Critical Action Research: Exploring Organisational Learning and Sustainability in a Kenyan Context

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The main goal of this study was to deepen an understanding of exploring organisational learning and sustainability using critical action research methodology in a Kenyan context. The research process involved a group of 23 middle level management employees of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) in identifying and acting on sustainability issues. This group was designed and cultivated as a community of practice for organisational learning purposes. The basic premise underlying the study is that exploring agential, structural and cultural interactions (morphogenetic relationships) through educational interventions (communicative interactions) in a community of practice can deepen context specific understanding of organisational learning and sustainability. I developed this argument by drawing on a complex philosophical framework that brought together assumptions from Archerian social realism, Deweyan pragmatism and critical theory. The framework underpinned three distinct and yet related theoretical perspectives – the Archerian morphogenetic approach, Habermasian critical theory and Lave and Wenger’s communities of practice. The Archerian morphogenetic approach and Habermasian critical theory respectively provided ontological and epistemological perspectives for the study. Lave and Wenger’s communities of practice approach provided both a unit of analysis (the NMK community) and a social theory of learning to complement the Archerian and Habermasian theoretical perspectives.

I generated data within a 14-month period between March 2005 and March 2007 in three distinct but integrally intertwined broad action research cycles of inquiry. During the first cycle, the research group identified contextual issues related to organisational learning and sustainability. In the second cycle the group investigated the issues deeper and deliberated possibilities for social change and the emergence of sustainability. The final cycle delineated social learning outcomes from the study and explored ways of institutionalising social change processes. Throughout these cycles, I explored ways of knowing the social reality of enabling organisational learning and sustainability. The cycles were integral to communicative interactions, which I implemented as educational interventions for developing agency in the NMK community of practice. Data analysis was undertaken
within cyclical processes of entering and managing data, manual coding and developing categories, identifying themes, presenting results and validating findings.

Undertaking a collaborative critical organisational analysis of the NMK revealed various contextual factors that both constrained and enabled participant learning capabilities and reflexivity to address sustainability issues. These factors manifested as contextually mediated issues of communication and information flows, decision making and leadership (governance), staff motivation and development, financial management and the identity and role of the NMK. The research process promoted collective social action and innovation, fostered critical reflections and reflexivity, enhanced democratic deliberations and strengthened systemic thinking capabilities in the NMK community of practice. This study contributes to the body of literature on environmental education in its employment of a coherent and complex philosophical and theoretical framework for exploring organisational learning and sustainability.
Declaration

This thesis is submitted in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Macquarie University. I declare that the work described herein is original, except where otherwise indicated and acknowledged. I further declare that this thesis has not, either in part or whole, been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Abel Barasa Atiti
30 May 2008
Acknowledgements

The realisation of this study was possible as a result of collaboration with many people at the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) and Macquarie University (MU). I am grateful for the tremendous support I received from the management of the NMK. I would like to sincerely thank Dr Idle Farah, the NMK Director-General, for granting me permission to undertake this research and also for allowing me to access the facilities, financial and human resources at the NMK. His overwhelming support for this research project stimulated me to investigate issues that colleagues thought were subversive to surface. I am grateful to all the Directors, Heads of departments and colleagues at the NMK for their support during the action phase of this research. I am greatly indebted to the 23 colleagues who participated in this research as members of a community of practice. Their humour, heated debates and commitment to the research process kept the sustainability spirit in me burning. Special thanks to the top management team and other colleagues who took part in the research workshops. I sincerely thank the proprietor and staff of Langi Langi Cafeteria for providing meals during the research meetings at the NMK.

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In loving memory of my father

To my mother, wife and children
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# Acronyms

<table>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>BGCI</td>
<td>Botanic Gardens Conservation International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBD</td>
<td>Convention on Biological Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CITES</td>
<td>Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora</td>
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<tr>
<td>CKRC</td>
<td>Constitution of Kenya Review Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSRP</td>
<td>Civil Service Reform Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEC</td>
<td>Directors Executive Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFRD</td>
<td>District Focus for rural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>EHS</td>
<td>Environmental Health and Safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERSWEC</td>
<td>Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>Education for Sustainable Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FG</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
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<td>GSE</td>
<td>Graduate School of the Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRDC</td>
<td>Human Resource Development Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEEP</td>
<td>International Environmental Education programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPR</td>
<td>Institute of Primate Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>IUCN</td>
<td>International Union for Conservation of Nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>KACA</td>
<td>Kenya Anti-Corruption Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>KANU</td>
<td>Kenya African National Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>MU</td>
<td>Macquarie University</td>
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<tr>
<td>MUWA</td>
<td>Museum Welfare Association</td>
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<td>NARC</td>
<td>National Rainbow Coalition</td>
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<td>NEMA</td>
<td>National Environment Management Authority</td>
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<td>NMK</td>
<td>National Museums of Kenya</td>
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<td>NMKSP</td>
<td>National Museums of Kenya Support programme</td>
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<td>NPEP</td>
<td>National Poverty Eradication Plan</td>
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<td>PRGF</td>
<td>Poverty Reduction Growth Facility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRSP</td>
<td>Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>REEP</td>
<td>Regional Environmental Education Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>RISSEA</td>
<td>Research Institute of Swahili Studies in Eastern Africa</td>
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<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern Africa Development Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAPS</td>
<td>Structural and Adjustment Programmes</td>
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<td>UN</td>
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<td>UNCED</td>
<td>United Nations Conference on Environment and Development</td>
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<td>UNDESD</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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<td>WCED</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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<td>World Summit on Sustainable Development</td>
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