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The experiences and perceptions of 6 NGO leaders on the role and value of formal and informal learning in leadership continuity in the NGO sector across 3 historical periods in South Africa

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ABSTRACT:

In this research study I explore the role and value of formal and informal learning in leadership continuity in South Africa. In order to do this I look at the experiences and perceptions of 6 NGO leaders in South Africa whom I locate within 3 historical periods. Within this context, I also explore the shifts in leadership and modes of learning, which I argue and based on my data analysis, were accompanied by broader shifts in the power relations in South Africa post 1994.

Based on my findings, I discovered that the NGO sector has experienced a leadership discontinuity further exacerbated by a disruption of learning processes with serious implications for transfer of knowledge, skills and experiences with a subtle undermining of a body of knowledge produced in the process of struggle for a true developmental practice in the interest of the poor and marginalized in what I conceptualized as the 1st historical period.

I highlight three informal modes of learning that were dominant in the 1st historical period namely, experiential learning, popular education and situated learning which became eroded in the 2nd and 3rd historical periods and substituted by more formal learning processes. My study found that in the latter part of the 3rd historical period there was a resurgence of more informal learning processes in line with an emergent and developing social movement that questioned the continued power imbalances in society.

In conducting this study my research methodology was informed by an interpretive and qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews with the 6 NGO leaders employed as the primary means of data collection.

In answering my main research question I found that effective leadership continuity to enhance sustainable organizations can best be facilitated through informal learning processes where, within a community of practice, these processes are more respected and valorised. I also found that formal learning processes will best be effective if it can be complementary to but not a substitute for these informal learning processes. I also found that the conflation of training with learning and the dualism between formal and informal learning are not very helpful in understanding leadership development and continuity in the NGO sector.

Another important finding that this research study highlights is the importance of appreciating the dynamic interrelationship between the macro power alignments represented by the state and the

economy and the micro power relationships represented by leadership and learning within a community of practice.

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I also wish to extend a special thanks to my close family, friends and the many clients I am privileged to work with in my profession and who, unbeknown to many of them, inspired the writing and completion of this thesis.

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DEDICATION:

This mini-dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Cecil Julie and my mother Dorothy Julie.

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Rationale for this research study:

I have been active in the non-government (NGO) sector in South Africa for about 28 years starting out as a volunteer, field worker, organiser, programmes manager and later as director. I have also served on many NGO boards and now practice as a development practitioner within the sector.

During these years of involvement I have tried to develop a sensitive understanding of the challenges that NGO type organisations face. I recently wrote a book (Julie, 2006) that captured my experiences to make it available to a broader audience. The central focus of the book is the role of leadership in building sustainable social sector based organisations. The response to my book was overwhelmingly positive and this prompted me to develop the question that informs my main research question.

According to Barnard (2008: 1) there is a current perception and acknowledgement that NGOs in South Africa are in crisis. Although this crisis is manifesting itself as a funding crisis or lack of resources, my view is that the crisis can also be viewed as a *leadership crisis*. It is my view is that the NGO sector has experienced a *leadership discontinuity* further exacerbated by a disruption of mainly *informal learning processes with serious implications for transfer of knowledge, skills, experience and a lack of valuing of a body of knowledge produced in the process of struggle against apartheid* for a true developmental practice in the interest of the poor and marginalised.

My view is that this process of discontinuity, coupled with a *lack of clear articulation of a development theory and practice*, created the ideological space for sections of the NGO leadership to be influenced by ideas and practices that are diametrically opposed to the fundamental purpose of social and economic transformation. The shifts in learning processes, from predominantly informal- and non-formal- to formal learning as well as the contents of learning were also influenced by fundamental shifts in power relations in the broader South African society.

Informed by the above my main research question is:

What kind of learning and knowledge is important in leadership continuity in the NGO sector?

My sub-questions are:

- Based on their experiences, how do leaders perceive what learning and knowledge are important?
- What type of knowledge do leaders bring with them to the sector and to what extent is that knowledge being valued and used?
- How do leaders acquire their leadership skills, experience and knowledge?
- How do leaders define learning about leadership?
- What are the facilitative or constraining factors in the transfer of knowledge, experiences, skills and expertise?
- What training do leaders in the NGO sector undergo?
- How do leaders believe leaders learn about leadership?

I answer these questions by looking at the experiences and perceptions of 6 NGO leaders on the role and value of formal- and informal learning in leadership continuity.

My aim in this chapter is to clearly contextualise my research question by presenting a brief overview of the development of the NGO sector in its global and South African context. I am providing this overview to indicate how the South African NGO sector, despite its relative isolation and insulation from the rest of the world during the apartheid era, was also affected by the global influences and discourses. I am also doing this to show the kind of challenges that leaders in the sector faced before and post 1994 and how these challenges may have impacted on *how* (method) and *what* (content) they had to learn.

I will first define the NGO as a social formation and then proceed to provide the overview. In the process of developing this overview I will also attempt to show how my understanding of this development of the NGO sector as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) within the African and specifically the South African context influenced my conceptual framework and research methodology in chapter two and three respectively.

Defining the NGO sector:

According to Rockey (2001) the NGO sector is often described as those organisations that are independent from government and are not profit making in its operations, with an agenda of social transformation as its ultimate purpose. Rockey (2001:130) states that the term non-profit organisation has been developed to be all-encompassing and include community based organisations, trade unions,

church groups, stokvels and school committees. For the purposes of this thesis I will prefer to use the description of non-government organisation (NGO).

The Non-Profit Directorate (1999: cited in Le Roux, 2005: 19-20) defines NGO activities that can encapsulate issues such as poverty alleviation, protecting human rights, skills development, advocating for change of certain policy frameworks, research around innovative ways to address social problems, service delivery on behalf of government or funding agencies that provide financial or material support, gender mainstreaming, combating HIV/Aids, building organizational capacity, etc.

Background to the NGO sector globally and in South Africa:

European origins of the NGO sector:

According to Rockey (2001: 129) within the European context the anti-slavery movement in England in the late 18th century provided the initial impetus for the rise of what we today know as the NGO movement. This movement gave rise to various “political associations” that eventually led to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840. Subsequently the World Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations (YMCA’s) was founded in 1855 and then followed by the establishment of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1863.

Trade unions in England emerged later in the 19th century as a leading force in the NGO movement. Rapid industrialisation with its consequent social and economic challenges, have created specific areas of need within societal structures. It is these needs that the NGO sector tries to address. According to Rockey the growth of the sector globally has been very substantial over the last decade fuelled by increasing concerns over issues such as the environment, globalisation, unemployment and poverty, human rights violations and more recently the HIV/Aids pandemic (Ibid).

The NGO sector in the African context:¹

The emergence of the NGO sector in Africa can be traced back to the period of colonisation and the role of the missionaries in conquest. Manji and O’Coill (2003: 1-2) state that the role of NGOs in ‘development’ represents a continuity of the work of their predecessors, missionaries and voluntary organisations that cooperated in Europe’s colonisation and control of Africa.

¹ The picture sketched here is very general and I accept unevenness and nuances within certain countries may have prevailed. The purpose here is to indicate a general trend that emerged captured in the 3 periods as outlined.

According to them NGOs can either subscribe to an “*emancipatory agenda*” or a “*paternalistic role*” in development (my emphasis) (Ibid). Although not stated explicitly, the authors identify at least 3 major periods within which this colonisation and control evolved.

(a) The 1st period: colonialism

This period was characterised by the colonial period of war and conquest with the missionaries playing a significant role in controlling the expectations and behaviour of black² people. The popular struggles by the indigenous population led to political independence for many countries starting in the 1960’s (Manji and O’Coill, 2003: 2).

(b) The 2nd period: neo-colonialism

The post independence or *2nd period* landed these missionary and charitable groups in a crisis since the popular political movements derived their legitimacy and credibility from a desire to end social injustice. Manji and O’Coill (2003: 4) raise an important point about how these missionary and charitable groups managed to survive after independence and found the answer in the changing discourse around ‘development’.

While the idea and practice of ‘community development’ existed within the colonial period, voluntary bodies did not represent themselves or their work in terms of ‘development’ until much later when the US Government and the international agencies began to distinguish half the world as ‘underdeveloped’ and to describe ‘development’ as a universal goal.

It is important to note that the discourse around ‘development’ was quite different to how NGOs with social transformation as an objective would interpret and understand it. If development is understood as a *process that cannot be delivered* to people, is *innate to any individual or society*, must lead to *more control over one’s destiny* and a *fundamental shift in the power relationships*, then the dominant discourse was a total distortion of this process (my emphasis) (Taylor, 2000: 5). The dominant discourse about development was framed “with a vocabulary of charity, technical expertise, neutrality, and a deep paternalism” (Manji and O’Coill, 2003: 6).

² The term ‘black’ is used here to include all those groups disenfranchised by the apartheid government i.e. Africans, ‘Coloureds’ and Indians.

(c) The 3rd period: neo-liberalism³ and globalization

According to Manji and O’Coill (2003) after political independence the new African rulers were not so eager to extend the benefits of political office to everyone. The popular movements, associations and trade unions that brought these rulers to power were now seen as an obstacle to progress. The language of emancipation and denial of rights was now replaced with ‘poverty’ and ‘basic needs’. The difference may seem trite, but the implications are huge for development practice. As Manji and O’Coill (2003: 7) state, the first approach

demanded popular mobilisation, the other inspired pity and preoccupations about the **technically ‘correct’** approaches to **‘poverty alleviation’** (my emphasis).

According to Manji and O’Coill (2003: 9) the 1970’s saw major political and economic upheaval and a growth in poverty and inequality in many African countries. This was fuelled by the imposition of structural adjustment programmes by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Popular uprising and demonstrations that ensued were violently suppressed. This widespread opposition forced the multilateral and bilateral aid agencies to reconsider their approach to promoting their version of ‘development’. The outcome of this process was,

the ‘good governance’ agenda of the 1990’s and the decision to co-opt the NGOs and other civil society organisations to a repackaged programme of welfare provision, a social initiative that could be more accurately described as a programme of social control (Manji and O’Coill, 2003: 10).

Manji and O’Coill (2003: 12) note that some NGOs may have allowed themselves to be influenced by the language of ‘good governance’. According to them the precondition for NGOs’ adoption of this neo-liberal cause was merely a “coincidence in ideologies rather than a deliberate plan” (my emphasis). Instead of coercive means to uphold an unjust social order, the proponents of neo-liberalism saw an opportunity to perpetuate this order through consensual means.

The evolution of the South African NGO sector:

³ Neo-liberalism is a political ideology that believes in the centrality of market forces as the driver of economic growth with minimal intervention from the state. It advocates free trade, deregulation, downsizing of government, privatization of public services and cutbacks in welfare spending. When this growth is secured then the poor will benefit through a trickle down effect (Ruiters: 2007: 123)

It is within the context of the global developments and discourses in the development industry, that one can view the evolution of the South African NGO sector as a community of practice in order to understand the current crisis and how it has influenced leadership and learning. The same patterns can be discerned of social and economic control as outlined above. For this reason I have conceptualised a typology of 3 historical periods in the South African context with the 1st period starting in 1973 and the final one ending in 2008 when the data for this study was collected. This also helped me to identify my respondents as I discuss in chapter 3.

Brief background to the 3 historical periods:

In 1652 South Africa was colonised by the Dutch and later the English. This period of colonisation led to many wars of land dispossession of the indigenous population. The discovery of gold, diamonds and other valuable minerals created the need amongst the colonialists for a unified economy. This led to The Boer War in the early 1900's between the English colonisers and the local Dutch who trekked north into South Africa where they established Boer Republics. This war that started in 1899 and lasted for 4 years led to a compromise deal that culminated in the Act of Union in 1910. The entire local black population was denied political rights and the land dispossession intensified culminating in the Land Act of 1913. This led to the emergence of African political mobilisation and organisation with a relentless struggle for a democratic dispensation. In 1948 a nationalist wing took power and entrenched the policy of separate development. According to Camay and Gordon (2007) the struggle against this policy reached a climax during the 1960's when the major political actors were banned, imprisoned or forced into exile with a political lull that prevailed between 1964 and 1973.

(a) 1st Historical Period: 1973 – 1990⁴

The political and economic situation:

After the 2nd world war South Africa experienced enormous economic growth in the 1960's. However, in 1978 the country experienced a deepening recession that resulted in its worst economic crisis since the great depression in the 1920's. The collapse of colonial regimes in Mozambique and Angola developed a renewed confidence amongst local activists to confront the apartheid state. This

⁴ This periodisation is based on my own experiences in the sector and that reflected by my respondents. The aim here is to indicate that there may have been qualitative differences based on the challenges faced by the leaders in the sector in each period. My understanding is that the 1st period was characterized by opposition and protest against the apartheid system; during the 2nd period the emphasis was on reconstruction and the need to develop an enabling environment through relevant policy design and implementation; the 3rd and current period is characterized by the effects of these policies on the intended recipients.

confidence was fuelled by one of the biggest strike waves in manufacturing industry since the second world-war in 1973 in Durban that spread to major centres in South Africa until 1978. Out of this strike wave was born a new trade union movement. It was baptised as the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and subsequently the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

In 1976 the country was engulfed by the biggest rebellion of high school students against the forced imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. This period also saw the emergence of the Black People's Convention (BPC) with its ideology of black consciousness. The emergence of the BPC was a forerunner of the more modern NGO post 1970 (Matiwana and Walters, 1986: 25-26).

South Africa experienced deepening crises manifested in various political uprisings in 1980, 1985 and 1989. The military strangulation of the South African defence force in Angola led to the independence of Namibia in 1989 and later a negotiated settlement in South Africa (Camay and Gordon: 2007).

The role of NGOs

It was during this period that NGOs mobilised against the apartheid state with some NGOs acting as front organisations for banned political parties. Various struggles were waged during this time such as consumer boycotts, school boycotts, worker strikes and the boycott of the Tri-cameral Parliament⁵. Out of these struggles emerged alliances of popular organisations such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the National Forum (Matiwana and Walters, 1986: 33). During this period many NGO leaders had an activist background with affiliation to a certain political tendency.

According to Soal (2001: 3) it was during this time that NGOs were flooded with external funding with very little or no concern for accountability from donors. Funding during this period came mainly from church based sources or international donors who entered the NGO scene during this time. For example the Foundation for Social Development, initiated by the Urban Foundation, was primarily funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Camay and Gordon: 2007).

⁵ In line with the ideology of separate development, this parliament catered for the White, 'Coloured' and Indian population groups as defined by the apartheid population register.

(b) 2nd Historical Period: 1991-2000

The political and economic situation:

During this period political parties were unbanned and a new political climate prevailed. In 1994 a new democratic government was elected by popular vote. NGOs started to re-evaluate their role vis-à-vis the state and many leaders left the sector to join the new democratic government. The United Democratic Front (UDF) was dissolved and a process of demobilisation of popular organisations (Ngwane, 2007: 178) was embarked upon. The political negotiations that led to the political compromise happened with almost no input and participation from these popular organisations. This was in stark contrast to their previous role in the struggle years where consultation and participatory democracy were embedded in the process and practice of struggle (Ibid).

A new economic policy called the Growth Economic and Redistribution Policy (GEAR) was put in place in 1996 that replaced the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) launched in 1994 (Gentle, 2007: 135). GEAR was to be South Africa's version of the structural adjustment programme imposed on other African countries in the 2nd period as outlined above.

