Remote Employment in terms of cost or cost savings represents a Reductionism approach). Systems Thinking is suggesting ways of coping with social settings that challenge the very idea of problems, solutions and normal organisational life.

### **1.2.2 Complexity Theory**

Problems as such do not subsist. The idea of “problem and solution” is said to inadequately characterise the complexity of organisational and social settings. These settings should be more usefully understood as wholes where people, purposes and interacting issues bring them together in one of two ways, either in emerging conflict and /or emerging co-operation. Some issues arise from conflict and turn out to be insoluble and insoluble issues are dilemmas. The suggestion therefore is not to entertain ideas of problems, solutions and the maintenance of normal organisational life but rather to think in terms of interacting issues and dilemmas that materialise and are dealt with over time. Systemic thinking gets to grips with such complexity through a form of reasoning called boundary judgements. (Flood, 1999: 6) Boundary judgements are explained in the context of Complexity in perspective -below.

#### **Complexity in perspective**

In practical terms complexity theory is employed to show what systemic thinking involves. For example, it would at the outset tentatively draw boundaries around stakeholders, primarily clients and raise issues and dilemmas relevant to these clients. This bounded space is envisaged as an action area. Extended questions for dialogue like who is embraced by this action and who benefits as well as who is outside of it and does not benefit? What are the consequences of this and how do we feel about it? Boundary questions therefore nurture issues of an ethical nature in addition to issues of efficiency and effectiveness. Resultant boundary judgements that are therefore at any one time temporary and partial because they are the result of the choice of the client made at a particular place and time.

The temporary and partial nature of boundary judgements serve to remind practitioners that whatever choices we take we will never completely “solve a problem.”(Flood, 1999: 7)

### **1.2.3 Going Deeper**

In this section I have relied heavily on the work of Flood (1999) and will continue to do so as we discuss his approach to extending systemic appreciation. For Flood extending systemic appreciation is made possible because in drawing a boundary, action areas are created. While these boundaries are temporary, systemic appreciation can be deepened through further dialogue. Using a metaphorical example, deepening systemic appreciation is likened to opening four windows on the action area. (Flood, 1999: 7)

The four windows are: -

1. Systems of processes.
2. Systems of structure.
3. Systems of Meaning.
4. Systems of Knowledge Power.

Bringing together and debating these views through Prismatic thought helps build systemic interpretations of the manifold issues and dilemmas. Each systemic picture suggests possible creative courses of action and transformation, from which choices (management choices) can be made.

#### **Window 1: Systems of Processes**

This is one perspective for organisational improvement and also as a feature of systemic appreciation. Systems of Processes approach issues and dilemmas in terms of the efficiency and the reliability of process design. (Where efficiency is defined as working without any waste in time or resources and reliability to the demonstration of accurate and dependable performance.) Processes are then explained along with possible action steps to consider when encountering inefficiency and unreliability. A spectrum of action is identified from radical change to continuous improvement and the well-known operational approaches of business processes reengineering and Japanese kaizen are positioned at opposite ends of the spectrum. Not to be taken in isolation, there is recognition that any system of process flows within and is supported by a system of structure. (Flood, 1999: 7)

## **Window 2: Systems of Structure**

A second perspective on improvement is to approach issues and dilemmas in terms of effectiveness of systems of structure – i.e. its structural design. Again Flood defines effectiveness to mean achievement of chosen tasks. Explanations of structure are given and possible actions to implement when encountering ineffectiveness. The Remote Employment environment might be likened to that of a rule free structure. In many instances where regulatory structures are not in place, there is no substitute for simple employee/management trust, - a process which itself takes time to establish. The spectrum identified in the context of structure ranges from rule bound structures to rule free ones. Similarly a range of corresponding remedial structures are positioned on this spectrum, including tall and flat, circular, organic and less formal ones. Placed in perspective, however purposefully organisation members (including managers and Remote Employees) strive for improvements in effectiveness, efficiency and reliability in systems of structure, all require some form of agreement to be made that accommodates peoples' system of meaning. (Flood, 1999: 8)

## **Window 3: Systems of meaning**

This introduces the third thrust of the model, which as we shall see later forms the crux of the theoretical basis for this investigation. Systems of meaning focuses on enhancing the quality of agreement and understanding between people and consequently, the potential of decisions that are taken that affect them and the organisation they represent. Agreement and understanding is considered in terms of systems of meaning that people assign to both issues and dilemmas. Once explained, a number of approaches are introduced that promote dialogue about systems of meaning. The spectrum of possible outcomes of dialogue relating to these approaches range from consensus through to accommodation and finally tolerance. Yet as before, the outcome of agreement in any form will not be meaningful to people when their ability to participate in dialogue is severely restricted by the knowledge/power relationships that directly effect them. (Flood, 1999: 8)

## **Window 4: Systems of Knowledge Power**

As mentioned this fourth angle of improvement looks for power-knowledge relationships that influence the shape of designs and the outcome of supposed dialogue particularly in the light of issues such as race, class, sexuality, culture, age disability, and the expert and management hierarchy. A spectrum of ways in which patterns of entrenched behaviour might be transformed and made fairer is suggested. Again, moving along a spectrum of

situations the objective would be the “emancipation of the privileged (Senior/Executive management) from their ideologies and power structures”. In the same vein, Remote Employees must regard their new employment relationship as one of positive engagement.<sup>1</sup>

### **Prismatic thought**

Combining the perspectives that are formed by looking through each of the four windows just introduced are subsequently transformed through a process of prismatic thought. Here perspectives generated by opening in turn all four windows on the action area gain in insight through a holistic, creative interpretation and transformation. Plausible systemic explanations of issues and dilemmas can then be developed as well as optional sources of action. Prismatic thought is likened to a prism that refracts light creating many bursts of colour by similarly creating many coloured stories of events. These stories of events can then inform on choice of action. (Flood, 1999: 9) For Forestry organisations whose operational spread covers thousands of square kilometres this interrelated approach (my words) as advocated above should receive consideration, in most organisations. For it provides a perspective that though complex and time consuming, is meaningful to contemplate for organisational orientation and well considered strategic plans.

#### **1.2.4 Why is the Focal Question Important and Relevant?**

For any organisation that is attempting to investigate new frontiers in technology, science or as in this case human resource utilisation, the systems of meaning that people employ are pivotal to ensuring the ability to co-exist and adapt in relative harmony and/ or degrees of conflict. The challenge is to ensure that it succeeds in generating a creative tension that generates the forward momentum of a learning organisation.

To date, there is seemingly no personal profile for the ideal Remote Employee but neither for that matter, is there one for the ideal manager of a Remote Employee. If Remote Employment is not carefully investigated it's continued ad-hoc implementation will result in unnecessary casualties. These casualties will be seen in the form of overworked, over stressed employees and managers or conversely the same being alienated, underdeveloped, under utilised or non-committal. Loss of knowledge capital, inflexible attitudes and

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<sup>1</sup> Nchabeleng (2000) illustrates how people can look at the world in two ways. They can view it either through a lens of dependency and helplessness or through one of independence and empowerment. If applied to employees, the first requires role players' like Victims (i.e. employees), Oppressors and Saviours. The second lens adopts a positive approach, instead of blaming oppressors and seeking saviours, people take responsibility for their own actions. They trust themselves and others and develop and maintain self-confidence. (Nchabeleng, 2000: 4)

entrenched mental models are sure to be a source of great frustration amongst an organisation's employee personnel. Once established, other consequences like high employee turnover, mercenary approaches<sup>2</sup>, questionable organisational loyalty and poor corporate governance can be anticipated. The opportunity cost in terms of not engaging the action area of Remote Employment might well be symptomatic of the organisations failure to continually expanding its capacity to create its own future.

### **Global Perspective**

With some imagination it is not difficult to realise why new patterns of organisational and social engagement should be tackled. Perhaps employers who have considered Remote Employment from a global perspective will surpass organisations operating within the scope of rural and urban settings. Indeed the development of the international space station points to a new and growing reality where the activities of space men and women over a protracted length of time can no longer be considered space missions but rather employment in space. I would venture that seizing competitive advantage is not necessarily just about pioneering new frontiers but also about perfecting the groundswell movement of the alternate workplace.

### **1.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has given an extensive introduction to the issue of Remote Employment. The reasons for the Researcher's personal engagement with this issue as well as the process of reflection and deeper reflection have been outlined. In addition this has been set against the backdrop of the nature of the emergent organisation increasingly influenced by technology.

By way of introduction, various authoritative definitions and distinctions have been offered around the subject. Great emphasis has been placed on the value of the organisation's human capital. This is pivotal to meeting the challenges and seizing the opportunities of this relatively new employment frontier. The nature of the emergent organisation, it is contended, either rests or falls on its capacity to become a learning organisation particularly while organisations make the transition from industrial to information based entities.

Being close to the information flow of an organisation is all-important if the organisation is to present a united front for it calls for the active participation and contribution of all employees.

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<sup>2</sup> Mercenary Practices - Where the employee looks after his or her interests first and the employer who bids the highest

In this way organisations can be proactive to both set and respond to growing complexity. Even remote employees, despite their remoteness must participate. For remoteness is a double-edged sword enabling the organisation employees to be its listening/ information posts “out there” while retaining a basis of knowledge and experience within (the organisation).

With increasing complexity in organisations, the reality is that while Remote Employees may be out of the office, they cannot afford to be out of their organisations learning loop. Complexity Theory also brings with it a sense of realism that acknowledges the necessity to respond to issues and dilemmas on a local basis. This allows for role players to operate locally and to rely on spontaneous self-organisation to align matters elsewhere. Both complexity theory and systems thinking allow the drawing of temporary boundaries. This makes it possible for individuals and teams to manage in a complex world, while appreciating the interrelatedness and impact of other systems on the organisation.

A learning approach to the organisation’s human relations allows the transcendence of physical proximity, through new mental models. It implies an incorporation and acceptance of all employees as value adding members of the organisation regardless of the individual’s relative proximity to the organisation’s hub of operation. Added to Mental Models the organisation’s members have cultural and political dispositions that are also cognitive in nature. These while loaded with potential for affecting positive dialogue and engagement, also have the capacity to obstruct and dampen any form of meaningful engagement. Surfacing these aspects is therefore a prerequisite for any organisation wishing its members to explore new and innovative avenues of working and conducting business.

Our focal area of keeping stakeholders engaged by recreating meaning necessitates an innovative way of engaging stakeholders to adopt a broader employment front. It also indicates a growing urgency to respond to contemporary global developments that increasingly exercise a stronger gravitational pull towards this broader front (extending to space missions). Chapter 2 reflects on an investigative project into Remote Employment that adopted a Logic-based stream of analysis.

“ Logic-based stream of analysis is a practice which encourages practitioners to investigate the situation they are in, to look for new opportunities and to seek ways to achieve accommodation between people, thus closing the gap between them” (Flood, R 1999: 58).

The chronology of project activities and subsequent outcome indicate that the issue needs continual attention, one that is inherent in a more holistic approach.

## **Chapter 2**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter highlights an organisational development, initiated nearly three years ago. What is significant is the impact of organisational development on personal development. These features are interrelated and are reflected in the fact that an issue officially closed should still remain foremost on my mind. It becomes apparent that in the process of emerging understanding, there are always overlapping influences which periodically consolidate and take individuals and organisations to new levels of learning. Such is the case when the practices of ongoing organisational development and Systems Thinking intersect.

Through the process of double loop learning there has been deeper reflection on the issue of Remote Employment. So with recourse to Systems Thinking, a learning approach to Remote Employment is explored. The intention throughout is not to detract from the original investigative effort but to enhance it. It was mentioned that global developments are placing growing pressure on organisations to accommodate alternative workplace arrangements. It is therefore possible that the issue of meaningful Remote Employment will again resurface only now with greater urgency. New learning will have to show practical application and the chapter concludes with a suggestion for the specific application of incorporated learning to a strategic position in the organisation. For coupled with local knowledge of the organisations particular context (in my case forestry) one is undoubtedly better positioned to successfully expand the organisation's employment horizon to include Remote Employment.

### **2.2 Project Origin**

I have spent 18 years as a Human Resources practitioner, with the last 14 years in the Forestry Industry. During that time I have held various portfolios but more recently these portfolios have included change management, facilitation of multi-disciplinary projects, operational improvement and latterly staff training and development. In June 2000, a project team driven by a deliberate organisation development initiative was formed. The ongoing demand for improvements in overall organisational efficiencies and the observation that office space at its

Divisional Head office, “Cascades” was not fully utilised, led to the investigation of remote employment, as an employment option. I was asked by the project leader to facilitate the project in the capacity of player/coach.

The primary focus of this investigation centred on employees based at Cascades Pietermaritzburg. Since all the team members involved in the project were based at Cascades, this project potentially had direct bearing on the members themselves. We considered the question:

*“Remote Employment: does it have a place in Sappi Forests Cascades office?”*

### **2.3 An Incomplete Form of Action Research**

In some respects the investigative activities that followed resembled those of action research for the team noted how their learning progressed as they went through an iterative process of investigation. The research was intended to identify the particular challenges and opportunities associated with this phenomenon. Prompted by an inductive line of questioning, the activities of the project were unravelled and brought together in a project report.

From the outset the project team’s motive for initiating a study on remote employment (at Cascades Offices) was informed by several issues. Firstly the complex operated as the service centre to the Division, providing administrative, management and technical support to the core processes of growing, buying and selling timber. The requisite infrastructure, to provide service from a central venue requires extensive infrastructure and incurred overhead costs. – (Costs that included providing for offices, furniture, equipment and other essential services to these positions.)

Secondly, there was a perception that with the exception of the Finance department, many employees spent a good deal of their working hours outside “the office”; indicating an under utilisation of office space and the assumption that unnecessary company expenses were being incurred.

#### **Project Objectives**

The project team set out several objectives or milestones that it hoped to complete. The first leg of the project had a three prong objective namely to investigate the concept of Remote

Employment (RE), conduct benchmarking of other companies (who had implemented the concept) and lastly to determine the suitability of applying Remote Employment to positions at the organisations' Cascades Office? The second thrust was to investigate the concept of Office Hotels, hot desking and any other pertinent methods for improving space utilisation.

It should be noted that the usual mandatory activities that apply to projects were executed. For example: -

- Determining the scope of the project
- Establishing the terms of reference
- Deciding on the Tools and methodologies it would use
- Conducting the Research
- Analysing the findings and
- Reporting the findings that emerged from the project

was all part of the project management process.

From a team perspective, intentional effort was made in ensuring that the project team effort was a productive one. To this end the researcher encouraged the team to complete work related to each of the four stages known as Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing. Based on the work of Tuckman, the 'Orming Model as referred to by Weaver and Farrell (1997: 67) proved to be a useful tool in bringing the team together. Designed to focus the team, each stage required from the team both its attention and conscientious action. Evolutionary in design the model helped the group understand where it was, how it got there and how it could advance to the next stage. Each stage had its own issues in terms of the work to be done the behaviours and dynamics to be observed the questions to be answered. The model also helped pinpoint possible problems that would continue to surface if not addressed. From a researchers perspective this was particularly pertinent because the team perceived his contribution to the team in terms of the explaining and coaching the team through the stages, suggesting and offering ways in which the work could be completed and finally supporting team results.

After several months the team brought its efforts together in a report and PowerPoint presentation with bottom line conclusions and recommendations.

## 2.4 Reflections Emerging from this Experience

On reflection, several issues stood out immediately. The first was the cohesiveness of the team engaged in the project. The project was time consuming and demanding but the “novelty” of an exploratory project and the opportunity to explore beyond the normal boundaries of the workplace created great interest and enthusiasm amongst the team members.

Second, the project team’s activities created a “buzz” amongst employees at the facility. Their initial curiosity with project team members’ monitoring attendance patterns was later replaced with interest as “one on one” surveys were conducted with each employee in the facility. The exercise created new awareness amongst project team members and employees alike, even to the extent of creating amongst some a sense of enthusiasm, which in practical terms was misplaced. (i.e. employees becoming pre-occupied with the idea of escaping the confines of the office, when the nature of their job pointed to their required presence in a centralised environment.) In other instances the project helped surface and confirm for employees their socialising inclinations and the priority they placed on daily face to face interactions, hence their opting to remain “at the office”.

For me, the dual role of facilitator and subsequent exposure to Systems Thinking helped confirm the conviction that a scientific approach to human settings, calling for objectivity and a reductionist approach was in this instance unrealistic. I found that involvement without participation was problematic and that confining one’s activities to process issues without getting involved in hands on “content” issues, was well near impossible.

In metaphorical terms I relate Remote Employment to a body part in-plant. This holds that regardless of Remote Employment being considered as an intended strategic thrust or experienced as a current reality, managers need a framework that will determine its condition relative to the organisation and see to health care requirements. (i.e. A means to anticipate rejection before it occurs, prepare the organisation for its incorporation, help with problem shooting and maximise its potential - once established.). Similarly as candidate donor recipients (organisations) need self-examination to determine whether under current conditions, an in-plant would indeed be life enhancing (i.e. in the interests of competitive advantage). If not, Remote Employment can still be implemented but with the clear understanding of its limited utility. This will be further discussed in Chapter Three.

## 2.5 Deeper Reflection

**I then engaged in a process of deep reflection shown in Figure 1 (Steps 5 – 6)**

### **My observations after the project**

Exposure to systemic thinking affirms that our understanding of the past is always partial or incomplete, as is our understanding of both the present and the future. This understanding is also temporary since further experiences and knowledge and new understanding also impact on this knowledge of the past. At the time of the project, I was unaware of the methodology of practical animation, which facilitates reflection of the past. Therefore, while unable to more fully exercise recoverability by using practical stories from the campaign, my reflection of the project and ongoing investigation was greatly influenced by the process of double loop learning. While the process is incomplete, several significant conclusions could be drawn giving promise of new possibilities and ideas when it comes to Remote Employment.

