

**USING SYTEMS THINKING TO CREATE A VIABLE  
STUDENT RECRUITMENT MODEL: Accommodating  
conflicting concerns in the student recruitment process**

**By**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The University of Natal has a Schools Liaison team that is responsible for undergraduate Students Recruitment. Recruitment activities are, however, not restricted to the Schools Liaison team. There are special programmes funded in part or wholly by corporate partners. These partnerships have placed additional demands on the recruitment function which is served by using special recruiters. Certain faculties have also chosen to make use of specialised recruiters in the form of Public Relations Officers. The presence of more than one group of individuals involved in Students Recruitment creates problems, more especially because the various groups of recruiters operate mainly within the same target market. The coming together of the conflicting and competing goals coupled with the parallel and independent recruitment drives of competing faculties, negatively affects the synergy that could be beneficial to the recruitment function.

The focus of the study is on using systems thinking methodologies to engage stakeholders in a process that assists the University in creating a Student Recruitment Model that allows the various recruiters to pursue their various goals without harming the larger organisational goal and fragmenting the organization. The objective of this study is to use the Soft Systems Methodology as a tool aimed at developing a viable Student Recruitment model.

This dissertation uses systems thinking methodologies to examine stakeholder interests and concerns and attempts to bring all these together within a consolidated framework that should make up the viable Student Recruitment Model that serves the various interests within a single system.

A number of lessons learnt during the process are highlighted and discussed in the last section of this study. The said lessons are considered valuable in the future as new demands arise and the organisation needs to modify its recruitment model.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this dissertation is my own work, that all the sources used or quoted have been acknowledged

L.M. MZIMELA

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Student Recruitment is a marketing activity and marketing is a fairly new concept in higher education. Marketing and thus active Student Recruitment was previously considered an activity suited to those organisations that needed to convince customers/clients about the quality of their products/services.

Higher education institutions previously assumed that their products were good enough not to warrant any deliberate and active marketing. As a result of this assumption, institutions continue to struggle with the concept as they attempt to balance the need to recruit for/into what are considered public institutions subsidised by taxpayers and embracing an activity that some still consider useful but unnecessary.

Student Recruitment is made up a number of sub-activities all aimed at the targeted prospective students. The 'prospective student' is not a homogeneous entity. The pool from which institutions have to draw is made up of numerous variations that are mainly the product of political, economic and social history. Universities have developed a number of incentives that are used to attract the right kind of students. Such students are useful in establishing the right kind of institution profile and helping to maintain high academic standards.

The problem though is that there is a limited number of 'good students' and every institution is out pursuing 'good students'. The

result is a high demand for 'good students' and a low supply from the market. Another facet of the problem is that it is not only about recruiting students but also about recruiting equitably from the various sections of the South African community.

'Good students' are also a commodity in high demand in the business world. Some prospective employers are aware of institutional Student Recruitment drives and have formulated strategies aimed at benefiting from successful recruitment. Some of the said employers have as part of their Corporate Social Investment (CSI) programmes, formed partnerships with universities. This is part of the new strategising in corporate social investment.

Strategising is really about establishing partnerships. A company identifies a partner within a field that it has targeted and jointly develops a plan with the partner. The partner then helps deliver the project to the target community. For most of these companies, they are committed to paying tuition fees and book fees for the right kind of student enrolled in pre-selected degree programmes. These CSI partnership programmes bring together three parties – the university, students and the corporate community. Each of these parties brings expectations into the partnership.

The CSI partnerships create special projects for which universities have to recruit students. The simplest way to serve CSI partners' demands has been to employ special recruiters to recruit students into the special programmes. In this approach the special recruiters are engaged in exclusive recruitment activities aimed at the special type of students as specified in each of the specialised programmes.

These partnerships with corporate entities have had to co-exist with the normal student recruitment activities necessitated by the need for targeted recruitment in order to meet the various demands placed on higher education institutions by political organs, corporate partners and social/civil bodies. The situation has also been made more complex by the need to make faculties more economically viable by attracting the type of student that would succeed thereby translating into an income for the various faculties.

So the Student Recruitment process is now a complex process with a number of stakeholders each pursuing different goals. Owing to the limited number of learners who meet the minimum entrance requirements to the various degree programmes and the similarity between the various entrance requirements; there is a lot of competition amongst the various faculties. The success of faculty programmes relies on student numbers and thus each faculty is very keen on actively pursuing students in order to maintain the various degree programmes.

The central issue though is that the University has to compete for a limited resource against its major competitors. It is therefore important that the strategy that drives such an endeavor is based on a model/framework that allows us to unite the various competing and conflicting goals of various stakeholders in a way that strengthens our competitiveness against our competitors.

## **1.2 Title of the Study**

The title of this study is: **USING SYTEMS THINKING TO CREATE A VIABLE STUDENT RECRUITMENT MODEL: Accommodating conflicting concerns in the student recruitment process**

The focus of the study is on using systems thinking methodologies to engage stakeholders in a process that assists the University in creating a Student Recruitment Model that allows the various stakeholders to pursue their various goals without harming the larger organisational goal and fragmenting the organization.

The higher education environment is forever changing as a result of a number of both external and internal factors. It is therefore imperative that we develop capacity to respond to familiar and also unexpected changes. A viable model will allow us to adapt to the various changes that may happen within the University.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

I work as a manager of the University of Natal's undergraduate recruitment team (Schools Liaison). The task of the Schools Liaison team is to promote and market undergraduate degree programmes to prospective students. The basket of undergraduate programmes that we promote is made up of a variety of degree programmes drawn from the various University faculties.

The University has ten faculties spread over four campuses. The Schools Liaison unit is however centralised, operating from one campus and serving all faculties. The University is managed on the philosophy of 'many campuses, one university'. Faculties do however have some degree of independence. This independence has allowed faculties to create activities aimed at marketing their programmes and creating public awareness about a range of projects they are engaged in. The result has been a mix of approaches to the marketing function. Most of the faculties have marketing committees made up of

faculty staff tasked with looking after faculties' marketing needs. Some faculties have employed Public Relations Officers (PROs) who lead the faculties' marketing function whilst others do not have PROs but rather have a Schools Liaison Officer dedicated to them to assist the faculty's marketing committee.

The partnerships that the corporate community forms with the University are managed at faculty level. For example, the businesses that fund the scholarships on the EMS Programme deal directly with the Faculty of Management Studies. The two partners (University & corporate partners) discuss their needs and the faculty designs the appropriate programme with the relevant curriculum. As a result of the specialised programme and pre-determined type of student, there is also specialised marketing and recruiting process. This has resulted in specialised recruiters that operate independently and run parallel to the University's centralised student recruitment unit.

The other aspect of this situation is that there are ten faculties vying for a limited number of students. Often the degree programmes are very similar, related, and flexible or offered across faculties. With the prevailing funding formula, faculties' earnings/incomes are determined by the number of students completing degrees in their faculties as opposed to the number of students registered in their faculties. As a result, faculties are in competition with one another for students. This complicates the recruitment process for the student recruitment team as they recruit generally for a single University with competing faculties.

The competition between faculties and the faculties' partnerships with corporate partners has resulted in a number of marketing drives running parallel to each other and serving different stakeholders. The

problem is that the various student recruitment drives are aimed at the same primary market. This creates confusion within the market and affects the University's larger goal. There is no structure to:

- create relevant policy to handle independent, conflicting and parallel recruitment drives.
- gather the appropriate market intelligence to help each stakeholder deliver more efficiently.
- manage, co-ordinate and control the various marketing and recruitment activities.

South Africa has thirty-eight public institutions of higher learning and a number of private institutions. All these institutions compete within the same market for a limited number of learners. Schools remain the easiest and most efficient way of reaching these learners. They however have little time available to accommodate the various universities/technikons/colleges that compete for the learners' attention. So with separate strategies and recruitment activities we end up trying to secure two or more appointments with the same school. This works against us in that it then presents a fragmented front to the prospective students and mis-communicates what should be a unified approach from a single organisation.

What further complicates the situation is that the University is also dealing with a range of other issues that impact on Student Recruitment. South African institutions of higher learning are partly funded by public funds and as a result are subject to political and civil pressures. In a society that is still focused on redress of past inequities and social imbalances; race is a very important factor. Universities are aggressively trying to reflect the demographics of the

South African society in their student populations. Recruitment therefore is purposely aimed at learners of all race groups.

The prospective students are located at different non-homogeneous environments. They are at varying degrees of resourcefulness and 'advantage'. The challenge comes in developing a unitary recruitment approach that treats prospective students equally in a society that treats differentiation as an aspect of discrimination. Developing an approach that, simply put, says – “whoever you are, whatever your present circumstances, we have a place for you.”

The coming together of the conflicting and competing goals coupled with the parallel and independent recruitment drives of competing faculties, negatively affects the synergy that could be beneficial to the recruitment function. What we end up with is a range of dysfunctions:

- *Lack of a coordination and control function* from the various recruitment arms. This results in conflicting marketing material, replicated expenditure and duplicated activities. The components of the recruitment function are clearly pursuing a common goal. Because of an absence of an implicitly expressed root definition of what the recruitment process should aim to achieve for all the stakeholders, the recruitment process is structurally unfit.
- *Disjointed strategies with competing priorities.* The various stakeholders exist in different groups and with no existing forum in which they can share their needs and expectations; there are no consolidated support structures and functions that can help establish what the global recruitment strategy should be and how the different stakeholders can take advantage of a bigger recruitment team and still accomplish their goals.



So the main problem is that the existing Student Recruitment approach and its strategies is not viable. Not viable in the sense that it does not have the capacity to respond to changing and varying needs of the organisational units and allow them to survive and thus allow the entire organisational system to survive. The conflicting goals, interests and priorities are bound to defeat the very purposes the University as an organisation is attempting to pursue. The present model used to handle Student Recruitment is structurally unfit. It is unfit in that it lacks the structures necessary to co-ordinate, control and manage the various recruitment activities. This lack of a co-ordinating and management structure fragments the University's approach in the target market.

Structural fitness, I propose, would help establish an overall Student Recruitment strategy and also create resources to help deliver and support such a strategy.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The recruitment activities and recruitment approaches we presently engage in are a result of a varied, non-homogeneous market and also the demands that some of our partners/funders make on the organisation. It is however possible to consolidate a differentiated approach in a way that creates a viable recruitment model.

For this to happen there has to be some organisational learning. Such learning has to happen in areas like;

- *Systems Thinking.* The first area of learning has to be in the way that we think about recruitment. The University decided, some years ago, to adopt the principle of 'many campuses, one University' in dealing with the various issues of management, policy and control. There may be four centres but there is one organisation. Recruitment activities can be made different because of the demands of the various sections of the market from which we recruit. The recruitment model, policy foundations, intelligence gathering tactics need to be consolidated in a way that recognises that the various activities that all sections engage in, influence, affect and has a bearing on each other and in turn impacts on the organisation.
- *Management Cybernetics.* The model on which we build and manage the recruitment process needs to be viable if the University is to meet its enrolment targets. We need to realise that there is a need to develop the various levels necessary to establish a viable systems model by which the recruitment function will be managed. The said levels would then help establish the necessary functions (co-ordination, control, managing, intelligence gathering & policy making) that would help develop a more effective recruitment strategy. The need to include a learning organisational environment where various concerns of faculties/campuses and partners can be included in developing an approach that benefits the various stakeholders and whole organisation.
- *Stakeholder Analysis.* The identification of the needs of various stakeholders and their expectations and the compilation of a root definition of a strategy that would satisfy the various needs. Better coordination of recruitment activities will require an

understanding of the expectations of the various stakeholders in partnered/partnership programmes. Who the stakeholders are and what they are hoping to get out of the programme/process. The challenge would then be about bringing together the various objectives and expectations into a consensual framework that could then be the basis of a root definition that would define the necessary recruitment approach(es).

- *Structural and Functional Fitness.* The importance of creating an environment where various sections of the University can recruit into their programmes without working against the synergy that is fundamental in creating a structurally and functionally fit recruitment team. We need to learn of ways in which variation and unity can mutually and inclusively exist within our activities.

## **1.5 Definition of Terms**

There are a number of key concepts that are central in this study. It is therefore vital that they are defined in this section so that their meaning is explained and that they are understood in the proper context.

- **Marketing**

The American Marketing Association defines marketing as, the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organisational objectives.

- Viable

Viable in this study is based on Stafford Beer's definition of a viable system as a system that is able to maintain a separate existence and has its own problem-solving capacity. So viable in this study will be taken to mean the ability of a model to support a system that has the capacity to adapt to changing environments.

- Higher education institutions

Higher education institution will be taken to mean universities and technikons.

- Student Recruitment

The carrying out of a range of activities like school visits, direct marketing, attending career exhibitions, advertising and campus-based events with the aim of publicising the various degree programmes and student services available at the University.

- Stakeholders

For purposes of this study, stakeholders are those parties that stand to benefit from recruitment activities and may be involved directly or indirectly in recruitment activities. Faculties are the major stakeholders in that they have a vested interest in the recruitment of students for programmes offered within schools that make up the said faculties. The Student Academic Affairs section is another stakeholder in that the various services they offer like counselling, student development, financial aid, scholarships and registration are directly dependent on the type and size of the students recruited. The Schools Liaison unit is also a stakeholder. This is a team of individuals tasked with establishing relationships with the schools community with the intention to recruit students through the

promotion and publicity of degree programmes. The other stakeholders are the special recruiters for specialised programmes offered in selected faculties.