The role of NGOs

A more challenging donor environment prevailed with more emphasis now on professionalism, accountability, transparency, effective management, good governance, legal compliance, measuring impact and project planning. Existing funding was only made available with strict conditions. The logical framework planning method imported from the USA (Pentagon) via Germany (popularly dubbed the ZOPP method) became prominent with many leaders sent for training to master this tool (Reeler, 2008: 5). This planning model schooled leaders in how to plan their programmatic work according to a strict formula grounded in an outcomes based approach.

Many NGOs collapsed unable to adapt to the new conditions. Those organisations that acted as front NGOs for banned political parties died a natural death. Funding internationally slowly dried up as more donors decided to exit or channel funding through the now legitimate state. Local funding sources opened up to mitigate the effects of the funding exit and more international governments preferred to enter into bilateral funding agreements (government to government) such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Union (EU). Local funding sources were marred by bureaucratic red tape, inefficiency and lack of will. NGOs were now encouraged to develop 'income generating' strategies to mitigate the effects of a developing funding

crisis. To meet the challenges many NGOs started to network and established forums. The South African NGO Coalition (SANGOCO) was a product of this networking (Camay and Gordon: 2007).

A new policy framework for NGOs was developed with the most important element being the Non-profit Organisation Act. This NPO Act required all NGOs to register themselves as a precondition to access external funding and to compel NGOs to legally comply with certain provisions such as submission of annual narrative and financial reports to promote accountability.

At the same time new NGOs and CBOs⁶ started to emerge focusing on the new challenges such as HIV/Aids, poverty alleviation, women and child abuse, youth development, counselling, skills training, gender mainstreaming, capacity building, etc. A new cohort of leaders entered the sector, at times unaware of the lessons of the previous period. Social movements with a more overt political agenda started to gain more prominence as the social and economic crisis deepened with service delivery protests becoming sustained and spreading.

Some of the leaders in this period with years of experience in organisational management migrated to government and the corporate sector whereas others having achieved formal qualifications started their own businesses or became consultants to the sector (Kaplan, 1994).

(c) 3rd Historical Period: 2002 – 2008

Whereas the previous period was marked by *uncertainty* about how the state will relate to NGOs as well as uncertainty about the effects of various policy frameworks, this period was marked by awareness and the experience of the effects of the policy frameworks on the poor and the marginalised.

The political and economic situation:

Despite the ruling African National Congress (ANC) increased majority at the 1999 election polls, divisions deepened inside the party culminating in a change of leadership at its Polokwane conference in December 2007.

⁶ Non-government organizations (NGOs) are regarded as more service oriented and professional serving a broader community whereas community based organizations (CBOs) are regarded as more locally based and less professional.

Meanwhile every statistical report⁷ confirmed the widening gap between rich and poor with South Africa being the most unequal country in the world after Brazil. This deepening social and economic crisis and its effects on the poor led to intensified service delivery protests and finally spilled over into the xenophobic attacks⁸ in early 2008 (Hough: 2008).

The role of NGOs

The funding crisis deepened with a myriad of NGOs collapsing, some of them staffed by highly experienced and professional people. According to research by the Centre for Civil Society only two percent of NGOs would remain sustainable in the long term.⁹ Frustrations with state subsidised donor agencies spilled over into anger and despondency amongst many NGOs. SANGOCO as a network organisation all but collapsed. New alliances with NGOs were forged especially in the HIV/Aids field.

During this period another cohort of leaders emerged who entered the NGO sector having left the corporate sector or state institutions. Others were unemployed and started NGOs as a survival strategy. The policy frameworks of the state were now largely in place with a sudden change in attitude towards the sector from a potential opposition (in the 2nd historical period) to a partner in service delivery. The state was also redefined itself as a ‘developmental state’¹⁰ as opposed to a welfare state. However the developmental principles, as I outlined earlier, on which this ‘developmental state’ basis its policies, are not clear.

A typology of the three periods:

1st Period: Political activism and informal learning processes dominant	2nd Period: Political uncertainty and bias towards formal learning processes emerge	3rd Period: Awareness of policy implications; entrenchment of formal learning processes
Political and economic crisis in SA; focus on activism; trade unions rebuilding; UDF and National Forum launched to coordinate local struggles; SA isolation deepens; war	Political compromise; new democratic government; new policy frameworks; GEAR adopted; popular democratic organisations demobilised; NGO networks	Deepening social and economic crisis; service delivery protests intensify; social movements gain prominence; xenophobic attacks; deepening divisions in ruling party;

⁷ Sunday Times, *Business Section*, 20 November 2005, p.1

⁸ Frustrated South Africans in black townships physically attacked fellow Africans from other countries.

⁹ Cited by University of Stellenbosch Business School, Mail and Guardian, 5 May 2007

¹⁰ A definition of what defines this ‘developmental’ state is not readily available.

<p>in Angola a turning point; learning in action; informal learning dominant; learning as participation in struggle; ample funding available; struggle sector vs. state subsidised welfare sector; male dominated; the ‘development’ discourse enters SA; leadership training offered by churches; a strong indigenous NGO movement become entrenched</p>	<p>emerged, foreign funding dries up; local funding sources open up; focus on ‘income generation’, leadership exodus to government; new leadership enters sector; new language of ‘good governance’, ‘capacity building’ and accountability; many NGOs collapse; formal learning become more dominant and leaders flock to universities to validate learning</p>	<p>crisis for NGO sector deepens, more NGOs closing down; new leadership networks emerged; revival of SANGOCO; a new generation of leaders enter; female leadership dominance; developmental state’; NGOs seen as partners in service delivery; split in ruling party formalised; formal learning processes become entrenched</p>
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Summary:

This then, is the context within which the NGO sector as a community of practice finds itself. The reality that confronts the leadership is an evolution of an NGO sector from a predominantly *activist* and *collectivist* culture to a more *individualistic* and *materialistic* culture. The dominant mode and content of learning mirrored this fundamental shift. The exit of the 1st generation of leadership and entry of two generations of leadership facilitated this culture shift, a shift that was also influenced by the shift in power relations in broader society.

Based on my experience of the sector and reading on the history of NGOs, I am proposing to understand the sector through 3 historical periods that can be identified with the movement of leaders in and out of the sector in each period. Each generation of leadership faced different qualitative challenges that impacted on the continuity of leadership with implications for transfer of knowledge, skills and experiences.

I have introduced this typology also as a way to explore and understand leadership and learning. I discuss its role in my methodology in chapter three and I draw on it again in my analysis in chapter four. I turn now to chapter two, in which I discuss my literature review and conceptual framework.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In chapter one I explored the NGO sector and showed how it evolved and the particular challenges that the leaders faced. In this chapter I will set out to develop my conceptual framework which emerged inductively during the reading of my data. It made me realize that the following was important:

- Focusing on the practice and theory of leadership as part of a key focus of this research.
- A focus on three fundamental approaches to learning namely informal-, non-formal- and formal learning and then specifically explore three theories of informal learning namely experiential learning, critical cultural perspective and situated learning.

Literature review

Before exploring my conceptual framework however, I need to locate my research study which I found more relevant and applicable within the field of workplace learning due to its focus on leadership and learning within the NGO sector as a community of practice.

Fenwick (2001: 4) provides a definition by stating that workplace learning is about

...human change or growth that occurs primarily in activities and contexts of work, however it is defined and located.

According to Fenwick (2001: 5) the discourses on workplace learning can be located within the post-Fordist shifts that took place within the nature of work. These shifts have been characterized by workplaces that have previously been highly regulated, supervised with routine and repetitive work with an emphasis on manual labour. In the post-Fordist era the nature of work started to shift to more knowledge based work with workplaces becoming more flexible, with flexible structures, remuneration and also learning. All of this is regarded as necessary for companies to remain competitive. In this scenario workers are expected to be responsive, adaptive and transferable with work structures becoming more fluid, insecure and adaptive to consumer demands and changing markets.

According to Foley (1999) all the above happens in the macro context of globalization, an economic system characterized by overproduction, overcapacity and the integration of economic markets at a global level. A consequence of this development has been the privatization of public assets, casualization of labour with permanent workers more and more reduced to temporary workers to reduce labour costs as well as processes of deregulation to promote the rapid and free movement of capital on a global scale. This process has been facilitated by technological innovation and advances in communication.

According to Fenwick (2001: 4-5) with the shift towards knowledge based work, emphasis is placed on the continuous production of knowledge and innovation. This, it is argued, has become pivotal for companies in maintaining a competitive edge to help them survive in the new milieu (see also Usher and Solomon, 1999: 159). Within this context the new workplace is presented as a shift away from “command-and-control” structures to more “self-directed teams”. Previously highly regulated workplaces with mostly routine work have now presumably been transformed into “empowering, creative communities of learning”.

In this context the role of the individual self is highlighted. Workers are expected to see constant change as an immutable reality, accept insecure and flexible employment as well as the need for continuous improvement in line with organizational objectives. The benefits for workers are presented as “personal development and productivity, fulfilling purpose, meaningful relationships, creativity and spiritual growth and happiness” (Ibid: 5).

Writing from a concern of how the experience of workers can be managed, Usher and Solomon (1999: 159) are very critical about what constitutes the new workplace and caution against a “seduction at work and by work” where the regulation and control of workers and their knowledge are no longer so visible. They warn against the conflation of work and learning where the private space of learning has been absorbed within the public space of work with the potential for surveillance and regulation of workers. Although mindful of the liberating potential of experiential learning, they also warn against its abuse since it intersects with the discourse of workplace reform where the management of experience plays an important role in shaping the way workers think and behave (Usher and Solomon, 1999: 162).

Billet (2002) argues against a view (Wenger, 1998) that perceives workers simply as passive recipients of knowledge in the workplace and highlights the importance of “co-participation”. According to him workplaces are not just “benign environments” but highly contested spaces. Citing theorists such as Engestrom and Middleton (1996) and Cobb (1998), he advances a view of learning and the production of knowledge as not a one-way process but “reciprocal albeit complex and contested.” He is critical of views that present communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1996) as peaceful and friendly environments marked by shared understanding and mutual support. According to him the level of participation in a workplace depends on how workers are invited to participate and the perceived benefits they believe they will derive from participation. This participation is also influenced by the standing of the worker in the workplace. Billet identifies various personal and institutional factors that may impact on workers’ ability to participate. Citing various theorists and their particular focus within a community of practice, he raises the issue of values (Hodges, 1998), status of employment, i.e. whether they are full- or part-time workers (Bernhardt, 1999), their involvement in teams and the status of those teams, (Darrah, 1996; Hull, 1997) and the personal objectives and work objectives of a worker (Darrah, 1996). The shifting relationships between workers and their representatives, supervisors and management also determine levels of participation.

Hodges (1998) highlighted the importance of “dis-identification” where the values of workers can come into conflict with that of the community of practice. I found this an interesting perspective since my respondents were mostly motivated by their values to join the NGO sector and became uncomfortable with the values that penetrated the sector in the 2nd and 3rd historical periods. I also found the perspective of Darrah (1995 cited in Billet, 2002) interesting since she raises the issue of who holds power within a community of practice and how that determines the level of participation, a point that also emerged in my analysis.

I found Billet’s views interesting and very relevant for my study which focuses on how learning about leadership happens within the NGO sector as a community of practice. As I pointed out in my analysis there are various role players in the NGO sector as a community of practice such as volunteers (paid and unpaid), permanent and temporary workers, beneficiaries, external auditors, board members, consultants and other service providers, government and external donors, all with a different standing in the community of practice. This shifting relationships and alliances between all these role players also influence what (content) is learnt and how (mode) the learning happens. Who holds power is a big determinant in relation to the above.

Conceptual framework

Now that I have located my study in the previous section where I drew on some key concepts, I now turn to my conceptual framework where I outline various theories of leadership and learning as they link to my main research question.

Part 1: Theories of leadership practice

The field of leadership theory is very broad. During my review of the literature, I discerned at least two approaches within this broad field namely a business or corporate approach and a more humanist or social approach. I found these distinct approaches very interesting since it is commonly assumed in the literature on leadership that what applies in the corporate sector can also apply in the social sector (Greenleaf, 1998; Kouzes and Posner, 1990; Covey, 1990; Du Pree, 1989; Tichy, 1997). Hence, little distinction is made between leadership practice in social sector organizations and that within corporates. Within the corporate approach the focus is mainly on qualities of vision, attitude, serving, relationship to subordinates, leaving a legacy, building standards, modeling exemplary behaviour, etc.

During my data analysis I picked up a great concern amongst my respondents that in the 2nd historical period, donors exerted pressure on NGOs to become more professional. However, this shift towards professionalism was conflated with corporatism, i.e. for NGOs to become more like businesses. Although my respondents found this pressure problematic, I sensed that not all of them were able to clearly articulate the fundamental reasons why. Collins (2006) comments about this tendency:

We must reject the idea – well intentioned, but dead wrong – that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become “more like a business.” Most businesses – like most of anything else in life – fall somewhere between mediocre and good. Few are great. When you compare great companies with good ones, many widely practiced business norms turn out to correlate with mediocrity, not greatness. So then, why would we want to import the practices of mediocrity into the social sectors? (Collins, 2006: 1).

At a surface level there may not appear to be major differences between the corporate and social sector approach in terms of what leaders *must bring with them* in exercising the task of leadership. However when the *exercise of power* (Kaplan, 1998) is regarded as fundamental to the task of leadership, *how that power is defined and exercised* starts to separate the social sector from the

corporate approach to leadership. In grappling with this distinction I found the work of Collins (2006) very relevant for my study. Collins (2006) definition about leadership resonates very strongly with my own experiences and that of my respondents. He states:

True leadership only exists if people follow when they have the freedom not to (Collins, 2006: 13).

Collins (2006) emphasizes that when people follow because they have *no* choice then that is not leadership. As alluded to earlier this definition is informed by an understanding of *how* power is exercised. Collins differentiates between *executive leadership* (more prevalent in the corporate sector) and *legislative leadership* (more prevalent in the social sector). With the former enough power is concentrated within one individual to make the right decisions. However with the latter the opposite may apply where the leaders may not have enough power to make the most important decisions by him/herself. Legislative leadership has to depend upon

persuasion, political currency and shared interests to create the conditions for the right decision to happen (Collins, 2006: 11).

According to Collins social sector leaders have too many stakeholders on whom they depend for the effective exercise of power. I now proceed to explore the views of Kaplan (1998) on what defines leadership from a humanist perspective.

According to Kaplan (1998: 1) leadership is a discipline in its own right. He emphasizes that there is no set of techniques, rules or series of commandments with which a leader can arm him/herself and be assured of success. A leader may respond to the same events differently from time to time. What may work today may become obsolete tomorrow. Leaders operate in a world of ambiguity and cannot just follow hard and fast rules.

Kaplan highlights a very important aspect of leadership development that is often downplayed, namely self-development. For him “self-development, rather than training courses or lists of skills, is the path required of the leader.” For Kaplan (1998: 4)

There is no substitute for working on oneself, for knowing oneself...questioning everything, for taking nothing for granted, for looking beneath and behind the skills and techniques one is taught, the underlying paradigms, so that one obtains mastery over them, freedom to challenge and adapt and re-

fashion. One should continually question and play with received knowledge in order to keep the concepts one uses alive.

Continuing with the importance of self-development Kaplan (1998) stresses how this can help leaders to become more versatile to

respond to different situations differently, rather than responding to all situations in the same way (Ibid).

I found Kaplan's ideas interesting since it resonates very strongly with a key principle of knowledge transfer in situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1998) which I address later in this conceptual framework. Situated learning questioned the idea of knowledge transfer and prefers to see the application of knowledge as that which is appropriate to a particular context.

An unexplored element of leadership development has been "eldership". According to Arnold Mindell (1995: 184) these are men and women of great wisdom that can only develop over years of experience. I found this idea interesting since it emerged strongly during my interviews with respondents. According to Mindell eldership is a higher form of leadership. This concept is later linked to the role of masters or "old timers" as expounded by the community of practice theory.

