

**The politics and micro-politics of professionalization:
An ethnographic study of a professional NGO and its interface with the state**

by

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature: Monique McCusker

Date: _____

ABSTRACT

The NGO sector is continuing to diversify, experiencing increasing competition from the for-profit market and pressure from the state looking for support through service delivery. There are growing internal and external calls for the development of appropriate evaluation methods within NGOs, intended to provide a much needed transparency, and to monitor and evaluate the sector's accountability, legitimacy, and credibility – the very politics of its image and identity. As a result many NGOs are adapting their strategic behaviour to increase their efficacy to meet these new challenges. Professionalization or corporatization is said to be transforming NGOs into new regimes of efficiency, leading to their absorption of increasingly commercial practices. How professional NGOs go about their business has become as important as what they do. Using an ethnographic approach and participant observation, this study reveals the many constraints and opportunities one such NGO faced as it employed strategies to professionalize, and the various forms of organising it exhibited in its political, economic and social context. I explore the social interface between the organisation and its environment, and again between the staff members and the organisation itself. The study explores the connectedness between the broader context and the local experience, which in turn informs the NGO's shifting strategies. An 'embedded' understanding provides insight into the evolution of social processes behind the production of everyday life within the professional NGO, exploring how it arrives at a certain coherence in the face of multiple realities at the local level. Development literature is used as a point of departure before applying anthropological theory as a lens through which to interpret the research questions. I place the NGO in a historical context and depict the political nature of the state-NGO relationship within a contract culture and competitive market. Discourses around surviving the embedded contradictions within accountability and legitimacy are explored. I reveal the pains of institutional and cultural evolution within the organisation under the push to professionalize as staff search for meaning and agency in everyday practice. And finally, I describe how the professional NGO negotiates an identity through both the external and internal politics of representation. There is no simple trajectory for professional NGOs. I find instead a competitive fight for survival and increasing dependence on political and economic savvy. The professional NGO has to constantly re-define and re-affirm its mission, while staff members weather the effects of this ongoing change and are forced to continually reconcile the very meaning of their work and identity to make sense of this experience. As an organisational study this contributes to an understanding of one professional NGO's survival strategies in context, its organisational culture as an activity, and individual sense-making and identity formulation in the local setting. This study hopes to reveal what is gained and lost through employing the strategy to professionalize, and add to a growing body of research narrating the evolution within the NGO sector, informing questions currently being asked by state, business, and civil society groups.

OPSOMMING

Diversifisering duur voort in die nie-regeringsorganisasie (NRO) sektor wat toenemende kompetisie vanuit die mark-sektor en druk van die staat ervaar as gevolg van 'n soeke na dienslewering. Eise vir die ontwikkeling van geskikte evalueringsmetodes word al hoe meer beide binne asook buite die NRO-sektor gestel. Die doel hiervan is om deursigtigheid te verskaf sowel as aanspreeklikheid, legitimiteit en geloofwaardigheid (d.w.s die beeld en identiteit van hierdie sektor) te monitor. Gevolglik is 'n groot aantal NROs besig om hul strategiëe aan te pas om hul doeltreffendheid tov hierdie uitdagings te verhoog. Daar word beweer dat professionalisering hierdie sektor meer doeltreffend maak wat lei tot toenemende kommersiële praktyke. Die wyse waarop professionele NRO's handel het net so belangrik geword as dit wat hulle doen.

Hierdie studie toon die beperkinge en geleenthede wat een NRO ondervind tydens 'n proses van professionalisering en herorganisering binne sy politieke, ekonomiese en sosiale konteks. Met gebruikmaking van 'n etnografiese en deelnemende benadering, het ek die raakvlakke tussen die organisasie en sy omgewing asook tussen die personeel en die organisasie self ondersoek. My betrokkenheid as lid van die organisasie verskaf insig tov wat alledaagse realiteit in die organisasie onderlê om sodoende organisatoriese koherensie op plaaslike vlak beter te verken.

Ontwikkellingsliteratuur word eerstens gebruik voordat antropologiese teorie aangewend word om navorsingsvrae te stel en te interpreteer. Die NRO word histories en polities binne sy kontrakgedrewe en mededingende konteks ontleed. Die diskoerse van personeel omtrent teenstrydighede tussen aanspreeklikheid en legitimiteit asook omtrent die stryd wat professionalisering onderlê, word ondersoek. Laastens word die totstandkoming van 'n organisatoriese identiteit wat geskied deur onderhandeling tussen interne en eksterne faktore, beskryf.

Geen eenvoudige ontwikkelingsbaan bestaan vir professionele NRO's nie. Eerder bestaan daar 'n stryd vir oorlewing gebaseer op kundigheid met die gevolg dat die organisasie gedurig sy missie en die organisasie se personeel hul werk en hul identiteite moet aanpas. Hierdie studie poog om 'n bydrae te lewer op drie vlakke: die organisatoriese vlak waar oorlewing belangrik is, die organisasiekultuur vlak, en die individuele vlak waar sin in plaaslike konteks geskep moet word. Daar word verder gepoog om die voor- en nadele van die professionalisering van 'n NRO aan te toon en derhalwe om by te dra tot die groeiende navorsingsresultate wat die NRO-sektor betref.

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- the participants, without whom this would not have been possible;
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|-----------|---|
| BEE | Black Economic Empowerment |
| CBO | Community Based Organisation |
| HOD | Head of Department |
| ISEH | International Society for Evaluating Health (pseudonym) |
| HARP | Name of the organisation (pseudonym) |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicator |
| MEC | Member of the Executive Council |
| MD | Managing Director |
| NDA | National Development Agency |
| NDOH | National Department of Health |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NHC | National Health Council |
| NPO | Not-for-Profit Organisation |
| PHC | Primary Health Care |
| R | Rand (South African currency) |
| SANGOCO | South African Non-Governmental Organisation Coalition |
| SMT | Senior Management Team |
| SADC-CNGO | South African Development Community Council of Non-Governmental Organisations |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |

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1 CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

I know that if we don't continually look to see how we can achieve our mission better as things evolve we are going to become obsolete. The limiting factor has been finance, even in spite of that I believe that the risk is worth it. There are times I have been looking at the budget thinking in three months we are gone. But somehow or other the money's come in. For example the AIDS work, I know that people on the board were sceptical about going that route, and now we have an opportunity to get World Bank funding. One of the interesting things about HARP since it began is that the rate of change has been no faster than over the last two years. From moment to moment HARP has been changing. The changes that we make are based on looking at the environment and saying what do we need to do, and how do we deal with the opportunities that come up. It's not as if we started ten years ago and are only changing now. Everything day-to-day has been changing over the last ten years. I think it is fantastic (HARP's Managing Director).

The bad thing about a professional NGO is that there is a lot of room for doubt; the motives are not entirely pure. HARP is no exception; it is a very grey area. We are not a purely capitalist organisation selling baked beans and making the most money we can for our shareholders, we are also not distributing free beans to people living under the shade of the tree. What we are actually trying to do is to say to people . . . here are the seeds, grow your own beans (senior HARP staff member).

We know that our system is a damn good one. There has been one thing that I have believed in through all the difficulties . . . we have got a good product. I believe 100% in the product, that we can make a difference. HARP is a very difficult place to work in but the kinds of people who work here are sure of themselves and are professional people. It satisfies my needs and I feel that I matter. I matter by value of what I do and give back (HARP field staff member).

I know I have often said it, and I will keep saying it – although we have grown as a company over the years, we have lost ground as an organisation (senior HARP staff member).

1.1 Introduction

The yellow brick road is an element in the novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum, and provides a tongue-in-cheek metaphor to describe the many challenges NGOs face on their journey in pursuit of an altruistic mission or cause. As an anthropology student working for one such *professional*¹ NGO within the healthcare sector, I found myself in the unique position of companion on this journey. The discoveries I was to make exposed me to the great successes and disappointments this organisation faced on its journey; the continuing need for courage, heart and strategic thinking in simply 'keeping it together'. In this manner I was provided a window of opportunity to live within the 'village' of this professional NGO and found myself inspired to reveal the historical and political-economic dimensions of this fight for survival. With a mission statement aimed at helping to improve the delivery of quality care in hospitals, this service delivery NGO operated within a highly politicized environment. The South African government's efficient and effective delivery of healthcare was an issue of national interest and debate, as the process of transforming the public health system provides a challenge in light of its post-apartheid legacy. The media, opposition political parties and civil society continue to highlight the evidence of widespread mismanagement, lack of capacity and appalling standards of care in public sector hospitals.

In lay terms the idea behind a non-governmental (NGO) or not-for-profit organisation (NPO), its mission and 'culture' often leads to stereotypical assumptions around a sense of unity in shared ideals, pure intentions, grass roots representation and advocacy. However, the ongoing publicity around increasing accounts of corruption and disappointing performance outcomes has led to both internal and external calls for the development and implementation of appropriate regulations and evaluation methods intended to provide a much needed transparency, and to monitor and evaluate the sector's accountability, legitimacy, and credibility – the very politics of its image and identity. As a result many NGOs have had to adapt their strategic behaviour to increase their efficiency and efficacy within the sector, adjusting their image and identity to meet these new challenges. NGOs are continuing to diversify, experiencing increasing competition from the for-profit market, in addition to the pressure from the state looking for professional advice and support through service delivery. As an increasingly fluid sector it has to continually renegotiate its allegiances and boundaries, redefining its relationships with the market, state, donors, clients and communities. There is no simple trajectory for professional NGOs, no clear blueprint to follow. Rather there appears to be an expanding underbelly on this yellow brick road which reveals a messy and competitive fight for survival and increasing dependence on political and economic savvy. This is a

¹ Within this study the reference to 'professional NGO' implies an organisation offering the services of specialists who have undertaken academic study and are understood to be proficient as experts in their field.

journey fraught with constant compromise, re-evaluation and innovation in the search for ongoing funding and sustainability. As a result the professional NGO must constantly re-define and re-affirm its mission, while the organisation and staff members must weather the effects of this ongoing change and are forced to continually reconcile the very meaning of their work and identity to make sense of this experience. To be sure no paltry 'survival 101' manual would suffice for a journey fraught with political agendas, fierce competition, waning resources, questionable alliances, performance challenges, faltering will, and even identity crises. How does one make sense of how a professional NGO manages to 'keep it together' on its journeys along the yellow brick road, and possibly beyond? Firstly, I would need to place the NGO in a historical context and reveal the political nature of the state-NGO relationship within a contract culture and competitive market. Secondly, explore how discourses around surviving embedded contradictions within accountability and legitimacy intertwine with the politics of the day. Thirdly, reveal the pains of institutional and cultural evolution within the organisation under the push to professionalize as staff search for meaning and agency in everyday practice. And finally, describe how the professional NGO negotiates an identity through both the external and internal politics of representation. Exactly how does the professional NGO arrive at a certain coherence and foresee its future in the face of ongoing ambiguity and multiple realities at the local level?

An exploration in context revealed the richness of insights, diversity and tensions within the NGO's reality lived through professional spaces, cultural practices, power relationships and politics in daily events and processes. Using an ethnographic approach, I was able to contextualise the organisation as a unit of analysis, 'studying up' on the complexities and contradictions experienced by one professional NGO from both an emic and etic perspective. In my preliminary reading of the literature I discovered a large body of management, development and sociology theory focusing on third sector organisations; however theoretical input from anthropology specific to organisations proved a growing field. Based on my experiences within the organisation, I made use of broader development literature as a point of departure and then applied anthropological theory as a lens through which to interpret the questions that were coming to the fore through field experience. This led to the research problem developing as a fusion of both the development and anthropological perspectives. The aim was to define a relational connectedness between the broader framework, distinct phenomena and the local experience by describing both the political, economic, and non-economic manifestations that define the organisation's complex and multiple realities.

The methodology used for this study was that of participant observation, using an ethnographic approach to data analysis. An emphasis was placed on an analysis of a combination of political power plays, discourse, moral reasoning, cultural flows and social creativity. The research aimed to reveal the identification and contestation within and between NGO staff, how micro-politics and

discourse around the organisation's purpose, moral accountability and identity intertwine with politics of the day and provides meaning for all. In what way were realities sanctioned, marginalized, or forced to play into larger political processes? How did local practices shape the NGO, how were responsibilities shifted and illusory boundaries created? The hope was that things unfamiliar may be uncovered in a familiar landscape, revealing the social interface between the organisation and its environment and again between the staff members and the organisation itself.

1.2 Profile of a professional NGO

1.2.1 The organisation

Conceived as a pilot from a Faculty in one of South Africa's leading universities, HARP² has been operational since 1995 as a not-for-profit NGO, and recently proudly South African organisation. During HARP's initial development the approach was based on the managing director's (MD) Doctoral thesis. HARP is a health care quality improvement body that has been working behind the scenes for the past ten years to help improve standards in South African hospitals and the quality of service delivery in both the public and private sector. To date it has been working in hundreds of health care facilities in six provinces across South Africa, with the aim of assisting service providers to understand and implement quality standards. Through comprehensive evaluation and reporting, HARP makes the National Department of Health (NDOH), provincial authorities, private healthcare administrators, and general public aware of the facilities that substantially comply with such standards. HARP has itself also been certificated by the International Society for Evaluating Health (ISEH)³ - this international recognition gives HARP credibility as a health care standards and monitoring body and reassures its clients, funders and health policy makers that it has sound and consistent systems and processes (HARP website). Modifications to HARP's philosophical and academic approach are based on the latest academic and international guidelines brought back by the MD from international meetings.

As repeatedly stated by the MD, HARP is not an activist or grass roots NGO. It is a *professional* body operating from a strong values base, with a mission to empower South African healthcare facilities to deliver quality, cost-effective and compassionate care through an integrated quality improvement and certification approach. In consultation with a non-executive board, the MD is responsible for managing the overall strategy and operations of the NGO. HARP is loosely divided into the following sections: management (including strategy, communications and legal), finance and administration, programme management, facilitation management, surveying management and data management. Section heads and senior individuals then manage the day to day

² To facilitate maximum disclosures during fieldwork, pseudonyms for the organization and participants will be used.

³ Pseudonym used to protect HARP's anonymity.

operations and staff for which they are responsible. With its head office situated in Cape Town, HARP does not utilise volunteers, but employs 38 staff across the country, of which 19 are facilitators and surveyors involved directly with health care facilities in the field.

From its inception as a small professional NGO, the management style within HARP grew in a collaborative and consultative style, although the MD retained the decision-making power. With regard to communication, although there is an abundance of paperwork produced as a result of HARP's activities, at a senior level interpersonal communications are informal with management communication mostly oral at both individual and group levels. However, with the organisation's infrastructure growing considerably in the last few years to sustain annual gross revenue of over ten million Rand⁴, an inevitable distancing has occurred. This has been supported by the introduction of a more business-like management approach with the aim of professionalizing HARP and to monitor its performance. As a result, communications have been increasingly formalised to senior management meetings, along with the introduction of key performance indicators (KPIs) and more frequent performance evaluations. Senior staff gather formally every two weeks for a senior management team (SMT) meeting chaired by the MD, where they report on KPIs, provide input into overall NGO strategy and management, and coordinate ad hoc committees and activities across the organisation.

As the founder of the NGO, the MD is responsible for 'bringing in the money' and spends a fair portion of his time travelling nationally and internationally. In addition to reporting back on progress to existing clients and authorities around the country, the MD is involved with World Health Organisation (WHO) committees, active networking and relationship management, lobbying for work and giving presentations when requested as an expert in his field. Therefore outside of periodic conferences, the flow of knowledge and information within the organisation remains largely top-down before being integrated into training and development structures. Healthy tensions do exist within HARP around levels of participation, expectations of management and the allocation of time and resources. It is important to note that as a growing NGO, HARP has struggled through many years where there was no guarantee of 'the next contract'. As a result staff have banded together, many internalising an ethic of conservative spending and a 'don't count your chickens' approach to the sustainability of the organisation. Although HARP's gross income runs into the millions, a five percent profit margin in no way guarantees its future and uncertainty is always a real part of future planning. The low staff turnover rate within HARP is a testimony to both the commitment its members have and perhaps the perceptions of a finite job market in South Africa.

⁴ Annual average for years 2002 to 2005.

The challenge of a national health care system in distress along with periodic disease outbreaks guides HARP in strategically positioning or aligning itself to best respond to system deficiencies. Initially piloted in the private sector, HARP has as part of its mission developed a long and complex relationship with the NDOH. At this point in time at least ninety percent of HARP's funding is sourced from the NDOH. HARP follows a state tender process and is 'contracted' to the NDOH to implement its quality programmes as a delivery of service. However, there is growing competition for funds between NGOs, coupled with tighter controls on the NDOH's provision of funding. HARP is experiencing increasing pressure to continually streamline and adapt itself to sustain a market position, all the while nurturing a collaborative spirit in meeting the NDOH's often poorly defined or changing service delivery requirements. In addition, there is an ongoing play-off between courting the aggressive private sector, or the demanding public sector, each with its own bias and influence on the organisation. HARP has to remain not only viable, but accountable, credible and hold fast to its value base while managing its professional contract deliverables in its service relationship with the NDOH.

1.2.2 The people

Walking into the HARP Cape Town office on any given day, you are immediately impressed by the corporate layout of the offices and the welcoming demeanour of staff. HARP is no grass roots community organisation, but a professional 'company' displaying all the slogans and framed certificates that speak of its achievements. Far from its humble beginnings HARP has clawed its way to international recognition in its field and is responsible for evaluating the management of millions of the tax payer's Rand. As an NGO, behind its accomplishments and front stage persona one finds passionate and dedicated people, holding diverse opinions of the organisation's role but united in its drive to 'make a difference'. You will among them find the mother who is driven by financing her kids education, the nurse who is disillusioned by the public sector, the single male willing to travel, the retired academic, the white middle aged afraid of not finding alternative employment and those just appreciative for the monthly pay cheque. You will also find those who are motivated by a belief that the programme makes a real difference and the focus on quality improvement can be a saving grace to health care. The confounding variable is that shades and diluted versions of all of the above reside in single individuals.

HARP employees are professionals who mostly have a medical or clinical background and are inevitably influenced by the ethics of their profession but are employed by an organisation to implement a programme. They did not volunteer or sign up to an activist organisation and I wager would support their employer in a similar fashion to any corporate company employee who has developed a sense of loyalty to the company. As far as the daily grind and management of the head office is concerned you could imagine that you are working in the training division of KPMG, dependent on your next contract for your livelihood. It is important to highlight that although the

majority of staff members are highly educated within the medical field, these are not political activists or third sector specialists. However perhaps something special does seep through . . . an awareness that you are a not-for-profit keeping your costs low to ensure affordability for your clients. There exists an affinity with the higher ideals within the medical profession that this is about the business of providing a service and saving lives. Awareness that without your efforts facilities will be worse off and that is bad news for the patient. These are people who have mostly worked in public healthcare facilities and have experienced the dire situation on the ground. It is within this context that the daily reality plays itself out, the professional growing pains and increasing requirements for accountability, adaptability, and political savvy to ensure credibility and survival for this NGO.

1.2.3 The programme

We do what [the NDOH] should be doing, but don't have the knowledge or resources to do it themselves. Health care workers don't have the capacity to do what we do as well. We assist them and provide expert and specialist input. We also provide objective evaluations as an independent outside body, free from bias or corruption. We are in the forefront of quality assurance worldwide (HARP staff member).

By way of a high level overview, HARP has over the last ten years written sets of standards for hospital, clinic and hospice services. These have been developed in collaboration with a network of professional bodies both nationally and internationally – a veritable bible of professional standards of care. As a 'door stop' of intellectual property they provide a unique resource which is made available amongst all participating facilities, and most often offered freely to bodies that approach HARP to consult the 'bible'. Once compliance is evaluated, facilities' scores are entered into a custom designed information system that calculates the average scores across multiple possible views – and demonstrates these as text based reports, or graphically in one page overviews of progress. Certification is a specific activity that adheres to well defined policies and procedures overseen by an independent technical committee. The ultimate goal is that the quality of care within a facility gradually improves as a result of all services within the hospital meeting a pre-set minimum score. In addition to this evaluation technology, HARP has recently developed a project management database which monitors and evaluates the facilities' participation in a structured facilitated programme by way of attendance, number of services evaluated, specific deficiencies identified and quality improvement programmes initiated as a response. The aim of this technology is to provide a management tool for clients at facility and provincial level, in addition to monitoring the performance of HARP facilitators in delivery of service.

Quality improvement is a very fashionable concept at present, and is actively promoted by the WHO as a strategic choice for governments to employ in improving health care. However, there is no documented proof that quality improvement saves lives. It is an associated benefit, an

assumption that efficient systems, policies and procedures will ultimately impact on the quality of delivered care, and hence the patient welfare. There are a couple of provincial initiatives to develop internal quality improvement programmes, but none has of yet managed to gain a broad measure of success. Quality improvement is no quick fix solution, has to be driven by management and the challenge taken up by facility staff. HARP does not perform a line management function, and ensuring top-down support is a real and ongoing challenge to the success of the programme. A senior member of HARP staff is well known for repeating that “we objectively evaluate and provide target standards; change must be driven by the facility and enforced by management strategically.” HARP is contracted at provincial level and allocated certain facilities to work in . . . therefore support for the programme at coal face is not ensured, and it can be seen as enforced labour by facility staff who are already stretched thin. Facility staff feedback has been recorded showing a range of responses, from “salvation at last“, to “these people are just making money from the department. . . . If they want this . . . implemented, they must start at provincial level and take it down from there”⁵. It is also an approach that is directly impacted on by structural constraints ranging from a lack of soap, no working toilets, failing equipment and crumbling building infrastructure. Education and training can only go so far before what is often referred to by the NDOH as the ‘legacy of healthcare infrastructure’ blocks quality initiatives. HARP deals with this ‘legacy’ within its programmes and although it does not address structural transformation directly, it highlights the nature of these issues in its reports to provincial management.

1.3 Research aims and rationale

This is not a study which seeks to evaluate the NGO’s programme or critique its position in relation to development anthropology, nor the anthropology of development. Bypassing a focus on local development or project outcomes and impact⁶, this thesis is primarily an organisational study. It aims to understand the integration of one professional NGO’s survival strategies in its context, its organisational culture as an activity, and individual sense-making and identity formulation in the local setting. The study does not seek definitive answers to questions nor provide solutions to problems, but rather attempts to bring to the fore the complexity of the multiple realities and issues the NGO faces through its lived experience. It is hoped that this ‘embedded’ understanding will provide insight into the evolution of social processes behind the production of everyday life within the NGO, leading to deeper questions being asked beyond categorizing organisational life too simply. NGOs rebelliously refuse to fit into neat and obedient categories; they prove themselves unendingly flexible and innovative. As a means therefore of describing and exploring the ‘real world of NGOs’, this research follows a more ethnographic approach as demonstrated by Hilhorst

⁵ Anonymous quotes sourced from a participating facility newsletter.

⁶ The persistent question of whether NGOs ‘do good’ or not (Fisher 1997; Ferguson 1990).

(2003). "Understanding what is happening within and through organisations such as NGOs and adapting to the changing conditions within which they operate present challenges to anthropological researchers" (Fisher 1997:459). This thesis hopes to go some way towards answering that challenge.

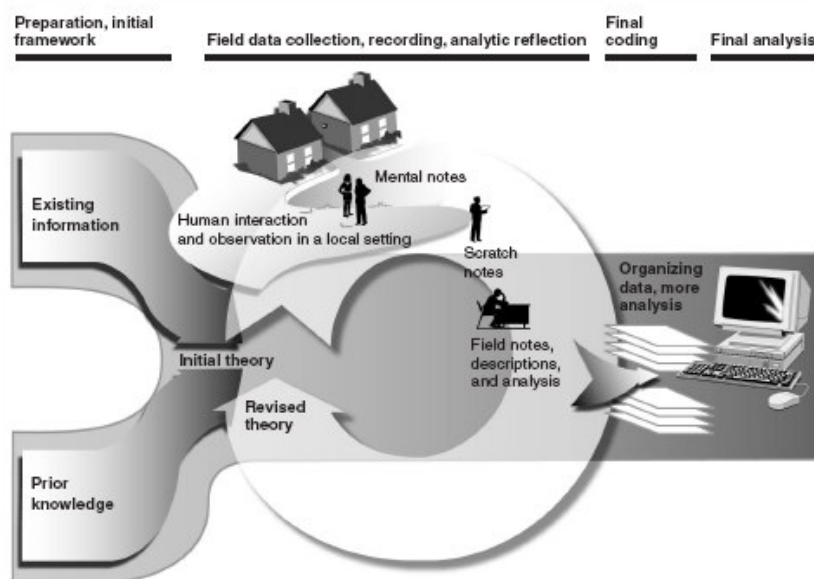
1.4 Design, methodology and ethics

1.4.1 Research design

The design chosen for this research was ethnography, developed from within the discipline of social anthropology. North Carolina State University describes ethnography as a "form of research focusing on the sociology of meaning through close field observation of sociocultural phenomena" (NC State University 2005:1). As discussed by Gellner and Hirsch (2001:1) there is no one ethnographic style, rather it encompasses different styles of thinking and writing. It can be described as a method of fieldwork activity (doing), an intellectual effort (thinking) and a narrative style (writing) (Bates 1997:1151). Ethnography refers to both "a set of activities, a way of doing research work 'in the field', and . . . to the product of those activities. It is the activity which comes first. Thus the practice of ethnographic fieldwork . . ." Therefore, "ethnography is, confusingly, both a process and a product: the term can apply both to a methodology and to the written account of a particular ethnographic project" (Savage 2000:1). In recent years ethnography has increasingly been used as a design to study organisations (Van Maanen 2001). For the purposes of this study, ethnography was used in the broader sense as a qualitative field-research method, based on participant observation and in-depth interviews over an 18 month period. Exploratory in nature, ethnography was an appropriate choice to reveal the experience of the organisation and its members from their own perspective, facilitating an empathetic understanding of their embedded reality. Stated differently, the approach hopes to facilitate the in-depth qualitative study required to view and analyse the insider's perspective of the multiple realities produced and embedded within organisational daily life.

As a qualitative approach, ethnography enabled flexibility throughout the research process, allowing it to be both iterative and inductive. The design guided initial planning around research questions and literature review, but then allowed the complexity of the research problems to evolve as a result of data collection and analysis (O'Reilly 2005). There is some agreement that there is no 'one way' to go about ethnography, however Bate (cited in Gellner and Hirsch 2001:9) suggested a good ethnography conveys among others: a sense of being there, reflects polyphony, contextualises findings, addresses questions of power and inequality, emphasizes what people say and do, includes 'back stage' behaviour, and examines how language is used. The aim of ethnography is not to make generalisations, but to reveal an 'embedded tale' which "in the end [is] a matter of philosophical standpoint and interpretation, depending also on the level and the framework within which the interpretation takes place" (Gellner and Hirsch 2001:12). It is also

widely agreed that any ethnography inevitably “combines the perspectives of both the researcher and the researched” (Savage 2000:1). “Whatever else it may be, ethnography is an interpretation” (Van Maanen 2001:238). The diagram below provides a useful graphic depicting a broad overview of the ethnographic research design (GOA 2003:6):



Source: GOA and Art Explosion.

1.4.2 Access and ethics

I had recently embarked on my study programme when joining HARP in 1994, and it was fortunate that I was able to negotiate access to the organisation from the onset of my contract. During the research period, my work as a consultant included programme management, strategic planning, and systems development. The MD gave permission to conduct research within HARP as part of my commitment to the organisation, and hoped it would prove an asset to receive feedback as a result of my observations. Once my broad research goals were clarified, it was agreed that principles of voluntary participation and informed consent will be adhered to, with confidentiality and anonymity assured. HARP does require staff to sign stringent confidentiality agreements, but this attends particularly to disclosing information regarding the performance of clients. After completing the in-depth interviews, I had been working with HARP for two years, yet as a consultant my position was often seen as one of a ‘temporary interloper’. The reality was this provided both advantages and challenges to the research, enabling staff to speak freely about certain topics, but at times they were uneasy about my allegiance and seniority within the organisation.

After approximately eight months spent working with middle management and field staff, my role took on more responsibility, particularly in support of the MD. Yet as a result of my project based mandate, interactions with a range of staff members remained ongoing. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that staff members’ perception of my allegiance fundamentally shifted as I began to work ‘on’ projects as opposed to ‘in’ them. The initial months spent working alongside staff

members put me in good stead to appreciate the shifts and groupings between staff from the bottom-up, from the top-down, and around issue-specific conflicts.

It was made clear to staff within HARP that I was completing my master's thesis while working in the organisation, but this appeared almost irrelevant to the majority of staff until the onset of the formal interview process. There were certain staff members who did ask questions about my research, and during informal conversations I would remark on the relevance or valuable contribution certain dynamics or situations would have for the thesis. Although participant observation and the recording of appropriate conversations were widespread across the organisation, formal in-depth interviews were restricted to eight staff members due to their key roles, or level of participation in my daily work life. I selected key informants on the basis of their knowledge and overview of the activities within the organisation, and using chain sampling these informants identified other staff members they felt were representative of the community (NC State University 2005:1). Sensitivity was crucial where confidentiality about certain role players would prove challenging to maintain, or when certain conversations or documents were clearly not intended for research. Every effort was made not to exploit any situation or informant and therefore ethical issues had to be recorded and resolved on an ongoing basis.

1.4.3 Methodology

Applied theory

Important to mention are the additional theoretical tools applied in the gathering of field data. With regard to interpreting organisational behaviour Goffman's (1959) notion of 'impression management' via 'front stage' and 'back stage' behaviour was useful for framing observations. Goffman used a dramaturgical approach of seeing our world as a stage where individuals and groups perform for each other. As actors we 'play roles' and manage the impressions we consciously 'give' and unconsciously 'give off'. Social life could be differentiated into on the scene 'front stage' more public behaviour, and behind the scenes 'back stage' behaviour where we "change our mental, physical and moral 'underwear'" (Anthrobase 2004:1). Goffman (1959) points to the challenge of controlling these impressions and the inherent contradictions and tensions between front and back stage, and their dependency on a particular reference point in a performance and the function being served. It may prove interesting with reference not only to HARP's backstage informal behaviour, but to the organisation as a whole in how it manages front stage uniformity and accountability with stakeholders. An additional 'tool kit' applied to track cultural aspects was Kamsteeg and Wels' (2004) proposed model for understanding symbols in organisational anthropology. Through identifying 'symbols' as they manifest or are expressed as material (objects), verbal (words), and behaviour signposts (deeds), one can observe and interpret the concepts of culture (rules of the game), identity (positions of the players) and power (playing

strength) within an organisation. These symbols may then show the way to better understanding the cultural, identity, and power dynamics at play in the specific contexts and settings within HARP.

Hilhorst (2003:214) also offered useful methodological tools for gathering and interpreting data. She emphasizes an 'actor orientation' to observation because processes work through people, and not upon people. Therefore to understand and analyse process, for Hilhorst (2003) you must understand how people act on, and interpret them, delving into their surrounding, histories, and social networks to understand their motivations and activities. Keeping an actor orientated approach when studying HARP facilitated the focus on the staff's interpretation of their reality and mediation of concepts in their discourse and daily activities. Also useful was a focus on what Hilhorst (2003) terms the 'social interface analysis' - this "focuses on the linkages and networks that develop between individuals or parties at points where different, and often conflicting, life worlds or social fields intersect" (Long, cited in Hilhorst 2003:214). Interface analysis reveals important dynamics and multiple discourses concerning the way in which power relations become shaped, particularly between different stakeholders through conflict and cooperation (Hilhorst 2003). Applying the concept of a social interface analysis within HARP will provide a tool to analyse any internal and external incidents arising in day to day operations, and how associations in local realities are transformed. Hilhorst (2003) emphasizes how claim-bearing labels, discourses and representations are composed and strategically used and mediated to interpret the multiple realities within an organisation.

Methodological approach

The methodological approach for this study was that of participant observation. Opportunities in specific field situations guided a choice of multiple methods and techniques for observations, data collection and analysis. Fieldwork took place at different levels within the head office, and interaction with off-site staff was facilitated by their need to be in head office for reporting every second week. As an inductive strategy, observations were to be the starting point in formulating an analysis and any emerging insights.

i) Spaces and events of fieldwork: as a benefit of working within HARP itself, data was gathered through participant observation on an ongoing basis. During participant observation field notes recorded critical events, meetings, and conversations, and constituted base data on which interpretation took place. These spaces and events included formal meetings, group discussions and 'hanging-out' in corridors, tea rooms, and smoking areas.

ii) Interviews: once trust and rapport had been established, both unstructured and formal semi-structured interviews were conducted with willing staff members. These provided a window to

explore how staff members interpret the research problem; uncovering values and ideologies, reflections on concepts and discourses, behaviour, circumstances, identity, and events.

iii) Documentary resources: attention was also focused on site documentation and statistical reports produced by and about the HARP. These revealed a process of how HARP expresses itself, in addition to placing it in a wider institutional context. Viewing documentation as a currency revealed useful definitions, constrictions, privileges, prejudices and identities. They included contractual agreements, strategic plans, governance records, policies and procedures, media reports, promotional materials and informal memos. With regard to the official programme reports generated by HARP, the study focused not on the actual report results such as, but rather the method of communication and interpretation of meaning as a basis for action or decision-making.

1.4.4 Data analysis

Using an ethnographic approach to data analysis allowed underlying assumptions, tensions, trends, themes and lived experiences to come to the fore. "It should be noted that ethnography may be approached . . . as a descriptive rather than analytic endeavour" (NC State University 2005:1). Local categories of meaning were revealed, and themes began to develop. "In short, one is searching for a 'pattern' both in the data/perceptions and by implication in how the people studied present order and systematize their lives" (Gellner and Hirsch 2001:8). Throughout the fieldwork these emerging concepts were explored and cross-validated, incorporating valuable respondent feedback into the results. Triangulation between methods and their data sources validated congruencies and highlighted differences in experience and exploration of the research problem. The study was contextualised ensuring quality data and interpretation through reflection on relevant theoretical perspectives, and critical analysis at multiple levels. As a result meaningful analysis was possible, the proposed theoretical framework interrogated, and the research problem explored (University of Pennsylvania 2004).

1.4.5 Strengths and challenges

The research design was strengthened by my position as an 'embedded' researcher working for HARP, and this provided easy access to senior management and 'closed door' negotiations, as well as insights into organisational micro-politics and water-cooler gossip. Establishing a strong rapport with colleagues was facilitated due to everyday relationships, encouraging rich data in discussions and interviews. Ironically, the flip sides to these strengths were the challenges they produced, such as compromising objectivity or losing the 'fresh' perspective an outside researcher may hold. Managing the uneasy tension between confidential observations and the agreed boundaries of research provided a challenge with regard to both information and personal trust . . . all that you see and hear cannot be transcribed per se. It is noted by Gellner and Hirsch (2001) that researcher's notes can become a form of 'covert research which is hard to publish'. Inevitably

one has to reinterpret data appropriately requiring decisions to be made on how to reveal the lived reality of subjects, often with every word weighed in consequence.

An additional challenge faced was the ramifications of upholding the organisation's request for confidentiality and anonymity. An extended period of negotiation and review was required after the initial production of text and before the final submission of results. Moving beyond the seemingly simple use of pseudonyms, there was a need to carefully consider the potential misuse of any information included in the study, and the subsequent exclusion of certain information in order to protect an individual, the organisation, or a client. With the heightened political tension surrounding health care at the time of submission, not all aspects of the broader field within which the NGO operated could be discussed, nor could critical analyses of certain aspects of the NGO and client activity be included. It was agreed that considered omissions would be prudent for all parties concerned, despite the potential value this information may hold for academic research. This challenge gives support to the argument that being privy to insider information but providing confidentiality for an organisation does require compromise in the disseminating of research findings.

The nature of an ethnographic design, particularly focused on one case study, also fields criticism of a lack of generalisability, replicability, and representation. Savage (2000:1), however, identifies possible criteria that can be used to assess ethnography; the consistency of claims compared to data, the credibility of the account to readers and subjects, the extent to which findings are relevant to those in similar settings, and the reflexivity of the account and audit trail. Data analysis must therefore be kept as rigorous as is qualitatively possible, ensuring validity and integrity when 'interpreting'. In response to claims that ethnography can be compared to story-telling, Van Maanen (2001:256) explains "narrative is not an ornamental or decorative feature designed to make ethnography more palatable or audience-friendly, but a cognitive instrument in its own right."

