UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

UNDERSTANDING STRATEGIC CONVERSATION AS A TOOL FOR LEARNING AND CHANGE IN ORGANISATIONS: A PUBLIC SECTOR PERSPECTIVE

by

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DECLARATION

I Monwabisi H. Mngxaso declare that:

(i)   The research reported in this dissertation except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

(ii)   This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

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> a) their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced:
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AKNOWLEDGEMENT

ABSTRACT

This dissertation has posed and answered the question whether strategic conversation can be used as a tool for facilitating learning and change in organisations, within the context of the public sector. The study provided answers to the following sub-questions through the literature review:-

- [ ] What is 'strategy' and what does it entail?

- [ ] What are 'strategic conversations' and what do they entail?

- [ ] What is 'organisation learning'?

- [ ] What is 'organisational change'?

- [ ] What factors create an environment conducive to the facilitation of learning in organisations by means of strategic conversation?

- [ ] What factors create an environment conducive to the facilitation of change in organisations by means of strategic conversation?

After the above questions had been answered, an interactive data collection and analysis was conducted. This process culminated in the findings of the study which made it possible to draw specific conclusions.

The main conclusion of the study was that strategic conversation is a tool that can be used to facilitate learning and change in the Legislature as an example of a public sector organisation. The study concluded by highlighting key recommendations.

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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

"'Cheshire Puss,' she [Alice] began, rather timidly…'would you please tell me which way I ought to go from here?' 'That depends a great deal on where you want to get to' said the cat."

Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study and the problem it has addressed. It also provides a background to the nature of the organisation in which the problem was located. It further discusses the problem statement, objectives, research question and significance of the study.

1.2 Background

The Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature (the Legislature) is an example of a public organisation established in terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (the Constitution) and was the focus of this study. Section 104 of the Constitution establishes the Legislature, while Sections 114 and 118 outline the functions as focusing mainly on the following areas:

- law making in the province;
- conducting oversight over the executive (provincial departments) and state organs; and
- facilitation of public participation and involvement in the legislative processes and activities of the Legislature.

Unlike private sector organisations, the nature of the business the Legislature is in, is determined by the Constitution. This seems to be the case with all public organisations established in terms of the Constitution. In this context, the success of the Legislature and similar organisations would have to be measured by the extent to which they fulfil their

constitutional obligations, rather than the level of profitability and other general profit-motivated indicators as is the case with private sector organisations.

However, for all organisations to grow and survive, they need to be effective and efficient in what they do (Schutte, 1993:3). This seems to be one of the common threads that bind all organisations, irrespective of their sectoral classification or categorisation. The reality though, seems to be that it is a challenge for contemporary organisations like the Legislature to remain effective and efficient in a rapidly changing environment. Something will have to be done to address such a situation.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This study was based on what Phillips & Pugh (1994:50) refer to as "problem-solving research." As a researcher, one entered a "real-world" situation aiming to both acquire knowledge and address a real problem. The objective of this study was, therefore, to explore and gain insight as to how strategic conversations can be used as a tool to facilitate learning and change in organisations. This was explored in the context of the Legislature as an example of a public sector organisation. It is believed that through the pursuance of this objective, the study provided and cultivated useful insights for addressing the challenge of learning and change in organisations through the use of strategic conversations.

This objective of the study is also embedded in the title of the study which emerged during the process of the preliminary literature review. The title was initially considered to be what Creswell (1994:3) refers to as a "working title". It was then subsequently modified in the process of sense-making, underpinned by on-going reflection. The articulated objective was an acknowledgement of the existence of an organisational problem which is discussed below.

1.4 Statement of the problem

Swanepoel (2003:30) argues that "change is woven into the fabric of organisational life as a way of functioning and continuously developing". Drucker cited in Wack (1984:68) accentuates this sentiment when he asserts that, "the greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic". In order for the Legislature to continue functioning and developing, it had to contend with the constant changes driven by political, technological, economical factors, to mention but a few. However, the manner in which the Legislature was functioning at the time, was not considered to be conducive to its sustained future success[1]. Among other things, there appeared to be difficulties in embracing the new management thinking and practices necessary for dealing with the changes at the Legislature.[2] The Legislature continued to function as if the environment was static, and, in the process, it was confronted with the possibility of stagnation.

Furthermore, organisational learning is considered important to the Legislature as it seeks to achieve its goals and objective. Starkey *et al* (2004:3) posit that learning is a fundamental building block in the creation of strategic architecture that links the present to the future**.** Tan (1999:1) also emphasises that "learning at the rate faster, or at least equal to the degree of change itself is considered a strategic imperative for the survival and future success of organisations".

Despite the articulated significance of organisational learning, little or no effort was devoted to it at the Legislature[3]. The Legislature did not prioritise learning as it was supposed to, hence it continued to be characterised by old ways of doing things even though they were not yielding good results. However, the unfortunate tendency of not prioritirising organisational learning was not a phenomenon unique only to the Legislature, it also permeated other organisations in general. Galer & van der Heijden (1992:6) contend that not all organisations put corporate learning high on their agenda.

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[1] This was revealed in the strategic planning reports of the Legislature for the 2005- 2006 financial year.
[2] Ibid
[3] Ibid

This could explain, in part, why organisational learning has yet to "establish a secure beachhead at many organisations", including the Legislature (Gavin, 1993:86).

The reality for the Legislature and similar organisations is that high level and continuous institutional learning, and ensuring corporate change are prerequisites for organisational success (De Geus, 1988:72). It was in this context that the need to address the challenges of learning and change was considered, not only as relevant, but also as of strategic necessity for the survival and growth of organisations like the Legislature. The strategic conversations seem to provide a possibility for addressing these challenges facing the Legislature and similar organisations.

In reflecting on the potential value of strategic conversations Weissflog (1998:2) suggests that:

> the pace of change in the company's markets required an approach that was different from traditional strategic planning; the idea of the plan has to be replaced with strategic conversations, i.e. the ongoing quest to find answers to several strategic questions.

Hamel (1996:80) expands on this point and articulates that:

> if you want to create a point of view about the future, if you want to craft a meaningful strategy, you have to create in your company a 'hierarchy of imagination'…and strategic conversations are viewed as a hierarchy of imagination which is a management tool that is different from traditional strategic planning.

It is in this context that the notion of strategic conversation was found attractive, and was explored in this study as one of the management tools for addressing the problem of learning and change at the Legislature and similar organisations.

1.5 The research question and its justification

In an article, entitled, *Conversational Proficiency: the Emergence of the Sixth Discipline,* Alan Sieler (1998:3) defines an organisation as a "network of conversations and relationships". He further contends that:

> the quality of the conversations and relationships have a major impact on the performance of individuals, teams and the organisations, and if we could develop a foundation discipline based on conversations, it might be the sought after sixth discipline.

Sealer's observations immediately provoked some thoughts in the researcher's mind. As an employee of the Legislature with an in-depth insight about the organisation[4], the researcher started reflecting and began asking several questions, namely, to what extent the Legislature is a "network of conversations and relationships". How do these conversations manifest themselves? What is the strategic value of these conversations to the Legislature in the current changing environment? Without necessarily freezing or limiting one's vision, it was considered a good idea to start with general research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994:24). As shown below, the general questions became the catalyst that led to the main research question.

The initial questioning process had somewhat of a "ripple effect". More questions emerged during the reflection process. One of these questions was - to what extent does the Legislature learn and change in the context of a changing environment? This process of self-enquiry then culminated in the formulation and reformulation of the main question of this study which is: Can strategic conversations be a tool for facilitating learning and change in organisations like the Legislature? This became the main research question which the researcher wanted to explore in this study.

In the light of the problems highlighted at the Legislature, the above question had to be posed and answered with a view to finding a solution. This was seen to be consistent with

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[4] The researcher's role in the study is discussed in detail in chapter four of this study

the fact that this study was considered as problem-solving research (Phillips & Pugh, 1994:50).

The task involved an ongoing process of investigation and discovery during the research stages of this study, which then culminated in recommendations aimed at addressing the problems at the Legislature. In this context, it was considered justifiable and worthwhile that the questions relating to these organisational problems had to be posed and addressed as this study has done.

1.6 Significance of the study

The study focused on a "real-world problem" rather than a fictional and non-existent problem. It opened a window of opportunity for addressing a real organisational problem. It is for this reason that this study was considered as "problem-solving research".

It was mentioned earlier on that the objective of this study was to explore and gain insight as to how strategic conversations can be used as a tool to facilitate learning and change in the Legislature as an example of a public sector organisation. It is believed that the insights that have been cultivated by the study would make it possible for the Legislature and similar organisations to better understand the notion of strategic conversations.

It is expected that such an understanding would create a possibility for public organisations to exploit the benefits associated with strategic conversations. It is hoped that this, in turn, would then assist in facilitating the process of learning and change in order for organisations to have a possibility of surviving and growing in a changing environment.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a background of the Legislature as an example of a public sector organisation in which the problem was located. It has also highlighted the objectives and the problem statement of the study. It has concluded by discussing the

research questions and the significance of the study. The next chapter focuses on the discussion of the literature review.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

"If I have seen further, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants"

Sir Isaac Newton

2.1 Introduction

The subject of strategic conversations is relatively new, especially in the context of public sector organisations like the Legislature. Even in this research context, where there is limited information on the subject under investigation, it is true that "no research project exists in isolation" (Moore, 2006:106). Mouton & Marais (1990:4) also note that scientific research takes place within "research communities". The literature review stage is therefore considered a significant part of the research process (Remenyi, 1998:65).

This chapter focuses on the review of the available literature relating to the subject under investigation within the context of the Legislature. It discusses themes and sub-themes that emerged during the literature review stage. These themes were further pursued in the course of the study. However, as it will be shown later in the chapter, the type of research and the selected research paradigm, among other things, influence the purposes that the literature review plays in the entire research process (Cresswell,1994:21 and Moore, 2006:106).

2.2 Towards the understanding of strategic conversations

It is unlikely that the Legislature, and any organisations for that matter, could appreciate the usefulness of strategic conversation as a tool without initially making sense of it. It therefore becomes necessary to cultivate an understanding of the notion of strategic conversations. The use of concepts normally presents many problems that one has to contend with in the search for a better understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Some problems that are experienced most of the time include ambiguity and vagueness of concepts (Rossouw, 2003:16). It was in this context that the clarification of these concepts was considered important in attempting to cultivate

understanding of the subject of the study. The next two sections are devoted to describing the concepts of "conversation" and "strategy".

2.2.1 Description of conversations

According to Knowlton, (2002:3) the term "conversation" comes from two root words, "con" and "verse". Con means "with" or "together". Verse means "to turn." Converse therefore means to "turn with" or "turn together." A dictionary meaning of "conversation" is that it is "an informal exchange of ideas by spoken words" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990:251). Similarly, Knowlton, (2002:3) observes that conversation is an oral exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, or ideas. However, a conversation is not only verbal as implied in the above definitions. Sieler (1998:2) accentuates this point by stating that "conversation is the basic unit of human interaction which can be both spoken and unspoken''. In this context, conversation in the Legislature can take place verbally and non-verbally. However, such a conversation must have a purpose, which is an aspect that the above definitions do not address.

Other authors attempt to define the concept of conversation by establishing how it is different from other concepts related to it. Bohm, cited in Groombridge & Kulski, (2002:2) identifies two types of discourse, "dialogue" and "discussion" which he further distinguishes in terms of purpose. He considers the purpose of a "discussion" as winning and gaining acceptance of one's views by the group, while he sees the purpose of a "dialogue" as allowing a group to assess a large pool of common meaning, and explore complex or difficult issues from many points of view. This conceptualisation of a dialogue is echoed by Stacey, (2000:14) when he defines dialogue as a "situation in which two parties exchange views about paradoxical situations, each having the intention of modifying positions in light of the views presented". Furthermore, it is said that "real" conversations cover dialogue, deliberations and reflection and that "discussion", "debate" and "discourse" are considered less collaborative, congenial and productive (Co-intelligence Institute, 2003:1).

Despite the apparent distinction between dialogue and discussion, it seems as if these concepts can be used interchangeably in the normal course of events, which could become confusing. However, in the context of the Legislature, what could be learnt from the observations of Bohm, Stacey and the Co-intelligence Institute, is that ''discourse," "dialogue", "discussion", and "deliberation" seem to be the common concepts that are employed in making reference to conversations. Furthermore, the above definitions of conversation illuminated the point that the conversations are both informal and informal, and that they take place amongst human beings. In the Legislature, the people that could be involved in such formal and informal conversations are the employees, Members of the Legislature, the public, including various interest groups; just to mention but a few. However, who actually gets involved in the conversations at the Legislature is likely to depend on the issues that constitute the conversations, and on whether the Legislature decides to involve internal or external stakeholders or not.

2.2.2 Description of strategy

The definition of the concept of conversation led to the surfacing of the following question: what makes the conversation strategic? Shedding light on this question led to the posing of a further question: What is strategy?

The word "strategy" originates from a Greek word "strategos" which means "the art of the General" in a military context. General Clausewitz, cited in Manning (2001:8) states that "strategy forms a plan of the war, maps out the proposed course of the different campaigns which compose the war, and regulates the battles to be fought in each". This definition suggests a conceptualisation of strategy in a war environment. However, over the years, strategy and associated concepts have spread and gained prominence, not only in the private sector, but also in the public sector. The Legislature as a public organisation does employ various strategies as it seeks to achieve its objectives and goals[5].

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[5] This is reflected in the strategic planning reports of the Legislature for 2005-2007 financial years.

Drucker, (1974:36) defines strategy as:

> the continuous process of making entrepreneurial decisions systematically and with the greatest knowledge of the futurity; organizing systematically the efforts needed to carry out the decisions; and measuring the results of those decisions against the expectations through organised, systematic feedback.