- University

University with the capital 'U' will be taken to mean the University of Natal.

- Faculty PRO

A faculty PRO is a public relations officer based at faculty level and tasked with the responsibility of promoting the faculty and its programmes and projects to the various target communities.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Access to higher education is a very important issue in South Africa given the past political history that restricted access for certain groups. With South Africa being a democratic society now access to higher education is a politically driven endeavour. The political pressure that is applied on institutions often means that institutions of higher learning;

- depict the racial demographics of communities around which they exist.
- admit students who sometimes do not meet the entrance requirements of academic programmes they intend pursuing.
- are sensitive to the various needs of rural, economically disadvantaged, second-language speaking and under-prepared students
- need to educate students to meet the needs of the world of work.

This is a very complex situation. The needs are mainly human needs that cannot be easily met given the practicalities of space availability, fees, basic academic requirements of academic faculties and the excessive demands of communities. Systems Methodology offers a rational intervention in managing and organising complex human situations.

This study makes a prediction that the demand for higher education will be around for a long time in the future. Those that require or even demand access will continue to differ with regard to their racial orientation, economic background and readiness. Constructing a framework of a model that enables us to accommodate varying needs will help us deal better with recruiting students to meet the various recruitment goals of the University at various periods.

The model that is created by this study could help define the process of dealing with future fluxes brought about by conflicting needs of various sections of the University in future as they try to stay competitive and meet the various goals they set themselves. Those that manage the process would also hopefully be able to decide on purposeful action and implement a model that we allow the various sections to stay competitive and also benefit the larger organisation.

## **1.7 Chapters Outline**

Chapter 1: This chapter introduces the primary purpose of the study. It also introduces the major issues of the problem and provides an overview of the research question. The significance of the study is also explained and the focus of the study stated.

Chapter 2: This chapter begins by exploring the various methodologies used in this study. It explores how the methodologies will be used at various stages to deal with the challenges raised in the study. It is really aimed at building a theoretical base for the topic.

Chapter 3: With the methodology explored in chapter 2, this chapter will describe and explain the research model, research methods and tools.

Chapter 4: This chapter describes the process I went through in obtaining the data. The process is broken down to phases and each phase into stages. The data is also presented and a theory formulated as a way of interpreting the collected data.

Chapter 5: This chapter focuses on the reflection process. It highlights the various lessons learnt from the stages of the different phases of the process and explains the value that such lessons add to my practice. The chapter ends with a discussion on how the data collected might be useful to my practice and the organisation.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

The objective of this study is to use Systems Thinking Methodology to engage stakeholders in a process that assists the University in creating a Student Recruitment Model that allows the varying goals to be pursued in a co-ordinated way. The same model should also allow for the ability to add on new units that set out to recruit students according to the changes, expected or unexpected, whilst still remaining competitive against our competitors.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 Introduction

The tackling of this problem should ideally start with the exploration of some of the key mental models that have influenced the handling of Student Recruitment and resulted in the present approaches. This exploration will be carried out in the context of a number of tools and methodologies drawn from Systems Thinking. There are a number of methodologies and approaches in Systems Thinking that lend themselves well to dealing with the identified problem. The selected methodologies allow for flexibility in dealing with some central factors of the identified problems;

- *Multi-stakeholders.* There are numerous stakeholders with varied interests. The interests of the stakeholders are sometimes both conflicting and competitive. There is therefore a need to unify the various stakeholders under a unifying approach that them to pursue their goals whilst benefiting the larger organisation.
- *Complex alliances amongst stakeholders.* A new stakeholder in the Student Recruitment function has been the corporate partners who are either pursuing survival projects by offering scholarships to those they hope to have as future employees or as part of their corporate social investment programmes. The alliances that such corporate partners have with the University are, as a result of multiple goals, therefore complex and not very well structured. Checkland (1999) argues that, “hard systems engineering



methodology could not be used in ill-structured problem situations in which the naming of desirable ends was itself problematic“. (p 277)

The primary methodologies that will be adopted in dealing with the problematic situation are explored below.

## **2.2 Overview of the Soft Systems Methodology**

Checkland's *Soft Systems Methodology* (SSM) proposes a system that brings together stakeholders in an inclusive way and then deals with the problem of the situation by first defining what the proposed solution/improvement of the problematic situation should be. It's a consultative process that potentially involves going back and forth amongst the various stakeholders with the aim of establishing consensus. The consensus helps establish the framework of the structure of the proposed change or improvement of the problematic situation.

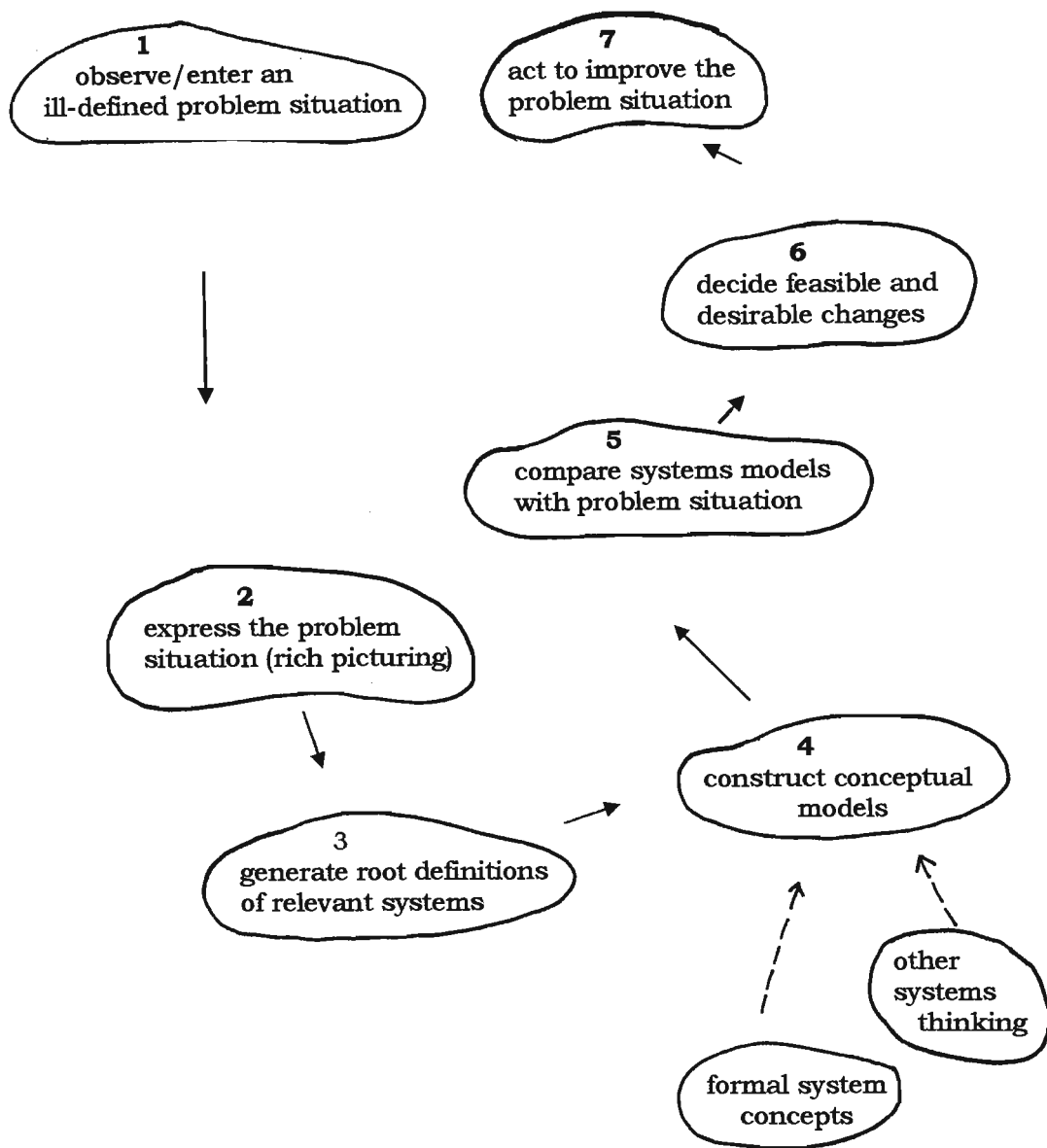


Figure 1: *The Soft Systems Methodology*

There use of SSM presents a number of advantages in tackling this intervention process. The various stages of the methodology involves specific actions aimed at various breakthroughs

### *Entering*

The first stage of SSM, entering, presents a means to approach the various stakeholders and engage them on aspects of the proposed

intervention; what their responsibilities and my responsibility would be in the proposed intervention.

### *Rich Picturing*

The second stage allows for the collection of data from all information-rich sources. The data can then be used to compile a rich picture. The rich picture is a great way of representing various aspects of the problematic situation from all stakeholders' point of view. It helps get others to understand how other stakeholders perceive the situation; thereby highlighting the central issues of the problematic situation.

### *Root Definition*

Rich picturing are a great source of conversation among stakeholders and can help generate a root definition that can define the direction that the intervention needs to take.

### *Construction of conceptual model(s)*

Once the root definition is in place, the next step involves testing it, a process that involves the setting up of Human Activity Systems model (HAS model). The HAS model spells out activities necessary to achieve the intervention as specified through the root definition. Such activities would then be monitored and controlled using the built in monitoring and control activities.

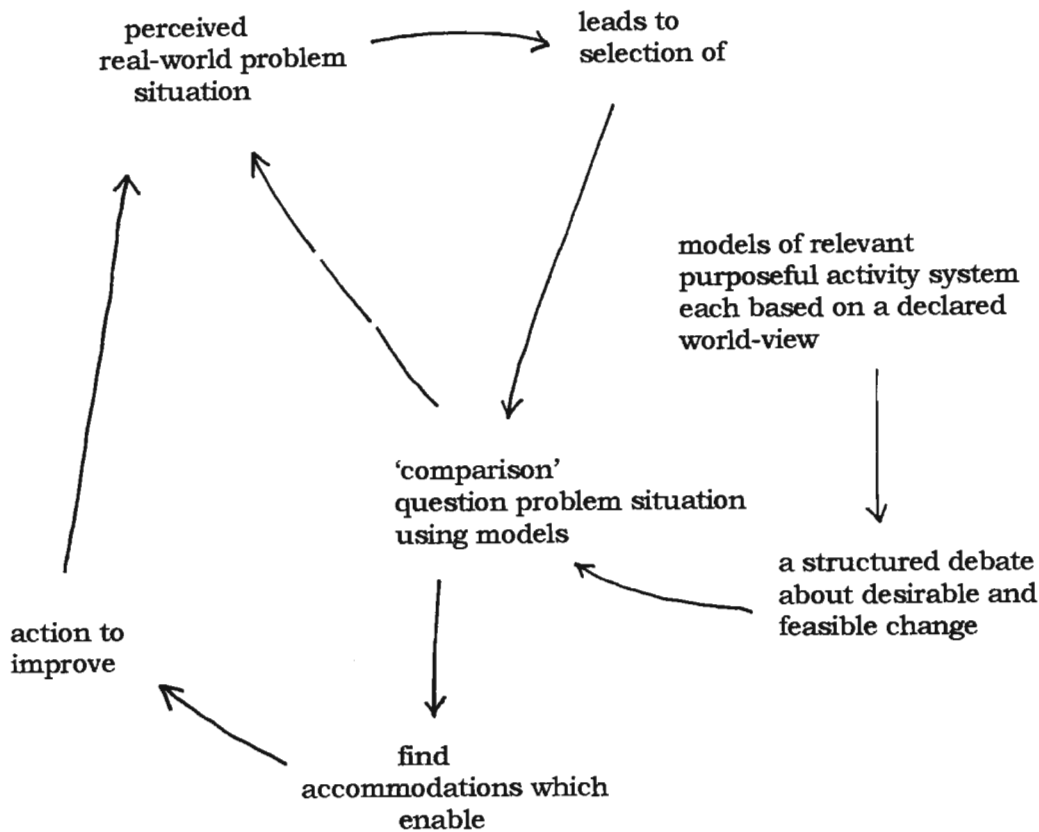
### *Comparing systems models with problematic situation*

This stage involves the use of the systems models to generate debate about the proposed change. It is about going through the activities listed in the proposed models with the stakeholders and encouraging them to pose questions about the activities listed in the models. My response would then be aimed at highlighting; why each activity should be done, what omitting the activity would do.

### *Deciding feasible and desirable changes*

This stage involves looking at the present situation and how applying the proposed activity would help to improve the situation. Stakeholders' concerns/ideas/questions are noted and used to either modify or moderate the models.