At the outset of the project, the team was driven by several factors that included a deliberate organisation development initiative, an ongoing demand for improvement in overall organisational efficiencies and the observation that office space at Cascades was not fully utilised. As it set out to investigate remote employment, the objectives seemed simple enough. As mentioned, the first leg of the project had a three prong objective namely to investigate the concept of Remote Employment (RE), conduct benchmarking of other companies (who had implemented the concept) and lastly to determine the suitability of applying Remote Employment to positions at the organisations' Cascades Office. The second thrust was to investigate the concept of Office Hotels, "hot desking" and any other pertinent methods for improving space utilisation. In terms of the project schedule much of what followed was accomplished from scoping, establishing, terms of reference, conducting employee surveys, benchmarking with other organisations, monitoring specially set up guinea pig remote employees amongst other activities.

At the close of the project, the conclusions and recommendations of the project team were captured in a written report and accompanying power point presentation. The project team felt that although Remote Employment was new to South Africa, Sappi Forests Cascades was well placed to embark on a Remote Employment program since the organisation had remote operations and the concept has been well canvassed (i.e. employees were informed and

receptive to the idea). Furthermore this promised opportunity for employee empowerment on the one hand and for the organisation, possibilities such as outsourcing and using video conferencing to save on travel costs for meetings. More specifically the project team felt: -

1. Potential RE's must present a business plan to their next two levels of management, covering cost, performance measurement and goals to be achieved. The service contract for the Remote Employee must be re-negotiated, and reviewed annually.
2. The company in terms of training and psychological support should support RE's.
3. If management supports these recommendations, we propose that a project team be established to determine an implementation plan for Remote Employment within Sappi Forests.

The project teams report and presentation were well received by senior management but shortly afterwards, a significant change in senior managers as well as the appointment of a new Managing Director lowered the priority of Remote Employment and dampened impetus towards implementation. In addition the two persons who volunteered and were set up as Remote Employees, left the organisation before the benefit of their experience as "seasoned" RE's could be fully tapped and incorporated. Yet on a personal note, this exploratory study had served to challenge the researcher's paradigm of the work place. More significantly, now more fully aware of the approaches of systemic thinking, it enabled fuller reflection on what was and could yet be. Figure 2 diagrammatically represents these converging activities. It illustrates how the researcher engaged in "on-going" organisational development could on reflection relate my exposure to Systems Thinking to the issue of Remote Employment.

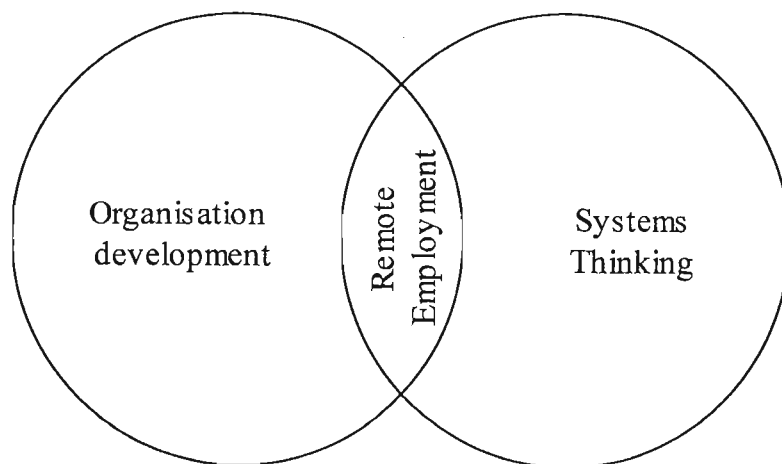


Figure 2: Relating my Work Activity to Systems Thinking.

I felt that while the rest of my project team was happy in accomplishing the brief it had set itself, I given my recent exposure to Systems Thinking, was not. I felt the exercise had taken a narrow approach looking at systems of processes at the expense of the interrelatedness of other systems. I also suspected that two of the central assumptions we had made were naïve and unrealistic. The first stated that although Remote Employment was new to South Africa, Sappi Forests Cascades Divisional office was well placed to embark on a Remote Employment program “because the organisation had (experience of) remote operations’ . While the second assumption that Remote Employment could be successfully introduced, was based more on the favourable employee perceptions during investigation than the objective assessment of its viability. (i.e. the target group was struck more by the novelty of the idea than its practical implementation and this held sway with the investigating team).

### **Reflection**

On reflection, these basic assumptions needed to be reconsidered. Although some employees from forestry organisations operate from a small cluster of remotely situated satellite offices,<sup>3</sup> many employees are urban based. The context for application to the organisation’s urban Cascades Divisional Office is different. Secondly the notion that popular response to the concept of Remote Employment be taken as a cue for implementation is also questionable. Several factors including classical phenomena such as the Hawthorne Effect<sup>4</sup> may have featured just as prominently in making the concept popular at the time. There is no doubt there were other faulty assumptions that were not surfaced, but suffice to say, the aforementioned were sufficient to bring into question whether the recommendations made at the time, were appropriate. Remote Employment is indeed a popular concept and advances in the information age have certainly added to its popularity. Nevertheless, Remote Employment’s value beyond the scale of mere novelty and media hype has to be seriously questioned and organisations must find accommodation with it, if it is to rightfully assume its position as a new frontier of the workplace.

Reconnection therefore takes the form of exposure to systemic approaches and perspectives because they take the researcher beyond the normal frame of reference, creating new possibilities for a more holistic consideration of Remote Employment. This takes the form of Reframing, which represents nothing more than the attempt to articulate new guiding ideas in

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<sup>3</sup> With plantations dotted throughout the rural countryside, forestry has always had in terms of its definition, provided alternative workplaces to a substantial part of its employees.

the hope that they will extend possibilities for organisations and their strategists by equipping them with new mental models.

### **Reframing**

In terms of double loop learning, Reframing is the final component of reflection and for a change agent would form input for organisational management (or for example a specially assigned implementation team) to digest. If this were done in a systemic way the final two steps of double loop learning would be complete in both Deciding and Doing. Deciding - referring to deciding on the way ahead with explained reasons for the choice(s) taken. Doing - referring to task performance whilst assuming as far as possible an experimental mindset.

### **Recent Developments**

Recently the organisation's executive again brought the concept of Remote Employment to prominence. From the insights gained through interim exposure to systems thinking and deep reflection, the researcher would be keen to contribute towards any implementation initiative that would enable project stakeholders to take up from the previous initiative. The objective would be to play a catalytic role in enabling a fully representative team of stakeholders to complete double loop learning and finding agreement on the issue of Remote Employment. Through the researcher's ability to use systemic thought, both a learning event (such as enquiry into Remote Employment) and double loop learning can be re-interpreted.

To complete my own journey of this learning experience, I took the decision to completing the full round of double loop learning by embarking on a dissertation. As mentioned earlier, my intention is thereby to ensure my understanding of the issues around Remote Employment are captured and used as a resource for future investigation. Submitting and anticipating the response to my dissertation will not only subject my work to evaluation but will bring to the surface other observations. These observations will add impetus to further investigations on the matter.

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<sup>4</sup> Comes from a classic case where workers in a factory produced more merely because of a change in routine. (Mouton, 2001: 106) In the same manner, the possibility of a change in routine arguably sounded more appealing than the reality of becoming a remote employee.

## **2.6 The Key Issue : Learning for Change**

My key issue is the mental model of people in the organisation resisting the change from an industrial model to a network information model. This is a key challenge to my work as an internal educator, not only in terms of technical training but also change management and organisational learning. Mental Models surfaces peoples' willingness and capacity to learn. .

It seems that where RE programmes fail to engage, failure can occur on at least two accounts

- 1 failure to secure senior management (also implies executives) backing but in the event of this happening
- 2 failure to sustain remote employment for long term strategic gain. There is a pressing need for managers both senior and manager/supervisors to think more holistically about Remote Employment so as not to be unduly swayed by superficial reviews and partial orientations.

This Project seeks to furnish guidelines and operating instructions and suggests they be embraced and processed in the spirit of action learning. There are also ethical considerations that include the right for every stakeholder to know the concept and discuss their own mind when it comes to this alternate workplace practice. In many respects the mental models may have not been surfaced and in terms the adoption of this employment practice, fuller consideration, experimentation and learning needs to be undertaken. It is hoped that by concentrating on organisational culture and mental models, prompts will be created for stakeholders to assume more than a notional interest on the impacts of this issue.

Mental Models, Cultural and knowledge power forces can prevent this debate and ignorance on this score could create the impression that consensus or accommodation between views is relatively easy to achieve. Dilemmas are healthy because they are meant to stimulate a thoughtful process of exploration of people's personal experiences and ways in which these can be preserved, in a shared and constructive manner all at the same time.

## **2.7 Practical Application**

The aforementioned could serve as a trigger for other applications of remote employment. For example, professional employees who operate in both urban and rural contexts could benefit from this inclusive systems approach. The organisation has in recent times, come to realise

the pivotal role of Silviculture Development Managers play. Since the onset of the outsourcing key operational activities some five years ago, these office bearers have become indispensable assets both as extension officers as well as quality insurance inspectors. The extension service they provide is to advise foresters on the best Silvicultural Practices (i.e. growing and caring of trees) currently available. Quality Assurance involves checking and monitoring the quality of the work that contractors perform for foresters. This activity also reflects on foresters' (implying all Forestry operational staff from Forestry Manager to Junior Forester) ability to manager contractors in their application of silvicultural practices.

In addition, as professional employees who are required to be objective and expansive in improving silvicultural practices, they have a role in mentoring operational staff who by virtue of the outsourcing of key operational activities do not have the same knowledge and experience base as "foresters" of old. Their networking role means that while at times operating remotely, their role must be balanced by their participation in several arenas of management, technology, and operations. (See Figure 3.)

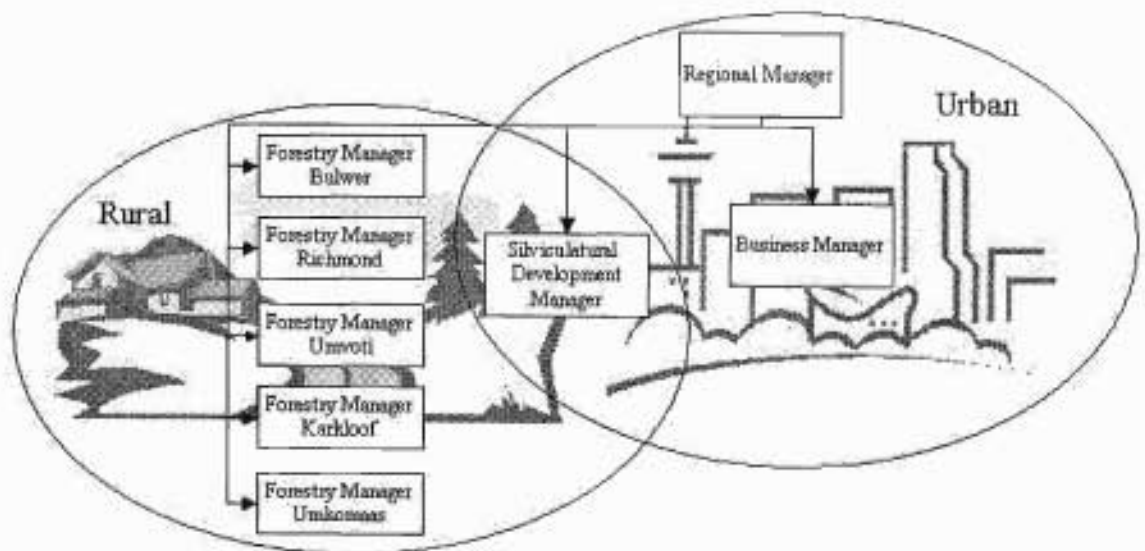


Figure 3: Organigram of my Organisation's Natal Region : The Silvicultural Development Manager's position

The learning orientation of an organisation is vital and more so when attempting to transfer knowledge and develop expertise amongst "New Foresters" who do not enjoy the same practical base previously taken for granted. As such the Silvicultural Development Manager must generate innovative settings for learnership that will help new foresters become competent ones. Cultivating, establishing and sustaining Silvicultural Development Manager

as Remote Employees calls for a “game plan” to operate beyond the boundary yet within the organisation and the Remote Employee’s own personal interests.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The importance of an organisation learning orientation is paramount particularly in an organisation that is geographically widespread. This is especially so when attempting to transfer knowledge and develop expertise amongst employees. More broadly speaking, all organisations should create innovative settings for employee learning to take place so that their necessary competency levels can be met and exceeded, regardless of their work locale. My learning on Remote Employment and Remote Employees can in my organisation best be brought to bear on the function of the Silvicultural Development Manager. Further to what my original project team had uncovered, I could generate additional perspectives that helped in profiling those employees best equipped to become and remain remote employees within my organisation.

## Chapter 3 - The Stake Holders

### 3.1 Introduction

In September 2000, while writing up the year report on the original Remote Employment project, I had come to the conclusion that many of the original project issues my team had covered had been dealt with superficially. Furthermore, if I had to be truthful, the project had originally been motivated by cost cutting considerations. My recent exposure to Systems Thinking troubled me and I began to appreciate that some of my teams' original approaches needed to be reconsidered. Part of that endeavour went towards all those parties included in the employment arena.

Within the arena I included managers and employees and the latter's next-of-kin. More specifically I considered those managers who would manage Remote Employees as well as those employees who might become Remote Employees. The issue at stake was the institutionalisation of Remote Employment in my organisation. It was my belief that particularly when it came to Remote Employment, these two parties could both individually or collectively influence its success or failure. I wanted to revisit the whole event and reconsider these stakeholders plight.

By highlighting Remote Employees, Managers/Supervisors and Senior Management, it would be naïve to say that there are not other stake-holders and indeed consideration should be given to the families and close associates of Remote Employees, office bound employees and clients. All the above play interrelated and influential parts in making Remote Employment possible. Within the "Action Area" of this research it is shown that while these other stake-holders are not referred to directly, their influence may be seen in the cognitive issues and dilemmas that emerge from this employment dynamic.

The type of Remote Employee that is central to this discussion is the employee that must operate across a wide geographical area. This focus raises certain issues and the purpose of this chapter would be to consider two issues, which I considered pertinent. Firstly, the acknowledgements of a differential support base for normal workers versus those of Remote Employees. Secondly, the imperative of seeking to find agreed meaning for this new employment relationship, by understanding the diverse roles, motives, concerns and mental models they embrace. It is only once these issues are made transparent that facilitators might begin to conceive of how this employment alternative might become a more established one.

## **3.2 The Stake-holders**

### **3.2.1 Remote Employees**

The challenge that must be addressed when considering Remote Employees is how to engage them. What is quite evident is that the social dynamics, the work culture and bringing people together in a progressive way are all different when considered in the light of the centralised work place. The “off the cuff”, impulsive and spontaneous interactions taken so for granted in an office environment are no longer possible and must somehow be taken into account. In some cases these casual interactions might be regarded as trivial but in other instances they could play a catalytic role in expanding the employees awareness and bounded knowledge. Social interactions previously unsolicited now have to be staged and that stage management becomes the responsibility of both remote employee and his/her immediate superior.

#### **3.2.1.1 Primacy of the individual**

Remote Employees have a different role to play as opposed to those in the traditional office arrangement. As referred to in the previous paragraph, remote employment is characterised by the primacy of the individual and the strange phenomenon of operating beyond the organisation as opposed to within the organisation. This represents a double-edged sword of potential on the one side and isolationist vulnerability on the other. From a career perspective the prospect of being “out of sight, out of mind,” presses heavily as a concern for employees. Like their office bound colleagues their outputs are monitored, but their efforts implicit and unobserved, will not receive the same appreciation accorded to office bound employees. (Bibby, A. 1997: 3)

#### **3.2.1.2 Motives**

Besides the issue of new roles, the motives of employees who are prepared to consider remote employment should be scrutinised. Various sources indicate from which situations employees might make themselves eligible for Remote employment. (For example those employees who function as specialists or internal consultant to the organisation.) Physically disabled employees who experience difficulty in commuting find the prospect of working from home, attractive, as do Employees contemplating a move to self-employment. Such an opportunity, to operate from an environment that would facilitate the

transition to self-employment must have some appeal. The single parent employees, and employees with ailing or incapacitated companions and/or family members might similarly be drawn to the prospect of Remote Employment. By furnishing these examples some motives become self-evident, yet the crucial question remains whether they are congruent with the interests of the organisation.

### **3.2.1.3 Time and Space**

Other concerns revolve around personal circumstances. Space previously catered for by the organisation, now becomes the responsibility of the employee. This can not be viewed as isolation as it impacts on others like living companions and family. The information age through making employees accessible has also inadvertently brought into question employee availability. Though not seen, employees can be accessed 24/7 or 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In the light of flexi-hours which could be both advantageous as well as disadvantageous, the employee must now make moral decisions as to where to draw the line on availability and non-availability. Operating beyond the organisation, work can extend to pervade the home and occupy both time and space.

### **3.2.2 Managers and Superiors**

Just as the Remote Employee is confronted with issues and concerns, so to is the employee's manager and direct superior. Their issue is how to engage and continuously re-engage employees in learning to thereby better the organisations business. A range of issues on which agreement must be reached if remote employment is to be a meaningful consideration similarly confronts them. There are perceived benefits and risks, which need to be carefully considered and debated.

#### **3.2.2.1 Roles and Relationships**

A primary consideration is whether the Remote Employment alternative as a modus operandi has been self initiated or imposed. Coping strategies are required in both instances. Furthermore customary roles between superior and subordinate must be redefined calling on the manager to perform additional roles like mentor, facilitator and/or Network Manager. The relationship between employee and superior should be a well developed, mature one based on mutual trust. Ideally the Remote Employee/Manager

relationship would have had the opportunity to develop and mature in the close proximity of an office environment before being projected “beyond the organisation”.