Succession is also an important element of leadership. According to Drucker (1990: 20) the final test of true leadership lies not in the organization but outside of it. That means that while leading inside the organization, leaders will never know whether they have been successful or not. According to him what leaders leave behind is the true test of leadership. Creating the conditions for the reproduction of the organization is the ultimate test of leadership. The fact that the role of the leader is always temporary informs the process of succession.

In the above section I have tried to show the difference between leadership practice from a corporate and humanist perspective. I have also tried to focus on elements that are important in leadership development and continuity within organizations. I now proceed to explore different modes of learning.

Part 2: Informal, non-formal and formal learning

Central to my thesis question is the role and value of informal, non-formal and formal learning to leadership development in the NGO sector. I now proceed to critically unpack these concepts and explore various theoretical perspectives on the subject. Given that I am particularly interested in how NGO leaders learn about the practice of leadership within a community of practice with its own culture and history (as outlined above) in this thesis, I feel this is important to discuss.

According to Schugurensky (2006: 165) informal learning refers to learning

that occurs outside of educational institutions, or the courses or workshops offered by educational institutions.

He makes an important observation that informal learning can also take place within a formal- or non-formal setting. He feels strongly that this form of learning has been and still is marginalized (Ibid).

Informal learning can therefore be regarded as learning that derives from people's participation in everyday activities. This learning is not structured, may be intentional, unintentional, incidental or tacit. This learning can happen in formal and informal context, including workplaces which are the focus of my research (Walters, 1998; Millar, 2005; Colley, 2002; Livingstone, 2001). According to Foley (2001) people may learn deliberately and formally but learning will mostly be informal and incidental which he regards as unplanned, tacit and very powerful.

For Schugurensky (2006: 166-167) knowledge is not predetermined but continuously created and contested. According to him there may be no age, class, gender or other restrictions due to its voluntary nature. The content may be flexible and be defined by what the learners bring to the process instead of being predetermined in a prescriptive manner. Learning is regarded as a continuous and life long process involving all aspects of life and not as a means of upward social mobility to access material wealth. It is also all pervasive and can literally happen anywhere. It can be planned or incidental or self-directed.

Another category of learning Schugurensky (2006: 164) brings up is non-formal learning which he described as "outside the formal schools system, and are usually short-term and voluntary". Non-formal learning he reminds us is governed by "a curriculum with various degrees of rigidity and

flexibility” (Ibid: 164). It can also take place with or without a teacher. Walters (1998: 1) remind us that from an educational viewpoint, the distinction between non-formal and formal learning are not always helpful because the boundaries are blurred. However, Eraut (2000:12) challenges this notion by arguing that the use of the informal label is not always useful. According to him the term informal can be

associated with so many other features of a situation – such as dress, discourse, behaviour, diminution of social differences – that its colloquial application as a descriptor of learning contexts may have little to do with learning per se.

Resnick (cited in Swansick, 2005: 860) defines formal learning as

that which takes place in an institution as a result of instruction, an individual process, involving the purely mental activity of manipulating symbols resulting in the production of generalized concepts.

Referring to Knowles and Tough, Brookfield (1986: 149) explains how they have dispelled the false dichotomy of formal learning being more superior to self-directed learning in informal settings. According to them formal learning is regarded as rational, purposeful and effective whereas informal learning is regarded as ineffective, serendipitous and inferior. According to Walters (1998: 1) those who hold power in society determines what kinds of knowledge to valorize. I was interested in the ideas of Walters and Brookfield since my respondents expressed an overwhelming bias towards modes of informal learning in their leadership development.

Part 3: An exploration of three learning theories

In this section I will explore the following theories:

- (a) Experiential learning
- (b) Critical Cultural Perspective
- (c) Situated learning

The purpose of this exposition is not to unpack every element of the following theories but to identify those elements that can be linked to my research question namely:

What kind of learning and knowledge is important in leadership continuity to enhance sustainable organisations in the NGO sector?

In exploring these theories I have decided to start with experiential learning and then proceed to discuss the critical cultural perspective and situated learning. Whereas the former highlights the role of the individual and experience in the process of knowledge construction, the other two focus on the role of the individual within a collective context. I found situated learning especially relevant since the individual is placed within a community of practice at the centre of the learning process. I found this theory more useful in answering my research question and also because it resonated strongly with the experiences and perceptions of my respondents.

(a) Experiential learning:

During my interviews with my respondents all of them confirmed the role of experience in their development as leaders in the sector, especially in the 1st historical period. I therefore decided to explore this theory as part of my theoretical framework.

Experiential learning is based on learning through a process of reflection, i.e. reflection by the learner on lived experience. The experience is then interpreted and generalized to form mental structures. These mental structures are knowledge that is stored in memory as concepts and can be represented, expressed, and transferred to new situations (Fenwick, 2001: 9).

The role of the individual is central in this theory as the agent that constructs his/her own knowledge by interacting with his/her environment. David Kolb, a prominent advocate of this theory developed a model to explain this process of knowledge and skill acquisition namely: confrontation among concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and then active experimentation. According to Brookes (2000: 3) this process can begin at any stage and is continuous, i.e. there is no limit to the number of cycles you can make in the learning situation. Without proper reflection we can simply continuously repeat our mistakes.

Underlying all experiential learning theories there is a basic assumption of

an independent learner, cognitively reflecting on concrete experience to construct new understandings, perhaps with the assistance of an educator, toward some social goal of progress or improvement (Fenwick, 2001: 7).

This tradition of learning strongly values the experiences of learners and advocates its celebration in the process of knowledge construction.

A key idea by Boud and Walker (1990) I found particularly relevant for my research is the concept of learning milieu that becomes the context within which a learner learns. Based on the periodisation of the sector as outlined in chapter one, I found their definition of the learning milieu very applicable since it resonates strongly with that of Ismail (2009) and Cooper (2005) when they highlight the importance of the macro context in researching learning which I refer to later in this chapter. According to Boud and Walker (1990: 66) the learning milieu refers to

the history, values and ideologies of the culture as well as the manifestations of these in particular events. Issues such as gender, race and class are all potentially significant elements of the milieu.

Another idea highlighted by Boud and Walker (1990: 68) is that of noticing which they describe as and “act of becoming aware of what is happening in and around oneself.” As an active process, noticing may be unintentional and unplanned and may happen at the most unlikely times.

I have been attracted to this idea of active noticing since my respondents all mentioned how they perceived the changes in the evolution of the sector in terms of change in values from collectivism to individualism and materialism. They also noticed a shift from experiential learning in the 1st period to more formal learning in the 2nd and 3rd period. Linked to this I also found the idea of naming the learning process (Griffin, 1987 cited in Boud and Walker, 1990: 69) interesting. Citing Boyd and Fales (1983) she explains that learners have more power over a situation if they are able to name what they notice. According to her the act of naming

is a way of making familiar, of translating into common language occurrences which are perceived to have some meaning (Ibid).

In his quest to understand workplace learning, Donald Schon (1983: 20) introduced the concepts of “reflection-on-action” and “reflection-in-action”. According to him practitioners

sometimes deal well with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict .

It was important for Schon that critical reflection happens so that nothing is taken for granted in the learning process. When people reflect critically, they ask critical questions about their actions, the beliefs that influenced their practice and what could constrain or facilitate the practice. He was very critical and challenged the

high road” of theoretical knowledge, technical rationality, over which universities hold authority (Schon, 1983: as cited in Fenwick, 2001: 12).

I found the above ideas very useful since it resonates with views expressed by my respondents about the sector which they reported was also rife with “*uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict*” as well as their critical gaze on the dominance of *theory* in knowledge production in the 2nd historical period embedded in the formal learning approaches.

Critiques of experiential learning:

Experiential learning theory has been challenged by a number of theorists. Usher and Edwards (1995) and Usher and Solomon (1999 cited in Cooper, 2005: 2) have criticized practices such as journaling or portfolios and the usurpation of workers experiential knowledge for human resource practices. These have been seen as ‘confessional’ i.e. learners disclosing a lot about themselves personally.

Experiential learning with its focus on individual reflection on experience also tends to individualize the learning process and fail to stress the importance of the collective nature of learning. The social dimensions of learning are ignored and the learner is removed from the social context. Where context is recognized (McGill and Weil, 1989: 246) it is seen more as a static space surrounding the individual rather than as an integral part of knowledge construction (Lave, 1996: 146).

(b) Critical Cultural Perspective (CCP)

The CCP is a form of experiential learning where power relations assume a central position in the knowledge production process. A branch of the CCP theory is the popular education model espoused by Paulo Freire. His educational approach sees man as an active enquirer instead of a passive recipient of the ideas of others. Key to his view of knowledge production is what he termed “praxis” or conscious action. According to him people are constantly in a process of action and reflection. Human beings are able to detach themselves from their natural and social environment and can act to change it (Walters, 1989: 87).

Freire (1972: 46) highlighted what he termed “banking education” where learners are perceived to be passive recipients of static knowledge. This approach to learning encourages a one-way dependence of the student upon the teacher. This leads to a memorizing and regurgitation of ‘facts’. A relationship of dependency is promoted that contradicts “authentic free thinking and real consciousness” (Ibid: 87). Instead of teachers teaching Freire promoted what he called a dialogue where the educator and learner are in constant search for knowledge together. The focus of this search is not just an intellectual activity but also action. For Freire

Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction by reconciling the poles of contradiction, so that both are simultaneously teachers and students (Freire, 1972: 46).

When this solution of roles take place then the teacher is no longer the one who teaches but can also be taught, i.e. the teacher can become the student and vice versa. They now enter into dialogue with each other and become collectively responsible for each others’ growth (Freire, 1972: 53).

Freire (cited in Smith, 2005: 2) insisted on “situating educational activity in the lived experience of participants...” An example of this is his work with people around literacy’s “that have the possibility of generating new ways of naming and acting in the world.”

Being able to name the world was considered important to those who have always worked with those who are marginalized and oppressed and who lack voice. Another important concept advanced by Freire was the idea of conscientization, i.e. the developing of a consciousness that have the power to change the world (Taylor, 1993: 52 cited in Smith, 2005: 2).

I have been particularly interested in the idea of naïve consciousness advanced by Freire (Kane: 2001) and described as a process when learners are uncritical of and accept what is being experienced. This acceptance according to Freire is related to the internalization of the dominant ideas in society (Kane, 2001: 37). My respondents from the 1st historical period raised the issue of foreign and harmful ideas that have penetrated the sector in the 2nd historical period as I pointed out in my contextual analysis. To address this naïve consciousness Freire proposed that those who struggle for social change step back and reflect critically on their experiences. In the process of

reflecting on their actions a link is developed between theory and practice, what Freire terms ‘praxis’ (Ibid).

Based on my on my data analysis and findings, there were two more ideas I found resonated strongly with the views of my respondents. Firstly, that the process of producing knowledge is socially and not individually based. It happens not from person to person but is the product of social interaction between people (Kane, 2001: 37). Secondly, that education can either lead towards liberation or domestication. The latter is when an established order is uncritically accepted (Ibid: 39). With the shift in the 2nd historical period towards more formal modes of learning, my respondents in the 1st and 2nd historical period alluded to the conformist role training programmes started to play within the sector as well as the emphasis on the individual nature of the learning process.

Critiques of Popular Education

Popular education as a theory of learning has not been free of criticism. One such criticism is that popular education examined oppression from a male perspective and ignored gender issues in oppressive structures (Paulsen, 2006: 27). In the spirit of further enriching Freire’s theory of education and writing from a feminist perspective, Weiler (1993: 132) states that people are multiply oppressed for e.g. a man can be oppressed by his boss and the man in turn can also oppress his wife. Weiler feels that this issue is not addressed adequately by Freire.

Another aspect of critique has been the eclecticism of Freire (Kane, 1990), i.e. that he borrowed from various ideological streams such as humanism, Marxism and Christianity and that he did not invent anything original in the development of his educational philosophy. It is for this reason that Freire’s ideas have been found to be attractive to all and sundry (Kane, 2001: 53). As Walters (1989: 91) states,

His eclecticism allows his work to be used by a wide range of people from very different philosophical perspectives.

However, citing Freire (1996: 144) Kane (2001) points out that he made it clear that his political leaning is to the left and that he was a staunch opponent of the rule of the market. According to him Freire’s wish was to see an end to the dictatorship of the market and the “perverse morality of profit” on which it is based (Kane, 2001: 54). I found this idea interesting since the adoption of discourses

foreign to the sector in the 2nd and 3rd historical period were linked to this ideology as I pointed out in my contextual analysis.

(c) Situated learning

In contrast to the experiential learning theorists that highlights the importance of individual reflection and learning as a cognitive process, the situated learning theorists such as Lave and Wenger (1996) highlights the importance of the *situation* in which learning occurs. According to Lave (1996: 149) the emphasis on individuals learning leads to a perception of individual failure in the learning process and the legitimatization of divisions of social inequality in society. Situated learning theorists emphasizes learning as

rooted in the situation in which a person participates, not in the head of that person as intellectual concepts produced by reflection, nor as inner energies produced by psychic conflicts. Knowing and learning are defined as engaging in changing processes of human activity in a particular community. Knowledge is not substance to be ingested and then transferred to a new situation, but part of the very process of participation in the immediate situation (Fenwick, 2001: 34).

In other words, according to the situated learning theorists, learning is less about mental processes that leads to knowledge production and more about how individuals participate with others within a particular community that provides the context for that learning to happen. This is referred to as a community of practice. Wenger (2007) defines a *community of practice* as

groups of people who share a passion for something that they know how to do and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, 2007: 1).

According to Lave and Wenger (1991: 98) a community of practice can also be just an “activity system” where participants are in common agreement about with what they do and the meaning it has in both their lives and that of the communities.

According to Fenwick (2001) the following themes emerged from this theory namely, individuals learn as they participate by interacting with the community, the tools at hand and the moment’s activity; knowledge emerge from these elements interacting; knowing and doing is closely linked;

individuals aim to become a full participant in the community of practice, not to learn *about* the practice (Fenwick, 2001: 35).

What I found interesting about this theory (Wenger, 1998) is its emphasis on shared, collective learning that is distributed and embedded in the rules of practice. The process of learning (i.e. the acquisition of knowledge, expertise, skills and discourses) is closely bound to the construction of an identity that reflects the competence of participants, both the explicit and tacit dimensions. Lave (1996) is critical with the equation of teaching and learning which she regards as a two-way process. As participants are shaped by the community of practice the community of practice shapes them (Wenger, 1998: 86). The idea of participants shaping the community and the community in turn shaping them was appealing to me since it echoed the view of one of my respondents in the 1st historical period.

A community of practice has three dimensions (Wenger, 1998: 95) namely, mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. Mutual engagement refers to the actions of people “whose meaning they negotiate with one another.” I would like to expand on this concept of the three dimensions referred to above, since my view is that the crisis within the sector can be linked to a breakdown of these three dimensions which I address in my analysis and findings.

Mutual engagement is the mutual relationships amongst participants and discovering what works and what does not work; finding out who is who and who knows what in the community. It is also about finding out what facilitates and what are constraints in the community and who you can get along with and who not. Mutual relationships can be harmonious or marked by conflict and tension.

A joint enterprise is about participants “aligning their engagement” with the community and learning how to become and hold each other accountable to the enterprise; it is about “struggling to define the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about” (Ibid).