The meeting of the two worlds of business and the social world brings into the partnership a clash of models based on different world-views. Soft systems methodology recognises the complexity of relationships in the real world and proposes an exploration of these relationships via models of purposeful activity based on explicit world-views. The methodology then proposes an 'action to improve' that is based on finding accommodations or versions of the situation which conflicting interests can lie with. SSM argues that the process should be conducted with a wide range of interested parties and that it should be given away to the people in the problematic situation. (Checkland, p A9)



*Figure 2: The inquiring/ learning cycle of SSM  
(adapted from Checkland, p A9)*

The above diagram depicts the SSM approach to dealing with problematic situations. Using this learning cycle to deal with the inquiry process within CSI will help consolidate the various models that I propose exists within the world-views that are brought into an alliance through partnerships in CSI programmes. The principles driving the SSM learning cycle makes available opportunities for a structured debate and questioning which can only help highlight what should be central issues in the evaluation process of the various CSI programmes. The inquiry is in principle a never-ending process

that is conducted with a wide range of stakeholders. The process is given away to the people who are involved in the situation.

The argument here is that since partnerships bring together different worldviews, we therefore need a learning system that reconciles the differing worldviews and can offer a situation where, “the appreciative settings of people in a problem situation – and the standards according to which they make judgements- are teased out and debated.” (Checkland, p A55) Soft Systems thinking is appropriate for this situation because the aim is to improve a problematic situation through the facilitation of a learning cycle. It is also suitable because there is a need to facilitate an inquiry process that enables the different stakeholders to define a system that they believe can improve the problematic situation.

### **2.3 An overview of Management Cybernetics**

In his book, **CYBERNETICS: A New Management Tool**, Barry Clemson (1984) argues that we all perceive reality differently, that “the nature of reality depends partially upon the nature of the observing system” (p16). We then, he maintains, proceed to define occurrences based on our perceptual biases; from our definitions we highlight variables that promote our interpretation of reality. Clemson’s argument is that we engage the same in dealing with organisational systems, that, “the choices of variables that define the system is critical in determining what the system is, what its behaviour will be... and what can and can’t be done about, or to, that system.” (p16)

Clemson’s argument is an introduction to his argument in favour of cybernetics. Cybernetics he maintains, “... [takes] insights from [the]

various other sciences, [generalises] them, and [integrates] them into a powerful framework for dealing with complex, dynamic, probabilistic systems. (p18)

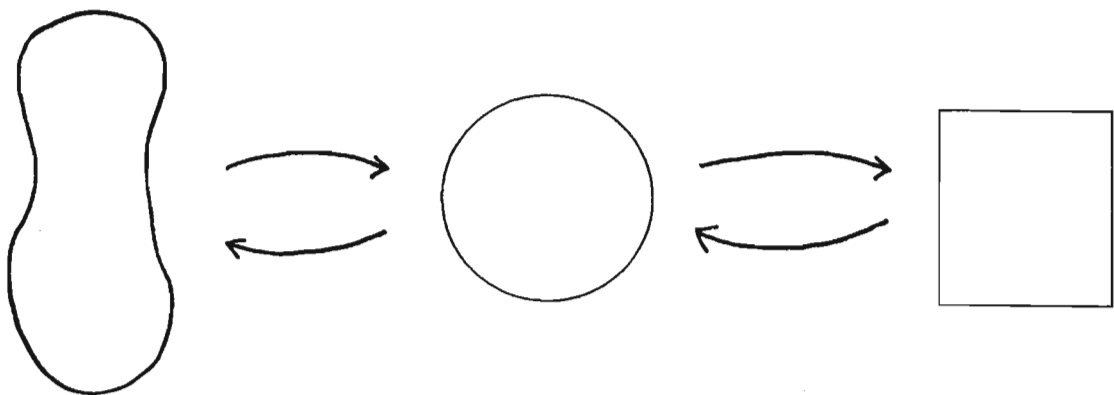
Cybernetics would be one useful way of dealing with the present organisational problematic situation. Stafford Beer (1967) defines cybernetics as, "...the science of effective organisation." Beer's definition of a system includes 'complex', 'dynamic', 'probabilistic', 'integral' and 'open' as characteristics of a system. The University's recruitment system involves a number of competing parties (complex), with ever-changing needs (dynamic), operating in an unpredictable environment (probabilistic), by various units within a unified organisation (integral) that are embedded in an environment which affects them and they in turn affect (open).

The characteristics of the recruitment system meet the criteria used by Beer to define cybernetics. Management Cybernetics is the applied science that uses cybernetics as its starting point in dealing with organisations and will be the starting point used in dealing with this system. The reason for this choice is that the concern of this dissertation is with the establishment of an effective structure and methods of organisation. Cybernetics does exactly that by concerning itself with "the general patterns, laws and principles of behaviour that characterise complex, dynamic, probabilistic, integral and open systems." (Clemson, p19)


Management Cybernetics is one methodology highlighted in the course of this masters programme that allows one to position various activities and numerous stakeholders within a structure that allows for more effective management, control, intelligence gathering and policy making. These functions are located at various levels within

what Stafford Beer calls the Viable Systems Model (VSM). Through the Viable Systems Model diagnosis I will be able to identify the organisational chart that supposedly will highlight weaknesses and strengths in the present model; identify the necessary functions and then establish the necessary systems level through the use of Organisational Fitness Diagnosis (a concept used by Schwaninger with VSM as a guide). Management Cybernetics enables one to identify a set of operational elements that collectively make up an organisational entity, in this case, the recruitment unit.




Management cybernetics allows the management practitioner to bring together various specialised demands and organise them in differentiated recursion levels and create within the structure, command, coordination and audit levels.

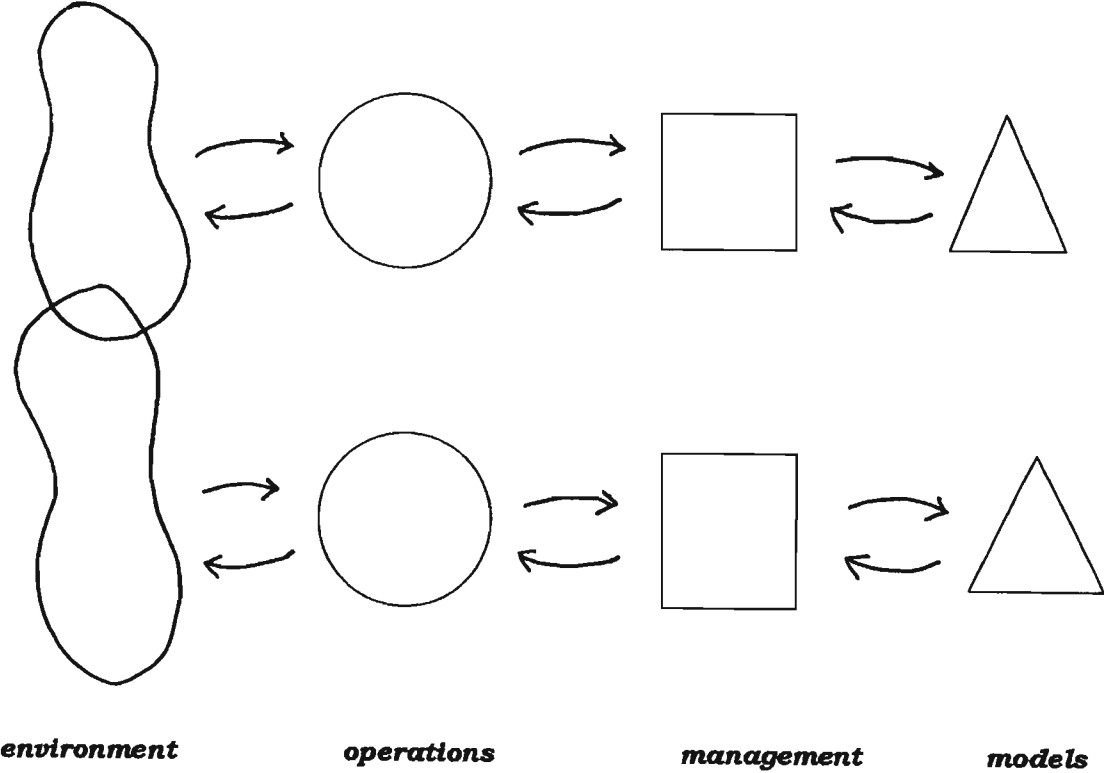


*Fig 3: A single level of recursion*

The above diagram uses the viable systems model and demonstrates how a single unit can establish itself incorporating components like the environment (represented by ) , its operational element



(represented by  ) and the management unit within the operational element. The various arrows represented by  show the information flow between the components. The  represents the models held by the management unit. In dealing with the recruitment problem, each recruitment unit can then be structured according to how it wishes to organise its target market and operational management.



*Fig 4: A set of operational elements that collectively make up an organisational entity.*

The above diagram is an extension of figure 3. It shows how the various recruitment units can then, using the VSM be organised in relation to other competing and complementing units to form a single recruitment structure. With one of the problems being that units are not coordinated, the re-organisation of the various recruitment units into a systems levelled structure would create a holistic management.

The advantage of this methodology is that it accommodates units that are competing for limited resources (good students in this case); maintains organisational homeostasis by ensuring that all “the critical variables are maintained within their normal limits so that the organisation can continue to function effectively” (Checkland, p 106). This is very important in this case since part of what I am trying to achieve is to create a coordinated structure whilst incorporating the needs of CSI stakeholders who have formed partnerships with the organisation and whose support benefits the organisation in the long run.

## **2.4 An overview of Organisational Fitness**

Schwaninger argues for the use of Organisational Fitness. Organisational Fitness is a development from the field of planning theory and is synthesised with Stafford Beer’s Viable System Model. (Espejo & Schwaninger, p 39) Organisational Fitness addresses the need to maintain operational structures in proper control modes. Organisational Fitness is at one level about being able to act and function within the various operational structures and maintain effective control thereby maintaining a ‘dynamic equilibrium’ (Espejo & Schwaninger, p49)

Organisational Fitness allows for the diagnosis of various logical levels of management, i.e. normative management, strategic management and operational management.

## **2.5 Why the need for Systems Thinking**

In marketing, organisations have to establish who the customers are; who are they in competition with; what competences the organisation possesses and who the possible collaborators can be. Knowledge of these four components can then help in the process of establishing the organisation's marketing strategy. The proper identification of the four components should ideally help refine the definition of the core business in which the organisation is involved. The definition of the organisation's core business results in the identification of the target market; a component that shapes the product, price, place and promotion in the marketing mix.

The components of the marketing mix mentioned above and the process that leads to it are the vital components of a marketing strategy in any organisation that engages in any form of marketing. Most marketers would argue that such a marketing strategy would succeed or fail based on how much the organisation understands its target market. Leyland Pitt (1998) in his book, *Marketing for Managers: A Practical Approach*, argues that, "...from a marketing perspective [the target market] is fundamental, since marketing strategy is determined by the demarcation of the target market." (p24)

The knowledge of the target market should, in the marketing world, provide more valid and reliable information about the marketing environment. Aspects of the environment are the political/legal sub-environments, economic factors, sociocultural factors and technology.

These components form the basis of a marketing strategy that makes an organisation competitive and allows it to compete and remain viable. I would like to state at this stage that this is a very simplistic view of marketing that would normally apply in a simple organisation that produces a single product.

Universities are however complex organisations. Universities are increasingly expected to be managed like businesses whilst operating like civic organisations. The funding mechanisms are dictated by a range of stakeholders who have a stake in higher education. As a result the various stakeholders have an interest on the student profile of each university. As stated in the opening chapter of this study, the target student is not a homogeneous group. Amongst the differences are race, background, school type, economic status, etc. This creates the first challenge in the process of recruiting students.

Adding to the complexity of situation is the independence of faculties. Each faculty aims to be competitive and to draw the best students onto its various degree programmes. They also may have an added need to deliver to their corporate partners as dictated by agreements they may have entered into as explained in the first chapter of this study. The pool from which such students can be drawn is however very small. This then creates two levels of competition.

The first level of competition is internal competition between faculties. The second level of competition is the external one between institutions of higher learning. The argument that is made in this study is that marketing at the University cannot be approached in the same manner as one would in a corporate business. The marketing strategy is complex as there are many stakeholders with a variety of needs. The target market is non-homogeneous and has political

leverage on the organisation. This is not simply a process of getting the product/service to the client but is a complex process that involves the identification, selection and funding of the relevant client.

Systems Thinking encompasses a range of methodologies that seek to understand why organisations are the way they are and also how to intervene in an attempt to make organisations make for the people that work in them and those that benefit or rely on them.

With organisation dealing with competition at two levels; internally and externally, there is a need to develop the independence of the individual faculties whilst simultaneously developing the cohesion of the whole. Viable Systems Model (VSM), one of the methodologies in Systems Thinking, can provide the University with the necessary flexibility needed to deal with the organisational complexities. Faculties' independence will mean that they continue setting and pursuing their goals. They will, as a result, be confronted with problems in their recruitment process. It is for this reason that this study proposes VSM, as Bornman (1992) maintains, as an intervention tool that enables people to handle autonomously the problems that they confront.