Yet there are instances where this foundation experience and natural transition is not possible. Here greater emphasis and facilitated effort must be devoted to the process of establishing dialogue. It is only once the dialogue process is established that meaningful broad-based agreement can be reached. Therefore over the broad spectrum of Remote Employees, the agreements negotiated may be similar and yet uniquely different (i.e. accommodating agreements). In summing up, interactive dialogue leads to meaningful agreements that help define the employment relationship (objectives, duties, roles etc.). Since this process is a dynamic one and dialogue is on going, we are reminded that Systems of Meaning are continuously open to change. Change will define and redefine the employment relationship.

### **3.2.2.2 Skills, strategies and Mindset**

Concerns of control, access and availability to the remote employee are real and must be negotiated. Coping strategies for dealing with loss of proximity to subordinates must also be taken seriously, as they can be perceived as disempowering and a lowering in status. Besides developing specific skills, much of the transition required to manage remote employees has to do with the cognitive processes in operation. Factors such as cultural persuasions and mental models are central to these processes and managers must have capacity to extend themselves towards a more holistic mind set.

### **3.2.3 Senior Managers**

Senior Managers are incorporated as prominent stakeholders because of their political and strategic presence. Contemporary management theory stresses the responsibility of senior management and/or executive to be pathfinders in extending organisations to new frontiers and no more so than in the “workplace”. Accountable for the ultimate survival of an organisation, these senior office-bearers share a pre-occupation with recruiting, retaining and extending the organisation’s knowledge capital.

### **3.2.3.1 Approaches**

In the context of remote employment this is found in correctly resourcing such staff members in a manner that will contribute to the organisation's competitive advantage and long-term success. Given the calibre of the people nurtured and entrusted to become Remote Employees, diligent oversight and a resolve to see the program through the long haul are necessary approaches for the likes of such an investment.

### **3.2.3.2 Strategic Intent and Mental Models**

Senior Managers have an obligation to examine their motives and see whether Remote Employment holds any meaning for themselves, for share-holders and ultimately, the organisation at large. Affirmation from these three role players should translate into the incorporation of a Remote Employee programme becoming part of the organisations strategic policy. As policy makers, managers feature prominently in setting the organisations culture, values and norms. Sometimes the prevailing climate in this regard is as much a result of management's actions as well as its failure to act. "Knowing one's mind" on these issues is once again pivotal to the success of a learning organisation. Practical confirmation might then typically be found in secured career pathways for employees involved in working from home.

### **3.2.3.3 Evaluation**

Charged with evaluating the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats that are to be found in extending the workplace beyond the organisation, Senior Management must evaluate the viability of Remote Employment on a recurring basis. The foremost consideration being whether incorporation or continued incorporation (still) contributes to the interests of a learning organisation and its competitive advantage

By drawing out these issues both real and perceived stakeholders can more easily find meaning and make sense of approaches to Remote Management. Having established such a platform, implementation for the present would be less complex and agreement could be sought for establishing a new management practice. Through such management practice, organisations would be better equipped and more resourceful in dealing with Remote Employment.

### 3.3 Emerging Issues that affect Stake-holders to Remote Employment

#### 3.3.1 Remote Employment: Participant or Passenger?

Observers have noted that the working society is once again in a state of flux. The industrial revolution having left as trademark, the hierarchies and bureaucracies found in organisations, is increasingly being affected by an Information Age, a technology driven movement that makes employees accessible from afar. It is not that the Information age is necessarily “heir apparent” to the bureaucracies that have characterised much of the organisations of the 20th century, but that by its very nature, it has at least become a source for alternate workplace options.

The bureaucratic form of organisation has long been regarded as the main feature of modern Western society. According to Nohria & Berkley (1994) Weber who is accredited as a founder of modern day sociology, (Nohria & Berkley, 1994 was insistent that only the bureaucratic organisation was suited to the otherwise unmanageable complexity of the modern work enterprise. It is important that we examine the basic features of Weber’s bureaucratic type because while many question its current relevancy, it still, in the absence of a suitable successor, serves as the benchmark for understanding the contemporary work organisation.

Some of the features of Weber’s bureaucratic type are summarised as: -

1. A discrete set of “jurisdictional areas” separate and regulated spaces pertaining clearly differentiated functions within an enterprise.
2. Hierarchy consisting both of the subordination of offices and of individuals, with a resulting separation of levels of planning and execution.
3. A management system based on written documents of “files” and on a staff of people who maintain and transmit these files.
4. Exclusive focuses on the organisational roles specific to particular offices so as to create a neutral, impersonal environment.
5. A stress on technical training, with the use of technical criteria for matters of both recruitment and promotion.
6. An office system comprised of general rules, which are stable, thorough and learnable.<sup>5</sup> (Nohria & Berkley, 1994: 111)

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<sup>5</sup> Weber, M (1947,1978) The theory of social and economic organisation.

Challenges to the appropriateness of the bureaucratic type as the norm come in various discussions with reference to network organisations, knowledge workers and other terms contrary to the bureaucratic ideal. They argue against the relevance of the bureaucratic ideal but fail to verbalise a vision of what constitutes the new organisation. Organisational theorist Bell gives one prediction relevant for discussion. He predicts that: -

“The emerging socio-cultural order that would come (would) be marked by a turn back to the individual, and by a new primacy of the individual in the workplace.” (Bell 1973: 163)

Such a transition is difficult to rationalise and Nohria and Berkley (1994: 109) comment on the paradox of trying to give meaning to the concept of organisation based on the emergence of individuals. They ask how after all would such organisations become a reality? Despite these difficulties, recent technology driven developments continue to eat away at previously unchallenged notions about what an organisation should be. We know that technology is contributing to changing the infrastructure for co-ordination and control that many believed had to be bureaucratic in nature.

### **3.3.2 Remote Employment: Adding Complexity**

To be specific, Remote employment driven as it is by technology shows that that boundaries between and within organisations can be eroded. For example, e-mails and electronic conferencing permit employees to develop ever-shifting structures that decrease the importance of formal structures and organisational boundaries. Secondly, Poster argues that,

“Electronic communication disrupts existing hierarchies by making it less dependant on cues of status, power and gender” (as cited in Nohria and Berkley, 1994: 117).

Thirdly, consider the proposition that organisations are (and could become) flatter and less differentiated because layers of middle management previously required to co-ordinate organisation knowledge are no longer required. – Their place having been taken by employees who can use PC networks to carry out a range of functions that had typically been separated into distinct jobs. All of the above point to a need for taking such claims seriously, highlighting again the potential primacy of the individual (albeit a selected few),

where organisational structure becomes the outcome of employee action as opposed to its driver.

In summary, it is now not just a case of what is happening in the organisation but also what is happening beyond it that now comes into the reckoning. This means that remote employees empowered as they are by technology can impact on organisations despite this previously being regarded as the domain of bureaucracy. Therefore despite its fragmentary nature<sup>6</sup> and the difficulty in clearly defining its impact on the organisation, Remote Employment does remain connected to the organisation.

By virtue of this connection, it beckons recognition, at being able to contribute to shaping how future work will be done. For in reality, the contradictory sense of connectivity and isolation of being while not, is symptomatic of remote employment's association with the virtual organisation concept.

“While both are broadly considered in rhetorical terms (with the objective of impressing rather than substantiating), they have shown that some of the dynamics attributed to them do exist, and should be taken more seriously as factors shaping and driving the organisational environment” (Nohria, et al., 1994: 126).

### **3.3.3 Practical Impact of the Move to Virtual Organisation**

Technology has been the means of making available to many, “virtually” anything. Couple this to organisational imperatives such as Globalisation and the utterances for boundarylessness, by corporate “supremos” like Jack Welch and remote employment is heralded as the new way for companies to operate and get work done. Futurists like Tom Peters<sup>7</sup> compound the momentum of what now becomes the remote employment movement and the concern is that organisations (and all their stake-holders including employers and employees) are thrust headlong into something that by virtue of being virtual, actually has little substance (to it).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The fragmentary nature of Remote Employment is discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

<sup>7</sup> Peters, T. What will we do for Work? *Time*, 29 May. 2000: 50 – 53.

<sup>8</sup> There is a dearth of research on Remote Employment. One reason is said to relate to the speed of change and that change in information technology make researching a moving target uniquely challenging. Secondly research has found that management issues have been a significant factor in preventing the widespread adoption of Remote Employment. (Staples & Hulland, 1999: 2)

### **3.3.4 The Relationship of Virtual Employment to Organisational Transformation**

It is suggested that any organisational transformation where employees work away from the traditional office/headquarters should be guided not only by a more human approach but also by factors that in addition to technology, makes the development coterminous with organisational practice itself. Taken in isolation it is understandable why “Virtual Employment” can be alluring. Technology has enabled the concept of virtuality to capture everyone’s imagination and incorporate it as part of everyday life. Cell phones and Computer networks such as the Internet allow people inside and outside an organisation to meet in what has been termed virtual space where inter acting parties meet screen to screen rather than face to face. In so doing, technology has made powerful inroads in reconfiguring social space and social interaction (Nohria, et al., 1994: 113). Such progress is commendable but is it enough to make Remote Employment the new way for Working Life?

#### **Five Sense Organisation Management and the Technology Paradox**

For some the interpretation of “Hands On” Management might relate to the manager being connected to the people he or she manages by various combinations of the five senses - of sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. Technology has effectively bridged the first two but is that enough for herein lies a paradox? People are now far more accessible and yet can feel alienated and disempowered. In Organisational terms this paradox effect can permeate through the ranks of management and employees to impact customers and suppliers. For if we briefly confine our focus to within the organisation, we are reminded of the myriad of internal customers and suppliers that need to be fed by the demand and supply of products and services. If tampering with interrelatedness can have such telling consequences within the organisation, imagine its repercussions beyond it, particularly as it seeks its livelihood in the business world. To more fully understand the paradox, it is fitting that we more fully explore the concept of accessibility, in the context of Remote Employment.

### **3.3.5 Accessibility: Challenges to Drawing the Boundaries**

An important consideration when it comes to Remote Employment is when and how often should interpersonal contact be made. For working from home often blurs what constitutes home time and work time and failure to make this distinction merely bedevils the practical need for interpersonal access. While it is not my purpose to debate why people work, there

seems to be broad-based agreement amongst commentators regardless of their persuasions, that humankind has a need to work. White commenting from a social level states that,

“If no one worked, we would lack the “where-with-all” not only of a civilised existence, but of *any* existence.” (White, 1977: 20)

Given this, the challenge still remains for remote employment, in particular, to place in perspective work relative to employees other basic social needs. Therefore, where distinctions between home and work need to be made, it is suggested that the distinctions should be both of a physical and a psychological nature.

Organisations have learnt from the bureaucratic age, the importance of structure and placement and some of its benefits have been clear prescriptions of what, when, where and how to conduct work. In this way very definite guidelines are given where or where not to work as well as the minimum expected time frame in which work is to be conducted. By this arrangement, life is ordered to the extent that even commuting to and from work, is incorporated and validated as an effective means of transition between work and home life. This is because it creates the time and space to bringing closure to daily work life whilst preparing individuals for home life.

Because Remote Employment is more individual than collectively based, “drawing the line” is therefore far more an independent and personal issue to what has gone before. (Flexi-hours for example typifies one of the so-called draw cards to remote employment). If there is not the same collective conscience to regulate work at home as there is for work at the office, individual choice becomes the turnkey for both employee emancipation and slavery. In some cases people choose to be available 24 hours a day and 7 days per week but in other cases, that choice can be made for them. With choice comes responsibility and failure to take responsibility limits the potential of the concept for all its stakeholders.

### **3.3.6 Lessons on Accessibility from “Big Brother”**

The popular television series “Big Brother” is an internationally syndicated game show, which affords the paying public, the opportunity to view the social dynamics of a diverse group of adults. The contestants are confined to an enclosed house and yard where cameras and sound equipment are strategically placed to capture all movement and sound in “real

time” (as they occur). In some respects the technology involved supersedes human capabilities and special night lenses provide enhancements that enable the audience to view both the contestants day and nighttime activities i.e.24/7.

While the situation is contrived and contestants have agreed to become “public domain”, social commentary on the show in relation to remote employment would not be remiss. The first point is the re-affirmation of the growing “virtual” opportunity to access individuals away from the traditional centralised workplace. Second, the opportunity to set some precedents on electronic monitoring - where one way monitoring at best constitutes information gathering and at worst, spying. Finally that for the remote employee, work life will encroach on home space and where unchecked can spread insidiously to effect other institutions like the family and/or the individuals right to privacy.

### **3.3.7 Concluding the Paradox and Introducing Availability**

What then of the suggestion that increased accessibility is commensurate with the heightened possibility of employee alienation and disempowerment? One reason, it may be argued, is found in the proposition that accessibility is not synonymous with availability. So, while the prospect of accessibility and real time response grows daily the choice for real time availability does not.

The extent of a person’s availability over and above normal conditions of employment should remain a personal choice. (A choice which is hopefully uniformly applied by the Remote Employee and likewise respected by his or her manager.) Either of the parties by virtue of their communication being technology driven can terminate that communication at the flick of a switch. Starved of a communication lifeline that at best permits limited exposure (audio and visual), it is understandable that remote employees have grounds for feeling isolated, shunned, and ostracised. Similarly “Bosses” sensing a loss in circulation can experience heightened frustration and a multitude of other negative emotions. What follows is that wherever ones basic instincts are not privy to exercising the full range of senses, the individual has the potential for jumping to conclusions and losing touch with reality.

A Ladder of Inference<sup>9</sup> emerges which can apply equally to both stakeholders. It also points to the need for both parties to conclude through mutual agreement a code of understanding within a mutual relationship of trust. In essence and mindful of the pitfalls listed it should regulate the accessibility/availability dynamic. This would make it possible to recognise “virtual” two-way monitoring under prescribed conditions as a socially acceptable approach to meaningful work related interactions.

### **3.3.8 Summary on (When) Working Hours of the Remote Employee**

In summary, an understanding of working hours for remote employees is different to those of office employees. Finalising working hours is a strategic (albeit personal) matter between remote employee and the organisation and should include a fresh understanding of the dynamics inherent in this employment form. Lastly there is a premium placed in discerning the potential benefits of Remote Employment (i.e. such as flexi-time) and this will become apparent in the exploration of why and when employees consider this alternative. What is nevertheless evident through out this discourse, is the need for a more carefully considered approach to establishing this employment form.

### **3.4 The Differential Support Base.**

Several reasons are suggested as to why Remote Employment can become attractive to various stakeholders.

#### **Employees Perspective**

Employees who consider themselves eligible or are drawn to the prospect of working away from the office include.

1. Employees whose functions are those of specialist/ consultants.
2. Physically disabled employees.
3. Tele-sales workers. (a form of piece-work)
4. Employees who are contemplating the move to self-employment or retirement.
5. Single Parent Employees – Widowed/ divorced/ Unmarried.
6. Employees with an ailing or incapacitated family member.

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<sup>9</sup> This term attributed to Argyris refers to a common mental pathway of increasing abstraction that often leads to misguided beliefs. (Senge, 1994:243)

## **Organisation Perspective**

In addition to the above, organisations consider remote employment as an option when.

1. Downsizing.
2. Outsourcing functions.
3. Preparing employees for retirement.
4. Extending operations nationally or globally or catering for the geographical spread of operations.
5. Retaining or recruiting the services of a specialist employee.
6. Project Work that requires extracting an employee(s) from an operational environment.
7. Employee Development

## **Analysis of Why Organisations Pursue Remote Employment**

An analysis why an organisation pursues Remote Employment seems to indicate the following behaviour patterns. In the majority of instances, organisations engage in this employment either to 1) Retain or 2) Release employees. Force Field analysis (Weaver & Farrell, 1997: 130) best depicts this dynamic and indicates that there are insufficient counterbalancing activities in its implementation. This, in itself, points to the transitory nature of remote employment.

## **How to Synergise and Order: Force Field Analysis**

To facilitate the process of change, Force Field Analysis is a useful starting point especially as it is suited to options such as remote employment, which is difficult to quantify. The objective in employing force field analysis is to outline forces for change, juxtaposed with those of stability and how both are influencing a situation. It requires participative management and could enable a group to set in place a strategy to assimilate remote employment in the organisation.

The underlying rationale is that moving from a current state to the above-mentioned desired state requires conception of both forces for change and forces for stability. Once conceived, this understanding provides necessary information about “leverage points” for changing the status quo. From a management perspective, stakeholder involvement is crucial in executing organisational change (i.e. joint participation). For joint participation in a process that identifies problems and opportunities, arrive at workable solutions and implements agreed upon action plans, promises greater sustainability than an imposed solution. (Weaver & Farrell, 1997: 130)

Secondly, save for employee development and special assignments, organisations exercise the option for the sake of expediency, a means to an end and not an end itself. Exercising the option of Remote Employment is therefore a mechanistic way of catering for individual situations and is not necessarily pursued in the best interests of remote employees or the strategic interests of the organisation at large. Here, specific reference is made to foresight in creating pathways for remote employees' upward mobility, Career Planning and/or Succession Management.

### **Benefits of Remote Employment**

Some of the reasons for organisations implementing Remote Employment are found in the factors of production.<sup>10</sup> The most obvious factor of production is Money particularly in terms of cost to the organisation. One of the popular selling points for Remote Employment is the reduction in overall costs. In terms of overhead costs it is said that for every remote employee placement cost reduction can be realised in savings on working space, parking space, consumables (tea/coffee), telephone and risk management. By application, Remote Employment can serve as a precursor to downsizing and moving to smaller premises with an associated reduction in the cost of real estate. Similarly, it may represent a deliberate effort in risk management where given the recent 11th September 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre, organisations may be more wary about the concentration of their workforce to one particular area.

Remote Employment also creates the opportunity to retain employees who may be lost to an organisation because of external factors. For example where an employee's partner is transferred or relocated, remote employment makes it possible to retain - albeit under different conditions, the services of the affected employee. Similarly, the recruitment of key personnel can be facilitated by the option of retaining them on a RE basis. In both instances, instituting Remote Employment represents a flexible and cost effective alternative to Relocation Costs.