A shared repertoire is about “renegotiating the meaning of various elements”. The breaking of old routines and creating new ones, production and adoption of tools, artifacts, representations, recording and recalling of events and inventing new terms, redefine and abandoning old ones and sharing of stories are all part of a shared repertoire. A shared repertoire or shared practice also refers to the

resources people develop reflected in experiences, stories and the ways in which they may address certain recurring problems (Wenger, 1998: 72 - 85).

Another key element of community of practice is that of “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 53) which is important because it explains how learning happens. I found this idea very interesting because it resonated strongly with the experiences of my respondents as revealed in my data presentation and analysis. This concept highlights a process where novices become competent in a community of practice through a process of observing and participating with more skilled or experienced workers. The novices move from being outsiders from the margins to being fully integrated participating members within the community of practice. Part of the process of participation and integration is the acquisition of a particular identity that is shaped by the social relations, rules and cultural values of the broader society. This is how Fenwick describes this process:

Newcomers start working at the margins first by observing, practicing a little, getting to know and interact with a few community members before they are gradually integrated into the networks of action (Fenwick, 2001: 35).

An idea I found very relevant about legitimate peripheral participation and linked to research conducted by Wenger (1998) amongst claim processors, was the concern amongst the latter about the *duration of formal training* to become fully competent in their practice. Wenger respond that it is not so much the duration of the formal training that is a problem but the difficulties these claim processors may experience “*in entering their new community of practice.*” According to him the newcomers needed to focus more on creating attention and building relationships with “*old-timers*” to allow them access to the community of practice. According to Wenger (1998: 100) the role of “*old-timers*” in integrating the newcomers into the community of practice, is not always recognized and valued.

Linked to the above I also found the idea of “*legitimate*” interesting since it involves a process where newcomers need to be accepted by their peers or “*old-timers*” as a precondition for *effectively* learning about the community of practice. According to Wenger, although learning will happen, its effectiveness can be constrained if a newcomer is made to feel unwelcome (Ibid: 101).

I found that the above ideas resonated strongly with comments by my respondents, especially with regards to the shift of foregrounding the formal training approach as a mode of learning in the 2nd historical period. Another respondent in the 3rd historical period highlighted the importance of her learning from mentors, which, in my view, is another way of referring to “*old timers*” in the sense that Wenger (1998) uses the term.

Another important concept highlighted by situated learning theorists is that of boundaries (connections that create bridges across communities of practice), and boundary practices (where people introduce elements of one practice into another). It also illuminates the fluidity and instability of the educator role, and points to the “*richly diverse field of essential actors*” (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 93) who – by virtue of being knowledge brokers in some sense or another – may step into this role at different times. I found this idea also interesting because of the number of stakeholders within the sector such as donors, volunteers, government, board members, etc. that all play a role, tacitly or explicitly in determining the agenda of learning about leadership.

According to this theory knowledge is not judged by what is “true” and “false” or what is “erroneous,” but by what is relevant and appropriate in a particular situation, who is supposed to know and apply knowledge as well as what to do once application of knowledge happens. (Lave and Chaiklin cited in Fenwick, 2001: 35). In view of this situated learning theorists find the concept of knowledge transfer highly problematic. According to Wilson (1993 cited in Fenwick, 2001: 35) “adults don’t learn *from* experience, they learn *in* it.

If we are to learn, we must become embedded in the culture in which the knowing and learning have meaning: conceptual frameworks cannot be meaningfully removed from their settings or practitioners.

Lave also questions the concept of knowledge as something that a person possesses. Instead she views what one knows more as “...doing rather than having something.”

“Knowing” is a relation among communities of practice, participation in practice, and the generation of identities as part of becoming part ongoing practice (Lave, 1996: 157).

Another idea that resonated strongly with my initial findings was the dualist view between formal and informal learning. Lave (1996) is very skeptical about this dichotomy based on her research amongst

the Via and Gola tailors in Liberia. According to her it is “counterproductive to compartmentalize ...so-called informal from formal educational endeavor” (Lave, 1996: 161).

Since my thesis focuses partly on the issue of generations of leaders who entered the sector and leadership continuity, I was interested in Wenger’s (1998: 99) explanation of “generational continuities”. His view is that

The existence of a community of practice does not depend on a fixed membership. People move in and out. An essential aspect of any long-lived practice is the arrival of new generations of members.

What interested me about the above idea is that Wenger (1998) does not view continuity as good and discontinuity as bad, a view strongly echoed by one of my respondents in the 1st historical period. According to Wenger

that practice can be shared across generational discontinuities precisely because it already is fundamentally a social process of shared learning (Ibid).

According to Wenger (1998: 94-95) constant change that may lead to discontinuity is an integral part of a community of practice.

This combination of discontinuity and continuity creates a dynamic equilibrium that can be construed...as stable and as the same practice.

Critiques of situated learning

However, situated learning has also been criticized for downplaying the importance of power relations in a community of practice. Cooper (2006: 22) highlights the failure to

account for how broader, historical and structural relations of power at a societal level might reverberate within the dynamics of any community of practice.

She is also critical of the concept of “legitimate peripheral participation” based on research in a trade union. Citing inequalities between workers based on language, formal education, gender, urban and rural divide as well as the hierarchical nature of the division of labour, she highlights the constraints this place on participation.

All these factors promote greater participation by some, and the more limited participation or exclusion by others (Ibid).

Although this theory seems to assume an apolitical position, the concept of “legitimate peripheral participation” implies a centre of power. What is not clear is whose knowledge is afforded greater influence? Is it the one who seeks full participation or the other way around? According to the positionality of actors in the system, we take up a position within knowledge, power and desire in relation to other participants. Power flows through the system according to the way these positions are connected, the way participants address one another and the resulting space between positions; positions are in constant flux especially when someone turn to a new activity or subject.

A community of practice can also become a closed society that risks the danger of perpetuating harmful practices such as race or gender inequality (Salomon and Perkins, 1998 cited in Fenwick, 2001: 38). According to Cooper (2005: 12) this theory is also silent on resistance in the community of practice. She raises the question:

What will happen if the communities rules of practice are challenged and in danger of being overturned?

Part 4: The macro and micro context of power relations

As part of my conceptual framework I would like to highlight the importance of macro and micro contexts of power relations. In conducting my research I became acutely aware of the dynamic interplay between the macro context (the state and economy) and the micro context (leadership and learning in a community of practice) as my contextual analysis tried to point out in chapter one. Ismail (2009: 282) in researching popular education in a women’s housing project in Cape Town, echoes this approach. She highlights the complexity of learning and consciousness raising and reminds us that issues of gender, class, race, poverty and socialization cannot be ignored when researching learning. In her view changes in the “ruling alignments” at a macro level, impact on the micro level or institutional context.

In her case study of a trade union as a community of practice, Cooper (2005: 12) support this approach by Ismail and found the absence of foregrounding macro power relations in situated

learning as a fundamental weakness to the heuristic value of her study. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003: 181) reinforce this approach when they state:

...power relations, both inside and outside any community of practice have to be given more direct attention. It is not just that such relations influences what individual workers can learn from a community, they also help determine its cultural norms and working practices.

Summary:

I have advanced a perspective on leadership within the NGO sector as a practice that can be more fully appreciated once it is linked to processes of learning and understood within the context of the peculiar demands within the NGO sector. I have unpacked three theories of learning with the first one foregrounding the role of the individual and valuing experience in the process of knowledge production. The second theory emphasized the power dynamics in the process of knowledge production and the role of the individual as an agent for social change within a social context. The third theory highlighted the role of the leader within a community of practice and the acquisition of knowledge as a process of participation. I have also tried to show that informal learning is a valuable process of knowledge production and more so within the NGO sector as a community of practice. This resonated strongly with the experiences and perceptions of my respondents.

In the next chapter I will focus on my research methodology and how it was informed by my understanding of the evolution of the NGO sector as a community of practice.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will outline my research methodology and specifically why I chose a qualitative methodology, the selection of my respondents, research ethics, my pilot interview and its results as well as what informed my approach to my data analysis.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative research

I have decided to adopt a qualitative research methodology (Bryman, 1984) to fully explore the role and value of informal and formal learning in leadership continuity as perceived by 6 NGO leaders. With this approach the researcher strives to perceive the world from the perspective of the research subject. The researcher is therefore required to suspend his/her own subjectivities. It also necessitates a very close involvement by the researcher. The focus here is to understand instead of trying to explain (Bryman, 1984:78 cited in Brynard and Hanekom, 2006: 37).

The methodologies employed by qualitative research allow the researcher to see people as they are, getting to know them personally and “to experience their daily struggles when confronted with real-life situations” (Ibid). Methods such as case studies, in-depth interviewing of key respondents, participant observation, questionnaires and perusal of personal documents are used during qualitative research.

According to Krueger (1994: 27)

Qualitative research concentrates on words and observations to express reality and attempts to describe people in natural situations.

My study focused on interviewing leaders and using their exact words as a key source of data collection. The study of human experiences from the ground up is another focus of qualitative research. Kelly (1999) states that qualitative research

is less immediately concerned with discovering universal, law-like patterns of human

behaviour (e.g. theories of cognitive and moral development that apply to all people in all contexts), and is more concerned with making sense of human experience from within the context and perspective of human experience (cited in Terre Blanche and Durheim, 1999: 398).

Echoing Paulsen (2006: 41), I want to state that the aim of my research has been to allow the experiences of leaders to inform the research rather than the imposition of preconceived ideas and theories and then to identify certain patterns.

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is critical. With my background and experience in the nature of the research undertaken I was keenly aware of this dynamic. According to Kelly et al (1994, cited in Paulsen, 2006: 41) the role of the researcher is not as an objective, “cold” researcher who must maintain a distance from the respondents. Referring to women’s oppression they believe that the researcher should rather be part of the process, fully involved, present and with empathy. It becomes imperative therefore for the researcher to maintain a fine balance between becoming too involved and maintaining enough professional “distance” to enable her to interpret the research.

Data collection:

In this section I will discuss some of the experiences that I as the researcher encountered during the data collection phase of this research study. I will also focus on some of the challenges I faced and how I developed strategies to face these challenges.

Interpretive research methods:

Characteristic of the interpretive approach is a belief that the reality to be studied consists of people’s subjective experiences of the external world. This specific approach aims to explain “the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social action” (Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter, 2006:7). According to them

the interpretive paradigm involves taking people’s subjective experiences seriously as the essence of what is real for them (ontology), making sense of people’s experiences by interacting with them and listening carefully to what they tell us (epistemology), and making use of qualitative research techniques to collect and analyze information (methodology). Thus...it focuses on harnessing and extending the power of ordinary language and expression to help us understand the social world we live in (Ibid: 274).

Interpretive research therefore

relies on first-hand accounts, tries to describe what it sees in rich detail, and presents its ‘findings’ in engaging and sometimes evocative language (Ibid).

Two key principles on which interpretive research are based involves:

1. Understanding the context
2. The role of researcher as primary ‘instrument’ of data collection and analysis

According to Terre Blanche et al (2006) understanding the context

translated into the idea that the meaning of human creations, words, actions, and experiences can only be ascertained in relation to the contexts in which they occur (Ibid: 275).

This principle of understanding or empathy as the authors call it, has a strong influence on the idea of telling it like it is, “is telling it in context.” They highlight the need for the researcher to undergo some “personal change” in order to do better interpretive research.

The application of the interpretive approach to my research resonated with me due to my previous experience in the sector and the design of my research question. I conceptualized the 3 historical periods within which leaders act or acted that highlighted the importance of context as outlined by the interpretive approach. As an actor myself within that context I developed a deep empathy and sensitive understanding of the research subject and acquired important skills such as listening, to look and to question as part of my training as a development consultant.

Selection of the respondents:

My research study focused on six leaders within the NGO sector, two of whom were selected from each historical period based on when they assumed a leadership position within their organization or previous organizations and not when they necessarily joined the sector. I also decided to select leaders from sectors within civil society namely, social housing, development consultancy, women abuse, community development and early childhood development. My selection of the respondents was informed by the need to pick up any differences or nuances in interpretations of what they may have experienced based on the historical period when they assumed leadership in the sector as well as

the focus of their work. Another consideration was to select leaders who themselves have been working with leaders in the sector since my focus is on their experiences and perceptions. My selection was also informed by my focus on NGOs with an explicit agenda of social transformation and emancipation (Manji and O’Coill, 2003) with leaders whose leadership is characterized by involvement as evolvment in a community of practice.

No gender or racial considerations informed my selection of respondents. Two males (from the 1st historical period) two females (from the 2nd historical period) and two females (from the 3rd historical period) made up the six respondents.

Profile of my respondents:

Respondent 1

He studied social work at a university in Johannesburg after he completed his high school career at a school in the Free State where he was the head boy in his final year. After his studies he worked in Soweto in the late 1970’s until the political uprising. He left the country for England in the mid 1980’s where he worked as a social worker. He became active as a leader in the local neighbourhood council. He returned to South Africa in the late 1980’s and joined a local rural community based organization based in the Boland region. He was appointed as director after a few years. In the early 1990’s he joined a development consultancy where he was formally trained as development consultant. He was co-director for a number of years until he was appointed as executive director in 2005 when the original pioneer left.

Respondent 2

He also studied social work to the level of an Honours Degree in the late 1970’s at a local university. He joined a local NGO in the early 1980’s as caretaker director. At the same time he was involved in various anti-apartheid organizations. In the mid 1990’s he launched a NGO specializing in early childhood development. He became the director where he is still active after 15 years. He is also a part-time lecturer in social work at the same university where he graduated.

Respondent 3

She was involved in various church based youth clubs and street committees in the early 1980’s. She studied analytical chemistry at a local university where she obtained her degree. In the early 1990’s she was recruited into a local NGO and acted as a programmes manager for a few years. She

continued her studies at another local university in Adult Education where she obtained an Advanced Diploma. In 1999 she joined a local development consultancy where she received formal training as a development consultant. She worked at this development consultancy for a few years and was then recruited back to her previous NGO as executive director in the community development sector.

Respondent 4

She became involved in the struggle against apartheid in the early 1980's through various youth and student organizations. She joined a women's movement in the late 1980's where she cut her teeth in organization. She studied and obtained a diploma in banking at a local technikon. She joined her organization as a fieldworker in the early 1990's. In the mid 1990's she left on unpaid leave to continue her studies in financial management at a local university. She returned to the organizations when the board requested her to take over as executive director from 1998 to 2006.

Respondent 5

She grew up in a rural area in the Boland where she started work as a fork lifter at a local fruit factory. She became a shop steward and then the gender coordinator for the local trade union. Due to gender discrimination she left the union in 1996 and traveled to Israel where she spent one year working in a kibbutz. She returned to South Africa and made contact with a local rural NGO specializing in legal studies. She subsequently launched a research project through another NGO specializing in sexual harassment. In 2003/4 she teamed up with another Masters student with a similar interest in research around sexual harassment and launched an NGO with this key focus on farms in the Boland and Overberg regions.

Respondent 6

She was involved in political struggles in the early 1980's through various organizations. She failed to complete matric in the late 1970's. In 1996 she was approached by a political party to politicize a local women's forum attached to a local church group. In 1998 the Medical Research Council (MRC) launched a research project around women's health in the local community out of which a project was launched to fight women's abuse. She became the project coordinator in 1999. She attended various non-formal courses at groups such as DELTA, Maryland Training Centre and the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE). She is currently in her 3rd year as a social work student at a local university but still active as director in her organization.

Semi-structured interview as a primary means of data collection

Interviews as a method of data collection suit the interpretive approach to research. My rationale for conducting semi-structured interviews as a primary means of data collection was to allow the authentic voice of my respondents to emerge. This method also allowed me the space to

probe more deeply following the answer of a respondent” It also allowed me to explain the context and the questions should the interviewee not be clear (De Wet et al, 1981, 161-163 cited in Brynard et al, 2006:40).