Checkland (1981) defends VSM as a way of bringing together participants, creating a shared platform and common language. In an organisation where the relationships between faculties are central in the survival of the entire organisation, systems thinking will be used to structure the system in a way that facilitates the healthy growth of relevant relationships. This study will demonstrate the confidence I have in Systems Thinking methodologies to bring about the necessary structure to create and maintain a viable Student Recruitment Model. Checkland (1981) argues that, "hard systems engineering

methodology could not be used in ill-structured problem situations in which the naming of desirable ends was itself problematic-“(p 277). It is my argument that the present approach to Student Recruitment is ill structured in that the various parties engaged in the process of Student Recruitment operate outside of a structure that defines strategy, consolidates and controls activities in a way that reduces and/or eliminates conflict.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Multi-stakeholders with competing interests can best be served by a circular as opposed to a linear approach. Being circular in approach allows the practitioner to use various methodologies and cater for the interests of various stakeholders within a fluid structure. The fluidity helps accommodate all stakeholders rather than forcing everybody within a ‘one size fits all’ methodology that may be irrelevant and insensitive to the needs of other stakeholders.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODS AND TOOLS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The process of dealing with the identified problematic situation and developing an intervention process to improve the situation involved the use of action research. Initial definitions used the term 'problematic situation' as opposed to 'problem' in order to acknowledge my biases and subjectivity at the beginning of the intervention. This was a work situation in which I am also directly involved and until I embarked on a process of learning more about the situation and consulting other stakeholders I chose to adopt a less judgemental stance. This stance would hopefully also help prevent possible animosity between myself and the participants.

The process was divided into two phases. The first phase was loosely based on Checkland's Soft Systems Methodology. The stages of the methodology were used selectively in order to achieve various aims throughout the process; not all the stages were used in the first phase. The first phase was largely diagnostic and the second one largely corrective. The methodologies used in each phase were eclectic; using a variety of approaches that I was exposed to during the course of this masters' programme. The various methodologies used are selected for their suitability to dealing with each situation.

The main purpose of the first phase is to engage the various stakeholders in a non-threatening way and explore the various perspectives held by the various participants in the process of

Student Recruitment. Checkland's Soft Systems Methodology offers one a great opportunity to revisit the various stages of the process until one is satisfied with the outcome. This flexibility is very important in a situation where the stakeholders' goals are not only competitive but also conflicting.

### **3.2 Establishing the boundaries of the study**

The system in focus will best be determined by establishing the boundaries of this study right at the outset. Establishing boundaries is a common technique used in systems thinking. Establishing the boundaries also helps participants engage with the relevant components and stakeholders as it is easy to include other factors that have little to do with the issue at hand.

The main reason for establishing boundaries is best expressed by Churchman (1970) where he defends the technique of boundary setting as crucial in determining where the best leverage resides during systemic intervention. This, he argues, helps determine what actions are necessary during the course of the intervention. Student Recruitment is a complex function involving a range of stakeholders at the University. Universities are fundamentally businesses whose main business is about offering academic services to their 'clients'. Students are therefore at the centre of what universities are about and the presence or absence of students affects almost all aspects of the university.

Owing to this wide ranging influence students have on the University's existence and thus viability, the boundaries of this study will be broadened at times to make the intervention more inclusive to include more stakeholders in the consultation process. This is in line



with Churchman (1970) who also argues for the broadening of the range and extent of consultation by pushing out the boundaries to make interventions more inclusive. Ulrich (1983) is another proponent of boundary setting. He proposes that such a process should be pursued through dialogue with those involved and affected by the intervention.

In line with Churchman's and Ulrich's view, the boundaries of this study will be drawn in a way that simplifies the focus on the framework of a Student Recruitment Model as opposed to the specific recruitment activities used by the various stakeholders. Conversations will be central to the process of intervention. Such conversations will take place between the various stakeholders and will be used to shape the final model that gets adopted at the end of the intervention. There will need to be opportunities created for stakeholders to learn about the various perspectives and concerns of others. As a result the approach will be mostly action research based.

The action research will be based on the systems thinking approach. The main reason for this is that the issues at the centre of this study are 'soft' and involve a range of stakeholders who are involved with the practice of the identified activity. Systems thinking as a methodology has been used since its inception to get stakeholders involved in a process to first define what they would be content with in a new environment and has allowed them to participate in constructing such an environment. I have confidence in systems thinking methodologies' capacity to bring together conflicting/competing stakeholders and allowing them to create an environment where they can arrive at a place where they can both pursue their various goals in a mutually inclusive way.

### **3.3 The research model**

The process of engaging University stakeholders and external stakeholders is going to be a very long process owing to the fact that although a single organisation; the University is spread out in four campuses. At the core of this study though is the attempt to use Systems Thinking to create a viable Student Recruitment using a range of methodologies drawn from Systems Thinking. So the process will not be completed at the end of this dissertation but will continue beyond that. The process will become even more complex with the introduction of new stakeholders and new vision and mission statement as a result of the upcoming merger between the University and the University of Durban-Westville.

This study is therefore an initial step in what will eventually be a larger process as the organisation grows more complex and goals of various stakeholders change. The process does not end with this study but rather carries on as we attempt to deal with both expected and unexpected changes in future. As a result the implementation stage in the next chapter mentions as the last stage, an implementation timeframe. Such a timeframe will include re-opening conversations that may take us back to the beginning of the process (phase 1).

The advantage of this study will be that it will give us valid and reliable data in that we will have engaged stakeholders in a process that allows us to deal with changes in the future. The methodology engages stakeholders directly in a circular as opposed to linear process. This way there is an opportunity to revisit stages and refine data. This way the data will be more reliable and valid.

### 3.4 Summary of the process

The process of dealing with this problematic situation was divided into two phases.

#### PHASE 1

- **SSM** stage 1 observe/enter ill defined situation , 2 express the problem situation ,3 generate root definitions of relevant systems, 4 construct conceptual models (other systems thinking/ formal system concepts), 5 compare systems with problem situation, 6 decide feasible/desirable changes, 7 act to improve the problematic situation
- **VSM** at stage 1 and 4 to establish each recruitment unit into a level of recursion.

#### PHASE 2

- Apply **Organisational Fitness Diagnosis** at levels 5 and 6
- Decide feasible/desirable changes (stage 6 of Checkland's SSM)
- Act to improve problematic situation (stage 7 of Checkland's SSM)

### 3.5 The use of the data

At the core of this study is an attempt to use SSM to tackle an organisational problem. Argyris (1978) defines an organisation as a closed network of multiple interrelationships between people. The challenge here is drawing those relationships towards a unified goal that allows the organisation to become more competitive.

When a single organisation finds itself in a situation where its components are in competition, what foundation must be created as a

basic structure to allow for such competition. Put differently, what characteristics go into a model that benefits the larger organisation, allow for healthy competition amongst units whilst remaining competitive against other similar competitive organisations?

The data collected in this study will be used to identify the central components of such a model and organise it in a way that allows the organisation to remain competitive whilst allowing for the necessary diversity of goals in various organisational sub-units.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Student Recruitment is a complex function involving a range of stakeholders. The process of engaging relevant stakeholders will be a very long process of circular stages as we define, redefine and refine our purpose and positions. At the core of this study though is the attempt to use Systems Thinking to create a viable Student Recruitment using a range of methodologies drawn from Systems Thinking.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **REITERATION OF ACTION RESEARCH**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The process was divided into two phases. The first phase was loosely based on Checkland's Soft Systems Methodology. The stages of the methodology were used selectively in order to achieve various aims throughout the process; not all the stages were used in the first phase. The first phase was largely diagnostic and the second one largely corrective.

#### **4.2 PHASE 1**

In this phase Soft Systems Methodology was used because it allowed for an approach that was qualitative and made room for conversations with stakeholders in ways that did not appear threatening. The stages of the methodology are also very fluid allowing for regression in order to clarify issues should the need arise. The nature of the process was thus cyclical as opposed to being linear. This way it created the possibility to revisit and repeat stages until the desired result was achieved.

##### **4.2.1 Observe/entering a problem situation**

Entering the situation was carried out through a series of smaller stages. The first of these was securing appointments with the possible 'owners of the system'. This stage was about identifying the relevant primary stakeholders and then engaging them on a number of issues.

Conversations are very central to this stage. The way that the engagement process was carried out was structured but non-formal. The aim was to gain the stakeholders' confidence, explain the aim of the research and invite their contribution in the process.

The entering was carried out through the use of conversations and questions about the present state of how things are carried out. The smaller stages mentioned above involved dividing this stage into two sub-stages. The first sub-stage poses a series of generalized questions about the current situation and is aimed at getting a general idea of people views about current practice. The second sub-stage again poses questions but these are more specific than the first set of questions. In instances where the stakeholders are made up of more than one individual, the questions were posed to a group or the manager of the section. The questions posed during the conversations/interactions in the first sub-stage and the accompanying edited responses appear in appendix 1. Questions posed in the second sub-stage appear in appendix 2.

The stakeholders' responses to second sub-stage questions were then analysed through an affinity diagram and a relationship diagram. The process involves:

- Identifying main ideas from each response.
- Isolating central concepts from the main ideas.
- Establishing the relationship between the identified central concepts.
- Identifying the *drivers* and *outcomes* of the problematic situation.

This process was based on Chris Argyris' method called the *relationship diagrams*. This stage of this phase was in reality a

learning process. Chris Argyris (1978) maintains that, “learning occurs whenever errors are detailed and corrected” (p 20). This stage of this phase was aimed at identifying intentions (espoused theory) of the various recruitment sections and matching those against actions (theory in use) with the aim of identifying what lay behind the problem with the present recruitment processes. In this stage it was being used as an attempt to identify the mental models that informed the present recruitment activities.

The process of teasing out the responses provided by primary stakeholders, from sentences down to key concepts/ideas helped to create a better understanding of the ill defined situation. Since I was also a participant within the situation and therefore one of the primary stakeholders, I opted for the structure/process/climate approach. This would hopefully help me take better advantage of my familiarity with some of the organisational issues and structures.

The next step was about looking at elements of structures in the situation. The management structures differed from one recruitment unit to another (see appendix 5). In looking at elements of structure and making observations, the aim was to identify the type of hierarchy and process and the nature of the interaction resulting from such a hierarchy.

#### Elements of the process

As a result of the changing face of tertiary education nationally, the resulting competition has resulted in a growing need to market institutions. This need had also meant that the organisation had to continually re-adapt and reorganise in an attempt to better position itself in the tertiary education market.

Tertiary institutions had long been operating in an environment where almost all their activities were supported by government subsidies. The last five years had seen, dwindling numbers of student intake and diminishing state subsidies. Survival has therefore meant that the organisation has to actively recruit the right kind of student to maintain desired subsidies. This had been complicated by certain sections of the organisation feeling that they need specialised recruitment as they perceive that they are not well served through a generalised and centralised recruitment function. Further complication of the process had arisen through the partnerships that university has established with business as part of business' corporate social investment programmes. These partnerships have created special needs groups whose needs have to be served through the creation of additional and specialised recruitment activities/programmes.

#### Elements of the climate

Climate is a subjective component and so can best be handled through a process that allows stakeholders to enter into conversations where they are allowed to explain their opinions freely. A non-formal seminar was set up to carry this out and collect information. The seminar creates a situation where the stakeholders get together and can engage through a structured conversation. A seminar also allows the practitioner to further observe and clarify a number of things/issues.

#### **4.2.2 Express the problem situation**

The conversations carried out in the first stage of this intervention process produced information that was then used in the expression of the problem situation using the various inputs from stakeholders that



were consulted. The observations and data gathering in *the entering stage* of this intervention process continually pointed to environmental factors as either predisposing and/or precipitating influences to the ineffectiveness of the present recruitment model.

Student Recruitment as a function had been largely seen as a single task that could be carried out by individuals operating with little co-ordinated function and with no clear/specific/ operationally defined key performance areas. As a result the recruitment function had not been thrashed out into its constituent elements and organised systematically in a way that served organisational units' goals.

The above information was collected in the previous stage as is expressed as a rich picture in appendix 3. The rich picture was then shown to stakeholders and their opinions sought regarding whether the rich picture captured what was the essence of the present recruitment model.

#### **4.2.3 Generate Root Definition**

This stage builds on the rich picture, a product of the previous stage. Having drawn a rich picture this was then presented to the stakeholders and discussions carried out with the stakeholders around central issues as depicted in the rich picture. Stakeholders were then involved in adding to or modifying the rich picture and contributing to the creation of a root definition of systems that would help improve the situation.

This was then followed with asking the primary stakeholders to define traits that they would expect the new model to encompass. The various contributions were then arranged into an affinity digraph that

then identifies common concepts amongst the various responses and helped shape the construction of a root definition.

The root definition constructed based on stakeholders' contributions was:

- **Create a system that allows the various recruitment units to carry out recruitment activities by subscribing to an integrated and non-contradictory mission in order to contribute to a more viable recruitment process that can better meet organisational recruitment goals.**

#### **4.2.3.1 Testing the Root Definition**

**C** - the University is the major beneficiary of the transformation. The transformation will mean that the University moves towards maximising the recruitment function that should help meet its enrolment targets. Individuals involved in recruitment activities will also benefit in that they can now use the synergies from co-ordinated teamwork to meet their various goals.

**A** - actors/the people who would make the system work are Liaison Officers, Public Relations Officers and Information Officers.

**T** - in this transformation the creation of specified targets, targetted activities and proper monitoring is an input that is supposed to have as an output: a well structured, co-ordinated and viable recruitment model. The transformation will be broken down into activities which are reflected in the Human Activity System (HAS) Models shown under (d) below.