Remote Employment also speaks of the greater mobility of the workforce. For once equipped with Lap tops and "dial up" facilities, employees can be deployed to the point of contact for both realising business opportunities and conducting remedial action (i.e. trouble-shooting).

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<sup>10</sup> Recognised in the Researcher's organisation as Quality, Cost, Delivery, Environment, Risk Management/ Safety and People/Morale.

### **Reality Check for Remote Employees**

Authorities on Remote Employment caution employees considering this route not to be impulsive in opting for Remote Employment. They state that working at home is different to living at home and that just like any business, planning and market research on this aspect is crucial. Remote Employment, it is concluded, ultimately hinges on work being more of a human issue than a technological one. (Bibby, 1991: 1)

### **Managers' Disempowerment: Social Intercourse and Out of Sight Out of Mind**

Foremost must be the consideration whether organisations have any long-term contingencies for remote employees, for example what becomes of ones career aspirations? The answer to this question is most likely dependant on the management frame of reference or their mind set. Ordinarily "out of sight," could mean "out of mind" could prevail. This is because management's method's still predominantly rely on monitoring a physical presence at the office as opposed to the output and the quality of that work that is presented them.

It should be remembered that physical presence could be perceived as a necessary ingredient for supervisors to supervise and managers to manage. Without an employee being physically present some supervisors and managers may perceive the development as a lack of supervisory opportunity and therefore cause for unhappiness. Therefore a superior's Frame of reference coupled with management maturity are critical to the success of Remote Employment.

### **Employees' Disempowerment: Out of Sight Out of Mind**

Where physical presence and social intercourse are valued as necessary ingredients for affirming work status and self worth, Remote Employment becomes an issue. For example the domestic environment is a poor substitute for the office when it comes to maintaining gender neutrality. Gender neutrality can be collectively enforced at the office (albeit a minority movement) where there is strength in numbers. In the domestic environment there is little sense of presence and social intercourse.

Employees build unrealistic anxieties and fears when they are starved of physical cues and such dependencies are dangerous because employees can lose a sense of perspective. For example, where members of the office fraternity regard domestic work in a negative/inferior light, socially dependant remote employees might internalise the negativity by virtue of their

association with the home environment. Remote employment requires strong resolve, a mindset that operates interdependently and a confidence that is not swayed by the negative impressions of other people, particularly within the organisation.

### 3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter several aspects have been outlined for the purpose of creating awareness in and around the issue of Remote Employment. From a meta-level, the impact of the Information Age on the sociology of work was discussed. This has particular relevance to Remote Employment stakeholders since advances in technology have contributed towards challenging traditional infrastructure for organisational co-ordination and control; something that many believed had to be bureaucratic in nature. As a growing employment option, Remote Employment by virtue of it being more personal than collective, defies and sometimes makes obsolete the bureaucratic inspired prescriptions on work practice (Who, what, when, where and how).

There is also a connection between Remote Employment and the concept of virtuality as made possible by advancements in technology. Though still considered in broad rhetorical terms both concepts are interconnected and have shown that some of the dynamics attributed to them have substance (i.e. accessibility, availability) On these grounds alone, it is sufficient that they be taken seriously as factors which influence change in the organisational environment.

Further awareness was created on the differential support base for employees working from the traditional office environment as opposed to those working at home. (The latter, roughly translating with my definition for remote employees). Operating both from the Remote Employee and Organisation's perspectives, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were reflected on both accounts. My findings were that both parties could operate from different agendas of self-interest. Such a development is unpalatable particularly as in its extreme form; Remote Employees are regarded as a dysfunctional and fragmented community that is clearly out of step with the rest of the organisation.

Remote Employment is a challenging reality, which can either work in favour for or against the organisation. It is contended that where there is dialogue over stakeholder approaches, remote employment can indeed become a sustainable feature of the workplace environment,

working to an organisation's advantage. It is nevertheless an organisation's imperative that its management remains accountable for Remote Employment's successful incorporation.

## Chapter 4 – Some Theoretical Constructs

### 4.0 Introduction

The action research (Project investigating Remote Employment) gave me some insights into Remote Employment. In turn, this launched an interest in the broader dynamics that impact on the workplace, where preparations are made for the implementation of Remote Employment. Flood R. (1999) raised the issue of cognitive influences, which are driven by our mental models. These will be defined and discussed shortly as it is possible that they can both promote or hamper the meaningful incorporation of Remote Employment into an organisation.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the model forwarded by Flood is at the crux of the theoretical basis for reflection on Remote Employment. In particular, the focus on systems of meaning is a central concept because it has to do with defining interpersonal relationships. Here it is explained that cognisance or rather cognitive processes define our relationships with other people and with the world at large. How and what we think is largely defined by these cognitive processes, which in turn are textured by personal values, norms, ideologies, thoughts and emotions, coherence and contradiction. (Flood 1999: 110) All of the above being central to our making adequate interpretations of what people around us say and do.

As Flood explains, these systems of meaning have the ability to yield cohesion in cultural ways of living but also to create tensions arising from disagreement. If unchecked they have further consequences, prompting groups within an organisation to form coalitions and engage in political interaction. Where Remote Employment is concerned, the consequences may be simpler but equally as challenging with employees simply disengaging and leaving the organisation.

Systems of meaning also enjoy high priority because it is critically important that people in an organisation have an understanding of what people mean and what their current state of co-existence is. This is because; flowing from systems of meaning, necessary agreements must be sought and concluded, if an organisation is to implement improvement strategies. I shall return to the topic of agreement and the types of agreement in order that focus first is given to exploring systems of meaning.

If expressions of meaning are to be transparent and clear and significantly, they are able to provide opportunities for understanding and learning, then greater awareness is needed around

their factors of influence. Factors including, organisational culture and mental models, which if not correctly cast become problematical. (Serving the futile purpose of deforming the ways in which ideas eventually become strategies.) Therefore, in order to provide a context and platform for my particular interest in interpersonal relationships in Remote Employment, Goffee and Jones' Model (1996) explanation of what holds the modern company together, is featured. By raising the question of what holds the modern organisation together, their discussion of organisation cultures provides a framework for understanding stakeholders varied orientations, inclusive of RE and provides clues for appropriate engagement.

Similarly, Mintzberg's Model on "Managerial Work Rounded Out" (1994) points to the centrality of applied cognitive approaches for purposeful human resource management. Adding dimension to mental models and giving practical consideration to modern management practice, the model helps to locate management's predicament and disposition to a more integrative management approach.

Therefore, in the quest for fleshing out influencing factors on systems of meaning, there is a need to explore organisational culture in tandem with people's mental models. The proposal is that where this is done in an inclusive way that holds a wider appreciation of cognitive processes, sustainable agreements can continuously emerge. Action Learning can be the catalyst that promotes group interaction, informs on systems of meaning and provide guiding principles for progressive approaches to Remote Employment.

Finally, under Systems of meaning (Flood 1999) we will return to the topic of agreement, specifically as the focus turns to appropriate forms of agreement for the incorporation of Remote Employment. We conclude the chapter therefore, by briefly referring to Floods closely interrelated Systems of knowledge power, as this view provides basis for discussion on the overarching role of senior managers.

## **Part One**

### **4.1 Introduction to Goffee and Jones Model**

This section is essentially praxis, meaning the combination of theory and practice that relates to the management of Remote Employees in particular and organisations in general. The issue of a holistic evaluation of Remote Employees is relevant to my organisational context because senior management initially considered implementing Remote Employment in an urban

context three years ago and recently expressed renewed interest in the concept (i.e. it remains relevant). Secondly, it is believed the large-scale implementation of such a concept would fundamentally changed the character of the organisation. Goffee and Jones published an article in 1996 that sought answers to what holds the modern organisation together. They aimed to integrate and capture what is known about corporate culture and outline why it should have the bonding qualities to hold an organisation together.

A feature that is central to the entire thrust is the pretext that managers can not manage what they don't measure. They need to have some appreciation of the impact of changes in their organisations. To establish the organisation's culture/cultures, contributes to such a process. Secondly, from a systems thinking approach, the focus is not so much on the integrity of the model (right or wrong) or the pretext just stated. The focus is rather on the rigorous inquiry that we apply to gain transformational insights for application to our organisations. The model is therefore a proposition and a means to an end and not an end in itself. For the purposes of this chapter the SCQARE Methodology for inquiry (Ryan, 1999) will be applied as it is a means of ensuring that the inquiry remains orderly and is consistent and inclusive in approach.

This methodology was introduced to the researcher in 1999. The approach assumes that the author of the text believes that he/she has added value to the world by producing the text and that a reviewer is tasked with evaluating that perceived value. The process requires the reviewer to formulate the value of an answer to a question, which reflects a concern that exists within the situation. The acronym is derived as follows: -

- S - situation
- C - a concern that exists in the situation
- Q - a question derived from the concern, which if adequately answered will deal with the concern
- A - answer to the concern
- R - the rationale supporting the answer
- E - the reviewer's evaluation of the reading

#### **4.1.1 Applying the SQARE Methodology to the Goffee and Jones Model**

One of the virtues of Systems thinking has been the emphasis on heightening awareness in and around the context of a particular situation, problem or event. It is therefore,

appropriate, that this treatment be applied to the Goffee Jones model in order that one obtains as full a perspective as possible on this component of the praxis.

### **Situation, Concern and Requirement**

For years, writers have tried to capture the requirements for holding an organisation together. This they have done by referring to traditional mechanisms for integration such as hierarchies and control systems. Goffe and Jones questioned these conventions because they have proved both costly and ineffective. What prompted Goffe and Jones was the observation that of all the factors considered organisational culture stands out as a means of bolstering a company's identity as an organisation. (Goffe & Jones, 1996: 2).

Beginning with the assertion that culture is community they contend that business communities are no different to communities outside the business arena (e.g. families clubs and communities). They assert that if business communities do indeed share the same commonality with other communities, they should be viewed through the one lens that has illuminated the study of human organisations for nearly a century and a half, namely that of sociology. Their quest was therefore to provide a model, because of its propensity for practical application, to: -

1. Understand whether there is one right culture for every organisation, and if not
2. How can management actively change an organisation's culture to suit its circumstances?

### **Goffee and Jones' Response: Answer and Rationale**

Goffee and Jones' model is extensive in its undertaking, of providing an integrated visual model of four-archetype business cultures, which are each appropriate for different business environments. Secondly, the model is useful to the extent that it can be practically used to understand different managerial approaches something that is not remiss to an organisation wishing to evaluate alternative employment options relative to its own business culture. (Goffee and Jones 1999: 4)

Goffee and Jones explain that Sociology divides a community into two types of human relations: Sociability, basically a measure of friendliness among members of a community, and Solidarity, a measure of the community's ability to pursue shared objectives. By plotting the dimensions of sociability and solidarity against one another, four types of

business community are identified. The four types of community briefly summarised below:

1. Networked – High Sociability, Low Solidarity

High sociability implies working almost like a family and sharing in events even after hours. Based on the situation this informality has strengths and weaknesses. Low Solidarity implies there is little commitment to shared business objectives and so integrating inter department/division objectives could be frustrating

2. Communal – High Sociability, High Solidarity

Mostly prevalent in companies starting up, these characteristics can be found in mature companies too where employees may have worked together for decades and in the process have come to develop both friendships and win-win objectives. Employees have a strong sense of company identity and reaching significant milestones are accompanied by great fanfare. High solidarity is demonstrated in the equitable sharing of risks and rewards and the strong commitment to company goals and rewards shared business objectives.

3. Mercenary – Low Sociability, High Solidarity

Low Sociability implies that work is strictly business with little socialising. Employees might well respect and like their organisations but don't feel they owe it their loyalty. Work is performance driven with little tolerance of poor performance; not surprisingly employees therefore share few personal ties and are very competitive.

4. Fragmented – Low Sociability, Low Solidarity

The Low Sociability alludes to employees hardly being aware of their membership to an organisation, often working behind closed doors or from their home. In terms of solidarity there is little consensus on organisational objectives and managing from top down is challenging.

Goffe and Jones emphasise that amongst the 4 cultures, there is no continuum running from worst to best. Instead each culture is appropriate for different business environments and Remote Employees are closely identified with the Fragmented type of Business Community. (See Figure 4.) From a management perspective, there is therefore no need to advocate one cultural type over that of another. To do so would miss the point, which is to afford management the opportunity to identify the culture, that best typifies their organisation from a competitive perspective. It is only once management has concluded its relative position can the process and techniques for transformation or realignment towards a desired end (culture) be considered. (Goffee and Jones 1999: 4)

The Goffee and Jones article professes to have been drawn extensively from fieldwork consisting mainly of observations and interviews of a wide range of managers. They include case studies of organisations, which each occupy one of the four culture quadrants, describing why these organisations find themselves where they are. They then outline from their analysis; practical steps that are being taken to optimise, re-align or transform the organisation from its current position. It is of note, that the fieldwork aspect is perhaps more in evidence in illustrating and helping readers understand managerial styles. In terms of the concerns and criteria that the theorists posted, the model represents a coherent and tidy response.

Goffee and Jones: Four types of Business Community  
Two Dimensions, Four Cultures

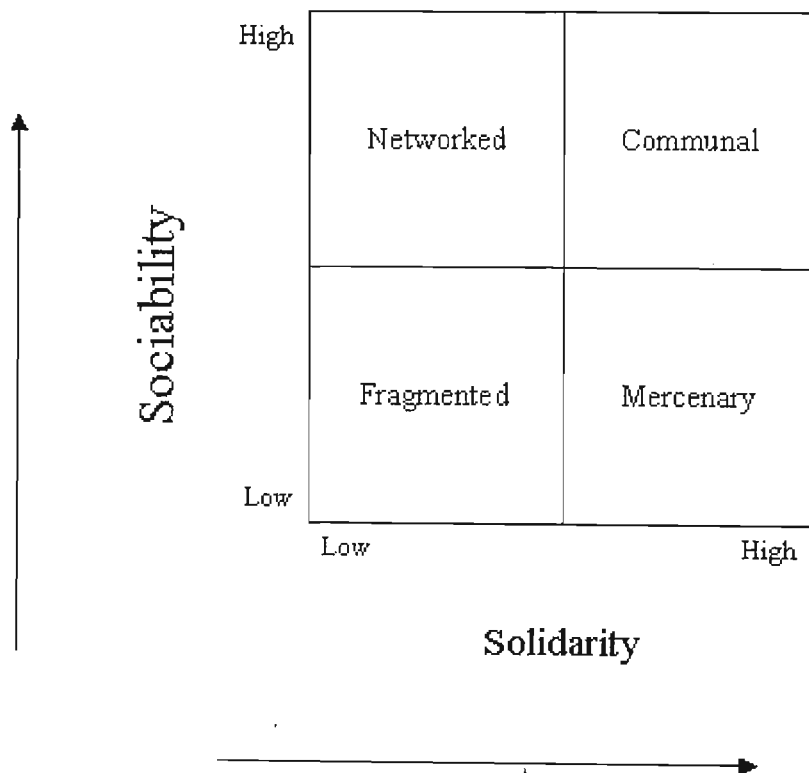


Figure 4: Plotting the “Work Unit” Culture

## **Evaluation: Relevance, Utility and Validity of the Goffee and Jones Model**

### **Relevance**

There is little doubt that development in management literature that increasingly gives a skewed or one-sided perspective as opposed to a holistic view, goes against the grain of Systems Thinking. Goffee and Jones' model as an explanation of what holds the modern company together is relevant in that it is a genuine attempt to arrest this tendency and put in place a means to refocus the inquiry by looking more holistically at organisation types. Secondly, the model can serve as a framework to consolidate learning about organisational culture. Thirdly, the model is interactive by virtue of it prompting readers and managers through a questionnaire, to ask the right questions that will assist them to identify their organisation's culture.

It is also practical in that it warns against the error of recent literature on corporate culture that assumes that organisations are homogenous. This is indeed central to the inquiry on Remote Employment because just like organisations differ from each other, so do units within them - where the remote employees in the researchers organisation would indeed constitute such a unit (albeit loosely knit).

### **Utility and Validity**

While it would be foolish to try and get the Goffee and Jones model to fit an organisational situation without compromising it, it is of concern that the model does not go to any great lengths to describe how managers can be better developed to deal with remote employment." Secondly, while development steps may be held to be self-evident, further propositions should be sought to explore means by which learning and development will prevail for all stakeholders including in our case, "empowered remote employees". A third concern is whether it is at all advisable to think in terms of the complete manager. The danger lies in the exercise of self-sufficiency at the expense of team development.

#### **4.1.2 The Model: a Proposition for Introducing and Monitoring Remote Employment**

##### **The Work Situation**

Perhaps it is prudent to carry over the general concerns on the utility and validity of the Goffee and Jones Model to later discussion. This is because in the context of the

researchers specific organisation, the model can find immediate relevance to its current position. That context is one in which the organisation and more specifically departments in the organisation have implemented remote employment in an ad hoc way because it has been expedient to do so. Secondly, when a project team was commissioned to investigate the feasibility of introducing Remote Employment formally at Divisional Head Office, the motive was driven almost exclusively by cost saving considerations.

In reality, Remote Employment ought to be given a more holistic consideration, if it is to offer the organisation any sustainable competitive advantage. The utility of the model is best found in its application where although its primary unit of analysis is the organisation, it can just as well be used by management to look inside their own organisations, to compare units divisions or other units with one another. Goffee and Jones' model helps us to locate Remote Employment within one of the Four business cultures identified. For in a community that has a tendency to score low in the two types of human relations of sociability and solidarity, Remote Employment is decidedly part of a Fragmented culture.

Characterised by low solidarity and low sociability, one might struggle to think who would voluntarily want to work for a fragmented organisation? Yet fragmented organisations are as much a fact of life as trouble-ridden countries, communities and neighbourhoods.