1.4.6 Researcher reflections

Reflexivity is essential to maintain credibility and delineate validity of the research results. Constant self-reflection and interpretation of being an instrument of the research was essential, interrogating how data was constructed through my personal history, cultural filters, and attachment to conventions. Important to record is the fact that as a researcher in her early thirties, I am English-speaking and of European descent. Although able to converse in Afrikaans which ensured I could communicate with all staff members, I was unable to speak with black African staff in their first language. Having been raised and educated in South Africa, my ten years of management consulting experience was gathered in the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Never having worked in South Africa led me to ask many original questions and provided an initial point of interest for staff. Throughout the research, my challenge was to be constantly aware of my own

biases and dichotomies, to be up-front and guard against bending the data to the will of the research question. In addition, as stressed by Mosse (cited in Gellner and Hirsch 2001:10) “there is an irresolvable tension between studying inside an organization, and therefore accepting its aims and agenda, and critically studying the organization itself.” An important factor to staff feeling comfortable with my dual role as consultant and researcher was affirming the intent of the research design as extrapolating organisational themes and dynamics, and not focusing on exposing personal opinions or judgments. I was forced to track my methodological ethics and reflexivity, providing a reference point to reflect on the effects this evolution may have had on the research questions and results. All personal reflections were included in the field notes and formed part of the analysis. Where appropriate, these reflections were written up in the research results.

1.5 Outline of thesis

In chapter One I offer an introduction to the broad *research objectives*, and profile HARP as an organisation, its people and programme. The research aims and rationale are shared along with the design, methodology and ethical considerations for this study. Chapter Two provides a summary of the development of civil society in South Africa, before presenting an analytical overview of development literature and anthropological perspectives, revealing the many constraints and opportunities NGOs face as they employ the *strategies to professionalize*⁷, and the various forms of organising they exhibit in their political, economic and social context.

Chapter Three contextualises HARP within the milieu of public health sector politics in South Africa, and then, using two descriptive case studies as a point of departure offers a *window into HARP's world*, revealing the lived reality of the organisation and its members from their experience. This facilitates an understanding of the ‘real world’ of the NGO and provides the foundation for further field results discussed in the following chapters. Chapter Four aims to explore the politics and power relations HARP navigates as it goes about the *business of NGO-ing* as a service provider for the state, staking its territory on an uncertain and competitive journey. What emerges is a complex and interwoven reality, saturated by the political agendas of multiple stakeholders.

Chapter Five investigates the embedded contradictions and social nature of *surviving accountability* essential to ensure HARP's legitimacy. These concepts are brought into sharper relief once situated in the local setting, and prove accountability to be a multifaceted concept intertwined with ideas of legality, intent, performance, obligation, trust, and even morality. Chapter

⁷ The terms professionalize and professionalization within this study refers to the process of incorporating ‘best practice’ management discourses borrowed from the private sector. They are understood to include the concept of corporatization i.e. the process of absorbing tools, or exhibiting behaviour traditionally associated with profit-driven corporations or companies.

Six examines the pains of cultural and *organisational evolution* within an NGO under the push to professionalize, as staff search for meaning and agency in everyday practice. It discusses the need to take care of organisational development during times of change, as this process proves an inherently personal experience which cannot be separated from organisational life.

Chapter Seven explores the varied staff perceptions around HARP's sense of identity as a point of distinctiveness and how inherent *multiple realities* within the organisation are negotiated and reconciled over time. It explores how HARP negotiates the tension between pursuing the NGO's social mission and/or its business orientation in support of sustainability. Chapter Eight then concludes the thesis by discussing the *main findings* of the study and makes tentative recommendations for further research.

1.6 Conclusion

In the introduction of this chapter the yellow brick road was presented as a metaphor through which to understand the many challenges HARP would face on its journey in pursuit of strategies to professionalize the organisation and ensure its sustainability. This metaphor was chosen based on personal experience as I was afforded the opportunity to fulfil the roles of both an anthropology student and an employee within the organisation for the duration of my research. I was privileged to explore the underbelly of this professional NGO's fight for survival on a challenging but exciting journey. Ethnography was therefore chosen as a field-research method, and based on participant observation over an 18 month period I was able to facilitate the type of in-depth qualitative study required to reveal the insider's perspective of the lived reality embedded in HARP's everyday organisational life. Although this research design was strengthened by my position as a researcher working for HARP, reflexivity was an ongoing challenge as I wrestled with the ethical dilemmas sourced from my dual role, and a heightened awareness of my personal filters and attachments to organisational conventions. It is therefore important that the theoretical interpretation and discussions of the observations made within HARP are understood as moments in time developing as a result of a broader history with continuing change. It is not always possible to appreciate this complex context within a single study, but, having said that, valuable insights did reveal themselves, with themes and trends validated by narrating the organisation's experience. The purpose and relevance of this study is that it hopes to contribute towards a growing field of anthropological research within organisations, and particularly within the NGO sector. The study aims to provide insight into the complex and competitive nature of increasingly professionalized NGOs and their growing dependence on political and economic savvy. A deeper and more holistic understanding of the challenges these professional NGOs face may lead to a different set of questions being asked. This knowledge and awareness may afford professional NGOs the opportunity to reflect on and self-correct their own evolution over time, and garner constructive support to pursue opportunities which expand the influence they seek, in spite of the unavoidable

institutional and socio-economic constraints they face. “Organisation theory has an important topic; anthropology has a promising method. If the two can be put together . . . maybe the result would help us understand what we experience during the major part of our adult lives” (Joerges, cited in Bates1997:1148). The purpose of the following chapter will then be to analyse the various literatures which reveal the many constraints and opportunities professional NGOs face as they employ strategies to professionalize, at the interface of their external and internal environments.

2 CHAPTER TWO: NGO STRATEGIES TO PROFESSIONALIZE

2.1 Introduction

NGOs are vulnerable to all the problems that befall other kinds of institutions, including the dangers of routinization and the gradual conversion of democratic to oligarchic rule (Fisher 1997:456).

For the purposes of this study civil society⁸ is understood as “the organized expression of various interests and values operating in the triangular space between the family, state, and the market”, distinct from both the state and private sector by virtue of its focus on objectives as opposed to profit making (Habib 2003). As a growing sector within civil society, NGOs have provided the platform for much debate in development circles on their genesis, purpose, organisation, ethics, ‘anti-politics’ and the persistent question of whether they are ‘doing good’ or not (Fisher 1997; Ferguson 1990; Murdock 2003). Fisher (1997:447) defines the term NGO as “shorthand for a wide range of formal and informal associations. There is little agreement about what NGOs are and perhaps even less about what they should be called.” The challenge is to appreciate the various forms of organising that NGOs exhibit in their differing political, economic and social contexts, avoiding a reductionist use of the label NGO (Fisher 1997). What has become clear is that the “appropriate role imagined for NGOs in development depends on the critical stance one takes towards the development industry” (Fisher 1997:443), whether it be an instrumental view of NGOs in support of neo-liberal economic policies, or as moral or political transformers of state and society, or as at risk of being co-opted and becoming ‘technical’ solutions to ‘development’ problems.

The aim of this chapter, however, is to provide an analysis of literature revealing the many constraints and opportunities NGOs face in strategising to professionalize and the impact this has on the organisations. Within the chapter, the nature of the relationship between civil society and the state will be explored, in particular its contingency upon the socio-economic history and political transformation in South Africa. Within a post-apartheid civil society there is a new trend towards the professionalization of NGOs as these organisations are innovating and evolving in order to bid for state contracts with the aim of providing a service delivery function and ensuring their sustainability. The discussion further describes the path of corporatization that professional NGOs must navigate in an increasingly commercialised and competitive environment, where they are exposed to seepage of market related or private sector ideologies and practices. This trend has implications for organisations’ ability to survive growing demands for accountability, efficiency

⁸ For a deeper discussion on the varied definitions and debates around civil society see Comaroff and Comaroff (1999), Hall (2000) and Burchell (1996).

and flexibility against commercial contract deliverables. Professional NGOs contracted by the state may be forced to increasingly manage their organisation's tolerance for change, capacity to evolve and aptitude for reconciling multiple realities and identities.

While attempting to highlight the political, economic and ethical dilemmas professional NGOs deal with, the discussion does not attempt to answer the question of whether professional NGOs 'do good' or not (Fisher 1997), but rather to appreciate that "perspectives on professionalization are related to political interpretations of development itself" (Murdock 2003:509). What might be the cost of this new trend to NGOs' mission and ethics, how do these evolving professional NGOs deal with the rise of accountability, efficiency and market competition? Professional NGOs are forced to reconcile many of the traditional perceptions around NGOs against what some feel is their increasingly for-profit-like appearance and corporatization. A review of the literature hopes to reveal the political, economic and historical forces shaping the strategy to professionalize NGOs, providing a context for later discussion on the lived experience within HARP and how the organisation might negotiate, or negate the demands of the state, a competitive market and the micro-politics of its own survival.

2.2 Civil society in a South African context

NGOs do not always feel heard by Government and the relationship between Government and the NGO sector is currently still an issue of debate (Da Silva Wells 2004:83).

The political landscape within which NGOs operate in South Africa needs to be appreciated as it nurtures the relationship between the state and civil society. Habib (2003) identifies two distinct phases in the development of civil society in South Africa: the phase of growth and formalisation of associational life in the political sphere in the 1980s, and the post-1994 democratisation phase of civil society. Under apartheid, as a result of the liberalisation of the political system in the 1980s, a space was created for the emergence of anti-apartheid civil society. Despite an attempt by the state to co-opt or marginalise this sector, by the 1990s this group constituted the dominant element in South African civil society. This emergence was supported by political opportunity and an injection of resources from both domestic and international sources. State-civil society relations throughout the 1980s were highly adversarial and the legal environment proved hostile to NGO operations. The antagonistic nature of the state-civil society environment persisted until the democratisation phase of South Africa's political transition in the mid 1990s (Habib 2003).

South Africa's transition towards democracy and globalisation post-1994 has significantly impacted on the development of post-apartheid civil society. A more enabling security and legislative environment led to the passing of a Non-Profit Organisation Act and the establishment of a Directorate for Non-Profit Organisations under the Department of Social Welfare. In addition, as foreign funding began to re-direct to the new democratic state, institutions such as the National

Development Agency (NDA) and Lottery Commission were mandated to fund legitimate not-for-profit activity, supported by tax reforms which granted not-for-profit bodies tax-exemption status (Habib 2003). As a result of these changes a more collaboratively focused environment has been structured between the state and civil society.

Along with its political democratisation, South Africa's transition to democracy has also been strongly driven by its policy on economic liberalisation. The government's adoption of neo-liberal economic policies, relaxation of exchange controls and privatisation programme have been criticised as benefiting the elite at the expense of employment and poverty alleviation. In addition, the state has been accused of non-disbursement of funds allocated to the NDA and Lottery Commissions, despite many NGOs experiencing a domestic skills and international funding exodus in favour of the democratic state (Govender 2001). Within this context, Habib (2003) describes three trajectories of civil society development in the 'new' South Africa. The proliferation of survivalist community based organisations (comprising 53% of not-for-profit organisations⁹), the more politically minded community based social movements and the more formal NGOs largely defined by their sub-contractual role with the state. As a result, each of the three blocks has a different relationship with the state and public participation and “. . . includes anything from engagement in public demonstrations to diplomatic negotiations with state officials” (Habib 2003:7). It is within this third grouping of formal NGOs that this study took place, where NGOs have entered into partnerships or contracts with the state and a more engaging or collegiate relationship is presumed.

However, the oppositional history or political stance of NGO development during the apartheid years has not guaranteed a feeling of trust between NGOs and the state. The vision of “inter-dependent and mutually supportive engagement” between the state and NGOs remains “potentially contradictory” and “tension-filled” (Pieterse, cited in Reddy 2003:22). Government may resist working with NGOs for a number of reasons: if they are viewed as a competitor, viewed as opposition, or even if inadvertently perceived as highlighting an alternative or more effective form of service delivery which reveals government inadequacy. Outside of voluntarily registering under the NPO Act with the Department of Social Development¹⁰, there has been no further development of a policy framework governing relations between government and the NGO sector. Tessa Brevis of the Non-Profit Consortium has stated that the implementation of this legislation has proven problematic, while the relevant government structures created to support NGOs have proven understaffed and as a result prevent organisations from obtaining funding because they are waiting for their NPO number (Penderis 2006). Funding remains a contentious issue as illustrated by

⁹ Recently published study of the Johns Hopkins survey (Habib 2003)

¹⁰ <http://www.welfare.gov.za/NPO/npo.htm> , <http://www.info.gov.za/gazette/acts/1997/a71-97.pdf>

comments made by SANGOCO and Earthlife Africa who feel it is easier for NGOs who deliver services to obtain government funding than for those choosing to lobby for policy change or who are seen as potential whistleblowers¹¹ (Penderis 2006). It has been argued that in the medium term the critical space for NGOs to engage with government is reducing, and NGOs are increasingly becoming accomplices dependent on government contracts for their sustainability (Reddy 2003). For the period 1994 - 1999 an estimated R18 billion in international donations was received by government, utilised in the forms of grants, concessionary loans and technical assistance (Govender 2001). However, of this funding 50% was directed to government (some redirected to civil society), 25% to parastatals, 15% to the civil society sector and 10% to others. The sector breakdown of this funding reads as follows:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Education | 22% |
| Good Governance and Social development | 19% |
| Infrastructure and Services | 13% |
| Water and Sanitation | 11% |
| Business development | 11% |
| Health | 7% |
| Others | 16% |

Govender (2001) predicted a trend for foreign funding to be directed directly to certain types of civil society organisations as donors became increasingly frustrated with the pace of state delivery. These would be increasingly professional organisations that have a definable product and are able to measure impact or assist with the establishment of independent NGOs. History seems to have borne this out as government appears increasingly uncomfortable with foreign funded NGOs who garner public support and popularity. Only recently President Mbeki caused a stir in NGO circles by questioning the independence and legitimacy of African civil society bodies as not being truly African, particularly those with international affiliations who may be seen to be manipulated by foreign donors, “do they reflect us, the ordinary people they should be representing, or do they represent other interests?” (cited in Maclean 2005:1). Civil society hit back by criticising the President as undermining their legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of their communities. While acknowledging that all donors have a certain agenda, they highlighted the crucial role donors play in promoting democracy, participation and accountability among local NGOs (Smith, Davids and Hollands 2005). In 2004 the MEC for Social Development in the Eastern Cape questioned NGOs

¹¹ However, government suggested a law to restrict whistleblowing in April 2005, after Earthlife Africa – a regional environmental action group – expressed fears about the safety of the Pelindaba nuclear facility, outside the capital of Pretoria. At the time, President Thabo Mbeki called Earthlife Africa's claims "reckless", "without foundation" and "totally impermissible". And, the then minister of minerals and energy, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (now deputy president), threatened to legislate against those spreading "unnecessary" panic (Penderis 2006).

as to what had happened to their culture of participation, transparency and accountability – why should government alone be questioned on these principles (Moerane-Mamse 2004)? To date the government increasingly calls for NGOs to be more participatory and transparent with more buy-in from NGOs to become responsible, accountable partners in agreements with the state.

[F]unding of NGOs from the department will now be output based and not input based, obliging NGOs to sign service-level agreement contracts. . . . Payment through transfer of lump sums will only be made to service providers with a proven track record of compliance, credibility and accountability (Zola Skweyiya, Social Development Minister 2004).

A greater involvement could be interpreted as a possible justification for more extensive state involvement, and some NGOs argue this angle is used by government “. . . as a cover of a hidden agenda for more political control . . . rather than maintaining their accountability. NGOs claim that there are different mechanisms of ensuring accountability without a need for the Government to dominate such organizations” (Isdudi 2004:1). However, speaking at a recent conference hosted by the South African Non-Governmental Organisation Coalition (SANGOCO), the Deputy President of South Africa acknowledged that many public servants and representatives did not know how to harvest goodwill or successfully manage healthy tensions between the state and NGOs: “Not all of us know how to insist on proper accountability when government allocates resources to NGOs without being too demanding, . . . while being compliant with the Public Finance and Management Act (PFMA) and the political mandate of Government” (Mlambo-Ngcuka 2006:1).

2.3 The State-NGO relationship

Bratton (cited in Motala and Husy 2001:1) proposed “the key issue in the relationship between state and NGOs as being the political tension between the state's urge for order and control, and the NGOs' quest for organisational autonomy.” He added that a confident and capable state would elicit constructive relationships, while a defensive and weak state leads to conflict with NGOs. Tandon offers a useful model that identifies three types of state-NGO relationships. Firstly, one of dependency and clientelism; secondly, adversarial and characterised by cooption and intimidation; and thirdly, collaborationist in a genuine partnership based on constructive debate, shared goals and strategies (cited in Clark 1993:1). However, in a study on the sustainability of NGOs, Fowler (2000) proposes a fourth more realistic relationship: complementary - in that the goals between state and NGOs are shared but they differ on the strategies required to achieve them. A complementary relationship is most likely to lead to contracted work or service provision based on shared goals, with room for manoeuvring for an NGO within contract conditions e.g. the methodologies chosen and directionality with regard to degrees of cooption between parties which then ensures participation. In a study comparing the state-NGO relationship in Britain and the Ukraine, Kolybashkina (2004) concluded that in Britain where both civil society and the state are strong, cooperation emphasizes recognition of the independent roles of each player and a

commitment to shared values. There is a focus on including NGOs as stakeholders in policy making and not only as implementers in service delivery. She suggests a revival of the original ethos of service provision is possible with both state and NGOs working at improving their practices. However, in the Ukraine where both sectors are weak and still developing a base for cooperation, there exists an emphasis on 'concrete outcomes' and a dependence on service delivery. In a paper on the role of NGOs in promoting democracy and health, Alison and Macinko (1993) argue that a dual role of service delivery and advocacy or policy making is often not desirable as it can come at the expense of service delivery. Particularly in the arena of health reform, although service delivery NGOs may have "the institutional strength and capacity to become advocates . . . a primary focus on advocacy [has] become perceived as threats to their government. Advocating change in health care is often advocating change in the dominant political system" (Alison and Macinko 1993:21). Would HARP understand its relationship with the state as dependent or complementary in nature, and how might any move to re-affirm its autonomy or independence influence the state's perception or support of the NGO and its future sustainability?

There are many challenges professional NGOs face when involved in a service delivery relationship with the state. Clark (1993:1) offers a comprehensive overview compiled from a range of commentators which I have again summarised, these are challenges of:

- a) A highly political policy environment. NGOs often fall in the opposition camp and the government or ruling party may see itself as the sole legitimate voice of the people.
- b) NGOs' preference for isolation hence unwillingness to dialogue with government, and poor coordination with one another. Some NGOs prefer to keep well separated from the government orbit to avoid drawing attention and therefore outside control, to their activities. However, by keeping a low profile they may actually be making themselves more vulnerable to government attack . . .
- c) Jealousy of civil servants towards the NGOs' access to resources.
- d) Pressure on successful NGOs from major donors to receive more funds, leading to a decline in performance. . . . This has been at the expense of both its original agenda and its relationship with NGOs. This has consequently undermined its advocacy effectiveness towards the government.
- e) The NGO's constituency. If, as frequently is the case, it is a narrow constituency . . . the government may consider it too selective since it must consider the common good. Similarly, NGOs have the "luxury" to pick one or two issues which dominate their attention, while governments must juggle with a multitude of concerns.
- f) NGOs' capacity. NGO projects may not be as effective as claimed, the professional skill of NGO staff, the accountability of NGOs to the grassroots, and strategic planning are poorly developed.

- g) The public sector's capacity. The government's commitment to improving services, eradicating discrimination and poverty may be weak; there may be a shortage of competent staff especially at local level; corruption and nepotism may be rife.
- h) Political jealousy. Governments may not want to foster a healthier NGO sector for fear of bolstering the political opposition.
- i) Dependence on foreign donors. A government might be more suspicious of NGOs which are highly dependent on foreign funds and therefore might impugn their motives as "guided by a foreign hand."

Kolybashkina (2004) ironically remarks on the often chosen wording of NGO as 'service provider', which implies participation in provision, as well as involvement in formulating policy. Instead the current contracting culture is turning NGOs into 'public service contractors', wording that reflects the nature of the business relationship with the NGO as 'vendor'. Is the service delivery relationship HARP holds with government that of a vendor, or does the contract agreement reflect participatory values and shared responsibilities? How does HARP negotiate the many challenges involved in its service delivery relationship with the state, and in what way does this influence the strategies it adopts?

2.4 Contract culture

Richmond and Shields (2003) discuss the constraints and consequences of NGO restructuring, and argue that under the guise of 'building partnerships' increasingly top-down contractual relationships are developing between the state and NGOs. There is a shift from 'core' to 'programme' funding which compromises development work and creates burdensome accountabilities under the guise of evaluation, often accompanied by the devolution of state responsibilities to local authorities or municipalities. Richmond and Shields (2003) contend that the contract relationship between state and NGO is both transforming and commercializing the NGO sector, distancing it from its mission, putting its autonomy into question, and creating a politics of competitiveness. "Contract funding was perfected in New Zealand and Britain, under Thatcher, and is guided by a neo-liberal political philosophy and New Public Management administrative practices. With contract funding there has been a deliberate built-in under-funding of nonprofit organizations" (Richmond and Shields 2003:7). Kelman (2002:282) defines contracting as "a business arrangement between a government agency and private entity in which the private entity promises, in exchange for money, to deliver certain products or services to the government agency or to others on the government's behalf." More specifically, changing the nature of funds provided to 'contracted deliverables' is seen to bring in the rigours of business and a focus on efficiency targets for NGOs, along with increased competition for limited financial resources.

Goodin (2003) provides a comprehensive overview of democratic accountability in the third sector. In his view, contract culture compromises accountability on three counts. Firstly, NGOs are

increasingly performing tasks of the state's choosing, resulting in changes to their priorities and ethos. Secondly, NGOs are now paid for a service and taking this money implies political control, courtiers cannot hold their king accountable, and clients cannot hold their patrons accountable. Thirdly, the confidentiality clause in contract law obscures public accountability, shielding the state from parliamentary and public scrutiny – yet the tax payer is footing the bill. Goodin (2003) proposes that to fulfil democratic accountability governments should write in appropriate publicity provisions into their contracts. His contention is that the NGO sector is commercially restructuring itself as a result of increasing contractual agreements, and in the process transforming the services it offers, stifling creativity, constricting flexibility in programme delivery, and losing an independent perspective. As fees are now paid for 'professional' services, a personal touch is being replaced by professional management and accountability to the buyer rather than to the community (Richmond and Shields 2003). Kolybashkina (2004:9) maintains that studies of the new relationship between the state and NGOs suggest it is not collaborative but rather instrumental, and reflects a continuing imbalance of power: "what is often forgotten, is that state-civil society partnership does also imply accountability on behalf of the state." In a paper on the shifting relationship between the state and NGOs, Kumar (2004) highlights the trend of NGOs to push for a more partnership-focused arrangement where they are treated as knowledgeable partners, as opposed to pawns of the traditional 'low bid contract service provider'. He suggests however that accepting contracts from the state comes 'at a price'. Kendall (cited in Kumar 2004:12) proposes that contracting turns "gift-giving and community development into a legal matter of service delivery at a price." What impact might the contractual obligations HARP holds with the state have on the understanding of its democratic accountability? Would HARP perceive there was a 'cost' to be paid against its status as an NGO, or does it have a broader definition of its purpose and identity?

2.5 Market competition

Over the past decade, NGOs have had to rethink their relationship with the state; in the next decade, they must rethink their notions of and relationships with the market and private capital (Beggington 1997:1763).

By way of exploring competition, Goodin (2003) describes the somewhat porous distinction between the state, market and NGOs. While the state relies on actions and performance relative to hierarchical control, the market relies on results according to a bottom line relative to competition, and NGOs rely on intention and motive relative to cooperative networking based on mutual monitoring and reputational sanctioning. In his view, levelling the playing field to competitive tendering renders NGOs indistinguishable from for-profits, and this sector-blurring undermines democratic, social and dual accountabilities. If NGOs want to participate in the government tendering process, they inevitably become like for-profits in disguise, compromising their motivational distinctiveness as they are forced to employ managerial prowess over commitment to their mission. In addition to this, competitive tendering pits NGO against NGO,

destroying mutuality and equality amongst NGOs, “markets are by their nature competitive; and competition by its nature undermines cooperation” (Goodin 2003:58). Kolybashkina (2004:7) argues NGOs viewing their colleagues as competitors “separates the NGOs from the local community, thus undermining the founding democratic principles of civil society.”

The danger seems to be that self-interest among NGOs may result in their deviating from their missions, suppressing ethical incentives, and compromising quality as they focus on maximising revenue. Goodin (2003) argues that where for-profits may be effective and efficient, they are prone to ‘cutting of corners’ and a ‘whatever works’ approach to getting things done. Competitive tendering brings these sorts of market principles into the service delivery process. Yet when NGOs are operating within the contract culture, many argue they have no choice but to become market-driven, competitive, and flexible - or risk losing out on revenue or regular income if they remain fixated on a narrow definition of their mission (Tuckman, Rowe, Skloot and Jones 1999). Reddy (2003) describes the emergence of ‘market-driven public service contractors’ who can be regarded as ‘co-opted/conformist’ NGOs, based on an international neo-liberal agenda and lacking a community support base. However, the NGO contract culture is by no means a new phenomenon and it has been evolving over time as NGOs provide their services to those who are in the market to buy. It might be more relevant to consider whether “companies maximise profits while non-profits maximise social missions” (Galaskiewicz, Letts, Sadler and Hall 1999:4)? In their discussion of competition in civil society, Tuckman, Rowe, Skloot and Jones (1999) suggested that NGOs must be prepared to change, and the increasing level of competition encourages NGOs to become more relevant and innovative. In contrast, for others although efficiencies may come from this form of competition, it brings into the open the question of magnitude taking precedence over values (Goodin 2003).

2.6 Options and opportunities

How then do professional NGOs such as HARP manage these challenges and maximise their strengths to develop healthy and participatory relationships with the state as contracted service providers? It is proposed that there are key advantages that NGOs may hold over government and business. They have the freedom and flexibility to create issue-related alliances and ad hoc coalitions, pursuing social ventures with a degree of risk not appropriate for the state. NGOs pursue issues considered to be worthy causes, and generate trust and legitimacy through their professional and supposed moral authority, safeguarding a good reputation and knowing that it takes only one bad move to lose credibility. They are mobile and able to respond swiftly across horizontal networks, crossing geographical and political borders to ally across the globe. Being located in the field, their grassroots experience is a valuable commodity, enabling them to link agencies and provide feedback on ground level to adapt or mobilise resources. NGO success is ensured by accentuating what they do well in their target groups through committed and caring

delivery, and building strong connections and respect in a community. NGOs represent a cause of the people and it is “what it does, and not representation, that makes an NGO legitimate. NGOs and their networks are legitimised by the validity of their ideas, by the values they promote, and by the issues they are about” (Marschall 2002:1). The nature of NGO accountability reflects its very distinctiveness from government and business, having to generate trust through full transparency and performance (Lister 2004; Marschall 2002; Tuckman, Rowe, Skloot and Jones 1999).

Yet these advantages appear to have their own caveats. Freedom and flexibility inevitably have to be negotiated against accountability, reliability, and size. Lack of funding may prevent an NGO from acquiring technical or managerial skills that it requires, and as a result keeping things small may constrain the scope of the project to a localised area and result in duplication and limit potential impact. An NGO’s mandate could also be considered as limited with regard to overall representation, and it faces the challenge of achieving the required participation and support to generate legitimacy. Not all NGOs are skilled in learning to network, pool expertise, share challenges and communicate across issues. Being focused on their target group may challenge the NGO’s ability to reach national or international donors, and there may be a danger of parochialism if passion for a single issue leads to tunnel vision or narrow mindedness that compromises long-term success (Alison and Macinko 1993). There appears to be certain key areas that need to be addressed in order for NGOs to compete viably and ethically. In particular they could consider investing in strengthening their political acumen, banding together and collaborating. As an approach this includes raising awareness and sustaining pressure on the state to ensure contract relationships transform into true partnerships. NGOs could also focus on improving their performance and taking responsibility for the impact of their work, in addition to increasing their efficiency through getting their house in order as an organisation - by honest reporting and evaluation. There may be benefit in focusing on revenue producing opportunities and continuing innovation through new services and products. Yet whether nimble-footed, competitive, well intended, or not, NGOs appear fated to answer questions around mandate, responsibility, accountability and legitimacy (O’Brien cited in Lister 2004). What complicates the issues of performance and accountability for NGOs is “the ‘onion-skin approach’ – an outer layer of welfare-oriented activity that protects inner layers of material service-delivery that act as nuclei for a core strategy dedicated to transformation” (Edwards and Hulme 2002a:223). How NGOs go about their business has become as important as what they do.

2.7 The rise of accountability

I believe all civil society organizations should adhere to the SANGOCO Code of Ethics. We in civil society must practice transparency, good governance, accountability, and sound financial management. For those organizations that lack the financial or organizational skills to manage a healthy organization, then we must capacitate them to do the right thing. For those organizations that refuse to adhere to a Code of Ethics then we must expose them and disaffiliate from them (Manong, President of the South African National NGO Coalition [SANGOCO] 2005:1).

The increasingly fashionable concept of accountability has over the course of the 1990s become a hotly debated topic. Initially pushed by civil society onto business and the state, it has become a case of 'a backlash against the backlashes' - commitment and good will seem no longer sufficient to maintain NGO accountability in the public eye. The move has been championed by governments, mainstream media, the general public, and from within the NGO community itself. The ongoing debate around accountability raises many questions around why it is necessary, to which stakeholders must it be held accountable, what must be reported on, and how? Lee (2004) highlights a few pertinent reasons for the emergence of accountability as an issue - the rapid growth of the NGO or third sector, the increasing amount of funds NGOs attract and the stakes involved, the stronger 'voice' and power of NGOs in shaping policy, and NGO response to the increasing threats on its political space.

There is now a push for awareness amongst NGOs of the multiple bottom-line in their work. International NGO organisations, such as ActionAid, have developed accountability measures following a rights-based approach; Oxfam International, a programme of standards for accountability; and the World Wide Fund for nature an accounting system to audit the efficacy of their projects (Lee 2004). There are no locally publicised equivalents, but the South African Development Community Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (SADC-CNGO) aims in its 2005-2008 strategic plan to circulate international resources and formulate for NGOs "position papers on best practices for action and governance with transparency and accountability" (SADC-CNGO 2005:1). Third parties have also played a role - there is a growing body of research that looks beyond seeing NGOs as the 'magic bullet' and calls for a more considered and appropriate analysis of the sector with 'light but firm' quality standards, ombudsman, certification and complaints procedures (Edwards and Hulme 2002a; Zimmer 2002). However importing new managerialist and business modes of working and evaluation e.g. Logframe Analysis and Strategic Planning, have proven difficult to 'roll out' within the NGO sector, with technical accountability mechanisms often meaning less relationship (Slim 2002; Lee 2004). Awareness also needs to be created around the political nature of accountability questions, and the danger of using administrative accountability to obscure public accountability (Richmond and Shields 2003).

Anthropologists have also suggested that accountability processes more accurately reflect negotiation and power struggles, rather than what happens in the actual development process (Hilhorst 1993).

2.8 The nuts and bolts of accountability and legitimacy

In analysing the literature it quickly became apparent what multifaceted concepts accountability and legitimacy are. Accountability as a process implies an organisation is justified in its words and deeds, and it is required to ensure NGO legitimacy (authenticity) and credibility (reputation). Both accountability and legitimacy demonstrate the merits of the NGO, and show it to be worthy of trust. The capacity of the NGO to generate funding to achieve its mission relies on legitimacy, and demands that accountability is communicated to the public and stakeholders. The NGO's development and strategic approach is guided by this communication, within its local and socio-political context. Accountability 'should' prove an NGO's effectiveness and whom it represents, countering criticisms and increasing the organisation's ability to learn. Where the emphasis within and between accountability and legitimacy is placed very much depends on who's asking, and will differ across the types of NGOs and their fields of activity (Votolini 2002; Lee 2004).

Moving beyond the 1990s and the traditional view of financial and board accountability, the challenge has been set to broaden the notion of a 'new' accountability – satisfying professional, commercial, political and moral demands. Definitions of accountability developed to the more inclusive, “. . . process by which an NGO holds itself openly responsible for what it believes, what it does and what it does not do, in a way which shows it involving all concerned parties and actively responding to what it learns” (Slim 2002:1). Three key questions are commonly quoted in NGO literature as a basis for this new accountability (Lee 2004; Ebrahim 2003a; Slim 2002; Edwards and Hulme 2002a): 1) What is the NGO accountable for? This usually interrogates the duty, actions, results or intentions (mission) of the NGO. 2) To whom is the NGO accountable? That is accountability upwards, downwards, and sideways (or laterally). 3) How is the NGO accountable? This recognises the operational context of the NGO through diverse media (financial information and reports), both formally and informally. Mechanisms for measuring or verifying accountability aim to be transparent and include key stakeholders, and may range from social audits, complaints procedures, stakeholder surveys, “certification systems, rating systems, infrastructure and management capacity tools, self-regulation, codes of conduct, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E)” (Lee 2004:7).

However, it is possible to delve further into the complexity of accountability - the credibility and legitimacy of NGOs depend on this very broadening. In a study of the mechanisms of NGO accountability, Jordan (2005) provides a valuable framework by identifying three types of accountability that need to be addressed. Those are questions of *effectiveness*, organisational

reliability, and *legitimacy*. Jordan's (2005) framework facilitates a means through which to organise and explore relevant theoretical contributions on accountability, a field of literature that can be overwhelming. The first question of *effectiveness* dictates the need for the NGO to respond to an authoritative body, mostly seen as an upward accountability - it has to do with the quality and quantity of services provided. For Ebrahim (2003a), this encompasses an integrated perspective on accountability requiring both a functional and a strategic level of organisational response. Ebrahim (2003a) puts forward that it is the emphasis on functional short-term activities e.g. logical framework analysis, at the cost of longer term strategic change e.g. internal self-evaluation and accounting for impacts, which obscure the complex issues of social and political change. It is here that accountability matures from only being *held* responsible for one's actions, to *taking* internal responsibility for shaping the mission, opening to public scrutiny, and assessing performance in relation to goals. Slim (2002) addresses this issue by asking for what improvement is the NGO accountable? Here he suggests probing the extent to which the NGO is responding to stakeholder input, to what it has learnt, and how new action is taken as a result thereof . . . hence *felt* responsibility and being strategically accountable.

The second question of *reliability* focuses on the internal management of NGO structures, a re-interpretation of the 'capacity building' of the 1990s. Although encompassing upward accountability, reliability questions tend to stimulate more of a horizontal accountability toward similar organisations, stimulating trust and accountability of the third sector as a whole. In a similar vein, Goodin (2003) broadens the mechanism of accountability by proposing a form of co-operative network-based accountability. In contrast to the state, NGOs claim to be motivationally distinct, dedicated to a 'cause' rather than being motivated by profits or managerial efficiencies. Inquiries into their motivations are therefore more central in terms of holding them to account. Although seen in more strategic terms, a mechanism of this accountability is in networking to achieve political results. Goodin (2003) proposes that this networking mechanism can be seen as a regime by which NGOs are themselves held accountable trans-nationally, domestically, or internationally. As an approach it supplements traditional forms of vertical accountability with a horizontal model. Outside of the need for hierarchical authority or commercial interest, these networks operate on the basis of reputation and trust – based on mutual monitoring of performance among the network sharing common concerns (Goodin 2003).

The third question of *legitimacy* leans towards public transparency, adherence to the NGO mission, representative status, and the perceived value base of the NGO and its extended network. It is agreed that NGOs will never have a uniform voice, but "do NGOs speak *as* the poor, *with* the poor, *for* the poor or *about* the poor? . . . they will lose all legitimacy if they are found to be masquerading – a sort of ventriloquist . . ." (Slim 2002:1). How they answer to the 'new' accountability (as / with / for / about question) goes a long way to determine the nature of their legitimacy. Mostly through a

patchwork of agreements, the contested term of legitimacy is both derived and generated. It is in turn supported by claims of representation, whether through membership (who you represent) or in the case of professional or service related NGOs – knowledge or skills (what you have to offer or report on) (Slim 2002).

As discussed above, the characteristics of accountability vary according to NGO type. HARP's surviving accountability will be contextualised in its nature as a professional organisation, and one assumes legitimacy will reside in its positioning itself as expert and critic, as opposed to being democratic. Accountability for a professional NGO such as HARP in particular does not rely on membership, but rather on what Slim (2002) calls 'voice'. 'Voice' accountability is essentially both empirical (can you prove it), and political (by whose authority or derived power) – and remains possibly the most contested area of NGO accountability and legitimacy. Professional NGOs justify empirical claims through research, or strategic alliances with academics and experts, but authority is more complicated not only through the technicality of representation, but more so through issues of class and perceived fraudulence in speaking for a cause. If HARP claims its mandate on the back of the people who support and work with the organisation, how might the organisation's 'voice' be understood as authoritative or powerful by both its clients and staff members, in addition to proving its effectiveness and reliability by virtue of its service delivery?