**W** - organisations that sell /promote a variety of product offerings are very conscious of the need for branding. Branding as part of the marketing may involve various groups each promoting individual products yet avoiding conflict of interests in the process. A single example would be that of ABI products. 'Sprite' is promoted and sold without taking away from 'Coke'. It is therefore important that messages carried by promotional teams from the same organisation are both complimentary and co-ordinated and that the various products should draw from each other's strength and benefit the larger organisation.

**O** - the owners of the system are the Liaison Officers, Public Relations Officers, Information Officers and the Line Managers of departments responsible for these individuals. These are the people who can choose not to implement any of the suggested changes to improve the situation.

**E** - the owners of the system have little control over special interest groups. Certain sections of the organisation will always be driven by perceptions and therefore a little difficult to convince. There is also a limit to how many changes one can make because of the non-homogeneous nature of the market and specialised needs of sections of the target market.

4.2.3.2 The HAS for the Root Definitions

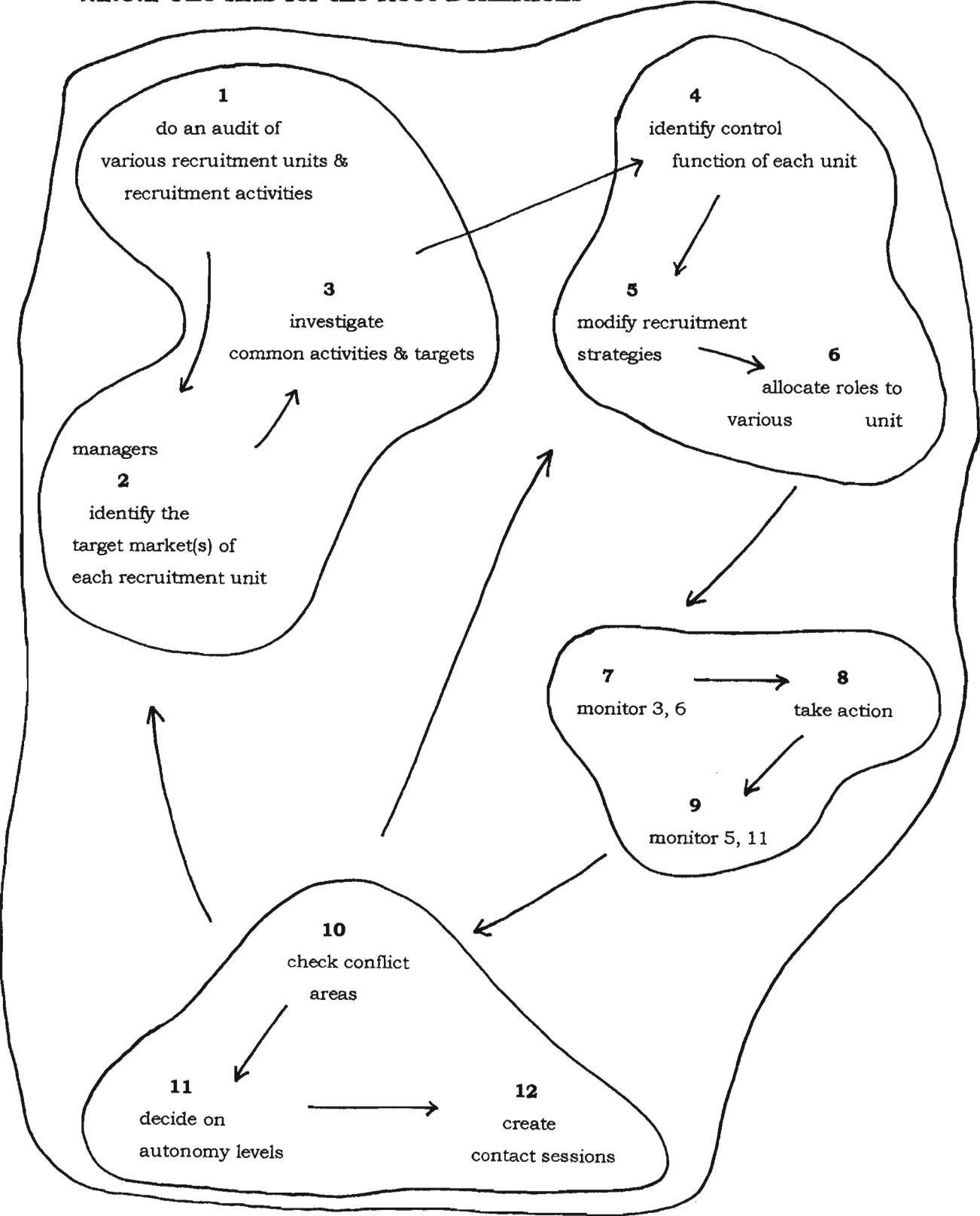


Fig 5: The Human Activities needed to accomplish the root definition

#### **4.2.4 Using insights from other methodologies**

Insights used in a number of activities like activities 5,10,11 and 12 in first model and activities 4,5,8 and 10 in the second model use knowledge gained from studies in environmental psychology and psychology of work. Some of this knowledge has been cited under W in the testing of the root definitions

##### Monitoring and Control

Activities 4, 5, 7 and 8 in the first HAS model and activities 7, 8, 9 10 and 11 in the second HAS model should take into consideration issues raised in researches discussed in appendices 4, 5 and 6. Another element of the monitoring and feedback will be communication. There should be communication between management and sections about needs, concerns and changes. The communication channels should be used before and after changes have been implemented. Communication is aimed at helping in monitoring how effective the changes are and whether they are helping in achieving the desired transformation.

Such communication can be structured through periodic meetings within sections or a general staff meeting where changes are included in the agenda. The monitoring is to be used to inform action aimed at further modifications and also informing management and staff about the efficacy, effectiveness and efficiency of the transformation.

### **Why does the present recruitment model appear non-viable?**

#### **a) Ideas and concerns associated with the problem**

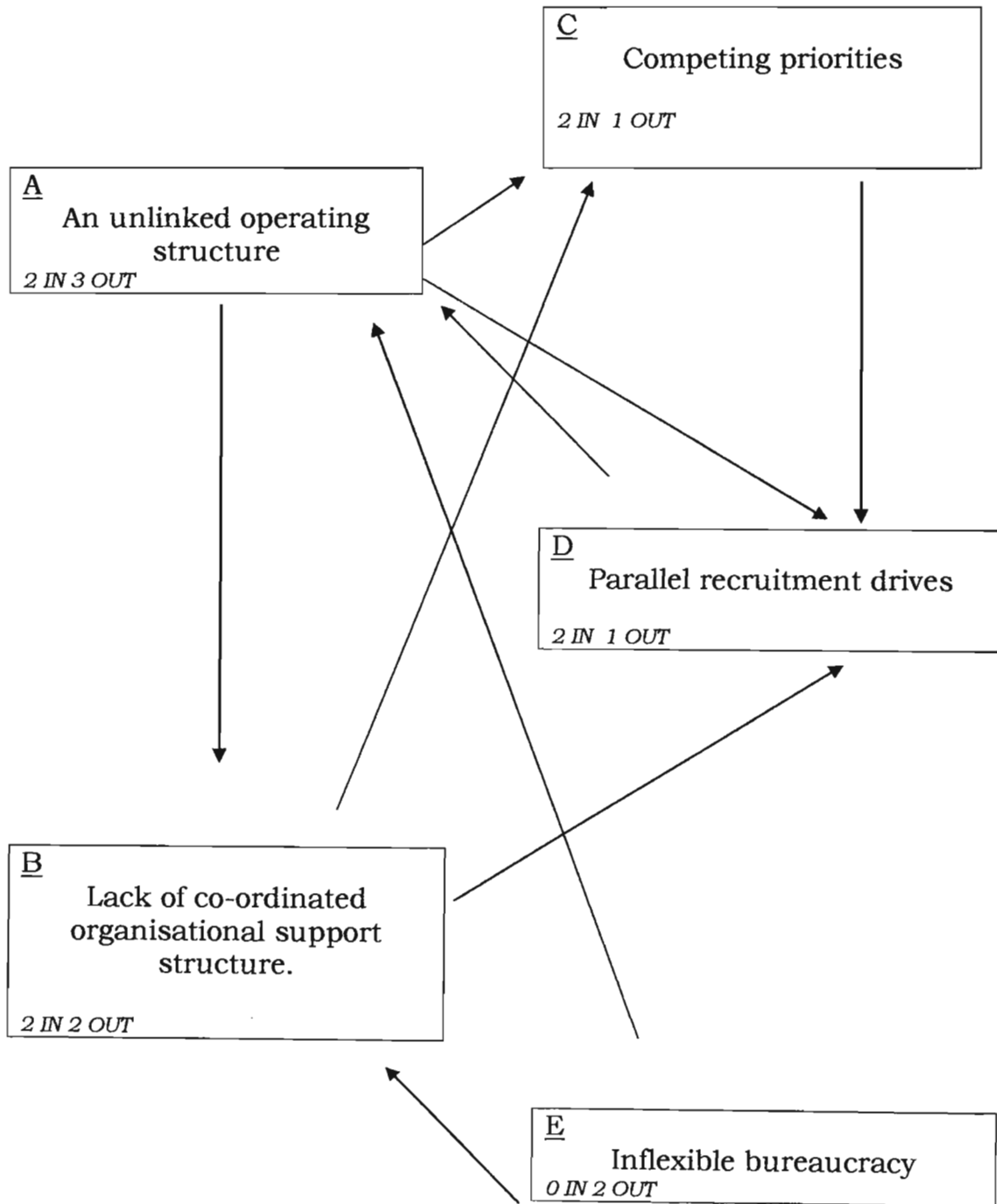
- Ignorance about how other recruitment units work.
- No meaningful interaction amongst colleagues.
- Fragmented organisational systems.
- Parallel recruitment drives.
- Disjointed strategies.
- Competing priorities.
- No consolidated support structure.
- Unusual set up of multi-campus.
- No unifying mission.
- Lack of proactive action on the part of practitioners.
- Units are self-contained.
- Independent operations.
- The needs to address separate needs.
- No meaningful interaction amongst colleagues.
- Faculties compete for the same learners.
- There is duplication of activities.
- Processes are managed by different groups.
- Faculty targets.
- Need to draw quality students.
- Biased corporate approach.
- Sponsors set targets for programmes.
- Trustees control implementation.
- Steering committees drive the process.
- No unifying mission.
- Ignorance about how other recruitment units work
- Unusual multi-campus setup.
- Faculties work differently.
- Budgets are very restrictive.

## b) Affinity Diagram

Why does the present recruitment model  
appear non-viable?

- A    **An unlinked operating structure.**  
Units are self-contained.  
Independent operations.  
The needs to address separate needs.  
No meaningful interaction amongst colleagues.
  
- B    **Lack of co-ordinated organisational support structure.**  
Faculties compete for the same learners.  
There is duplication of activities.  
Processes are managed by different groups.
  
- C    **Competing priorities**  
Faculty targets.  
Need to draw quality students.  
Biased corporate approach.
  
- D    **Parallel recruitment drives**  
Sponsors set targets for programmes.  
Trustees control implementation.  
Steering committees drive the process.  
No unifying mission.  
Ignorance about how other recruitment units work
  
- E    **Inflexible bureaucracy**  
Unusual multi campus set-up.  
Faculties work differently.  
Budgets are very restrictive.

### c) Interrelation Digraph





d) **The Theory**

**OUTCOMES**



**DRIVERS**

Competing  
Strategies/priorities

Parallel  
Recruitment drives

Inflexible bureaucracy

Lack of co-ordinated  
organisational support  
structure

An unlinked operating structure

## **DRIVERS**

The process of teasing out the stakeholders' responses, through the use of interrelation digraph and the affinity diagram, helped in developing a theory that attempted to explain what the core of the problem. The rest of the intervention process was then based on the theory that was developed through this stage of the process. The theory was:

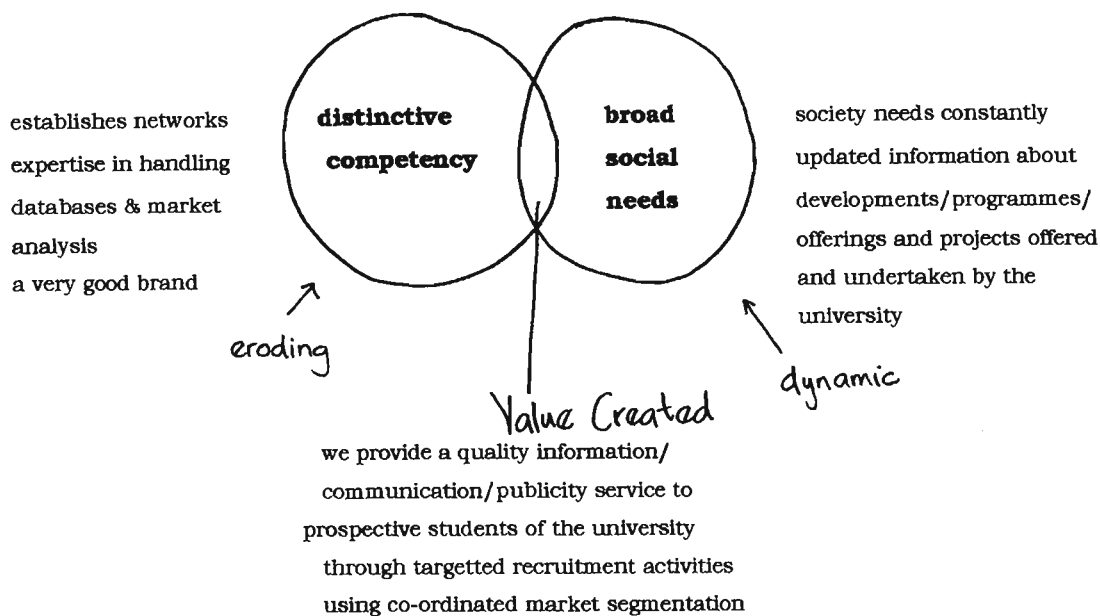
**An unlinked operating structure coupled with a lack of co-ordinated organisational support structures and supported by an inflexible bureaucratic system is the main driver behind a model that has parallel recruitment drives and competing strategies.**

This theory was very useful in pinpointing the behaviour or situation that created the problem. It also helped in pointing out how such maladaptive behaviour/situation created a chain reaction in a host of other factors, which created the problem.