Hallmarks of such a workplace community include exhibiting a low perception of organisational attachment. Goffe and Jones have found that such employees often believe that they work for themselves or will identify more closely with their occupational groups (for example professionals like Lawyers) than the organisation. Therefore, persons dedicated to this form of organisation can show a definite deficiency in emotional attachment to their organisation. Sometimes this form of remote employee devotee only goes to the office when it is absolutely necessary to do so and could easily be regarded as anti-social. Clearly, this expresses the one extreme, for it is imperative that efforts be concentrated on a more balanced attachment between organisation, occupation and employment status.

Goffee and Jones also add that it can not be expected of this community to agree about measurement criteria such as objectives, key performance areas and standards. Dissent is a logical consequence of such a community and therefore there is little or no solidarity. The

collective management of such individuals is indeed problematic and leaders can feel marginalised or insignificant.

Yet, situations that might benefit from this culture and environment are instances where individuals either want to work alone or draw a very clear distinction between work and personal life. Lucrative forms of this community type include manufacturing concerns that rely heavily on the outsourcing of piecework, professional organisations like consulting and law firms are organisations that have become virtual. (Which Goffee and Jones simply define as employees who work from home or on the road, reporting to a base mainly by electric means.) The most destructive form of fragmented organisation that exists is where politics, downsizing and other disruptions have so fragmented the ties of sociability and solidarity that the community is truly dysfunctional and the prevailing concern is individual survival. From this broad categorisation, our focus is singularly on the emergence of the virtual aspect, though the reference to other categories, particularly the dysfunctional community indicates sobering limitations.

Traditionally, with the exception of the last scenario, fragmented cultures might be suitable where: -

1. There is little interdependence in the work itself, for example tax lawyers each with different clients, or telesales employees working different areas or sub contracting.
  2. Where standards are achieved by input controls as opposed to process controls. The proviso in this instance is that management should at least ensure that the right people are recruited, who once hired and trained, require very little supervision, are their own best judges, strongest critics and harshest taskmasters.
  3. There are few learning opportunities between individuals. (Goffee and Jones, 1994:20)
- All of the above are symptomatic of Remote Employees operating as a peripheral (as opposed to integral) part of the organisation.

The question is how does a remote employee (taken as an entity and therefore a unit) relate to the unit he or she reports into? It is quite conceivable that both have different cultures just like differences between other units where there might be marked differences in hierarchies and management levels. The point is that the possibility of variation is recognised and once recognised can be more easily managed. Several possibilities exist, for example, where there are radical differences between units, it may very well explain conflict and suggest necessary intervention. Conversely, if there is homogeneity of culture

throughout an organisation, it could be a signal to management to be more expansive and to make organisational adjustments that will cater for different business environments.

### **Positions That Emerge as Learning Points**

A Corporate culture is pivotal to the organisation existence and corporate growth.

Goffee and Jones' model emerges as displaying immediate potential for providing anchoring points for the stage by stage consideration, accommodation and implementation of an effective Remote Employment program. Secondly, much of changing ones corporate culture has to do with the manipulation of the two continuums of Sociability and Solidarity. Sociability is not necessarily contrived it sometimes comes naturally. As mentioned earlier, it is defined as the measure of emotional, non-instrumental relations (in which people do not see others as a means of satisfying their own ends) among individuals who regard one another as friends. Friends share ideals, attitudes, interests and values and usually associate on equal terms. Sustaining sociability comes through continuous face to face interactions that are characterised by high level of reciprocity. There are no prearranged deals, hidden agendas, social interaction is uninhibited and reciprocal so that we talk, we share, we laugh and we cry.

#### **4.1.3 Sociability**

Goffee and Jones (1999: 5) believe that the benefits of high sociability include: -

- 1 An enjoyable work environment leading to high morale.
- 2 Since sociability fosters teamwork, it impacts positively in stimulating creative thought, information sharing and openness to new ideas.
- 3 Thirdly Sociability creates an environment where employees would be prepared to work to exceed employer expectations not only for their own benefit but for their colleagues too.

The disadvantages of high levels of sociability are: -

- 1) Prevalence of friendship can allow for the tolerance of poor performance.
- 2) A disproportionately large concern for consensus amongst the members, where the best compromise gets applied to a business as opposed to the best solution.
- 3) The development of cliques and informal alliances - that can undermine or bypass the due process in an organisation. For example, golf playing executives might over a game of golf agree to a strategy that should strictly speaking be confined to the boardroom

where non-golf-playing executives are included. (Though, in some cases it is acknowledged that this possibility offers certain flexibility to the organisation.)

#### **4.1.4 Solidarity**

Just like with sociability, Goffee and Jones (1999: 6) are of the opinion that solidarity can make a natural emergence in-groups in the business environment. The distinction between the two issues is that where sociability is in the heart, solidarity is a mind issue. They cite labour unions as the classic example of high solidarity communities but also include communities of professionals such as doctors and lawyers. In all of the above, relationships are based on common tasks, mutual interests, or shared goals that will benefit all involved parties. Groups such as these can be mobilised swiftly and effectively to combat outside competitive threats. Numerous examples exist, but could include amongst others, mobilising to counter threatening legislation, changes in conditions of service and so forth,

The unique feature with this phenomenon is that solidarity can just as easily occur amongst groups and individuals who are dissimilar and who require no build up in sustained continuous social relations. Solidarity can be demonstrated in fits and starts and only as a need arises. It therefore lends itself to special operations; where a mercenary team of experts each with different attributes is assembled and their talents harnessed in pursuit of a particular objective. Once the objective is achieved the same team, dissolves and disappears as quickly as it was formed.

Benefits of solidarity in a business community include: -

- Sharp strategic focus.
- Swift response to threats
- Intolerance of poor performance
- A degree of ruthlessness which if the organisation strategy is correct can be hugely effective.

Strangely, the same ruthlessness can also perpetuate solidarity especially where everyone suffers together. If everyone must meet the same high standards, employees can also develop a strong sense of confidence in the organisation. Confidence which in turn might be transformed into allegiance and devotion.

Solidarity does however come at a price and is particularly costly, warn Goffee and Jones, when a good strategic focus locks onto the wrong strategy (i.e. Single Loop Learning). Secondly, there will be nothing to trigger mobilisation until it is unambiguously clear how every individual participant will benefit from participating. Where job definitions and roles have been cast, no intrusions from persons outside the community are tolerated. This means that while great benefits might be realised from the multi-disciplinary synergies of the original “community”, no additional contributions from an outsider, however genuine, will be considered.

#### **4.1.5 Other Improvement Areas for the Model**

While Goffee and Jones’ contribution to management learning might prepare managers to be more sensitive when recruiting, training and supporting remote employees, I return now to one of the concerns first posted. That concern is that the model cannot give specifics on the “how” of going about management development for remote employment and therefore, overall Organisational Development. The model enables an organisation to evaluate itself against the dimensions of sociability and solidarity, a process that in it requires management competence. Finally, it assists in determining whether the organisation culture fits the business environment, to leverage competitive advantage within a particular frame of time. Both business environment and organisational culture are variable components since they are situation based. Yet the contingency that is not catered for is - how to cater for diverse and changing cultures within the organisation while trying to remain competitive in a ever changing business environment?

Here the model is too simplistic and should be enhanced to cater for organisational contexts that change all the time. By placing emphasis on the current changing context of work and needs, we urgently need to explore a new management dimension where managers assume a more dynamic action/ intervention role in order to impact change in an organisation. While the authors give practical guidelines how to manipulate the dimensions of Sociability and Solidarity, it is believed that organisations could take matters even further.

Carefully facilitated workshops bringing together prospective Remote Employees and their managers could be scheduled. Goffee and Jones (1999: 9) provide a questionnaire to determine perceptions of an organisation's culture. Carefully plotting the position of the

participants and encouraging dialogue on that outcome can give rise to a deeper appreciation of the issue. The distance and relative positioning of these 2 points, provides important determinants. For example, can bridges realistically be forged between the two communities (or not). The closer their proximity of the cultures the greater the possibility for accommodation, conversely the further the distance, the less likely it is for bridging (i.e. accommodation) to occur. The latter does not mean to say that Remote Employment is an out and out impossibility but rather given the context of “inclusiveness”, that there would be a greater degree of difficulty in realising this objective.

Relative positioning is also seen as significant because it creates latitude for change. This could mean effecting change within the RE situation to bring it closer to head office and the less likely (but possible) scenario of effecting changes in head office to more closely align with Remote employees and/or their community. However, in the process of bridging the most evident development will be the accommodating of cultures. As Figure 5 suggests,

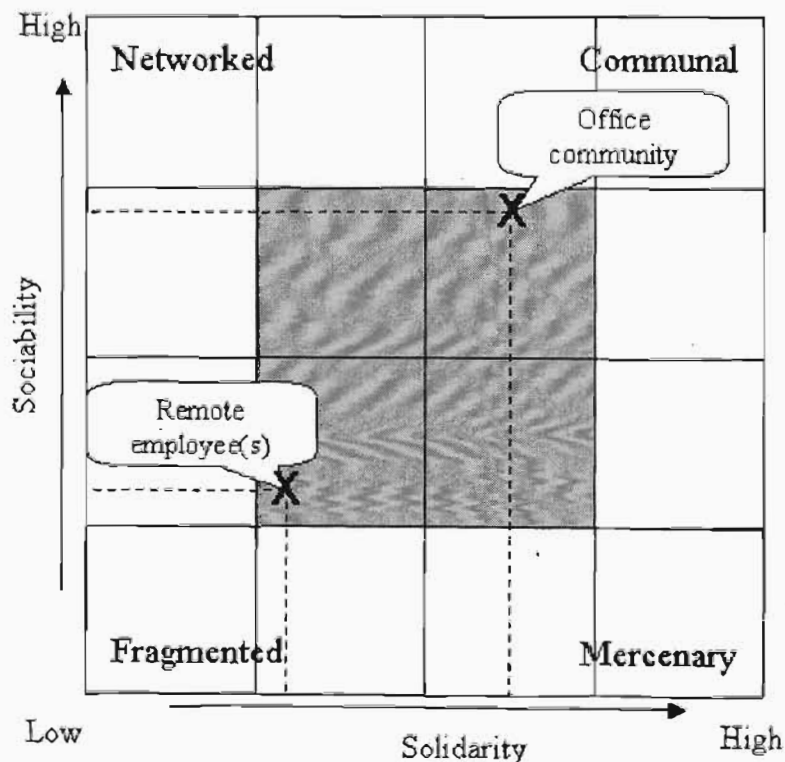


Figure 5: Plotting the Office Community relative to the Remote Employee (my adaptation)

The chances of co-operation and incorporation are greatly enhanced if the stakeholder's relative positions can be clarified and discussed. In addition, it indicates reciprocally where greater effort should be expended in terms of sociability and solidarity.

There is no ideal form of community because the business environment changes all the time and the corporate organisations must respond accordingly. Yet, given this complexity, the manager must within his or her locality make bounded judgements in time and space to identify for the time being, the community type which best serves the organisation's interests. Remote Employment can be incorporated towards this community provided it is not already dysfunctional in terms of sociability and solidarity. Given this understanding, improvements towards increasing their Sociability would include steps like

1) Sharing ideas, recruiting compatible people 2) Increasing social gatherings 3) Reducing formalities 4) Leading by example in displaying friendliness and being caring.

Similarly, Solidarity would be enhanced by 1) developing and broadcasting awareness of the organisations competition 2) Setting out a gripping yet compelling call to action 3) Stimulating a Winning Orientation and 4) Bolstering commitment to shared organisational goals. (Goffee & Jones 1996: 32)

#### **4.1.6 Conclusion**

This section explored the question of what holds the organisation together and in discussing corporate culture, it is apparent that there are great complexities within the organisation. Remote Employment regardless of its status (i.e. whether already institutionalised or under consideration) would contribute to this complexity. Though I have quoted extensively from Goffee and Jones' model, it must be emphasised that its appeal lies primarily in it being a suggested means of ordering complexity. The model also suggests that, by understanding cultural components and discussing the dimensions of Sociability and Solidarity, managers can be proactive in accommodating Remote Employees as integral members of the organisation.

From this approach, it then becomes possible for human relations within the business environment to be deliberately interactive and more cohesive, particularly by using the model as a starting block to initiate dialogue. This concept will be discussed more comprehensively later under systems of meaning. It is with this, that attention is given to

mental models as a platform for developing management skills. Skills that will better enable the incorporation of remote employment in the organisation.

#### **BOX 4.1 VIGNETTE: REACHING THE POINT OF NO RETURN**

Greg Ellis was a particularly enthusiastic Change Manager in Sappi Forests. As a non-conformist his “wacky ideas” were often tolerated because they captured public imagination and were generally progressive. Since Greg relished all the advances that technology had to offer, there was little surprise that he was one of the first people to volunteer to become a test case for our Remote Employee project – albeit that he lived 2 kilometres from the organisation’s divisional head office.

In a short space of time, Greg mastered use of electronic media and what once comprised engaging conversations were now replaced with streams of e-mails. Many employees found this medium of communication impersonal and tedious and with time communication with Greg became decidedly one-sided.

In 6 months it became apparent that Greg had inadvertently divorced himself from his customer base. A base that preferred to engage him face to face, “off the cuff” in office corridors and at the tea-stand. It was the beginning of the end and with a dwindling audience Greg’s good influence was slowly diluted. In his enthusiasm it seemed that he had got ahead of himself and the organisation. The death knell came when broad scale organisational restructuring took place and sidelined his programme. Greg found this experience hurtful and felt in part that he had been allowed to fall outside his area of influence.

Nine months after inception Greg resigned bringing to an end a promising career in Sappi Forests. Today he is back doing what he does best, engaging people at the office face to face. Instead of a receptive audience of Sappi employees he now enjoys the attention of employees at a New Zealand forestry company.

## Part Two

### 4.2 Introduction to Mintzberg's Model

This section deals with the management of remote employees in the context of general management. The issue of Management is relevant to the researcher's inquiry because remote employment clearly presents organisations with unique challenges. More directly, when an exploratory project on remote employment was commissioned in 1999, it has had no substantial impact on subsequent remote employee placements. Coming from an organisational context, where the structure is relatively flat because of outsourcing, this company is generally regarded as a Management Company. In reality, there are sections and departments that can be described as fragmented communities (where Remote Employees are located) but at the same time, there is also evidence of the other organisational cultures.

Clearly, managers will have to exhibit greater resourcefulness to cater for all cultural contingencies, not least of which includes remote employment. The objective in exercising such competencies would be to synergise different communities for maximum organisational advantage. Henry Mintzberg published an article in 1994 that aimed to integrate and capture what is known about the manager (ess) and his/her job. (Rounding out the Managers Job. Sloan Management Review, vol.36, no.1, 11 – 26.) It is around this work that aspects of system learning, participatory research and the practices of a “multi-cultured company”, are applied. The net effect is to enhance Mintzberg's work by creating a synergy between all these aspects that will provide fresh applications for organisational transformation.

The pretext that features centrally throughout this chapter is that effective learning is directly related to effective management. Again the focus is not so much on the integrity of the model (right or wrong) or the pretext just stated, but rather on the rigorous inquiry that we apply to gain transformational insights for management development. Operating from a Meta level where the focus is on that of learning about learning, we allow ourselves to see the world through a model with the expectation that it might provide results not achieved before. The model is therefore, a proposition and a means to an end and not an end in itself. For the purposes of this exercise, we will apply the SCQARE Methodology as the basis for our inquiry in order that we might be consistent and inclusive in approach.

With hindsight, it can be said that Remote Employment in a Forestry Organisation might not be as unconventional a concept as many would believe. Typically, given such an

organisations geographical spread, it is still commonplace to find clusters of three to four employees manning forward operation centres based on remote plantations. Surprisingly, one of the consequences of the extensive outsourcing in the researcher's organisation was diminishing numbers of employees on the ground relative to those employed at divisional head office.<sup>11</sup> What was unconventional, was the shifting of inquiry on remote employment from the rural extremities of the organisation (where RE is a necessary and generally accepted practice) to its suburban-based divisional headquarters.

Though the project indicated possibilities for remote employment through associated rationalisation, it inadvertently raises concerns about the status of a manager's dexterity to cope with individuals working from home. In proceeding with implementation, does the organisation strive to include the expanded management of remote employees as another specialised management module, increase the repertoire of its managers or does it adopt a laissez-faire approach believing its experience of the past will equip it for the future? Systems Thinking looks at reinvention rather than continuous improvement and begs a more holistic approach

#### **4.2.1 Applying the SQCARE Methodology to Mintzberg's Model**

One of the virtues of Systems thinking has been the emphasis on heightening awareness in and around the context of a particular situation, problem or event. It is therefore appropriate that this treatment be applied to Mintzberg's Model, in order that one obtains as full a perspective as possible on this component of the discussion.

##### **Situation, Concern and Requirement**

For many years, writers have tried to capture the integrated job of managing by describing management behaviours such as planning, leading, organising and controlling. Mintzberg questioned this convention because it had developed to the extent that even the best-known writers in management literature were seemingly emphasising one aspect of the manager's job to the exclusion of the others. What prompted Mintzberg was the concern that while collective literature may cover all aspects of the integrated job of managing it somehow lost the essence of describing the whole job. Mintzberg's quest was therefore to provide a model, because of its propensity for practical application, to: -

- Assist in understanding the job properly.

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<sup>11</sup> Amongst foresters this modus operandi is accepted as part of the job and satellite offices range from anything like an

- To provide a basis from which one can deal with the many requirements of the job.

### **Mintzberg's Response (Answer) and Rationale**

The objective of Mintzberg's model was firstly that of providing an integrated visual model of best-known management practices (i.e. what managers do). Secondly, the model seemed useful as a practical tool to understand different managerial styles; something that is particularly important in my organisation - which explained earlier, would best be regarded as a "management company".

Working from inside out, the model has as its core, the person in the job, the frame of the job and its agenda. (These are referred to as largely "cerebral roles"). The core is surrounded by concentric circles and represents the roles managers play at three levels: (see Figure 5).