2.9 Embedded accountability

First, accountability is a relational concept. It does not stand objectively apart from organizational relationships, since the demands for accountability and the mechanisms used to achieve it are constructed by those very relationships. The key challenges of accountability thus concerns the management of day-to-day organizational relationships, which involve a wide range of actors including funding organizations, individual donors, public agencies, nonprofit staff and boards, members, clients and communities (Ebrahim 2003b:207).

As Ebrahim (2003b:194) emphasizes: "even our understanding of these multiple dimensions of accountability are socially constructed", and vary between organisations and over time. Slim (2002:1) states that accountability ". . . is much more about reporting on relationships, intent, objectives, method and impact. As such, it deals in information which is quantitative and qualitative, hard and soft, empirical and speculative. It records facts and makes judgements." Therefore to interrogate the multifaceted and perhaps more formal literary approaches discussed above, additional theoretical tools are required that foreground local complexities and narrate the lived reality from within the organisation.

In analysing the 'village' of the professional NGO, it is through the everyday lived reality of the staff that these concepts and challenges are mediated and translated. For anthropologists such as

Hilhorst (2003), NGOs are more than just their leaders, mission statements, strategic plans, statistical reports and management processes. It is the micro-politics and discourses within and between the staff that translates the lived reality and provides valuable insights and frameworks. As a result, Hilhorst (2003) separates accountability into two interwoven and interdependent modes. Firstly, the *rational* mode or more formal process (largely discussed above), is an inherently social process and holds an NGO responsible for its actions to an authority and aims to provide an external process of visibility and apparent transparency. She is sceptical of this more rational model of control which aims to ensure different parts of the organisational 'machine' are functioning properly. Hence, Hilhorst (2003:127) emphasizes the second mode of accountability as *moral*, where an informal 'moral contract' is found embedded in the creative practices of everyday organisational culture, competition, and politics - "what the report and the statistical record are to rational accountability, stories, ironic remarks and gossip are to moral accountability." Where rational accountability claims to be transparent, moral accountability is radiating, prismatic or obscure. For Hilhorst (2003) both rational and moral accountability combine elements of discipline and sense-making.

Across both modes of accountability, Hilhorst (2003) identifies three operating elements of accountability. Firstly, accountability as relational at its interface with multiple stakeholder groups, and the question is how these relations are shaped to provide mutual obligation and discipline, both rationally and morally. Secondly, accountability as control or a device of legitimation interpreted through the influence or exit capacity of stakeholders. The question here is how some accounts become more convincing than others, whether through power dynamics, enrolling support or concealing implicit moral appeals. Thirdly, accountability as the substance of 'an account' itself, and the question is how these accounts or reports are constructed - through multiple representations of performance that act as devices to makes sense of a project (rationally and morally). In her theoretical framework Hilhorst (2003) sketches an approach to accountability that overlaps and enriches the approaches discussed above (Jordan 2005; Lee 2004; Ebrahim 2003b; Slim 2002; Goodin 2003; Edwards and Hulme 2002a). Her particular contribution, however, resides in her expansion on the third element of accountability, the further analysis of the actual account or substance of the accountability process, and how this representation is negotiated and attributes meaning to the NGOs. She suggests that how these accounts are composed and sustained actually tells more about the discursive processes, power processes, and room for NGO manoeuvrability in the arena of accountability, than about accountability at the coal face or local site. Jordan (2005) also points to the defects of accountability tools in not allowing negotiation of 'what' is to be measured, and whose interest this may be serving. Similarly, for Slim (2002:1), 'voice' accountability "also bears very little relation to the actual effectiveness of an NGO . . . what matters it seems is their class and their politics." Everyday interpretations and practice invade this notion of formal accountability shattering any dreams of transparency, while socialising

and sense-making in turn permeate these formal procedures and “suggest a certain reading of the organisation’s practice. . . . This renders the accountability process essentially social” (Hilhorst 2003:131). Hilhorst (2003) argues that focus should be on how accountability evolves, partly through altering formal mechanisms, but also outside of them in the ‘grey’ areas of social interaction, chatting, gossiping and rumour-mongering. Studying HARP through an anthropological lens will be essential to allow for embedded accountability to come to the fore.

2.10 Managing efficiency

As discussed in the literature above, the contract culture, competition, and drive for accountability among service delivery NGOs has resulted in the sector repositioning itself and taking on profit-like characteristics, employing business-like models to optimise efficiency through monitoring and evaluation of services and impact. A statement by the Non Profit Consortium (Fortune 2004:1) reads: “it is appropriate that the non-profit sector responds in a spirit of partnership to government initiatives, and draws on the resources . . . from the corporate sector.” According to Reddy (2003) for professional NGOs in South Africa it implies the “effort to become more business-like in their operations. Specifically it includes professionalizing, rationalising, streamlining, increasing efficiency and adopting stricter standards of financial accountability to donors. It also includes an element of bureaucratisation as the organisation grows in size and income” (Reddy 2003:18). Many NGOs argue that their well-being and sustainability depends on their commercializing and selling their services to government, and this has included “introducing a degree of professionalism to their operation” (Reddy 2003:30). Commercializing an NGO as a means to sustainability can be both a solution and a problem particular to each NGO, creating opportunities to build trust, strengthen credibility, and accountability (Voltolini 2002).

Edwards and Hulme identify institution-building as the primary challenge for NGOs, and the bureaucratisation that follows often comes as an unwelcome shock to NGO staff who have been more comfortable working on informal terms, only to find decisions are now being driven by organisational issues and not only a mission (cited in Reddy 2003; Edwards and Hulme 2002a). Galaskiewicz, Letts, Sadler, and Hall (1999:4) suggest that NGOs do not have the infrastructure to deal with the important issue of developing systems to measure their efficiency. In a discussion of new concepts and models used in the third sector to manage governance, accountability and evaluation, Lewis (2003) calls for careful consideration by NGOs when importing ‘apolitical’ managerialism from business, and advises caution in adopting a ‘magpie-style’ approach where NGO leaders appear to exhibit a ‘chameleon-like’ quality based largely on improvisation. Mulhare (cited in Lewis 2003:339) suggests that ideas recycled from the private and public sector such as strategic planning, “sent a message of professionalization to influential stakeholders, but did little in practice to improve effectiveness in terms of services provided to users.” They both call for more research in developing third sector management.

The increase in bureaucracy within professional NGOs inevitably has implications for governance and management, which in turn impact upon and reflect perceptions around the organisation's values. With regard to implication for governance in particular, Schein (1991) appears to overly emphasize the role of the founder in the creation of organisational culture and values. In his opinion, the vision and values of the founder are shared as people are brought into the organisation, and soon become learned assumptions that, when taken for granted, are the 'makings of an organisational culture'. For Schein (1991) these assumptions give staff meaning, set guidelines for behaviour and reduce anxiety when confronted with uncertainty. Leaders do however increasingly need to adapt the character of organisations for which they are held accountable, and in the face of change "venerable cultural patterns associated with organisational life unravel with innovations in technology, alterations in governance structures, . . . and the internationalisation of markets and communications" (Van Maanen 2001:243). For James (1999) leaders are also required to change their views, attitudes and behaviour, and themselves be supported in the specific skills and responsibilities this demands. This gives changes around governance a very personal nature above the 'impersonal' tools and strategies used to drive the process.

Alison and Macinko (1993) offer a practical scale for understanding NGO governance and community interaction; by way of a continuum from authoritarianism, participatory, empowering to democracy. They explain that NGOs are not innately democratic in their governance or management style, and the transition from authoritarianism may take time and prove a challenge. More recently however, anthropologists such as Hilhorst (2003) have contributed to deconstructing the social notions around the influence of a 'charismatic' leader. She suggests that the strength of an NGO leader may lie not so much in managing values within an organisation, but more in their ability to present a believable and coherent 'front stage' organisation to observers and stakeholders. This implies the NGO leader is both an 'interface expert' and a 'broker of meaning' able to master a range of development discourses, and create social relations and communities - ensuring they have a social meaning despite being infrequent or culturally and professionally diverse (Hilhorst 2003). The role of a 'charismatic' leader therefore needs to be understood as part of the social fabric of organisational life – leaders alone do not shape an organisational culture.

2.11 A culture of change

The impact of an NGO's strategies to professionalize are grounded within the day to day practices of the organisation as it is forced, or chooses to evolve, inevitably influencing the atmosphere or culture within the organisation (Galaskiewicz and Bielefeld 2000). "Incremental shifts and repositioning of the organisational order are the rule and not the exception. Individuals and groups constantly adapt in response to new problems and this in turn pushes adaptations elsewhere in the organisation" (Van Maanen 2001:246). It is argued by Edwards and Hulme (2002a:224) that NGO

staff “must show an ability to live with non-standardised responses and procedures in order to promote flexibility and experimentation – the ‘open systems’ approach to development.” Foster-Fisherman, Maynard, and Yang (2001) also suggest NGOs take on a learning orientation and embody a sense of ‘venturesomeness’ to enable them to adapt to changing demands. However, such a ‘readiness for change’ requires a clearly articulated mission enabling staff to feel sufficiently grounded to take risks, continuous investment in improvement, and a ‘flat’ management structure with participatory decision-making. A fairly tall order for the many NGOs impeded by increasing bureaucracy, resource constraints, a lack of access to appropriate best practice knowledge and little leadership development (Foster-Fisherman, Maynard, and Yang 2001). Sustainability and flexibility is not necessarily the same thing. Motala and Husy (2001) point out that flexibility also comes at a cost often hidden to the organisation, including staff burnout, and spreading resources too thin or at the expense of alternative programmes.

In an original study of organisational contradictions experienced in times of strategic change and changing environments, Jäger and Mitterlechner (2004) propose that NGOs develop strategic practices that balance external contradictions with internal contradictions in a way that ensures the organisation will remain capable of acting, specifically by creating a managerial perception of a slower rate of strategic change. Their study suggests that this can be achieved when “major decisions are coordinated in formal arenas and are made outside of them”, “strategic change is a negotiated practice” and “decisions are waiting for contextual changes and are legitimized by them” (Jäger and Mitterlechner 2004:1). They acknowledge their findings are “highly counterintuitive when compared to prior research which proposes that nonprofit organizations should adopt strategic change practices of profit organizations in order to increase their speed of responding to environmental change” (Jäger and Mitterlechner 2004:15). It is their premise that NGOs need to take care of their internal context to enable any real change, even if this results in the pace of change not being as fast as would be desired. They emphasize that appropriate attention be given to the deeply embedded rules within which organisations operate. As a result their study shows that organisational contradictions are in fact organisational rather than individual phenomena “the managerial challenge turns from blaming individuals to the question of how to remain capable of acting and integrating the organization despite emerging organizational contradictions” (Jäger and Mitterlechner 2004:17).

Hilhorst (2003:217) argues that with the consistent changes over time a relevant question is “how NGO management and staff members arrive at [a] certain coherence in practice, given the multiple binds and life worlds in which they operate. How do managers and staff deal with multiple realities?” Ybema (1996:42) suggests an organisational reality where unity and disunity exist jointly “to become a sensitive mixture of cooperation and competition, contrast and commonality . . .an *either-or* perspective on consensus and dissensus to a *both-and* orientation.” He suggests you

find 'working consensus' in bureaucratic rules or events, but these in turn also contain 'seeds of discord' between different groups and lead to divergent interpretations. "Boundaries between people appear and disappear: they are marked or ignored depending on the ideas, interests and identities that are at stake, and the setting in which the interactions take place" (Ybema 1996:43). He emphasizes a focus on analysing the interconnectedness between consensus and dissensus, and should not confuse them with good or bad relations. There is an ongoing social life to organisational processes where gossiping and quarrels around everyday interests and processes are constituted by social ties. NGO staff members develop multiple ties and accountabilities into which they invest their own meaning and ambition in the process.

As suggested by Bate (1997) change within organisations is not a simple linear experience, but is interpreted through a vast 'informal system' of contested cultural processes which need to be explained. With the only constant within flexible NGOs being the promise of change, a huge strain is placed on the organisation to assemble a sense of uniformity in representation front stage, as staff and management sort through ongoing adjustment and ambiguity. A means through which to view the complexity of this everyday reality in NGOs is a cultural lens. A professional NGO could well be interpreted as re-mapping itself comparable to what Clifford Geertz describes as a model *of* the world, and simultaneously a model *for* the world (cited in Kamsteeg and Wels 2004). Working towards being representative *of* an effective and efficient NGO, and at the same time aiming to set out a precedent *for* how the organisation may understand itself and behave. Academics such as Martin and Frost (1996) have loosely categorised varying theories on organisational culture into three groups. Firstly, those that subscribe to the more managerial unitary assumptions on organisational culture fall into the Integrated Perspective. Secondly, theories that perceive organisational culture as somewhat compartmentalised subcultures fall into the Differentiation Perspective. And thirdly, those theories that appreciate organisational culture as not easily categorised fall into the Fragmented Perspective. With the latter, ambiguity pervades the 'jungle' of organisational culture itself, creating complex relationships with elements of contradiction and confusion, where any clarity is "a dogma of meaningfulness and order propagated by management to create an illusion of clarity where there is none" (Martin and Frost 1996:102). The hope is that ethnographic research within HARP reveals the emic nature of the journey to possible consensus despite inherent ambiguities - how does HARP 'keep it together' through a culture of change?

2.12 Multiple identities

In light of the challenges presented in the literature so far, what makes professional NGO identity or distinctiveness unique is becoming hard to measure against increasingly blurred distinctions between NGOs and the market (NGOs performing a service delivery role), and between NGOs and the state as the latter take on activities which "subscribe to core NGO values of participation and empowerment" (Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington 2005:3). Increasingly there exists an inherent

tension within NGOs as to 'who exactly are we' and 'what do we signify'? NGOs are by nature problematic organisations and work in situations of necessary ambiguity where multiple identities lead to conflict and uncertainty, so the importance of a common identity with a shared understanding of the NGO's character and profile is essential to the strategic decisions and behaviour of the organisation (Edwards and Hulme 2002a; Zimmer 2002). In a study on mobilising resources within the third sector, Feeney (2004) recognises the complexity for NGOs in defining a sense of identity that negotiates the intersection between economic sustainability and a social mission. The assumption is that NGOs by their nature operate with a social mission as their bottom line, and an economic focus often proves a lesser priority. Her research however suggests inconsistent support for an emphasis on profit, where adopting more business-like practices may weaken a social focus and place an additional burden on staff to invest in a strategy they may be ethically or culturally opposed to, or even lack a knowledge or skill base to take on a more entrepreneurial role resulting in an ambivalent or 'torn culture'. Oftentimes it was the board or management who encouraged staff to adopt a business orientation resulting in tension that led to negotiation around the nature of the mission and benefits for key constituents, resulting in the mission becoming a litmus test or yard stick for decision-making (Feeney 2004:10). An additional challenge identified was the danger of a market focus causing 'value creep', placing its identity in question and even allowing certain services to fall away due to their non-marketable features. Feeney's (2004:14) study revealed that there existed a conviction among many NGOs that they could be "in the market but not of it; that the ideology and value of the third sector could be maintained." Consequently it appeared that the importance of values, ethics and socially focused ideology remained a strong common ground, with acknowledgement that a market paradigm could cost the NGO precious time away from the priority of delivering on their mission (Feeney 2004).

Again, Jäger and Mitterlechner's (2004) study of organisational contradictions experienced in times of strategic change and changing environments provides insight into the challenge of managing multiple identities which are inherently contradictory. They define organisational identity as "the features of an organization that members perceive as ostensibly central, distinctive, and enduring in character that contribute to how they define the organization and their identification with it" (Albert and Whetten 1985, Sutton and Callahan 1987, Dutton and Dukerich 1991, cited in Jäger and Mitterlechner 2004:2). Funding scarcity, competition, diversifying activities, blurring lines between profit and not-for-profit behaviour, and market rationality have all been found to translate into intra-organisational contradictions between traditional mission-orientated value and market place values (Jäger and Mitterlechner's 2004:1). This has resulted in many NGOs becoming 'hybrids' composed of multiple identities, showing variations in perceptions around what is distinctive or enduring about their organisations, highlighting the tensions between economic and social concerns. How then do contradictory identities enable or deter actions and how are they managed? Jäger and Mitterlechner (2004:3) do not conceive organisational identity as stable, but

rather as created, maintained, and altered through practice over time. Contradictions emerge from the interplay between environmental changes and organisational identity 'rules'. In their view, slowing the pace of change and decision-making when responding to external pressures enables NGOs to balance internal contradictions and reproduce subtle changes in identity 'rules': "When nonprofit organisations change too fast they risk giving away their own identities" (Jäger and Mitterlechner 2004:17). They support calls for more research that accounts for the dynamism of organisational identity. In a similar vein, Alvesson and Willmott (2002:14) contend that organisational identity cannot be presumed and must be actively engendered or manufactured through 'identity work': "people are continuously engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness." They suggest that actively managing 'member identification' provides an effective means of organisational control as opposed to relying on external stimuli. Their research emphasizes the role of engaging in discourse to ensure an attentive and coherent narrative in support of identity formation, shared understandings and convictions - hence control of organisational practices in a wider context (Alvesson and Willmott 2002). At this point it is important to be aware of the tendency of various theories either toward the more managerialist view of culture as a psychological disposition (Hofstede's (1980) 'collective programming of the mind'), or as a more open system where culture is a process and negotiated order to be analysed in the context of organisational social structures (Wright 1994).

For Hilhorst (2003:214) multiple realities within NGOs come about as a result of the organisations representing "many things for different people both simultaneously and sequentially." Notions of identity and meaning are used strategically in response to people's notions of their organisation, and contain a multiplicity related to internal official policies and procedures, political opportunities and changing relations with the state in a historical context. There exists an ongoing process of renegotiation around the organisation's identity, label claiming, and mentality as an NGO or not-for-profit body. In Hilhorst's (2003) opinion it is by improvising and reconciling all the incompatible commitments and contradictions that NGOs attribute meaning to their organisation and establish some coherence in everyday life. The question becomes how these labels are negotiated and how meaning is accorded – do these representations correspond to reality and do they prove workable as others are enrolled to accept them, or do they box organisations into ideological corners (Hilhorst 2003)? When the identity of an NGO is taken for granted it "diverts attention away from power processes in these organisations. It would leave one unaware of conflicting notions, and hence of signals of alternative modes of NGO-ing and prospects for change" (Hilhorst 2003:217).

What future alternatives, or re-negotiated roles and identities may exist for professional NGOs? In a discussion around the crises of identity and mission of private professionally staffed NGOs in Latin America, Bebbington (1997:1755) explores possible creative alternative trajectories for NGO

institutional adjustments and change. Two of the options he offers are relevant to this study; a consultancy model and a social enterprise model, where either would provide a solution to the crises of identity and legitimacy, and result in the organisation no longer being considered an NGO in the traditional sense. Converting to a consultancy model offers a transition for the increasing tendencies of professional NGOs to be seen as ‘think tanks’ or advisors, where the contract becomes the mechanism for accountability and the organisation strives to increase its efficiency and quality in order to survive – where the label of NGO becomes more difficult to justify. Some NGOs have opted for a dual legal existence, but this has often proved messy and provides commercial groups with the grounds to claim unfair advantage in the market. Converting to a social enterprise model on the other hand offers a transition for income generation where the NGO “becomes a sort of holding company, with both profit-making and non-profit making enterprises, and uses the profits of one to finance the other” (Bebbington 1997:1760). However, a successful social enterprise relies heavily on considerable business acumen, large investment in skills and substantial market networks. Bebbington (1997) acknowledges these as ‘ideal types’ and emphasizes a long-term iterative change process would be required toward any combination of the above, based on a continued and secure financial situation. An inherent mix of roles for NGOs has always proven a challenge, and Bebbington (1997) offers that future transitions need not be feared or seen as a problem, but would rather ensure the validity of the NGO label is protected. Where might HARP find itself on this trajectory?

2.13 Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to provide an analytical overview of development literature and anthropological perspectives by illustrating the relational nature of a broader framework, distinct strategies and their impact on the local experience. As a point of departure into the thesis fieldwork, the literature foregrounds the political, economic, and non-economic manifestations that influence and define a professional NGO’s complex and multiple realities. The chapter revealed the many constraints and opportunities NGOs face as they employ strategies to professionalize, and the various forms of organising they exhibit in their political, economic and social context. Increasingly professional NGOs are viewed as delivery-orientated agents, which some believe jeopardize the sector’s independence and reason for being (Richmond and Shields 2003; Kolybashkina 2004; Goodin 2003; Reddy 2003; Feeney 2004). Should they convert to a consultancy model (Bebbington 1997), or are complementary relationships and advancement towards broader accountability and efficiency mechanisms with a strong value base sufficient to maintain the title of NGO (Kumar 2004; Fowler 2000; Edwards and Hulme 2002a; Motala and Husy 2001; Slim 2002; Jordan 2005)?

Many suggest that professional NGOs have no option but to ‘maximise social missions’, ensuring their sustainability through increased flexibility and creating new opportunities to build trust and

credibility - avoiding a narrow definition of their mission (Tuckman, Rowe, Skloot and 1999; Galaskiewicz, Letts, Sadler and Hall 1999; Edwards and Hulme 2002a; Voltolini 2002). As highlighted by Fisher (1997) the fluidity and adaptive nature of NGOs are not necessarily viewed as weaknesses and the permanence of their presence may be discovered in their persistent emergence and engagement as they make an effort to avoid the pitfalls of formalizing or professionalizing within their engagement with the state. However, the necessary organisational development that is required to support these strategies by either importing or designing relevant commercial practices provides an ongoing challenge for the often under-resourced and historically informal NGOs (Edwards and Hulme 2002a; Galaskiewicz, Letts, Sadler and Hall 1999; Lewis 2002; Foster-Fisherman, Maynard, and Yang 2001; Motala and Husy 2001).

From a more embedded view, Jäger and Mitterlechner (2004), Ybema (1996), Hilhorst (2003) and Murdock (2003) highlight the need for a considered 'both-and', 'actor orientated' and 'practice' understanding of how the issue affecting NGOs evolve, how staff deal with them and find a certain coherence in the multiple realities of their environment. The development of professional NGOs needs to be understood in context, and negative evaluations of their development may lead to resistance or hinder their ability to counter certain harmful tendencies they themselves acknowledge (Murdock 2003). This study supports such an approach which encourages interpretation, negotiation, dialogue and conscious engagement of social actors within the organisation. This leads to an emphasis on the dynamic nature of NGOs' interpretations and negotiations with the external environment, which in turn informs the shifting NGO strategies. Research by Murdock (2003) into answering the question of whether professional NGOs are 'doing good' has revealed it is not always entirely up to the NGO. She suggests it is important to reveal the constraints and affordances under which these NGOs attempt to 'do good' in realising their missions, and "seeing NGOs as 'processes' rather than entities helps to get away from a moralizing perspective . . . " (Murdock 2003:525). It has been necessary to review the various historical and socio-economic trends that impact on NGOs, however it is particularly in the 'village' of everyday NGO life that various opportunities and challenges are mediated and translated. That is where management negotiates uncertainty at its interface with the state, where staff reconcile continuous dissonance, financial uncertainty, survive accountability, interpret fragmented organisational culture and find spaces to assert themselves. As suggested by Fisher (1997:458), the transformative potential of NGOs may emerge from the "relatively chaotic sets of multiple opportunities and interdependencies" that define their reality. The next chapter therefore provides a brief overview of the politics of public healthcare in South Africa, before sharing two case studies which provide a window into the micro-politics of organisational life within HARP.

3 CHAPTER THREE: A WINDOW INTO THE WORLD OF HARP

3.1 Introduction

Having provided an analysis of literature that reveals the many constraints and opportunities NGOs face in employing strategies to professionalize, Chapter Three aims to contextualise HARP's sustainability as an NGO in the milieu of health sector politics and service delivery challenges in South Africa. A brief overview of the state of public healthcare delivery in South Africa is presented, highlighting the many challenges the state faces in light of its post-apartheid legacy. In addition, questions are raised as to the effectiveness of relations between the NDOH and its decentralised provincial authorities, and their capacity or willingness to build co-operative partnerships with civil society.

As an introduction into later chapter discussions and fieldwork, two case studies are narrated each providing a window into the 'tension-filled' currents HARP must navigate as it seeks institutional support and cooperation with the NDOH, provinces and NGO networks. They provide an insight into the external and internal relations of HARP, illustrating how the NGO capitalises on strategic openings and opportunities to raise its profile, further its mission and ensure its sustainability. The challenges HARP faces are understood in context, with each case study exploring the complexities of accountability, legitimacy and the very authority and identity of the NGO. They reveal the political and moral nature of the interface between the NGO and its clients, and the NGO and its internal environment. The role of the MD as a 'broker of meaning' comes to the fore as he generates HARP's front stage credibility and influences internal discourses within the organisation.

3.2 The politics of health in South Africa

In 1994, the new democratic government inherited a highly fragmented, inequitable health system. . . . there were huge inequities in the quality of care between hospitals in formerly black areas and rural areas, and hospitals in urban areas to serve white patients. These still exist today. . . . The health system is complex, and the process of transforming it is massive. It is thus important to acknowledge this and to give credit to those hospitals that are trying against all odds to improve the services that they offer to patients. Even the very best run hospitals are struggling to deal with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the massive shortages of healthcare staff – the two biggest challenges facing the overburdened health system (Cullinan 2006b:1).

With the advent of democracy in 1994, the South African healthcare system underwent numerous policy changes and placed an emphasis on the right of every person to achieve optimal health. Health budgets shifted their focus to traditionally poorer provinces and free primary healthcare was introduced in 1996. At the core of the government's plan was decentralisation through delegating funding control to the lowest possible level compatible with maintaining good quality care (Burger

and Swanepoel 2006; Day and Ntuli 2004). However, health systems do not operate in a vacuum and the government's adoption of a tight macroeconomic policy framework impacted on the NDOH's planning.

In a review of development and social change in South Africa, Naidoo and Veriava (2004) point out that health has not escaped the effects of neo-liberal restructuring, including their reach into policy shifts within the national health system. In terms of the South African constitution, the National Health Service is a joint function of both the NDOH and individual provincial authorities. The NDOH is responsible for formulating health policy, legislation and ensuring appropriate utilisation of health resources. The provincial health departments are responsible for providing and rendering health services, while formulating and implementing provincial health policy, standards and legislation across 388 healthcare facilities (South African Government Information 2006). According to Cullinan (2006b), transformation in the health sector has been hampered by the lack of a legislative framework to inform these concurrent processes. The National Health Act was designed to provide guidance on how the national health system should be managed and run, but was only signed into law in 2004. Cullinan (2006b) reports that national government lacks the systems to monitor provincial implementation, while provincial administration is weak and lacks the capacity to fulfil its duties. The Health Systems Trust reports that South Africa spends a considerable amount of money on health services compared to other middle-income countries, and yet the average health status of South Africans is relatively poor (McIntyre 2000). They highlight the fact that existing resources are not being effectively used, and increased spending does not by itself lead to good healthcare. MacIntyre (2000) calls for dramatic improvements in hospital efficiency accompanied by pro-active efforts to develop adequate management capacity. "In 2004, six out of the nine provinces under-spent their health budgets because of a lack of capacity" (Cullinan 2006b:1). Corruption within provincial departments is also an often cited concern. In 2006 one province health department in particular was issued with a financial audit disclaimer by the auditor-general for being unable to confirm that its funds were used for their claimed purposes.

Media and civil society reports continue to highlight the evidence of widespread mismanagement and appalling standards of care. "Complaints by users of public health facilities include long waiting times, staff rudeness and problems with drug availability" (Burger and Swanepoel 2006:1). Health personnel cite "low levels of job satisfaction, poor working conditions, despondency in the face of the HIV epidemic, and unsatisfactory management, as well as inadequate salaries, as underlying their dissatisfaction with working in the public sector" (Day and Ntuli 2004:1). The loss of personnel from the public sector to both the private sector and opportunities abroad presents a worrying trend in the face of an increasing divide between those dependent on the public health sector and those who are able to afford access to the private sector (Day and Ntuli 2004). While data suggests that all population groups are increasing their use of the private sector, the health

system clearly reflects and represents the broader fragmentation of society within South Africa where the majority of people cannot afford medical aid. “Private providers and private insurers play important roles within the sector, but still predominantly serve the white, higher income groups, leaving the public sector to serve the lower income, largely African population” (Wadee, Gilson, Thiede, Okorafor, and McIntyre 2003).

There is, as always, an air of controversy around the politics of health in South Africa - the NDOH's responsiveness to HIV and AIDS, the recent infection control outbreaks across the country, and opposition party political attack on the quality of care in public health care facilities in 2006¹² only serve to fuel the fire. In 2006 a team from Health-e News Service¹³ and the Mail & Guardian Newspaper¹⁴ completed a three-month investigation, visiting 26 government hospitals. They reported that one-third of healthcare posts countrywide are vacant, with existing staff suffering enormous workloads, unacceptable working conditions and daily exposure to deadly infectious diseases linked to poor hospital infection control. To complicate matters, accountability was difficult due to hospital managers not being delegated sufficient authority by centralised provincial bureaucracies (Cullinan 2006a). This investigation supports a 2005 study commissioned by the Department of Public Service and Administration which described hospital management failures as a result of the dysfunctional relationship between hospitals and provincial head offices which had centralised control over processes but were unable to deliver on these (cited in Cullinan 2006a). In response to the public health sector infrastructure crisis, the government is implementing a revitalisation programme to upgrade 48 hospitals with the aim of showing that “contrary to popular belief, public hospitals can offer quality healthcare” (health minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, cited in Cullinan 2006a:1). “However, assessing the standard of care that hospitals provide is difficult as the [NDOH] has never formally adopted any indicators to do so” (Cullinan 2006b:1).

The need for intervention and collaboration with social partners seems essential to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the health care system. In 1997 a White Paper on the Transformation of the Health System was adopted and makes claims to focus on creative ways to generate a more useful public-private mix, where a critical strategy to success is that both “the provincial and local spheres should explore the roles that the private sector, NGOs and CBOs can play in extending capacity to deliver . . . services” (Tshabalala Msimang 1999:1). More recently the NDOH has acknowledged its inability to form strong partnerships as a key weakness and claims to be urgently exploring areas of cooperation between the private and public sectors. The health section of the government information website reads as follows:

¹² http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=vn20060710115949151C317952

¹³ <http://www.health-e.org.za/>

¹⁴ <http://www.mg.co.za/>

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at various levels play an increasingly important role in health, many of them co-operating with government to implement priority programmes. They make an essential contribution in relation to HIV, AIDS and TB, and also participate significantly in the fields of mental health, cancer, disability and the development of PHC systems. The involvement of NGOs extends from the national level, through provincial structures, to small local organisations rooted in individual communities. All are vitally important and bring different qualities to the healthcare network (South African Government Information 2006).

Although there is currently a high media profile around adverse events and infection control incidents in the public health sector, international bodies such as the People's Health Movement¹⁵ have identified that civil society in the health sector is much weaker than in the 1980s when organisations campaigned for the right to health as a central component of the mass democratic movement. They have encouraged the initiation of a local coalition of civil society and other groups, to spur the strengthening of civil society around health issues in South Africa. This would then enable local organisations to link up with international networks of like-minded health groups and build international solidarity and capacity to advance the right to health. Perhaps the tide is turning as illustrated by the recent meeting of a coalition of South African civil society organisations against the backdrop of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in the country. The Treatment Action Campaign, a national AIDS lobby group, joined forces with other civil society organisations, including the South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO), the South African Council of Churches, the AIDS Consortium and the Congress of South African Trade Unions in response to the government's calls for greater unity in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Zanele Twala, executive director of SANGOCO commented that it was "time that civil society organisations stand up and . . . make our voices heard. We need to collaborate and come up with a national action plan that is owned by all of us and supported by all of us" (cited in PlusNews 2006:1). In an increasingly politicized environment, community based organisations persevere at the coal face, while social movements and advocacy NGOs utilise adversarial tactics to further their missions. The more formal and professional NGOs, however, are increasingly providing contracted services at the state's bidding, and must reconcile their critical loyalty with service delivery – redefining and re-evaluating their relationship with the state. It has been proposed that the decentralisation of government services to provincial and district structures in South Africa has created the space for cooperation, and focused attention on the relationship between the state and civil society (Motala and Husy 2001).

¹⁵ The People's Health Movement is a global network of civil society groups, researchers, activists and teachers involved in health <http://www.phmovement.org/>

3.3 Infection control case study

During the course of 2005, there were a number of infection control outbreaks in various public health care facilities across the country, many with tragic outcomes¹⁶. This case study tracks HARP's exposure to one such incident within a facility participating in its programme, and the influence this had not only on the organisation, but its wider network as well. The front page of a recent HARP newsletter released prior to the infection control outbreak leads with the title 'Clean care is safe care – don't forget to wash those hands'! Opportunity or accountability disaster? What became known as 'the infection control outbreak' sparked a haphazard inquiry by the NDOH, an incident that would inevitably alter the course of HARP as it navigated both precariously and opportunistically through the political backwash. Tracking the challenges this outbreak created for HARP over the following five months provided a unique lens through which to explore the complex nature of profile, accountability and legitimacy for the NGO. Questions arose which highlighted the activities, philosophy, adaptability, authority, creditability and very identity of HARP. It would lead the organisation on an emotional roller coaster as it was given the opportunity to 'hurry up, and wait' in political corridors, and be offered a few harrowing moments to prove both empirically and politically it should be part of the drive to improving the state of public health care in the country.

First contact

Ironically, the story broke shortly before the MD was due overseas to attend an international conference. He joked about 'voodoo' on his leaving the country as things "always go wrong" when he is not around. A comment worthy of note as it bears out the nature of the organisational structure and dependency on its leader. To begin however, as the news breaks, the head of department (HOD) of the province made a call to the MD and requested a statement from HARP on the facility to provide him with background information for his official response to the minister. Understandably under great stress, during this conversation the HOD communicated the sentiment that 'I thought HARP was sorting all this stuff out'. Both this question and the infection control outbreak itself form an intense spotlight on the accountability, legitimacy and impact of the NGO. Staff members retrieved relevant data and as the hospital's scores were analysed, it revealed that with regard to infection control this hospital had been rated very poorly. An experienced facilitator was on duty, and discussions revealed specific local challenges and issues that contextualised the outbreak, all revealed in the HARP reports and recommendations submitted earlier to the facility

¹⁶ http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=vn20050724102049245C896700
http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=vn20050708090939870C280458
http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=vn20060722094456288C687102
http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=vn20060823234043308C783757
http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=qw1148670540433B211
http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=qw1160756821304B243

and province. The infection control standards themselves were affirmed as robust, developed in conjunction with subject matter experts and ratified by professional bodies. The question remained: how does HARP support the HOD at this difficult time and affirm the nature of its accountability?

The situation was complicated by the HOD being a long time supporter of HARP, having built a relationship with the MD over many years. Staff members referred to the need to handle the issue sensitively while protecting HARP against becoming a scapegoat. HARP's public relations company was called in to assist, and along with senior management a response was drafted for the HOD to pass on to the minister. The debate was intense and the choice of words carefully considered. One staff member put it strongly that "this is not our fault, we are not responsible, and should not be seen to be acting as guilty – we do not perform a line management function." Others contributed: "but look how this reflects on HARP", "this again brings into question how we make a difference" and "they must appreciate where HARP's responsibility stops and the hospital's starts." There was concern that any provincial fallout may be associated with HARP. The brief was completed reaffirming the hospital's status and progress reported, and offered assistance to the department in any way possible. Having been given guidance by the public relations company, the MD then responded individually to journalists who contacted HARP for comment. He discussed the general challenges faced by public sector hospitals and what HARP was attempting to achieve, but no official press release was given. While struggling to reach the HOD on the phone for feedback, the MD left for his conference abroad.

Shortly after the MD's departure, HARP received an email addressed to "Dear HARP" from Mr Jacobs¹⁷, a senior NDOH official who has worked closely with HARP in the past. Excerpts include:

This has also become a major-major concern to the Minister. Earlier today she wanted to know what exactly we are doing as government officials in this regard. Amongst others, I mentioned that HARP through their business in provinces, has valuable information on what the status is in terms of infection prevention and control. She expressed her annoyance with me for having been 'sitting' on such information while people are dying in our hospitals. I tried to explain to her that there is at present no official arrangement between National Department and HARP that obliges HARP to share with us the information and I also told her of the confidentiality clause in the contract that exists between HARP and the provinces and my efforts to respect this clause. Having said this made her even more annoyed, telling me that she is not the 'Minister of Confidentiality' and that she wants a full report on her desk by Friday.

¹⁷ Pseudonym

I will in my accompanying memorandum to the Minister also recommend to her that [the MD] comes and presents to the Department the relevant information. From a strategic point of view, I think this might well be the opportunity we have been waiting for so long to actually 'position' HARP for the future.

Needless to say, that my report will definitely touch upon the HARP-provincial relationships as well as the national Department's relationship with HARP.

The email was the first official acknowledgement of its existence HARP had ever received from the minister. A focused interest expressed by the NDOH was new to HARP, and placed it in a unique position with a plethora of promises and possibilities beginning to take shape.