Raimond (1996:208) also defines strategy as a "process and range of techniques by which organisations decide what goals and objectives to pursue, and the means by which they pursue them". Other authors describe strategy as a "discourse". In this regard, Parker & Bradley (2004:199) define strategy as a "particularly suitable discourse for making sense of, and giving sense to the new challenges of management in organisations". Similarly, (Palli *et al,* 2009:303) describe strategy as a "discourse which has its own specific conditions of possibility and that these conditions enable certain ways of acting while at the same time they restrict other actions".

These definitions seem to emphasise specific aspects of organisations that each author considers important. In their definitions, Drucker and Raimond, among other things, focus on the process of making decisions about objectives and goals to be achieved by organisations. Palli including Parker & Bradley, emphasise discourse in their definitions of strategy. The question that is explored in the following chapters is, how these aspects are applicable at the Legislature as a public sector organisation?

In attempting to further describe the concept of strategy, there are authors who explain what it means to be "strategic". In this regard, Boisot, cited in Stacey (2000:45) asserts that:

> a strategic situation confronted by a firm is unique, ambiguous, paradoxical, and presents varying levels of uncertainty dependent on the contextual environment and therefore by definition, a strategic situation has a given level of uncertainty and ambiguity.

Rosenthal & Schober (1999:7) also suggest that "strategic issues involve questions an organisation asks to determine its effectiveness or need for improvement in realising its vision, mission, values and goals''.

In seeking to illuminate the meaning of strategy, the definitions highlighted above make reference to organisations in general, without a focus on a particular type of an organisation. They seem to indicate that all organisations do employ strategy in one way or another. However, in line with focus of this study, it is necessary to keep in mind that the nature of the public sector implies that strategy will have to be adapted to the public sector context in general, and the Legislature's organisational context in particular (Schwella cited in Fox *et al,* 1991:233). The reason why this is necessary is that "the internal features of an individual organisation will influence how it identifies problems, and how it solves them, what consequences it emphasises and evaluation criteria it uses" (Christensen *et al,* 2007:2).

One of the definitions of strategy that seems to address the concern related to an organisational context raised here, is articulated by Palli *et al (*2009:303) who state that "strategy is a discourse which has its own specific conditions of possibility and that these conditions enable certain ways of acting while at the same time they restrict other actions". This definition seems to take into consideration the "specific conditions of possibilities" that an organisational context like that of the Legislature would play in the process of "strategising".

2.2.3 Description of strategic conversations

Now that a conceptual understanding of conversation and strategy has been established, it becomes pertinent to pose the question: What is strategic about conversations and what does that entail? In simple terms, strategic conversations refer to those conversations that involve strategy. However, formal definitions of strategic conversations abound. One definition considers strategic conversation as "an informal, but structured discussion on a strategic policy issue or issues" (Rosenthal & Schober, 1999:2). Bleed (1999:2) defines strategic conversations as "organisational people coming together to share and analyse

information, ideas and paradigms that are of strategic importance to an organisation". Furthermore, Weissflog (1998:2) observes that strategic conversations constitute an ongoing quest to find answers to several key questions which include the following: "Why are we in business? Where are we today? Where do we want to be"?

The significance of the above definitions in this study is that they highlight some key elements that could constitute strategic conversations at the Legislature. These definitions suggest that strategic conversations could be informal but structured; involve people sharing ideas about strategic matters of an organisation; and involve soliciting answers to important questions of an organisation. The question that could become of interest in this study is the extent to which the articulated elements of strategic conversations manifest themselves at the Legislature. An answer to such a question is provided in the next chapters of this study.

However, it must be taken into consideration that different organisations may use similar "labels for their strategy concepts, but the concrete practices behind the labels could be different" (Palli *et al,* 2009:305). The employment of strategic conversations by two or three organisations is likely to be different due to different organisational contexts. It would therefore, be prudent for the Legislature to ensure that strategic conversations are rooted in its specific context. The next section builds on the efforts of cultivating understanding of the strategic conversations.

2.3 Uses and benefits of strategic conversations

It has emerged from the sections that have already been discussed that conversations are important to the strategy processes of organisations. This is a view that McCarthy (2003:12) echoes in arguing that "strategic conversations are a powerful tool in the hands of management". These sentiments seem to emphasise the point that strategic conversations are useful and beneficial to organisations. The question is how the strategic conversations would be useful and beneficial to the Legislature as a public organisation? This is one of the questions that the study seeks to answer. However, the uses and the benefits that are associated with strategic conversations are highlighted

below and are an indication of the possible ways in which the Legislature could employ strategic conversations to its advantage.

2.3.1 Uses of strategic conversations

Strategic conversations, according to McCarthy (2003:12) can be used for three purposes: to "validate existing strategies, to test their robustness against a plausible future, and to develop new strategies". Rosenthal and Schober (1999:1) also highlight that strategic conversations can be used: to facilitate better understanding of issues, to encourage a higher degree of support for decisions, to foster stronger commitment to the organisation, to maximise human potential in an organisation, to lead an organisation that is undergoing tumultuous change, to establish an environment conducive to promoting learning, and to foster an organisational culture that builds trust and develops team spirit. This discussion above indicates the possible value of strategic conversations in organisations, which is a point that is further accentuated in the next section.

2.3.2 Benefits of strategic conversations

The literature consulted revealed potential benefits emanating from employing strategic conversations in organisations. In this regard, Kleiner (1989:4) identifies the following benefits: strategic conversations cultivate unthinkable ideas and unusual sources of organisational wisdom and encourage an atmosphere of modest pragmatism in which everyone participating in the session becomes a colleague, rather than a boss or just an employee. In articulating further benefits, Groombridge and Kulski (2002:3) highlight that "strategic conversations are useful in addressing complex and difficult matters in organisations".

The observations regarding the various uses and benefits of strategic conversations by the different authors reflect obvious overlapping ideas. However, what has emerged in the discussion seems to illuminate the significance and the potential value of strategic conversations for organisations. It is in this context that "the time spent developing and preparing strategic conversations is considered as the best investment an organisation can make to develop a new understanding of complex issues'' (Rosenthal and Schober,

1999:1). The apparent optimism about strategic conversations does not however, come without scepticism. The scepticism is underlined by the edict; "stop talking and get to work" (Brown and Isaacs, 1997:2). The main argument in this view is that strategic conversations take time away from the critical tasks of the organisation that people are supposed to be doing, and should, therefore, be discouraged. This further explains why strategic conversations in most organisations are considered more "toxic" than "nourishing", and in the process people are kept "out of the loop" (Manning, 2001:16).

The scepticism about strategic conversations is a point that has to be acknowledged because it exists in organisations. It would have been worthwhile though if Brown and Isaacs, including Manning, had also provided ways in which strategic conversations can occupy a pride of place in organisations. In the absence of that, the uses and benefits of strategic conversations that have been highlighted provide a reason for embracing optimism rather than scepticism.

It was indicated earlier on that the uses and the benefits of strategic conversations that have been highlighted are an indication of the possible ways in which the Legislature could employ them to its advantage. It is expected that any new management approach or tools that the Legislature decides to employ, should, in one way or another, contribute to the fulfilment of its constitutional mandate. It is in this context that it could be argued that the extent to which the Legislature employs the strategic conversations to better fulfil its constitutional mandate, will determine the usefulness of strategic conversations. However, a word of caution though for the Legislature, is that it must be capable of "staying in conversations" in order to maximise the potential value of strategic conversations (Weissflog, 1998:3).

2.4 Principles and prerequisites of strategic conversations

The literature that has been reviewed suggests that there are principles and prerequisites of strategic conversations. The appreciation of, and adherence to the principles and prerequisites of strategic conversations is considered important in creating a conducive environment within organisations; hence they are explored in this section.

2.4.1 Principles of strategic conversations

In terms of the literature that has been reviewed, there are few authors who have paid particular attention to the principles that should underpin the use of strategic conversations. This is regarded as a shortcoming, considering that principles normally guide practice. Some of these authors include Wheatley and Rogers, cited in Ungever *et al* (2002:315), who highlight principles for developing strategic conversations. The main principles articulated by these authors include active participation of people, recognition of multiple-perspectives of reality, and establishment of internal and external organisational networks. In addition to the above principles, Brown and Bennett (1994:1) state that "strategic dialogue is built on the operating principle that the stakeholders in any system already have within their wisdom and creativity, the capacity to confront even the most difficult of challenges''.

From the above discussion, one gets a sense that principles are important in guiding the practice of strategic conversations in organisations. However, this does not mean that these principles represent the "one best way". The idea of a universal set of principles on how to manage and lead organisations is challenged through more calls for "adaptability, flexibility and ingenuity'' (Fox *et al*, 1994:11).

The implication for the Legislature in this regard, is that the above principles should be viewed as a representation of some of the important factors that could be considered in employing strategic conversations. However, the Legislature as a public sector organisation also has other principles that it must adhere to. These include constitutional, political, social, economic and public management principles which the Legislature must protect and promote in order to contribute to the realisation of the government's ultimate goal of a "better quality of life for all" (Gildenhuys & Knipe, 2000:92). Some of the constitutional principles that the Legislature must adhere to, emanate from Section 41 of the Constitution. These are principles of co-operative government and intergovernmental relations which, among other things, state that the Legislature as an organ of state, "must secure the well being of the people of the Republic, exercise its power and perform its functions in a manner that does not encroach on the geographical, functional or

institutional integrity of government in another sphere, and should co-operate with other organs of state in mutual trust and good faith''. Since the Constitution is regarded as the "supreme law of the land", there are penalties and sanctions for not adhering to it by any organ of state, the Legislature included. The implication is, therefore, that the Legislature would also have to adhere to these constitutional principles in the process of developing or conducting strategic conversations.

2.4.2 Prerequisites for successful strategic conversations

The literature that has been reviewed also revealed that there are prerequisites that must be adhered to in order to ensure the success of strategic conversations within organisations. In this regard, Bohm, cited in Senge (1990:43) states that "participants in the strategic conversations must suspend their assumptions and must feel secure and comfortable to make contributions''. He further suggests that "leaders of organisations must participate rather than preside over conversations, and that a facilitator who holds the context of strategic conversations must be involved in strategic conversations", *ibid.*

Schwartz, cited in Corsini (2003:1) also identifies conditions necessary for strategic conversations to be effective. These include the need for the creation of an "open environment in which no ideas are rejected (or accepted) out of hand, and that an organisation must keep conversations going". This principle is supported by the view that in an ideal organisation, "ideas filter up, as well as down, and their merit carries more weight than their source, and also that participation and shared objectives are valued more than executive orders" (Spencer in Rigsby *et al,* 2003:135). Schwartz (2003:1) further states that it is important to involve external stakeholders to encourage new and fresh thinking during strategic conversations.

The above factors are some of the prerequisites that may have to be adhered to in order to ensure effective and purposeful strategic conversations in organisations. The aspects of "participation" and "involvement" of employees seem to be one of the important prerequisites that both Schwartz and Bohm have highlighted in the context of the Legislature. These aspects are also linked to the constitutional requirements that the

Legislature has to adhere to. Section 116 (1) (b) of the Constitution requires the Legislature to "make rules and orders concerning its business, with due regard to representative and participatory democracy." Furthermore, Section 118 (1) (a) obligates it to "facilitate public involvement in its legislative and other processes of the Legislature". Faced with these constitutional requirements relating to participation and involvement, the Legislature seems obliged to encourage participation even in its strategic conversations. As an "indispensable part of government machinery", the Legislature must set an example and be seen to be adhering to its constitutional obligations. However, in the process of considering the principles and prerequisites of strategic conversations, the Legislature and other organisations are warned not to take too much time searching for the perfect method. What is more important is to get started with the strategic conversations (Corsini, 2003:1).

2.5 Organisational learning and change

It has already been mentioned that the focus of this study was the understanding of strategic conversations as a tool for facilitating learning and change in organisations. However, this section has attempted to review literature with a view to defining and describing organisational learning and change. All this is considered important in facilitating appreciation of the two concepts in the context of strategic conversations.

2.5.1 Organisational learning

A dictionary definition of learning is that it is "the acquisition of knowledge, skills or ability" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990). However, in the context of organisations like the Legislature, learning seems to entail more that what the above definition suggests. This point is illustrated by the definitions of organisational learning that are presented below.

Friedman (2002:64) defines organisational learning "as a process that occurs through shared insights, knowledge and mental models…and builds on the past knowledge and experience – that is memory". Similarly, Simon (1991:71) defines organisational learning

as "the insights and successful restructuring of organisational problems by individuals as reflected in the structural elements and outcomes of the organisation itself".

Argyris & Schön (1996:16) provide a more detailed definition. They state that:

> Organisational learning occurs when individuals within an organisation experience a problematic situation and enquire into it on the organisation's behalf. People in an organisation respond to the mismatch through a process of thought and further action that leads them to modify their images of the organisation and their understanding of the organisational phenomena and to restructure their activities as to bring outcomes and their expectations in line, thereby changing organisational theory-in- use.

In their definition, Argyris & Schön also describe how leaning actually becomes organisational in nature. They argue that:

> the learning that results from organisational enquiry must become embedded in the images of the organisation held in its member's minds and/or in the epistemological artefacts (maps, memories, programmes) embedded in the organisational environment (ibid).

The above definitions of organisational learning highlight various elements that constitute organisational learning. Some of these elements suggest that organisational learning is a continuous process which places people at the centre of learning. They also suggest that organisational learning deals with organisational challenges that have to be addressed. These elements further indicate that organisational learning facilitates change in behaviours and encourages improved performance.

Even though the focus of the study was on organisational learning, the above definitions also reveal that individual learning is important for learning to take place in organisations. However, "individual learning does not necessarily precede organisational learning, but does play a critical role in setting the learning process in motion"

(Friedman, 2002:71). This point warrants further discussion and will be explored in the context of answering the question: How do organisations learn?

In answering the above question, Simon (1991:125) states that "all learning takes place inside the individual human head, and that organisations either learn through the learning of their members, or by taking in new members with new knowledge". Senge (1990:139) argues that "organisations learn only through individuals, however, individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning; but without it, no organisational learning can occur''. The observations by Senge and Simon suggest that individuals are considered agents of learning in organisations. It can, therefore, be argued that organisational learning cannot take place without individual learning of the people in an organisation.