- Managing by Information
- Managing through People
- Managing by Action

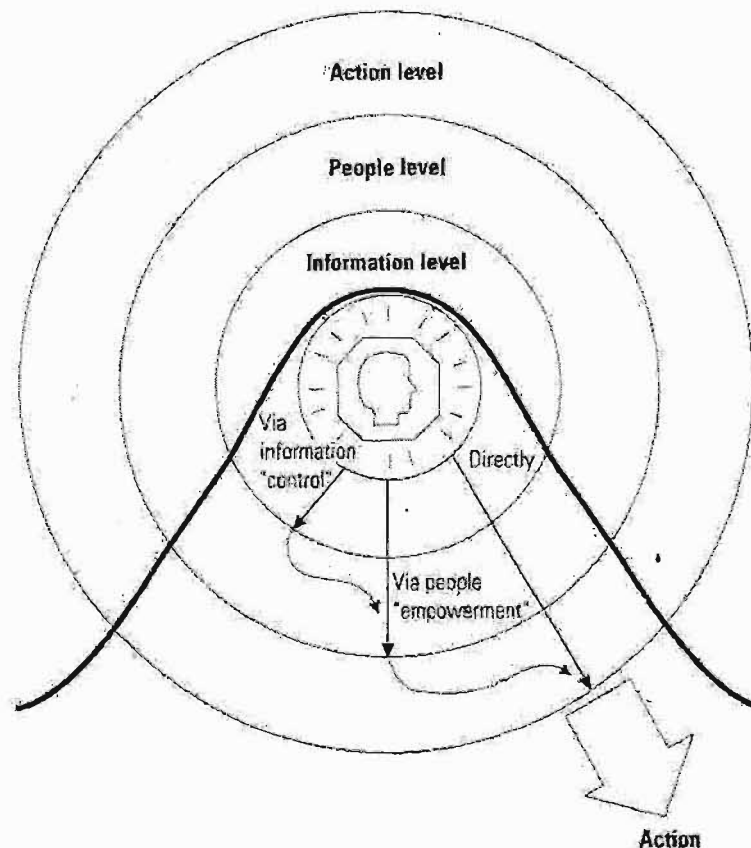


Figure 6: Three levels of evoking action

These roles are more tangible and whereas the core roles may be regarded as cerebral, the former roles form the crux of “getting things done”. An important feature of the above is that in each of the three cases, managers can play roles inside and outside (either within the larger organisation or thirdly, completely outside the organisation).

Mintzberg’s theories were apparently drawn extensively from fieldwork consisting mainly of observations and interviews of a wide range of managers. The fieldwork helped Mintzberg formulate a model that he felt would help students understand managerial styles. In terms of the concerns and criteria that Mintzberg posited, the model represents a logical and uncluttered response.

### **Evaluation**

#### **Relevance**

Mintzberg’s model tries to look at management multi-dimensionally recognising that management is not static. Such an endeavour has merit because it systematically guards against good strategic focus being locked into the wrong strategy. Secondly, it puts in place a means to refocus the inquiry and can serve as a framework to consolidate learning about the dynamic scope of management, which in changing times, now includes managing Remote Employees.

#### **Utility and Validity**

As useful as it may be, it is simplistic to think of this model as being able to fit any organisational situation without compromising it in some way. Of greater concern though, is that the model’s limitations in describing how managers can be better developed – or to quote Mintzberg’s words, become “Well rounded.” Secondly, while development steps maybe held to be self-evident, further propositions should be sought to explore means by which learning and development will prevail for the whole management unit as well as its manager. A third concern is whether it is at all advisable to think in terms of the complete manager.

The danger lies in the exercise of self-sufficiency at the expense of team participation and development. Though not mentioned, a manager’s reliance on subjective evaluations could rob them of vital development cues as provided by the workplaces social environment. It is

perhaps for this reason, that management development can also be shown to be the result of deliberate social engagement. In this light, Remote employment presents management with a particularly extreme situation, where social engagement does not come naturally and the need lies with being proactive and creating a social environment which naturally would not exist.

#### 4.2.2 The Model Used as a Proposition for Management Development

##### The Work Situation

My organisational context is one in which the organisation is evolving to a flatter 4-tier operational management system (see Figure 7), supported by departments providing specialist services (such as Information Technology, Planning, G.I.S., Organisation Development and Administration). The significance of this situation is that even at the lowest tier of management (level 4), employees find themselves managing others (i.e. contractors).

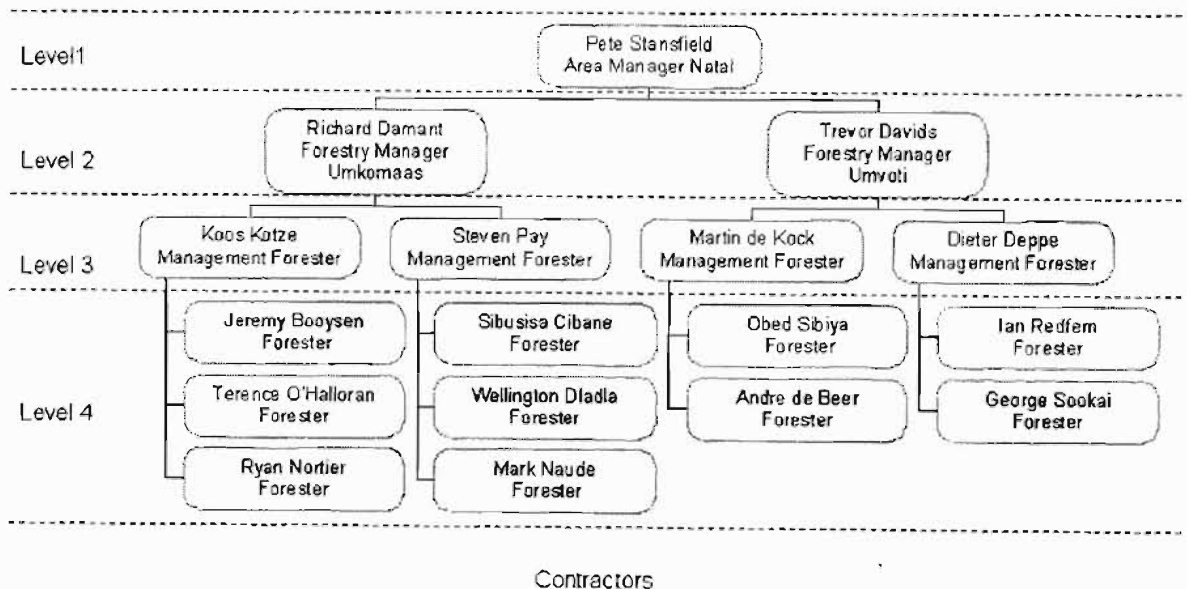


Figure 7: Forestry – Natal’s four tier management structure

Management Development is therefore pivotal to the organisation’s existence and continued growth, Mintzberg’s model emerges as displaying immediate potential for providing anchor points even at base management level (level 4). It shows the stage by stage implementation of an effective management development program that incorporates

Remote Employment. More directly, having once contemplated Remote Employment as an alternative work option, the model can assist managers in orientating themselves to either take on the management of existing remote employees or consider the introduction of remote employees to the organisation.

A further course of action is prompted by Mintzberg's contention that, "People are not neutral when they take on a new management job. Greater appreciation of this fact will allow us to be more careful of how we select managers in the first place. Or else, more flexible in how we let them mould their jobs to themselves in the second." (Mintzberg, 1994:12)

In both situations, the individual brings to the job values and experience that can be channelled in the directions of skills and/or competencies on the one hand and organisational knowledge on the other. (Where knowledge is probably the last outflow points from which "Mental models" are formed.) Together, knowledge and competencies determine how the manager will approach job-related issues, which once applied, will indicate his or her style of management.

To understand how managers conceive what they must manage, Mintzberg introduced the concept of the "Frame of the Job". Frame of the job covers the three fundamental issues of Purpose, Perspective and Position. On each account a managers approach is significant because collectively, they will determine how the manager will pre-occupy himself/herself in conducting managerial duties. Purpose for one, prompts the manager to resolve his or her approach to managing their unit. Approaches can go in one of three directions: of either maintaining the unit as is, adapting it towards a new or desired condition or creating/recreating to be operationally different.

Where purpose speaks of imposing, Perspective addresses assimilation or taking in where the unit is and where it is striving to be. This emphasises Mintzberg's point addressed more likely to the managers of managers (i.e. senior managers) he appeals to organisations to be more flexible in allowing managers to mould their jobs to themselves. Vision and culture are central to gaining perspective and although Mintzberg is fairly dismissive of their significance, discussions in Part one of this chapter indicate the centrality of incorporating culture as part of the management dimension. This is particularly necessary in terms of organisational change, since organisations are internally not just characterised by

monocultures but rather diverse organisational communities. Positions are the cumulating of thinking through the previous two components with the resultant conception of arriving at a strategy.

The manager plays a pivotal role in the implementation, maintenance and growth of their unit and none more than with the management of REs'. While the temptation might be to group remote employees as one organisational community, individual personalities and circumstances realistically point to the need to regard each RE as a separate "community".

Given this complexity the manager's style becomes central to strategy formulation. His/her response to the frame of the job and what this entails has, according to Mintzberg, magnetic qualities for drawing (or discouraging) the behaviours of persons within the management unit. The Frame of the job can be imposed by some outside (person, force or system) alternatively; it can be developed by the manager himself/herself. Secondly, another dimension to the frame of the job is the clarity of the frame and this ranges along a continuum from vague to sharp. Juxta-posed, these two dimensions produce four broad styles for conceiving the frame of the job (see Table 2).

In terms of management it is imperative that the frame has a sharp focus because of the effect it has in tightly binding (the units) behaviours. Vagueness on the other hand has the opposite effect, as the issues and activities performed risk being scattered in all directions.

As the saying goes "some people make things happen, some let things happen and some people watch things happen." Managers have a choice in how to respond to the environment they perceive both in terms of what is being done and what needs to be done. Whether the circumstances are imposed, or of the managers own doing, the style of responding to any current or anticipated situation rests predominately with the manager. Their choice can have telling consequences.

		Clarity of Frame	
		Vague	Sharp
Selection of Frame	Imposed	Passive style	Driven style
	Invented	Opportunistic style	Determined style

Table 2: The Frame of the Job

The manager's central activity in relation to the "Frame" he/she encounters, is that of conceiving it. How they conceive it manifests itself in the strategic intent or thrust they bring to their management unit. Accordingly, where the focus on the frame is sharp but imposed, managers display a DRIVEN STYLE. Where the same high degree of Sharpness is maintained and the manager has free reign in selecting the frame, a DETERMINED STYLE is evidenced. Thirdly a manager that enjoys the same free reign in frame selection, (therefore displaying creative and innovative flair), but whose clarity of frame is somewhat vague is considered to have an OPPORTUNISTIC SYLE. Finally, where both Clarity of Frame and Selection of Frame are respectively vague and imposed, a PASSIVE STYLE of management is conceived.

The significance of the above classifications is found in the orienteering they provide for contingencies like Remote Employment. So from a strategic perspective for example, it suggests that organisations and managers in particular can not afford to regard Remote Employment as merely serving the purpose of functional utility - a case of doing for the sake of doing. Classifications re-orientates by further suggesting that the management of Remote Employees is less about sustaining just another employment option and rather more a case of regarding it as a lucrative pursuit that adds value to the employee as well as the organisation. Perhaps one of the conclusions that can be drawn is that Remote Employment requires of their managers, sensitivity, energy and the ability to give individual attention. This is not because these employees are naturally reclusive but because their work environment makes them more vulnerable to being marginalised.

A traditional work office arrangement might be more accommodating of management deficiencies but managing REs' is less forgiving. Accordingly, in terms of Mintzberg's model, managers cannot reasonably afford to be pre-occupied with anything less than the Driven or Determined style of management. More often than not, managers cannot prescribe their work environment, it is imposed and to coin a metaphor one must "manage the cards you are dealt". Secondly, the imposition of a vague frame is no excuse for evoking a passive style of management, since it is within every manager's grasp to sharpen the frame.

### **4.2.3 Concerns about Mental Models**

The significance of Mental Models is that they are the predominant means through which the managers interpret the world around them. By permeating thinking they also effect behaviour thus greatly determining how managers approach a given job. The insidious thing about mental models is that in many cases they are faulty and Argyris states that where blindly followed, individual's can develop "skilled incompetence" (as cited in Senge, 1990:25). In the context of the work team, undetected differences in people's mental models can act as a hindrance to change and transformation. In today's fiercely competitive business environment, businesses can rise and fall in proportion to opportunities realised and opportunities missed. It is particularly tragic where organisations inhibit themselves and miss breakthrough opportunities through managers not first checking out their employee mental model profiles. When engaging in Remote Employment for instance and using Mintzberg's model as a guideline; organisations might be more inclined to opt for Remote Employees and managers with a Driven or Determined style- as opposed to those with Passive Or Opportunistic Styles. The main point though is that all stakeholders should learn to manage their mental models properly before their mental models manage them and render them both incompetent and resistant to change. It therefore, makes good sense, for this cerebral level (mental models) to be the first anchoring point for management development.

### **4.2.4 Question, Answers and Relevance in dealing with Mental Models**

One would want to question the feasibility of improving and adjusting mental models for the purpose of improved managerial competence. Central to any such effort would be the requirement of bringing to the surface (from the depths of the unconscious mind), people's

current “theory in use”. Senge refers to various tools, which assist in facilitating this transformation, tools like the Ladder of Inference (Senge, 1994: 242), which through processes of Inquiry and Advocacy, allows a team or management unit to understand their mental models. Mental models shared collectively can then be harnessed, adjusted and positively re-deployed to tackle new business challenges and opportunities.

#### **4.2.5 Application to my Organisation**

The organisation that I work for can enhance management development by incorporating into its programme, some background on mental models. Through its application I have felt empowered where my prior knowledge of Mental Models has assisted me in more accurately pairing prospective Remote Employees to suitable Managers. In other instances this might be facilitated by a 360-degree assessment exercise being conducted by a senior manager, the direct manager and his/her team with the assistance of a facilitator (also an active participant). The objective is - to review assumptions on day to day business and to practice using the tools at one’s disposal, to find and appropriately treat the mental models in operation. To institutionalise this discipline, the ideal situation is as item one of the agenda of any meeting. Mintzberg claims Managers spend up to 40% of their time communicating. What better way to sell the concept than by using relevant case studies and promoting this time as a form of mental warm-up, an ice-breaker preparatory to an “effective meeting”

Having dealt with the core of Mintzberg’s model above, we see the same further developed in the 1) formal authority that the incumbent enjoys over the organisational unit. This is but one of three areas which complete the context of the job, the others being 2) “within”- like between units but within the organisation (i.e. inter team, inter department etc.) and 3) outside. This refers to the rest of the context though not formally part of the organisation with which the manager must work. These distinctions are very useful in tracking one’s own organisation and in some cases can show why some managers are now managing differently to how they did in the past. (I.e. the composite context has changed). To add to the context, Mintzberg states that managers can manage on three levels

1. Manage directly by action.
2. Manage people to encourage them to take necessary action.
3. Manager to influence people to take necessary action

In summary, the combination of the context and management levels provides a basis for understanding different styles of managing, as well as, the different contexts in which managing take place.

#### **4.2.6 Conclusion : Other Improvement Areas for the Mintzberg Model**

While it is acknowledged that Mintzberg has made a huge contribution to management literature and has enabled organisations to take more seriously the recruitment, training and support of managers of remote employees, we return now to one of the concerns we first posted. That concern is, that the model cannot give specifics on the “how” of going about management development and therefore overall Organisational Development. The model could be more flexible because for organisational contexts change all the time and models should try and mirror these changing dynamics. By placing emphasis on the current changing context of work and needs, a new management dimension where managers assume a more dynamic role (in order to impact change in an organisation), urgently needs to be explored. For many companies today, “incremental change is not enough, Managers (who are) groping about for more fundamental shifts in their organisations capabilities must realise that change programs treat symptoms, not underlying conditions. These companies do not need to improve, they need to re-invent themselves.” (Goss, Pascale & Athos, 1993: 98)

Managers need to be able to play new roles those of

1. Change agent.
2. Organisational Designer and Re-designer.

In addition, managers must be seen to play the role of an extra-ordinary communicator. What is meant by this expression is that the manager is not only seen channelling information but also reworking and using it to stimulate learning in the organisation. Significant shifts are needed in organisational growth and these shifts can only incubate in a receptive environment, a learning environment.

Earlier we expressed the concern whether it is at all advisable to think in terms of the complete manager. The danger lies in the exercise of self-sufficiency, at the expense of team development. Action learning promises to be mutually beneficial in both instances and relevant to organisational growth.

## 4.3 Action Learning

### 4.3.1 Situation

Mintzberg's Model can be enhanced if it takes into consideration the findings of research and Action learning. Here one looks not only at the manager but also more importantly at the manager and his context. We already know that often learning on the job can be more important than learning in the classroom or study-school. This is particularly so when learning occurs in the company of colleagues or the management unit. Top prize is the huge potential that can be reaped from convening a multi-disciplinary team that exceeds the boundaries of department, inside, within and outside the organisation. In the company of such teams, huge benefits can be realised in sharing issues and dilemmas, offering mutual support, offering advice, accepting constructive criticism and ultimately finding new meaning.

#### **BOX 4.1 WHAT IS ACTION LEARNING?**

The following extract comes from an article in a periodical: Introduction to Action Learning (1997, May 13). *Competency International (SA)*, p.1.

“This is learning to take effective action to solve real work based problems. The learning occurs with a group of colleagues (called the learning set) who share the problem and are able to offer mutual support, advice and criticism. The action group develops a united approach to solving the problem.

Action Learning is more than ‘learning by doing’ as it aims to develop fresh perspective on existing knowledge and experience to apply to current problems or issues. The need for review, reflection, rethinking and reinterpretation of this knowledge and experience is integral to the action learning process.

Action learning creates a working context in which people are encouraged to ask, learn and take action, in a constantly changing environment.”