The establishment of an atmosphere of openness and trust within which the interviewees can express themselves authentically is a vital component of this method of data collection.

What is important to remember is that the meanings that are constructed during an interview are regarded as “*co-constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee.*” More important however is to note that

These meanings are moreover, not only constructed by the two people involved in the interviewee but are products of a larger social system for which these individuals act as relays (Terre Blanche et al, 2006: 297).

Research instrument:

In consultation with my supervisor a list of questions were designed that corresponded to my research aim and focus. Due to the unpredictability of the respondents’ responses and my ambiguity about the relevancy of the research questions, I decided to first conduct a pilot interview.

Pilot interview

In deciding to conduct a pilot interview, I was informed by various considerations such as potential problems that may crop up during the actual research process; feedback on the questions designed and whether other questions should be considered; has enough time been allocated and whether the research focus is relevant to the sector; are enough material available and where; is my focus clear and are modifications needed based on any perceived strengths or weaknesses (Brynard et al, 2006: 52).

I selected a respondent previously involved in the early childhood development sector and currently a development consultant who can be placed in the 2nd historical period in terms of her involvement in the NGO sector. Her selection was informed by the fact that she conducted research into women's leadership in a local community in Cape Town. She also used a qualitative and interpretive approach in her research study. After having read her research study I realized she would be an excellent candidate to advise me about the design of my research instruments. She was keen to assist and our interview took place without any major obstacles. The fact that we knew each other as fellow students having studied together at UCT a few years ago also helped to create an atmosphere of openness and cooperation. After an initial informal session to discuss and clarify the rationale for my research focus, we decided on a date for the pilot interview.

Results of the pilot interview:

I received the following feedback after the interview session namely that the questions were all relevant; the duration was reasonable; the list of questions emailed beforehand was useful to prepare responses. The respondent agreed with the conceptualization of the three historical periods and found it a useful conceptualization to make sense of the development of the NGO sector in South Africa. She also advised that I conduct the final interview with one of the respondents in the 3rd historical period in order to get an overall view from him about all three historical periods and to modify my questions based on the responses from other respondents.

Preparing for the main interview sessions

Through the literature I became acutely aware of the process in preparing for interviews as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the method. I learnt about the kind of questions to pose, the importance of the setting within which interviews take place, mannerisms, interviewer attitude, 1st impressions, personal appearance, seating arrangements, timing of the interview, preventing bias during the interview, how to avoid arguments during the interview process and avoid asking embarrassing questions. I also picked up some general hints that proved very useful (Brynard et al, 2006: 39-45).

I made use of a recorder (with the permission of the respondents) that assisted me to listen actively and respond to the ideas expressed by the respondents and maintain eye contact throughout the interview sessions.

Securing interview dates:

All my respondents are directors playing a leading role in their respective organizations. All the interviews had to be postponed for a number of reasons such as ill-health, traveling outside of Cape Town and unforeseen work duties. Since my fieldwork was spread over a 3-month period I was able to adapt myself to this unpredictable situation.

Establishing relationship and rapport

A great advantage for me was the fact that all the respondents are known to me due to past interaction either as development consultant, a fellow student, colleagues or workshop participant. This was important for it allowed the respondents to be open during the interviews. Respondents therefore felt comfortable and open to share with me without trying to tell me what they think I want to hear.

However, I was fully aware that their prior interaction with me may result in me not being challenged enough by the respondents. I still felt though, that the potential negative factors were outweighed by the positive ones.

With my knowledge and deep understanding of the NGO sector I struggled to remain objective and not losing my distance or to 'go native' "and become a member of the group and forgo the academic role". I had to constantly watch myself not to become sucked into the organizational lives of the respondents and hence to lose focus on the purpose of my research. Playing the role of academic researcher was a big challenge for me since my immediate instinct was to give advice when certain challenges were raised. With each interview I learnt to maintain my distance and remain objective.

A constant tension I experienced was the role of academic researcher and activist. I found myself constantly slipping into the role of activist to the detriment of the role as researcher. The tension was extremely difficult to manage and I had to watch myself constantly not slipping into an activist and therefore very subjective role. During the writing up process of this study I experienced a similar tension.

DATA ANALYSIS AND REFLECTIONS

An approach to data analysis

When I reached this stage I was guided by Terre Blanche et al (2006: 322) who provide a useful 5-step process that can assist with interpretive data analysis. They caution though that this process should not be viewed

as a fixed recipe that has to be applied to the data, but rather to ‘unpack’ some of the processes involved in immersing oneself in and reflecting on the data. In reality, interpretive analysis rarely proceed in as orderly a manner as may be suggested...but it can be a helpful starting point.

Terreblanche et al (2006: 323) identify a 5-stage process that consists of familiarization and immersion, inducing themes, coding, elaboration and interpretation and checking. During the 1st stage you become familiar with the material (texts, field notes, interview transcripts) by reading it over and over, making notes, brainstorming and drawing diagrams. At this stage you get to know your data well enough to know where to find what. The interpretations that can be supported by the data should also become clear at this stage.

During the 2nd stage of inducing themes Terre Blanche et al advise to use the language of the interviewees instead of “abstract theoretical language, to label categories.” They further advise that the researcher move beyond just merely summarizing content and think in terms of “processes, functions, tensions, and contradictions.” You then try to find an “optimal level of complexity” by identifying about ten to fifteen themes with a smaller number of main themes and sub-themes. Playing around with the themes follows with final advice not to lose focus on the purpose of your study (Ibid). This is exactly how I decided to approach this stage as well.

During the 3rd stage Terre Blanche (2006: 326) advises that one marks sections of your data that is relevant and linked to the themes you have identified. During the 4th stage you need to move beyond viewing your data in a linear, chronological order. Here you try to see it through fresh eyes, looking for different possibilities for themes. Certain themes can be regrouped under different headings. In organizing this you must be guided by your research question and sub-questions and how your data is answering them. During the 5th stage you scrutinize your interpretations to identify weak points and potential contradictions. You can also check for issues unrelated to your research question (Terre Blanche, 2006: 326).

Data presentation, analysis and coding

Before I proceeded to my data analysis, I first studied these guidelines from Brynard and Hanekom (2006) and Terre Blanche et al (2006) as outlined above. With the first phase of familiarization and immersion I started to really get to know and immersed myself in the data through a process of

transcribing from the dictaphone to my laptop. Through an iterative approach of playing the interviews, rewinding, playing, forwarding and rewinding and playing I was able to familiarize myself with my data. During this stage I developed files for each interview and arranged them according to historical periods.

During the 2nd phase of my data analysis I decided to use colour highlighters to identify certain themes that were beginning to emerge naturally. I compared the responses of the various respondents to explore similarities and differences and responses. I identified key concepts or headings and colour coded them. These headings included “Leadership and learning”, “continuity and discontinuity”, “informal and formal learning”, “effective leadership”, “followership”, “historical periods”, “leadership demands”, etc. A few sub-headings were also identified such as “leadership path”, “personal background”, “struggle background”, “experience base”, “inner work”, “self-confidence”, “risk taking”, “passion”, “support structures”, etc.

During the next stage of coding I decided to arrange the interviewees’ responses according to historical periods firstly and then according to the questions. During the elaboration stage I decided to briefly go back to my literature review to explore connections between what the learning theories were saying and what the interviewees were confirming through their personal experiences. Having done this I was able to filter the data that was relevant to my research question and ignore that which was irrelevant. My main aim was to focus on the data critical to my research (Brynard et al, 2006: 61).

When I reached the final stage of ‘interpretation and checking’ I was able to look at my data differently. I was now ready to engage my own interpretation of the data from a more informed perspective with a confidence that I will maintain focus on the research topic and not stray into seemingly important but irrelevant areas.

Reflection on the research methodology

The pilot interview

This pilot interview assisted me immensely. I realized the importance of keeping the interviewees’ focused on the questions that relate to the research topic instead of straying into areas of less relevance. This was not easy since the interviewees knew I would be informed of the issues that they

raised and expected me to have an opinion. I tried very hard to restrict the interviewees to the research topic.

I also realized the importance of checking and re-checking that participants received the list of questions in advance instead of assuming that they did. I also learnt that the studying of the questions before the interview helped in focusing the mind of the interviewees and facilitated the flow of conversation instead of a question and answer session. New questions would arise that I could not anticipate which allowed for more relevant data to be collected and new insights to emerge.

The main interviews

With the pilot interview as a source of learning I was much more confident to engage the interviewees and to collect my data. The interviews lasted for an average of 90 minutes and it helped that I used a dictaphone to record each interview. The interviewees appreciated that they were briefed before the interviews about the rationale for the research and receiving the list of questions in advanced. I consciously reminded interviewees of their interview appointments at least twice before the interview to avoid unnecessary postponements.

ETHICS AND VALIDITY

Consent and confidentiality

Before the actual interviews all the respondents agreed to be part of the research study. They were briefed either telephonically or during a personal visit to their offices about the rationale for my research and its importance for the NGO sector as a whole. To formalize their verbal consent and to assure them of confidentiality, I requested that they sign consent forms that were submitted to my supervisor. It was agreed that pseudonyms will be used to protect their identities and where an identity would still be very obvious we will jointly agree on strategies to maintain such confidentiality. Due to some sensitive personal information I decided to instead use a numbering system to identify each respondent.

Validity considerations

According to Van der Riet and Durheim (2006: 90) validity in its broadest sense “refers to the degree to which the research conclusions are sound.” External validity relates to the extent to which one’s findings can be generalized to “broader populations and settings” (Ibid: 91).

This study set out to explore the experiences and perceptions of 6 NGO leaders on the role and value of formal and informal learning in leadership continuity in the NGO sector in South Africa across three historical periods. I believe that my research methodology and methods of data collection enabled me to achieve this. I would however caution against generalizing my overall findings to the NGO sector as a whole since this research study explicitly targeted “struggle NGOs” with an explicit transformation agenda. However, despite this qualification I believe that this study has validity.

Possible limitations of this research

During my selection of the 6 leaders I decided to focus on depth and not breadth. My selection of the six leaders was further informed by the need to find respondents who themselves work with leaders. Their experiences would therefore reflect not only their personal experiences but also capture the experiences of those with whom they interact on a continuous basis, i.e. to see the social in the personal and vice versa (Michelson cited in Fenwick, 2001: 50).

Since leadership is a practice that inevitably affects others, it would have been helpful to interview a colleague to confirm some of the responses by the respondents. However this would have extended the time period for the fieldwork stage and also created other dynamics that could have influenced the responses of the respondents.

Another limitation is that all my respondents have an activist and struggle background. In conducting my research I became aware that there were various issues suppressed during the 1st historical period and regarded as problematic, that surfaced during the 2nd historical period e.g. issues of gender and patriarchy. As mentioned earlier, since my study focused on leaders with a struggle background my findings should therefore not be generalized to the NGO sector as a whole.

I present my data, interpretation and analysis in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In this chapter I will present my data, analyze it and present my findings. The focus of my research study was:

What kind of learning and knowledge is important in leadership continuity to enhance sustainable organisations in the NGO sector?

I have postulated that the NGO sector in South Africa can be divided into a typology of 3 historical periods. My selection of respondents has been informed by these 3 historical periods in terms of *when they assumed leadership positions at the highest level of the organizational hierarchy*. This point is very important to note since, in my data analysis, I was constantly confronted by the tension between data related to my respondents' *perceptions and experiences within the sector* and that *within their own practice*.

Based on the confidentiality agreement with my respondents as outlined in my research methodology, I will only refer to them using a numbering system of respondents 1 and 2, (1st historical period) 3 and 4, (2nd historical period) and 5 and 6 (3rd historical period).

PART 1: DATA PRESENTATION

In this section, I shall present the data from the interviews across the three periods. This is done in order to provide an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of the six respondents about the role and value of formal and informal learning in leadership continuity.

Respondents 1 and 2 (1st Historical Period)

Leaders' motivation to join the sector:

Within this group the primary motive to enter the sector was to bring about social and political change in society, hence a political motive. The suffering of black people, their suffering, exclusion and discomfort were advanced as motivations to join the sector. The absence of legitimate political organizations was also a factor.

Respondent 2 stated:

I wanted to bring down the apartheid government (Interview: 9 June 2008).

Respondent 1 stated:

I came into the NGO sector... influences came even before I knew the word... NGO sector...naïve youthful questioning of why the world excludes people in the way it does... the discomfort... I was drawn to that... the suffering, exclusion (Interview: 23 July 2008).

Respondent 3 stated:

I was a student and we were informed by our activism... the fight with the witdoeke... the same as now with the refugees...it was something I could give back to communities... the gaps in the poverty... huge gaps that exist in poverty... that is why I'm still involved in the sector (Interview: 12 June 2008).

Respondent 4 who traced her involvement in various struggle organizations, commented:

My involvement is value driven... wanting to work in a value based environment. I value social justice... (Interview: 23 June 2008)

Leaders' perceptions of the sector when they entered and how they see it now:

Respondents in this period described the sector as predominantly “white welfarist” or traditional welfare groups. Separate development was informed by the dominant ideological force. Respondent 2 mentioned that there was a clear distinction between a state subsidized sector and a “struggle sector”. The struggle sector was completely isolated and mainly church funded. Poverty was seen as part of life. People struggled to take control of their own destinies.

According to respondent 1 the international isolation of the sector had the unintended advantage of a strong indigenous sector that emerged that escaped most of the damage inflicted upon civil society in other African countries. During this period communities were rising up against the state. The sector suffered marginalization and exclusion.

Respondents described the sector now as more sophisticated, with more organizations and your traditional welfare groups that are now transforming into development organizations. Respondent 1 mentioned that poverty has become a mainstream professional industry characterized by a technician and bureaucratic culture. According to him there is crisis and upheaval. NGOs feel under threat, are “*weak, being dismissed and abused.*” They feel lost, act as victims and according to respondent 1 “*try to play everybody's game.*” They are not finding their own voice. The market is very dominant.

According to respondent 2:

Differences between NGOs are not determined by race anymore but by economic areas (Interview: 9 June 2008).

The role of experience and formal- and informal learning in leadership development:

Respondent 1 found him attracted to action learning due to his background of struggling with formal learning. He started to read at a late age and thought of himself as being dyslectic. He never viewed books as a major source of learning. He developed a keen interest in how others learnt and stressed that he mostly learnt in community, i.e. through others and with others. He like to question. As a leader and part of a leadership he believes that learning should be located as a primary focus within an organization that should be recognized, supported and invested in. For him experience played a dominant role. Learning he emphasized, is leadership. There is a place for both learning and teaching. His organization however emphasizes the importance of facilitating learning. They are critical of the concept of “transferring knowledge” since you need to know in advance what you are going to transfer. According to him

what is learnt must come out of the relationship itself. You must show people what they already know; people must value what they bring to the process and know (Interview: 23 July 2008).

He felt strongly that there should also be a rethink of formal- and informal learning since some of the informal learning programmes offered by NGOs are quite rigorous and are very structured with a clear form.

Although there is a place for both formal- and informal learning respondent 2 felt that 99% of his learning about leadership was informal. He read a lot, copied things from others and learnt through his failures. He stressed the importance of learning through his experiences. He had the opportunity to observe what others did wrong and learnt not to repeat it. He also worked with others who were useless leaders who promoted nepotism and were autocratic.

The relationship between sector development and leadership shifts/changes

Commenting on whether leadership shifted in the sector respondent 1 was rather blunt.

it may have gone backwards I think. It was not valued and validated... a lot of leaders went to get their PhD's and now they can say “I am validated”. Nobody wrote it up ... I don't think we realize how remarkable the leadership was... there was no way of validating it (Interview: 23 July 2008).