The culture of loyalty and confidentiality is very strongly inculcated within HARP. Based on the nature of information and graphic photographic evidence procured, the NGO is held to strong confidentiality clauses in contract with provincial clients. The senior management team met and agreed that no information can be shared with the minister without the written consent of provincial authorities to whom it is contracted. One staff member stated: "we don't have a contract with national – we are a non-governmental organisation." The MD (from overseas) agreed that under the circumstances an anonymous sample of data (i.e. not naming the province) would be provided in the interim. He then immediately drafted a letter explaining the situation and requesting permission from each province to share their infection control data generated by HARP with the NDOH. The letters were faxed, emailed and couriered to the respective authorities, in addition to messages being left on answer phones to please contact him. Mr Jacobs was informed and given a copy of both the sample data and letter sent out requesting provincial consent.

In the engine room of HARP the pistons were working at full power. To retrieve this non standard reporting data on infection control from the information system took time and effort . . . and HARP was given three days. It required a deeper level of analysis to comment on the extrapolated data and what the risk implications were for individual facilities and provinces. The effort called for multiple levels of staff involvement in data processing, information presentation, analysis and explaining the intent and scope of the standards. The work was done in collaboration with the MD through unreliable email connections and telephone conferences. The general feeling among staff was that this was an unwelcome additional burden to their existing workload, and once again work was being completed free of charge with no promise of income, with a typical lack of appreciation from the NDOH that these efforts took time and money. The MD however was pushing strongly that it was a critical opportunity for HARP to prove it was able to provide valuable information at a national level. He saw this as a way to gain visibility and be validated as an organisation albeit as a result of an adverse situation. He was keen to make the most of the chance to raise the profile of the HARP reports as a management tool able to provide a multilevel and multi-tier analysis across

the country. His view was supported, although staff members remained cautious and reflected on the disappointments and broken promises they had faced in the past, yet were required to generate ongoing output based on a changing mandate.

As time passed, the provinces proved slow in giving consent to provide the data to the NDOH. Through telephone conversations, the MD (now back in the country) was able to gather verbal consent from a couple of provinces, but others were proving 'unreachable'. The reasons for this would be pure speculation, but staff opinion was that they were avoiding the issue and reluctant to have the minister breathing down their necks based on their poor scores, hoping to ride it out and survive the scandal unscathed. As a result the focus for HARP soon became the promise of meeting with the minister to provide an overview of infection control across the country. Unfortunately the original date diarised by the minister's office for HARP to present its findings had now been 'moved' three times. There was a growing sense of frustration in the office, a feeling that HARP "did not strike when the iron was hot", and the window of opportunity had passed. What reports had been compiled now lay gathering dust without official provincial consent, and the confidence that the minister would ever keep to an appointed date ran low. As it became clear consent would not be 'officially' given, the detailed presentation for the minister was prepared to be delivered, listing all facilities and provinces by name. The MD had reached a decision that the remaining provinces who were slow to provide consent were fully aware of the situation and based on the minister's mandate presenting HARP's data openly would not constitute a breach of contract.

With regard to the infection control presentation for the minister, there was much thought put into finding the balance between communicating the data, and at the same time educating the minister as to exactly who HARP was, what it stood for, and what it had achieved. It showed a fundamental shift from 'the account' or data itself, to justifying the 'voice', authority and legitimacy of the NGO as an organisation. A new addition was exactly 'how' HARP could assist and collaborate with the NDOH, and what support both HARP and the participating facilities required from a provincial and national level to succeed. These new proposals were the result of hours of senior staff discussions and brain storming with the MD, facilitating a slow and at times unconscious shift in the way that HARP was thinking about its identity and how it presented itself, and for what purpose. The challenge to staff morale through such a process was the frustration of seeing all the hard work not being delivered or utilised, bearing in mind as one month rolled into two – data needed to be updated, re-analysed and reports amended. Kitchenette and smoke breaks hummed with tension, conversations centred on how the outbreak was highlighting the ability of HARP to "bail out" the NDOH in providing objective evaluations and crucial information . . . but the minister just couldn't seem to "get it." As it happened, two months after the first request for information came through and much of the initial publicity had subsided, the minister handed down the appointment to one of

her senior staff. In the face of staff disappointment, the MD kept spirits up by repeating that this is nonetheless the highest audience HARP had been given, and just had to make the most of the opportunity. The MD requested that Mrs Xola¹⁸, a senior black staff member, accompany him for the credibility of her extensive field experience, but also to affirm HARP's empowerment stance. There were no illusions within HARP as to the importance of demonstrating a politically correct demography at this level. The presentation was delivered, and the feedback given appeared positive with a confirmation that the information would be shared with the minister. Had HARP been sidelined? It was quite simply the time to sit back, and wait.

The ripple effect

With the profile of infection control raised in the public eye, during these months a parallel initiative was set off by the MD. He called Mr Jacobs and suggested that a 'think tank' with relevant experts be held to discuss infection control and what the NDOH could do to turn the situation around. The idea of course was based on the assumption that HARP would be part of the think tank. Mr Jacobs was hungry for ideas and expressed his appreciation for the input, with the MD managing the conversation strategically so that by its conclusion the 'think tank' was Mr Jacob's idea. The meeting was later confirmed as being arranged, with Mr Jacobs again requesting all the reports HARP could produce on infection control. HARP was aware that these reports would be integral for the NDOH to identify the extent of the issue and could be used as a means to identify points of appropriate intervention. The NDOH was now in an uncomfortable position, and as a staff member put it: "if the quality of care is dangerous or inadequate, obviously they are laying themselves wide open to litigation and that is the hook at the moment. Infection control has focused people's attention, pity it takes something like that but it always does." It was with irony that staff commented that this provided HARP an opportunity to better fulfil its mission, but again expected to perform this with no additional funding or official agreement with the NDOH. In the interim the MD was lobbying and communicating across his professional network, discussing the state of infection control and what could be done. Professor Kaizer¹⁹, a leading expert in the field of infection control, had worked with HARP in the past and supported what it was trying to achieve. It was during this time that he called the MD to inform him that Mr Jacobs had arranged a meeting of experts, but had failed to include HARP among other relevant players. Professor Kaizer subsequently cancelled his participation in the meeting, and suggested Mr Jacobs re-arrange with all representative bodies invited. With the Professor being an integral part of the 'think tank', Mr Jacobs was obliged to do just that. Professor Kaizer remained immovable on the requirement for standards and objective evaluation by an appropriate independent body on what was actually happening, more than simply checking off pieces of paper. In an alternative strategy Mr Jacobs

¹⁸ Pseudonym

¹⁹ Pseudonym

then requested a meeting with the Professor himself, to which he agreed – and then proceeded to invite HARP to attend. During this meeting of the three parties, certain progress was made and agreements to cooperate were reached in principle. The MD subsequently delivered the infection control presentation at the two day NDOH ‘think tank’ on infection control, along with Professor Kaizer and a host of professional experts. He received positive feedback from the group of like-minded professionals and was commended on the detailed level of reporting that HARP was able to produce. It was common knowledge that the NDOH knows what the problems are, but it needed to implement measurable improvements based on ratified standards and baseline assessments. So began HARP’s involvement and contribution towards coordinating a draft infection control policy framework for the NDOH.

It was during this two day workshop that the MD was approached by HOPE²⁰, an international donor body currently working towards infection prevention in Africa. Impressed with HARP’s presentation and the work it is doing, they asked the MD “how much money do you need” to further infection control focused research. The MD had found an appreciative audience. Four representatives from HOPE subsequently flew down to Cape Town to share their mission, and discuss how it could collaborate with HARP. Both HARP and HOPE delivered short presentations, followed by questions and enthusiastic discussion amongst all attendees, some of whom had met before. It was obvious that HOPE’s initiatives were compatible as a specific project under the umbrella of HARP’s larger programmes. HOPE was looking for a vehicle through which to deliver the project, and HARP had the expertise and ongoing access to participating hospitals. It was an exciting outcome facilitated by the NDOH infection control workshop that would lead to a pilot project in collaboration with HOPE. On hearing HOPE would be meeting with senior officials in a province participating in the HARP programme, the MD mentioned that this province had declined certain essential management training as part of its contract. HOPE agreed this was to the province’s detriment, and affirmed it would highlight its new collaboration with HARP and stress the training’s importance. A veritable network ‘back scratch’.

An anecdotal yet doomed ripple effect associated with the infection control profile was an initiative by the WHO. Having leveraged off HARP’s network and capacity in the past, a WHO representative with an established relationship with HARP contacted the MD. The WHO were looking for assistance in facilitating a higher profile for South Africa’s attendance at a locally based international teleconference on infection control. One staff member previously ‘roped in’ to supporting the WHO commented that the “WHO is looking for cheap labour, we can bring people together but we must not volunteer to organise anything.” The MD rang Mr Jacobs to afford the NDOH an opportunity to co-ordinate a national presence at the conference node, in light of the

²⁰ Pseudonym

current state of infection control in South Africa. Unfortunately Mr Jacobs offered a somewhat bureaucratic response, commenting he was busy with meetings on that day and was concerned about the cost implications of NDOH staff attending. He however emphasized that HARP could not be seen to be driving this initiative, and it must go through the formal channels. The MD affirmed he was hoping to provide Mr Jacobs with a much needed windfall, “that is our role as an NGO.” It was agreed that HARP would pass on the contact details of a NDOH representative to the WHO. The MD corresponded with the WHO, filling them in on the requirement to go through the formal channels and approach the NDOH directly. The last feedback received from the WHO indicated that they were struggling to garner any response from the NDOH and that the teleconference would continue at a provincial level, without formal NDOH representation.

The face off

Three months had passed since the outbreak and HARP had gained access to new platforms and forged new relationships. The disappointment of not meeting the minister had faded somewhat in the wake of business as usual when the minister’s office suddenly made contact with the MD’s administrator ‘inviting’ HARP to give a presentation to the National Health Council (NHC), the highest body of health in South Africa chaired by the minister herself. The summons was given with only one and a half days warning, and at the cost of the NGO. The minister requested HARP provide an overview of the state of infection control in public facilities participating in its programme. At great pains, the MD’s administrator tracked down the organiser to confirm exactly how much time he would be given to deliver a presentation, and it was confirmed that although the NHC had no strict format, at least 45 minutes to an hour was provided from 3pm in the afternoon. The MD called all available staff members into the board room to deliver the news, congratulating all staff on their efforts that had brought HARP to this opportunity. There was some congratulatory clapping initiated by one of the field staff, in addition to the raising of a few sceptical eyebrows and the shifting of eyes.

The MD and Mrs Xola arrived at the NHC with plenty of time to spare before the 3pm start. The time allocated for HARP to present had been reduced, but no expectation could prepare the MD for being told he had 10 to 15 minutes. The MD moved to deliver the presentation, while Mrs Xola sat on the side as an observer. What followed was a desperate attempt to condense the message into 10 minutes, an impossible task to adequately communicate the basics required to understand the information presented and analysis that followed. However, certain ministers of the Executive Council for each province asked pertinent questions regarding their provincial data, and engaged with the photographic evidence. The minister then interjected by asking “how long are you going to be”, and as communicated by the MD stated she was not interested in the detail of the findings but wanted a brief overview of the state of public hospitals in relation to infection control. He felt she appeared offended by the photographic evidence of the state of public facilities, and held an

aggressive stance for the remaining minutes provided. Having been a witness, Mrs Xola was on the other hand somewhat more optimistic. It was in the corridors after the meeting that she had the opportunity to gather informal feedback from attendees with whom she was acquainted. They commiserated with her and shared that this is what they had to deal with on an ongoing basis, it was typical protocol. Feedback was given that HARP retained support at a provincial level, where the programmes were being run and valued.

Beyond infection control

Through informal telephone conversations within her network, Mrs Xola was able to gather additional feedback on the discussions that continued after HARP's presentation. Issues included the perception of the high cost of the HARP programme, and its lack of leniency toward facilities who suffered legacy infrastructure problems, debating that the standards were too high and not sufficiently tailored to the South African reality. Mrs Xola was advised by her contact to request a feedback session with the Director General, who was considered a fair and just person. Within this forum it was suggested HARP present in appropriate detail the state of hospitals in the public sector, and contextualise HARP's costs in the field reality. It would also provide the opportunity to highlight the benefits of HARP, and define the relationship between its emphasis on quality improvement, with evaluation as a goal and not the only focus of the programme. Mrs Xola's balance of experiences and information proved an essential component for feedback provided to HARP staff at home base. She was able to contextualise the value of the presentation in relation to all those present, and not only the minister's stance. Both the MD and Mrs Xola emphasized that it was at provincial level that support was given to HARP, and provincial authorities had the independence to allocate funding to their preferred providers.

Contact was made with the Director General's office, and he agreed to provide one and a half hours to HARP a week or so after the NHC presentation. Once again the MD was on the road reporting back and meeting with various provincial authorities, but in his absence he requested the senior management team meet and brainstorm 'the benefits' of HARP, in order to better define and communicate this message. After initially being focused on HARP's programme processes and outcomes, they began to extrapolate the broader benefits of both the organisation and programme. Their contributions were guided by their own role within the organisation, and staff who experienced contact on a client based level as opposed to in-house or facility exposure found it far easier to focus on broader issues and benefits. It was a new experience for many of the team to think about 'marketing and selling' the NGO beyond the assumption that what HARP does will speak for itself. They perceived it through the eyes of those who hold the purse strings or need to see the benefit of collaborating at a national level, as opposed to the community of facilities benefiting from the programme. When the question of whether HARP should convert to a business consultancy model was thrown in, only one staff member was in favour.

The 'benefit brainstorm' by senior staff was collated and incorporated by the MD into the presentation prepared for the Director General – it was again time to deliver, learn, and leverage HARP's profile. The meeting ran its hour and a half course and proved invaluable in furthering awareness for both HARP and the NDOH around the potential to collaborate and potentially assist with the NDOH mandate to monitor policy for provincial health care. The Director General confirmed that many senior officials were not always in support of the HARP programme, as there was no clear understanding of what HARP actually does in the field. HARP was seen as an 'entry-exit' organisation, where sums of money paid towards an unachievable goal seemed disproportionate, de-motivating facilities already under strain to perform the additional improvement work required. The Director General placed evaluation in the domain of the NDOH, and suggested that perhaps HARP could contribute within that framework, and focus more on providing training. The MD re-affirmed HARP's legitimacy and credibility as an indigenous programme with international recognition, able to provide objective monitoring and evaluation and willing to share its wealth of data. The Director General suggested that the NDOH uses its own internal evaluation tool to sample hospitals where HARP has worked, to assess their alignment with national standards. The MD agreed that this would allow for an objective assessment of the benefits of HARP's programme to disadvantaged facilities. The meeting came to a close with the Director General informing the MD that word on the ground was that there may be an inquiry into HARP.

On his return, a two page letter was compiled thanking the Director General for his insights and the perspective he provided, confirming HARP's willingness to play a role in a public/private partnership. Stating it would be a pity for the NDOH to waste resources reinventing the wheel, HARP agreed to be willing to further tailor its programmes to take into account the serious deficiencies common to the public sector, and would welcome further discussion in this regard. Amongst other points it concluded by saying "HARP is keen to collaborate fully with the public sector to assist in whatever way possible to ensure that all citizens receive equitable, quality care." Mrs Xola had again spoken with her informal network, and reported back that HARP needs perhaps to emphasize the message that it depended on NDOH support, and therefore NDOH collaboration was required. She was informed that there was also talk that HARP would again be discussed in a national meeting in the coming weeks. The reality was, as one staff member put it "there *might* be a breakthrough at the NDOH level in understanding what HARP has to offer, and infection control has been the pivot for that."

In summary

The infection control case study provided insight into the complex and political nature of the relationship between HARP, its provincial clients and the NDOH. It also revealed the state of internal communication and cooperation between provinces and the NDOH itself, and how gaps between the two state bodies provided both strategic opportunity spaces and yet placed

constraints on HARP's ability to raise its profile and further its mission. The activity and sanctioning provided by HARP's broader network were also brought to the fore, providing insight into the entrepreneurial manner in which NGOs deal with challenges of access, accountability, representation and legitimacy. The internal and organisational processes within HARP were also highlighted, and provide insight into the role of the MD as leader, and how discourses among staff members within the organisation lead to sense-making and become powerful over time. This descriptive account will afford context for further research and discussion in later chapters. The second case study will journey further into the organisation, and focus specifically on the role of HARP's information system in both its front- and backstage production.

3.4 Reporting case study

It had been shared by the MD that HARP had yet to fully maximise the benefits of information it could provide its clients. With his exposure at senior and provincial level, he was kept informed of the different reporting needs between facility, provincial, and national managers. Facilities often felt they didn't have provincial support of the programmes, and with HARP having the opportunity to discuss provincial interest and needs, a means was required to provide relevant information at provincial level. This meant reporting on existing information currently held in HARP's databases but in a way that speaks to the provincial agenda by providing visibility of high risk areas and urgent issues within the province. Every two or three months the MD was required to attend provincial feedback meetings in accordance with the contract agreement. His preparation for these meetings was lengthy and at the time a difficult process where it appeared as though field staff were unable to provide him with necessary high level information to report professionally on HARP's activities. Field staff would abbreviate their existing narrative reports and this resulted in an excess of detail. This preparation time brought many emotional agendas to the fore as many field staff were unsure their meaning was getting through to clients when their narratives were summarised in graphs and figures. One field staff member felt "it is the words in the report that matter, that make sense. A graph can't say that." It was a tug of war between 'tell it like it is' versus 'show them where to improve'. Senior management's position was that in the initial stages of a contract clients should be encouraged to remain positive and understand that a difference can be made over time. Further into the contracts, feedback to the provinces may become harsher as the facilities are required to move into implementation of quality improvement. At the time there appeared to be a lack of consensus between senior staff, office staff and field staff around the purpose and means of producing 'the account' for clients.

As HARP developed it became increasingly important that accurate summarised reports were given to clients so that they could evaluate the progress of the contract, in addition to HARP improving the capacity to evaluate its own internal performance. Over a period of months and with the assistance of two senior staff members, the MD undertook an analysis of narrative reports in

the face of growing incongruence between field staff members' positive feedback on progress and facilities inexplicable failure to comply with standards. Initial results of the narrative reports showed that they were often subjective, as well as not being focused on the standards against which facilities would be evaluated and at times inaccurate and containing grammatical and spelling errors. The analysis revealed that the approaches between field staff varied in style and format, and even within the same report – concluding that the reports were unprofessional and reflected badly on the organisation . . . urgent remedial action was required. It was crucial that the reporting process was accurate and reflected the actual situation within facilities. Thus began the challenge of professionalizing the reporting process, a development that fuelled an ongoing lack of consensus between those staff members in favour of the change (mainly office based) and those that were not (mainly field based).

In addition to providing reports that serve as an evaluation, the MD wanted to provide clients and provincial staff with a management and comparative tool, where reports could be summarised over time to enable outcomes of the project to be predicted and advise clients on how their facilities were performing with regards to their certification preparedness. For this aim the development of the project management database was undertaken, which required staff convert their previous narrative reports into a table format, as well as to including new variations on existing information. The aim was to produce a professional monitoring and evaluation report that would enhance HARP's services and provide accountability and credibility. The HARP newsletter of winter 2004 stated this new report was “designed to ensure that reports are objective and professional, developed to improve HARP's overall performance.” Progress of facilities and services could now be monitored at unit, provincial and national level. The new report would also summarise what the evaluation figures actually meant: the external influences, internal conditions, areas needing improvement, and corrective actions taken. The report would provide clients with transparency as to how the HARP programmes were performing from an operational and project management perspective, and serve as a tool through which facilities could also be held accountable and manage their responsibilities for improvement. One office based staff member felt that “now you have objective non-judgemental data without bias or any human factor about what the status of the facilities are.”

The change

It is critically important that you are credible and you can validate yourself. It became obvious that the reports weren't being written well, and secondly you couldn't extract the data that we needed to validate what we did. Right from the start I have been refining the tools and wanting to show we can make a difference (HARP's MD).

As the new reporting system was implemented it revealed a number of shortfalls in the programme structure where improvements were needed. For example the new reports highlighted that the

frequency of evaluating services was far too low and led to inaccurate accounts of facility performance. Meetings were held with staff to discuss these issues and to overcome this deficiency. A clustering system was introduced where more services were evaluated in one visit, providing increasingly accurate updates within the reporting cycles. However, these and other changes found resistance with certain field staff who had each formulated their own distinctive approaches and were now required to adhere to a more structured process. This approach placed an additional time burden on field and office staff alike, requiring them to both report on the facility, and record the process of managing the project implementation. The new report provided the organisation with a means to monitor and evaluate the performance of field staff, holding them accountable through their efficiency, effectiveness, and objectivity across the programme. Computerising this process into a new project management information system also suffered a jaded introduction. Expediency required field staff to utilise the report before the information system had been appropriately 'debugged'. Continuous changes were made to its design as opportunities for improvement arose (the improvement process was ongoing at the time of the research). As a result of seeing the system producing on occasion inaccurate data for clients, many field staff lost confidence in the tool and resistance developed towards this new 'system generated report'. A struggle for consensus between the senior staff, office staff and field staff continued.

Staff resistance focused on two main areas. First, many field staff claimed their facilities preferred the shorter more descriptive, narrative report. They claimed the richness of feedback was lost when interpreted through an information system, as it required them to soften the way things are reported: "you cannot say in there that the passages are filthy; you have to say the hospital is not hygienic." A field staff member commented, "the people who are reading the old reports relate to them in a similar language – now we must waste time making them fancy and pretty." They noticed that facility managers struggled to read the new reports and would require additional training to use the report as a management tool. Certain field staff appeared uncomfortable with all the columns and figures in their reports and they began to see it as a senior management tool. A long time field staff member commented that with regard to monitoring performance within the new report "much of the measures are impractical, but it looks impressive on paper." Some office staff also commented on the length of the new reports, at times between four to six hundred pages, "obviously one has to report, but this current system is a bit over-indulgent. I mean it's nice to have hundreds of pages, but people don't have the time to read it, I wouldn't."

The second area of resistance centred on certain staff perceptions that the MD was using this report as a means to generate more data to further his own research interests. Historically, research has been a sensitive topic in the corridors of HARP. As an academic the MD is motivated by research and is driven to continuously evaluate and improve HARP's programmes. Seen as a

luxury by most staff focused on the delivery of programmes, they perceived any research as drawing on already scarce funding and increasing the demand on their time over and above their daily workload. One staff member explained that in the past the MD's passion for research "may have impacted on operations at the coal face. Yes, you have to research, but we didn't have the resources so we had to use staff and resentment built up at work."

The transition

The unavoidable reality was that although the new project management report placed an additional time burden on field and office staff, it was a critical transition in increasing the credibility and professionalism of HARP as a contracted service provider. However, resistance did flare during times of stress or conflict, with perception among many staff members that it remained a burden. With provincial attention on these new reports gaining momentum, the MD was determined to ensure they would represent the professionalism for which HARP was striving. As a consequence of the new report structure, head office introduced a formal editing system to ensure all reports sent out to clients used professional language and were error free. The initiative required a particular staff member who had experience as an editor to altering her job focus, and she eventually petitioned for a part-time assistant. With neither of these persons having a medical background nor field experience, they 'improved on' the field staff's grammar and sent the reports back with questions for correction. As a process this fuelled high emotions and accentuated the tensions between office and certain field staff. Increasing quantity most often comes at the expense of quality, and 'field rats' are by nature innovative. Bearing in mind that field staff themselves were under the spotlight to work more efficiently and effectively, they proposed a 'tick' system, where 'one tick' would mean no change to their previous comment, and 'two ticks' would mean the same action as they had stated above. General consensus was given at a whole organisation meeting on the 'tick' systems although those field staff members who preferred to write things out were free to do so. When this new system was implemented, however, it proved a greater challenge for the editing team as they received pages scattered with 'ticks'. They were frustrated by the ongoing resistance of field staff to utilise a 'house style'. In their view this new system encouraged certain "lazy field staff" to cut. This compromised the quality of the data and thus the accuracy and quality of the reports. One field staff member on the other hand felt that "head office must sort out the 'pretty' formatting." There was a sense within the NGO that working in the field was a rite of passage, and it was common to define an argument by 'the reality in the field dictates . . .' or on a more personal note, 'if you worked in the field you would understand . . .' There was an ongoing but somewhat healthy tension between the office staff and the 'field rats'. Certain office based staff members were enthusiastic about having a field experience, while others appeared reluctant to go.

Looking forward

Over a twelve month period the MD and senior office staff persevered and while open to feedback on the new reporting structure, they remained firm on promoting its importance for HARP's credibility and profile. The MD's interpretation of initial resistance was that field staff members were becoming aware their performance being more closely monitored and evaluated. A senior office based staff member observed: "there was huge resistance initially. First of all nobody likes change, and secondly the [field staff] were being made accountable and they didn't like that. They work hard, we know that, but there is always a gap, the human factor." Over time, the information system stabilised and the project management reports won pockets of support within the organisation. The MD had emphasized the report's value as a management tool at provincial level, enabling senior managers to pressurise facilities to perform based on objective and measurable data, an effort long requested by field staff. He had also shared the positive feedback received on the new reports' ability to provide summary data on facilities' achievements and challenges. A senior staff member commented that the MD "needed something to back him up when he speaks to provincial authorities so that he can actually show what happens at the visits. So he will now have something to substantiate the programme." Based on the new reports, preparation for provincial feedback meetings was no longer such a stressful process. One field staff member reflected: "for the managers it is shorter and easier for them to see, and that is what he was lacking previously." A senior staff member with field experience even qualified facility managers' inability to read reports as "managerial laziness. More than anything else, the reports are straightforward. They feel it is too much information, but in reality it is only a section of the report that is relevant to them."

With the country-wide focus on infection control and HARP's growing profile over the previous six months, a field staff member conceded that they needed the face of the head office, the glamour of the suit and tie. "There is nothing new in the report in terms of information that wasn't there before, but I can see that the MD had to make it work and it was time to move on." Another field staff member concluded that the MD "needs to be there making these decisions, thinking ahead, planning ahead, and we need to give him the ammunition to be able to do that." A senior office staff member concluded that "the reports themselves are a bit tedious, but I don't know if there is an easier way." On the issue of the project management report, relations between the MD, office and field staff improved, as described by one field staff member:

Head office is a mouth piece, they need us and we need them. There is no animosity really, we see ourselves working closely together but being very different people, very separate people. I may say that those people who sit in the office all day sent me off to the airport at 4am in the morning, yes it's difficult – but thank goodness there is the group in the office who make the plans and present the report, make them look professional.

In summary

The reporting case study illustrates how the 'account' or report generated by the NGO is much more than simply a report on activity in the field. As a tool it can be burdened with multiple purposes, all of which are not necessarily compatible. This becomes clear at the interface between facilities' reporting needs and those of the provincial client, and again at the interface between the NGO management's evaluation needs and those of the field staff members. The report as a tool soon begins to reflect the NGO's image and interests, supporting strategies to professionalize and prove its legitimacy as an organisation. It appears that as much as the new reports demonstrate transparency both internally and externally, there remained those of the opinion that they both obscure aspects of field reality and again generate new internal processes that need to be managed. The insights on the complexity of HARP's reports offered in this case study will be discussed by introducing additional field work results in later chapters.

3.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a window into the 'real world' of HARP as an NGO. Descriptive in nature, the case studies are therefore designed to reveal the experience of the organisation and its members, revealing their own perspectives, facilitating an understanding of their embedded reality. It is intended their reading raises more questions than answers, which can then be explored in the following chapters in relation to further ethnography and with reference to the literature analysed. Chapters Four to Seven form the main discussion of the thesis and describe the relationships between the broader framework, distinct phenomena and the local experience in the strategy of professionalizing HARP. They reveal the political, economic, and non-economic manifestations that define the organisation's complex and multiple realities. The next chapter begins with a discussion of the broader framework of the politics of NGO-ing. It describes the power relations through which HARP navigates as a service provider for the state, and reveals a complex and interwoven reality, saturated by the political agendas of multiple stakeholders.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: THE POLITICS OF NGO-ING

4.1 Introduction

Rather than taking organizations at face value, we have to ask and observe how the claims and performances of NGOs acquire meaning in practice. NGOs are not things, but processes, and instead of asking what an NGO is, the more appropriate question then becomes how 'NGO-ing' is *done*" (Hilhorst 2003:5).

This chapter aims to explore the political context within which HARP is staking its territory, and how it negotiates relationships with multiple stakeholders during an uncertain and competitive journey down the 'yellow brick road'. NGOs are part of 'open systems' and have porous boundaries, making them "highly dependent on events and resources in their environment" (Lewis 2003:325). Internal factors can be *controlled* (staffing, planning, structure), wider relations can be *influenced* (lobbying, collaboration), but political structures, and macro economic systems and international dimensions of context can only be *appreciated* (Lewis 2003). As revealed through the infection control outbreak, in order to justify its very existence HARP must accommodate multiple agendas, including its own – constantly aligning its moral compass with ongoing challenges around its very identity and future sustainability. What did the infection control outbreak reveal around the balance of power and HARP's ability to negotiate a relationship with the NDOH? How does HARP manage the NDOH's desire to remain in control, or perceptions of it as a potential competitor, and then reconcile these dynamics with its professed status as an independent and autonomous NGO? Through conflict and cooperation at its interface with clients, there are multiple discourses, labels and representations that shape these power relations (see Hilhorst 2003).

Using case study material and observations, this chapter hopes to expand on how HARP is able to find a foothold when there is an imbalance of power between itself and the provincial client. As discussed in the literature, there are multiple complexities that NGOs have to deal with when contracted as a service provider (see Goodin 2003; Kolybashkina 2004). How does HARP find room to manoeuvre within the terms of engagement, and constantly deal with a range of perceptions and expectations around client and public accountabilities? Within this environment, HARP must find the delicate balance between chasing and creating a market that will enable it to fulfil its current mission, or diversifying services to access additional funding. As an NGO it remains responsible for maintaining a moral authority, raising its profile, and communicating its effectiveness and impact honestly. Depending on the particular reference point and audience, what front stage roles does HARP play, and how does this contrast with the backstage perceptions within the organisation (see Goffman 1959)? As a contracted service provider to provincial authorities, HARP deals with a vast reality outside of a simple legal 'transaction'. The discussion explores the nature of this relationship, asking whether parties collaborate with each other,

complement each other, or define HARP as merely an instrument of delivery? The chapter further focuses on the spaces negotiated and created for competition and collaboration. The challenge is to reveal the backstage dynamics that lead to competition or collaboration with the NDOH, the provinces and other NGOs. Where does HARP find itself in relation to the challenge of strengthening its network and forging alliances to further its mission, and ultimately raise its visibility and profile?

4.2 An unequal relationship

Any discussion based on observation is always enriched by preceding this with a case study. The infection control and reporting case studies both provide a narrative that informs theoretical discussions as additional situational observations are introduced. They establish a framework that enables the reader to appreciate multiple organisational dynamics and offer a socio-political reference point for the discussion. In this way the infection control case study highlights the evolution of HARP's relationship with the state, in this instance specifically the NDOH. It is relevant however to take a step further back in this story . . .

My understanding is that the relationship [with the NDOH] has been a little bit uneasy – talking at cross purposes a lot, from the bits and pieces I have picked up. There hasn't really been real understanding on the part of the NDOH of what HARP has to offer and how this may be useful at this level (HARP staff member).

Over the last ten years HARP has struggled to establish a lasting memorandum of understanding with the NDOH. It has been suggested that the NDOH is suspicious of the very genesis of HARP. As one HARP staff member put it: "our relationship with the NDOH has often been more adversarial than collegial . . . I keep hearing 'so and so can't stand HARP' but I really don't know why?" The original seed capital for the academic pilot was provided by the previous government prior to 1994. However, as the project grew, the University supported the MD's decision to form an NGO. As an independent organisation, this status dictated appropriate governance expected of an independent evaluating body, as the NDOH could not be expected to measure itself. Yet it is possible that NDOH resentment perseveres at not owning the resulting intellectual capital. A senior staff member speculated that "from when the MD made that first stand he hoisted himself on his own petard." HARP has also been accused of being a white elitist organisation possibly due to suspicions around its origin, and logically associated with a white charismatic MD. This phenomenon is described by one staff member as "the elephant in the room that nobody wants to talk about. If [the MD's] name was Tshabalala and he was forty we would be working across the country right now. In the private sector it doesn't really matter, but it has affected our influence in the public sector."

With respect to business as usual, HARP found a client base among the provinces. It was the government's decentralisation of public services that created much of the space for NGOs to interact with local structures (see Motala and Husy 2001). As explained by the MD "it was at a fortunate stage where the provinces saw themselves as independent. That helped us." As a result, HARP signed contracts with individual provinces that had the autonomy to spend their budgets as they saw fit. When HARP entered into an agreement, it was confidentially bound to a particular province and had no *official* contract relationship with the NDOH. In exploring why HARP did not in fact work in *all* of the provinces, the MD explained that certain provinces with large medical schools "felt they could do this themselves . . . but previously disadvantaged provinces were given a lot of money to improve and they didn't know what to do, and HARP came through. That has been very important." Being the 'bread winner' for HARP, the MD's effectiveness depended on his awareness of where the income streams were flowing, and he leveraged off his network of supportive provincial officials or willing ears within the NDOH. With talk of health budgets being returned 'unspent' to treasury, the MD invested much of his time lobbying for provincial buy-in and affirming the benefits of the programme. Potential clients did check HARP's reference with participating provinces, and over time the MD worked at nurturing relationships with the senior provincial management teams. HARP aimed to maintain a critical loyalty with its patron, while ensuring a collaborative role in line with the NDOH's aims and objectives. This often placed HARP in a tenuous position as provincial and NDOH agendas were mediated through personalities, and national politics flowed into provincial weirs.

According to Edwards and Hulme (2002a:220) studies have shown "that it is the *quality of the relationships* between . . . NGOs, donors and governments that determines whether patterns of funding and accountability promote or impede the wider goals of all these organisations in development." At provincial level, the quality of HARP's relationship with its clients was dependent on local provincial politics, which results in multiple discourses that shaped power relations through both conflict and cooperation (see Clark 1993). Two observations bore this out with respect to investing in relationships with key provincial stakeholders, and answering for the programme's impacts. Holding long-term trustworthy relationships with senior officials was essential to further HARP's aims. Yet where the preferred reporting protocol for HARP was to include as many officials as possible, one HOD had engineered a gate-keeping strategy where all feedback was reported directly to him, partly due to the tenure of his support for HARP and personal relationship with the MD. HARP learned a hard lesson when this lack of transparency and visibility of its activities fuelled suspicion and a sense of exclusion amongst senior provincial staff, in addition to aggravating an internal provincial battle around its own attempt to develop an internal quality improvement methodology. Possibly as a result of this internal provincial tension, a contract signed with the HOD and celebrated by HARP was unceremoniously 'downgraded' by a more senior official, drastically altering the NGO's future sustainability. The fallout included an internal

battle within provincial ranks, to the extent that a senior provincial representative refused to attend a facilities certification ceremony because HARP would be present. These are not ideal conditions in which an NGO is able to curry favour. If loyalty is based on personal relationships alone, security of the relationship is tenuous at best and lasts only as long as the patron holds the position, or is overruled by a superior. Although legally binding, HARP chose not to enforce the original contract, due in part to respect for the HOD and then the risk of alienating the province at the expense of future income. This provides support for Edwards and Hulme's (2002a) contention that although relationships between individuals are vital in a healthy partnership between governments and NGOs they do not guarantee lasting impact. ". . . there is often a major barrier between the 'pilot project' stage of cooperation (which is heavily dependent on the NGO and one or two like-minded government officials) and the acceptance and diffusion of new approaches throughout the government hierarchy" (Edwards and Hulme 2002a:46-47).

In previously disadvantaged provinces the context within which facilities are challenged to make improvements is enormous – both in terms of infrastructure and capacity. This leads to the questioning of the impact and the very credibility of HARP's programmes. Staff members recognised that HARP was no magic bullet, but client perceptions and expectations around its benefits were at times varied. One provincial MEC was quoted as saying "we pay millions to the programme, but hospitals continue to go down, how is this benefiting us?" At a provincial level, support for the programme was suffering due to hospital CEOs blaming the programme's inefficiencies for their facilities' lack of progress. Answerable to the MEC, the senior representatives remained in favour of HARP but were looking for backup from the NGO. On one occasion, half way through a programme, a senior provincial representative was sent to the HARP head office to spend two days with the NGO to establish the reality of the situation. HARP was expected to prove its accountability and demonstrate the legitimacy of its efforts. During these two days the representative became better acquainted with the premise upon which the programme operates, and detailed analysis of the reports revealed the lack of management accountability at facility level, in addition to the infrastructure and capacity bottlenecks. The provincial representative revealed that: "grounds people²¹, teachers and union leaders popular in the struggle are now CEOs as awards of loyalty. They are not to be found in the hospitals but in resorts, they don't even know what they are signing. They are politically appointed under an umbrella, and I have no ability to say 'no' to these appointments. The only option for me would be to quit." HARP reiterated its belief that these facilities were spending tax payer's money on quality improvement programmes, and that facility management accountability should be part of hospital performance reviews. It appeared the CEOs were using HARP as a scapegoat in avoidance of their own

²¹ In this context the provincial representative was referring to staff who worked in the gardens, security or maintenance departments.

accountability. These observations illustrated the tenuous and vulnerable position the NGO holds when buffeted by internal politics and power relations within provinces.