The implication for the Legislature in this regard is that the employees and the elected representatives who collectively constitute individuals at the Legislature, would be required to each embark on individual learning, otherwise the Legislature will not learn. This means that the responsibility for individual learning at the Legislature must not be confined only to employees, but must also include the Members of the Provincial Legislature.

There are other factors that should be considered in answering the question: How do organisations learn? Galer & van der Heijden (1992:7) provide guidance in this regard by suggesting that an organisation learns in three ways: by affecting the mental models of people in it, by filtering the type of people selected to belong to it, and by embedding the learning in practices and procedures of an organisation. Peter Senge (1990:6-10) who popularised the idea of learning organisations, also outlines learning capabilities which he articulates in terms of five disciplines. He asserts that organisations will learn if they adopt and practice the five disciplines, namely, systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, team learning, and a shared vision. In emphasising the significance of these disciplines, Senge (1990:6) states that "each of the disciplines provides a vital dimension in building organisations that truly 'learn', and continually enhance their capacity to realise their highest aspirations".

Furthermore, in their observations on learning, Argyris & Schön (1978:33) draw a distinction between a single-loop and double-loop learning. Their main argument is that in single-loop learning, organisations make a change to an area that is not functioning well in order to ensure that it works better, *ibid.* In double-loop learning, organisations question the assumptions that lead to an area that is not working well, with a view to reviewing or modifying those assumptions, *ibid.* In articulating the potential value of double-loop learning, Pearn *et al* (1995:203) argue that "it is the learning that organisations must have for future success". In this context, double-loop learning is regarded as the kind of learning that needs to be encouraged in organisations, as they seek to achieve their goals and objectives. Such learning is considered to have occurred "when an error is detected and corrected in ways that involve modification of an organisation's underlying norms, policies, and objectives" (Argyris & Schön, 1978:34).

If one considers the potential value of double-loop learning highlighted above, it can be argued that it is the kind of learning that the Legislature "must have for future success" in our "democratic" South African society. According to de Villiers (2001:17), a "democratic society that encourages healthy participation depends on a variety of institutions". The Legislature is one of these institutions and, among other things, it is expected to play a formidable role in the development of a "learning society" (Ranson *et al,* 1994:168). Judge, cited in Waddell (2005:23) uses a related concept of "societal learning" which he describes by its "ability to generate its own answers in a more inclusive sense". It must be acknowledged though that this research investigation focuses on organisational learning rather than on "learning society" or "societal learning". However, the matter of societal learning is raised here because it is considered relevant in that "those nations that invest in learning gain economic, social, and personal benefits for their citizen: those that fail do suffer decline'' (Pearn *et al*, 1995:5). Furthermore, "the requirements for a learning society will only be met if public organisations themselves become organisations that learn" (Ranson *et al,* 1994:168).

The extent to which the Legislature is an organisation that learns is answered in the next chapters of the study. What is accentuated here in the context of the Legislature is that organisational learning is important for public sector organisations as it is important for

any organisation. However, the public sector organisations must "build public learning as a necessary condition of societal development which is achieved through the arena of public discourse and political processes" (Ranson *et al,* 1994:179). The Legislature and similar organisations are, therefore, advised that effective organisational learning in "the public sector requires not merely what would be required in any organisation, but the development of that arena, the effectiveness of those political processes and an organisational capacity to learn from them", *ibid.*

Another pertinent question is: How will one know that organisational learning has actually taken place? It will be shown in the study that the answer to this question is of relevance to the Legislature. Various writers have expressed different but related viewpoints in attempting to address the question, and some of these views are captured in this section. Rhodes (1996:1) argues that "organisations are considered to be learning when the collective patterns of behaviour among organisational members change and adapt to their environment". He adds further that "organisational learning would have taken place when the new individual learning emerges victoriously from the struggle between the "learning" and prevailing organisational behaviour". Another response to the question is provided by Dodgson (1993:377) who argues that "learning is considered to have occurred when organisations perform in improved and better ways, usually as a result of requirements to adapt and improve efficiency in times of change".

The above responses seem to suggest that when learning has taken place, a change in behaviour or practice occurs and there is improved performance in an organisation. In the case of the Legislature, a change of behaviour would occur among employees of the Legislature as well as the Members of the Legislature who are elected public representatives. However, such a change in behaviour should be preceded by a learning intervention. It must be noted though that learning is an ongoing process. In times of turbulence and accelerated change, "organisations often have to continue to learn, unlearn and relearn" (Tan, 1999:1). However, Price and Shaw (1996:7) express a word of caution for institutions like the Legislature and states that "in the midst of change, the learning organisation will only be a learning organisation when it is not stuck on discussing what a

learning organisation is". In a sense, the Legislature is advised not to be paralysed by endless debates in this regard, but to focus on the path of an ongoing learning process.

However, despite the potential value of organisational learning as articulated above, not all organisations put learning high on their agenda. The fact that organisational learning is not being prioritised might explain why it has yet to establish a secure beachhead in many organisations (Gavin, 1993:86). This situation creates a potential for compromising the extent to which learning can take place in organisations. The problems associated with organisational learning could be attributed to a number of possible obstacles that organisations need to address.

There are many of these obstacles to organisational learning that the Legislature and other organisations are likely to experience. Vaill cited in Galer & Van der Heijden, (1992:8) outlines some of them as including "lack of awareness of the world outside an organisation" and the "use of traditional frames of references which have become outdated". Other obstacles include the "shortage of resources to embed learning of an individual and also the turbulence in the environment that leads to confusion", *ibid.* Lack of adequate communication is also considered a "basic impediment to organisational learning" (Strata, cited in Rigsby *et al,* 2003:171).

As stated earlier on, "learning in some form is critical to organisational success" (Driver, 2002:104). In the context of the Legislature, learning is "critical" in ensuring that it is able to fulfil its constitutional mandate. However, if there are obstacles to learning at the Legislature, its ability to fulfil the constitutional mandate is likely to be compromised. This means that the Legislature might be unable to provide the necessary services to the people, and that will cast doubt on its ability to fulfil its constitutional obligations.

In such a situation, it seems fair to assume that these obstacles have to be addressed by the Legislature in order to maximise the value of learning. Considering the possible value of learning, it seems important that the Legislature and other organisations develop useful tools to eradicate the obstacles to learning. In this regard, Bleed (1991:1) states that

"organisations require tools and methodologies that will help them to learn consciously and proactively in pursuit of their goals, and one such tool is strategic conversations".

From the literature that has been reviewed, it seems evident that there are a number of authors who amplify the view that strategic conversation is a tool for facilitating learning in organisations. In this context, Dixon (1994: 83) asserts that "conversation and dialogue are crucial in ensuring that there is a collective setting that results in mutual learning upon which the organisation can act". Brown & Isaacs (1997:2) further assert that individuals in organisations collectively learn in conversations as they work together. It is also stressed that strategic conversations are central to the discipline of organisational learning, because they encourage "collective thinking, learning, communication and change" (Dixon, 1994: 84). How does the concept and practice of change relate to strategic conversations? The response to this question is discussed in the next section.

2.5.2 Organisational change

It has been said earlier that the primary focus of this study is on strategic conversations; however, it was considered necessary to also briefly define and describe change in the context of strategic conversations. Public sector organisations are facing comprehensive reorganisation and modernisation processes (Christensen, 2007: xi). The Legislature as a public organisation is inevitably faced with change which is a situation that is attributable to environmental changes (Van der Walt & Du Toit, 2002:253). Due to the changes that the Legislature cannot escape, it is also expected to deal with "reorganisation and modernization processes". This leads to a need to explain what exactly is meant by the term 'change'.

Many competing definitions of the concept of change abound. Van Tonder (2004:6) defines change as a "process resulting in a difference of varying magnitude and nature in the state and/or condition of a given entity over time, whether the entity is a phenomenon, situation, person and/or object". Stickland (1998:90) also defines change as "a phenomenon of time, where something over time turns into something else". These definitions represent what could be considered as general definitions of the concept of

change. How then does change relate to an organisation as intended by the term 'organisational change'?

Porrass and Silvers, cited in Van Tonder (2004:12), observe that organisational change is a process which starts by altering critical organisational processes, which, in turn, influences individual behaviours, and which subsequently impacts on the outcomes of an organisation. According to Binnis, cited in Van Tonder (2004:15), organisational change is a "response to change, values, and structures of organisations so that they can better adapt to new technologies, markets and challenges, and the dizzying rate of change itself".

The definitions suggest that organisations are "territories" of change, making it (change) omnipresent in contemporary organisations including the Legislature. Change is therefore woven into the fabric of organisational life as a way of functioning and continuously developing (Swanepoel, 2003:29). In this context, organisations cannot escape change, but have to accept and deal with it. The reality is that "no change is no option" (Blair & Meadows, 1996:76). This study advocates that strategic conversations are one of the ways in which organisations can deal with change. This is a matter that is further explored in the coming chapters in the context of the Legislature as a public sector organisation.

Van der Walt & Du Toit (2002:86) argue that the environment is a critical factor that must be understood to recognise its influence on public institutions. This emanates, among other things, out of the realisation that "failure to take cognisance of the importance and influence of the environment may have serious consequences for the organisation, at least, the functioning of the organisation will be impaired, and at worst, its existence may be threatened" (Fox *et al,* 1991:13). The implication for the Legislature here is that, its management and the political leadership must monitor and evaluate the environment in the process of delivering its public services in line with its constitutional mandate. If the Legislature monitors and evaluates the environment, it is likely to be in a better position to pay attention to the important aspects of the environment that are likely to have an impact on the achievement of its objectives and goals. The significance of

"paying attention" to the strategic organisational matters, is accentuated by Schein, cited in Scharmer (2009:538) when he observes that "what we pay attention to, and how we pay attention, is key to what we create". It seems apparent that by paying attention to the important aspects of the environment, the Legislature would be in a better position to identify and address the "blind spots" as it creates a successful future underpinned by effective fulfilment of its constitutional mandate

The literature that has been reviewed reveals that the factors that drive change are located mainly in the macro and micro environments of organisations, (Kroon, 1995:56, Swanepoel *et al,* 2000:754; Van der Walt & Du Toit, 2002: 93 and Fox *et al*, 1991:18). The macro or general environment is characterised by political, economic, technological, social and cultural factors which are external to an organisation. The micro environment includes all the internal processes, activities and functions that are carried out within an institution (Van der Walt & Du Toit, 2002; 93). Some of the components of this environment include institutional structure, mission and goals, management methods and approaches, policies, and employees, *ibid.* In addition to the two main environmental levels and their components, there is also another level of the environment referred to as the "intermediate environment" which is made up of an institution's interaction with clients, like the public or communities and external regulators (Kroon, 1995:56).

It is also considered equally important for the Legislature's management and political leadership to understand and appreciate the nature of the environment that drives change in their organisation, so that they are better prepared to deal with challenges that the environment imposes. In this regard, Van der Walt & Du Toit (2002:90) identify four characteristics of the environment which include: complexity of the environment, uncertainty of the environment, interdependence of environmental variables, and increasing instability of the environment. These characteristics render it challenging to deal with change that the environment imposes on organisations; however, change has to be addressed despite the challenges.

In the process of addressing change, it is also considered important that people in organisations have an idea of the areas that can be changed. In this regard, Leavitt, cited

in Swanepoel (2003:30), proposes that there are three areas that can be changed in an organisation: its structure; its technology; and its people. Beatty & Ulirch, cited in Swanepoel (2003:31), echo Leavitt's proposition when they state that changes can take place in the organisation's hardware (strategy, structure and systems) and software (employee behaviour and mindsets). Similarly, Stickland (1998:86-91) points out that a number of areas that can be targeted in a change effort include the "organisation structure, business processes, behaviour of people, strategy of the organisation, and state/ condition of an organisation".

The various writers mentioned above articulate common and unique factors that could be the target of change in organisations. However, the literature that has been reviewed also revealed that the path of change is littered with stumbling blocks. One of these stumbling blocks is resistance to change. A number of authors who include Swanepoel (2003:30) and Robbins & Finley (1997:25-27) have outlined factors that cause resistance to change in organisations which could be in individual or organisational or both. Some of the individual factors that cause resistance to change include, fear of the unknown, job insecurity, general mistrust, and failure to recognise the need for change, *ibid*. The organisational factors that lead to resistance to change include threats to existing power relationships; resource allocation and expertise, structural and work group inertia, including previously unsuccessful change efforts*, ibid.*

The factors highlighted above reveal some of the obstacles that the legislature and other organisations are likely to be confronted with in the process of dealing with change. The reality is that, even though there is an acknowledgement of the ubiquity of change, managers are often unable to make sense of it and are generally in need of some framework or perspective to deal with change (Van Tonder, 2004:11). In the context of the Legislature, not only managers, but also the political leadership composed mainly of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the Legislature might also be in need of a "framework or perspective to deal with change". This is the case because they are not insulated from the challenges associated with resistance to change. It is also true for the Legislature that any efforts to bring about change are sure to meet with resistance (Fox *et al,* 1991:166).

However, there are a number of techniques that are proposed for addressing and overcoming possible obstacles to change. In the context of the Legislature, the identification and application of appropriate techniques for dealing with resistance to change are critical for the delivery of its constitutional mandate for the benefit of the citizens of the province. In order for the Legislature to continue to provide the required services in terms of its constitutional mandate, it must remain "alive" and that would be possible only if it is able to adapt to the changes in its environment. There is a recognised need for public sector organisations to be more flexible and responsive in their dealings with the public, and to be more sensitive to the diverse needs of the citizens that they service (Frederickson, cited in Parker & Bradley, 2004:198). The implication for the Legislature is that it must be more responsive and flexible in relation to the changing environmental factors so that it can be able to deal with the changing demands and needs of the people it serves. In order for the Legislature to succeed in this regard, it will, among other things, have to "adjust its strategy to reflect the environment in which it operates" Miller (2005:73).

However, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the Legislature to successfully adapt to the changes in its environment if it does not identify and apply appropriate techniques for dealing with resistance to change. There are numerous techniques that could be employed by the Legislature in this regard. Some of these techniques include education and communication; participation and involvement, negotiation and agreement (Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979: 113). Fox *et al* (1991:1660) also suggest some techniques that could be explored for addressing resistance to change, and these include behaviour modification, non-directive counselling, team building, and sensitivity training. The techniques that have been enumerated here confirm that there are various instruments that are available for the Legislature and other organisations to use as they seek to address the challenge of resistance to change.

According to Hughes, cited in Parker and Bradley (1994:198), there has been "increased interest in management approaches and tools that are regarded as more suited to a changing environment". There are also a number of authors who seem to recognise strategic conversations as an attractive tool for dealing with change in organisations. O'Brien, cited

in Senge (1990:13-14), identifies strategic conversations as the "single greatest tool, a criterion with the necessary attributes to cope with change in organisations".

Commenting on how this tool of strategic conversations has led to change in his company, Weissflog (1998: 3) states:

> changes came about because of repeated and ongoing inquiry into the critical and strategic issues, staying in the conversations made a difference. The pace of change in the company's markets required an approach that was different from traditional strategic planning. The idea of 'the plan' was replaced with strategic conversation.

Groombridge and Kulski (2002:2) also observe that strategic conversations enable development and change to occur. According to Ramsden, cited in Groombridge and Kulski (2002:2) a "leader's role in fostering collaboration development and change requires him/her to re-conceptualise the importance of creating a strategy dialogue with staff, and to provide an environment where dialogue and discussion can occur". From the above observations, it emerged that strategic conversations are a possible tool with the potential for dealing with change in organisations. This optimistic view of strategic conversations does not seem to be misplaced if one takes into consideration the uses and potential benefits associated with strategic conversations, which have already been alluded to in the previous section of this chapter.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter an attempt was made to review available literature about the subject under investigation. This included key concepts, arguments and counter-arguments, which culminated in the emergence of potential themes and sub-themes which are further explored in the next chapters of this study.

The lack of information on the subject under investigation, especially in the context of the public sector, meant that the literature review element of this study was constrained to delivering evidence of a theoretical nature associated with the subject under discussion.

However, it is believed that the authors that have been referred to, have contributed to the development of this study. This takes us to the next chapter which will focus on the research methodology employed in this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

"It is a capital mistake to theorise before you have all the evidence.
It biases the judgement."

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, 1892

3.1 Introduction

 "Research methodology refers to the procedural framework within which the research is conducted" (Remenyi *et al,* 1998:28). This does not mean that there is a universally agreed upon procedural framework for conducting research. In the context of the research methodology, the choices that one makes during a research journey like this one are not arbitrary. As Miles & Huberman (1994:3) put it, such choices "depend not only on your preferred research style, but also on the study's topic and goals, available theory and the researcher's familiarity with the setting being studied". This instructive observation found resonance with the researcher, and consequently informed the decisions and choices that have been made in the research phases of this study.

This chapter outlines the paradigm and data collection methods that were employed in the process of collecting and making sense of the data regarding the research question. The unit of analysis and the sample of the study are also briefly discussed. The ethical considerations that were adhered to during the data-gathering processed are highlighted. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the various instruments used for collecting data, mainly focusing on the questionnaire and how it was administered and what the limitations were.

3.2 Research paradigm

"A paradigm is a fundamental model or frame of reference used to organise people's observations and reasoning" (Babbie, 2001:42). Kuhn prompted the idea that one's paradigmatic view of the world might be related to the way one went about researching (Bazeley, 2002:2). In undertaking a research investigation like this, one had to make a

choice between a qualitative and a quantitative paradigm and, in the process, align the research within a particular "side" of the "paradigm debate". Even though the scope of this study does not permit an elaboration on this debate, the researcher wishes to acknowledge the presence of divergent views and questions that also influenced the choice of the paradigm in this research investigation.

It is therefore considered important to note that the quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches are not wholly a matter of technical difference, but instead, result mainly from two different philosophical and theoretical traditions of interpretivism (phenomenological) and naturalism (positivism) (Williams, 2002:6). Many empirical and theoretical questions and views flow from the adoption not just of one or the other methodological approach, but from the assumption (usually implicit) of the philosophical or methodological positions, *ibid.* This then helped to shape the existing thinking in the various schools of thought represented by "purists", "situationalists", and "pragmatists," *ibid.*

According to Creswell (1994: 176), the purists argue that paradigms and methods should not be mixed; situationalists assert that certain methods are appropriate for specific situations, whilst the pragmatists argue that a false dichotomy existed between qualitative and quantitative paradigms, and that researchers should make the most efficient use of both paradigms in understanding the social phenomena. The ongoing divergent arguments from the various schools of thought suggest that the choice of a paradigm in a research study like this one is not an uncontested undertaking. Despite this reality, a choice has to be made. However, one has to bear in mind that, in the final analysis, "the researcher's creativity and imagination are of paramount importance, and that the research strategy and tactics are there to support, rather than hinder the researcher's creative faculties" (Remenyi *et al,* 1998:43).

In this world of contested research practice, Henning (2004:1) advises that the purpose of research normally influences the paradigm to be used in a study. In this study, the researcher wanted to employ a paradigm which would better answer the research question and fulfil the objective of the research as articulated in the first chapter of this

investigation. It was in this context that the research paradigm selected for this study was the qualitative paradigm[6]. This paradigm was relevant mainly due to its "ability to enquire for the purpose of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words, reporting detailed views of information and being conducted in a natural environment" (Creswell, 1994: pp.1-2). It is different from the "quantitative research paradigm which focuses on a social or human enquiry based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analysed with statistical procedures in order to determine whether the predictive generalisations of a theory hold or not", *ibid*.

The researcher was, however, cautiously motivated to learn that integrating qualitative and quantitative paradigms can help yield insights that neither paradigm would produce on its own (Rao & Woolcock, 2003:165). It was with this in mind, that the researcher recognized that this study, while remaining qualitative in nature, can still benefit from employing a quantitative paradigm as it relates to the methods of gathering data. In a sense, this study has embraced the view espoused by the "pragmatists" that researchers should make the most efficient use of both paradigms in understanding the social phenomena (Creswell, 1994: 176). This school of thought is mainly influenced by what Bryman (1998:140) refers to as the technical version of the "paradigm debate" which recognises that:

> Research methods and approaches to analysis may have been developed with a
> particular view of social reality in mind, but this does not tie them exclusively and
> ineluctably to particular epistemological viewpoints. Methods of data collection
> and analytical approaches are therefore more "free floating" than in the
> epistemological version. The crucial question according to the technical version of
> the debate is not whether there is an appropriate fit between epistemological

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[6]The qualitative paradigm was a counter response to the positivist tradition to research. It is also referred to as the constructivist approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Creswell,1994:4), and as the intrepretivist approach (Saunders *et al*, 2003:84)

position and method but whether there is an appropriate fit between the research problem and the method[7].

The model of combined design employed in this study is referred to as "dominant-less dominant design" where a researcher presents the study within a "single dominant paradigm" with one component of the overall study drawn from the alternative model (Creswell, 1994:177). The overarching dominant paradigm was the qualitative paradigm and the element of quantitative research is the data-gathering method which is discussed in detail later in this chapter. This model of combined design was found attractive because it provided the possibility of maintaining the consistent character of the qualitative paradigm in the study, whilst also enabling a data-gathering method to be drawn from the quantitative paradigm as well. The configuration of this model is consistent with what normally happens when two paradigms are integrated. As Bryman, cited in May and Williams (1998: pp.154-155) puts it, "most cases of integration operate within a frame in which one paradigm predominates".

3.3 Type of research

It is argued that the purpose of a research study is indicated in the kind of conclusions one aims to draw, or the goals of the research one aims to achieve (Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:39). It has been declared earlier on that this study is qualitative in nature, and Henning (2004:1) asserts that the decision to employ qualitative data is linked to the type of enquiry that a researcher wishes to undertake. However, as has already been articulated, this study has also employed "between methods" drawn from both the qualitative and quantitative data collection procedures. It is for this reason that it is referred to as a combined method study in which the researcher has used multiple methods of data collection across paradigms (Creswell, 1994:174).

Due to the limited information on the topic that was under investigation, the study was exploratory in nature. The aim was to make preliminary investigations and provide insight into a relatively unknown area of research. This justification is consistent with the

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[7] Bryman, 1998 provides a detailed discussion of the technical and epistemological versions of the paradigm debate. The scope of this study does not allow further discussion in this regard.

view that one of the chief reasons for conducting a qualitative study is that the study is exploratory; not much has been written about the topic being studied (Creswell, 2003:21). Besides being exploratory, this study was also considered as applied research. This is due to the fact that it was able to generate findings that could be applied to solve social problems of concern (Bailey, 1982:21). Pure research, on the other hand, is the type of research with findings that have no immediate application to social problems, *ibid*. This type of research was not found to be appropriate to the study, mainly due to the fact that it lacked practical application, especially with regard to the problem faced by the Legislature. Buchat, cited in Blanche & Durrheim (1999:42) refers to such research as "ivory tower" research.

3.4 Unit of analysis

The study focused on the extent to which individuals in their organisation understand and use strategic conversations to learn and change. In this case, the object of the study was the individuals in their organisation. Individuals were studied as members of an organisation and were considered as an organisational unit of analysis (Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:38). The results were essentially drawn on the basis of these organisational units of analysis.

Blanche & Durrheim (1999:37) argue that the units of analysis have an impact on sample selection, the data collection method and the type of conclusions that can be drawn from a research study. This kind of influence was evident in the course of the study and one had to maintain design coherence. This was done by ensuring that the selected sample and data collection method were coherent with the unit of analysis of the study.

3.5 Sampling strategy

As much as one might want to, "one cannot study everyone, everywhere, doing everything" (Miles & Huberman, 1994:24). A sample is therefore necessary, as one seeks to manage the study in order to achieve its objectives. According to Levin & Rubin, (1991:287) "a sample is a portion of elements in a population chosen for direct examination or measurements". The aim of sampling was to select "elements" of the

population within the Legislature which would provide representative information. In order to achieve what sampling was meant to achieve, stratified random sampling was employed in this study. This kind of sample was obtained by separating the population into non-overlapping groups called strata, and then selecting a simple random sample from within each stratum (Bailey, 1982:95). In the context of this study, the main reason for choosing a stratified random sample was that it ensured that the sample matched the population in terms of several variables which included gender, job category and age.

Furthermore, a sampling frame was obtained from the Human Resources Department of the Legislature. The names of all employees from each category of position were selected from the sampling frame, creating four homogenous non-overlapping groups. After the selection of the four groups (Executive Managers, Senior Managers, Middle Managers and Non-management staff), a simple random sample was drawn from each stratum and a stratified sample was then obtained. This stratified sample ensured that individuals in all the job categories at the Legislature were represented in the sample.

It must be mentioned that the sample frame was obtained after the researcher had explained to the Executive Manager of Corporate Services and her team, the purpose and possible benefits of the study to the Legislature. By the time the meeting was held with the human resources officials, permission to conduct the study at the Legislature had already been granted by the Secretary to the Legislature, and all business units had been subsequently informed. It was therefore not difficult to convince the human resources department to provide information, as they had already been informed about the study.

3.6 The researcher's role

Wheatley, cited in Remenyi *et al* (1998:35) contends that, "as people, we inhabit a world that is always subjective and shaped by our interactions with it". In the process of conducting this research investigation, the researcher was also part of this "subjective" world. In qualitative research like this, the researcher is often required to be open about the biases, values and judgments, that he or she brings to the study (Creswell, 1994:147).

Such openness by the researcher is considered to be useful and positive rather than detrimental to the research investigation (Lock, cited in Creswell, 1994:147).

Having been employed at the Legislature for a period of four years at different management levels, the researcher was essentially "immersed" in the research setting. The researcher was therefore not independent of the study, he "affected and was affected by the subject of the research" in the context of the Legislature. The author was therefore a subjective researcher rather than an objective one, "coolly making detached interpretations about the data that had been collected in an apparently value-free manner" (Saunders *et al,* 2003: 83). The subjectivity of the researcher influenced the study from inception to completion. However, motivated by the need not only to achieve the objective of the study, but also to maintain its integrity, the researcher was mindful of the need to remain open-minded and objective throughout the course of the investigation. This was considered important in ensuring that the researcher was able to be receptive to what was emerging from the investigation.

3.7 Methods of data collection

Methods refer to "techniques and procedures used to gather data which will be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction" (Cohen & Manion, 1994:36-37). Certainly, some form of data is required in undertaking any kind of research investigation. The distinction between forms of data and the methods used to collect them, posits that data can either be quantitative or qualitative, just as the methods used to collect that data can also be quantitative or qualitative (Hentschel, cited in Rao & Woolcock, 2003:168). As has already been stated, this research investigation is a combined method study. It has embraced the idea that quantitative methods can also be used to collect qualitative data (Rao & Woolcock, 2003: 169). The adoption and the use of this approach was part of a research strategy which was motivated by the need to answer the research question, and also, to achieve the objective of the study.

However, before selecting an appropriate research method, one must evaluate the research setting to determine inherent risks and ethical issues for consideration,

(Esterberg, 2002:67). As an employee of the Legislature for a considerable period, the researcher brought with him knowledge of the organisation which proved useful in evaluating the research setting. The Legislature was considered a highly unionised environment where trust between staff and management was at a premium. This was due to a history of difficult labour relations that was still prevalent at the Legislature during the period of the study. This presented a potential risk for the research investigation in that, in an investigation like this one, conducted by a member of management, there was a possibility for it to be viewed with scepticism by the unionised staff, thinking that they were being "used" by management. As a result, they might not want to participate, or to be seen participating in what they perceived as a management project. Furthermore, those who would want to participate in the study, might not do so in fear of being perceived to be collaborating with management.