According to him leaders were thinking on their feet

and there was this mad craziness and everybody is being consulted... if you captured this and take it to the world more confidently (Interview: 23 July 2008).

Respondent 1 felt strongly that the sector had been subjected into accepting leadership and management practices that “suits others more than us really...” There is also a more professionalism and corporatism. NGOs are now talking about niches and moving offices from London to Johannesburg.

Respondent 1 felt that leadership has now developed as an industry with more courses and training taking place. Leadership clubs are formed where the elite is prepared for leadership. Leaders are trained to shape things instead of learning to be shaped by things.

You are trained to think of yourself as worthy and able to contribute to shaping things instead of being shaped by things” (Interview: 23 July 2008).

An important point raised by respondent 1 is how people are introduced to heroes. People are conditioned to think that:

There are clever people around (Interview: 23 July 2008).

As he stated:

My interest is more on followership than leadership and ultimately they must be the same thing. Our sector has been diverted from that. In the early stages there was a much more heightened consciousness. Some of it was clumsy but we could build on it. When the guru starts talking there is much I agree with. But they are the gurus (Interview: 23 July 2008).

Respondent 2 mentioned that there has been a shift from a white male dominated sector to a black female dominated sector. These women come from community based structures. There has also been a shift from

“we know what is best” to a more developmental approach. The language of leadership is also changing. Now people talk about impact and outcomes. There is more talk on return on investment (Interview, 9 June 2008).

Leaders cannot only emphasize the “good feel basis” but has to understand the “economic basis” of their work. He lamented that “sadly less than 5% of organizations” are sustainable in this context.

Key qualities of effective leaders in the sector:

Respondent 1 felt that there needs to be a movement away from command, control and directing. More listening should be done than telling. Respondent 2 felt that a rethink of leadership should take place.

We need to rethink the function of leadership and how it can shape the whole. It is really a critical challenge in shifting our thinking. I don’t pretend that I can see it clearly (Interview, 23 July 2008).

According to him organizations operate on the principle of valuing those at the apex of the organizational hierarchy. This is based on the understanding that those at the top can “see more, shape more, understand better and can see a much bigger picture.” But he felt that this is not always true since their ideas can also be shaped by what they hear on golf courses and during their MBA studies.

Effective leaders must learn to focus at the bottom. They must connect with the least powerful. The minority voice must be amplified, those voices that may not always be heard. Learning instead of knowing must be emphasized. Good leaders must also allow themselves to be shaped by others instead of thinking that they should do the shaping. Good leaders allow themselves to be shaped by others than to shape them. Through that opportunity you can allow others to shape the organization and in that way shape the world (Interview, 23 July 2008).

For respondent 2 an effective leader should

know your subject matter (refers to sector specific work responsibility), have a good track record (personal branding), should be a hard worker, have experience and core academic qualifications, be able to engage with people, ability to fail and then to acknowledge failure, be able to know what you

want to do, getting it done and communicating with the right people who need to know this (Interview, 9 June 2008).

Respondents 3 and 4 (2nd Historical Period)

Leaders' motivation to join the sector

The motivation within this group was almost similar to the 1st group, namely a need for social justice, activism, compassion and passion. The huge gaps in poverty and the need to give something back to the community were advanced as reasons. Within this period the democratic government was already in place. The observation of respondent 3 is important at this stage:

Governments do not necessarily pursue policies in the interest of the poor (Interview, 23 June 2008).

Leaders' perceptions of the sector when the leaders entered and how they see it now:

Respondent 3 felt there was a funding crisis with many NGOs doing “non-strategic” work. There were more projects than programmes. People came with a lot of degrees but no complimentary experience. There were people who opted out of the private sector but lacked (what she referred to as the) “struggle experience.”

Respondent 4 mentioned that this was a tense period with the wind of change (1994) coming to South Africa. There was a brain drain of NGO leaders migrating into government. Before 1994 there was attachment to a social cause. People were contributing to something bigger than themselves. People took risks and there was investment in people. People were handpicked before 1994 to lead organizations. It was an organic process. People now use their involvement as “stepping stones” to higher positions. Leaders are now employed with career development the primary focus. There is a focus on money and no or little time devoted to invest in people. According to respondent 4, “*The money flows have changed.*” Northern donors are not developmental and have become more results/market oriented. The sector is very disorganized with less sophisticated agendas. There is individualism and very weak leadership. Local money has opened up but a welfare oriented approach is becoming dominant in institutions with a development mandate such as the National Development

Agency (NDA).¹¹ These institutions, partly funded by the state, are struggling to meet their mandate. Collaborative action in the sector is weak.

The role of experience; formal and informal learning

Respondent 3 also stressed the importance of learning from the experiences of others and through observations. Like respondent 2 she also worked with leaders that she respected but also others who were bad. She studied organizational management at the University of Cape Town (UCT) where she was exposed to action learning in the commerce faculty. She found this fascinating since material from an NGO was utilized to explain the application of this method of learning. She also studied banking and regarded this skill as crucial for her in the financial management of her organization.

Some NGOs are experiencing financial crisis because of no financial management skills. You need financial skills... my background in the bank helped me to work with money (Interview, 23 June 2008).

Respondent 4 believes that informal learning is more important than formal learning in her experience. According to her "...formal learning is like cement on bricks." It must affirm what you already know innately. Formal learning should build and strengthen your analytical abilities, allowing you to be strategic. She emphasized that learning can only really happen if a person reflects. Formal learning also contributes to your ability to write and make a person understand that you cannot know everything. You learn to draw lessons of how you want to take things forward. These capacities are built through formal learning. She stressed the importance of learning in the context of succession within an organization.

I don't want to remain here forever. It is about maintaining the growth and integrity of the organization (Interview, 12 June 2008).

According to respondent 4 there is a shortage of "human capital" so leaders must work with what they have and make sure that they are able to see and nurture potential leaders. Continuous learning is important to discover blind spots in leaders.

¹¹ The National Development Agency (NDA) is a funding agency set up by the government to address issues of poverty alleviation.

The relationship between sector development and leadership shifts/changes

Respondent 4 commented that there was no accredited learning in the early 1990's but leaders learnt.

There was experiential learning...the real questions that you were struggling with as a leader...yes, there was credibility and a strong foundation was laid (Interview, 12 June 2008).

She stressed that she is not into certificates. She feels that learning is what you take out of and bring to the experience. A point earlier emphasized is that leaders according to respondent 4 are now being employed whereas previously they were handpicked.

As respondent 4 stated,

There was a search for leaders. Leaders now enter the sector for their own career development and as a steppingstone for higher ground. Leaders also took more risks previously but now we are just churning them in and out" (Ibid).

Key qualities of effective leaders in the sector:

Effective leaders for respondent 3 are those who are clear about their values irrespective of the sector they work in. She also raised courage as an important factor. This relates to the courage to admit what is right and wrong as well as the courage to admit when you don't know. There should be a focus on listening and awareness of your weaknesses. She consulted many people before she accepted her job as director and she was advised to know her limitations. According to respondent 3 the times we live in demand that leaders should consult people.

We live in a time where there are no definite answers to current problems... you need many minds...so much brainstorming...leadership in the sector needs to adapt to this trend (Interview, 23 June 2008).

Respondent 4 highlighted the importance of effective leaders who must "build the succession." This will ensure, she felt, that the growth, integrity of an organization and that knowledge remain in the organization. She also stressed the importance of listening and connecting with people inside and outside the organization.

Respondents 5 and 6 (3rd Historical Period)

Leaders' motivation to join the sector

The respondents in this group are both activists in the women abuse sector. Respondent 5 was clearly motivated by her own abuse background. She witnessed the abuse of her mother by her father, witness abuse in the community and was herself abused. Respondent 6 described how she was “socialized into justice.”

Leaders' perceptions of the sector when the leaders entered and how they see it now:

According to respondent 5, in the late 1990's there was fierce competition but also vibrancy within the sector. In 2005 SANGOCO ceased to exist. There are now more partnerships and sharing of information. NGOs are forming consortiums. The sector is in survival mode with more young directors entering who are prepared to take more risks. The older generation is more conservative. The new directors are working with the older ones.

This is how respondent 5 put it:

There was a fierce competition at that stage... we went to people to learn and to cooperate... we were condemned to die by one NGO... we asked who is representing the sector... there was no one... people did not want to help you with advice... of how to register an NGO... where to source funding... people did not want to share or refer... it looked like complete madness, cat fighting (Interview, 3 July 2008).

The role of experience; formal and informal learning

Respondent 5 learnt through a mixture of reading books and being willing to ask. She also had mentors. She came from an abused experience and was herself abused and so experience was an important source of learning. She commented:

I am a tried and tested person... I don't think I am always right... I depend a lot on others' experiences (Interview, 3 July 2008).

She also reflects a lot although it is not always planned or structured. She mostly learnt informally from older people. She studied at a school for trade unions namely Southern Hemisphere and also attended the Management Development Programme at University of Stellenbosch. She attended the 1stone that was offered just as she launched her organization.

It was a good programme...you learn practical know-how there...case studies. I think it is a must that NGOs invest in sending staff there for training (Interview: 3 July 2008).

For respondent 5 intuitive knowing is also important but should be backed up with know-how. For respondent 6 her experience played an overwhelming role. She is currently engaged in formal and full-time university studies after she last failed matric many years ago. She know when lecturers explain something whether it comes from experience or just theory. For respondent 6 experiences “comes from the heart and theory from the head.” Referring to her lecturers she stated:

I can assess if they have personal experience or just paper knowledge (Interview, 18 May 2008).

Formal learning for her came late in her life. She would have preferred it to happen earlier to allow her to develop a career path. She feels that theory can become better understood and appreciated if you have experience. Respondent 6 studied at the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE). She benefited from the course because it allowed her to “structure things more...gave me experience... the courses were very relevant. As a group they were able to develop a more formal facilitation style during their workshops. She was able to gain information from various sources such as social workers, the women’s network and from CASE. Commenting on the quality of their training programme she said:

People look at our program and they look at you and they ask: did you design that? (Interview, 18 May 2008).

Respondent 5 attended training at Southern Hemisphere and the Management Development Programme for NGO leaders and managers offered by the University of Stellenbosch. She also believes in being guided by your “intuitive knowing” but it should be backed up by “know-how”.

Respondent 6 felt she was a leader from a very young age. She was part of the church band and participated in the church brigade and choir. Her aunt played a huge influence in her life. She learnt through observation and later she became more reflective. Her compassion for other people drove her including her conscience. Her family and the religious sector also influenced her.

As an activist she was involved in the community and later in political organization. She failed matric and did not study formally for many years. Most of her learning happened informally and through experience. She received women abuse training at Maryland Centre and later did training at Delta, a

women's organization training potential women leaders to run their own organization utilizing a Freirian methodology.

Relationship between sector development and leadership shifts/changes

There are many leaders in the sector who should not be in leadership according to respondent 5. She elaborated:

People join to look for a job... people who can't secure employment. There are organizations where you can be idle...not knowing what to do. They (referring to donors) want us to be like corporates...but the everyday is removed from being a corporate. There is nothing wrong to subscribe to relevant laws but you cannot lose focus on your mandate (Interview, 3 July 2008).

According to respondent 6, leadership previously went the extra mile and showed more commitment. She felt leaders today are more superficial and have become too busy. She felt that leaders who went to parliament left a gap. They did not know what to expect and no follow up was done to bridge the gap. She commented further:

It is becoming rife that people want to climb the ladder. Leaders are also keen to get their papers because they don't earn the money that they deserve (Interview, 18 May 2008).

The key qualities of effective leaders in the sector:

For respondent 5 effective leaders are also effective followers. They take responsibility and will try something else if they fail. These leaders admit their mistakes and apologize. They are humble and strongly attached to their vision and not their egos. They do not become the organization and are always ready to share knowledge. In this way the leader prepares for succession by preparing others to take over.

For respondent 6 an effective leader should have done the job before he/she tell others what to do. As she puts it: "The sweat must 1stcome from your face." The leader should also feel gratitude towards the little things in life. An effective leader she felt,

is relaxed, passionate, creative, and know when to do what, to whom to say what. Humility and having an open mind are also important qualities. You have to learn everyday and have to listen (Interview, 18 May 2008).

In the next part I present my data analysis and interpretations using various themes derived from my data presentation.

PART 2: DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS

Based on my data presentation above, I now proceed to interpret and analyze it using themes developed from my data presentation as my guide.

From informal learning to formal learning

My data indicates a clear shift from modes of informal learning in the 1st historical period to more formal learning in the 2nd and 3rd historical period. At the same time my data points to an overwhelming bias towards valuing informal learning as a dominant mode of learning to acquire leadership skills, experience and knowledge from all the respondents. There were three forms of informal learning that dominated the 1st historical period namely experiential learning, popular education and situated learning or learning via a community of practice. During this phase learning was closely linked to the context of struggle against an unjust system of oppression. Except for the churches that provided non-formal training programmes, there were almost no formal learning opportunities.

The valuing of informal learning within this period was not accidental. The very dynamic of struggle required an action and experiential learning approach. There was no time for training workshops since people had to think on their feet and act in very fluid situations. Incidental and tacit learning were therefore dominant at this stage. Incidental learning happens when there is no intention on the part of the learner to learn before the experience but become conscious after reflecting on the experience (Schugurensky, 1998: 167). Other times learning was both unintentional and unconscious. This is referred to as tacit knowledge or socialization (Ibid).

An example of such learning is provided by respondent 4 when she states:

I got a lot of political education... I got an understanding about the broader international context... it was very valuable... in the student congress...I was representing the region/province. We learnt how to organize... you were exposed to organizational process... you mimicked what you were experiencing... e.g. mandates... there was no training session... you were disciplined when out of turn (Interview, 23 June 2008).

The above idea resonates strongly with the popular education model advanced by Freire (Walters, 1989) as outlined in my theoretical framework in chapter 2. According to Freire people can best learn

democracy by experiencing it. According to him every organized formation should potentially be a site of democratic practice (Walters, 1989: 84).

Experiential learning was also a dominant mode of learning during the 1st period. As respondent 4 stated:

There was experiential learning...the real questions that you were struggling with as a leader...yes, there was credibility and a strong foundation was laid (Interview, 12 June 2008).

The reference to “the real questions that you were struggling with” echoes the concepts of reflection-on-action and reflection-inaction expounded by Schon (1983: 20). As I pointed out in my contextual framework, for Schon critical reflection is necessary so that nothing is taken for granted in the learning process.

Situated learning or learning within a community of practice was also very prominent during this phase. A community of practice embodies “*a set of values, behaviours, and skills to be acquired by member*” (Schugurensky, 1998: 168). According to this mode of learning people normally join a community of practice as novices at the periphery from where they develop their skills, become more competent within the community and then ultimately progress to the centre where they become masters (Ibid). This is also referred to as legitimate peripheral participation. This community of practice approach was very dominant during the 1st historical period. This is how respondent 1 described his development as a leader:

I was just incredibly lucky...working in remarkable groups and teams of people. I never came into a group as a leader. My leadership was part of the groups I was a part of. I have taken the lead from them really. We tried to understand what they need and what the organization needs. My learning about leadership has been through these groups (Interview, 23 July 2008).

Respondent 4 echoed this process as part of her leadership development when she commented:

I had the benefit to work with leaders that I respected. I also worked with leaders that I thought were bad. I was also clear about what I should do and what not to do. I have experience of bad leadership...not my own experiences only but other’s experiences. I learned through

observations...some people have influence and power...why must you knock your head... (Interview, 23 June 2008).