Any service provider always holds out for the 'big fish'. If HARP could garner the support of the NDOH, it could avoid competitive and lengthy tender processes and be mandated to survey the entire country and provide invaluable measures of the state of quality of health care. Yet HARP continued to work at the provincial coal face on the grace of the NDOH's apparent indifference, and the province's funding autonomy. When approached directly, NDOH officials had revealed the sentiment of wanting to reduce state dependence on HARP. As a seasoned negotiator the NDOH is renowned for squeezing 'free bee' consultancy out of HARP with the elusive 'promise' of collaboration on a project. On one occasion a NDOH advisor supportive of HARP's initiatives cautioned against applying for funding from a certain international donor as this body ran contrary to the NDOH agenda. The donor was not an approved funding source and it was suggested the NDOH would hamper implementation efforts at a political level and deter any collaboration with HARP in the future. When HARP was approached by an 'appropriate' foreign government to enter into negotiations to facilitate a public private partnership – on getting wind of the situation, Mr Jacobs, the NDOH representative, was quick to suggest that the MD hand over control to the NDOH who *itself* would facilitate an appropriate deal with the donor. Mr Jacobs has also informed HARP that certain provinces are reluctant to work with the NGO because of 'political reasons', and when HARP documents are circulated at a national level, the logo was removed from pages to avoid any association with the NGO. The MD's comment was this "shows the unethical behaviour of people . . . or it may be political." Mrs Xola, a HARP staff member, once again investigated the matter with a long time friend who happened to be a senior official within such a province. His response was that should the province show favour towards HARP, they were fearful of an opposition party attack at utilising a preferred provider, and HARP should therefore secure an independent, third party introduction to the provincial officials. Mrs Xola explained that "in politics, if you bring up something, the opposition will question where your proof is, how you tested it, how sure are you." This same conversation also revealed that the very Mr Jacobs had been heard referring to HARP as a "*self-appointed* [certification] body" . . . despite his knowledge of its international certification. As one staff member put it: "to be involved with politicians in the NDOH is a very dangerous game with only a short-term benefit, and HARP has often badly navigated through the political minefield."

However, the nature of HARP's relationship with the NDOH was to some extent illustrated by the infection control case study, and HARP was given visibility of the NDOH agenda at the time and the inconsistent provincial support it received. It became clear that the NDOH did not have a clear understanding of what HARP's programmes entailed, or the extent of the information it had available. The NDOH was initially not even aware that HARP could provide relevant information

on infection control, hence the minister's irritation with Mr Jacobs. It was an opportunity for HARP to communicate its value, but as a service provider it had to negotiate in the context of a highly politicized environment, a previously low profile, professional jealousy, a single issue concern, a reflection on the public sector's capacity, and being seen as possible competition (see Clark 1993). Being given profile with the NDOH in a defensive position may not have guaranteed HARP a positive press. HARP was challenged on the impact of its programmes and their relevance in the face of the infrastructure and capacity issues facing the public health care system. The outcome illustrated the NDOH's reluctant position to collaborate, apparent in the Director General's suggestion that HARP must contribute within the NDOH's framework. This supports Tandon's assertion that if NGOs accept the state definition of the development framework, greater tolerance will be shown (see Motala and Husy 2001). One message came through loud and clear: the NDOH placed evaluation in the domain of the NDOH, monitoring the quality of provincial health care was their role. The MD commented "I think what helped . . . was when I suggested we can be a preferred provider for them, in a public-private partnership as well. There still is a clear gap; they don't feel they can do it themselves." Clark (1993) however argues that NGOs cannot offer alternatives because their solutions will be seen as competition, and not the complementary contributions required to foster a genuine collaboration with the state.

There is however always room to manoeuvre, and HARP found this through its network and eventual collaboration as a contributor to develop a national policy for infection control. The hope was that this would lead to further invitations to contribute based on HARP's skill and expertise, as long as it was not perceived as a threat to the NDOH as advocating change in the dominant political system (see Alison and Macinko 1993). The MD's sentiment remained strong that if HARP's intellectual property was protected, any form of collaboration or 'good will' donation was in line with HARP's mission even if it didn't result in funding of some sort. However, a back stage perception amongst certain HARP staff members was that it was again being bullied by the NDOH. These staff members felt that one of the weaker points in the organisation was that it did not stand its ground with the NDOH. It was common practice with HARP to carefully consider the choice of phrase or statement, to avoid being seen to criticise the NDOH. A staff member suggested that every time HARP made concessions and 'gave in' it lost a foothold on its credibility . . . "we do that at the peril of our long-term sustainability." Yet staff appreciated that the short-term financial gain was often essential with everybody 'looking the other way'. At its interface with the NDOH, province and donors - HARP had to accommodate multiple agendas, including its own. As suggested by Lurgen, NGOs must develop their policies through balancing their values with pragmatic considerations such as the needs of the country and the type of relationship it shares with government at various levels (cited in Motala and Husy 2001:1).

4.3 The contract agenda

In order for HARP to present itself in a contract environment, it emphasized its knowledge and expertise, communicating its legitimacy and moral authority. Although there were many competitors in the market who were applying themselves to quality improvement, once a client decides to contract HARP it must allow the NGO to employ its unique strategy to accomplish a shared goal. This indicates more of a complementary than truly collaborative relationship (Fowler 2000), leaving HARP room to manoeuvre and negotiate to ensure participation. The broad perception within HARP was that this defined its independent status as a service provider, in being 'programme' and not 'core' funded. Recent provincial entries into the HARP programme at this time were however proving both industrious and financially hard nosed, being pressurised by treasury themselves. Biggs and Neame (2002:30) emphasize that it is not the dependence on funding per se that is important, but "the way these funds are negotiated, and who is accountable to whom, for what, at what time and by what process, that is important." HARP had in the past restructured and shortened the timeline of an entire contract by provincial demand to enable that province to be seen to meet its own national deadlines. An action taken against the will of many staff, knowing that for programmes to achieve full impact, the learning that is required simply takes time. Yet when the only option is 'this or nothing', an NGO has to 'make a plan'. In one case, after a province had signed off on the budget for a contract, the small print revealed that travel and accommodation costs would be reimbursed on submission of cash register or credit card slips within the bounds of HARP's quote. Already passing on a saving for shared accommodation costs between geographically clustered facilities, HARP was no longer able to shave off a sliver of much needed 'savings' through rationalising travel cost. Not having any objection in principle, HARP would however not realise the target 'profit' from this contract which was earmarked for seeding capital, or be able to provide additional visits to the province at no internal cost – a guaranteed 'good will' currency it relied on in the past.

The danger of a contract agenda is the need to demonstrate short-term gains possibly at the expense of HARP's flexibility, its core function, and its need to highlight the importance of long-term social or structural change (see Motala and Husy 2001). Although macro improvements are a shared long-term goal between HARP and the state, HARP learnt to be aware of placing itself as a second priority on the provincial budgets. Being dependent on ensuring ongoing contract income, how did HARP find room to manoeuvre in its contracts and develop its capacity to negotiate with multiple constituencies? As an NGO it had a political role to highlight deficiencies and pressure government to take action, but what type of communication would government accept or ignore (Biggs and Neame 2002)? In his study of NGOs, Nauta (2005) describes the use of research and reports as a form of *strategic translation* that NGOs use to manage the tension between their mission, the communities' needs and those of the government. The reporting case study revealed HARP's use of its changing reporting structure for its own internal research through monitoring and

evaluating both the staff and the programme. In addition, through what Nauta (2005) terms a 'show down', the reports act as a strategic link between the NGO, the target community and government. In the way that the programme engages with 'the field', the reports communicate 'front stage' with management. "A report is a locus of interaction in which NGOs have the possibility to present their version of 'reality'. Especially in combination with the carefully scripted, translated and reinterpreted results . . . these reports become important tools of *strategic translation* in political processes" (Nauta 2005:13). Through the use of 'facts and figures' HARP created an objective language through which to dialogue around the difficult issues of mutual accountability, and a lack of management capacity.

HARP was acutely aware of the lack of coordination between various stakeholders at a senior provincial and national level. The infection control case study illustrated this with regard to the lack of national data, and the erratic provincial responses to releasing their data, each no doubt holding back by virtue of their individual political agendas. The state cannot be seen as homogeneous, and "different parts act in different ways and for different reasons to include or exclude NGOs from partnership relationships with it. Experience in South Africa clearly bears this out" (Motala and Husy 2001:1). As Clark (1993) suggests, only when parties are prepared to objectively learn from each other, will government be receptive to outside advice and not view these 'consultations' as confrontational. HARP continually highlighted the essential component of more partnership and dual accountabilities in its communications with clients, who at times appeared to not want to receive the revealing reports. As Kumar (2004) highlights, contractual service delivery comes at a price. In the absence of "long-term institutional support [and] a continual dialogue about objectives and strategies" the "cut and thrust of contract culture" which relies on outputs and targets "may ultimately disable organisations and compromise long-term quality of impact" (Edwards and Hulme 2002a:220). Although there was the front stage dialogue of partnership with each of HARP's provincial contracts, a broader view of the dynamic gave HARP's relationship with government an instrumental flavour that reflects an imbalance of power (see Kolybashkina 2004).

4.4 Ensuring profile - cooperation and competition

HARP gaining profile was inevitable; I am just surprised it has taken so long (HARP staff member).

The capacity of HARP to generate funding relied on legitimacy, and this demanded that accountability be communicated to clients and the public as part of its broader accountability. Within the politics of NGO-ing, however, for ongoing communication to take place HARP had to be *visible* in order to generate and maintain any profile. Yet for many years HARP had been 'goggles on' hard at work at the coal face, dedicated to proving a product in an untried arena. As the standards were taken out of the academic ivory tower to face the harsh reality of the public sector, many challenges had to be overcome. HARP followed clear guidelines with regards to both the

normative and empirical phases of standards development, continuously engaging with client, appropriate specialist and interest groups in order to incorporate expert and relevant site feedback. The MD retained a focus on continuous *internal* research, often despite staff members' resistance to its demands on their time and questioning why the programmes should pay for research. Although a couple of external research papers had been published regarding HARP's work, including a randomised case-control site, there was a perception among many staff members that there were opportunities for HARP to increase its profile through publishing articles that share the challenges its programmes face. As understood by one staff member, until the MD was certain the programmes made a difference, there remained a persistent reluctance to publish any claims with regard to HARP's activities and open it to sticky questioning. At a conference on NGO and civil society perspectives, Samjpati (cited in HDN 2001:8) stated that an NGO "must publish the outcomes of its efforts; stating some of its case studies. Even if it is not a success story, the facts should be analysed." Many staff members were in favour of at a minimum publishing the NGO's experiences to date, one stated "this is how we get recognised; one of the biggest pitfalls of HARP is that we don't publish, if we are not visible people are not going to think of us."

Historically, HARP has relied heavily on the MD to ensure its profile through his professional network, presentations and conference attendance²². This has been part of the NGO's strategy to diversify and open the organisation to opportunities outside of South Africa. Although a few staff members had been known to question "what is the point of the MD presenting at conferences; it's a waste of time and money", most appreciated these presentations as the golden opportunities to let potential clients know of the good work HARP is doing. With regard to profile there was a concern based on the idea that the MD 'is HARP', as one staff member said "when you see the MD, you see HARP. It scares me." However as HARP continued to grow, the MD felt that his singular association with HARP appeared to be shifting, "quite a few people are saying 'what role do you have in HARP', which is good, that is starting to emerge because HARP is getting big." The reality was, however, that the MD had over his career developed an extensive professional network and amassed social capital as a recognised expert in his field. Staff members admired the MD's international standing and ability to source an almost indefinite number of national and international professional contacts for any given circumstance. As described by one staff member: "what people don't realise is that this man has almost killed himself to bring quality to this country." The standing the MD held internationally could at times be seen as a double edged sword. Professional jealousies were inevitable and the MD had been described by staff as a man who was often verbally attacked by people who 'find it easy to talk about things, but do nothing themselves'. What could be further explored is the degree to which the standing and reputation of the MD

²² A handful of staff members have attended select conferences, but this requires funding and remains an area the NGO would like to improve upon.

necessarily extends to include the organisation itself? How does HARP as an organisation ensure its profile?

On an international level, a part of HARP's profile has been its association with the WHO and its international status as an evaluating body by ISEH. These associations have at times led to research funding as a product of the MD networking at international conferences. Although an international flavour for an NGO is often understood to be favourable within South Africa, one staff member explained that this has its own pitfalls, "government can be very anti those big structures because they feel they are very westernised. Liaisons at that level are not always a good thing." Despite the MD being asked to present at numerous provincial quality summits, there remained a perception among certain staff that the MD was not sitting on enough relevant boards within South Africa, and this could be a source of political disadvantage for HARP. For some there was merit to the argument that HARP was better known outside its national borders, "we need to reinvent ourselves to claim the African continent. A lot of it has been tokenisms up to now." Even though the development of an African initiative for quality improvement in health care was in its infancy, where HARP had collaborated with African countries in the past, some feared being labelled as 'colonialist'. Hilhorst (2003) argues that NGO representation is a two way process at the interface with stakeholders. An NGO has to negotiate its identity in relation to those stakeholders, "they often lose this battle, and have to deal with political labels attached to them. . . . Making representations work is a process of reflecting and effecting power relations in development" (Hilhorst 2003:223). In the past HARP has been paid to train staff from a couple of African countries - although this has not led to ongoing collaboration, HARP sharing its expertise across Africa remains an area for future focus.

Three themes appeared to be influencing HARP's profile: the issue of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), the necessity for senior provincial support to realise programme impact, and the increasing competition in the field of quality improvement. Firstly, the issue of BEE. It was the opinion of one staff member that with the MD being a senior white male, no matter how willing, he has not been able to entrench himself within the changing political elite, outside of provincial health services. There was a perception that HARP was a white organisation. Another staff member felt this perception was a contributing factor to contracts 'drying up', and HARP being passed over when government work was available.

The current environment is that you have to have the political connections to get the big contracts. If you have got people who are competent, one of them has to know 'so and so'. I'm not saying it is a bad thing or a good thing – it is just the way things are. And we can't really run away from it (HARP staff member).

Due to HARP's niche market, appropriately skilled black African professionals willing to work for an NGO were difficult to source and previous isolated incidents with senior black African staff had resulted in uncertainty. Some staff members had made reference to additional training that may be required, while one staff member felt that due to the political necessity of their appointment there was perhaps a difference in work ethic? The MD was concerned by the lack of success HARP has shown in not only employing, but successfully retaining skilled black African staff. The market holds many attractive opportunities for these professionals, and at times they faced a lack of acceptance from certain staff members within the organisation. The MD shared that "every black person that has come into the organisation has been given little leeway by some people . . . this is something that we have to somehow stop." In Da Silva Wells' study of NGO management in South Africa, she found that NGOs need to talk about gender and race more explicitly: "negative racial stereotypes obstruct internal cooperation and make teamwork difficult. Race is a sensitive subject and can easily polarize the organisation" (2004:84). Although satisfying its overall employment equity status, it was only within the last couple of years that HARP had been able to recruit a number of skilled and politically 'savvy' senior black African professionals, understanding the need to present high profile empowerment appointments. These staff members proved invaluable in their ability to extend HARP's formal and informal network, they 'comfortably' commented on the skill competencies of senior NDOH officials, partnered with the MD on his presentations (or delivered them alone) and advised on the political playing field. As one staff member put it "you need to hang out with the guys who will give you the money to ensure you are able to carry out your mission, we should be much more demographically representative and we are going to have to change things." "But have too many bridges been burnt?" queried another staff member. What might be the change in impact and profile if HARP were represented by a black female MD?

Secondly, as a result of programme feedback it was increasingly evident that in order for HARP to achieve lasting impact, support from senior provincial level was essential. Through sustained effort HARP was making headway into the ranks of the provincial elite. In HARP's favour was the fact that the NGO had now been around for ten years, and was ever more in a position to gain leverage through its historical data and experience. Based on a profile of having worked in six of the nine provinces and the pockets of senior provincial support, HARP had also set its sights higher and achieved some access to the senior national elite in pursuit of raising its profile. This ran concurrently with the NDOH's changing agenda and move to becoming more involved in quality assurance. Certain staff members suggest that it was possible that HARP did not listen to the NDOH carefully enough "for the money to keep coming in, HARP has to adapt to the environment, government doesn't really look at things the way they used to." The advent of the infection control outbreak which split the poor quality of public health care wide open also drew HARP into the spotlight. One staff member felt "we have been put on the map. HARP is now an entity out there." The infection control case study highlighted the fact that there had not been a clear understanding

at national level of what HARP actually does: “if the NDOH can actually see what HARP is doing, they should be running to us . . .” As a result HARP has focused on its benefits, ‘why we matter’, and has also expressed a willingness to be flexible within the NDOH framework to ensure the programmes succeed. HARP has also more recently been part of the feedback on the NDOH Patient’s Rights Charter document, extending itself beyond mere delivery of its programmes. One staff member felt “we owe it to the government to contribute, because all the initiatives that have been built here are based on the money that has come from government, we owe it to them. Not all the people in HARP are seeing that.” Based on recent overtures from the NDOH, it appears they may be placing HARP on a short list of service providers with regard to specific research projects and service assessments. These expressions of interest have however failed to include HARP’s core programme as an evaluating body. This echoes back to Clark (1993) who highlights the challenge for NGOs not to become too ‘cozy’ within the government’s stance on issues, merely ‘filling the gaps’ made available and relying on this for their income at the expense of maintaining a critical loyalty.

A possible third theme influencing HARP’s profile had been the increasing competition in the field of quality improvement in health care, including a public awareness around the NDOH’s internal evaluation programme. It is well known that the government in general is in favour of competition to stimulate a market, and the NDOH is no exception in fostering a ‘politics of competitiveness’ (see Richmond and Shields 2003). Liebler and Ferri (2004) argue that NGOs that embed themselves within multiple networks are more visible, accessible and attractive to possible funders, increasing their profile and legitimacy by providing a platform through which they can be heard. According to Biggs and Neame (2002:39), the emergence of competitive contract NGOs is the evidence “that major achievements . . . come through operating as partners in formal and informal networks and coalitions involving other NGOS, government agencies and the private sector.” However, HARP’s experience of successfully collaborating and networking had been inconsistent. For example, with the advent of its HIV programme HARP was approached by an NGO working in a similar field but focused on the private sector. Sounds of collaboration were made and despite certain reservations HARP pursued the endeavour in good faith. HARP facilitated an introduction with certain public sector officials and invited the NGO to participate in a provincial meeting. Yet after this ‘meet and greet’ no further overtures were made by the NGO and all telephones fell silent . . . HARP had to assume this NGO was really only after ‘a way into’ the public sector. On another occasion HARP participated in an endeavour where a group of NGOs collaborated to form a consortium as a vehicle to facilitate the distribution of international donor funding into South Africa. HARP was instrumental in driving the process and invested significant resources, however as described by a staff member “there were no roles or goals specified, and certain ‘black sheep’ NGOs didn’t pull their weight and nothing came of it.” Practical service delivery networks which in theory should reduce competition had not proven fruitful for HARP, and it had not been able to

manage some of the basic requirements for trust, clear governance, commitment and leadership (Liebler and Ferri 2004).

As highlighted by Goodin (2003), structuring a competitive market among service delivery NGOs by its nature undermines cooperation. There are no illusions between NGOs as to the competitive nature of securing any source of funding. A real sense of urgency takes over when a funding gap presented itself implying that if the NGO does not raise its profile to meet those needs, they would be filled by another organisation in record time. One staff member felt this was a good incentive for HARP to accept the challenge and prove itself, while retaining its international links to ensure it could compete globally in the long-term. As a service provider HARP avoided advocacy networks, but had however achieved some measure of success through value-driven knowledge-focused networks, with the purpose of sharing skills and expertise that are specific and time bound. The collaboration with HOPE as a result of the infection control outbreak was a good example, and the informal networking through Professor Kaizer and Mrs Xola serves as another. The relationship that HARP held with Professor Kaizer also highlighted a networking ability to provide mutual monitoring and reputational sanctioning (see Goodin 2003). As argued by Biggs and Neame (2002:32) it is the linkages and networks with actors and organisations in the same area that underlies the effectiveness of NGOs: “in such networks, it is important that NGOs retain and expand their room for manoeuvre so that they can adapt to changing circumstances, maintain their accountabilities to different constituencies, and if necessary subvert or manoeuvre around vested interests.” As a result of a formal and informal knowledge network, HARP participated in drafting the national policy framework for infection control. Perhaps the above supports the contention that more success is achieved through networking in the absence of competition and where financial gain is not a primary motive (Goodin 2003). With regard to the ‘compete or collaborate’ conundrum, HARP appeared to be open to dialogue with other parties and consider opportunities that fell within HARP’s competencies, despite certain staff member’s reservations.

4.5 Conclusion

Being both a contracted service provider and an NGO burdened HARP with all the requisite challenges regarding its commitment to its mission, ensuring an income stream, retaining independence, demonstrating multiple accountability, etc. However, the aim of this chapter was to explore the politics and power relations HARP experiences as it goes about the business of NGO-ing as a service provider for the state. What emerged is a complex and interwoven reality, saturated by the political agendas of multiple stakeholders. HARP’s dealings with the NDOH could be described as cat and mouse drama, it was an unequal relationship. Although HARP had taken the strategy to work with the provinces as a point of departure and leave the door open to the NDOH - at the time of this research HARP’s relationship with the NDOH appeared to be more overshadowed by the government’s desire to control its activities within a national framework,

limiting HARP to a supplementary role as professional consultant or agent of research. Gaining access to NDOH officials was hard won, and often only by virtue of HARP's ability to access a circle of influence through leverage off issue-specific informal networks. It could be argued that the NDOH remained a state department under significant stress and media focus and HARP remained aware of the dangers of politicising issues and to be seen to be criticising the state. It appeared that any challenge to the dominant system through advocacy would come at the expense of its role in service delivery. As HARP itself acknowledged, it needed the NDOH to fulfil its mission and was willing to be flexible to secure this buy-in over the longer term. Through contracting to the NDOH as a consultant, hiring high profile black African management, or diversifying its service provision it may achieve this elusive partnership, yet it remained to be seen to what extent it would then be co-opted, and lose its autonomy by changing its priorities to suit a NDOH agenda. The accusation that HARP 'hasn't really listened' to the NDOH in the past, ironically might just have ensured its independence to date.

Both the challenges faced and agency found by HARP was inextricably linked to the nature of the relationship between the NDOH and its autonomous provinces. Where the NDOH was unable to provide sufficient support in the area of quality improvement within the provinces, HARP had found a space to provide a service. HARP was also opening a market for continuous quality improvement and believed it played a part in leading the NDOH in this direction. HARP's relationships with provincial funders remained complementary at best and instrumental at worst, but without the aspect of control experienced from the NDOH. Yet examples of real provincial collaboration with HARP did exist and successes were found. However, HARP was aware that it could at times be used as a pawn within provincial politics in the tension between professional agendas, competition, and national politics. HARP had to develop the acumen to navigate around provincial and national agendas as its sustainability depended on the ability to engender a culture of mutual accountability, despite any lack of coordination between various stakeholders. HARP was challenged to maintain a critical loyalty in the face of inadequate management capacity, staff shortages, and infrastructural degradation. Typical of many NGOs, HARP had to do what it could, with what it had . . . there were no ideal conditions in which to promote its programmes, as those ideal circumstances may prove the programme itself redundant.

As a service for fees provider, HARP was dependent on its clients, and the relationship could perhaps be described as autonomous and accountable, more than purely independent . . . but this point remains debatable. In its dealings as a service provider, HARP did not appear to experience any moral dilemma regarding the decision to diversify its skill base, but backstage murmurs by certain staff members raised concerns that a possible income stream may dictate the *direction* in which HARP may diversify: "now we have to go in a new direction, just because there might be money out there." However it was in these new spaces that were created through politics and

funding that opportunities were found to collaborate, gain skills and expertise to protect a possible market, influence wider relations and find favour with clients. In HARP's experience it has been knowledge-based and issue-specific informal networks that have worked in its favour, while market oriented service delivery networks have failed to overcome their competitive nature. It would appear advantageous for NGOs to leverage off specific issues as they continue to innovate and raise their visibility and profile in a politically astute manner. Within the politics of NGO-ing, HARP strove to cultivate the ongoing institutional support it required through continual dialogue with clients ensuring it communicated its credibility, remained sustainable, and hence able to achieve real impact through its programmes or projects.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: SURVIVING ACCOUNTABILITY

5.1 Introduction

There is a powerful accountability measure built into the public life of citizen organisations. It is what we call the 'perform or perish' principle. . . . [If NGOs] do not perform on the basis of their stated vision, mission and programmes, they essentially perish (Naidoo 2003:1).

. . . well, who the hell are you and why should we listen to you rather than to other interests in society (Elkington, cited in Jepson 2004:1)?

The aim of this chapter is to reveal the embedded contradictions and social nature of managing the accountability essential to ensure HARP's legitimacy. Staff perceptions of the relationship between accountability and the mission and impact of the organisation are explored. The fact that HARP operates in a service delivery contract with the NDOH provides ample opportunity for traditional legal checks and financial balances in line with what some view as a narrow view of accountability. However, where does HARP find itself in relation to the challenge of a 'new' accountability which satisfies professional, commercial, political and moral demands i.e. what is HARP accountable for, to whom is HARP accountable and how is HARP accountable (Lee 2004; Ebrahim 2003a; Slim 2002; Edwards and Hulme 2002a)? An analysis of the literature (see Chapter Two) has suggested the emphasis will largely depend on who's asking the question and differ across types of NGOs and their fields of activity. Is there a consciousness around accountability and *felt* responsibility among staff and management within HARP, and who exactly do they feel the NGO brokers for? In what way does HARP represent claims to legitimacy and does it generate a co-operative network to bolster the authority 'voice' it presents? HARP accounts for its activities through levels of certification, reports and qualitative statistics, but what may this process reveal about the discourse around power and legitimation, as opposed to accountability for actual implementation? In addition, internal monitoring and evaluation systems are introduced to enhance HARP's accountability and to better manage programmes, yet is there any evidence that these measures may at times compromise programme quality and create incentives for forms of organisational self-deception?

Through case study and observations - events, issues, and perceptions around the concepts of accountability and legitimacy are brought into sharper relief once situated in the local setting, embedded within HARP's organisational reality. Discourses within HARP reveal the multiple realities and micro-politics of everyday life and expose social relations and a process of identification and contestation. The discussion hopes to further explore whether staff members experience any confusion around the NGO's mission, and in what manner they might rely on a moral or social conscience for guidance in decision making. By foregrounding organisational cultural processes, they may reveal how staff members reconcile their personal or professional

NGO values with the organisation's need to ensure economic efficiency- and sustainability. How does moral accountability show itself in informal settings and how may this discipline both staff and the organisation? Finally, using the insider's perspective, this chapter explores how HARP staff members frame these contradictions and attempt to validate their life-worlds to provide sense-making and room to manoeuvre within contract constraints. The challenge will be to track the evolution of multiple accountabilities and strategic representations of legitimacy as HARP attempts to position itself within a competitive and political environment to respond to the increasingly distressing state of health care in South Africa.

Through the window of HARP's infection control and reporting case studies (Chapter Three), questions and challenges associated with this 'new' form of NGO accountability (what, who and how) repeatedly revealed themselves in the NGO context. Accountability for HARP appeared on the surface to be a simple answer . . . it is paid to deliver a service. As communicated by various staff members: "we sell ourselves to province and they ask us to make a difference", "we have developed a product and we sell that to the clients."

What we are accountable for is number one: providing an accurate assessment of a facility.
Number two: providing training and quality improvement, monitoring improvement and doing that accurately. Number three: evaluating. No more than that (HARP's MD).

However, the research revealed a richer and more complex experience of accountability, and the legitimacy of the NGO appeared to depend on this very broadening. Recapping briefly on the theory discussed in Chapter Two, a more 'embedded' understanding of accountability included what Slim (2002) termed 'voice' accountability which requires an empirical account is expanded to include the more political and contested authority 'voice' with which an NGO speaks. Professional NGOs such as HARP are challenged to justify their representation based on their knowledge, and this leads to dealing with the issues of fraudulence as the NGO strives to be understood as authoritative and powerful. Anthropologists such as Hilhorst (2003), emphasize a moral mode of accountability, where an informal 'moral contract' is found embedded in the creative practices of everyday organisational culture, competition, and politics. Where rational accountability claims to be transparent, moral accountability is radiating, prismatic or obscure – both combining elements of discipline and sense-making (Hilhorst 2003). Jordan (2005) however, provided a useful framework through which to analyse field data, by identifying three questions around accountability that need to be addressed: *effectiveness*, *reliability*, and *legitimacy*. Effectiveness dictates the need for the NGO to respond to an authoritative body, mostly seen as an upward accountability - it has to do with the quality and quantity of services provided. Reliability focuses on the internal management of NGO structures, a horizontal accountability toward similar organisations that stimulates trust and accountability (in a similar vein to Goodin's (2003) proposal for a co-operative network-based accountability). Legitimacy leans towards public transparency, adherence to the

NGO mission, and representative status. This framework of three questions will be used as point of departure to explore the more embedded nature of accountability within HARP.

5.2 How effective is HARP?

Questions around NGO effectiveness and the quality and quantity of services delivered, illustrate that the relationship between NGO and client is more complicated than simply selling a service. What HARP is accountable for does tap into a deeper debate centred on the expectations of impact as a result of quality improvement initiatives. This is shown by the manner in which HARP was called to account for the impact of its activities in the hospital experiencing the infection control outbreak. Some staff members felt the mission statement was not entirely appropriate, and “perhaps we could redefine our mission . . . be a little less ambitious and grandiose in what we are claiming we effectively do.” For example, during strategic planning at the beginning of 2005, the senior management team within HARP queried the realism of the organisation claiming to enable the delivery of ‘compassionate care’ in the mission statement. Yet two underlying themes emerged around staff concerns with respect to claims dormant within HARP’s mission. Firstly, how did it justify its mission in relation to its results in the face of minimal improvements or impact; and secondly, how did it ethically justify accepting a mandate to work with facilities that were so challenged it appeared impossible that they would have the resources to apply the programme and improve.

The first concern focused on the perceptions of effectiveness and impact that HARP was accountable for. HARP staff repeatedly stated that they did not perform a line management function, and could not be held accountable for the facilities failing to implement the programme. The improvements provinces or facilities expected HARP to deliver were inextricably bound to the effort and accountability the facilities themselves were willing to own and then embed into the programme. A senior staff member explained “I don’t think we should claim that we make hospitals better, we *help* to make hospitals better and improve care.” The ideal formula would imply a level of facilitator skill which enables the transfer of knowledge to a required willing audience. One office based staff member put it that HARP was accountable for making sure “the people using the standards must understand and embrace them in that they become their own, rather than something that is being imposed.” Yet in the past there had been perhaps unrealistic expectations placed on HARP from certain clients to be almost solely responsible for gaining this ‘buy-in’ from facilities. On the other hand, there were concerns by certain senior management that not all facilitators would ‘get behind the facilities’ and at times may have been guilty of merely delivering a training speech, or even at times ‘giving up’ on a facility that was not willing to engage in process. It appeared that many field staff members were often frustrated or confused by the affirmation that HARP was not a line management function yet they are expected to take

responsibility for a facility's performance. Here it becomes clear how accountabilities are socially constructed, and are more about lived experience than formal definitions (Ebrahim 2003b).

The second concern which focuses on facilities' ability to realistically implement the programme proved more of an ethical or moral dilemma for staff. As a concern, it became particularly pertinent when HARP entered a previously disadvantaged province that was staggering under the lack of resources, capacity, infrastructure and national support. It made sense that HARP should strategically be focusing on those health care facilities that were in most need of assistance, this fitted its mission and was described by the MD as going into territory "where others fear to tread." Yet could it be a case of attempting to feed a baby solid food before it was ready? One staff member worried that "I don't care who says what, we are suggesting that we can make a difference." Another senior staff member was more philosophical and stated that "for evil to succeed, all that is necessary is for a good man to do nothing." HARP has over the years introduced mechanisms to support and encourage flailing facilities e.g. through improvements in the reporting process, recognition for multiple levels of progress and targeted key performance indicators to facilitate focused and iterative improvements. However, a field staff member working at the coal face shared "if province is not committed to making the resources available there is no way that they are going to [succeed] . . . in terms of the amount that we spend on quality improvement, does it justify itself?" Accountability is not only legal and regulatory, but also requires negotiation and making discretionary decisions and judgements; it challenges both explicit and implicit standards of behaviour (Kearns 1996). These deeper concerns around accountability were an everyday reality for staff particularly those who were out in the field, and again for senior management who had to justify programme progress at provincial feedback sessions.

Without being distracted by a development debate that deserves its own paper, it is relevant to highlight the tension that can exist between HARP and client when both were required to be accountable. This was further complicated by certain staff members' perceptions that at times senior management appeared inclined to take responsibility for activities outside of what they felt was in HARP's control, as illustrated in the infection control outbreak. HARP, however, increasingly emphasized that entering its programme was a long-term investment in timeline and finance that required hard work and commitment from facilities, in addition to support from hospital and provincial management. It was due to this very tension that HARP had been campaigning to raise the profile of reports at provincial level, and insisted on a broader audience at provincial feedback sessions to communicate this essential component of the programme's success. HARP also encouraged the NDOH to evaluate a sample of facilities participating in the HARP programme against their own standards; to open discussions on improving or tailoring HARP's programmes to meet national concerns. Particular attention was also given to opening dialogue with provincial and national authorities around the very issues that affect programme impact. These were the

challenges HARP faced in holding itself strategically accountable, moving from simply being held responsible for its functional or rational outputs, to feeling or taking responsibility (Ebrahim 2003a; Slim 2002; Hilhorst 2003). Having been a ground-breaking organisation for many years, the strategic transition to internal self-evaluation and impact assessment over time provided an ongoing challenge for many staff members and the organisation as an entity. HARP submitted an executive overview to the board every three months, budgeted for twelve to eighteen months of sustainability and continually looked for ways to ensure new business. Many of the challenges HARP faced are highlighted in Kearn's (1996) description of accountability that evolves from several organisational factors: legal mandate, mission and values, environmental challenges and opportunities, and internal strengths and weaknesses. What remained uncertain was how, if appropriate, HARP could or even should attempt to vocalise the challenge of dealing with the social and political issues around public health care delivery that impeded its programmes achieving full impact.

5.3 How reliable is HARP?

Reliability brings into question the multiple stakeholders to whom HARP held itself accountable, in addition to focusing on the independence and management of NGO structures (Jordan 2005). There was a level of acceptance that HARP was accountable to the 'client', and was *held* responsible for its deliverables. As explained by the MD "what we do is to enter into contracts with organisations and stipulate very clearly what we are going to do, give them reports every six weeks, and they only pay us if they are satisfied with the quality of our work." HARP's externally contracted responsibility appeared explicit; it was accountable to each facility, and upwardly accountable to the provincial client who nominated facilities for programme entry. HARP retained an open door policy with all its clients, and various senior provincial representatives had visited the offices to meet staff, peruse literature and ask questions regarding the organisation. As the NDOH ultimately governs health care, the nature of provincial contracting blurred the accountability boundaries. A staff member explained that HARP was accountable "to our contract with each hospital, secondly to provincial, and ultimately to national." Yet as illustrated by the infection control case study, although HARP was looking to establish a closer relationship with the NDOH, most staff members did not in reality accept any direct accountability to the NDOH as they were confidentially contracted to individual provinces. However in this instance accountability was pushed to the limits when the NDOH demanded provincial information regardless of their having given HARP consent.