The established theory was then followed by the establishment of a new structure that would then form the basis of the new recruitment model. This process was undertaken by a special committee drawn from sections of the larger organisation.

With the proposed structure in place, the next step in the process is systems diagnosis. The purpose of the diagnosis stage is to establish whether the new structure is viable. This process draws from Stafford Beer's Viable Systems Model. The diagnosis is preceded by the identification of the business idea of the unit. This serves to provide direction in terms of what the unit is aiming to achieve and the basis of its existence.

The business idea of the recruitment unit is:



*Fig 6: The business idea of the Recruitment Unit*

The following Viable Systems Model diagnosis was performed on the Student Recruitment unit. Student Recruitment does not exist as a single unit but rather is a unit of convenience brought about by a need to consolidate the various units engaged in a similar operation. It should also be remembered that although the discussions here are about Student Recruitment as a business unit, that this is in reality a component of a greater organisation, which is a university.

Below is a diagram that illustrates the various levels within Stafford Beer's Viable Systems Model VSM. This will explain the various levels mentioned in systems identification and systems diagnosis below.

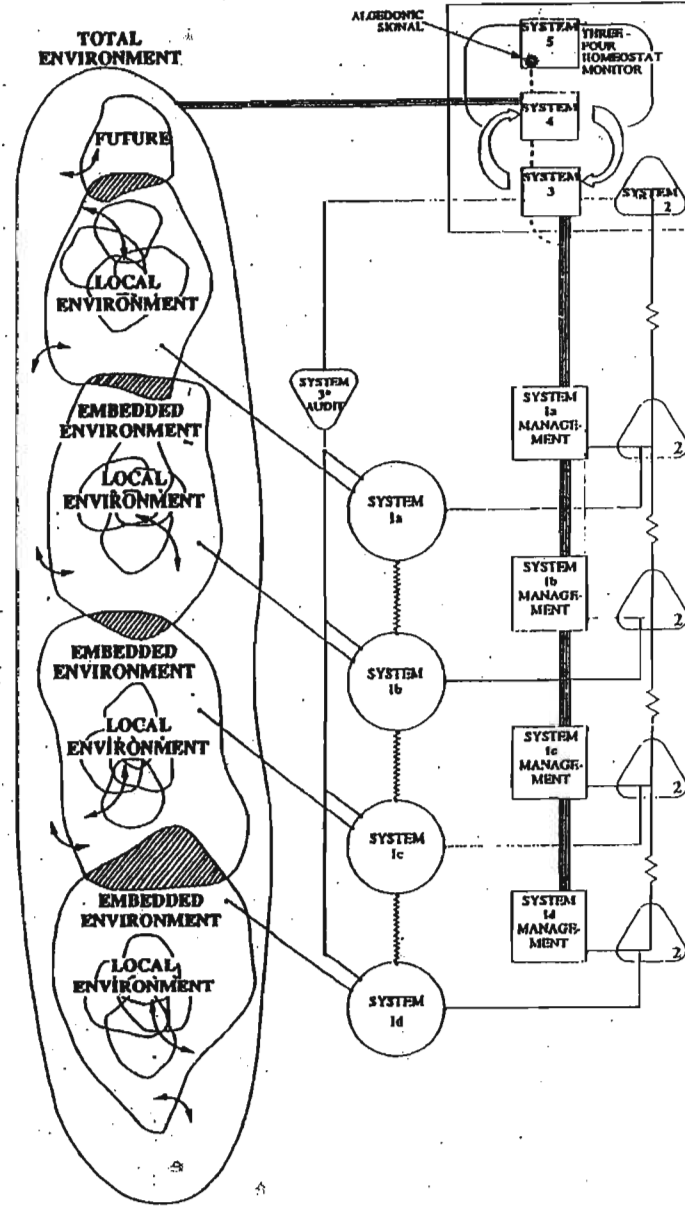
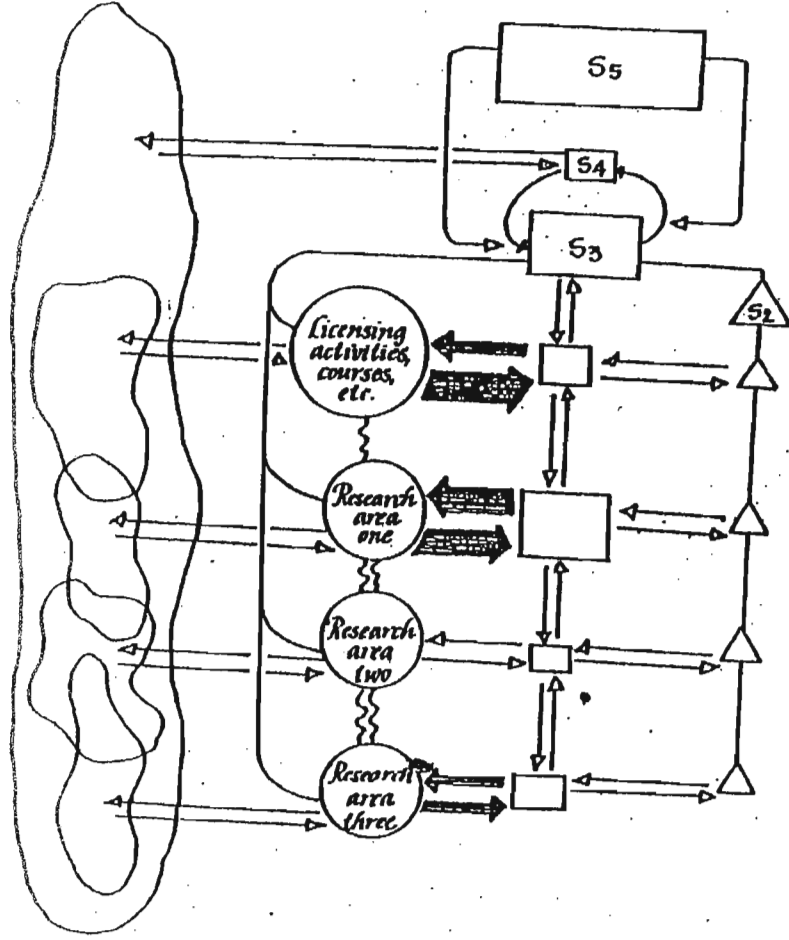


Figure 7: The VSM diagram

#### 4.2.6 SYSTEM IDENTIFICATION

- The primary purpose pursued by the system is student recruitment. The system aims to publicize the university and its programmes. The recruitment is carried out in different forms of activities that includes things like presentations, functions, advertising, displays, etc.
- The relevant system for achieving this purpose would be a System 1 that is made up of specialist individuals who are fluent in the different mediums. These individuals must be able to segment the targeted market and offer the right kind of service/product to the right section of the targeted market through the medium that maximises the outcome of what they are aiming at.
- The viable parts of such a system 1 are a team with a list of activities/tasks, which are aimed at market segments and are market-focused. The team should be made up of professionals who not only know the environment where the organisation operates but are also aware of the need to work in co-operation with other sections that carry out recruitment activities.
- This system in focus would be part of a wider system (the university-wide public relations undertaking). Such an undertaking would aim to create standards of dealing with the public by the greater organisation. In this way the system would be supported by a larger co-ordinate support system from the larger mission.

#### 4.2.7 SYSTEM DIAGNOSIS

*(This next section of the assignment is organised in a way that answers questions on each system as posed in pages 94 to 95 of Chapter 5 of Flood and Jackson's book; Creative Problem Solving: Total Systems Intervention see questions at **appendix 4**)*

## **System 1**

- For the Student Recruitment unit

**Environment** is the secondary education environment incorporating government secondary school, finishing schools, independent schools and any member of the public seeking to further studies at tertiary level.

**Operations** involve tasks like school visits, library visits, attending career evenings/days/career exhibitions and advertising in youth-focused publications.

**Localised management:** the schools liaison team is managed by a unit manager who manages the budget, establishes and maintains relationships with relevant groups and individuals within and outside the university. This individual monitors the different tasks of the sub-unit and reports to the deputy director of the Public Affairs unit. The other individuals, Faculty PROs, are managed within their faculties in various faculty models.

Within the new model, management is a shared function that brings together individuals from various sections in order to create co-ordination and control that serves the interests of all involved.

- Constraints imposed upon this part of the system 1 (S1) are mostly through a limited budget. Allocated budgets limit the number of activities in which the practitioners can participate. Further constraints are imposed through certain policies that govern the entire organisation. So policy issues like equality, affirmative action,

entrance requirements, standards, special interest groups' needs, etc. restrict what should and can be done by recruiters.

- Accountability is exercised in a number of ways. The manager of the Schools Liaison sub-unit is in charge of the daily running of the unit. He reports to the deputy director whom he meets weekly for update reports. The sub-unit has regular meetings where they discuss any necessary issues. The whole unit meets biannually to plan and reflect on activities. They in turn report to a steering committee made up of representatives from different faculties and departments from the greater organisation. At the steering committee meetings they report on what they have covered at certain stages and still have to cover until the next meeting.

## **System 2**

- The system 2 (S2) function is performed by the Manager: Schools Liaison and the Deputy Director: Public Affairs. They together co-ordinate the various activities of the different individuals performing their function in S1. They do this through regular meetings between the two of them and other meetings with S1 participants.
- The possible sources of oscillation or conflict between the various parts of S1 are
  - conflicting info on various and similar programmes.
  - insensitive approach to one section of the targeted community.
  - duplication of activities by two or more individuals on the same target.

System 2 has a harmonizing effect on these possible oscillation by planning coordinating tasks in ways that keep all in system 1 aware of what each one is doing, where and gives them an idea of how. S2 brings all in S1 together at intervals to involve them in planning coordinating plans. Challenges, difficulties are discussed at such encounters.

- For this reason, S2 is perceived more as facilitating than threatening.

### **System 3**

- The components of system 3 (S3) are made up of representatives from the different units within Student Recruitment. These are the Executive Director, Director, Liaison Manager and Senior PRO.
- System 3 maintains internal stability through a set of rules. These rules spell out procedure in terms of processes that need to be followed in carrying out activities; the people involved and the right equipment/tools to be used. S3 also allocates resources (financial & otherwise) to the different sections within Student Recruitment. They ensure an equitable and appropriate sharing of some resources, allocation of space and staffing.
- System 3 exercises authority by being involved in certain processes. They have to report on performances of staff at intervals. They have to sign documents that release certain resources to be used for certain activities and attend some activities. They are also members of certain strategic committees.
- Resources bargain takes place using an auditing process. They look at common resources and provide for those centrally and the rest is allocated to sub-units in accordance with annual priorities.



- The ultimate responsibility for the performance of the parts of S3 sits with the Executive Director.
- The audit enquiries into aspects of S1 include questions like:
  - What was planned?
  - Who approved it?
  - What was accomplished within what time frames?
  - How much was spent?
  - How successful was it?
- The relationship between S3 and S1 is perceived to be democratic because, performers in system 1 are given greater freedom in their performance of activities as professionals. They set the plans for activities and justify them before those are approved and resources allocated.

#### **System 4**

- System 4 is an intelligence gathering function. S4 is made up of a number of individuals/groups from all the different recruitment units. The group also draws people externally in order to create objectivity. A number of activities are carried out to satisfy the function. Among these are:
  - formal marketing researches carried out annually to test the effectiveness of certain activities or approaches used in system 1 list of activities. This sometimes involves using outside/independents organisations.
  - keeping statistics on the targeted populations.
  - keeping an eye on the competition; what they are doing, any changes, etc.

- informal information gathering by staff at every activity through feedback reports/evaluations forms by guests.

- These activities and their results are used to plan/organise and carry out future activities. Any positive change is implemented the next time the same activity is staged.
- System 4 uses these activities to monitor what is happening to the environment and adapts accordingly.
- S4 is very open to novelty in that it uses a number of individuals and organisations that are specialists in their fields to carry out some publicity exercises. These outside individuals/organisations bring a lot of novel ideas.
- Because the Executive Director, Director and Schools Liaison Manager serves in S4 this makes it possible for S4 to alert S5 of developments. Certain individuals serving the S4 function also perform S5 functions so that way can alert S5 of any urgent developments.