In a context characterised by the highlighted potential risk, it was considered ethically prudent to employ a research method that would be more likely to ensure privacy and physical protection of the research participants[8]. The researcher was mindful of the fact that if there is any possibility that participants could be harmed during the research work, one needed to make sure that it was minimised or avoided, *ibid*. In fulfilling this ethical obligation, the researcher had to tailor the research in order to meet the needs of the situation (Moore, 2006:15).

This was not, however, easy, because one had to make hard choices and abandon initial thoughts about what appeared at the outset, to be the most appropriate method of data-gathering. For instance, in this qualitative study, the researcher would have wanted to employ an in-depth interview method which is recommended as an instrument for soliciting detailed stories or what philosopher Gilbert Ryle, cited in Creswell (1994:147) refers to as "thick descriptions" about the phenomenon under investigation. However, an in-depth interview offers less assurance of anonymity to respondents, which renders it unable to ensure the privacy of respondents (Bailey, 1982:184). Researchers are always reminded to protect the privacy of their research participants (Esterberg, 2002:45). It was

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[8] More details on the ethical considerations in the study are discussed later in this chapter

in this context that an in-depth interview could not be used as it did not "meet the needs of the situation" as discussed above.

In attempting to address the muddle posed by the research setting and the limitation of in-depth interview method, the researcher was mindful that "research methods are no more than the tools of the trade" (Moore, 2006:12) and that sometimes, "researchers have to rely on their individual creativity" (Kvale, 1996:9). In this context, the researcher had to find other ways of soliciting "rich descriptions" and still be sensitive to the prevailing situation in the research setting. As Remenyi *et al* (1998:66) advise, in such situations, "compromises have to be made between what is ideal and what is practical". The survey method was then employed as the main practical research tool that most likely to achieve the objective of this research, without disregarding the inherent risks and ethical obligations demanded by the research setting at the Legislature.

As will be discussed below, the survey method is a "method of data collection that utilises a questionnaire in order to get opinions, attitudes and descriptions" (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2002:93). Unlike an in-depth interview, this survey method provides greater assurance of anonymity (Bailey, 1982:156), and therefore ensures more scope for the respondents to participate confidentially. Furthermore, the use of a questionnaire saves time, as it can be sent to all respondents simultaneously, and most of the replies can be received within a short time, while interviews are generally conducted sequentially and may take longer to complete, *ibid*. The survey method was also found to be useful because of the type and object of the study. The study was exploratory in nature, and its objects were the individuals in their organisation. In this context, the choice of this data collection method was found to be consistent with the view that "surveys may be employed in exploratory studies that have individual people as units of analysis" (Babbie, 2001:238). This study was complemented by telephone interviews and documents analysis on a limited scale, both of which are briefly discussed below preceding a detailed discussion of how the questionnaire was administered.

3.7.1 Telephone interviews and documents analysis

The telephone interview and the documents study are regarded as qualitative methods for gathering data (Bailey, 1982:208 and Creswell, 1994:150). In line, with the overarching paradigm of this study, these methods were found useful in complementing the questionnaire in this study.

3.7.1.1   Telephone interviews

"A research interview is a conversation between the researcher and a participant or participants with the specific objective of gathering information about a topic that is being researched" (Poggenpoel, cited in Rossouw, 2003:143). However, a research interview itself may be conducted over the telephone. Despite the fact that participants are less motivated over the telephone, (Bailey, 1982:208), attempting to conduct qualitative interviews by telephone may still lead to benefits associated with "access, speed and lower costs" (Saunders *et al,* 2003:269). It was not only to achieve these potential benefits that a telephone interview was used in this study. It was also used as a result of the already highlighted inherent risks and the ethical considerations that emerged during the evaluation of the research setting. Due to fact that telephone interviews provide anonymity (Bailey, 1982:207), they are able to offer a better opportunity for confidentiality to the research participants, and this was considered as a critical ethical consideration in the study. Furthermore, the participants could respond to telephone interviews at convenient times, and privately, without being exposed to potential physical harm by those who might not support the study. It was in this context that it was considered worthwhile to employ telephone interviews in this study.

In complementing the questionnaire, the telephone interview was also used for confirmation of outstanding or unclear information provided by participants in the questionnaires that they had submitted. As will be shown later in the discussion of the construction of the questionnaire, each questionnaire was coded with a number corresponding to each participant's name. Furthermore, the names of the participants

were also in the internal telephone list of all the employees of the Legislature. The researcher was therefore able to identify and contact the respondents who were going to be interviewed by telephone.

The telephone interview was semi-structured to allow for open-ended and also closed-ended questions. In the process of soliciting information from the participants, the researcher also got the opportunity to probe further on the responses provided. The probing technique provided more detailed information that would otherwise not have been obtained without the use of telephone interviews in this study. Before the telephone interviews were conducted, each respondent was reminded of the objective of the study, and the purpose of the telephone interviews was also explained through an email, since all the respondents in the sample had access to e-mail. The researcher also assured the participants of their privacy, and the confidentiality of the information they would be providing.

The confirmation of the date and time of the telephone interview was done through an e-mail as well. However, despite the fact that confirmations were secured with all the participants, there were a few instances where they were not available at the time of the interview due to work commitments. In those instances, appointments were rescheduled for a time and date suitable to both the participant and the researcher. Such flexibility on the part of the researcher was considered necessary in ensuring that the required data was gathered. The responses obtained from each participant were then recorded in a notebook as each of them responded to the questions. The telephone interview generated useful research information that was integrated in the process of data analysis and interpretation to be discussed in the next chapter. The next section briefly discusses document study as a method that also complemented the questionnaire.

3.7.1.2 Document analysis

A document study comprises the analysis of written material that contains information about the phenomena one wishes to study (Bailey, 1982:301). As is the case in most

research investigations, document analysis was primarily used in this study to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources (Remenyi *et al,* 1998:175). In this case, document analysis complemented the questionnaire survey. This method of data gathering was found useful after having considered the inherent risks and ethical issues emanating from the research setting which were discussed earlier on. Document analysis is described as an "unobtrusive measure which involves studying a phenomenon of interest without relying on asking people directly or on observing people" (Esterberg, 2002:114). Due to its unobtrusive nature, privacy and anonymity of respondents participating in the study were guaranteed. The use of document analysis did not therefore pose any danger to research participants in this regard. However, information emanating from the document analysis which concerned participants was still treated with strict confidentiality.

The use of document study was limited to a brief secondary analysis of the 2005 and 2006 strategic plans of the Legislature. Motivated by the need to answer the research question, the documents were specifically selected and their text scrutinised by the researcher in the awareness that they contained the most recent useful data considered relevant to this study. This is a reflection of the researcher's biases and assumptions which were declared earlier on in this chapter. The researcher's declared subjectivity in this regard was motivated by the desire to achieve the objective of the study. As Lock, cited in Creswell (1994:163), suggests, such a contribution by the researcher can only be useful and positive rather than detrimental to the study.

Gaining access to the documents was not difficult as they were stored and accessible at the library of the Legislature. The researcher borrowed and returned the documents after the analysis was completed. These were secondary documents, and as a result, a secondary analysis was employed. This involved the analysis of documents or data gathered and authored by another person (Bailey, 1982:308). The problem with secondary documents though is that they were compiled for a reason other than research, and may thus not necessarily reflect the situation accurately (Remenyi, *et al* 1998:176). However, this does not mean that such documents cannot be useful for a study like this

one. This is a point that Bailey (1982:308) illustrates in highlighting that secondary analysis saves time and money, and also protects privacy, by using existing available data. However, the researcher acknowledges that such documents are generally not organized in a way as to make them amenable to research (Bailey, 1982:309). To overcome this challenge, the researcher had to dedicate more time and attention to the analysis of the secondary documents.

As was highlighted earlier on, the document analysis was used to supplement the questionnaire as the main tool of data gathering. When used in this manner - as a method along with other methods, "documents are collected as entities of data and then follow the same route through analysis and interpretation" (Henning, 2004:98). In this study, document analysis generated useful research information that was also integrated during the process of data analysis and interpretation which will be discussed in the next chapter. The next section focuses on the main data gathering instrument that was employed in the study.

3.7.2   The questionnaire

The questionnaire was self-administered. It was hand-delivered and then collected from the respondents. Ghauni & Gronhaug (2002:95) advise that "the questionnaire for an exploratory study should be loosely structured to allow for discovery of ideas and insights". This advice was taken into consideration in the course of the data gathering. The researcher became conscious of the fact that the "ideas" and "insights" of the respondents were critical in a qualitative exploratory study, and therefore open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. The use of open-ended questions allowed participants to have an opportunity to describe their views and opinions outside the confines of the predetermined questions.

It was highlighted earlier on that the phenomenon under investigation is relatively unknown, and yet Babbie (2001:241) warns that "respondents must be competent to answer the questions". It was considered a heavy burden to expect respondents to provide detailed descriptions of a phenomenon that was relatively unknown to them. It was,

therefore deemed necessary to lessen the burden by also including closed-ended questions that allowed the respondents to merely select answers from a predetermined list that was provided in the questionnaire. However, the use of closed-ended questions is normally criticized for "not adequately allowing respondents to describe what is relevant to them, or to express different views" (Minichiello *et al,* cited in Tomison *et al,* 1999:3). It was for this reason that most of the closed-ended questions in the questionnaire included an "other" response category with the necessary space provided for recording responses.

Sometimes, if respondents have insufficient knowledge or experience about the phenomenon under investigation, they may deliberately guess at the answer, resulting in a tendency called "uninformed response" (Saunders *et al*, 2003:283). In order to arrest the possible "uninformed response" tendency in the study, it was considered necessary to provide respondents with an opportunity to declare their lack of knowledge where it prevailed. The "don't know" alternatives were, therefore, included in the questionnaire.

The questions that constituted the body of the questionnaire emanated from the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the process of the literature review. The questionnaire was then divided into four parts, namely:-

- Part One: Biographical Information
- Part Two: Understanding Strategic Conversations
- Part Three: Strategic Conversations and Learning
- Part Four: Strategic Conversations and Change

After the questionnaire was constructed, it was then pre-tested. Pre-testing or pilot testing is considered a "non-negotiable part of the questionnaire design" (Rossouw, 2003:140). It ensures that one is able to assess the validity of the questions and the likely reliability of the data that was collected (Saunders *et al*, 2003:308).

The questionnaire was pre-tested using six former colleagues at another Legislature in which the researcher was previously employed. Four of those colleagues occupied management positions, while two were from a non-management level. In a sense, they represented the population from which the stratified sample of the study was drawn.

They were each contacted telephonically and the purpose of the study was explained, before they were requested to assist in the pre-testing of the questionnaire. A questionnaire was then e-mailed to all of them and they were each given three days to return it. All of them e-mailed back the questionnaires within three days.

The pre-testing of the initial questionnaires culminated in a process of redrafting some of the questions due to the following reasons:-

- the questionnaire was considered too long
- some instructions needed to be revised to ensure clarity
- more questions needed to be added to ensure that key issues were included in the questionnaire

After the questionnaire was pre-tested, it was then administered and this is the focus of the next section.

3.7.2.1   Administration of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was accompanied by a covering letter[9] outlining the purpose and objective of the study. This was found to be necessary considering the fact that the questionnaire was self-administered, and therefore the researcher was not present to articulate what the study was all about. In the first page of the questionnaire there was also an introductory paragraph which explained why the respondents were requested to respond to the questions. This paragraph also provided general instructions on answering the questionnaire.

The issue of confidentiality was also addressed in the introductory paragraph. The respondents were assured that the information they were going to provide through the questionnaire would be treated with confidentiality. This was important in ensuring that the respondents were comfortable with answering the questionnaire.

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[9] Attached as appendix 2

The 60 respondents who were selected through a stratified sampling were each allocated a unique numerical number which was recorded in a register. This number was then used to mark each questionnaire for tracking purposes. The questionnaires were then hand-delivered to each respondent. Due to the fact that all of the respondents were in the employ of the Legislature, it was easy to hand-deliver the questionnaires to each respondent.

The respondents were given two weeks to answer the questionnaires. However, at the end of the first week, an e-mail was sent to all those who had not yet returned the questionnaires. The same reminder was also sent two days before the end of the second week. The reminders were aimed at ensuring that there was a high response rate which was essential in contributing to the credibility of the findings and conclusions of the study.

The idea of sending reminders actually paid off, as, out of the 60 questionnaires that were provided to the respondents, 50 of them were returned. This represented approximately an 83% response rate which eliminated possible response bias. According to Babbie (2001:256), if a high response rate is achieved, there is a slighter chance of a significant response bias than with a low rate. It was, therefore, pleasing that such a high response rate was achieved. Two additional questionnaires were received three weeks after the two-week deadline and those were not considered as most of the analysis was completed by then.

3.8 Limitations

The use of a questionnaire as an instrument of data collection presented some limitations that the researcher had to contend with. By its nature, a questionnaire does not provide the actual activities as they occur in a natural environment, and yet this kind of information was considered significant in this qualitative study.

Certain steps were, however, taken in order to address this problem. More open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire to allow space for respondents to articulate their natural and actual experiences which fell outside the predetermined questions in the

questionnaire. The closed-ended questions in the questionnaire also included an "other" response category with the necessary space provided for the recording of responses. This was done to allow the respondents to be able to "describe what was relevant to them, or to express different views".

Furthermore, the questionnaire was complemented by other instruments of data collection - telephone interviews and document analysis. The use of triangulation assisted in compensating for the shortcomings of a questionnaire instrument. Despite these limitations, the research process culminated in the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study. The next section provides a discussion on ethical obligations that the researcher had to consider in the process of conducting this investigation.

3.9   Ethical considerations

According to Babbie, (2001:470) "anyone involved in social scientific research, needs to be aware of the general agreements shared by researchers about what is ethical and unethical in the conduct of scientific inquiry". It was in this context that ethical matters were considered during this research study.