What then was the staff perception of accountability, as an NGO, outside of their contracted relationship? Jordan's (2005) questions around reliability stimulate an internal and horizontal accountability, interrogating the extent to which trust around the organisation is stimulated. There was some diversity with regard to opinions on multiple stakeholders, often appearing as issue, role

and value specific. Staff perceptions differed depending on the person's point of reference of HARP being accountable as a business, an organisation, or a not-for-profit body. In many respects this corresponds loosely with a sense of external, internal and moral accountability. As mentioned earlier, external accountability as a business appears fairly straightforward. As an organisation however the majority of staff held in high esteem their international certification by ISEH, which they felt held them accountable as an organisation and certified HARP as competent and adhering to internal policies and procedures as part of its governance and operational structure. Interesting to note was that other than the MD, only a handful of staff referenced accountability to the board of directors, with one staff member accompanying this with a vote of no confidence in the governing body. Although HARP did not have a published 'ethical' code of conduct, a common form of informal moral disciplining were the comments made by staff when HARP was falling short of meeting an ethical or procedural goal, one senior staff member commented ironically: "it's do as we say, not do as we do in HARP" – not an uncommon sentiment in many organisations. As illustrated in the reporting case study, the senior management and the MD were focused on improving the internal monitoring and evaluation of the organisation, and were striving to show the interdependencies and accountabilities various departments within HARP had towards each other, for example through monitoring KPIs. Interestingly, only one staff member emphasized accountability to herself first and foremost, a sense of *felt* internal responsibility. She added that "where it becomes difficult is if my team doesn't have the same idea of accountability as I do. What tends to happen with human beings is that we like to shift our responsibility." Perhaps this is a true reflection of accountability as a socially constructed, complex and dynamic concept. Contextualising this reality the MD explained that:

HARP has never been a cowboy show . . . when we found that there were problems we go to great efforts, a huge amount of money, time, staff anxieties, internal conflicts, standing on people's egos because [staff] thought that they could do things themselves and didn't have to be controlled. Everybody within the organisation is accountable in terms of their KPIs.

What then of any sense of moral accountability as a not-for-profit body? Both the MD and the majority of staff strongly identified a moral accountability to the 'general public'. One staff member explained this as being accountable to "the patients, the consumer . . . not the provincial authority, they are clients, be we remain accountable in terms of a courtesy." In reality however, at the time public accountability for HARP appeared to be more of an ideal and was also complicated by HARP's lack of profile in the public eye. One staff member explained "we want to believe we are accountable to the people out there. But obviously the contracts hold us to account." Through its newly appointed public relations company, HARP was working at letting the public know what it did and what it was achieving. A senior staff member stated that HARP speaks for the vulnerable, the patient, but "at this time and point because we are a new organisation, the person on the ground

may not see HARP helping them, but this is a long-term investment.” It was through the infection control outbreak that gossip in the HARP corridors gained momentum around its responsibility to the public versus accountability to its clients. Staff felt frustrated and guilty at having all this information at their fingertips, but contractually not being able to let the public know the extent of the problems out there. It was even suggested that perhaps HARP should push for an amendment in their contract that would allow them to make information public when it is a matter of national importance. I was told that in the past facilitators had been tempted to release information to the press due to their frustration with poor provincial response. One staff member felt that “in terms of our accountability to the greater population, us sitting on this information is almost criminal. I am glad that I am not the person having to make the final decision on these things.” Accountability is clearly “not only the formal processes and channels for reporting to a higher authority, but the wide spectrum of public expectations dealing with organizational performance, responsiveness, and even morality” (Kearns 1996:9).

As highlighted by Hilhorst (2003), staff members have to make sense of the prismatic nature of their moral contract. These multiple accountabilities at times sat uneasily with many HARP staff members, but they understood the sensitive nature of the information HARP dealt with, the danger in the press sensationalising the data out of context, and most importantly avoiding the possibility of the health care authorities not utilising HARP if they were seen as the enemy and not a helping hand. The fact remained that HARP was a *professional* NGO, and is not an activist or advocacy organisation. The relational nature of accountability at HARP’s interface with multiple stakeholders was clear. When moving beyond the NGO’s contractual obligation, “in practice, relationships between stakeholders and NGO actors are negotiated and evolve into a myriad of ties” (Hilhorst 2003:219). It was a conscious practice for HARP to nominate among their board members those who represent the NDOH, provincial clients, and professional bodies. Field staff members also built unique accountability relationships with certain facility staff to whom they felt morally accountable, just as the MD appeared to be bound by a sense of informal accountability to the HOD under investigation in the infection control case study, and didn’t want to appear unsupportive. For Hilhorst (2003), NGOs do forge social communities and strategically enrol representatives of funding agencies, so their contractual obligations include moral ties, emotional rewards, friendly favours and ideological statements . . . all complicating accountability relations.

Goodin (2003) proposed a co-operative network-based accountability to monitor performance through trust, leveraged for political results, and reverse accountabilities through reputational sanctioning. The infection control case study went some way in foregrounding this horizontal accountability for HARP. The MD’s negotiation with Professor Kaizer provided a good example of a relationship built on trust and a willingness to communicate, which linked the two bodies in pursuit of a common project. The relationship between HARP and Professor Kaizer could be

understood as “responsible to one another for their good-faith contributions to the shared task” (Goodin 2003:27). Through Mr Jacobs, a sense of obligation was extended to the NDOH to include HARP as part of the approach to dealing with infection control in the country. This resulted in a mutual accountability that linked multiple agencies through a network in pursuit of common goals. As an example this does indeed support Goodin’s (2003:40) view that “network-based accountability can provide a ‘reference group’ or ‘touchstone’ for policy formulation or transformation. A mutuality whether sharing common concerns or including government agencies ‘in the loop’ – with an ethos of cooperation in policy-making accountability.” Goodin (2003) emphasizes that in the absence of clear stakeholder accountability (no voters), strategic alliances can ensure NGO viability, and encourage NGOs to act responsibly and behave in transparent ways. Such an alliance was also illustrated through HARP’s new association with HOPE, and their promise to further HARP’s provincial interests.

A co-operative network-based accountability is however not the only answer nor is it foolproof. Goodin (2003) acknowledges the need to further explore how shared norms are socially constructed and internalised on a macro and micro level. This was shown by the manner in which the NDOH allowed the opportunity to participate in a WHO initiative fall through the cracks. It was also shown by certain staff members’ concern that HARP’s access to professional networks may be solely dependent on the MD enabling HARP to leverage off his professional network. One staff member expressed concern by stating that “I am not sure that HARP has this network, [the MD] has. I am not sure the rest of us feel that we have that network of support. Support and peer accountability are very closely linked.” However in the course of general business, cooperation amongst HARP and local NGOs was not commonplace and in the past HARP had been let down by these organisations. One staff member described relationships with other organisations involved in quality assurance as “adversarial and not collegial as far as I can tell – that is my perception of it. It is more competitive than cooperative.” The MD had also expressed sadness at the lack of cooperation amongst local NGOs, in his experience other NGOs “see the amount of money available . . . is limited, and [they’ll] fight you, they won’t work with you. . . .” Although examples of project specific networking had borne fruits for HARP, the organisation did not appear to be embedded in a strong local NGO network-based accountability.

5.4 How legitimate is HARP?

Who did HARP speak for, and how authentic was this voice? Legitimacy questions for Jordan (2005) included all spheres and directions of accountability in relation to transparency, mission, value base, and last but not least – representation. Although at times being described as a thin line, it is not surprising that in conversation many staff members felt they spoke ‘about’ their target group - and not as, with, or for - the group. This articulation personified their service delivery role, and as such required legitimacy is generated through what HARP had to offer (see Slim 2002).

Tangibly HARP had to take its morally good idea and demonstrate it in practice. Based on its ongoing viability this could not be disputed, but politically, with whose authority did HARP speak; how was the organisation accountable for the 'voice' it used? Not dissimilar to a new product being sold on the shelves, a business is accountable for delivering on marketing claims that the product is safe, and will perform as expected (read the small print). Similarly, what HARP was accountable for was to validate its authority 'voice' – demonstrated through performance, expertise and support from professional associations. Professional accountability forms an essential device of legitimation (Hilhorst 2003), and this ensured credibility and provided a 'legitimate microphone' through which HARP's voice could be heard.

What of the small print on HARP's packaging? The question of 'where does HARP gain its authority?' was actually listed in the NGO's frequently asked questions on its website, and the response reads as follows: "HARP has been [certified] by the International Society for Evaluating Health (ISEH). To date, various sets of healthcare standards used in Australia, Canada, England and Wales, France, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand and South Africa, have already been successfully assessed by ISEH. HARP has a formal policy to review its standards every two years and these are ratified by representative professional associations in the relevant disciplines." This statement highlights two main accountability claims. Firstly, as an organisation it had itself been internationally certified as 'competent' to deliver its category of service. Secondly, its product or standards were developed in collaboration with relevant bodies. An internal document stated the standards themselves are "home-grown to suit South African conditions but have been recognised as meeting the principles required by ISEH." The MD also described a 'reverse accountability' in that the standards were sanctioned by representative professional bodies such as Society of Surgeons, the Society of Anesthesiologists, the Democratic Nursing Association of South Africa, the Infection Control Society of South Africa and many others. A selection of professional bodies and clients were also represented on HARP's board to ensure it kept the highest standards. HARP also had to be accountable for the means of product delivery, with expectations of staff expertise and knowledge. All HARP programmes were delivered by professional nurses and doctors, who were trained in the methodology of quality improvement. The MD shared that "an organisation such as ours who claims to be measuring quality should be continuously accountable to our clients; all the way along the line I am making sure that we are accountable." HARP was not a fly-by-night organisation, but had ten years of experience in knowing what did work, what could work, and possibly what could not work. HARP staff members constituted a reservoir of highly-specialised knowledge and experience.

However, as stated by Slim (2002), it is often the political or authority voice that is most contested in terms of NGO legitimacy, calling on the issues of representation and class. HARP could comfortably cite innumerable credentials but the requirement for intangible legitimacy, based on

reputation and trust was harder won. With regard to its provincial support, the MD stated that “people wouldn’t come to us if we didn’t have a reputation for providing quality reports and services.” The MD and certain senior staff’s exposure across a variety of international domains had also provided HARP with expert knowledge and access to a network of international initiatives. With this advantage, supported by the MD acting as a key ‘interface expert’, HARP was able to provide clients with current and leading edge services, providing the organisation room to manoeuvre and advance its cause in South African health care. Hilhorst (2003) argues however that when groups rely on NGO representation to show what happens in other domains, it can complicate accountability processes. Perhaps the NDOH voicing concerns about HARP being insufficiently focused on the African reality demonstrates this perception. There also appeared to be persistent pockets of long standing perceptions of HARP being a ‘white’ organisation, with mixed feedback as to the benefit of its international affiliations and profile outside of the country. Health was highly politicised at the time, and HARP took the stance that it was important to distinguish between playing politics and playing what was in the best interests of the organisation i.e. its mission. The MD spoke about the danger of individual ideologies “which may not be the ANC, it might just be a political quirk of somebody who doesn’t agree with the WHO [for example]. The ANC have said as part of their charter they believe that they should have international alliances.” He explained further:

As the MD of this company I believe it is essential that we have very strong international alliances for whatever type of information, knowledge, skill bases that you can get your hands on to improve the competency of your organisation. I am not going to get that accountability from some political association; I am going to get it from ISEH, from WHO, from many of the [certification] bodies in the world.

There was within HARP also an ongoing debate as to the merits of increasing a focus on the private sector as a means of generating legitimacy. Opinions differed among staff members as to whether this would only provide a ‘soft target’, as opposed to following HARP’s value base and mission that demanded a focus on where assistance was most needed, arguably the public sector. This never ending debate within the organisation highlights the point that even “more important than performance and accountability, are questions of legitimacy, identity and governance as they go right to the heart of the NGO and its mission . . . “ (Edwards and Hulme 2002b:226). A high level of commitment to the public sector and the work that HARP often and inevitably completed at no cost would no doubt contribute towards generating what Slim (2002) referred to as intangible credibility. This intangible credibility often takes on a life of its own as it thrives on the perceptions of a ‘good will’ amount on an organisation’s balance sheet. Not ignoring of course the political currency ‘good will’ generates as a moral influence of generating legitimacy and credibility, inevitably defined by an NGO mission.

5.5 HARP's 'account'ability tool

One of the main reasons why HARP has been successful is because of the information system that we can actually show what we are doing (HARP's MD).

We service clients, we don't raise donor funding. So we are accountable for specific deliverables . . . we are not given a wad of money to 'go and feed the poor' (Senior HARP staff member).

Tools and processes of accountability must also be transparently demonstrated to acquire legitimacy. As a professional NGO leveraging off its expertise and knowledge, the reports HARP produced formed the foundation for how it provided visibility and transparency of its activities. When the HOD requested HARP account for its activities in the infection control case study discussed in Chapter Three, one staff member explained that although the reports were a 'pain in the neck' to maintain, "they are gold. The same afternoon [the HOD] had a report sent through, perfectly clear; this is what we found . . . that is accountability; we did what we were expected to do." The NDOH also approached HARP during the infection control case study specifically because of the perceived value of its information and reports. As Slim argues, NGOs know instinctively that their authority comes essentially from their presence in that mysterious place they call 'the field'; "we must always be seen to be speaking from our own practical experience" (2002:1). HARP's reports could be seen to form the foundation of what Hilhorst (2003) describes as 'the account'. They had their rational function which held HARP responsible for its mission and actions, in addition to having a 'grey' moral role of disciplining and sense making within the organisation, this was illustrated in the reporting case study presented in Chapter Three which described the contested nature of HARP's evolving reports. Looking beyond the instrumental presentation of the report then, what multiple purposes may the actual production serve and what representations were embedded within the report? In what manner might these reports have influenced HARP's power negotiations with clients at different levels and how might they create room to manoeuvre for the organisation?

The evolution of HARP's reporting process revealed a level of ongoing production at the head office that was at times perceived by certain staff members as somewhat independent, a process with objectives in addition to field activity at the coal face. These objectives involved the representation of being seen as a professional organisation, objective and legitimate in its account. A six to eight page narrative was transformed into a performance management tool, a new page of statistics and indicators provided a 'one page summary' snapshot of a facility's evaluation, while the narrative was edited using standardised professional language, and recommendations were organised by actions and responsibilities. HARP needed to ensure its viability not only through reporting on its activities and impact, but finding a means of negotiating multiple accountabilities, both internally and externally. With this new reporting format, HARP was able to leverage off

participating facilities' requests for senior and provincial support to gain ongoing access to senior management and lobby a provincial agenda. Hilhorst also argued that NGOs' negotiation of these representations has everything to do with power, the account giver has to enrol others into adopting the project, reports are "also devices for negotiating mutual accountabilities, and attempts to enrol the funding agency through interweaving the formal records with moral claims" (2003:222). To this end HARP was finding room to manoeuvre, raising its profile, working to create a demand at this new level for the new reports themselves. Using qualitative statistics as an instrument of diagnosis, they provided senior management with a means to hold facilities to account, beyond a narrative story telling.

Questions are raised with any new measure as to what they actually say, and whose interests or what multiple interests might they serve (see Jordan 2005)? It was one senior staff member's opinion that the new, now longer, reports were not often read by provincial management, "I see them using it as an insurance tool." This staff member's opinion gives support to Slim's (2002) argument that accountability is often more about politics or a technology of visibility, than actual activities at the coal face. At least three staff members raised concerns that field complexities may be lost in configuring these new categories of language in the report format, in addition to the new report process reducing the time field staff spent one-on-one with facility staff. Kearns (1996) highlights that the challenge of performance reporting is that there are often no agreed definitions of effectiveness, so how does one know if responsibility has been discharged? Although there were no focus groups held or facility involvement in the design and decision-making around appropriate measures in the new reports, it may be argued that this fell within HARP's directive as an expert service provider accountable for its evaluation tool. Although discussions were held with HARP staff, the report evolution was largely driven by senior management in head office – at times leading to some staff suspicion that the process fitted a research agenda, was designed to evaluate them, or served as a provincial management tool. These are not inappropriate or sinister organisational agendas, but by revealing these 'normal' backstage representations and power struggles it can be understood how they complicate 'the account' or report. In a study of 40 South African NGOs, Bornstein (2004) revealed systematic distortion of information as a result of monitoring and evaluation strategies ostensibly designed to improve learning, management functions, and impacts. Examples include "field staff neglect to carry forward local requests, office staff reinterpret field reports to fit defined output categories, and head offices re-write locally-defined projects to conform to their donors' strategic funding areas" (Bornstein 2004:1). Although this study did not reveal a 'systematic distortion of information' to the extent it was shown in Bornstein's (2004) research, it can be said that HARP's reporting evolution goes some way to support Hilhorst's position that all internal representations are constructed, in doing so they combine fragments of actual experience with knowledge about the paying client to whom a report is presented . . . in this way they "reveal the agency of the account-giver. . . . [as] *brokers of*

meaning" (2003:223). HARP reports were designed to communicate across multiple purposes, to broker the meaning of performance to the facility, the province and internally to the organisation itself.

Although it is important to be aware of the production and representations behind reporting, I would agree with Jordan (2005), that when applied with finesse accountability tools do strengthen the organisational management and governance structures of an NGO and are able to serve multiple purposes for internal and external stakeholders. HARP's new reporting system was designed to have multiple purposes and audiences, and although this may have complicated the report and its representations, it did broaden HARP's accountability and create room for the NGO to manoeuvre. Reports were used as a means of legitimation beyond simply accounting for activities at the coal face. HARP actively communicated that not only did it report on its own activities, it also provided a means for the client to report on itself, and attempted to hold the client to account. Reporting as an 'account'ability tool did sit particularly comfortably with HARP's role as a professional evaluating and quality improvement body, but may not be as appropriate for all NGOs. The directives of HARP's contract with its clients and the need to prove its short-term performance may have hampered initiatives to broaden downward accountability through additional interaction with participating facilities, but accountability mechanisms when understood as social processes and tools seem destined to moonlight as weapons in the everyday politics of legitimation (Hilhorst 2003).

5.6 Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to explore the emic nature of accountability within HARP as a *professional* NGO. Research revealed the reality of HARP's front stage contractual obligations, and relationship with the back stage complexities around the social nature of accountability. What emerged proved accountability is a multifaceted concept intertwined with ideas of legality, intent, performance, obligation, trust, and even morality. Accountability proved itself both a process and a tool, inextricably bound to the notion of ensuring legitimacy and credibility. The focus of HARP's accountability was unavoidably bound to its role as a service provider, obligated by its contract to the client. The situation was compounded by its status as a professional NGO, claiming legitimacy on its skill base and knowledge. Within this business contract HARP was primarily called to account on its performance and hence was driven to demonstrate this short-term accountability and continually generate its legitimacy as an expert in its field.

The spotlight of its contract obligations highlighted the risk of fading out multiple stakeholders and narrowing accountability focus on the paying client. In order to ensure long-term impact and sustainability, HARP was driven to cultivate a sense of dual accountability with the provinces and facilities themselves. Although field staff members built informal accountability ties with

participating facilities, they were in practice reporting 'about' the facilities which were entered into the programme largely by provincial mandate. To this aim HARP continued to adapt its reports to demonstrate it was making a difference, selecting measures that met both facility and provincial agendas while highlighting the long-term responsibilities of all parties involved. HARP had clearly identified and invested in the need to negotiate this interpretation at its interface with multiple clients. There was however a sense among certain staff members that an overemphasis on the accountability to the client could come at the expense of facilities. HARP was at times, it appeared, caught between ensuring its sustainability by proving valuable to provincial clients, and then suffering the opportunity cost that occurs as a result of performance measures that may limit reporting on the depth of field reality. This is an ongoing dichotomy that represents the tightrope that service delivery NGOs are destined to walk, as they aspire to report on long-term measures that make a difference, but are often driven to report on short-term measures that are countable to validate their performance (Ebrahim 2003a).

HARP was continually finding innovative ways to survive this accountability squeeze, and perceptions of its legitimacy played a vital role. Outside of international certification by ISEH, the ability to generate a legitimacy network at the time was largely driven by the MD, who navigated through what appeared at times to be a network of 'shark infested' NGO waters. Only entering its teenage years as an NGO, HARP had not yet developed a national public profile or broadly communicated its presence. Although it emerged that HARP's authority 'voice' was highly qualified and backed up by specialists, it had yet to leverage off a broad local community base or command the attention of the NDOH. HARP expressed itself within the bounds of its contract and relied on its performance and track record to ensure credibility and trust. This proved an ongoing challenge when it is reliant on a long-term investment by participants and multiple accountabilities to realise impact. Although HARP remained committed to being accountable by continuing to monitor and evaluate its programme, it remained reliant on its clients' desire to engage. 'Learning by monitoring' is gaining strength as a mechanism of accountability, but this study provides support for the notion that as a process (both internally and externally) it remains somewhat political, as measures are still developed by someone, for someone, to meet someone's purpose (Christensen 2004). Although a culture of internal accountability can be seen to be largely dependent on the 'tone at the top' (Kearns 1996), there was scope for HARP to continue developing internal capacity for conducting long-term evaluations of their internal performance, which is essential to strategic accountability. Being held accountable primarily by its contract obligations did reveal some level of mission confusion and moral dilemmas for staff. It could be argued that the need to survive and meet contract terms distanced HARP from its mission and complicated its moral obligation across multiple stakeholders. The general public or patient was on paper a primary stakeholder, yet HARP's interaction with the public at this point in time had been controlled and any wish by certain staff to make its findings transparent was prohibited by a confidentiality clause. Although HARP

intended for its efforts to ultimately benefit the general public, whose interests was it currently serving in relation to its moral obligation and mission? The background noise made by this moral mode of accountability may continue to push HARP to further broaden its accountability.

Unpacking the micro politics within HARP was dependent on placing it in context, and appreciating how it struggled to deal with both multiple and at times competing accountability demands. HARP's legitimacy was generated on its reputation and its accountability remained vulnerable to interpretation which could not be separated from its political and social evolution over time. HARP had proven resourceful as it found some agency and its accountabilities were evolving over time and constantly being negotiated. Within the bounds of HARP's contracts, seemingly formal mechanisms of accountability such as reporting were saturated with social interaction and strategy, creating and supporting representations that legitimise HARP's activities. As argued by Hilhorst (2003) the everyday politics of legitimation both corrupts accountability and at the same times pressures a move towards more meaningful accountability. The key issue for HARP seemed to be not to attempt to preserve some sort of 'mythical autonomy', but to continue to work towards strengthening multiple accountabilities with clients and stakeholders, building broader networks, finding room to manoeuvre and negotiating more effectively. Even the strongest proponents on NGO accountability, cannot find agreement within the complex local realities on how to accomplish that goal.

There does not seem to be a single solution or methodology to realize accountability. We shall always need critically to improvise, combine methods and make the best of them (Hilhorst 2003:225).

As a much revered mechanism for furthering the 'professional' nature of an NGO, broadening accountability has both political and social implications for the organisation's evolution. The following chapter then explores the challenges HARP faced as it managed ongoing change within the organisation and attempted to 'take care' of internal processes and cultural dynamics expressed through the micro-politics of everyday life.

6 CHAPTER SIX: ORGANISATIONAL EVOLUTION

6.1 Introduction

. . . a major concern seems to be that insufficient emphasis has been given to the very personal nature of organisational change. In capacity building, there is a tendency to talk, think and act in terms of "impersonal" organisational interventions such as strategic planning or systems development. Change has been depersonalised into something relatively neutral and unthreatening, yet the truism holds that organisations are made up of people (James 1999:1).

NGOs, as 'value-driven' organizations are under scrutiny to apply their principles to their own practice. An NGO aimed at redressing inequalities and empowering people that fails to apply those concepts and approaches to its own internal systems and processes, will encounter problems effectively motivating its members and mobilizing its resources (Soal and Fowler, cited in Da Silva Wells 2004:84).

The professionalizing of contract NGOs reveals fairly distinct consequences for internal functioning. Strategies to professionalize are played out through the social relations, management dynamics, and cultural projections in organisational life and cannot be separated from the organisation's environment (Van Maanen 2001). This chapter aims to foreground the relationship between the manifestations of local complexities and processes that result from the ongoing phenomenon of organisational change and evolution within a somewhat turbulent environment. As NGOs are encouraged to corporatize and become more business-like in their image and operations they face both new solutions and problems along with the introduction of bureaucracy (Voltolini 2002). These changes bring challenging times for leaders and staff as the organisation must count the cost of remaining flexible to clients' changing needs. What does the push to professionalize reveal for the reality of NGO staff and what, if any connection, do staff make between the environment and financial pressures experienced by the NGO and the internal changes taking place?

Through case study and observations, this chapter hopes to explore how HARP began to re-map itself as both a model *of* the world and a model *for* the world (Geertz, cited in Kamsteeg and Wels 2004). How did HARP manage to take care of its internal functioning and the needs of its staff in the face of perceptions around organisational contradictions, and what innovative means did staff members employ to make sense of their reality and cope with the ongoing changes they faced in their working environment? A challenge was to observe the front stage representations demonstrated by HARP's organisational processes (tools, routines, rituals, and communications), in contrast to the informal back stage relations or the 'underside' of organisational life (hidden and unofficial arrangements of trust, fealty, dramas, and interpersonal control) (Goffman 1959). The

discussion explores how the introduction of management tools over time affect staff members' perceptions of participation and control, or the loss thereof. What were the multiple discourses that defined and bound staff members' reality within this fluid environment? How did staff members manage multiple realities, and what internal dramas and polarisation took place within the organisation? The chapter further focuses on how any measure of consensus was achieved, and the manner in which organisational contradictions were reconciled and interpreted both interpersonally and organisationally. What was the effect of organisational evolution on staff members' internal projections, feelings of unity, or alignment of the organisation's cultural compass?

6.2 Push to professionalize

We need to be professional to defend ourselves properly (HARP staff member).

Over the past ten years HARP had survived from contract to contract, and continued to do so with viability on average assured ranging from 12 to 18 months. With the stress of sourcing contracts and increasing competition in the field of quality assurance, the MD and staff members have expressed that although HARP may not have the resources of private sector companies, or be as efficient – internal improvements could always be made to ensure the organisation is seen as a professional and legitimate service provider in the eyes of clients, the MD shared that: “there are many things that I have wanted to do but I couldn't because of lack of resources, now over the last few years we have a bit of money and now we can push as much as we can to be better.” An interesting observation was made by a visiting consultant from the United Kingdom who provided HARP with feedback during his two week stay. He felt strongly that HARP was reaching the crossroads of an 'expand or die' decision, and his personal opinion was that HARP staff seemed to have time to 'chat in corridors', and resolving operational inefficiencies could maximise HARP's performance. He also communicated strongly that the MD was a man carrying a lot of responsibility and was unnecessarily burdened by the daily operations of the organisation. Though highly complimentary of the staff skill and commitment, it was his opinion that an 'intervention' was required to move HARP and its board forward. One staff member commented that perhaps HARP had become comfortable over the years, and in order to survive competition and justify its profile it had to present itself at a higher level and with more professionalism than what had been happening (see Reddy 2003).

In a previous initiative HARP attempted to implement a Balanced Score Card method of evaluating the organisation and its performance. Three years down the line and only one section of the NGO continues to utilise this method, in the MD's words as a business tool “it failed dismally. I got the business school to come and teach us how to use it. We didn't have the information, it just didn't work.” This experience seems to provide some support for the cautionary note made by many third sector theorists (see Lewis 2003) against importing often 'apolitical' managerialism or private

sector tools into the NGO sector. From early 2005 the MD spearheaded a number of new initiatives focusing on specific organisational weaknesses. These included among others: contracting an external public relations company, a more formalised strategic planning process, the re-initiation of a bi-weekly senior management team meeting where all section heads were required to present KPIs, creating sub-committees to deal with operational issues or prepare contract proposals, a meticulous editing review of all client facing reports and the standardisation and improvement of client facing presentations. The aim was to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of HARP's operations and decentralise decision-making, enabling monitoring and evaluation of staff. A field staff member recalled their experience of this change as a huge *omswaa*²³ when staff were called into the boardroom in January 2005 and it was communicated that HARP was now a professional body and for this staff member "it came across so abruptly." This new focus on the organisation took some time to be accepted by many staff members who qualified HARP's professionalism on the basis that it employed skilled educated people, and therefore was by default a professional organisation. As explained by a staff member "we are regarded as experts in our field, and in terms of that we are a professional organisation."

These research findings fall in line with those of Edwards and Hulme (2002a) with regard to the 'shock' that many staff members experience when decisions within the organisation are driven increasingly by organisational issues and not only the NGO's mission, where institution building becomes a primary challenge. The need for HARP to better evaluate its internal operations was not automatically appreciated by staff. A newer staff member suggested that perhaps many staff members had been with HARP too long and felt as if they knew everything about what they were doing, or perhaps it may be a result of their public sector training²⁴. One staff member commented that hiring staff close to retirement may explain HARP's lack of focus on a general skills development component as it is expected that staff should have acquired the requisite skills during their career.

In HARP there is no real communication and capacitating of the individuals. There is a training session only every three months, and then it is usually very pressed for time. People are also not educated on the broader level as to what is the climate in the country or current issues at the moment (HARP staff member).

It became apparent that an understanding and appreciation of both the motivation to professionalize and the strategies employed to monitor and evaluate HARP could not be assumed among staff members. These changes had created a certain tension within HARP and provided a

²³ Afrikaans, loosely translated as an abrupt change of direction or 'swing around'.

²⁴ HARP made an effort to hire staff members that were close to retiring, making use of their breadth of experience and avoiding the depletion of a scarce public sector resource.

steep learning curve for some management staff who before were not aware of what the term KPI meant, or how they were supposed to produce them. A strong discourse developed around the frustration at the additional work load that is now placed on them: “meetings last for hours and I am frustrated out of my skull because I knew the work was piling up at my desk.” Galaskiewicz, Letts, Sadler and Hall (1999) emphasized that most NGOs do not have the infrastructure to develop systems to monitor efficiency - observations within HARP supported this finding. By way of analogy, as the organisation grew and lengthened as a rope, a perceived small change in direction by the MD and senior management at the controlling end of the rope resulted in an ever larger ‘whiplash’ action down the lengthening rope. In a number of staff members’ opinion, the MD believed that when he asks for something to be done it happens instantaneously, and he was unaware of the enormous amount of work that needed to be done in the background. Staff comments include:

I appreciate [the MD] needs his management tools to work. I understand that he has a right to know what work is coming in, where the hold-ups are. Yet, I already have my own system I need to keep updated, so that now gives me multiple systems to complete and that I find hugely frustrating.

Yet through persistence, communication and ultimately a combined effort over a 12 month period, this initiative to professionalize did garner support. A staff member shared: “our professionalism is now in the limelight. If you come across as professional you must look the part as well.” Not without its pockets of resistance, the KPIs for example had become entrenched in managing performance and evaluating progress and a new reporting structure was launched in November 2005. One staff member recognised the connection between the organisation’s viability and the push to professionalize but felt “many staff still don’t make that connection, not often enough.” The findings within HARP corroborate the Da Silva Wells study of NGOs which found that they have yet to master the “culture of organisational development”, and “staying attentive to staff’s needs and development is one of the more recent internal management challenges South African NGOs face” (2004:83).

6.3 Management dynamics

As described by the MD, HARP had a *non-executive* board. This translated their role into approving the strategic direction of the NGO and evaluating its performance. The board structure was driven by professional legitimacy and member profile within the industry and although it had provided the MD with the support to fulfil a vision, it also led to the frustration of not having a strong, diverse, or business focused board to source funding or actively further HARP’s profile. At the time of this research, the current board and staff remained largely dependent on the MD’s continued input and guidance to ensure the organisation’s sustainability. The MD had raised concerns that both the board and staff members were unable to assist in raising funds and the

organisation's survival depended entirely on his ability to attract clients. Regarding medium to long-term succession there was concern around sufficiently knowledgeable, skilled or recognised individuals to successfully take over the MDs critical role. The MD stated: "what I'd like to do is start training up a few youngsters, but we can only overcome that if we have more money." This dependency on the MD as a figurehead within the organisation could be seen in his providing the NGO with its strategic direction and his ability to successfully apply resources opportunistically to access funding pockets and meet clients' changing needs. The broader client environment within which the MD negotiated was somewhat dynamic and the political agendas within province and the NDOH fickle at the best of times - this required strategic footwork that was responsive and innovative to keep the organisation viable and ahead of the pack. Certain staff members had described the MD's management style as autocratic, however, at a governance level the strategic direction taken by HARP was recorded quarterly and approved by the board, along with the MD remaining in contact with the Chairman on an ongoing basis to report on activities and strategise if necessary. By the MD's request, the Board had for example approved the plan to bring in an operations manager to spread accountability and responsibility. However, it was interesting to note that the majority of staff involved in this research perceived the MD to be the final decision maker in the management dynamics, regardless of the governance process involving the board.

Alison and Macinko (1993) point out that NGOs are not innately democratic and the transition from what they termed authoritarianism takes time and proves a challenge, this research bears out both their and Van Maanen's assertion that leaders do have to increasingly adapt the character of the organisation for which they are held accountable. In unsettling times, they are "on the lookout for ways to swiftly redirect and alter the character of organisations over which they assume responsibility and for which they are increasingly held accountable" (Van Maanan 2001:243). Within HARP the reality was that the MD in consultation with the Chairman had at times needed to make hard and fast decisions about the strategic initiatives of the NGO based on his knowledge of what the organisation could operationally deliver. The MD explained that when the organisation was young the whole albeit small staff contingent had met at least once a week to discuss work and issues as they arose, new developments were conveyed and staff opinion was sought. As HARP has grown and moved to what the MD described as a more professional 'corporate structure', he planned an increased participation and control by the Board. The MD envisioned the board taking increased responsibility for the overall management of the organisation, while within the organisation each senior manager is more responsible for their individual unit to make sure it functioned within its parameters in terms of income, expenditure and output. He describes this move as having met with certain resistance by senior staff members who were showing signs of wishing to retain a perceived control of the organisation's direction. The challenge was of certain senior managers wanting to be involved in all aspects of overall organisational management, as

opposed to focusing on evaluating and monitoring their individual sections, the MD stated: “what they have got to do is conceptually give that over to the board, and they are not there yet.”

Within this move to professionalize, a particular focus had been the introduction of the bi-weekly senior management team meeting. The MD’s sense was that he needed a better understanding of how operational decisions were being made, and felt uneasy in not having visibility of these as the organisation had grown. His vision was to create participative management at the operational level, with governance remaining with the MD and the board, and section heads being responsible for how their individual units were run. KPIs were circulated before being presented at the meeting and the MD filled the chairman role holding final approval of decision-making as and when required. The aim was to create transparency, ensure collaboration and a common understanding of the organisation’s operational challenges, and provide both an opportunity for the MD to share his work and a platform for senior management to discuss their role in relation to strategic objectives. The initiative began with the MD stating he had created this forum for senior management to go about the business of running the operations, “as the senior management team you are all also now accountable, the decisions you make here are part of the accountability of management of the organisation.” The MD also used the meeting forum as an opportunity to validate individual members’ contributions, affirming their value. There was a certain enthusiasm among senior staff that this would avoid duplication of work requests and parallel information streams, in addition to providing them with a united front through which to deal with difficult issues. In addition, the MD tasked senior management with being conscious of ways to increase income streams into HARP through networks, partnerships and professional groups. In the past the full extent of the NGO’s financial insecurity was not always communicated to staff on an ongoing basis. With the new initiatives the MD committed to sharing the ongoing reality of the bottom line with the entire senior management team, hoping it would serve as a form of motivation and provide context for the need to “go in and start doing things properly” at each operational unit level, with the aim of “getting people to become less involved in the total organisation, but focus on their particular task or section. I think that is what is new at this point in time.”

While the senior management team meeting came to be accepted, however, there remained a level of backstage discontent among senior staff with regard to the level of participation they had in the overall running of the organisation. At the outset many staff members shared their hope that this forum would provide *them* with some leverage in how the organisation would be run at a strategic level. This highlighted the ongoing contested zone between the senior management’s perceptions of their role in guiding the overall organisation, in contrast to the MD’s mandate that they remain focused on the important operational issues and effective delivery of services. One staff member felt senior managers were not proactive enough and this was due to the culture of the organisation, “there must be instances when you can overrule the MD, but that never happens,

even those who could don't try." There was a sense amongst certain staff members that directives were "pushed down on everybody" and all decisions required the MD's "rubber stamp". Da Silva Wells' study of NGOs gives credence to HARP's experience by highlighting how the ongoing balance between short-term and long-term objectives compromises the NGO manager's ability to constantly reconcile conflicting goals within the organisation:

All of the managers expressed a strong commitment to participation of staff members and community in decision-making. However, this ideal often conflicts with the pressure to act quickly and compete with other organisations, or engage with Government. . . . Sharing information, giving feedback and encouraging learning are things that do not fit well in a competitive culture. Tensions arise because the ideology of caring and internal wholeness is difficult to reconcile with the pressure of external competition and delivery. 'You can't always be attentive and accommodating, because NGOs are pushed to compete and perform like business' . . . They want to be told what to do, but they also have expectations of participation. It is a confusing time (Da Silva Wells 2004:84-5).

HARP's MD stated that participation of all staff members all the time was neither possible nor viable:

At the end of the day if you had to listen to every person . . . we are trying to . . . meet the needs of clients who have got all sorts of political pressures on them that they have to respond to, and also meet the needs of patients, and meet the needs of continuous quality improvement methodology. And all of this has to be taken into account.