## **System 5**

Who is on the Board?

- The Board that carries out the policy making function is a steering committee. On this committee is the Executive Director, Director, SL Manger, Schools Liaison Officers and faculty representatives.
- This type of composition works well because it brings together stakeholders into the process and allows them to have a say in how they are represented by S1 through S1 activities.
- The fact that some individuals at S5 also perform functions at other S levels help create some homeostasis. S3 and S4 are then

taken seriously. This also helps in creating feedback loops throughout the whole system.

## **4.3 PHASE 2**

### **4.3.1 ORGANISATIONAL FITNESS**

VSM is all about setting structural conditions that must be met for an operational entity to be capable of effective action. So with the structure in place, the next phase looks at the functioning of the various systems levels and the synergies.

Organisational Fitness looks at the issues of self-control and self-organisation as the fundamental components of fit organisation. Such fitness is looked at from three perspectives- normative management, strategic management and operational management.

Looking at organisational fitness was carried as an exercised that ensures that the desired structure is fit to deal with a range of organisational challenges and requirements. The whole exercise was based on the goal categories and control variables as set out by Schwaninger and Markus (1989), see appendix 8.

### **4.3.2 Operational Management**

The proposed structure was looked at through operational indicators and control variables. The control variables looked at were *income* and *expenditure*; who would control expenditure and where would the source of income for the various activities be. The one indicator looked at was *costs*; how the various levels of costs would be defined and handled?

The cost indicator and the income and expenditure control variables were looked at as they would apply to the S1 and S2 levels of the proposed model/structure. Operational management is really about putting things into work and that is why the operational management diagnosis was only applied at the level of the structure where core business for the recruitment unit is operationalised.

#### **4.3.3 Strategic Management**

Strategic management diagnosis looks at the capability to create potential. This diagnosis looks at levels S2, S3 and S4. The indicators and control variables used are *customer problem*, *problem solutions*, *competitive position* and *experience*.

The discussions involved defining in specific terms what the competitive position of each recruitment segment was and the nature of the experience that each stakeholder brings into the larger recruitment unit. Competitive position and experience are critical success factors and therefore need to be better understood by stakeholders.

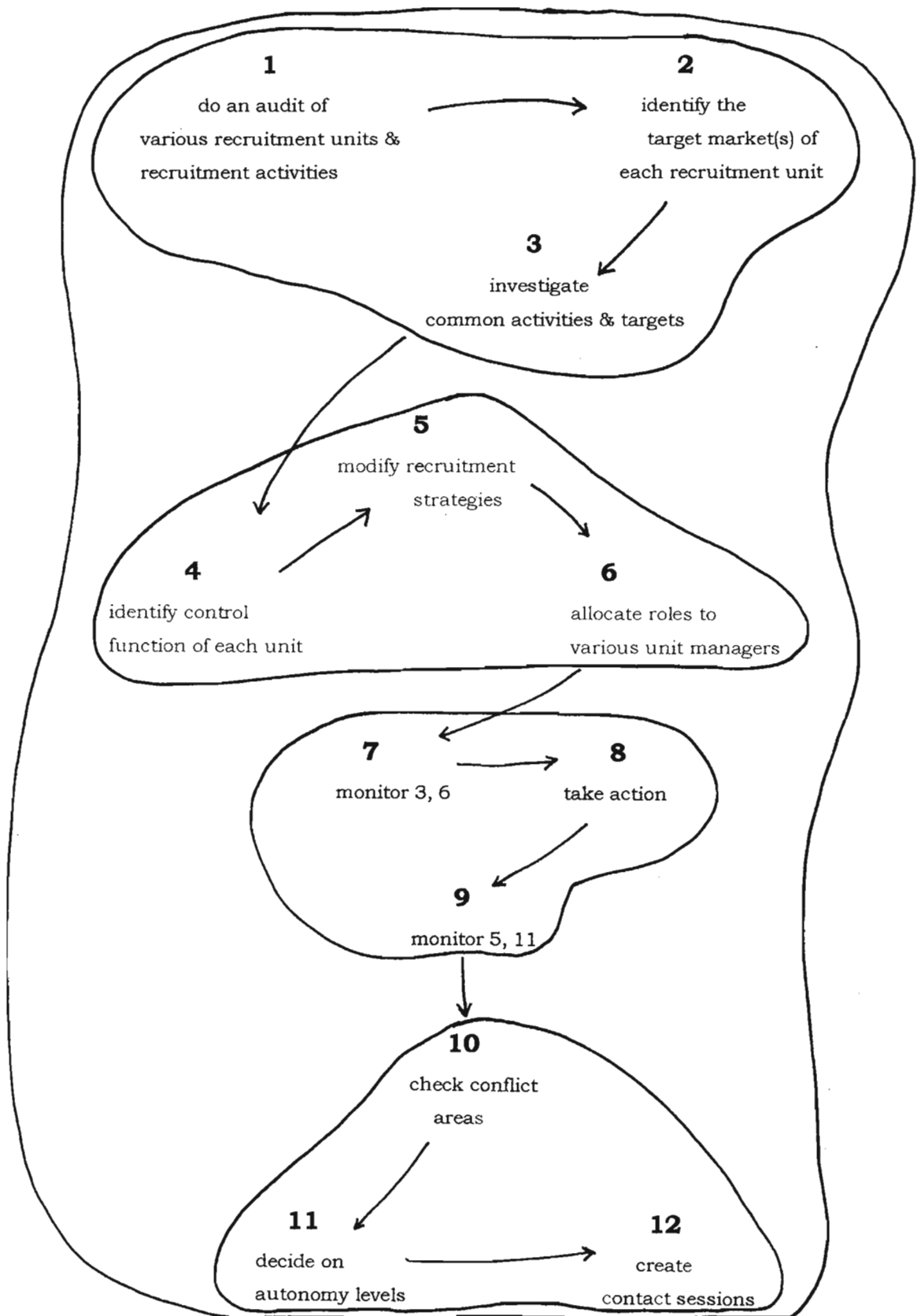
#### **4.3.4 Normative Management**

Normative management diagnosis looks at factors like *system philosophy*, *system dynamics*, *system structure* and *system culture*. These various factors together help create the appropriate identity and booster development and system viability.

## **4.4 IMPLEMENTATION**

The next stage was then developing a time frame to implement the new model. Aspects of the new model were already in existence within the various segments of the present recruitment model. They were present in the sense that each unit had some form of strategy in place and various activities aimed at pursuing the strategy. The various recruitment units did have management structures. Agreement was reached on the fact that we wouldn't simply abandon the existing practice in a single move but that the changes would be phased in at appropriate times.

It was agreed by the various stakeholders that the process used in the Human Activity Systems Model of the root definition earlier on in the study, would be the best way to manage the model development process. So, the model would be created through an activities process that breaks down the process into stages that each involves a range of actions;



*Fig 8: The various stages of implementation in the model development process.*

- Activities 1, 2 and 3 had established who the units are, the market environment and the recruitment activities.
- Activity 5 consolidates the various activities into groups depending on where, when and how they are carried out. This helps identify areas of possible co-operation where various stakeholders could pool their resources and develop a partnership plan
- Activities 4 and 6 help identify the roles required to better co-ordinate manage and control the recruitment process. The roles are then allocated to appropriate units.
- With roles allocated and control functions identified, activities 7, 8 and 9 are a series of delivery activities that allows the various mandated units/individuals to take appropriate action to keep the process within the identified root definition.
- The last series of activities, 10, 11 and 12 are quarterly activities that allow for further modifications at certain intervals to allow for amendments at various stages of the recruitment process. This stage also allows the stakeholders to modify the model as need arises owing to both expected and unexpected changes in the organisational system.

The process would be supported by continuous interaction and report back sessions where stakeholders would have the opportunity to redefine goals, adjust activities/approaches and talk about areas of frustration. The process is a circular one that allows the various activities to carry on in the grouped activities whilst allowing for the refining of the larger organisational strategy.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **REFLECTION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

There has been a lot of data gathered during the process of this study. This data forms the new knowledge that will form the basis of the model which will be aimed at supporting the Student Recruitment process. The new knowledge has added value to both my practice as the manager of Student Recruitment and also that of other stakeholders in the Student Recruitment function.

#### **5.2 Lessons from the Intervention Process**

There were a number of lessons learnt at the various stages of this intervention process. This was a process that aimed to re-organise an existing organisational model so that it could be extended to include the interests of the various stakeholders without working against the fundamental goal of the larger organisation. The lessons learnt have created values that can be incorporated in sustaining of the new model and/or future modifications of the model.

**Lesson      The importance of social discourse.**

**Significance** People value interaction because they have an opportunity to learn from one another. The social discourse allowed the stakeholders to express their various needs and expectations in a non-threatening way. It's through the discourse that I came to learn about what



was useful and important to the various stakeholders. As a result we learnt better about each other's activities throughout the intervention process because participants felt that they were being heard.

**Value Created**     *As a manager what I take from this lesson is that I need to create opportunities for social discourse in the workplace or throughout the implementation of this proposed recruitment model.*

**Lesson**     **The importance of allowing group members participants to drive the process.**

**Significance**     People feel valued; they feel like partners in the process and this helps to improve organisational culture. They share in the process ownership and are therefore self-organising. This then means that they need very little or no control/supervision during the process. Effectiveness increases.

**Value Created**     *As a manager I have to delegate, consult and empower participants within the process pursued by the organisation. Allowing participants to drive the process is also a very effective way of transferring skills.*

**Lesson**     **The importance of co-operation.**

**Significance** Knowledge/ information is vast and one cannot hope to learn everything personally. Letting others share their

knowledge helps one learn more and also get a different view of what may have already been known to oneself. One cannot hope to be an expert in all areas.

**Value Created**      *As a manager this means that I have to bring others into the process of learning and help create a synergy that allows all involved to consolidate and organise information into useful knowledge.*

**Lesson**            **Organisational competencies are continually eroding.**

**Significance** So, organisations have to continually find new ways of satisfying the social needs of the market where they operate. This is very important as such changes impact directly on our target market and make it necessary for us to adapt our approach accordingly.

**Value Created**      *As a manager this means that I have to establish ways of tracking social needs and make appropriate modifications.*

**Lesson**            **The significance of a business idea.**

**Significance**        The business idea helps identify what the organisation (unit) is about and so help in shaping organisational resources and actions in pursuit of better outputs. In this instance the business idea was that of the sub-system as the recruitment unit is part of a larger organisation.

**Value Created**     *As a manager I have to understand and communicate the business idea throughout the organisational unit.*

**Lesson**            **The importance of thinking systematically.**

**Significance** This means being able to realise that each variable being manipulated will have an effect on a host of other variables within the organisation and the larger system. The one element of this process that helped bring about any useful change has been the systems approach. In viewing the various elements of the situation I have been able to deal with the problem wholly. Systems thinking does not reduce issues to their smallest elements thereby removing other elements that may influence and/or affect the problem rather it allows for the analysis of a problem within the context of its existence.

**Value Created**     *As a manager I have to keep my eyes on the bigger picture as well. There has to be an understanding that elements are interconnected within an organisation. The manipulation of other elements may influence and affect other elements and this may create unanticipated problems.*

**Lesson**            **Using a cyclical approach in process that involves parties with often-conflicting interests.**

**Significance** Using various methods/processes in a cyclical way allows for the revisiting of issues thereby allowing for the clarification of processes and the refining of objectives. This also allows all stakeholders to participate fully and continuously in the intervention process. A linear process is both limited and limiting in that it prevents the backward movement to issues that may have been inadequately handled.

**Value Created** *A cyclical process may be time-consuming sometimes but it allows stakeholders to return to stages in the process that need further adjusting and can then refine issues and objectives. This is also a great way of restating the course of events should a need arise.*

**Lesson** **The importance of understanding the business environment.**

**Significance** Such an understanding is crucial in being able to plan, organise and adapt accordingly. Such an understanding includes being in tune with the prevailing politics of the industry, the norms and values and the prevailing culture. This type of understanding helps focus the access to various individuals/groups that are in turn owners of the process and can bring positive influence to the intervention process.

**Value Created** *The manager should gather intelligence about the business environment at both micro and macro levels.*

## **Lesson      Feedback**

**Significance** Feedback is not the response you get but what you do with the transformation process to try and control output to match the desired output levels. In this intervention process the challenge was in balancing the competing needs of stakeholders. So feedback was important in focusing the process in a way that served the various stakeholders without jeopardising the rest of the interested parties/other stakeholders.

**Value Created**      *The manager should understand what the desired output is and then feedback into the transformation process as opposed the input.*

**Lesson**      **Understand and establish the necessary levels of systems operations that help make your larger system viable.**

**Significance** This is important because my unit has to remain viable if it is to survive within the larger organisation in which it operates. The different levels of the systems operations are a useful tool in not only focusing the processes of the unit but also monitoring and controlling the operations in order to maintain necessary links with relevant elements within the larger organisation.