The dictionary definition of ethical is to conform to accepted standards of conduct of a given profession or group, (The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1989:258). For the purposes of this research, the ethical standards that were adhered to emanated from four moral principles considered to constitute the bases of ethics in social research, HCESSRH[10] (undated:1). These are:

(i) The principle of non-maleficence: Research must not cause harm to the participants in particular, and people in general.

(ii) The principle of beneficence: Research should also make a positive contribution towards the welfare of the people.

(iii)The principle of autonomy: Research must respect and protect the right and dignity of participants.

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[10] This is the University of Harvard's National Committee for Ethics in Social Research in Health.

(iv) The principle of justice: The benefits and risks of research should be fairly distributed among people.

In terms of the principle of non-maleficence, attempts were made to ensure that the respondents were not harmed during the research process. This was done by ensuring that the questions that were asked were not inappropriate and offensive and therefore became a source of psychological harm to the respondents. The pre-testing of the questionnaire played an important role in this regard. Furthermore, it was declared that the information solicited from the respondents was going to be used only for academic purposes and would be treated with strict confidentiality. This declaration was not compromised during the course of the research.

In terms of the principle of beneficence, the covering letter that was attached to the questionnaire highlighted the potential benefits of the study to the Legislature and its employees. In keeping with the promise, the findings and the recommendations of the study revealed a number of benefits that could be pursued by the Legislature and its employees. In addition, the accessibility of the report of this study to the respondents in particular, and to the employees of the Legislature in general, will ensure that they continue to use it. The value of such access is that it provides respondents and employees with an opportunity to enhance their understanding of the Legislature in the context of the study.

In the quest to comply with the principle of autonomy, attempts were made during the research process to respect and protect the rights and dignity of the respondents. Permission was requested to conduct the study, and no respondents were forced or coerced to participate in the study. Furthermore, the anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed: no respondent's identity was revealed during and after the research process. The information and records provided by the respondents were treated as private and confidential as promised. The records were not shared with anyone and were used only for academic purposes. In terms of the principle of justice, precautions were taken to

ensure that respondents were not exposed to unnecessary risk during the research process. The life of the respondents was not disrupted or compromised.

The researcher has attempted to fulfil ethical obligations demanded by this research investigation. Earlier, it was noted that anyone involved in social scientific research, needs to be aware of the general agreements shared by researchers about what is ethical and unethical in the process of conducting conduct of scientific inquiry (Babbie, 2001:470). Without such awareness, it might prove difficult to consider ethical requirements in a research investigation.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided insight into the scientific path that was followed in the quest to generate information on the subject under investigation. It has revealed that the selected paradigms, methods, instruments were necessitated by the nature of the research question and the objective of the study. All this permitted the researcher to appreciate the idea that "research is actually more of a craft than a slavish adherence to methodological rules, and that no study conforms exactly to standard methodology, each one calls for the researcher to bend the method to the peculiarities of the setting" (Mishler, cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994:5). Motivated by the need to achieve the objective of the study, the researcher kept in mind Mishler's observation during the iterative process of data analysis which is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

"It was not curiosity that killed the cat. It was trying to make sense of all the data
curiosity generated."

Halcolm, cited in Patton (2002:440)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter commences by describing the data analysis approach employed in the study. It then identifies and describes key categories that emerged during the interrelated and interactive processes of the literature review, data collection and analysis. This chapter also highlights and discusses the findings of the study. It concludes with comments on the validity considerations pertaining to the study.

4.2 Data analysis approach

Data analysis is the "act of transforming data with the aim of extracting useful information and facilitating conclusions, and it is used to bring order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected information" (Strydom *et al*, 2002:43). The empirical evidence in this study was extracted through a questionnaire, and two supplementary methods - the telephone interview and document analysis. These research methods generated both qualitative and quantitative data.

Simply put, qualitative data usually takes the form of words, whilst quantitative data is normally presented numerically. The distinction is not, however, as neat as it sounds. If one uses numbers, interpretation is still involved, and if one's data consists of texts, counting can still be appropriate and necessary (Bazeley. 2002:2). This confirms the fact that "we have to face the fact that numbers and words are both needed if we are to understand the world" (Miles & Huberman, 1994:1). This observation is consistent with the idea of a combined method study employed in this study, in which the researcher has integrated methods of data collection drawn from quantitative and qualitative paradigms.

Another point that was pertinent to the data analysis in this study relates to the issue of data integration. Most studies and reports about mixed or combined methods do generate qualitative and quantitative data. However, the tendency is such a situation is to "focus on the use of component (parallel or sequential) designs in which the different elements are kept separate, thus allowing each element to be true to its own paradigmatic and design requirements" (Bazely, 2002:3). This raises the issue of whether, in such cases, they really do constitute a mixed method or a combined study, *ibid.* Consistent with the declaration that has been made to combine methods of gathering data from different paradigms, the researcher is drawn closer to the view that "an over-narrow qualitative focus may lead us to forget that much data is both quantitative and qualitative, and that the key issue is therefore one of integration" (Caxon, 2005: 1). In this study, therefore, an attempt was made to integrate data analysis. The value of the integration of qualitative and quantitative data together is that it "provides a synergistic effect in interpreting results" (Oandasan *et al,* 2000:244). So, what is the data analysis approach that enabled such integration to occur in this study?

The process of data analysis is considered eclectic, there is no "right way" of doing it (Tesch, cited in Creswell, 1994:15). However, it was still necessary to establish a method of analysing data systematically and in an organised manner. It is in this context that the "systematic content analysis" approach was found suitable for this study. This approach to data analysis combines the (qualitative) coding of texts with the (quantitative) calculation (Fielding & Scheier, 2001:11). It is essentially a "qualitative content analysis that allows a connection to quantitative steps of analysis" (Mayring, 2001:8). This approach to data analysis is considered relevant and important in a study like this which has been declared qualitative in nature, and yet has combined and used methods of data collection that have yielded qualitative and quantitative data. As Sieber, cited in Fielding & Scheier (2001:15) posits, "there is something that quantitative data can do for qualitative data". This is the sentiment that Miles & Huberman (1994:254) also express in stating that "doing qualitative analysis of data with the aid of numbers is a good way of testing bias and seeing how robust our insights are".

In this study, systematic content analysis is used to bring order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected information (Strydom, *et al*, 2002:43). Among other things, this "entailed the reduction of the volume of information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed" (Patton, 2002:432). The data analysis process of this study is articulated well through the concurrent flows of activities described by Miles and Huberman (1994:12-13) as:

☐ *Data reduction*: the data was selected, refined, coded and summarized and assigned to themes and categories. In converting data, simple quantification was also used in the form of percentages and numbers.

☐ *Data display*: the reduced data was then organized and displayed in the form of tables, graphs, and figures in order to reveal the information emerging from the data.

☐ *Conclusions:* the reduced and displayed data was used to determine findings which then led to conclusions and recommendations.

It must be highlighted that the qualitative data analysis approach was an interactive process that oscillated between the literature review, data collection and analysis stages of the research process. It was essentially a sense-making process where data collection, analysis and theory were intimately intertwined (Babbie, 2001:358). Creswell (1994:153) advises that data analysis requires that the researcher be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts. He also states that "data analysis requires that the researcher be open to possibilities and be able to see contrast or alternative explanations for the findings". In this study, Creswell's observation was considered important in providing guidance in the process of data analysis in this study. It is believed that the data that emerged from the research process provided context-bound information that led to the development of categories for explaining the phenomenon that was under investigation. The next section discusses the findings that have emerged during the study in each category.

4.3 Demographic descriptions of respondents

Various demographic variables were employed to describe the respondents in the study. The usage of multiple variables during the sampling process strengthened the representativeness of the sample against the population.

Table 4.1 Age Distribution of Respondents

Group of Respondents by Age	Description of Age Groups of Respondents	Percentage of Age in Each Group of Respondents
Youngest respondents	Between ages 21 and 30	20%
Young respondents	Between ages 31 and 40	33%
Old respondents	Between ages 41 and 50	40%
Oldest respondents	Between ages 51 and 60	7%

All of the respondents were employed at the Legislature at the time of the commencement and completion of the study. As shown in Table 4.1 above, a slight majority (53%) of the respondents were below the age of 40 but not under the age of 21. However, 33% of this age group was older than the age of 30 but still younger than the age of 40. Furthermore, 47% of the respondents constituted a strong minority, and they were older than age 41, but younger than age 60. In this age group, there was a significant concentration of respondents older than the age of 40 but still younger than the age of 50.

Table 4.2 below, demonstrates a strong presence of women as compared to men at the Legislature. This gender preponderance was maintained in the way in which respondents were distributed at management and non-management levels. Female and male respondents occupied 40% and 20% of management positions respectively. However, in non-management positions, female and males were equally represented.

Table 4.2 Distribution of Respondents by Gender and Employment Level

Gender by Employment Level	% Representation
Females in management	40 %
Females in non-management	20%
Males in management	20%
Males in non-management	20%

The other findings relate to the length of employment of the respondents at the Legislature. The majority of the respondents were in the employment of the Legislature for a period of two years. This majority was represented by 83%.

4.4 Understanding strategic conversations

4.4.1 Strategic conversations as a management tool

Almost all the respondents who returned their questionnaires confirmed that strategic conversation is a management tool. However one respondent could not agree and commented, "I do not know this type of conversation" referring to strategic conversations. This respondent represented approximately 7% as compared to 93% of the respondents who confirmed that strategic conversation is a management tool.

4.4.2 Current understanding of strategic conversations at the Legislature

Even though almost all of the respondents confirmed that strategic conversation is a management tool, they still differed as to whether a common understanding of strategic conversations existed at the Legislature or not. As illustrated in Table 4.3 below, there is a high to low level of understanding of strategic conversations at the Legislature. The majority of the respondents (69%) believe that strategic conversations are understood at

the Legislature. This was in contrast to 24% who said they are not. The remaining respondents could not express a view in this regard.

Table 4.3 Understanding of Strategic Conversations (SC) at the Legislature

Understanding of SC	Perceived Level of Understanding of SC
Understanding SC exists	High
No understanding of SC	Low

4.5 Participation in strategic planning session[11]

4.5.1 Status quo on participation

All of the respondents were of the view that employees in top management and senior management positions currently participate in strategic planning sessions at the Legislature. In this regard, the sentiment was expressed by one respondent who commented that "the main responsibility of management is to deal with strategic matters". This view was consistent with one that emerged during the literature review.

For instance, in terms of what people should do at the strategic level of strategy, Prahalad & Hamel (1990:91) assert that "the top management's real responsibility is a strategic architecture that guides competence building". In a sense, other people who fall outside the realm of management are not normally allowed to participate in strategic matters of an organisation.

There were, however, different opinions regarding the current participation of employees in middle-management and non-management levels, and Members of the Provincial Legislature (Members). Out of the 50 respondents who returned their questionnaires, 67% were of the view that employees in middle management positions were currently

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[11] For the purposes of this study, strategic planning sessions were considered to be sessions where people of an organisation participate in discussions and decisions regarding strategic issues of an organisation.

participating in the strategic planning sessions, as opposed to 33%, who stated that they were not participating. Furthermore, 55% of the respondents were of the view that employees in non-management positions were currently participating in the strategic planning sessions, in contrast to 45% who believed that they were not participating. The respondents also differed in their opinions regarding the participation of Members in the strategic planning sessions. 60% of the respondents were of the view that Members of the Legislature were not participating in the strategic planning sessions. However 40% of the respondents did not agree.

Table 4.4 Current Participation of External Stakeholders at the Legislature

Name of Stakeholder	Level of Participation	Percentage of Participation
Suppliers	None	-
The Public	Very low	13%
Consultants	Very high	87%

As illustrated in Table 4.4 above, a further difference of opinions was also revealed regarding the participation of external stakeholders of the Legislature in the strategic planning sessions. All of the respondents were of the opinion that suppliers were not participating in the strategic planning sessions. However such unity of opinion did not prevail when it came to the participation of the public and consultants. Only 13% of the respondents believed that the public was participating. On the other hand, 87% were of the view that consultants were participating in the strategic planning sessions of the Legislature. The perceived low to non-participation of the public and suppliers was explained by one respondent who commented that, "the suppliers and the public are excluded because maybe they may not understand the core business of the Legislature and thus may delay or derail progress in strategic conversations".

It was interesting to note that people from the same organisation expressed divergent views on the same issues. The views expressed were considered to emanate from perceptions rather than realities. Such perceptions were considered important nevertheless, because they provided insights on the subject that was under investigation.

4.5.2 Desired and expected participation

The respondents expressed various opinions regarding the kind of participation they desired or expected at the Legislature concerning the employees of the Legislature and external stakeholders. The general view of the respondents was that all employees including Members should be involved in the strategic planning sessions irrespective of the position each person occupied at the Legislature. This view was certainly different from the *status quo* which reflected an uneven participation in strategic planning sessions as revealed in the previous section. However, it was consistent with information emanating from the literature review. In the literature review it emerged that one of the principles of strategic conversations was that the "people want to be involved and co-create the organisation's future because they recognise that it is a significant part of their future" (Wheately & Rogers, cited in Ungerer *et al*, 2002:315).

Furthermore, according to the 2005-2006 strategic planning documents that were analysed, the view that all employees should participate in strategic planning sessions seemed to be what is envisioned at the Legislature. This is demonstrated by the core values of the Legislature in Table 4.5 and the two statements in Table 4.6 made by a management representative of the Legislature.