Da Silva Wells' (2004) study bears this out: "though placing great value on consultation, the managers interviewed acknowledged that in the end they are the ones who have to make a decision, and sometimes the job requires tough and quick decisions . . . 'You can't always put all the fires out. The most difficult thing as a manager is to let some fires just burn'" (2004:95).

However, certain responsibilities had been shared at the senior management meetings, for example a member of mid-level staff was not proving productive and the MD put it to the management team to make a decision as to how it should be handled. After some discussion it became apparent that they were not prepared to make a final call, so the MD again made the uncomfortable decision. An experienced senior staff member philosophically commented that "as a manager you will not be liked, it is just the way it is. In the end they will thank him though." The seeming avoidance of senior management to make a decision in this case could be interpreted as a defensive response to perceptions of asymmetrical power relations between themselves and the MD, or fears around accountability, or 'breaking rank'. Ironically, team members' lack of decisiveness could in fact merely reinforce any perceptions of uneven power relations. This dynamic will be explored in more detail later in the chapter. As highlighted in the literature, the leader or figurehead of an NGO has complex and often contradictory roles to execute. This results

in their fulfilling the role of a 'broker of meaning', i.e. when a leader is seen in context they give change a very personal nature above the 'impersonal' tools and strategies they use to drive the process. Particularly as a founder of an organisation, the leader plays a pivotal role in creating an organisational culture, providing meaning and guidelines to reduce anxiety (Hilhorst 2003; James 1999; Schein 1991). How might these complexities be driven by or contextualised within the culture of HARP's organisational dynamics?

6.4 Family culture

. . . culture is understood as perceptions of values and practices more or less shared by members of a group that distinguish one group from another. . . . these are not personal values and practices, but perceptions 'in the third person' of values and practices that are ascribed to the organisation or the group (Ybema 1996:46).

When the MD registered HARP some ten years ago, staff were initially organically brought into the fold as the need for skills arose, very much through word of mouth and not reliant on a perfect skills match. There exists a history between many of the staff and the MD, based on previous work experience and social networks. Through the years the MD had nurtured the staff and subscribed to an open door policy. This was particularly relevant for HARP when a common analogy used to describe the organisation's culture retrospectively was that of 'a family'. By human nature there is inevitable resistance to change when an organisation is growing and introducing new management structures to evaluate itself, these changes will in turn affect the atmosphere and cultural climate within the organisation. Due to financial constraints, throughout the formative years staff members often multitasked across roles and were collaboratively involved in almost all aspects of the organisation. A staff member commented: "I honestly believe that in the early years, we all did everything." Another felt "we were a small organisation, we worked together. I didn't mind how much we worked because we were happy." This had been an advantage, yet complicated a push to evaluate work and introduce a more formal management structure. There was a sense that whereas before each senior staff member enjoyed a one-on-one interaction with the MD, these discussions were now redirected to the senior management team meetings, "he speaks to more people at the meeting, it's not that same one-on-one anymore, you lose that personal touch yet performance-wise it works out well. I think people feel insecure because there is a bigger gap between those on the ground and those at the top." The push to professionalize and corporatize had resulted in a perception for many senior staff members of social distance growing between the MD and themselves. Change in reporting structures and felt distrust as a result of being evaluated appeared to contribute towards staff members questioning their self-worth, job satisfaction and value.

Back office discussion among staff members revealed a perception that there was an ad hoc approach to being included in working with the MD to resolve specific issues or provide input

towards a project. Of interest was how this perception was actively nurtured by certain staff member groups, despite the MD continually communicating new strategies or opportunities through the management of group meetings . . . calling all senior staff (and sometimes the entire staff contingent) into the board room to pass on the latest developments and give guidance in implementation. Feeling that this provided a sense of inclusion and motivation for the staff, it had become somewhat of a ritual, even performed telephonically if the MD had completed a presentation or conference. This practice could be considered in light of a controversial study by Kunda (1993), which focused attention on how culture is engineered in organisations through collective 'highs' and in his findings even a personal form of management control. In this way culture is used as a tool to create the ideology an organisation espouses, perhaps in HARP's situation the group communication could be understood more as an attempt to broker as opposed to engineer a form of participation, reviving a culture of the inclusive family. It was these group presentation rituals or practices that provided an opportunity where culture could be made meaningful, and so formed the foundation for experiences that led staff to define them and others in the company collectively. This group communication however could not always guarantee a staff member's participation from beginning to end in a project, and at times resulted in certain members questioning their abilities and value, based on their inclusion or exclusion, or alternatively expressing frustration at being distracted from performing their own jobs. There existed an interesting tension among staff between the sentiment of "well, it would be nice to know these things", and resistance to being called into the boardroom and away from their work. One newer staff member commented "people always complain that they are being called into the boardroom all the time, and then they say that they don't feel important – it doesn't make any sense and baffles me." It was Van Maanen who highlighted two key aspects that could shed light on HARP's organisational ritual detailed above, firstly he cautioned that with attempts to 'engineer' culture the "end result is widespread cynicism such that the very processes put to work creating a strong and desirable work culture undermines its existence" (2001:245). Secondly, when rituals cut across divisions of labour and hierarchical ranks it can become difficult to determine who is responsible for what, ". . . moreover, the same individual may serve on several teams simultaneously. . . . What this might mean in terms of one's identity (or lack thereof) as an organisational member . . . is clearly an open question" (Van Maanen 2001:255). Symbolic events represent a sense of collectivity but also lead to "seeds of discord" and divergent interpretations (Ybema 1996:43).

The initiative to hire an operations manager was to become a focal point among staff, representing the ultimate move to corporatize, a move away from the familiar 'family'. There was the expectation of an ever increasing distance being created between the MD and senior staff which was often interpreted by certain staff members as running contrary to the collaborative spirit of the past. A staff member shared that "he was always part of us, and all of a sudden he is not part of us, it is a separation anxiety." This was illustrated by a theme of 'when we' speak, talking of the

days when the workload was 'similar', but was done with half the staff and a quarter of the infrastructure and bureaucracy. However the MD made the decision, supported by the board, that he hire an operation manager to deal with the day to day workings of the organisation, freeing his time to concentrate on the strategy of the NGO, raising its profile and lobbying for funding. There were mixed opinions and pockets of resistance among staff, with certain members expressing their opposition to a change in the organogram which resulted in them no longer reporting directly to the MD: "what I see there is still a non-acceptance. I haven't felt in my body that it has been accepted. I think the tasks are being done, but not with happiness." The resistance was explained by another staff member as:

This is a family thing. People have got used to the idea that this was the culture of the organisation. Everything we have to sit and brainstorm together. People were used to that kind of management style; they knew that at any time they had access to the MD. That was the way it was done.

However, a more recently appointed staff member in favour of the appointment of an operations manager interpreted the resistance as a general opposition to *any* newcomers, "they mostly feel that we don't need an extra person, but I think it will be brilliant, people are not happy with anybody coming into the company – mostly it has to do with the culture of the organisation, keeping it small." The move was not without its pockets of support. Another field staff member stated that "up until about a year ago he was spreading himself too thin and then he turned a corner, there does come a time when you actually have to start delegating." When faced with what appeared to be a minor impasse in perceptions of organisational reality, it proved useful to view these research results in light of Ybema's (1996) writings on how unity and disunity do exist jointly in organisations. This enables an understanding of how HARP's changing organisation 'culture' could be understood not from an either-or orientation, but rather a both-and orientation. Appreciation must be given to the reality that bureaucracy does lead to divergent interpretations and these initiatives will be marked or ignored depending on staff ideas, interests, identities and the settings that are at stake. Ybema (1996) encourages a focus on the interconnectedness of these dynamics, and cautions researchers not to confuse the both-and orientation with either good or bad relations. HARP's experience illustrated this both-and reality as interconnected and contradictory, dependent on the issue at hand or staff politics around change.

6.5 Micro-politics and change

Our mission should be 'change is the name of our game'. That is a normal staff joke, but underlying it is a sort of seriousness (HARP staff member).

I know that if we don't continually look to see how we can achieve our mission better as things evolve, we are going to become obsolete (HARP's MD).

Working within an NGO does demand somewhat of a 'hurry up and wait' philosophy, and a 'do the preparation regardless of the outcome' frame of mind. Free-bees within HARP were required to demonstrate 'good faith', response times needed to be short, and work completed 'yesterday' when an opportunity presented itself. If the potential client moves the goal posts, the NGO has to adjust its strategy to match the play, keep it within its mission statement, or strategically re-define the mission statement 'on the run' if viability is seriously at stake. The nature of being a contracted service provider at the client's disposal added to feelings of frustration among certain staff and at times even a sense of powerlessness. The ongoing renegotiation of organisational direction and adaptability for change provided a platform from which to appreciate how staff struggle with making sense of their daily tasks, while reconciling what it meant to work for HARP and their commitment to its mission. It was not always possible for all staff members to fully comprehend the complexities of the MD's position in 'selling' the NGO's work within the somewhat turbulent waters of a highly politicized health sector. While a few senior managers appeared comfortable with constant change and aligned this with a philosophy of continuous quality improvement, the greater number of staff members were not as comfortable. This discontent was particularly acute in light of the additional performance measures that the move to professionalize had brought, as HARP moved from perceptions of a previously family orientated philosophy toward a more autonomous corporate-orientated operational structure. Collinson's (1999) study on surveillance on North Sea oil installations highlights the clear interaction between power relations and agency in performance assessment. His finding emphasizes that both employee knowledgeability of new measures and any asymmetrical power relations can lead to "unintended consequences of resistance to specific managerial practices" (1999:581). Such an awareness provides context for staff resistance concerning the introduction of new forms of managerialism, and how this resistance may in turn reproduce material and symbolic dimensions of asymmetrical power relations.

On delving further into HARP staff members' perceptions around change, what came to light was that change as an essential requirement did not on face value cause resistance, but more the frequency or pace of change was the key issue. The MD explained that "it's not as if we started ten years ago and are only changing now. Everything day to day has been changed over the last ten years. Basically right from the start you are learning to walk, then jump, then do hurdles." One field staff member acknowledged that they were not able to focus on all the organisational objectives and hence the MD role was essential, however he was perceived to take quantum leaps at least five steps ahead of everybody else. In practice a senior staff member felt there was never time to catch up because "the next improvement idea will be coming very soon, you are always on tender hooks, it is that sense of being off balance all the time." This appeared to be a very real stressor for many staff members who felt that the rate or pace of change within HARP was too high, with not enough time spent discussing the new direction or participation in the decision to change. A range of staff members' opinions shared were: "If we took some time to think things through, we would

avoid unnecessary gratuitous change”, “when will it stop”, and “of course you have to adapt to survive, but change must be handled carefully and be dealt with in an evolutionary manner, very well thought out.” Among others, Edwards and Hulme (2002a) and Foster-Fisherman, Maynard, and Yang (2001) called for NGO staff to be adaptable and flexible, embodying a sense of ‘venturesomeness’. However, these characteristics appear dependent on the NGO providing a clear mission, continuous investment in improvement, and ‘flat’ management structure with participatory decision-making. Perhaps this is somewhat of a tall order in light of the reality many NGOs face in competitive environments, the lack of financing for organisational development and a less than democratic management style if leaders need to make quick decisions and firmly guide the organisation in a sustainable direction.

Change within organisations is not a simple linear experience, but is interpreted through a vast ‘informal system’ of contested cultural processes which need to be explained. With the only constant within flexible NGOs being the promise of change, a huge strain is placed on the organisation to assemble a sense of uniformity in front stage representation, as staff and management sort through ongoing adjustment and ambiguity (Bate 1997). As with any organisation, HARP revealed its own evolving internal politics, discourses, representations and sense making in the face of change. Two common discourses among staff provided an insight into members’ search for agency and sense-making: “I don’t know what is going on”, and “things are always changing.” It was no surprise that these two discourses were intertwined and served as real signposts of staff members’ perception of ongoing asymmetrical or changing power relations. A study by Collinson (2003) on identities and insecurities at work contextualises these expressions of insecurity or persistent pessimism as a possible survival strategy which can impact on the work environment or power relations. His premise is that a greater appreciation of these insecurities and subjectivities can enhance our understanding of how power relations are reproduced, rationalised or even transformed within a work place. These findings within HARP support Hilhorst’s (2003) study of how and when discourses become dominant in NGOs. She explains how particular discourses convince people into closing down options in two ways: firstly when wider political processes pose such threats that actors resort to a single discourse, within a short space of time (crises response), and secondly they can also be less visible as an emergent property over a longer period of time, reproduced through unintended consequences of everyday routine practices without actors being aware. Dominant discourses are always multiple, and are never hegemonic but remain mediated by actors’ agency and acquired multiple meanings as a result of responses (Hilhorst 2003:220). Staff members who are employing certain seemingly disruptive discourses may find themselves at the mercy of their own making, in this instance further alienating them from the direction within which the NGO is moving. “More than fashions, these discourses are effective in re-creating the past, stipulating policy for the present, reshaping organisational forms and practices, and including, excluding and recomposing people’s relations” (Hilhorst 2003:220).

HARP provided a rich network of discourses and there was no shortage of behaviour dissonance to be observed between front stage and back stage. This extended from disruptive or colluding body language during official meetings, overt displays of apathy in the face of a directive, open agreement or aggressive disagreement depending on the audience, and the use of humour “it was the only way I would get away with saying something I was genuinely feeling.” As described by one senior staff member “there is a culture of moaning, an undeniable muttering into beards” among certain groups, at times leaving other staff members and the MD frustrated as to why tasks are not completed as requested, or certain operational challenges were not brought forward for discussion. Seemingly disruptive or obstructive behaviour within HARP needs to be understood in the context of staff employing mechanisms to cope with change and retain a sense of control and continuity or unity. The tension between holding onto the past, and growing the organisation in new directions both united and divided staff members at the same time, resulting in divergent behaviour. What was interesting was the louder mutters of discontent were generally heard from the longer standing members, while newer staff members to the ‘family’ or those with management experience outside of the public sector appear more open to ongoing change, even at a fast pace. It was also shared by a staff member that “many staff members sit on the fence and don’t know which way to fall because of the strong personalities who are very critical”, while there are other staff members who are seen as “lone cows grazing alone” who do not become involved, or alternatively attempt to mediate the discontent. There did however appear to be a tacit agreement among the longer standing members that these ‘discourses of discontent’ take place backstage and outside of the public arena, in the kitchenettes, in the corridors or whispered quietly behind room dividers. Any discussions were immediately halted with the approach of a ‘non-member’ with smiles and statements of “everything is fine” or “well, we have to get on with it.” It was quite common for gossip to affirm fondness or respect of another as a ‘person’, but express unhappiness with regard to the individual’s work output, role in the organisation, or political position towards a strategy. If a disagreement from within an informal grouping was by chance forced into a public setting, it was not uncommon for staff members to ensure group uniformity by denying any unhappiness or politely ‘agreeing to disagree’ based on a personal viewpoint or a passing reference to their lack of knowledge on the issue. According to Van Maanen (2001), discourses, values or specific episodes serve as small epiphanies and give charity to behaviour that may appear as odd, alien, lazy, malicious, or simple inexplicable. “Such processes and relations concern the way members of organisations individually and collectively come to terms and cope with, but seldom solve, the recurrent problems and contradictions they face when going about their daily tasks” (Van Maanen 2001:240).

These findings within HARP were brought into sharp relief by reflecting on Ybema’s (1996) detailed study on the double character of office culture in a Dutch amusement park, where organisational conflict was fought out indirectly between parochial longer standing staff members – the ‘old guard’

- and younger or business schooled management. He identified there being multiple group memberships and loyalties based on professions, tenure, language and ethnicity, where one can expect “unity and division to occur successively or simultaneously” (Ybema 1996:43). New people were often left to find their own way in the organisation, not easily admitted to the ‘private club’ of long time members. A climate existed where conflicts were fought out indirectly, with open and jovial relations quickly turning secretive in small enclaves. There existed overt friendliness in public, and hostility between ‘old guard’ and new professionals in private conversations back stage. There was a clash between formal and informal authority where the “. . . informal communication circuit obscured decision processes”, indicating how power and culture go hand in hand (Ybema 1996:48-52). There existed a cultural ‘coping style’ among staff with agreement that conflicts were to be taken underground or dealt with through double meanings, on different stages, mostly based on opinions and assumptions. Change brought about by a more business-like approach appeared to undermine traditional ideas and practices, increasing the impersonal nature of relations between staff. “Parochial ideas could be heard in complaints about current changes often accompanied with references to the past of the company, revealing a distinct pride of the organisation’s history . . .”, and Cohen (cited in Ybema 1996:48-55) points out that the past is selectively constructed to support an opinion of the present, and during times of change one finds communities “drop their heaviest cultural anchors in order to resist the currents of transformation.” Yet common pride serves as a sense of solidarity where “all members felt they belonged to a unique organisation”, where “. . . mutual understanding existed alongside with mutual discontent and disagreement” and cultural consensus was to be found in conflicts (Ybema 1996:51-54).

Within HARP, the backstage behaviour of the ‘old guard’ and their response in ‘acting out’ as a result of ongoing change re-affirmed their bond and created a virtual continuity through their ‘muttering into beards.’ This was a familiar pattern for them and reaffirmed their common response to change. Although seemingly negative, it provided a platform for this grouping within the organisation to manage the concept of change and facilitated an informal power struggle where they may be able to affect the pace of change. This research suggested that it may be irrelevant from whom the directive for change may come; the response will be similar and not necessarily a personal attack. Gossiping or the coercive ‘culture of moaning’ was not necessarily insubordination or a lack of respect or faith in leadership, but represented certain staff members’ attempts to assert themselves in an environment where there is a felt sense of powerlessness, or a need to establish some sense of bonding or coherence in the face of uncomfortable change. It was a seductive and negative discourse that created a sense of control that was never asserted in formal arenas, but enacted a sense of felt agency. These discourses and accompanying backstage behaviours had sustained staff throughout the years within an environment that had been changing since the NGO’s inception. The questions remained what then kept staff members working for HARP, an NGO which had an extremely low turn-over rate and yet appeared to be an

organisation with a healthy 'culture of moaning'? One staff member humorously commented that "you have people here who have been threatening to leave for 10 years." It had been proposed that staff members believed in the NGO cause, and pride in its programme kept spirits high. They had a respect for each other and the common 'complaints' among staff who had worked together for years constrained ambiguity inherent within their daily work life. Interestingly, it was the newer or perhaps more practically minded staff members who spoke of the fair salary packages, the independence in fieldwork, a fear of venturing into new things, or those 'white' staff members who may not find a job elsewhere and have to 'grin and bear it', while it was suggested that "others who start with the very best intentions are locked in for reasons that they cannot fathom themselves, are puzzled by their own loyalty."

Jäger and Mitterlechner's (2004) study of an NGO undergoing strategic change appears to reflect much of the micro-politics and daily reality on the ground within HARP. They draw an interesting distinction between the closely related concepts of organisational contradictions and interpersonal conflicts. Organisational contradictions, for example the 'hurry up and wait' philosophy, may lead to what they refer to as "'zones of disturbance', defined as organizational 'arenas' where actors may pursue unrelated courses of action lead[ing] to interpersonal conflicts of interests. Thereby, organizational contradictions may translate into organizational conflicts . . ." (Jäger and Mitterlechner 2004:3). The research within HARP also revealed what they identify as a differentiation between traditionalist and more modern or business minded people in that change activates and accentuates organisational contradictions which tend to be resolved by blaming individuals (2004:11). They move the attention from 'blaming' nonconformist individuals or phenomena to an organisational focus, thereby identifying contradictions and the need to take care of this internal context and ensure the organisation remains capable of acting despite these contradictions. Their research findings suggest that three practices can indeed slow the perception of the pace of change. Firstly, quick decisions must be made outside of the formal arena when environmental pressures demand action, and even if this does reduce formal committees to "stage performances, perpetuated for the sake of legitimizing decisions which have been already made", relationships are protected by superficially coordinating these decisions in formal arenas (Jäger and Mitterlechner 2004:13). Secondly, strategic change must be seen as negotiated and not centrally directed. Lastly, decisions should capitalise on the external environment as a means to legitimize them as "external pressures would have it that way", and avoid further damage to relationships (Jäger and Mitterlechner 2004:14). It is their premise that employing these strategies, delaying decisions where possible, and accepting organisational uncertainty are ways of taking care of the NGO internal environment and relationships. Through observations it appeared HARP practiced the first strategy of making quick decisions, maximised the third strategy of contextualising decisions within the external environment, but was found challenged by the second strategy of ensuring change is seen as negotiated and not centrally directed.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to foreground the local complexities and processes that highlight the need for NGOs to take care of internal functions during times of change in order to appreciate, motivate and mobilise resources. Strategic change in an organisational context cannot be separated from organisational life and is inherently personal. The push to professionalize within HARP was taken personally by certain staff members and ran contrary to their perceptions of the inherent value in a historical familial structure of the organisation. Although a number of staff members had made a connection between the organisation's sustainability and the need to introduce a higher degree of professionalism and managerialism in operations and organisational culture, the implementation of these initiatives was not guaranteed organisation-wide support. Growing competition as an external driving force had legitimized the push to professionalize and provided staff members with a rationale for understanding change, yet resource constraints and a lack of investment in organisational development at this juncture had hampered this transition. Many of the new initiatives were interpreted as an unnecessary burden on staff and often tagged as "part of the MD's research agenda" or "not really beneficial to the facilities". The findings revealed that it was not the philosophy of professionalism staff objected to, but the impact these new measures had on their perception of reduced participation, increased surveillance of their work, and the transition to a 'top heavy' organisational model or culture. It presented a catch-twenty-two dilemma in expecting a resource-stretched NGO to risk deploying scarce funding into organisational development, when survival demanded a 'perform or perish' philosophy in a competitive environment. Perhaps an increased investment in organisational development may result in a well adjusted, but out of work NGO? It was clearly an ongoing management challenge for HARP to fund organisational development and ensure that as an NGO it remained attentive to internal staff needs, training and development.

Change is a contested cultural process requiring ongoing adjustment to ambiguity as interpreted through multiple informal settings, and as a result leads to unity and disunity, consensus and dissensus, in all parts of the organisational arena. The ongoing requirement for flexibility does come at a hidden cost to the organisation, creating contradictions and 'zones of disturbance' (Jäger and Mitterlechner 2004). HARP's experience of change in the previous few years had been in the order of two steps forward by management, one step back by many staff members. Within informal settings, staff had employed a healthy underbelly of cultural 'coping strategies' (Ybema 1996) to deal with strategic change, and these mechanisms were employed to create a sense of continuity, slowing the pace of change, or highlighting tensions in a political struggle for participation. The end result was the organisation clearly moving in one direction, but with a healthy tension as ad hoc groupings of staff members found innovative back stage tactics and subversions of new bureaucracies that enabled HARP as an organisation to manage change at a sustainable level. However, attempts to create a sense of collectivity had both created a sense of

unity and at times fuelled ongoing dissent, with new forms of inclusion or exclusion leading staff members at times to question their value and often inadvertently reinforcing asymmetrical power relations or strategies. Key senior staff and the MD however remained focused on furthering strategic change and continued to make certain decisions outside of the formal arena where necessary, while attempting to coordinate these changes within front stage organisational structures. While this could at times have given credence to some staff members' perceptions of a lack of participation and decision-making in negotiating change, the MD's charismatic leadership provided strong direction and reinforcement of the organisation's mission, nurturing a sense of front stage unity. There did appear to remain a strong front stage consensus among HARP's staff members who could be fiercely loyal and believed strongly in the organisation's mission and ability to make a difference. Cultural consensus was definitely alive and well despite the back stage cultural 'coping strategies' developed to manage change.

In conclusion, based on my findings within HARP, I found myself reluctant to 'label' any sort of cultural manifestations observed from either an integrative, differentiation or fragmentation perspective. In line with Martin and Frost's (1996) eloquent discussion on 'The Organisational Culture War Games' I felt able to present and contextualise instances or processes that revealed cultural behaviour or activities as described by informants or based on direct observations. I was unable to categorize the slippery concept of culture, beyond utilising it as an invaluable 'lens' through which to interpret specific occurrences. I had found instances of organisation-wide consensus (integration), sub-cultures holding conflicting opinions (differentiation), and issues in a constant state of ambiguity generating multiple interpretations (fragmentation). As a learning researcher, based on my experience within HARP I concur that ". . . any organizational culture contains elements congruent with all three perspectives" (Martin and Frost 1996:609). With regard to the research results I found a comfortable resting place in Ybema's (1996) findings on organisational culture as including both contrast and commonality, where unity and disunity exist jointly. This study particularly supports the call for further research into developing third sector management and the need to better appreciate the micro-politics of cultural dynamics within organisational development in NGOs (see Lewis 2003).

7 CHAPTER SEVEN: MULTIPLE REALITIES

7.1 Introduction

If you have your hand in another man's pocket, you must move when he moves (traditional African proverb).

Increasingly, professional NGOs are transforming and being viewed as delivery-orientated agents, which some believe jeopardizes the sector's independence, motives, and even their ability to lay claim to the 'N' in NGO. Organisational identity is no longer cut and dry or presumed as NGO staff members are required to work within this necessary ambiguity, where increasingly multiple identities lead to conflict and uncertainty (Edwards and Hulme 2002a; Zimmer 2002). This chapter aims to explore the varied staff perceptions around HARP's sense of identity as a point of distinctiveness and legitimation. How did staff members respond to the idea of 'who exactly are we' and 'what do we signify' and for what purpose were claim-bearing labels enrolled or utilised? As management and staff members produced, reproduced and translated the symbolic meanings associated with what they did, how was a shared understanding of the NGO's character and profile actually achieved (Van Maanen 2001)? Through case study and observations, this chapter hopes to reveal how HARP defined its identity in relation to government and its constituency, and what meaning and purpose it invested in any distinctiveness. It may be interesting to track how identity was guarded and communicated, and whether investment in semantics corresponded to the reality of HARP's service delivery role as a professional NGO. Who exactly was seen to be the boss of 'me'? No doubt the multiple realities within the organisation may represent many things for different staff members both simultaneously and sequentially, and some 'identity work' should show itself through discourses aimed to produce a coherent front stage narrative (Hilhorst 2003; Alvesson and Willmott 2002).

The discussion further explores how HARP negotiated the tension between pursuing the NGO's social mission and representation of public interests and/or its business orientation in support of the bottom line. Did staff members feel that the mission was 'compromised' in any way through the contract relationship the NGO adhered to, and would there be evidence of a 'torn culture' if staff struggled to buy into a strategy they were ethically opposed to (Feeney 2004)? What role may the altruistic mission play as a form of moral compass or litmus test as staff members attempted to reconcile contradictions and bind the multiple realities in everyday practice? The chapter further focuses on observing how the concept of identity was maintained, renegotiated and altered over time. Within the multiple realities of NGO identity, were there any perceptions by management and staff of a 'value creep' as the organisation focuses on sustainability, or were these market focused strategies supported by a strong value base that proved workable and in support of a coherent identity? What might the future role be for HARP as an NGO?

7.2 Guarding the 'N' in NGO

We are an NGO because government did not prescribe our standards. Like any other NGO, we are not being ruled by government, we are not under them. We get money from government to run the project, but government is not telling us what to do, government is asking us to do something for it (HARP staff member).

It is a political decision to take on the title; we are all politicians in a way (HARP senior staff member).

There is a broad perception that society views NGOs in a favourable 'do gooder' light, based on the premise that they are run by value driven people grounded within the community and able to fill a capacity or skills gap without profit as the primary motivation. HARP's MD acknowledged that registering the venture as an NGO did hold a strategic advantage in terms of credibility and marketing although this was not the main reason, he felt more strongly that the motivation was to create something that the country should own: "this should be a national asset, and that is why we are an NGO." This goes some way to support the contention that taking on the NGO identity can have a political flavour, a claim-bearing label used in everyday politics aimed at acquiring legitimation (Hilhorst 2003), however this served as only a point of departure for HARP. The NGO label for staff incorporated the intent to assist the government, to provide a service it is not able to implement for itself, and go beyond what they were mandated to do. Yet within the organisation, it was quite natural for most staff members to emphasize HARP's independent status from the government, "it means we are outside of the regulatory framework of the government." As an NGO, HARP was motivated to fulfil its mission, but it needed to negotiate the terms upon which it could deliver its services. The crux of the matter was described by a staff member as being able to *choose* the work you want to do, or negotiate the terms of a tender according to the way the NGO works, "we will not be dictated to, if we accept a job we are going to do it the HARP way, or we are not going to do it at all . . . there are certain things you will or won't accept based on what you believe in." There was a general feeling that being independent gave HARP the ability to 'tell it like it is'. A senior staff member felt that "not being part of the government we can speak with honesty. We cannot be on their permanent pay cheque because we would be their mouthpiece and lose credibility." The MD explained that HARP had to be a service provider in order to avoid being beholden to the government: "at the end of the day the approach that I have and that the board has, is that we are fiercely independent."

Being independent from government, whose interests did the NGO then serve? The MD often reiterated that "our ultimate customer is the patient" and their best interests must be kept at the forefront of the NGO's endeavours. Yet one staff member explained a broad sentiment within the organisation that "NGOs say things for those who cannot say things for themselves, we are the agents and we fight for the patient . . . but our public hasn't the vaguest idea of their rights, or who

we are.” This challenge was revealed throughout the research and supports literature that highlights how defining representation for a professional NGO is often complicated by its service delivery relationship with a patron. The ongoing dilemma HARP faced was tied to the confidentiality agreements that their clients held them to. Although independence was maintained by doing things ‘the HARP way’, it could be argued that HARP was at times ‘gagged’ with regard to furthering the interest of the broader public according to the mission, outside of the client as audience. As a service provider it was not only contractually impossible for HARP to make its findings publicly known, but also a political challenge to not violate the chain of command with a provincial client by making dire findings known to the NDOH. One staff member cautioned that HARP should not be seen to be “telling tales” to the NDOH which may result in the provincial client suspending future contracts as a consequence. This study supports Bebbington’s (1997) research in South America where both greater flexibility and possible hostility is found in the NGO-state relationship when decentralised at the local level. Staff members often found themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to accept that they could not make known to the broader public the harsh reality of what they found as a result of HARP’s programmes. It was one staff member’s wish that a clause be written into the client contracts enabling HARP to disclose when patient lives were in danger, where currently “keeping secrets . . . is making a mockery of our mission.” In his study of democratic accountability, Goodin (2003) articulates how contract culture obscures public accountability and shields the state from public scrutiny, where accepting money for a service implies political control and by default changes NGO priorities and ethos resulting in a loss of their independent perspective.

In reality, as a contracted provider, HARP had to find agency within the chain of command. The MD stated that HARP was not an activist organisation, and has referred to HARP as the ‘foot soldiers’ for the NDOH “ . . . when you actually look at our vision and mission, it is more inclined to the public sector. That is why to a greater extent we need the support of the government.” The strategic use of metaphor and emphasis on the mission did appear to create a coherent front stage narrative that encouraged staff members to find coherence within the contradictions they experience, and this illustrated how identity is renegotiated through ‘identity work’ in practice. However, this was given a more colourful interpretation by a staff member who commented that “we are always *gat kruiping*²⁵ the government, we are almost in bed with the government and the provinces, all our staff come from that background. But we are not part of government . . . I don’t think we like government very much!” On the surface this may appear indistinct from a ‘for hire’ commercial provider who would also see itself as ‘fiercely independent’, however the point of difference becomes the intent and mission of the NGO - as opposed to the profit serving goal of a commercial venture. As Marschall (2002:1) proposes, NGOs represent a cause of the people, and

²⁵ Afrikaans, loosely translated as ‘arse creeping’

it is “what it does, and not representation, that makes an NGO legitimate. NGOs and their networks are legitimised by the validity of their ideas, by the values they promote, and by the issues they are about.” What then was the perception around the function of HARP’s mission and the role of profit, what was staff’s take on flexibility in the face of client pressure?

7.3 All about the mission - the ‘N’ in NPO

I think we are an NGO because we often do work for nothing (HARP senior staff member).

For me it is always the mission, I am not in it for the money. I feel if we make a promise we have a responsibility to live up to it, and the people out there cannot speak for themselves (HARP field staff member).

We have developed something here for the country that has been a sacrifice for a lot of us. It has been fun to do and worthwhile doing it (HARP’s MD).

With its academic beginnings the goal of the HARP programme was never to ‘make a million’, but rather to share the knowledge and fulfil the organisation’s mission to improve the quality of health care in South Africa. Most informal discussions around the organisation’s mission within HARP involved ideas of philosophy, value, ethics, sacrifice, distinctiveness and operating ‘on the smell of an oil rag’. The mission formed a veritable yardstick that was used in guiding decision-making, justifying choices and even a form of moral discipline. Beyond “hairy legged tree hugging” as one staff member put it, HARP just happened to operate as a business because its staff were professionals, but the *philosophy* was not-for-profit. The MD described how in every presentation he had delivered in the past ten years he went out of his way to communicate to the audience that HARP was a not-for-profit organisation, subscribed to public sector salaries, no director’s fees, and at most a five percent profit margin which was reinvested in the organisation. On numerous occasions during contract negotiations the MD had stated that HARP is not in it for the money and simply wanted to cover its costs. This may imply some strategy with the not-for-profit status providing a market advantage, however on deciding to take on a contract in a particularly difficult province, the MD calmed nerves by reiterating that although the organisation does not claim to have all the answers it is willing to try and make a difference, bound by its mission to go where there is a need, “where others fear to tread”, and not only where there is “a buck to be made.” HARP staff members often referred to the NGO as an altruistic organisation, not in it for the money but for the people of South Africa. These findings appear to support Feeney’s (2004) contention that NGOs can be ‘in the market but not of it’, HARP does not appear to easily allow services in direct support of their mission to fall away due to their non-marketable features.

I don’t think it has ever been part of HARP’s value system to be glamorous. As long as you can pay your expenses, I always got that feeling from when I first worked here that it is not all about the glamour, it is about paying the dues (HARP senior field staff member).

As a researcher I was also interested to explore whether the organisation's mission or not-for-profit status played a meaningful or significant draw card for new and existing staff members. There appeared however to be no rule of thumb within the organisation as to the motivation for working at HARP. Some staff members were not even aware that HARP was an NGO on joining the organisation, "I did not know what it means or how it works, but realised it was not a formal business in terms of your average company like Old Mutual, I just pieced it together from reading reports where I found the time." The middle road was represented by other staff members who referred to their frustration of doing the extra work in public sector or private practice and "would rather do it for an NGO." Yet within this sentiment, a senior staff member put it as coming "to work for HARP because of my value system . . . but this is still just a job." Taking time to wait for a measure of the front stage speak to dissipate, there remained a pragmatic foundation that for all the altruistic verse most staff members recognised that this was at its base a job first and foremost, and the only person who had ever worked for no income at any point in time had been the MD. Where there appeared to be a stronger connection with intrinsic meaning or sense making was among the field staff. An office based manager felt that "the altruistic passion lives in the field, at the coal face between the staff in hospitals and the facilitators." One field staff member felt that in "working for HARP I am giving back to society, and HARP fulfils my needs." Other fieldworkers stated that "when you come to work at HARP you understand it is a sacrifice going out in the field, but it is a choice that you make", and "it is not for the money that we are in it, then I wouldn't want to work here. I could also drive around in a glamorous car and look like a dolly bird, that is not part of my value system." After reflecting on the discussion, an 'old guard' staff member shared: "I didn't even know it was an NGO – but perhaps you get a certain type of person working here because we mostly come from a nursing or medical background?" This sentiment appeared to find support in another field staff member's feeling that working for HARP "is a commitment to your vocation that you have chosen, at this stage of our lives we are all older and giving back to society what you have learnt, it needs to be ploughed back." Although out of the scope of this research, it is remarkable that most of HARP's staff members were nurses or doctors and came from a 'caring' profession. This aspect could add to Littleton's (2002) study around understanding psychological contracts in not-for-profit organisations.

Discussion around the mission and identity of the organisation inevitably also revealed how it reflected on the moral fibre or accountability among the NGO staff. There was consensus amongst staff that money was always tight and this showed itself in the informal remarks staff made both with regard to the organisation, and their own behaviour. There did seem to also be somewhat of a transition period as new staff members joined HARP, whether from the public, private, or perceived 'richer' NGO sectors. One long time senior staff member commented that you may have to keep an eye on newcomers as they adjust to the cost saving mentality and modify their expectation of what, and how many expenses they are able to claim. Office gossip also extended

to the type of cars various staff members drove, reflecting on the appropriateness of how they may be viewed by clients if driving a 'fancy' car. There were the corridor mutterings about certain field staff members who refused to stay in perfectly acceptable accommodation, but expected HARP to pay for 'posh' bed and breakfasts. The concern was what a display of wealth might say about HARP and how much money it may be charging or making from its work. On one occasion during a contract proposal, a new staff member with an NGO background wanted to add in additional services to a quote. An 'old guard' staff member claimed it was unethical as the facilities concerned would not be able to make any improvements over a short period of time. It was the new staff member's opinion that this was a legitimate way to generate income, based on the fact that any reassessments would prove beneficial in advising the facilities of their progress and how they could increase their improvement efforts. A debate ensued, and ultimately a compromise was reached between the numbers of additional services proposed. This illustrated how coherence in everyday life and attributing meaning to the organisation was achieved through a process of negotiation, where reconciling incompatible commitments and contradictions was based on a common understanding of the values and ethics within the organisation (Hilhorst 2003; Feeney 2004).