**Value Created**      *As a manager if I do that I keep the staff motivated and focused with no fear of sudden collapse of the unit's business.*

**Lesson**            **Decisions made in organisations are influenced by the present/prevaling requisite variety.**

**Significance** This is important in that it highlights the need for a consultative process that uses other expertise within the organisation. In large organisations there are a host of people with varying expertise in various fields. It is thus important to not only recognise that but to incorporate that expertise in bringing about change that will benefit everyone by allowing existing expertise to influence the process.

**Value Created**      *This helps highlight the need to use others through delegation/allocation/designation to access different views, knowledge and expertise available within the organisation at its different levels.*

**Lesson**      **Functions at different systems levels can be made up of different individuals.**

**Significance**      A function does not necessarily mean one person performing it but could be a basket of skills drawn from a number of individuals within the organisation. This is a very good way of bringing in the various skills varieties and competencies present within the organisation.

**Value Created**      *This helps highlight the importance of being able to identify and draw from different individuals to maximise synergy that will help get things done better. That way there is a buy in from a greater number of people as their expertise is acknowledged and used in creating a better/improved situation.*

**Lesson**      **To be viable it is necessary to work on development and growth.**

**Significance**      Success of an organisation hinges on developing and growing the organisation because competencies erode over time. So there has to be built in a continual process of interaction, training seminars and modification of activities and processes of the new recruitment model.

**Value Created**     *This helps keep participants on the other side of complacency and draws the attention to the fact that development and growth within an organisation are mutually inclusive.*

**Lesson**     **Constant and regular communication between different systems levels is vital.**

**Significance**     This boils down to synergy. Different functions are baskets of skills drawn from numerous individuals; therefore if we are to draw from others within the organisation's basket of skills we have to be able to access these individuals and skills. Once the initial contact has been established it has to be maintained so that the same skill base used in the beginning can be used to maintain and improve on the intervention.

**Value Created**     *One of the manager's responsibilities is to make sure that communication channels are set up and are used.*

**Lesson**     **An onion is a sum total of its skins so one should be careful when peeling.**

**Significance**     In dealing with organisations and trying to isolate different levels during scrutiny; its important to remember that elements of the system behave within the system and not in isolation; they are affected by others levels.



**Value Created**     *There needs to be a realisation that each system level counts and is vital in the ultimate result of the organisation.*

**Lesson**     **S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5 are about functions not individuals.**

**Significance**     This is very important to remember in organisations that often cite shortages of staff/human resources. The same individuals can be brought in at different systems levels to carry out a designated function. In fact, their presence at more than one level brings in varying and enriching perspectives as they are aware of challenges faced at different levels of the model.

**Value Created**     *For me as a manager it means being diligent in hiring staff with skills/expertise that will help fulfill the different skills necessary to fulfill the various systems levels.*

### **5.3 Summary of Lessons**

Lessons from the various stages and phases of the stages highlighted the importance of a business idea, interaction and information sharing; the importance of thinking systematically, knowing one's business environment and providing the necessary requisite variety to make informed decisions; the interdependence of various systems

levels and the importance of continuous communication between the systems levels in maintaining a viable system.

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## APPENDIX 1

### QUESTIONS POSED DURING THE INITIAL CONVERSATIONS/ INTERACTIONS

- a) Who are your recruitment activities aimed at?

*How is your market defined?*

*Who designs your recruitment activities?*

- b) Who do you report to?

*Do outsiders have a say in your recruitment activities?*

*Does your unit receive any funding from external stakeholders?*

- c) What is the nature of your recruitment activities?

*What media do you use?*

*How big/small is your budget?*

- d) What areas of the country do you cover through your recruitment activities?

- e) Do you have any relationship with any other individuals or groups involved in similar activities within the University?

*Do you have membership of any provincial/national body(ies)?*

- f) How are your projects funded?

- g) Do you have any special database that you use?

*Who designed the database system?*

*Who has access to the database?*

*Is it linked to any organisational database?*

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS**

#### **QUESTIONS**

- 1. Who do you think should lead the recruitment function and/or carry out the school visits?*
- 2. In an environment where there are numerous groups engaged in the same activity; should there be a primary contact for the public? Who, in your view, should that be?*
- 3. If the various groups were then to work together, what would characterise such a partnership?*
- 4. What do you see as the focus of the various groups in terms of their recruitment functions?*
- 5. Would you say that the present arrangement serves the University well, is it accomplishing what the University wants?*
- 6. Is it possible for the groups to consolidate their various duties and work in a co-ordinated function?*

#### **Public Relations Officers' View**

- 1. The Schools Liaison team should working with PROs should lead the process. They should both make school visits.*
- 2. PROs should be allowed to identify sections of the market relevant to faculty offerings and be able to promote their faculty in ways they think appropriate. With proper co-ordination they (Schools Liaison & PROs) should be the primary people.*
- 3. PROs should be supported by Schools Liaison team in activities. That way we can save money and avoid duplication.*

Working together will also mean that we don't do separate things for faculties.

4. PROs report to the deans. They therefore have a responsibility to pursue goals set by the faculty and the faculty's marketing and publicity committee.
5. No. Schools Liaison is very outwardly
  - SL should provide promo material they think appropriate.
  - PRO should aim to achieve faculty priorities as opposed to placing University first.

### **Schools Liaison Team's View**

1. The Schools Liaison team should lead the recruitment process. They are a University-wide unit tasked with the promotion of the University of Natal and the publicity of the various degree programmes. It makes sense then if the Schools Liaison team is the one that leads the recruitment process and promotes the entire University.
2. Schools Liaison should be the primary contact with the schools community. Schools can only accommodate a limited number of appointments and so, there are a limited number of opportunities available for the University to market itself.
3. Extra recruiters should work through the SL and should be accompanied by the School Liaison team in cases where they are performing off campus activities. It is important that we speak with one voice and promote the entire University.
4. Extra recruiters should focus on on-campus activities. Extra recruiters are specialists. A specialist cannot attend to a big school group. They should then focus on campus based events that target special groups that attend campus-based activities.



5. No, we think that this present arrangement needs restructuring. People are doing different and separate things and the schools get confused sometimes.
6. Extra recruiters should carry general promotional material in addition to the programme/faculty specific promotional material. This way they can provide information about other offerings at the University should the prospective student want to find out about other options.

### **Special recruiters' View**

1. Schools Liaison Department
2. Special recruiting is very targeted and specialized and should therefore operate outside of the conventional recruitment. It has to operate independently from normal recruiters
3. Faculties are different and whilst the normal recruitment is important there are instances where they require a different approach to some programmes they offer that can best be served by a different and separate approach to recruitment.
4. Special recruitment is funded by corporate partners and the board of trustees require that targets are met.
5. Special recruitment is very different from normal recruiters
6. Teaming up with normal recruiters burdens the special recruiter and dilutes the work.

### **INFORMAL SEMINAR**

#### **Structure/Format**

##### **Informal**

Participants are broken up into three groups. Each group gets the set of questions. They choose their own style of reporting back their responses. They do not have to answer each question separately. Their response should however cover all the questions raised. The answers are captured.

#### **Topics of discussion**

1. If you had a magic wand, what would you change about the present recruitment process at the University?
2. What are your fears regarding the possible restructuring of the recruitment process?
3. If the restructuring process were to happen, what would you consider central features of the new recruitment model?
4. Do you have any knowledge of, in your opinion, an effective recruitment model in operation at any other institution or parts that work well?
5. What would an ideal recruitment model's purpose be?

6. Where does one locate recruitment within the larger organisation?
7. Who should manage it and what should be his/her main role?

- System diagnosis (reflecting on the cybernetic principles that should be obeyed according to the VSM).

Various tasks have to be undertaken in each part as described below.

### 5.5.2 System Identification

- As with any "unitary" methodology it is necessary initially to identify or determine the purpose(s) to be pursued.
- Taking the purpose as given, determine the relevant system for achieving the purpose. This is called the "system in focus". Remember that the purpose of a system is what it does and what the viable system does is done by System 1 (so it is System 1 that produces the "system in focus").
- Specify the viable parts of the System 1 of the system in focus.
- Specify the viable system of which the system in focus is part (wider systems, environment, etc.).

### 5.5.3 System Diagnosis

In general, draw upon cybernetic principles to carry out the following.

- Study the System 1 of the system in focus:
  - for each part of System 1 detail its environment, operations and localised management;
  - study what constraints are imposed upon each part of System 1 by higher management;
  - ask how accountability is exercised for each part, and what indicators of performance are taken;
  - model System 1 according to the VSM diagram.
- Study the System 2 of the system in focus:
  - list possible sources of oscillation or conflict between the various parts of System 1 and their environments and identify the elements of the system (the various System 2 elements) that have a harmonising or damping effect;
  - ask how System 2 is perceived in the organisation (as threatening or as facilitating).
- Study the System 3 of the system in focus:
  - list the System 3 components of the system in focus;
  - ask how System 3 exercises authority;
  - ask how resource bargaining with the parts of System 1 is carried out;
  - determine who is responsible for the performance of the parts of System 1;

- clarify what "audit" enquiries into aspects of System 1, System 3 conducts;
- understand the relationship between System 3 and the System 1 elements (is it perceived to be autocratic or democratic?) and find out how much freedom System 1 elements possess.
- Study the System 4 of the system in focus:
  - list all the System 4 activities of the system in focus;
  - ask how far ahead these activities consider;
  - question whether these activities guarantee adaptation to the future;
  - determine if System 4 is monitoring what is happening to the environment and assessing trends;
  - assess in what ways, if any, System 4 is open to novelty;
  - find out whether System 4 provides a management centre/operations room, bringing together external and internal information and providing an "environment for decision";
  - question if System 4 has facilities for alerting System 5 to urgent developments.
- Study the System 5 of the system in focus:
  - ask who is on "the Board" and how it acts;
  - assess whether System 5 provides a suitable identity for the system in focus;
  - ask how the "ethos" set by System 5 affects the "perception" of System 4;
  - determine how the "ethos" set by System 5 affects the System 3-System 4 homeostat (is System 3 or System 4 taken more seriously?);
  - investigate whether System 5 shares an identity with System 1 or claims to be something different.
- Check that all information channels, transducers and control loops are properly designed.

Diagnosis often leads to the discovery of violations of cybernetic principles. Some of the common faults found in organisations are presented below.

### 5.5.4 Frequent Faults

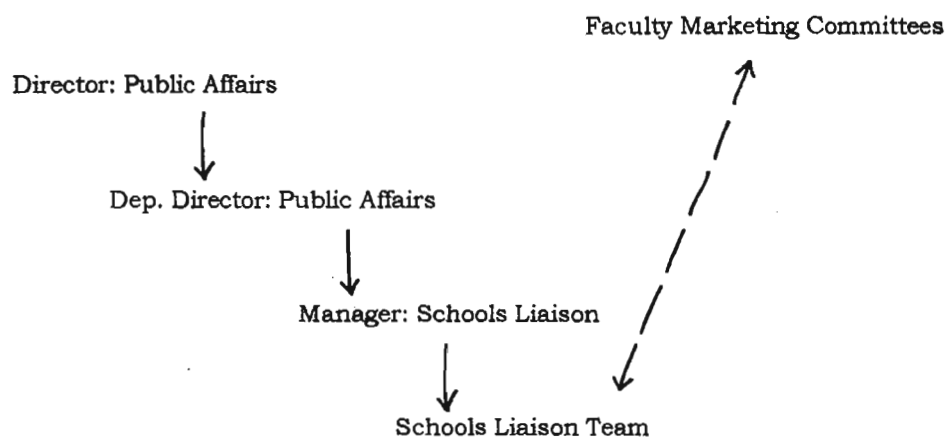
The following are some of the most common faults found in organisations as revealed by cybernetics.

- Mistakes are made in articulating different levels of recursion.
- The importance of certain parts of System 1 is not recognised, so they are not treated as viable systems and lack a localised management to tend to their affairs.

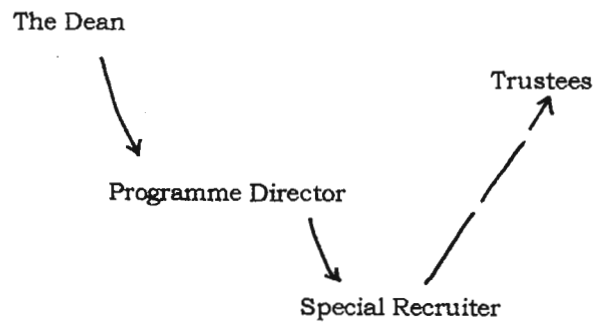
**APPENDIX 5**

**THE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OF RECRUITMENT UNITS**

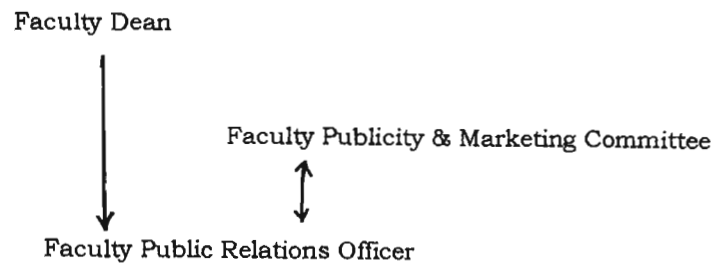
DVC Academic



**The Schools Liaison Unit**



**One Specialised Unit**



**The Faculty PROs Units**

# APPENDIX 6 THE RICH PICTURE