Table 4.5 Core Values of the Legislature Relating to Participation

Core Value	Meaning Attached to the Core Value
Participation	Involvement of everyone concerned prior to making a decision
Openness	Being straightforward, sincere and candid in discussions

Table 4.6: Statements Indicating Commitment to Participation by all Employees of the Legislature

- **"Effective communication is critical in the dissemination of information within and outside the Legislature. We intend to improve our communication channels and networks in the forthcoming financial year. We have identified a need to develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy"**

- **"Our strategic planning process was underpinned by involvement and participation by all staff members in the various Directorates. This decision was taken with the realization that collective ownership of any strategic plan is imperative for its success"**

In terms of participation of external stakeholders of the Legislature, only a minority of the respondents were of the view that suppliers and the public should take part in the strategic planning sessions of the Legislature. This was expressed by 13% and 27% of the respondents respectively. One respondent referred to suppliers and the public as "outsiders". However this view was in conflict with some of the prerequisites of strategic conversations which emanated from the literature review. These prerequisites state: "there must be an attempt to involve outsiders to encourage fresh thinking", (Bohm, cited in Senge, 1990:43), and that "all diverse stakeholders, both external and internal, are part of the process and such involvement enables the creation of a rich web of information" (Weissflog, 1998:7).

However, a majority of the respondents (60%) believed that consultants should participate in the strategic planning at the Legislature. This reflected a possible reliance on consultants regarding strategic matters of the Legislature, and yet it was consistent with the view expressed above by Bohm and Weissflog that "outsiders" must be involved.

4.6 Benefits associated with strategic conversations

The literature review revealed numerous uses of strategic conversations in organisations. These were uses that could be transformed into benefits in organisations where strategic conversations were actually employed. In this study, the empirical evidence suggests that

all the respondents expressed a common view that there were potential benefits associated with strategic conversations. However, there was an established majority view from respondents both in management and non-management positions (60%) that the Legislature was currently not enjoying the benefits associated with strategic conversations. This pessimistic picture is painted by the respondents' statements reflected in Table 4.7 below:-

Table 4.7   Statements by Respondents as to why Benefits are not Enjoyed at the Legislature

- **"… there is no method in place for helping staff and managers to engage in strategic conversations"**
- **"… management focuses on operational issues that could be dealt with at lower levels"**
- **"… colleagues at management level do not trust each other to feel secure in expressing their views"**
- **"… staff members at lower ranks are not really given opportunities to air their opinions, most of the time they are instructed"**

Out of the total number of the respondents who believed that the Legislature was currently not enjoying the benefits of strategic conversations, few of them (30%) were in management positions, whilst many of them (70%) were in non-management positions. This situation revealed that more people in non-management positions were pessimistic about this issue compared to those in management positions.

On the other hand, there was also a significant minority view (40% of the respondents) that the Legislature was currently enjoying the benefits associated with strategic conversations. This small and yet significant optimistic picture was further substantiated by the following comment from one respondent, "management does involve staff in strategic planning and now staff members know their responsibilities better". Out of the total number of respondents who believed that the Legislature was currently enjoying the benefits of strategic conversations, most of them (83%) were in management, whilst only a handful (17%) were in non-management positions. In this case, people in management

positions were more optimistic than those in non-management positions regarding this matter.

4.7 Facilitation of learning through strategic conversations

All the respondents confirmed that there were factors considered necessary in enabling strategic conversations to facilitate learning in organisations. This was consistent with the literature review, which identified factors considered as prerequisite for successful strategic conversations. The keen appreciation of these factors was demonstrated by the fact that some of the respondents even identified additional factors that they also considered necessary in enabling strategic conversations to facilitate learning. These additional factors are captured in Table 4.8 below:-

Table 4.8 Additional Factors for Enabling Strategic Conversations
"… respect for ideas, no matter who is talking"   "… leadership that invites conversation and create a platform for them"   "… giving people space to share ideas"

Furthermore, with the exception of only one, almost all of the respondents confirmed that there were also factors that could impede strategic conversations from facilitating learning in organisations. The respondents also provided additional factors that they thought could impede strategic conversations in this regard. These factors are captured by respondents through the statements reflected in Table 4.9 below:-

Table: 4.9 Additional factors that could impede strategic conversations from facilitating learning
"… stop using words such as 'you'll be in trouble' because such words create fear and tension"   "Power struggle and unmanaged egos"   "Hostility towards new employees"

The respondents were also asked to provide their opinion as to whether strategic conversations could be used as a tool for facilitating learning at the Legislature.

Figure 4.1 - Strategic conversations as a tool for facilitating learning
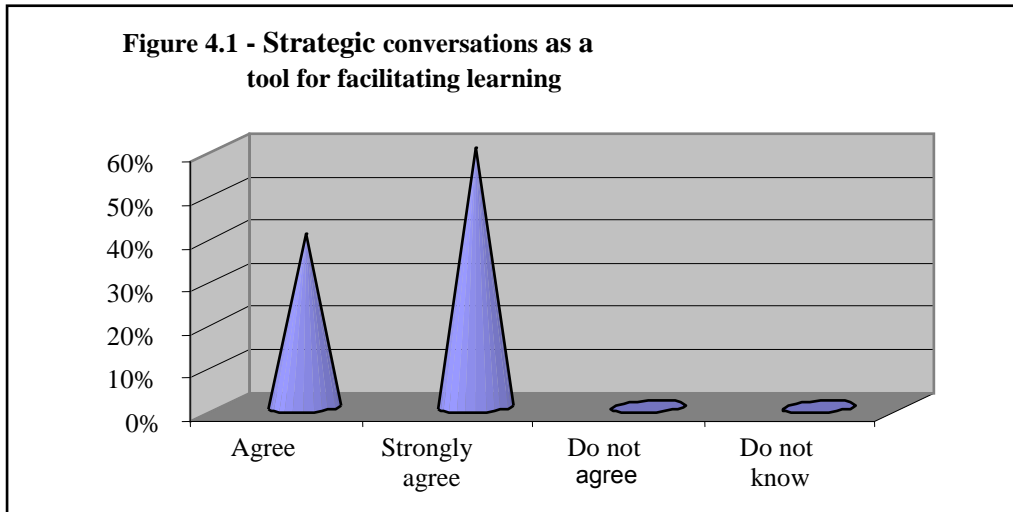
As demonstrated in Figure 4.1 above, the respondents expressed a total consensus in this regard; 40% "agreed", while a further 60% "strongly agreed" that strategic conversations could be used as a tool for facilitating learning at the Legislature. This apparent optimism regarding strategic conversations emerged despite the fact that a majority (60%) of the respondents believed that the Legislature was not currently enjoying the benefits associated with strategic conversations.

4.8 Facilitation of change through strategic conversations

All of the respondents confirmed that there were factors that were considered necessary in order for strategic conversations to facilitate change in organisations. Some of these factors were identified in the questionnaire. However, in the process of expressing their opinions in this regard, the respondents went further and identified their own additional factors that they thought could also enable strategic conversations to facilitate change in organisations. These additional factors are captured in Table 4.10 below:-

Table 4.10 Additional factors considered necessary for strategic conversations to facilitate change

- **"Management must resist the temptation of rushing to make decisions for the sake of completing a task"**
- **"… readiness to share information"**
- **"Acceptance of criticism that is aimed at making a contribution to the success of an organisation"**

With the exception of only five, all other respondents confirmed that there were also factors that may impede strategic conversations in facilitating change in organisations. In addition to the obstacles that were highlighted in the questionnaire, the respondents demonstrated insight in highlighting other additional factors that could impede strategic conversations in this regard. These factors are captured in Table 4.11 below:-

Table 4.11 Additional Factors that Could Impede Strategic Conversations to Facilitate Change

- **"Lack of innovations in organisations"**
- **"Individuals not ready to accept new ideas and ways of doing things"**
- **"Inward-looking management which misses seeing the bigger picture"**

Figure 4.2: Strategic conversations as a tool for facilitating change
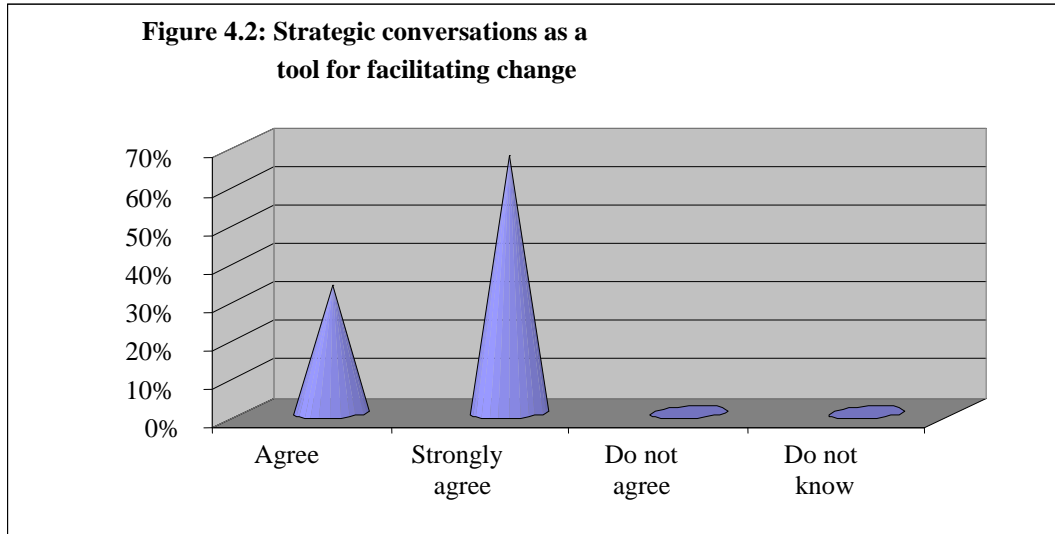
As illustrated in Figure 4.2 above, the respondents expressed a total consensus in this regard: 33% "agreed", whilst a further 67% "strongly agreed" that strategic conversations could facilitate change at the Legislature. This consensus might be a reflection of the confidence respondents had about strategic conversations as a tool for facilitating change at the Legislature. This would be consistent with the established consensus earlier on, that there are potential benefits associated with strategic conversations.

These findings outlined above emanate from the data that emerged from the interactive research stages of the literature review, data collection and analysis. This takes us to the next section which focuses on the validity of the study.

4.9 Validity considerations

According to Rossouw (2003:177), the knowledge that is generated by the process of research, "aims at a particular epistemological status, in the sense that it has to comply with the standard of validity". In the context of this study, an attempt was made to achieve a "particular epistemological status" by adhering to and complying with what Lincoln and Cuba (1985:296) refer to as the "basic epistemological standards of qualitative research". These are:-

- Good definitions
- The true value of research findings

- Applicability of the research findings
- Consistency of research findings

In order to ensure that there was a theoretical validity to the study, an attempt was made to define and clarify the key concepts that were used in the study. The conceptual definitions ensured that the problems of ambiguity, vagueness and unfamiliarity presented by the concepts in the study were addressed (Rossouw, 2003:10).

In the quest to comply with the standards of true value and neutrality of the research findings triangulation was employed in the study. The self-administered questionnaire as the main instrument of collecting data was complemented by limited telephone interviews and limited document analysis. Triangulation enabled the confirmation of data collected through the main research tool of the study, which then provided a solid ground for cultivating the research findings.

Furthermore, member checking was done to confirm the interpretations emanating from the process of data collection and analysis. Member checking was done through the limited telephone interviews with respondents who were part of the sample. These interactive processes provided opportunities of getting further feedback to ensure that the true value and consistency of the data interpretation and findings of the study were maintained and protected.

Critical discussions were also held with colleagues employed at the Legislature. One was the Secretary to the Legislature, (Chief Executive Officer) and the other was a doctor who was also the Executive Manager of Research, Policy and Planning and Monitoring Directorate at the Legislature. This process ensured that the information that emerged in the study was validated.

Ethical standards were also complied with to ensure that the research process, including its findings, has credibility. These ethical considerations have already been discussed in Chapter Four of this study. All these measures ensured that the internal validity of the

study was maintained and protected. However, it was also considered essential to maintain and protect the external validity of the study. A number of measures were employed in this regard and are discussed below.

One of the measures employed was the technique of transferability of the research findings. The stratified sample that was employed in the study had multiple variables that were represented in the actual population. It was therefore felt that the sample was adequately representative to provide for transferability of the findings of the study to similar contexts.

Furthermore, an attempt was also made to provide detailed descriptions of how the research processes unfolded in the study. It is believed that this approach provides any interested parties with a basis for transferability of the study and its findings. The findings of the study were therefore considered applicable to situations that resembled those which prevailed in the study.

It is believed that the above-mentioned measures played a role in protecting and maintaining both the internal and external validity of the study in general. These measures therefore represented an attempt at ensuring that this study complied with some of the standards of qualitative research.

4.10 Conclusions

This chapter has highlighted that the systematic content analysis was the approach which was employed in the study to analyse and transform data into meaning. It then discussed findings that emerged under the various data categories. The chapter has also outlined measures that were taken to ensure validity of the study and its findings. Conclusions and recommendations of the study are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"Say not, 'I have found the truth,' but rather, 'I have found a truth' "
Kahlil Gibran

5.1 Introduction

This chapter articulates the conclusions emanating from the findings which were discussed in the previous chapter. It also identifies recommendations that were considered critical in addressing the question that the study was investigating. It further discusses areas of future research, and ends by highlighting the limitations of the study.

5.2 Conclusions of the study

The conclusions of the study were based on the categories that emerged during the interactive research stages of the literature review, data collection and analysis. The main conclusions are discussed below:

There was a general and yet significant understanding of the concept and practice of strategic conversation as a management tool at the Legislature. There was also an awareness of the benefits associated with strategic conversations. However, it emerged that the Legislature was not deriving value from strategic conversation as a management tool. In fact, there was no common understanding as to how strategic conversations were employed at the Legislature.

In terms of participation during sessions where strategic matters of the Legislature were discussed, the prevailing view was that all employees should participate. However, it was also revealed that employees occupying executive and senior management dominated sessions where strategic matters of the Legislature were discussed. There was therefore a need to involve more employees in the middle management and non-management positions in the process.

In terms of external stakeholders of the Legislature, the existing view was that the public and suppliers should not participate in strategic conversations. However, there was a unanimous view that consultants should participate in strategic conversations.

Regarding learning and change, there was an almost unanimous view that strategic conversation is a tool that can be used to facilitate learning and change at the Legislature. This tool was considered necessary, especially in the changing environment with which the Legislature had to contend. However, there was also an appreciation of the fact that, in order to make strategic conversations work, a conducive environment must first prevail.