### **4.3.2 Concern and Question**

Yet in spite of all these initiatives, one of the concerns of such a groundswell movement is whether it creates a working environment in which employees are asked to learn and take action in a constantly changing environment? More importantly, if this is indeed possible, is it a question of design or plain good luck?

### **4.3.3 Answer**

It is claimed that the answer to both these questions are found in action learning, which deliberately and effectively caters for a changing environment. Secondly, it increases the individual's ability to a) work with people b) influence people and importantly c) allow the incumbent (particularly the manager), to be influenced.

### **4.3.4 Rationale**

What makes Action Learning appetising is the convincing argument, which states that Action Learning once applied, is synonymous with change. They point to the powerful dynamic that is generated when Programmed Knowledge (e.g. every day textbook material) is taken up and combined to the questioning and reflection of the group to produce value adding learning and action. Naturally, this process requires that skills are acquired but once mastered, Inglis (1997: 2) explains that this sets in motion the process of-

1. Asking Questions
2. Gathering Information and
3. Enforcing reflection on how to bring about improvement (change).

To capitalise, taking participants through development exercises that synchronises theory and practice, helps master and learns this new language. The objective would not be to merely change actions or behaviours (referred to as single loop learning), but to change the underlying "master programme" that leads individuals to act/ behave in certain ways (double Loop Learning)

### **4.3.5 Evaluation**

In the light of the limitations discussed regarding Mintzberg's Model, this inclusive approach is relevant and contains identified concepts. Interestingly enough, this approach

does have utility because it caters for both individual and group development without exclusion. Action Learning provides a compelling case to learn not only for generating solutions but also for a changing future. Managers and the Remote Employees that report back would have to ensure that traditional meetings and informal interactions are substituted with a more disciplined and deliberate strategy of regular get-togethers. The viability of Remote Employment would be at stake, if meetings were convened without an underlying purpose to empower employees. Incorporating the ideals of Action Learning and making a conscious effort to bolster obvious deficiencies in the elements of Sociability and Solidarity.

## **4.4 Action Plan**

### **4.4.1 Researcher's Context**

To summarise, the organisational context of Sappi forests has been established as that of a Management company. My roles in the organisation include change-agent; facilitator and proponent of project based initiatives for multi-disciplinary teams. Another aspect that has been incorporated since the original Remote Employment project is, promoting learning in the organisation and where through the ability of using systemic thinking, learning events (like the enquiry into RE) can be re-interpreted and extended to the organisation for double loop learning.

### **4.4.2 The Problem**

The problem with the organisation is questioning the readiness of all Remote Employment stakeholders to embark on a patterned RE implementation across the organisation using double loop learning. The newly acquired appreciation of cultural forces and mental models, bring into question the original motives for considering this concept. Clearly, implementation requires fuller exploration and interrogation that includes the participation of a wider stakeholder base. More specifically, it calls for the involvement of senior management, to sanction the initiative at the outset and endorse continuous learning (through experimentation).

### **4.4.3 Theory and Proposed Intervention**

The researcher's theory is that notwithstanding the above, meaningful synergies can be achieved, if team based learning is rigorously pursued in preparation for RE

implementation. More specifically, to test at every turn the sayings that, "two heads are better than one," and "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." The anticipated issue is for stakeholders to get a sense of the "Big Picture" and the complexity of interrelationships involved in such an undertaking.

#### **4.4.4 Lessons Learnt and How They Will Impact on My Theory**

Reflecting on these problems, I recently modified my outlook to ensuring that the composition of Project teams should as far as possible represent the critical mass of stakeholders in the organisation. Secondly, I have learnt to anticipate and script interactive sessions with leaders and team members, (a kind of internal audit and preparation for all contingencies before, during or after project meetings). By regarding an RE implementation team as a hub of learning and development other awareness enhancing tools such as personality profiles and brain dominance can be used to sharpen team dynamics while they engage the complexities inherent in implementation. In this way, the team can interact and co-exist on a candid, yet challenging basis.

Integrating Mintzberg's model can now prove to be another means to place managers in a context and to design appropriate interventions that will maximise team effectiveness during meetings. More importantly, I have learnt to manage my own mental models better and am empowered to turn this knowledge to my own advantage and to the advantage of the management unit I happen to be dealing with (i.e. I do not believe the two to be mutually exclusive).

In the forestry environment, the Learning approaches of 1) Social Interaction 2) Experience and Thinking 3) Reasoning and 4) consulting literature to increase organisational knowledge have validity. For example, where competently facilitated, literature could become a more ready source of knowledge if members use the SQCARE Methodology as used in part during this dissertation. This enhancement would be complete, if it was applied using the Group Synthesis advocated by Ryan (1999) – a kind of task over-lapping "buddy-buddy system using a tetrahedron organisation structure (cyber groups). The application goes well beyond reading, and can give purpose and synergy to the current "Buddy/buddy system already employed in team project work.

In Systems Thinking, Demming's model of Plan, Do, Check and Act is acknowledged as a model for learning and management. It is also interesting to discover that it keeps company with other models, which place the focus more squarely on learning (all which have direct bearing on effecting improvement). Kolb's model emphasises the relationship between experience and learning and has like Deming's four dimensions. His are those of Experience, Reflection, Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation. Significantly, Kolb (1984) sees reflection as the source of learning and development -

“Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it.”

Here, individuals have different preferences and natural styles, which can be, represented as different points along each of the dimensions. In a similar way, different positions in the organisation call for different types of knowledge. If managers are able to determine their own positions along these dimensions, they can pay additional attention to tasks, which fall out of their natural processes. The impact on my current theory is to give greater freedom to teams that they can learn by doing, (testing ideas and assumptions) rather than by passively obtaining practice. Secondly, activities will be more carefully designed so those teams, leaders (i.e. learners) can reflect on their experience, thus shifting the onus for development from formal development structures to that of self development.

#### **4.4.5 Conclusion**

Stakeholder development can not take place in a vacuum, it has to be lived and experienced. The current proposal has been shared but will be modified in the light of new learning and authoritative literature on this subject. Clearly, Sappi, as a Management Company, provides an unusual case but even here, there is accommodation for change. Praxis is going to be increasingly significant because there is now a deliberate purpose for organisational development - this purpose is to create a learning organisation.

### **Part Three**

#### **4.5 Recreating Meaning**

Much effort has been extended to understanding influencing factors that impact on cognitive processes. This has mostly been tackled from a management perspective but applies to all

stakeholders. Something though which does make interpersonal relationships more difficult is that beyond the confines of the office these relationships are less regulated than before. Within the traditional workplace, managers can arguably afford to be more reticent about interpersonal relationships, where except for extreme cases, routine interactions are regulated by “the office system” – of policies, procedures, practices and traditions.

The requirements of a Learning Organisation are such, that neither in the context of Remote Employment nor the traditional workplace settings, is there any advantage for managers managing office bound employees over those managing remote employees. Both require stakeholders to be proactive and in the case of managers, more resourceful.

Being resourceful includes being knowledgeable about those issues, which constitute meaning as well as developing coping skills to deal with those issues on which agreement is reached. Taking knowledge of Mental Models for example, the following is known and should be harnessed for consideration. (Balle, 1999)

- Mental Models are deeply held often sub-conscious sets of assumptions about how the world works.
- They effect our perceptions and our evaluation of the life situations that we come across.
- Generally a mental model is internally consistent and once rooted, will not accommodate opposing beliefs.
- Mental Models are stable and tend to resist change ( which could be an issue and even a dilemma)
- Mental Models determine how we act.
- Our thinking follows the principle of least effort and when faced with complexity, we resort to cliché views that require little or no thinking effort.

#### **4.5.1 Types of Agreement**

Negotiating meaning through this minefield of complexity also requires knowledge of agreements and which of those outcomes align with the sustained incorporation of Remote Employment. Flood points out, that in most organisations, agreement follow one of three prescribed routes namely consensus, accommodation and tolerance. With Consensus, the idea that people can or will form strong agreement on what and how things need to be done is regarded with scepticism and branded undesirable from a systems perspective.

Undesirable because in chasing conformance, it extinguishes amongst stakeholders the diversity of thought needed by learning organisations to energise creative and transformational movement.

Tolerance is a difficult form of agreement in that it calls on stakeholders to safeguard and honour differences. This seeks to find value in what emerges from a way of life where conflict is an accepted standard.

The likelihood of Consensus, where individual experience and interpretation remain unique, is felt to be for the most part too abstract and theoretical and therefore, it would be more true to life to seek and find an Accommodation amongst people. Seeking such Accommodation is similar to finding a shared view, while honouring other differences of opinion. In perspective, where there is common ground, there is said to be a “higher level of understanding” and consequently, agreement can be found for further action steps.

Though the arrangement is not considered ideal, in terms of individually held values, norms or ideologies, Accommodation can be regarded as a satisfactory way to proceed. Nor, explains Flood, is this individual sacrifice of suspension a lasting one. For in establishing an accommodation amongst people, these factors remain in the background and may once again feature as the alliance is continuously renegotiated.

On reflection and in the context of remote employment an agreement of Accommodation represents the most practical type of agreement. This is because Consensus and Tolerance are respectively considered as ideals that are either too lofty or demanding to maintain. (The latter might be acceptable in instances where lone ranger experts or specialists are employed. Though in all likelihood, such specialists might more gainfully be employed on short-term contracts as opposed to full time employment.)

#### **4.5.2 Improvement of Meaningfulness**

Systems of meaning focuses on enhancing the quality of agreement and understanding between people and consequently, the potential of decisions that are taken. Agreement and understanding is considered, in terms of systems of meaning that people assign to both issues and dilemmas. Once explained, a number of approaches are introduced that promote dialogue about systems of meaning. Two forms of disagreement mark the extremes of

disagreement with Polarised views, making out the one end and a Plethora of views, the other. (Where moving from polarised views to the plethora of views indicates an increase in the diversity of views).

Several approaches are mentioned that could effect double loop learning both in the establishment of a remote employment programme as well as in servicing its ongoing livelihood. The organisation I work for is and will possibly continue to be characterised by a one on one arrangement of a remote employee reporting to a manager/supervisor - rather than a group of remote employees doing the same. Regardless of this situation it would still be advisable for senior managers to convene a forum consisting of clusters of interests groups (e.g. manager, RE, colleagues and consultants), where the plethora of views -as opposed to polarised views, could be expressed. In this way, systems of meaning could be surfaced across the entire organisation, which in a collective way would enhance the diversity of thought sought to energise creativity, transformation and learning on a broad scale. Operationally though, the day to day experience of remote employment would be more personal but arguably should as often as possible be convened in a forum that offers a multiplicity of views and multi-disciplinary representatives. This in order to make the learning process count.

Flood suggests that both Interactive planning and soft systems methodology offer cycles of learning and understanding in three phases 1) Learning about the real world 2) constructing ideal systemic models. 3). Comparing ideal models to whatever appreciation is made of the real world. It would be the Researchers intention as volunteer consultant and change agent, to suggest that Checklands Soft System Methodology be employed as a strategy for improvement, for clear expression and transparency around the issues of Remote Employment. People, it has been contended, will meaningfully engage only when issues and dilemmas have crystallised to take on some form of meaning.

Flood (1999: 58) gives practical explanation of Soft Systems Methodology stating that Checklands and Scholes in "Soft Systems Methodology in Action"(1990), distinguished between two modes of SSM in action. While SSM Mode 1 was conceived to guide specific interventions, SSM 2<sup>12</sup> was envisaged to assist practitioners that are daily engaged in organisational settings, with the purpose of helping people make sense of the business of their everyday affairs. In the context of Remote Employment, this would be applied to the

interpersonal dynamic, involving predominantly Remote Employees and their respective manager(s). Designed to incorporate everyday thinking, Mode 2 SSM features two equally prominent strands of analysis: - (see Figure 8).

1. Logic Based analysis and
2. Cultural Analysis

The theory accommodates much of what has been discussed and allows “would be improvers” to engage issues and dilemmas on two fronts. The logic-based stream encourages would be improvers (practitioners) to scrutinise the situation they are in, to look for new prospects and seek ways to attain accommodation between people - thus closing the gap that exists between them. The stream of cultural analysis is an inexorably inter-linked inquiry into the intervention itself. It constitutes both a political systems and social systems analysis and alerts practitioners to three aspects.

1. Firstly, the intervention itself and investigating the roles of stakeholders - are including the client, problem owners and problem solvers.
2. Secondly, analysis of social systems looks at roles, norms and values and their impact on behaviour.
3. Finally, political systems analysis investigates political interactions, coalitions and the use of power – all of which exercise an influence on critical decision-making.

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<sup>12</sup> The theory is represented in Figure 8 (Flood, 1999: 59)

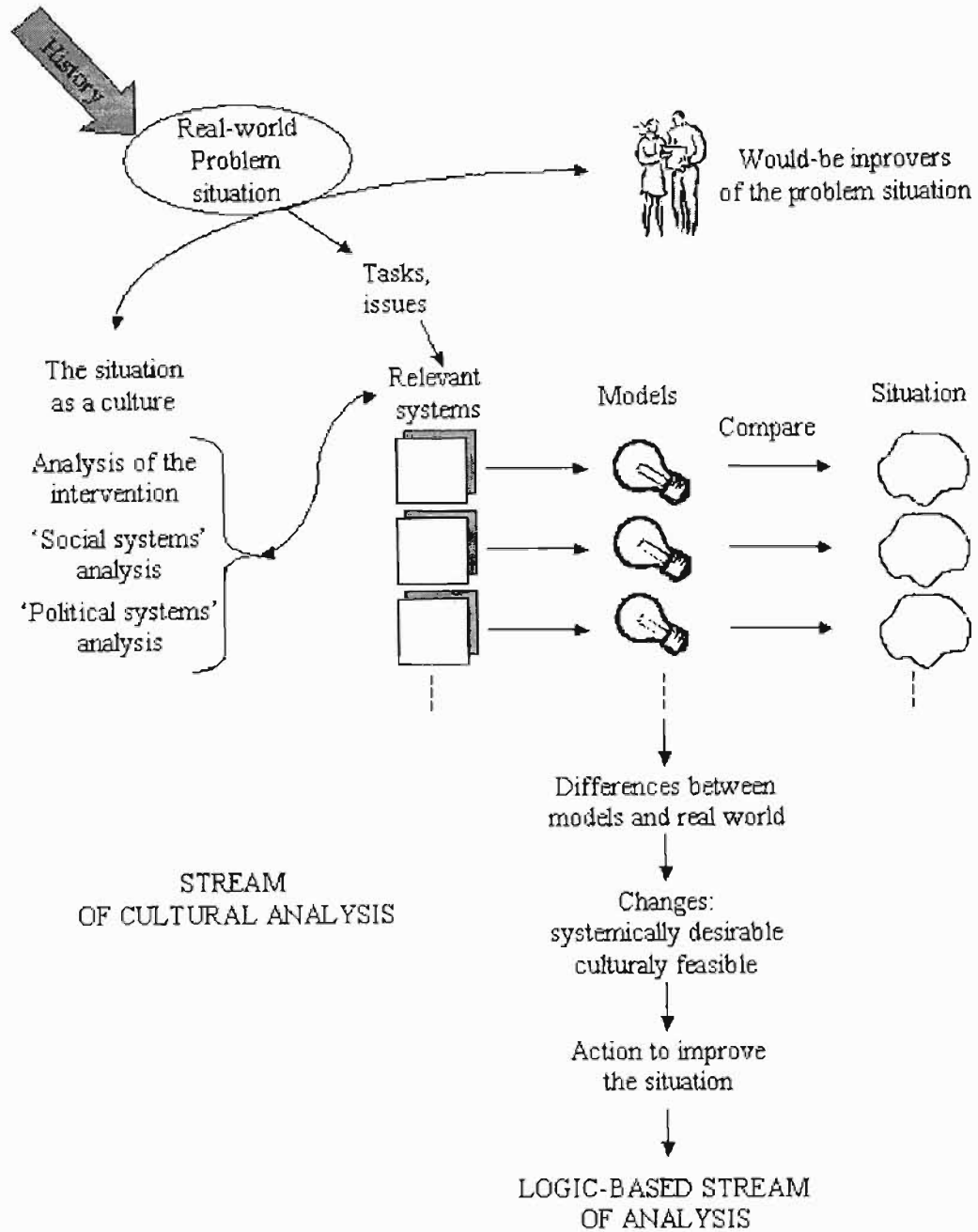


Figure 8: Soft Systems Methodology, Mode 2 - footnote 13 p.90

This system thinking approach would incorporate the considerations investigated under organisation culture and mental models earlier and has utility in assisting those that undertake research into human activity systems. This utility comes as the much needed information source those stakeholders' involved in remote employment need.

## 4.6 Systems of Knowledge-Power

One of the stakeholders evidently not fully incorporated in this approach is that of senior management (or members of the executive). This again, comes to prominence, because of the notion of knowledge-power and social transformation. Here systems thinkers would particularly seek improvements in power-knowledge relationships, as they influence the shape of designs and the outcome of supposed dialogue for issues such as race, class, sexuality, culture, age disability, and also consider the expert as well as the management hierarchy.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Knowledge power is the idea that people in a position of power determine what is considered valid knowledge and consequently valid action. Knowledge-power points to ethical considerations, to how things are done and raises the issue of their fairness. There are forms of entrenched patterns of social relationship that privilege some at the expense of others. Examples include race, class, culture, age, physically disabled but also the expert scientist and management hierarchy. Sensitivity to these issues and dilemmas are necessary because of their impact on the other three systems.

Flood cites the example of entrenched patterns of behaviour affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of designs. Why? Because formal power such as is found in management hierarchy might appear to be the only driving force behind the implementation of a design. People affected by such a design, exhibit a potency, that complexity theory suggests can bring to the fore, a web of interrelationships and spontaneous self-organisation of people, largely disregarded by managers, but who in the fullness of time prove difficult to manage. The subtle nature of this formation is not readily apparent but the ensuing “micro-political interaction can lead to the formation of coalition(s) around issues and dilemmas that arise out of arbitrary intervention, which should not be dismissed. For should this coalition become influential, their impact could lead too significant loses in efficiency and effectiveness.