Popular education was another form of experiential learning that was dominant at this stage and highly valued. The issue of power is central to this pedagogy hence its prominence during this phase. It teaches people to take collective responsibility to effect social change by addressing power imbalances in society. During this phase the focus was on building a critical consciousness to bring about structural changes that can ensure that people's needs are fulfilled both in their daily lives and at a broader cultural level. According to Freire (1983: 87)

Critical consciousness is brought about, not through an intellectual effort alone but through praxis – through the authentic union of action-reflection.

Respondent 1 commented about this process:

I don't think we realize how remarkable the leadership was. There was no way of validating it. A lot of what was happening – if you go back to the days of struggle and how leaders were thinking on their feet and there was this mad craziness and everybody is being consulted... (Interview, 23 July 2008).

During the 2nd historical period a shift started to happen to more formal leaning in line with the new educational regime that was established post 1994. With the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the move towards Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), in the 2nd historical period, more and more leaders attended formal leadership courses to validate their experiences acquired in the 1st historical period. The new generations who entered the sector in the 2nd and 3rd period gravitated more towards formal learning as a means to facilitate their upward social mobility.

Writing from a feminist perspective, Walters (1998: 436) argues that society has a way of deciding what knowledge to value which is determined by the power relations in society. She writes:

What constitutes knowledge and for whom different kinds of knowledge are appropriate vary from age to age.

This is how respondent 1 related his experience in relation to this process:

Behind that (the move towards formal learning) for me society has a certain way of attributing value to certain things... it attributes value to formal learning but it does not attribute value to effective action (informal learning). If I led a street committee I should be the equivalent of a Masters degree plus... but society has a clever way of attributing value (Interview, 23 July 2008).

With the shift towards more formal modes of learning in the 2nd and 3rd period learning became more individual and more disconnected from this context. Within the macro political context the shift towards individualized learning was not contested due to a shift towards Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) that created opportunities for previously oppressed people to advance academically. There was a dominant perception that the struggle came to an end in 1994 with an expectation that the new democratic government will deliver on their promises. Understandably the focus during this phase shifted from opposition to reconstruction (Kaplan, 1994). There was a widespread assumption that the content of learning, be it through formal, non-formal or informal modes of learning should accommodate this shift from opposition and activism to reconstruction and professionalism.

With the above theme I have tried to show how there was a clear evolution from a dominant mode of informal learning within the context of activism and opposition to a more dominant mode of formal learning within a new context of professionalism and reconstruction.

Although there was a great appreciation amongst the respondents for the value of informal learning processes based on their personal experiences, they did not devalue the importance of formal learning in leadership development. On contrary, they understood that formal learning has a major role to play. Respondent 3 commented:

Formal learning is important. It is like cement on bricks, what you know innately; affirming what you know. It builds and strengthen your analytical abilities, being strategic...formal learning develop these capacities...formal learning contributes to writing (Interview, 12 June 2008).

Shift from learning programmes to training programmes

The shift in emphasis to more formal learning processes with their emphasis on accreditation, standardization and commodification of education at the expense of the value of informal learning, also enabled a shift from learning programs to training programs. There was a foregrounding of leadership training programmes with their clearly defined, verifiable, predictable and predetermined

outcomes acting as a substitute (and not supplementary) to more comprehensive leadership learning programmes. The focus in these training programs supported by donors and government tended to emphasize “teaching” and not “learning”.

As Kaplan (1999: 16) states:

The “teaching” aspect of a training program should be considered a small part of the program. It incorporates only the possibility of exposure. The real learning aspect of a training programme take place in the **practice** back home (his emphasis).

Respondent 4 referring to the importance of *inner work* for NGO leaders and the role of *training* instead of *learning* programmes commented thus:

Training is not always the answer; to create that space for people to be vulnerable; you cannot learn unless you have made yourself vulnerable. **They come back** (referring to staff members) **and they are not able to utilize that training** (my emphasis); it is clinical training; there are many other things you have to put in place; training is being used to conform... it is about conforming (Interview, 12 June 2008).

Referring to the above phenomena, Schugurensky (1998) points out the weaknesses of what he refers to as decontextualized knowledge, i.e. knowledge production without any link to a particular context. He comments that this

knowledge becomes inert, and students learn new concepts but may have difficulties applying them in the absence of a real context for use (Schugurensky, 1998: 168).

Problematic areas of the training approach (as an end in itself) are the disconnect between theory and practice, lack of context and not being embedded in real situations, lack of respect of participant’s experiences, follow up in the workplace and the importance of practicing what participants learned. (Kaplan, 1999: 15-16) Commenting on this shift towards packaged training instead of holistic capacity building which is inherently a more slow process, Kaplan (1994: 10) stated:

Committees are convened and they ...are serviced by packaged training courses delivered as the final answer to the capacity-building problem.

In contrast respondent 1 commented on his leadership development.

I would say experience has played a dominant role compared to training or being taught to lead. Nobody sat me down to say here is a training course...you have to take this before you can lead. So that's very clear (Interview, 23 July 2008).

I would argue therefore that *what* was transferred (content) as part of leadership development in the SA NGO sector cannot be divorced from *how* (methodologies/form) it was transferred. The largely technician and academic approach (Hill, 2006) embedded in the formal learning approaches, reinforced this training paradigm. Respondent 6 put it this way:

When the lecturers explain something I can hear they lack experience. Experience comes from the heart and theory comes from the head. I can assess if they have personal experience or clinical experience, paper knowledge (Interview, 18 May 2008).

One of the findings of Hill (2006: 12) in an investigation of development and leadership training courses at 18 higher education institutions in South Africa, is that

Most of the academic staff interviewed is not development practitioners, some have not been exposed to development at all.

Confirming this trend, and in a critique of the NQF and its standard generating bodies (SGB's), a CDRA (2006: 3) paper made the same observation. Referring to the SGB's they state:

They are pretty much closed shops, dominated more by academics than experienced practitioners... the paradigms that lie behind them are generally instrumentalist and technician and very different from our own.

From learning in context to learning as a marketable commodity

Linked to the above theme pointing to a shift from learning programs towards training programs, another shift also occurred namely from learning in a context and learning supported by a practice towards learning converted into a marketable commodity. With the latter the context and the practice that need to support the relevance of the learning after the formal training (or transmission of ideas/teaching) (Lave, 1996: 151) becomes downplayed.

Respondent 3 relates her experience of this phenomenon in this way:

We hear of development studies... especially if we look at the South African context...**training programs are based on imported views that have no bearing on the context in which we live** (my emphasis) (Interview, 12 June 2008).

Echoing this view Soal (2003: 8) comments:

The development sector is teeming with people... who have their workshop “packages” that get sold all over the world...NGOs that make their reputation developing something original – then peddle it endlessly, **with little regards for need and context** (my emphasis).

Linda Cooper (1998) identified a similar trend in the labour movement where she contrasts a focus on ‘*workplace training*’ from previously ‘*workplace education*’ with its emphasis on formal certification, recognition of prior learning and accreditation within a national qualifications framework. According to Cooper (1998:10), worker experience previously regarded as shared resource and

guide to action’ amongst workers has been **turned into a commodity** which is ‘individually ‘owned’ “and can be exchanged for a qualification in order to compete with other workers on the capitalist labour market, and in a struggle for individual upward mobility and ‘career paths’ (my emphasis).

Walters and Daniels (2007: 70) commenting on the discourse around ‘short courses’ in relation to assessor training, made the following observation:

In many instances, organizers of ‘short courses’ and assessors of education and training do not see themselves primarily as educators, but rather as marketers of learning products to consumers – and this we believe is a problem.

They continue:

Providers of ‘short courses’ are often on short term contracts to deliver cost-effective products to organizations to which they have no long term affiliation. The short course is a **type of commodity that is sold in the market place**, with little relationship to the **social practices where it is delivered** (my emphasis) (Ibid: 70).

This is how respondent 1 commented about this process:

We have some serious problems of the world trying to standardize and package learning. One of the thoughts coming to my mind is how leadership has developed as an industry (Interview, 23 July 2008).

Facilitative and/or constraining factors in the transfer of knowledge

Two crucial factors emerged in my data that constrained and/or facilitated the transfer of knowledge, experiences, skills and expertise in the sector; the importance of context and the process of identity construction as highlighted by the community of practice learning theorists (Lave and Wenger, 1998). My data has shown the following in relation to this:

Within the 1st historical period characterised by struggle against apartheid, informal learning approaches such as popular education and situated learning were dominant. The context at that time supported these modes of learning with their focus on the collective. However, in the 2nd period and the 1st part of the 3rd period the context shifted fundamentally. Instead of collective struggle against a common enemy the focus now shifted to experts and technical approaches to fight poverty. With the migration of a large section of the old leadership to occupy positions in government and the corporate sector, the new generation that entered the sector was not prepared for the new tasks at hand. The economic opportunities that opened up through affirmative actions policies and the broader shift towards neo-liberalism also legitimized a process towards individualism and materialism.

It is within this changing context that the new cohort of leaders entered the sector in the 2nd historical period. The identity of this group was therefore fundamentally different from the previous generation. The shift towards formal learning approaches with an emphasis on text-based knowledge focusing primarily on managerialism, profitability and sustainability (more as an end in itself instead of a means to an end) reinforced this changing identity. Whereas value based leadership was dominant in the 1st historical period with an emphasis on leaders' responsibility towards the poor and marginalized, the new generation focused more on careerism.

Describing this shift in leadership identity in the 2nd historical period, respondent 3 commented:

There are a lot of people who want to do good. They have a lot of degrees but no complimentary experience. There are people who opted out of the private sector but with no struggle experience (Interview, 23 June 2009).

Referring to the sector she commented:

We now have less sophisticated agendas operating...the sector is very disorganized...it is now becoming very individualistic (Ibid).

Kaplan (1994: 2) commented about this process:

Some people formerly working in the corporate and commercial sector are bringing ideas about management and organization which would previously have been rejected by the “democratic” development organizations.

Respondent 2 described this shift in this way:

The language of leadership is changing... now it is about impact ... return on investment... not only a feel good basis... but the economic basis... about measuring impact... it is outcome and impact driven (Interview, 9 June 2008).

Other factors that contributed towards this shift in identity were new donor demands, especially around reporting and accountability as well as the emerging funding crisis due to the exit of international donors. Due to bureaucratic red tape available funding was slow to be disbursed. This scenario forced many NGOs into crisis management with many descending into survival mode. In many instances funding could only be accessed if recipients fulfilled strict donor criteria. In this context leaders enrolled onto formal short term training programmes to equip themselves with new skills. Training providers were ready to offer these programmes to the new generation of leaders.

Kaplan (1994: 10) commented on this process:

Outside the communities, in the airy realms of corporate development agencies, consultants and trainers thrive. In the name of ...capacity building the development sector has become the place to be, for some, more lucrative than the commercial sector.” He added: “...the corporate culture which accompanies many development projects does not go beyond the motions of development.

Respondent 4 commented:

When I came in there were all these strategies... all the top people were leaving...staff attritions... competition was tough....all this stuff about accreditation and SAQA....There was the slow decline of the organization.... people were just leaving... (Interview, 12 June 2008).

Legitimate Peripheral Participation – progressing from the margins to the centre

A key feature of the community of practice theory of learning is what is referred to as legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) advanced by Lave and Wenger (1991:29). According to Lave and Wenger

Learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners (where) the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community. 'Legitimate peripheral participation' provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers.

This process of learning explains how novices start at the margins of a community of practice and through 'guided participation' are assisted by more experienced practitioners or old timers to become competent in the 'culture of practice'. The teacher-learner role recedes into the background and is replaced by a "richly diverse field of essential actors" who all contribute to the learning process. Within these communities there is very little teaching and the curriculum is constituted by the community of practice itself. Resources for learning are drawn from a variety of sources to assist novices to become competent players in the community (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 93-95 cited in Cooper, 2005: 8).

I found this feature of community of practice resonated very strongly with the experiences of my respondents. They all indicated that their learning about leadership in the sector happened through their participation with other practitioners within a community of practice. Interestingly all my respondents indicated that their progression towards leadership in their organizations did not evolve only *inside* their organizations, but started within the sector as a community of practice in different organizations until they assumed leadership when they were regarded as being competent practitioners. An interesting observation from the data I collected is that learning to become competent about the practice was not defined as a mental process or about knowledge transmitted and stored in their heads but as

engaging in changing processes of human activity in a particular community...Knowledge is ...but a part of the very process of participation in the immediate situation (Fenwick, 2001: 34).

Respondent 1 put it this way:

I was just incredibly lucky...working in remarkable groups and teams of people. I never came into a group as a leader. My leadership was part of the groups I was a part of. I have taken the lead from them really. We tried to understand what they need and what the organization needs. **My learning about leadership has been through these groups.** Good leaders are shaped by others more than to shape them (Wenger, 1998: 86)... through that opportunity you can allow others to shape the organization and in that way the world (my emphasis) (Interview, 23 July 2008).

Respondent 2 stated:

I never did a course in leadership... you experienced things and you copy... you see people doing the wrong things and you don't do it... I also worked with people who were useless as leaders; who promoted nepotism and were autocratic (Interview, 9 June 2008).

Building on the approach of legitimate peripheral participation, Rogoff (1984) developed the concept of 'guided participation' (cited by Cooper, 2005: 8). This participation

may be tacit or explicit, face-to-face or distal; it may involve familiar or unfamiliar people, peers as well as experts, and goals which are explicit, implicit or emerging.

There is a very strong resonance with this approach within the sector and how learning about leadership and development practice happens within the 1st historical period. It will be wrong to generalize the positive aspects of this approach to the entire evolution of the sector over the 3 historical periods. Three factors militated against the positive use of this approach in the 2nd and 3rd historical period namely:

1. The penetration of corporate ideas, as alluded to in chapter two, that were harmful to the fundamental purpose and identity of the sector started to become dominant within the community of practice. The "richly diverse field of actors" consisting of government, donors, board members and new leaders (also referred to as boundary workers as I pointed out in my theoretical framework in chapter 2) largely introduced these corporate ideas into the community of practice that conflicted with the fundamental purpose of the sector.

Respondent 5 described it this way:

They (referring to donors) want us to be like corporates...but the everyday is removed from being a corporate. There is nothing wrong to subscribe to relevant laws but you cannot lose focus on your mandate (Interview, 3 July 2008).

Kaplan (1994: 2) as referred to earlier under the constraining factors confirmed this phenomena when he stated that:

Some people formerly working in the corporate and commercial sector are bringing ideas about management and organization which would previously have been rejected by the “democratic” development organizations.

Respondent 1 echoed these sentiments and referring to donors and corporates stated that the sector had been subjected into accepting leadership and management practices that “suit others more than us really.”

2. The migration of ‘old timers’ who could guide the new generation of leaders, to the new government created a vacuum for those who entered during the 2nd and 3rd period. The effect was that the new generations of leadership moved straight to the centre of practice without being fully competent. This is how respondent 5 summed up the consequence of this discontinuity:

There are many leaders in the NGO who should not be there... people join to look for a job... people who can't secure employment... there are organizations where you can be idle ... not knowing what to do (Interview, 11 June 2008).

3. The shift towards formal learning eroded this practice of guided participation since many leaders sought their knowledge about leadership on formal courses without a strong link to a practice (Kaplan, 1994).

Respondent 5, in relating her process of learning as a leader and the shift from competition in the sector to more cooperation in the latter part of the 3rd historical period, stated

There are more young directors now...they are more prone to take risks... this is unknown ground for me...the older generation is more conservative. I think the new ones working with the older ones are good. It makes for a more fantastic recipe (Interview, 11 June 2008).