This study has provided some understanding of strategic conversation as a tool for learning and change. Based on the literature reviewed and the data collected and analysed, it can be concluded that strategic conversation is a tool that can be used to facilitate learning and change at the Legislature and similar organisations.

5.3 Recommendations

Several recommendations emanated from the findings and the conclusions drawn from this study. The key recommendations highlighted below are not sacrosanct. They should be treated as guidelines for action at the Legislature as an example of a public sector organisation.

The recommendations are as follows:-

- The Legislature should take advantage of the existing overall understanding of the concept and practice of strategic conversation by officially adopting strategic conversation as one of its management tools.
- The Legislature should consider experimenting with strategic conversations when dealing with the challenges of learning and change.

- The participation of staff members in strategic conversations, irrespective of the positions they occupy, should be supported and encouraged at the Legislature.

- There must be an attempt to include external stakeholders in strategic conversations in order to take advantage of possible new and fresh ideas they might bring.

- Consultants should be used, but on a limited scale, to ensure that there is no growing dependency on their utilization.

- The Legislature should create, cultivate and maintain an environment conducive to the sharing of ideas across the organisation. This is considered as a necessary element for strategic conversations to work.

5.4 Areas for future research

One of the challenges of the study was the limited information on the subject under investigation. It was for this reason that the study was considered exploratory in nature. Despite this challenge, it is believed that the study generated insight into the subject of the research investigation. This insight is considered useful, not only for addressing organisational problems, but also as a basis for further research investigation in the future. It is therefore recommended that the following areas be investigated as part of future research endeavours:

- Understanding the relationship between strategic conversations and strategic planning in organisations

- Maximizing the benefits of strategic conversations for organisations

- The application of systems thinking to strategic conversations

As we cast our eyes ahead to the future, it must also be emphasised that the study was not intended to glorify strategic conversations as the only management tool that an organisation can use to facilitate learning and change. On the contrary, the study envisioned strategic conversations as a "growing discipline" that should complement the already existing disciplines.

Black *et al* (1997:1) have expressed a somewhat definitive sentiment in stating that strategic conversation is a "new discipline, the sixth discipline upon which the other disciplines can stand and be understood and be welcomed by all". On the other front, Sieler (1998:3) has adopted a more cautious and advisory approach when he asserts that:

> …the quality of the conversations and relationships has a major impact on the performance of individuals and teams as well as of the organisations, and that if we could develop a foundation discipline based on conversation, it might be the sought-after sixth discipline.

Efforts aimed at conducting future research on strategic conversations and related areas would be central in this regard.

5.5 Limitations of the study

Due to the limited information on the subject under investigation, the study was declared exploratory. Limited information was therefore an expected challenge of the study which became obvious during the early stages of the research investigation. The triangulation technique which was employed in the study is considered to have been useful in attempting to address the limitation in question.

Another limitation was that a computerized data analysis tool was not available to the researcher when the study was conducted. The data was subsequently analysed manually and, where applicable, calculations were effected with an "ordinary" calculator. This process was time-consuming, but rewarding and fulfilling because it yielded the desired results.

In addition, the fact that this study was exploratory in nature meant that it could not be exhaustive in addressing the phenomenon that was under investigation. As Blanche & Durrheim (1999:39) suggest, "exploratory studies generate speculative insights". The findings made and the conclusions drawn from this study should therefore be considered

preliminary. As already stated, further research investigations will have to be conducted in order to generate more conclusive findings and conclusions.

However, "exploratory research also involves pushing out the frontiers of knowledge in the hope that something useful will be discovered" (Phillips & Pugh, 1994:51). It is believed that this study has contributed to "pushing out the frontiers of knowledge" despite the highlighted limitations.

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APPENDIX - 1

QUESTIONNARE

Important Information

- All information provided in this questionnaire will be treated with strict confidentiality;
- Information is to be used only for academic purposes;
- Please adhere to the instructions relating to each question; and
- Please return the questionnaire not later than **6 September 2006.**

PART A
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Please answer your questions by making a cross on the box that represents your answer.

1. Please indicate your gender

Male	
Female	

2. How old are you?

Under 21 years	
Between 21 -25 years	
Between 26 - 30 years	
Between 31 - 35 years	
Between 36 - 40 years	
Between 41- 45 years	
Between 46 – 50years	
Over 50 years	

3. How long have you been employed at the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature?

6months to 1 year	
I - 2 years	
2 - 3 years	
3 - 4 years	
4 - 5 years	
5 - years and more	

PART B

UNDERSTANDING OF STRATEGIC CONVERSATIONS

Please answer the following questions by making a cross on the number that represents your answer as shown in the box below. If the space provided below for you additional comments is not adequate, please use additional blank papers provided at the end of the questionnaire. Do not forget to indicate the number of the question you are responding to and also attach your additional pages to the questionnaire.

1= Agree	2=Strongly Agree	3=Disagree	4=Strongly Disagree	5=Don't Know

4. **Strategic conversation is considered as a management tool that includes elements mentioned in the statements written below:-**

    4.1   Strategic conversations are conversations that involve strategy of an organisation:

        | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |

    4.2 Strategic conversations are about people talking about matters that are of importance to the success of their organisation:

        | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |

    4.3 Strategic conversations are about reflecting on important organisational matters:

        | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |

    4.4 Strategic conversations are about an ongoing quest to find answers to several key questions that include the following:

    4.4.1 Why do we exist as an organisation?

        | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |

    4.4.2 Where are we today as an organisation?

        | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |

    4.4.3 Where do we want to be in the future as an organisation?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | nities and threats for our organisation?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

4.4.5 In your opinion, what are other organisational questions that could be addressed through strategic conversations? List them below.

----

5. **In your opinion, do you think what is said above about strategic conversations is an understanding that exists at the Legislature? Please make a cross on the number that represents your answer.**

1= Agree	2=Strongly Agree	3=Disagree	4=Strongly Disagree	5=Don't Know

6. **Please provide a brief motivation on your answer of question 5 above.**

----

7. **Below are statements reflecting some benefits associated with strategic conversations in organisation. Please indicate your view on each statement by making a cross on the number that represents your answer as shown below.**

1= Agree	2=Strongly Agree	3=Disagree	4=Strongly Disagree	5=Don't Know

71. Strategic conversations cultivate and are a source of organisational wisdom:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7.2 Strategic conversations encourage atmosphere in which everyone participating in the session becomes a colleague rather that a boss or just an employee:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7.3 Strategic conversations allows people in an organisation to share and use critical organisational information:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7.4 Strategic conversations generate new insights relating to organisational strategic issues:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7.5   Strategic conversations are a good way to deal with complex issues in a non-threatening manner:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

7.6   Strategic conversations enhance the capacity for interactive learning in a organisation:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

7.7   Strategic conversations enhance the capacity for change in an organisation:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

8.   In your opinion, does the Legislature currently enjoy some of the benefits associated with strategic conversations? Please answer by making a cross on the number that represents your answer

1= Agree	2=Strongly Agree	3=Disagree	4=Strongly Disagree	5=Don't Know

9.   Please provide a brief motivation on your answer of question 8 above
----
----

10. Who is involved in the strategic planning sessions at the Legislature? Please answer by making a cross on the number next to each category as shown below.

1= Agree	2=Strongly Agree	3=Disagree	4=Strongly Disagree	5=Don't Know

10.1   Top Management (Chief Directors and above)

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

10.2   Senior Management (Directors)

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

10.3   Middle Management (Assistant Directors):

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

10.4   Non-management (Administration Officers and General Assistants)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

10.5   Members of the Provincial Legislature:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

10.6   Suppliers

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

10.7   Consultants:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

10.8   The public

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

10.9   Others (Please specify below).

-------------------------------------**---**

11. In your opinion, who should be involved in strategic planning sessions at the Legislature? Please answer by making a cross on the number that represents your answer in each category as shown below.

1	Should not be involved	2	Should somewhat be involved	3	Should be involved	4	Should significantly be involved

11.1   Top Management (Chief Directors and above)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

11.2   Senior Management (Directors)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

11.3   Middle Management (Assistant Directors):

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

11.4   Non-management (Administration Officers and General Assistants)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

11.5 Members of the Provincial Legislature:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

11.6   Suppliers

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

11.7   Consultants:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

11.8   The public

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

11.9   Others (Please specify below).

-------------------------**---**

PART C

STRATEGIC CONVERSATIONS AND ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

12. In your view, do strategic planning sessions (sessions where people participate in discussions and decisions regarding strategic issues) facilitate or encourage organisational learning at the Legislature? Please answer by making a cross on the number that represents your answer as shown below.

1= Agree	2=Strongly Agree	3=Disagree	4=Strongly Disagree	5=Don't Know

13. In your opinion what factors are critical for successful strategic conversations that can facilitate learning at the Legislature? Please answer by making a cross on the number representing your answer next to each statement as shown below:

1= Agree	2=Strongly Agree	3=Disagree	4=Strongly Disagree	5=Don't Know

13.1   A degree of divergence, tolerance of dissent, openness to outside views and ideas:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

13.2   Freedom to experiment and tolerance of errors:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

13.3   Commitment by management to learning as an objective:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

13.4   Representative participation:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

13.5   Individuals to be at the centre of learning in an organisation:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

13.6   Learning that result into knowledge sharing and knowledge acquisition:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

13.7   Involves enquiries about problems and challenges facing an organisation:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

13.8   Involves new perspectives of looking at a situation:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

13.9   Facilitates change in behaviour:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

13.10   Allows deep understanding

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

13.11.   Others (Please specify below).

----

14. In your opinion what factors can impede strategic conversations from facilitating learning at the Legislature? Please answer by making a cross on the number next each statement below:

1= Agree	2=Strongly Agree	3=Disagree	4=Strongly Disagree	5=Don't Know

14.1   Lack of awareness of the world outside your organisation:

1		2		3		4		5

14.2   Embracing and using traditional frames of reference (mental models) which have become outdated:

1		2		3		4		5

14.3   Limited resources to embed learning of individuals into your organisation:

1		2		3		4		5

14.4   Lack of involvement of people in your organisational matters;

1		2		3		4		5

14.5   Others (Please specify below).

PART D

STRATEGIC CONVERSATIONS AND ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

15. In your view, can representative sessions where people participate in discussions and decisions on strategic matters, facilitate or lead to change at the Legislature? Please answer by making a cross on the number that represents your answer as shown below.

1= Agree	2=Strongly Agree	3=Disagree	4=Strongly Disagree	5=Don't Know

16. Below are some of the statements that reflect issues said to be necessary for strategic conversations that facilitate change in organisation. What is your opinion on these statements? Please answer by making a cross on the number that represents your answer regarding each statement below.

1= Agree	2=Strongly Agree	3=Disagree	4=Strongly Disagree	5=Don't Know

16.1   A facilitator must be present to hold the context of strategic conversations and make participants feel secure and comfortable to make contributions:

    | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

16.2   Participants must identify and suspend their assumptions:

    | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

16.3   All participants must regard one another as colleagues:

    | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

16.4   Creation of an open environment in which no ideas are rejected or accepted out of hand so that participants feel safe to speak up:

    | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

16.5   Leaders of organisation must participate rather than preside over strategic conversations:

    | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

16.6   There must be an attempt to involve outsiders (the public, consultants and & suppliers) to encourage fresh thinking:

    | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

16.7   Organisation must keep conversations going indefinitely.

    | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

16.8   Participants must be able to engage in inquiry and reflection on organisational matters:

    | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

16.8   Others (Please specify below).

-----------------------**---**

17. Below are statements reflecting factors associated with impending or

   limiting strategic conversations from facilitating change at an organisation.

   What is your opinion on these statements? Please answer by making a cross on

   the number representing your answer regarding each statement

1= Agree	2=Strongly Agree	3=Disagree	4=Strongly Disagree	5=Don't Know

17.1   Tendency to protect and promote the status quo:

   | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

17.2   Failure to recognize the need for change itself:

   | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

17.3   General mistrust regarding the motives for change:

   | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

 17.4   Fear that change will disrupt existing traditions and working relationships:

   | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | 5 |

17.5   Existence of cultures that perpetuate and emphasise stability and tradition:

   | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

17.6   Fear that distribution of decision-making authority can threaten long-established power relationships within your organisation:

   | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 |

17.7   Others (Please specify below).

   -----------------------**---**

                         The End

            Thank you again for having answered this questionnaire.

APPENDIX - 2

THE COVER LETTER

Dear Respondent

You are kindly requested to respond to the attached questionnaire by answering all the questions. This questionnaire is aimed at gathering data to be used in the research study entitled <u>Understanding Strategic Conversations as a Tool for Learning and Change in Organisations: A Public Sector Perspective.</u>

The objective of this study is to explore and gain insight on how strategic conversations can be used as a tool for learning and change in a complex and ever - changing environment of public organisations like the Legislature. It is envisaged that the recommendations that will emanate from the study would be useful to the Legislature.

You are therefore kindly requested to fill in the questionnaire and return it not later than the **6th of September 2006**. If you have any queries regarding the questionnaire, please contact me on this telephone number: 013 766-1130.

Yours Sincerely

Monwabisi Mngxaso

APPENDIX - 3

ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER

**UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL**

RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 - 2603587
EMAIL : rimbap@ukzn.ac.za

20 OCTOBER 2009

**MR. NH MNGXASO (202524074)
LEADERSHIP CENTRE**

Dear Mr. Mngxaso

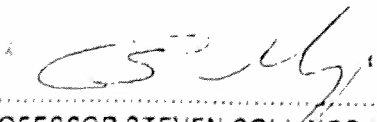### ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0636/09M

I wish to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been granted full approval for the following project:

> "Understanding strategic conversation as a tool for organisational learning and change: A Public Sector Perspective"

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

PROFESSOR STEVEN COLLINGS (CHAIR)
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE

cc   Supervisor (Prof. R Taylor)
cc   Mrs. C Haddon