This example illustrates that what is actually achieved, was more the consequence of the influence of the micro-political interaction of people affected by the interaction, than the grand design of the powerful people involved as designer and decision-maker. The exponential effect of this negative conflict is therefore that the more formal power is exerted, the greater the resultant micro-political interaction. What is therefore proposed, is a spectrum of ways in which patterns of entrenched behaviour might be transformed and made fairer. Moving along a spectrum of situations the objective would be the “emancipation of the

privileged from their ideologies and power structures”, by raising the awareness of privileged people to developing the self-reliance of vulnerable people.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

Several theoretical constructs have been outlined in this chapter. These have dealt with cognitive processes and the definitive role they play in establishing, shaping and maintaining interpersonal relationships. If the quality of interpersonal relationships is important in the office environment, they assume even greater importance when organisations add Remote Employment to their employment portfolio. In the office environment there are still traces of the bureaucratic type to assist in regulating interpersonal relationships but beyond this boundary, these prescriptions are less influential. Remote Employment accentuates the primacy of the individual in the workplace. It also exists beyond the “boundary” therefore necessitating new modes of engagement by stakeholders.

Systems of Meaning as outlined by Flood add synergy to the cognitive processes that have been discussed. It embraces dialogue as an important catalyst in shaping interpersonal relationships. Secondly it assumes that all stakeholders remain active in engaging one another. This serves not only to create and recreate the “employment contract” on an ongoing basis but also promotes action learning. With such dynamics in play it is possible to begin perceiving Remote Employment as having value-adding potential to the organisation.

Systems of Meaning are not self contained and both draw from and contribute to other systems (i.e. are interconnected). In effect, the perspectives generated by opening in turn all four windows on the action area help organisation development practitioners gain in insight. So for example, investigations into Remote Employment become more complete as Systems of Knowledge and power bring to our attention the role of executive management on this issue. Through Prismatic thought organisational development practitioners (represented mainly from management echelons) can come to appreciate many perspectives of events. (Flood, 1999: 9) Likened to multi coloured stories of events, these can then inform management more completely before management takes its choice of action.

## Chapter 5 Beginning from the End

This chapter provides a summary of learning points and recommendations. The main theme of this dissertation is remote employment as a concept, and the ability of an organisation (such as the mine) to change, as this theme is developed. In this chapter, several related issues are discussed to sum up my most recent learning points on this concept. These all come with the conscious recognition of the open-ended nature of this study and the inevitable prospect of further learning as the future unfolds.

The issues discussed run in chronological order and reflect my changing awareness on the concept of Remote Employment. These start with the discussion of the Paradigm Effect that can hold business and more specifically organisational development concepts hostage - not least of all, Remote Employment. This is in keeping with the cognitive approach of the dissertation and related discussion of mental models. The inability to check mental models and the resultant condition of Paradigm Paralysis are often at the centre of organisations' failure to make effective transitions from theory to practice. Coping strategies for making successful transitions then provide a second area for discussion. This appeals for a fresh approach in keeping with the principles of Systems Thinking. More specifically, "localism" (my term) is raised as an issue on two accounts. Firstly as a coping mechanism in a complex world and secondly, as a rebuff to organisational stakeholders who would believe in the availability of finding "off the shelf" management expertise for Remote Employment.

Inevitably new perspectives must be adopted and the role of management, with respect to Remote Employment, is revisited. Making transitions that stick, form part of the recommendations that are outlined and come in the form of Action Plans. In this way, Systems Thinking is seen as a catalyst for action shaping management practice through praxis. Having personally gone full circle in reflecting on Remote Employment, further application is found in continuously beginning from the end (i.e. this is a spiralling iterative process of action learning).

### 5.1 Comment : the Paradigm Effect

In this exercise, it was learnt that in organisations, when paradigms<sup>13</sup> shift then all accumulated learning on an issue goes back to zero. Similarly, when organisation consider

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<sup>13</sup> A paradigm is a set of rules and regulations (written or unwritten) that does two things: (1) it establishes or defines boundaries; and (2) It tells you how to behave inside the boundaries in order to be successful. (Barker, 1999: 2)

Remote Employment in an urban context when their accumulated learnings are based on a rural context, then much of that accumulated knowledge and experience counts for very little. A process of relearning to deal with a new environment must follow and assumptions of easy organisation transitions squashed.

## 5.2 Coping Strategies

Traditional coping strategies for managing the workplace are increasingly proving to be inadequate, this is particularly the case when considering the emerging workplace of the home office environment. The advance of the information age and the primacy of the individual in the social order of the workplace, show the shortcomings of bureaucratic and hierarchical structures in regulating this alternate workplace. The aforementioned, require employees to operate in close proximity to one another and therefore there is a struggle to extend these structures to remote operations.

Clearly, organisations need new coping strategies, where stakeholders can enter into dialogue and flesh out new systems of meaning to regulate their interpersonal relationships. This must apply to the entire organisation, as it would be difficult to incorporate remote employees, if they are dealt with separately to the rest of the organisation. An accommodating form of agreement on regulating interpersonal relationships for competitive advantage must permeate the entire organisation.

Adopting the concept of a learning organisation, is a means of coping with and mastering modern day complexities and developments like Remote Employment. This is because a learning organisation has a cognitive approach, which emphasises interpersonal relationships and puts a premium on them. It also puts a premium on team based learning and it is the Researchers belief that regardless of the origin of one's workplace station regular, well planned and facilitated team sessions can create synergies which promote learning and give participants a sense of belonging (to the organisation). Any party that facilitates, or is in any way involved with organising the proposed learning sessions, is immediately drawn into the issue concerned. They become part of the action area and attempts at controlling the meeting process, without getting involved in nitty-gritty content issues, are dismissed out of hand. One becomes part of the team.

Team based learning is a positive and inclusive building block which can be employed at any time and repeatedly, to explore issues and dilemmas. This is because it creates the opportunity for stakeholders to explore issues that as individuals held little meaning and/or limited appreciation but which collectively amplify awareness and subsequently promote learning.

Concepts like Remote Employment, challenge and stretch management practices because there is no recourse to prescribed policies and practices; these have to be re-invented. Similarly contemplating new issues with an old frame of reference (like cost, quality, delivery, environment and people) can be too stereotyped and detrimental to appreciating challenges holistically. Being inclusive is central, both to problem-solving issues as well as systems of knowledge and power for within a group of diverse stakeholders individuals (with their ideas, motives, cultures and values) can challenge and be challenged.

With regard to the implementation of a Remote Employment programme, recommendations would take the line of: -

1. Convening all stakeholders
2. Checking participants mental models
3. Employing Action Learning and seeking double loop learning

(This will be expanded on in terms of deepening systemic appreciation under Action Plans)

### **5.3 Localism**

Systems thinking calls on all stakeholders of Remote Employment and anyone throughout the organisation to adopt a new realism to the workplace environment. This realism, which I call Localism, acknowledges the interrelated nature of issues as expressed in endless occurrences of spontaneous self-organisation. Therefore the realism is expressed by only engaging those issues and dilemmas which are local to the community in terms of space and time. Remote Employment is one such issue and if handled well, there is a belief that this will have a positive knock on effect of self-organising related aspects elsewhere in the organisation. Therefore, operating under a changed reality (paradigm/ mental model) the call is to operate pro-actively in an action area believing that the impact made in so doing, will be a positive one. Senior Managers (because of their political capacity and organisational responsibilities) and managers of Remote Employees, (because of their potential to co-ordinate) must in particular, seize the initiative in being pro-active.

There is a realisation that Conventional Wisdom, (which largely embraces a reductionist approach), is mostly inadequate for increasingly diverse social settings. It is more useful to seek understanding of the issues and dilemmas of a social setting, where aspects are regarded holistically. This means that where people, their purposes and interacting issues that perpetually surround them are brought together, they either result in emerging conflict or emerging co-operation. “Localising” by drawing boundaries of time and place over the pressing issue of Remote Employment, will point to a necessary and focal action area.

Having broadly examined the range of Remote Employment types, the suggestion would be that the organisation “localises.” This would mean those Remote Employees comprising independent specialists, piece-meal (e.g. Tele-sales) employees and employees with mitigating social and physical motives (family circumstances and cases of disablement) would be excluded. Leaving bounded to the action area, forestry professionals, like the Silvicultural Development Managers referred to earlier.

Similarly with gaining a fuller understanding of the complexities of Remote Employment came the realisation that meaningful investigation of Remote Employment required “bounding”. The approach taken was therefore to deal predominantly with systems of meaning, fully aware that it would further impact - through its interrelatedness, on systems of planning, structure and knowledge and power. More specifically, the decision to opt for closer investigation of systems of meaning, stemmed from its focus on interpersonal relationships - considered key to the entire workplace dynamic.

#### **5.4 New Perspective on Remote Employment**

In engaging Remote Employees there are different departure points that could be considered. One consideration could be to engage people strictly on business terms at a contract level. This implies specialised work or piecework (like telesales) where there can be exclusivity to the rest of the organisation and where Remote Employees are engaged on a prescribed but limited basis. Here, Remote Employees are regarded as relevant appendages but their relationship to the organisation is kept at arm’s length. The requisite learning requirement for this situation is understandably, a fluid one but requires at least that the major stakeholders learn to rely on people’s sense of specialisation and expertise rather than their loyalty. Alternatively, if the status of Remote employees is limited to that of appendages to the organisation, this too provides opportunity for the current system of meaning to be

interrogated and questioned. More specifically a learning intervention might be directed at the transition of REs from full time to contractor employment.

A further consideration for engagement is a proposal based on employee professionalism and a practice that includes engaging on an inclusive, expansive and interactive levels (i.e. from the outset, in keeping with the ideals of a learning organisation). Here expectations exceed meeting the stipulations of a legal agreement of service to seeking in addition, engagement and agreement at a cognitive level. This approach requires systems of meaning to be surfaced and promotes reciprocal obligations to transparency and fairness. This approach strives to expose hidden agendas and espoused theories and therefore recognises that shared awareness of mental models; value systems and norms are crucial for interactive relationships. Looking beyond the original agreements that established the employment relationship, it strives for those that have potential for continuous nurturing and growing relationships. This also allows stakeholders to exercise cross checking vigilance against those intrapsychic forces that would bedevil and distort systems of meaning (theory in use versus espoused theory).

## **5.5 The Role of Management**

The awareness created around organisations' cultural settings is designed to simplify decision making on what strategies to adopt if Remote Employment becomes a reality. The decision of whether to embrace Remote Employees, as integral to the organisation or to hold them at arm's length will influence the subsequent role managers of Remote Employees will play. The latter leads to associating Remote Employees more with contractors than organisation members, while the former assumes a more inclusive approach - an approach where the management of Remote Employees forms part of a manager's broader "organisational management portfolio". The arms length approach to managing Remote Employees then emphasises competence in contractor management and in this instance will not need to use the cultural settings outlined to the extent of those organisations fully resolved to incorporate their Remote Employees into the organisation. Where this "inclusive approach" is adopted, managers mindful of their organisations overarching cultural arch-type would have to take the lead in initiating steps that ensure the effective accommodation of cultures. In this way the Remote Employee would not be regarded (either by himself/herself or the organisation) as being part of a Fragmented Community but rather as being an integral member of the organisation.

It is evident that the pool base for recruiting employees to Remote Employment lies within the body of current employees. This is because the establishment of an employment relationship requires extraordinary preparation. Not only does it assume mature interpersonal relationships based on trust but also that the incumbents would have an extensive experience base within the organisation. Only with these foundations in place can the process of creating and recreating meaning commence. (Bearing in mind that it is by recreating meaning that stakeholders in the Remote Employment relationship remain engaged.)

Being proactive is essential because Remote Employees have limited options embracing conventional office bound organisation culture, secondly they possess little collective clout and therefore their predicament is largely prescribed. Given their disadvantage, the onus is therefore on management to maintain bridging. The vignette “Reaching the point of No Return” points me to the lesson that Organisations must throw Remote Employees a lifeline to ensure that they stay in close orbit and remain an integral part of the organisation. Regular performance reviews could initiate and promote the process of deliberate dialogue (i.e. a part of bridging). Management is also the custodians of the political process and it is suggested that this aspect perhaps be considered as the subject for further research. (For example, that the incorporation of organisation politics be included as part of an organisation’s Triple Loop learning.)

Working for the organisation but beyond the organisation makes several calls on it to: -

1. Expand the paradigm of the workplace but with ethical considerations.
2. Keeping everyone in the loop.
3. Celebrate the primacy of the individual with the understanding that all Remote Employees have a unique employment portfolio to be embraced.
4. Engage in Career Pathing for all employees.

In summing up, interactive dialogue leads to meaningful agreements that help define the employment relationship (objectives, duties, roles etc.). Since this process is a dynamic one, and dialogue is on going, we are reminded that systems of meaning are continuously open to change. Change then will define and redefine the employment relationship and stakeholders must be ready to adjust accordingly.

## 5.6 Action Plans

Existing Remote Employment placements must be reviewed to determine their utility, using as a guide the items that I found insightful in the exercise of Double Loop Learning (Mental Models - espoused theories Vs theories in use, organisational culture agendas and so forth). It would be important that the facilitated participation of senior management is included in this forum, especially if the RE programme is to become part of the organisations strategic intent. This would be an extensive exercise and in the process would over and above the involvement of the core stakeholders' call in from time to time the services of others. The order of priority would be to tackle first principles (systems of meaning and agreement) before being diverted by detail. In other words, any weighty legal documents should be a consequence of the process and not a prescription. Typically during this implementation process, participants should include at various stages through the process: - 1) A delegated representative from the executive 2) Legal Counsel 3) The H.R. department 4) Labour Relations 5) Training 6) Information Services or Information Technology 7) Research 8) Public relations.<sup>14</sup>

Where preparations are being made to implement RE for the first time I would recommend that stake-holders (including, office bound employees, RE consultants (internal or external), senior managers, immediate supervisors and prospective REs must be coached individually and collectively over several sessions. The purpose would be to extract systems of meaning and also use the other interrelated systems and through a process of prismatic thought to tackle implementation more holistically. Here I would convene an open forum of primary stakeholders. The objective would be to hold a series of workshops where the four windows for deepening systemic appreciation are opened on the action area of Remote Employment. With careful facilitation I would expect new insights to be gained by all participants. Transparency would be encouraged throughout the process so that explanations of issues and dilemmas around Remote Employment can be developed. The next phase would be for participants to respond to the above by proposing a variety of action plans that reflect improvements of process design and are based on scenario building rather than mechanistic plans for short to long term implementation. Checklands and Scholes who in using the SSM2 approach provides an appealing blend of logic based analysis along with cultural analysis (in essence this includes both social and political analysis systems). Focusing on the intervention itself, as well as the role of the client, problem owners and would be problem solvers, would be the first point of departure. Secondly, social systems analysis would look at roles, norms

and values and their influence on behaviour (as covered in detail by this dissertation). Finally, political systems analysis would look at political interaction and prospects for coalition forming. It would also want to explore the use and abuse of power bearing in mind the ethical orientation of Systems of Knowledge power and determine how they can sabotage or promote the decision-making process. This is an area that I feel would need focused attention in the event that my organisation again considers institutionalising Remote Employment. What occurred to me is that even with the best preparations (facilitated under systems of meaning), outcomes such as agreements might not be meaningful. My observation is that Senior Management need to be on board at the inception of a Remote Employment project and sold on the idea so that their influence can be brought to bear on bringing concepts and issues raised in dialogue, to fruition.

If Remote Employment were to become one of the new frontiers in the workplace, it would be important that using the criteria established, (professional Vs specialist, inclusive Vs exclusive, learning organisation Vs traditional organisation), that the organisation produces a success story. In chapter one, mention was made of the occupation of a Silvicultural Development Manager. This occupation was identified because its incumbents are promising candidates for the launch of Remote Employment from an urban perspective. Silviculture Development Managers by virtue of their occupation bridge the divide between rural and urban context and it is precisely because of this mobility that they present themselves as ideal candidates. Initiating Remote Employment would therefore start on a limited scale and would be a consequence of intense preparation and experimentation abiding throughout, to the principles of action learning.

## **5.7 Conclusion and Recommendations**

Remote Employment is a temptingly attractive prospect both to organisations and the stakeholders operating within those organisations. My post project experience of Remote employment leads me to advocate where relevant, the guarded implementation of Remote Employment programmes. I mention guarded because such an undertaking requires effort and the comprehensive consideration of all persons likely to be affected by the opening of this new employment frontier.

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<sup>14</sup> Written and published by the Smart Valley Telecommuting team comprising representatives from 3Com Corporation, Cisco systems and Pacific Bell's S. Phillips. <http://www.svi.org/projects/tcommute/tcguide/telecommtng-guide.txt>

In undertaking this dissertation, systems of meaning, getting to some form of agreement so that Remote Employment is considered holistically, was the immediate focus. This was achieved in part by giving an appreciation of the theories, models and lessons I have experienced. This process in itself brought to prominence some issues and dilemmas but these were wide ranging and commenting on their interrelatedness was incomplete. I would recommend that subsequent and fuller appreciation of the interrelatedness of issues and dilemmas are achieved by beginning from the end. By this I re-emphasise the important role of senior managers and policy makers who through their influence bring into focus much of what has been discussed. It would heighten awareness and bound more specifically an action area to concentrate on.

Systems Thinking places great emphasis on learning through experience. In accentuating “the comprehensive consideration of all persons”, I imply that a process of leaning should manifest itself not only prior to implementation but also on an ongoing basis. This means Remote Employment is not only something to be considered at inception but as a living and growing reality in the organisation. What learning approaches serve to do is to strike at the heart of human resource management. Why, because efforts to better human interaction remain central to an organisation's well being and such efforts are rewarded when they are continually underpinned by ongoing learning within the organisation.

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