The idea of newcomers starting at the margins within the NGO sector as a community of practice must also be challenged. Within the sector this approach does not *always* apply in this linear and straightforward fashion. My experience, confirmed by my data collection, is that where members of a community start participating it is not so much dependent on *when* (i.e. timing) they join but the *power they hold* (i.e. their status) (see Billet, 1998) within the community of practice hierarchy when they join. Donors for example are unlikely to start at the margins of the community and will dictate the terms of practice based on their perceived power over the recipient of their funding. This is what happened in the 2nd and 3rd historical period in terms of reporting, planning and accountability models. Board members and consultants can also hold similar power within the community whether they are experienced or competent in the practice or not. Power and how it is distributed and shared therefore determines the level of participation and the rules of practice. A critique of community of practice has always been its lack of theorizing the importance of power dynamics within a community of practice (Cooper, 2005).

The entry of new leadership generations in the 2nd and 3rd period also implied that they did not necessarily start at the margins of the community of practice but at the very centre where competence as a form of identity (Lave, 1991) is required. Whereas this process may have been relevant in the 1st historical period, it certainly was not generally applied in the 2nd and 3rd historical period.

Distribution of power in the community of practice

The issue of power, although generally downplayed by the community of practice theory (Cooper, 2005), is a critical factor that determines how and what leaders learn. If it is accepted that power dynamics are embedded in the process of learning and that learning requires resources, then those who have access to resources and power (Darrah, 1996) are the ones who will have more opportunities to learn as well as set the agenda for learning and in the process reproduce certain values, rules and practices with the sector.

The community of practice theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991) assumes a periphery and a centre. Although not explicitly admitted, it is accepted that those at the centre holds more power than those at the periphery (Cooper, 2005). However, within the NGO sector organizations, being dependent mostly on external resources accessed through external stakeholders, (e.g. external donors, volunteers, board members) this power is not so concentrated. A periphery and a centre, with power more concentrated at the centre cannot always be assumed in all NGO type organizations. It may

apply to your more professional and highly specialized NGOs with a rigid hierarchy (Handy, 1976: 188-190) but not to all organizations generally.

Power within the NGO community of practice may be more distributed amongst various stakeholders such as donors, board members, government, highly skilled volunteers, consultants working on behalf of donors, directors and programme managers. Although the distribution of power may be uneven, all the stakeholders exercise a form of power that is interdependent and cannot be exercised in isolation from a consideration of its effect on the other partners (Collins, 2006: 11). I found the distinction between executive power and legislative power by Collins (2006) very helpful. As I explained in my conceptual framework, according to Collins executive power is exercised in corporates where power tend to be concentrated and legislative power is exercised in the social sectors where it is more distributed.

Referring to legislative power Collins (2006), as pointed out in chapter two, states:

no individual – not even the nominal chief executive – has enough structural power to make the most important decisions by him or herself. Legislative leadership relies more upon persuasion, political currency, and shared interest to create the conditions for the right decision to happen (Collins, 2005: 11).

The “shared interest” prevalent in the 1st historical period was eroded within the 2nd and 3rd historical period as donors, government and consultants assumed more power. This shift at the micro level was in line with the shift that happened at the macro level and consistent with the new discourses that pervaded the sector as pointed out in my contextual analysis. Since power shifted to donors, government and consultants, they also played a crucial role in what was learnt and the dominant mode of learning. However, the exercise of power at the micro level by donors, government and sometimes consultants happened without regard of its effect on the practice of development. The shift towards welfarism became dominant and this informed the content/curriculum of training programmes in the 2nd and 3rd historical period.

Respondent 3 confirmed this shift when she stated:

The way money flows has changed... the northern donors are not very developmental. I call it commercial. It is not the right work; they are results and market oriented. It is about what we can sell the public in Germany or the Netherlands. Others are very blatant! We now have less sophisticated agendas operating. It is becoming very welfare oriented (Interview, 23 June 2008).

Although Lave and Wenger (1998) subsequently did acknowledge the importance of power dynamics in the community of practice, they did not account for macro power dynamics and how this influence or reverberate within a particular community. Cooper (2005: 11) observed that:

although Lave and Wenger do acknowledge the dynamics of power that are likely to arise within a community of practice...they do not provide a means for analyzing how broader, historical and structural relations of power at a societal level (based on race, class, gender, language or culture) might reverberate within the dynamics of any community of practice.

This study has tried to demonstrate the dynamic interrelationship between the macro political shifts and how this impacted on the micro level (Ismail, 2009; Cooper, 2005) of leadership and learning within the NGO sector, a fundamental weakness in the situated learning theory expounded by Lave and Wenger (1991).

Leadership continuity and organizational sustainability

During my data collection respondent 1 questioned the prevailing approach to sustainability. The discourse around sustainability and leadership continuity became prominent within the 2nd historical period. The closure of many NGOs due to an emerging funding crisis and the migration of experienced leaders to government and the corporate sector informed this discourse. This discourse was informed by a corporate perspective.

Instead of viewing organizational sustainability as a means to an end (i.e. to effect social change and transformation), sustainability started to be viewed as an end in itself. Instead of focusing on the long term agenda of NGOs to effect a change in the power relations in society in the interest of the poor and marginalized, leadership continuity and sustainability came to be seen as means of survival for the sake of survival. The end in sight became blurred in the 2nd historical period.

Respondent 1 put it this way:

Sustainability is also being misunderstood...(in the current discourse) its about not dying...sustainability is not about pro-longing life for the sake of prolonging life... we need to create space for new life (Interview, 23 July 2008).

Viewed from this perspective, leadership continuity and sustainability are not necessarily neutral concepts. It can be viewed as good or bad. In this context therefore *discontinuity* is not necessarily a negative concept. It must be viewed in a broader context of organizations being part of a systemic whole. This view resonates strongly with that of Wenger (1998) on generational continuities within a community of practice as I pointed out in chapter 2. Wenger (1998: 94-95) states:

This combination of discontinuity and continuity creates a dynamic equilibrium that can be construed...as stable and as the same practice.

From dual forms of learning to learning in a community of practice

According to respondent 1 there needs to be a rethink about what is regarded as formal and informal learning. Based on his experience many NGOs are offering learning programmes that are not so informal and are quite rigorous and very structured. Situated learning theorists (Lave, 1996), as I pointed out in chapter 2 are also skeptical about this dualism between formal and informal learning. Based on her research amongst the Via and Gola tailors in Liberia Lave (1996) questioned what she referred to as the compartmentalization of informal and formal education (Lave, 1996: 161). Instead of this dualism situated learning proposes learning within a community of practice where these dualisms become obsolete and unnecessary. For Lave (1996: 161)

learning, wherever it occurs, is an aspect of changing participation in changing practices.

According to situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 104) the dualistic approach to learning is inherent in 'rationalist' cognitive theory and this cannot be accepted as unproblematic but need to be the object of interrogation and explanation. They argue that categories about abstract and concrete knowledge as forms of knowledge that is distinct are constructions of a particular cultural practice related to the western scientific model. For Lave (1996: 155)

it is not just the informal side of life that (is) composed of intricately context-embedded and situated activity: there is nothing else.

This concludes my data presentation and analysis. In the next chapter I outline my key findings as well as conclusion.

CHAPTER 5: KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This research study has set out to answer my main research question namely,

What kind of learning and knowledge is important in leadership continuity in the NGO sector?

In chapter one I developed my contextual analysis in which I explained my rationale for conducting this research. Here I tried to show the origins of the NGO sector and how it has evolved as a community of practice as well as the key discourses and challenges that those in leadership are facing at this historical conjuncture. In explaining the evolution of the sector I conceptualized 3 historical periods as one of many lenses through which the evolution of the NGO sector in South Africa may be understood.

In chapter two I developed my conceptual framework and my literature review. In presenting my conceptual framework I focused on theories of leadership practice from both a corporate and humanist perspective. I also provided a description of both formal and informal learning and further explored 3 theories of learning namely, experiential learning, popular education and situated learning. I also argued for an appreciation of the interplay between macro and micro power relations as these dynamics impact on a community of practice.

In chapter three I presented my research methodology which is based on a qualitative and inductive approach. I provided my justification for selecting my respondents, provided a profile of them as well as my choice of semi-structured interviews as a primary method of data collection. Here I explored some of the challenges I faced during the data collection and analysis stage. Based on my personal experiences within the NGO sector, a key challenge I raised was the tension I experienced in my role as the researcher and my identity as an activist. I referred to my struggle to remain objective and vigilant in the research process and not to be overwhelmed by subjective considerations that could influence or cloud the research findings.

In chapter four I presented and analyzed my data using key themes that were linked to my main research and sub-questions. In this chapter I am going to present some key findings based on my data analysis and conclude my study.

MY KEY FINDINGS:

The erosion of the NGO community of practice in the 2nd historical period

My analysis has tried to demonstrate that at the level of leadership and learning a qualitative change in the mode of learning about leadership impacted upon the nature of the NGO sector as a community of practice. In the 1st historical period informal learning was highly valued with experiential learning being more collective than individual.

However, a fundamental shift in learning about leadership occurred in the 2nd historical period. With the changing political and socio-economic context post 1994 (Ismail, 2009) informal learning and learning via the community of practice (with its focus on the collective) became eroded, less dominant and less supported by this changing context. The dominant role of formal learning and its perceived value was accompanied by more and more opportunities for those previously denied access to it. A trend developed where many leaders enrolled on numerous leadership and development courses (Hill, 2006) to validate their experiences through formal learning. This process happened at the same time when the older leaders (or “old timers”) within the sector migrated to government and the corporate sector.

The new generation of leaders who entered at this stage lacked the tradition and collective experience of the struggle period coupled with access to the body of knowledge developed during this phase. The identity of the new generation (Lave, 1991) of leaders in the 2nd historical period therefore differed fundamentally with the older generation. Their knowledge was mainly *text-based with an emphasis on managerialism, profitability and sustainability* (with a focus more on financial sustainability). During this phase popular education and situated learning approaches became eroded as learning shifted more and more to formal educational institutions in line with a new educational regime that valued standardized and outcomes based approaches to learning.

The shift towards this kind of leadership and knowledge did not support the holistic sustainability and an adherence to a developmental practice within the sector. As I pointed out in my contextual analysis during this period there was a breakdown of the 3 dimensions of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998: 72-95) namely, mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. With new practices introduced by various actors (Kaplan, 1994) all 3 dimensions were seriously disrupted and led to a destabilization of the sector.

The beginning of the 3rd historical period was largely characterized by elements of the 2nd period. However, the continued crisis within the NGO sector, the emergence of new social movements with an activist based approach to leadership and sustained community protests due to a lack of participatory democracy expressed through service delivery protests, caused a shift to take place within the NGO leadership towards once again valuing informal modes of learning and the valorizing of ‘local knowledge’ as in the 1st historical period¹².

Shift from learning to training programmes

Part of this shift from learning in a community of practice and through popular education in the 1st historical period was also a shift from holistic learning to learning based on training programmes where the organized transmission of ideas or teaching (Lave, 1991) is valued instead of learning by doing. This shift led to learning about leadership that became de-contextualized and text-based. This shift to training programmes coincided with a broader shift towards the commodification of education (Walters and Daniels, 2007). Instead of approaching training as a supplement to the ongoing learning process it became a substitute for learning through integrating newcomers into the community of practice and utilizing the skills and competence of the older generation to help shape the identity of the newcomers (Wenger, 1998).

The role of boundary workers is not unproblematic

The role of boundary workers or brokers (Wenger, 1998) is presented in the literature on situated learning as positive in terms of the value that they add across multiple communities of practice. Although this is partly true for the NGO sector, it is also a fact that these “richly diverse field of essential actors” (Ibid) can also play a negative role in terms of the rules of practice that define the community (Wenger, 1998). As was pointed out in my analysis, practices that were detrimental to the interest of the sector were introduced in the 2nd historical period (Kaplan, 1994).

Legitimate Peripheral Participation cannot be viewed as unproblematic and neutral

My analysis has tried to demonstrate that legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger, 1998) is not an unproblematic process of knowledge acquisition within the NGO sector. During the 2nd historical period there were individuals who entered the sector as leaders and became actors at the centre

¹² In November 2008 a country-wide popular education network based on the ideas of Paulo Freire was initiated.

instead of starting at the margins and being integrated into the community of practice (Wenger, 1998). This, I believe, was one of the causes of the discontinuity that led to the crisis in the sector. My view is that this process of learning as participation in practice and identity construction is a powerful way of understanding learning, and its conscious application in the sector will restore the equilibrium that Wenger (1998) refers to. Furthermore, the ideas that these individuals as part of the “*diverse field of essential actors*” introduced into the sector in the 2nd historical period (Kaplan, 1994) influenced the learning agenda embodied in the community of practice. In this context the process of legitimate peripheral participation cannot be viewed as neutral and divorced from the broader discourses operating at the macro level.

As I pointed out in chapter 2 Cooper (2006: 22) is also critical of the concept of “legitimate peripheral participation” based on research in a trade union. Citing inequalities between workers based on language, formal education, gender, urban and rural divide as well as the hierarchical nature of the division of labour, she highlights the constraints this place on participation.

All these factors promote greater participation by some and the more limited participation or exclusion by others (Ibid).

Knowledge transfer is possible but not the quality of a practice as competence through identity construction

Situated learning theorists (Lave and Wenger, 1996) reject the idea of knowledge transfer from one community of practice to another since the knowledge construction process is viewed as participation in changing communities of practice. My contention is that certain elements of knowledge transfer is possible through the organized transmission of ideas but not the quality of that practice (CDRA, 2006) viewed as the development of competence through identity construction as highlighted by situated learning.

Dualism of formal and informal learning needs rethinking

My data analysis has clearly demonstrated a strong bias from my respondents towards informal modes of learning in leadership development and continuity in the sector. Respondent 1 has questioned the underlying assumption that informal leaning is inferior to formal learning since many NGOs are currently offering learning programmes that are as rigorous as that offered by formal

learning institutions. As I pointed out in my conceptual framework, Brookfield (1986: 149) explained how Knowles and Tough have dispelled the false dichotomy of formal learning being superior to self-directed learning in informal settings. Formal learning is regarded as rational, purposeful and effective whereas informal learning is regarded as ineffective, serendipitous and inferior.

I also agree with Lave (1991) that we need to rethink this duality between informal and formal learning with a valorizing of the latter. I support the view that within a community of practice such a duality becomes unhelpful in providing a proper theorization of the effectiveness of the epistemological process. Hodkinson et al (2003: 187) advances a similar perspective when they claim that almost all learning situations “contain attributes of formality/informality” which “are interrelated in different ways in different learning situations.” They argue against a perspective that views certain modes of learning as inherently superior and others inferior.

Conclusion:

In this research study I have tried to show that the fundamental cause of the current lack of sustainability and crisis within the NGO sector is not just linked to a lack of funding. Rather, we need to understand that it is also located in the shifts in leadership and learning that have occurred within the three historical periods as outlined in my data presentation. These shifts were accompanied by broader shifts in the power relations in South Africa post 1994 and the witting or unwitting adoption by sections of the NGO leadership of practices that were detrimental to the NGO sector as a community of practice.

The entry of new leadership generations in the 2nd and 3rd historical periods into the sector facilitated this adoption. It was further reinforced by the disruption of informal learning processes and the tacit undermining of a body of knowledge, experience and skills acquired in the process of struggle to promote a developmental practice in the interest of the poor and marginalized. The shift in emphasis to more formal learning processes with their emphasis on accreditation, standardization and commodification of education at the expense of the value of informal learning undermined the NGO sector as a community of practice and consequently also leadership development and continuity within it.

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