7.4 Value creep or renegotiation

We are based on achieving the mission for which we need money. Ethically we . . . do what . . . we need to do . . . provided it is within our mission. Sure, we adapt (HARP's MD).

Is it possible the low rumble of discontent within HARP is because we are an un-comfortable hybrid, and at some level there is a base discomfort with the situation (HARP staff member)?

The multiple realities negotiated within HARP on a daily basis did appear to create a balancing act between thinking with the head versus thinking with the heart. Although the strong social drive was clearly visible within HARP, it could be argued that its financial counterpart could be at times equally strong headed. This economic mode of thinking was made more pronounced by a competitive market and the push to introduce managerial strategies aimed at improving the efficiency of the organisation. There is no doubt that the tension between a mission-orientation and market place value breeds intra-organisational contradictions, where multiple identities create variations in perceptions around what makes the NGO distinctive, resulting in the organisation becoming a type of 'hybrid' (Jäger and Mitterlechner 2004). It was commonly accepted among staff that as a professional organisation in a contract agreement with the government, HARP did operationally resemble a business venture. The MD had stated that HARP was both an NGO and a business, in the sense that as an organisation it must be run as a business.

We are not able to influence politics but we need to procure a contract - that is most important. Everything we move on is money . . . just as long as we can just keep to doing the work that we are doing on a professional basis (HARP MD).

With this in mind certain staff members did not identify with HARP as an NGO *organisation*, but felt more comfortable referring to it as a private *company*, pointing to its legal registration as a Section 21 Company. A tongue in cheek question was raised as to where one actually sees any legal registration document declaring HARP as an NGO, “what broad term is this NGO anyway?” On the other side of the coin, a staff member felt that using the word *company* was incorrect as it projected a for-profit image, and in his opinion staff members were happier with the idea that HARP was an *organisation*. This appears to be semantic gymnastics, but it illustrated a tension between staff as to their understanding of the intention of HARP as it represents multiple realities for different people both simultaneously and sequentially (Hilhorst 2003). A staff member had further interrogated the not-for-profit label through the experience of being accused by a government official of being in the field to make money. After reiterating HARP’s not-for-profit status the staff member was given food for thought as the government official explained that government was also a not-for-profit organisation but in it to make their money through salaries, or create profit for growth. . . similar to an NGO. The staff member could not deny the claims that it was possible that people establish NGOs so that they were able to dictate the packages they wanted, and set their own terms by which they chose to operate. It left him with a sense that “if you think about it we are all hiding behind this not-for-profit making statement, but at the end of the day we can set our packages at levels you wouldn’t expect in the public sector.” This tendency for NGOs to make money through high salary packages was also touched on by the MD, he reiterated that the label of NGO was often open to abuse and that was why HARP set its salaries in relation to relevant public sector norms. Such a move could go some way to avoid the caveat of self-interest and result in the NGO suppressing ethical incentives or deviating from its mission by focusing on maximising revenue (Goodin 2003).

The question has to be asked if service delivery NGOs at times are driven to ‘prostitute the mission’ to survive, or are they rather ‘street smart’ organisations that hunt for appropriate income streams to fulfil their mission? Opinion on the extent to which HARP was able to dictate terms of engagement or refuse funding on the basis of its mission differed between staff members. As an example, over the course of time HARP’s focus had moved largely to the public as opposed to the private sector, yet within the organisation itself staff opinion differed as to the motivation for this focus. Two themes seemed to emerge. Firstly the public sector was more suited to HARP’s mission statement, and secondly; moving to the public sector was a business decision. In support of the latter, a staff member commented that in the public sector contracts involve much larger numbers of facilities so, “this is for survival, we are dependent on government contracts, it’s just business. If I’m a plumber and I can get work from a hospital as opposed to a job at a private

home, the hospital is more money.” One staff member put it as “always a balance between getting the work so that you can survive, and sticking to what you believe in.” This complexity was further illustrated by a staff member’s opinion that “I cannot deny that we go for every financial opportunity, whatever will sustain us. But HARP has an altruistic essence, certain values.” Perhaps, as thoughtfully explained by another staff member, being a professional service delivery NGO created a certain ‘grey area’ and left a lot of room for doubt as to the organisation’s motives - the mission was all good and well, but the organisation needed money to survive. It becomes clear that within a contract culture NGOs do have to become market-driven and flexible, in fact their survival may depend on not becoming fixated with a narrow definition of their mission or identity (Tuckman, Rowe, Skloot and Jones 1999).

The tension between mission and market remains a multifaceted and issue-specific phenomenon, and it is within this very context of acknowledging a commercial focus within a flexible mission that opportunity spaces can be found. There was no doubt that HARP had branched into areas that were not traditionally part of the core programme. Not every venture had led to ongoing funding but the overall strategy had provided HARP with opportunities that were not necessarily foreseen at the outset, or temporarily provided an income source during difficult times and then later relinquished. Being in tune with the environment within which it operated was essential; where the NDOH may be diverting funds or even what parliamentary budgets were focused on. HARP had to think with its head and ‘get into the market’ and be seen to qualify for a new income stream in order to disseminate its knowledge and skills – ultimately to be able to fulfil its mission. This did at times require a renegotiation around the fringe of HARP’s mission, with staff questioning “how does that fit in with our mission?” and “ethically we should discuss this . . .”, or even “that’s not our job.” For some staff members any perceived ambiguity led to what appeared to be a fragmentation of purpose, leading to fears around losing focus on core programmes – yet there was a grudging acceptance that HARP was not a static vehicle and must be prepared to adapt and change, or risk becoming obsolete. This acceptance was of course at times complicated by staff members’ reluctant readiness for change and the perception as to their lack of participation in these decisions. It had also been suggested that certain older staff members’ resistance may be attributed to their dearth of knowledge of how NGOs operated and their lack of interaction with like-minded NGO workers. The reality is that there will always be a mixture of fear, confusion and learning experiences as professional NGOs such as HARP constantly renegotiate a balance between a business and social model. The MD had stated that he didn’t see HARP as being *operationally* different from any profit organisation; it could in fact easily be a commercial venture and not an NGO. He discovered that for many of the early years people mistakenly believed he was the proprietor, a perception that took him some time to change. However when it came to the reason HARP as an organisation was in ‘business’, the social driver remained in his mind paramount:

. . . at the end of the day the only reason I have gone this route is this greater explicitness of why we are in business in the sense that we are not there to make money. We are here to fulfil a mission . . . (HARP's MD).

If an NGO favours the economic as opposed to a social driver, there is a danger of it becoming a wolf in sheep's clothing. A commercial flavour is inevitably introduced as NGOs increasingly adopt business models to improve their efficiency and accountability, but these practices must be implemented in subservience to the organisation's primary social driver – its mission, flexible though it may need to be. Amnesty International's leader, Irene Kahn, provides a timely analogy in that NGOs are similar to commercial ventures where they both operate with the same computer systems with similar financial obligations and assets. However, her proposition is that while NGOs and companies are using the same 'hardware' (corporatization), they operate on very different 'software' (cited in Williamson 2005). One senior staff member suggested that HARP was indeed a hybrid, a positive evolution from a capitalist model:

They say you cannot serve two masters, you have got to choose. But I think we can be a hybrid where we can accommodate an altruistic ethos based on good governance. A new genre within the species of NGOs . . . I think we are a new animal.

The option of splitting the NGO into two divisions did periodically come up for discussion. One part would be the altruistic NGO body delivering programmes, while the other would be a consulting and training division operating for profit. Although there appeared to be some support for this idea within HARP, it had never quite taken root within the organisation. What proved interesting was that although a division may serve to resolve much of the tensions within the multiple realities that staff members reconciled, psychologically and perhaps more pragmatically and financially this idea had never gained momentum. This reality supports Begginton's (1997) research that any move towards a consultancy or social enterprise model as 'ideal types' is a long-term iterative change process and requires significant business acumen and financial security – a position HARP did not find itself in, in the short-term, but this may begin to take root over time. What was clear was that HARP did not appear to take its identity for granted or show itself as unaware of conflicting or multiple realities within the organisation, which in Hilhorst's (2003) view ensures that an organisation remains open to alternative modes of NGO-ing and prospects for change.

7.5 Conclusion

Research revealed that most staff would include three main themes in a description of the organisation as an NGO: its independence from government, its representation of public interests in accordance with its mission, and not being motivated by profit. Yet multiple realities and tensions showed themselves when defining the organisation as 'fiercely independent' from government and yet their 'foot soldiers' at the same time. Again, as representing the public interests and fighting for the patient, and yet brought to heel by their contractual obligations to

government. Again, operating as a business and yet not being in it for the money. What proved interesting was the difference of opinion even around the use of terminology used to describe HARP's identity, and how these various labels were perceived and used as leverage to influence or support decision-making. There appeared to be both confusion and strategic play around the terms of reference as to whether HARP was an NGO *organisation*, a professional *company*, a not-for-profit *body*, or some hybrid combination of all three. The tension between these terms revealed itself through issue-specific negotiation, representations, moral disciplining or undertones, and sense making for individual staff members. It is clear that a shared understanding of the NGO identity is not guaranteed, but rather shows itself as a process of negotiation with the mission playing a key role as moral and ethical yardstick, the measure against which agreements are reached. Identity work within HARP was evoked through binding these often contradictory realities under the canvas of the somewhat encompassing and flexible mission in support of a strong front stage narrative.

The context within which professional NGOs operate is ambiguous, and the identity battle of maximising a social mission as opposed to maximising profit does not mean the NGO should be bashful of being 'street smart', innovative, utilise business acumen and allow for flexibility in the pursuit of fulfilling its mission (Edwards and Hulme 2002a; Galaskiewicz, Letts, Sadler and Hall 1999; Tuckman, Rowe, Skloot and Jones 1999). Maximising a social mission while avoiding the lure of self-interest does however imply that value must win out over magnitude (Goodin 2003). In addition this stance is also maintained through adherence to an ethical and socially focused ideology (Feeney 2004). A distinctive mission and strong value base provided the 'glue that bound' HARP as a healthy organisation; however thinking with the heart in everyday practice had to be dynamically balanced with the head on an ongoing basis, ensuring that the NGO remained viable and tightly managed any compromise on time due to a business focus in order to remain sustainable. Although at times uncomfortable, it appeared that HARP may continue to renegotiate multiple realities around its dynamic 'hybrid identity'. Organisational contradictions or multiple identities resulting from new ideas, change to programmes, or operational procedures are more likely to be negotiated and accepted. However, *core* changes that may run contrary to the NGO's front stage identity and core values are not likely to take place without a significant crisis or strong pressure. As Hilhorst (2003) outlines although there are always ordering processes and routines that support a level of predictability within the multiple realities in everyday practice, there is never static order. HARP staff members may continue to negotiate their varied understandings of organisational reality and identity, while management ensures sustainability through implementation of business 'hardware' infrastructure and runs services based on the organisation's distinctive and socially driven 'software'.

8 CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

8.1 And the point being . . .

This study evolved out of a desire to make sense of the many contradictions and challenges I experienced while working for HARP as a professional NGO. My curiosity was raised on two broad fronts. Firstly, at HARP's interface with its external environment. I was intrigued by business-like practices exhibited by HARP, which challenged the preconceived notions I had of NGOs. I found the nature of HARP's relationship with its clients disturbingly familiar to that of the politics of the competitive and unforgiving business world from which I had come. However, as time passed it revealed the skilful and complex role that professional NGOs master in ensuring their sustainability while attempting to keep true to the not-for-profit philosophy inherent in their mission. Secondly, I was drawn to the multiple and often conflicting realities within the organisation's internal environment. This was no homogeneous group of people all following the same altruistic script, but at times an uncomfortably disharmonious environment, imbued with internal politics and power plays. And yet somehow the NGO managed to 'keep it together' on the yellow brick road and maintained a sense of common purpose. It was both a journey of discovery as much as a study to reveal what lay behind the front stage reality presented by the organisation as it evolved over time.

In order to 'see the familiar through unfamiliar eyes' and 'unpack' the lived experience within HARP's everyday reality, ethnography and participant observation provided the most useful and practical method to follow. It would enable the research to contextualise the historical, political, economic and non-economic processes which defined HARP's multiple realities in an 'embedded' manner. To this aim the study acknowledges drawing particularly on the ethnographic approaches of Murdock (2003) and Hilhorst (2003). Murdock (2003) suggested a 'practice' approach which centres on social actors and their own interpretations of their experiences and social reality. In addition she describes NGOs as 'processes' transforming over time (be they perceived as negative or not), as opposed to fixed entities which can lead to a moralizing perspective possibly condemning professional NGOs as 'sell outs' without acknowledging their ability to self-correct and change from within. Similarly, Hilhorst (2003) suggests an 'actor orientated' approach which starts with the premise that people are social actors who have agency. People reflect on their experiences and surroundings and use their knowledge and capabilities to respond; therefore a study needs to focus on the actors and the social to understand their motivations, ideas and activities. In addition Hilhorst's (2003) concept of interface analysis was utilised, which looks to the linkages and networks that develop between individuals and parties at points where often conflicting or different social fields intersect.

Using these ethnographic tools I was able go some way towards revealing one NGO's survival strategies in context, its organisational culture as an activity, and individual sense-making and identity formulation in the local setting. I was able to explore the richness of insights, diversity, and tensions within the organisation's reality lived through professional spaces, cultural practices, power relationships and politics in daily events and processes. This study adds to the understanding of what is gained and lost through employing a corporatization strategy to professionalize, and hopes to contribute towards a growing body of research narrating the evolution within the NGO sector, informing questions currently being asked by state, business, and civil society groups.

8.2 Survival strategies in context

The research results revealed one NGO's lived experience under the strategies to professionalize. An effort was made to unpack the political context within which the NGO interfaces with the state, and how strategic change could be negotiated by staff and was interpreted within their multiple realities. Professionalization is said to be transforming NGOs into new regimes of efficiency and leading to their absorption of increasingly commercial practices (corporatization). Within this context I was interested to explore the larger political practices professional NGOs might be playing into, how their responsibilities may shift and what processes could be inadvertently sanctioned or marginalized within the organisation. As suggested by Murdock (2003:524) professionalization must be given a sense of social reality, and it is a case of "rather than ask whether NGOs are 'good' or 'bad,' we should ask after the practices that tend to make NGOs more or less able to do certain things."

Professionalization does tend to accentuate a focus on meeting the demands of the client, however, as new spaces for collaboration and innovation are pursued they in turn bring with them new skills and a market to influence wider relations and create agency with clients. Yet new markets also inadvertently bring competition and exposure, requiring professional NGOs to deal with new criticism and improve their ability to navigate successfully through the resulting play for power. Professional NGOs therefore adapt their strategic behaviour to increase their efficiency and efficacy within the sector, adjusting their image and identity to meet these new challenges. In order to survive competition and justify their profile, professional NGOs have no choice but to present themselves at a higher level and with more professionalism (Reddy 2003), as seen for example in HARP's attempts to improve the efficiency of its operations, decentralise decision-making and enabling the monitoring and evaluation of staff. The strategies to professionalize within HARP were however not automatically appreciated and took some time to be accepted by staff members as they were led to question their self worth, job satisfaction and value. Their resistance to the application of these strategies over time supports the cautionary note of many third sector specialists (Lewis 2003; Edwards and Hulme 2002a) that this process initially might

come as an unwelcome 'shock' and care should be taken when importing private sector managerialism into the NGO sector. As observed within HARP, NGOs employing strategies to professionalize do not necessarily have infrastructure or training to effectively develop systems to monitor their efficiency (Galaskiewicz, Letts, Sadler, and Hall 1999). These findings support the Da Silva Wells' (2004) study of NGOs which found that they have yet to master the 'culture of organisational development'. Attending to staff development appears to be a new challenge for the internal management particularly within South African NGOs.

As a professional NGO HARP had to ensure its profile, elicit cooperation, and manage competition. It is proposed by the literature that embedding an NGO in multiple networks ensures visibility, access, and provides the organisation with a platform to be heard. HARP had found some measure of favour in knowledge-based issue-specific informal networking, but had not found success in overcoming the competition in market orientated delivery networks. These findings supported Liebler and Ferri's (2004) writings on the failure of service delivery networks to reduce competition, foster trust, or commitment. HARP's experience bears this out where competition among certain NGOs had undermined cooperation when financial gain was seen as a primary motive (Goodin 2003). However, in attempts to raise its profile HARP had faced many challenges to both its internal representation and its external credibility. Particularly relevant in South Africa, HARP's experiences around increasing the empowerment representation within the organisation are congruent with Da Silva Wells' (2004) study of equity in South African NGO management – these organisations need to talk about race and gender more explicitly as it can polarise an organisation. In addition, it is worth noting the awareness within the organisation (whether accepted or not), of the important role played by black staff members such as Mrs Xola in strategically representing HARP in line with the 'new' South Africa. It became crucial to maximising the advantages these staff members provided the NGO in strategically guiding the organisation through the political and cultural nuances that were a reality within the South African context. The challenges HARP faced around increasing external legitimacy also supported Hilhorst's (2003) view that NGOs must learn to negotiate their identity with stakeholders and deal with the political labels attached to them . . . making representations work in favour of the NGO was a process of affecting the power relationships themselves.

Watchdogs have suggested that NGOs need to be aware that there is no longer a red carpet laid down for their 'so called' innovative projects, they are in a long-term battle for ideas where the state increasingly controls access to resources (Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington 2005). It follows that progressively more professional NGOs are transforming themselves to become delivery-orientated agents, which some believe jeopardizes the sector's independence, motives, and even its ability to lay claim to the 'N' in NGO. As a professional NGO, HARP both chased and created the market enabling it to fulfil its mission, or diversify its services to access additional funding. While pursuing

diversity and sustainability, the extent of co-option to clients, or loss of autonomy remained to be seen. However, as an increasingly fluid sector, professional NGOs are continually renegotiating allegiances and boundaries, redefining their relationships with the market, state, donors, clients and communities. This study finds support for Fisher's (1997) suggestion that the fluidity and adaptive nature of NGOs is not necessarily viewed as a weakness and the permanence of their presence may be discovered in their persistent emergence and engagement as they make an effort to avoid the pitfalls of formalizing or professionalizing within their engagement with the state.

8.3 The uncomfortable contractual bind

The competitive tender processes and resulting service delivery focused contract preferred by the state is an inevitable market reality that professional NGOs learn to deal with. The question is how, within the confines of this process, professional NGOs are able to 'do more or less things' and what constraints or affordances does this provide them (Murdock 2003). Within the literature, Goodin's (2003) somewhat critical stance on the consequences of NGOs entering a contractual relationship found both support and yet was also challenged by HARP's experience. Although HARP to some extent may have designed its services to perform a task of the state's choosing, the findings suggest that any possible changes in priority or ethos within the organisation were not by default negative. By their very nature NGOs identify gaps in the state's service delivery capacity, and when this deficiency is acknowledged within the state it most often falls within an appropriate NGO mission statement. It cannot be assumed that only NGOs are equipped to identify where assistance to the state is needed, monitoring deficiencies in state delivery is better served as a collaborative project between the state and NGOs. That being said, however, once an NGO is paid a fee for a service, it could imply political control over the NGO's output. The findings suggest that despite this, the autonomy with which HARP enacted its programmes was maintained. As a professional NGO, HARP intended its service to support the department's aims and objectives, it was not driven to challenge the political status quo. However, Goodin's (2003) contention that the confidentiality clause in contract law obscures public accountability has been corroborated within the findings, meaning that HARP as a professional NGO was 'less able' to do certain things. Confidentiality was an ongoing point of contention within HARP, and although independence was maintained by doing things 'the HARP way', it could be argued that HARP was gagged with regard to furthering the interest of the broader public according to its mission. Importantly though, as a professional NGO, it was accepted that at the very least, as a starting point, the provinces and NDOH were made aware of the reality about the quality of care in their facilities.

Within this contract agenda, Richmond and Shields (2003) highlight the increasing tension between accountability to the 'buyer' over accountability to the community, where professional

management can at times overshadow a personal touch²⁶. Findings within HARP revealed that certain staff members did feel a personal touch at facility level was lost in light of efficiency or management targets. Yet other staff members believed that these new policies strengthen the NGO's accountability and credibility, ensuring it remained marketable and a leader in its field. This politics of competitiveness is a reality in the increasingly commercialised NGO sector, observed where client pressure on HARP's costing tended towards a built-in under-funding philosophy, pushing impact and efficiency for a limited financial resource (Richmond and Shields 2003). Competitive tendering does bring market principles into service delivery, but this has also brought about transparency and accountability in both its positive and negative forms. Kumar (2004), Motala and Husy (2001), and Edwards and Hulme (2002a) all assert in their own way that the hidden 'price' or 'cut and thrust' of contract culture will lead to short-term gains at the expense of flexibility, and ultimately disable and compromise long-term impact. Some evidence for this assertion was found in this study, particularly in the way that funds were negotiated within a contract. Concession and sacrifices were routinely made by HARP to ensure they retained client support. This, however, remained an ongoing debate of magnitude over value (Goodin 2003), and as HARP had from its inception survived on contract funding - the assertion that it would ultimately lead to the organisation being disabled cannot be substantiated. HARP maintained that preference for programme funding over core funding ensured its autonomy and ability to fill the service delivery gaps within state services. Although Clark (1993) highlights the threat of NGOs becoming too 'cozy' with the state by merely filling gaps and relying on this income as opposed to maintaining critical loyalty – HARP had yet to find this elusive 'comfort spot', and instead it had to work hard to emphasize its skills base, knowledge and expertise to gain a competitive edge in negotiating and winning contracts.

8.4 A less than formal relationship with the state

The impact of the historical and political context within which HARP found itself was a force strongly felt within the organisation. As a professional NGO in the healthcare sector its highest patron was the NDOH, a state department currently in a defensive position and surrounded by controversy. This put HARP in a unique position of having to ensure they kept the state 'on side', as the nature of their business required a delivery of service to a willing buyer. HARP's

²⁶ Although HARP is committed to professionalize and improve its output to provincial clients, any division between the 'buyer' and the community is obscured by the fact that in this instance the community (or health care facility) is both part 'buyer' and product. As a professional NGO, HARP has no direct contact with the public at large, and understands its immediate target community to be the facilities within which it works. This puts HARP in a position where the successful delivery of services or impact depends on facility 'buy-in' and resources . . . it cannot simply 'change or adapt' its product or service to suit the 'buyer'. Although not a focus of this research, this speaks to the complexities in a relationship between professional NGOs, funder, and their target community.

programmes by necessity required it to collaborate with the state to gain access to healthcare facilities, and as the 'foot soldiers' of the NDOH, HARP had to find agency within the chain of command. Any overtures made by HARP towards the NDOH as the target client were carefully evaluated in light of potential negative interpretations by the state, or perceptions of advocacy or conflict. Dealing with the NDOH had always placed HARP in a suitably subservient and non-threatening position ensuring its initiatives were in line with the department's aims and objectives. In addition, the competitive playing field also needed to be analysed, taking into consideration any alternative NGO, national, or provincial initiatives that may need to be acknowledged. With regard to the political nature of the state-NGO relationship, the findings of this research support the position that NGOs suffer an unequal partnership with the state. The NDOH has openly expressed its desire to limit HARP's influence to that of a consultant, where lack of support from the NGO would come at the expense of service delivery. With this in mind, historically the NDOH's somewhat indifference to HARP's work proved preferable to an opposing stance. Ironically, to date criticisms of 'not having listened' to the NDOH appeared to have preserved some form of independence.

In line with Reddy's (2003) study of NGOs commercializing in post-apartheid South Africa, the relationship between HARP and the state was indeed tension-filled and contradictory, as opposed to inter-dependent or mutually supportive. The reality for HARP was that its progress must be reconciled against the NDOH framework where it would be challenged on its relevance and often provide 'good will' service at no cost and even avoided potential donors who are out of favour with the state. Backstage resistance within HARP did exist towards this concessionary strategy where some staff members feared this came at the expense of HARP's credibility, yet sustainability often required you 'look the other way'. Playing to political favourites in HARP's experience had often proven a dangerous short-term game, and as a professional NGO, neutrality was a hard-won and precious commodity. What emerged was a complex web of power relations saturated by political agendas of multiple stakeholders. The relationship between NGOs and their governments are both ambivalent and dynamic, being at times co-operative and contentious simultaneously. Just as NGOs encompass a wide range of ideologies, the state is also a heterogeneous and complex actor in the relationship (Fisher 1997). HARP faced the challenge of finding political spaces for ongoing dialogue with the NDOH and continuing to develop the necessary political acumen and insider support to navigate both national and provincial agendas.

Research findings within HARP strongly support three assertions made by Motala and Husy (2001) in a study of NGO delivery in South Africa: a defensive state leads to conflict with NGOs, a state allowed to define the development framework will show greater tolerance towards NGOs, and government's decentralisation has created space for NGOs to interact with local structures. HARP's relationship with both the NDOH and provincial clients clearly bore this out. The need to

provide previously disadvantaged provinces with support, and an awareness of the lack of coordination between provincial and national stakeholders had provided HARP with agency outside of national control. The NGO had found room to manoeuvre in the local context as a result of provincial funding autonomy. HARP's relationship with its provincial clients could be described as complementary at best, with pockets of true collaboration amongst a certain instrumentality. Although autonomy was maintained over implementation of its programmes, it remained vulnerable to being used as a pawn or scapegoat for non-delivery within internal provincial power relations. Provincial politics showed both conflict and cooperation and many of the caveats Clark (1993) identified in the relationship between the state and voluntary sector were validated: a highly politicized environment, professional jealousies, being seen as a competitor, and placing the spotlight on a lack of public sector capacity. Support was found for Hilhorst's (2003) study of the 'real world' of NGOs where power relations are shaped through conflict, cooperation, multiple discourses and representations. Findings indicated that relationships did not in fact guarantee impact beyond like minded officials, and diffusion of HARP's approach was not guaranteed up the NDOH hierarchy. Long-term relationships established with provincial clients had proven both an advantage and a handicap, while the need to engender a culture of mutual accountability remained an ongoing challenge in the face of maintaining critical loyalty.

Kolybashkina (2004) queried the difference between an NGO being a service 'provider' as opposed to a service 'contractor' . . . these research findings indicate that an emphasis on the former phrase is largely dependent on the NGOs ability to build a participative relationship with the client and ensure mutual accountabilities in defining the impact of the programme. Although under legal contract, HARP's intention was to facilitate a transfer of knowledge and skills to the client. Whether collaboratively at best, or at least complementary (Fowler 2000), HARP attempted to avoid where possible the instrumentality of being seen as contractor to 'replace' a department's function. HARP manoeuvred and negotiated to ensure participation; it did not perform a line management function although certain client perceptions have at times run to the contrary. Edwards and Hulme (2002a) emphasized the importance of the 'quality' of relationships between NGO and the state in determining matters of funding and accountability to either promote or impede goals of development. Although open to debate, the relationship between HARP and its provincial clients could be seen as both autonomous and accountable, but not purely independent. For a source of funding HARP remained dependent on its provincial clients and had demonstrated its willingness to be flexible in the name of long-term buy-in, despite some internal resistance to increasing diversity in order to be financially rewarded or viable as an organisation.

8.5 Accountability as a social construct

When an NGO employs strategies to professionalize, this inevitably has implications for the manner in which it constructs, negotiates and presents its accountability. The findings within this

thesis indicate that not only do the front stage accountability tools a professional NGO utilizes constitute a negotiated process of representation, but the accountability of the organisation itself invokes the political process of legitimation. What emerged proved accountability is a multifaceted concept intertwined with ideas of legality, intent, performance, obligation, trust, and even morality. Accountability within HARP proved itself both a process and a tool, inextricably bound to the notion of ensuring legitimacy and credibility. These findings therefore support Hilhorst's (2003) argument that accountability is both a process and a tool. As a professional NGO claiming legitimacy on its skill base and knowledge, accountability was most often focused on demonstrating efficacy as a service provider held responsible for its deliverables to the client – in line with Naidoo's (2003) 'perform or perish' principle. Within the contract relationship, HARP's accountability was demonstrated through the production of its reports, the 'account' of its activities and impact. The findings however began to reveal a far more complex agenda held by these reports, both with regard to its external environment and within the organisation itself. HARP continued to adapt and improve its reports to demonstrate it was making a difference, selecting measures that met provincial agendas while highlighting the long-term responsibilities of all parties involved. HARP had clearly identified the need to negotiate this interpretation at its interface with multiple clients. The production of the reports therefore reflected not only the client's interests, but also supported the NGO's strategies to professionalize, proving it credible as an expert in its field to supporting a political play for power at its interface with clients. I agree with Hilhorst (2003) that accountability processes can at times more accurately reflect negotiation and power struggles, rather than what happens in the actual development process. Where the emphasis within and between accountability and legitimacy is placed does depend on who's asking (Votoloni 2002).

As a means of negotiating multiple accountabilities, HARP's reports also generated new internal processes that needed to be managed. The findings within HARP found some support for Bornstein's (2004) study on the potential for distortion of information in reporting as a result of monitoring and evaluation strategies, however, despite the challenges this posed, the meaning of the information was not lost with HARP's reports. As a tool it was however burdened with multiple purposes all of which were not necessarily compatible, often felt to come at the expense of communicating the depth of field reality and serving a management agenda . . . justifying the more political questions of whose interests it serves (Jordan 2005; Slim 2002; Lee 2004). Within the organisation, the micro-politics in context revealed HARP's struggles with the multiple and competing accountability demands. Accountability was complicated by its relational nature at the interface with multiple stakeholders between field staff and facilities, and again between management and provincial clients. This proves proof of the ongoing situation that represented the tightrope that service delivery NGOs are destined to walk, as they aspire to report on long-term measures that make a difference, but are often driven to report on short-term measures that are countable to validate their performance (Ebrahim 2003a). These findings also fall in line with

Hilhorst's (2003) notions on how 'the account' is constructed as a combination of actual experience in the field and knowledge about the paying client, serving as a representation to make sense of the programmes both rationally and morally. Within the bounds of HARP's contracts, seemingly formal mechanisms of accountability such as reporting were saturated with social interaction and strategy, creating and supporting representations that legitimise HARP's activities. I concur therefore that the HARP reporting process as an accountability mechanism must be appreciated as a social process, complicated by contract obligations, performance targets and judgements, providing it the opportunity to moonlight as a weapon in the everyday politics of legitimation (Hilhorst 2003).

With regard to accountability of professional NGOs themselves, the findings within HARP revealed the challenge of supporting a broader view of accountability through addressing questions of effectiveness, reliability and legitimacy (Jordan 2005). The perception of legitimacy played a vital role in HARP surviving the accountability squeeze, and raised questions of representative status and the political or authority 'voice' (Slim 2002) with which it spoke. Professional NGOs such as HARP seek to validate this authority not only through performance, but to be generated on reputation and trust which in HARP's experience was hard won as it remained reliant on its clients' desire to engage. Although it emerged that HARP's authority 'voice' was highly qualified and backed by specialists, HARP had not yet developed a strong backing from a visible professional network, a national profile, or broadly communicated its presence in the press. The process of 'voicing' this authority in an authentic manner revealed the complex and social nature of accountability, ever vulnerable to interpretation and dependent on the professional NGO's political and social evolution over time. Where to from here? The key for professional NGOs may be in the broadening of their definitions of accountability and acknowledging it as both a process and a tool imbued in the politics of representation. Continuing to work towards building professional networks and strengthening multiple accountabilities with clients may counter the tendency to default to short-term performance gains to satisfy a contract agenda, at the expense of the long-term benefits to their clients. As argued by Hilhorst (2003), the everyday politics of legitimation both corrupts accountability and at the same time pressures a move towards more meaningful accountability; NGOs must critically improvise and combine methods to make the most use of them.

8.6 A leader as a 'broker of meaning'

Figuratively speaking, the MD was described by more than one staff member as the 'head of the family', having been responsible for the development of the NGO from its inception. The organisation remained largely dependent on his continued input and guidance, and his role was central to both the organisation's strategy to professionalize and ensuring its profile and sustainability. The research supported Van Maanen's (2001) assertion that leaders in NGOs increasingly adapt the character of the organisation, for which they assume responsibility and are

increasingly held responsible. The flexibility and evaluation these strategies demanded of the organisation, and staff members' perception of their lack of participation, at times resulted in a hum of backstage discontent. This dynamic often showed itself in certain staff members' somewhat inventive or obstructive behaviour, which often resulted in power plays within the organisation and subversion of certain management objectives. Although these could be seen to inadvertently reinforce an asymmetrical management dynamic, it indicated that the internal structures and social processes of the organisation were of a joint origin. The findings suggest that contrary to Schein's (1991) strong emphasis on the role of the founder in creating an organisational culture, staff members themselves were co-creators in setting the cultural 'tone' and micro-politics within the organisation.

The findings did reveal a strong appreciation for the MD's vast social capital, and the role he performed when 'front stage'; presenting the organisation to the external environment, raising its profile through emphasis on its knowledge and communicating the legitimacy essential to its sustainability. It was his skill for promoting the organisation within a highly politicized environment that set him apart as a leader. He proved himself a practised negotiator in the external environment, able to keep the NGO 'ahead of the pack' by mapping and exploiting the trends within the NGO's field of expertise. Although these skills may not easily translate into a participative management style preferred by many staff members, the MD proved an expert at driving the vision for the organisation and nurturing a sense of front stage unity. This study therefore finds strong support for Hilhorst's (2003) concept of an NGO leader as both a 'broker of meaning' and an 'interface expert' able to master a range of development discourses, create social relations and communities, generating front stage unity and shaping internal discourses within the organisation. She suggested that the strength of NGO leaders may not lie so much in managing values within an organisation, but more in their ability to present a believable and coherent 'front stage' organisation to observers and stakeholders. This study concurs that the role of a 'charismatic' leader therefore needs to be understood as part of the social fabric of organisational life – and the shaping of an organisation's culture does not reside solely with the leader.

8.7 Change as a contested cultural process

The professionalizing of service delivery NGOs reveals fairly distinct consequences for internal functioning. Strategies to professionalize inevitable bring change and the requirement for a flexible approach to the renegotiation of organisational direction. Strategic change cannot be separated from organisational life and is inherently personal as staff members sort through the ongoing adjustments and ambiguity. The push to professionalize within HARP was taken personally by many staff members and created perceptions of reduced participation, increased surveillance and work load, and the end of a familial organisational structure. This provides a platform from which to appreciate how staff members struggled to make sense of their lived reality which in turn

affected the atmosphere and cultural climate within the organisation. The findings within HARP support Bate's (1997) contention that change within organisations is not a simple linear experience, but is interpreted through a vast 'informal system' of contested cultural processes which need to be explained in order to understand the contrast between the presentation of front stage unity of the organisation, and the informal back stage 'underside' of organisational life (Goffman 1959). Change as a contested cultural process leads to unity and disunity, consensus and dissensus, where the focus turns to how staff members deal with strategic change through their social relations, management dynamics and cultural projections in organisational life.

Within HARP I found support for Collinson's (2003) view that pessimistic discourses such as a 'culture of moaning' and 'muttering into beards' are contextualised as possible survival strategies serving as signposts of staff members' insecurities around perceptions of change and its affect on power relations. As suggested by Hilhorst (2003), these discourses did become dominant through either a crisis response to change over a short period of time, or more slowly emerging through the unintended consequences of everyday routine practices without the staff members even being aware. Certain staff members employing disruptive discourse within HARP did appear to be at the mercy of their own making and in danger of further distancing themselves from the direction the NGO was taking. However, these findings are in line with Van Maanen's (2001) argument that appreciating these discourses or episodes as coping strategies in the face of recurrent change or contradictions does give charity to behaviour that may appear as malicious, lazy or simply inexplicable. As a cultural process, obstructive behaviour within HARP needed to be understood in the context of staff resorting to such mechanisms in order to retain a sense of unity, control or continuity in the face of change.

The tension between holding onto the past, and growing the organisation in new directions both unites and divides staff members at the same time, often resulting in divergent behaviour. The study within HARP found strong congruence with Ybema's (1996) work on the double character of office culture where organisational conflict in the face of change was fought indirectly between more parochial longer standing 'old guard' members, and younger or management schooled members. Within HARP the louder mutters of discontent were generally heard from longer standing members, while newer staff or those with experience outside of the public health sector appeared more open to change. In line with Ybema's (1996) findings conflicts within HARP were fought out indirectly in private back stage conversations, while an overt friendliness was maintained in public. He too identified this as a cultural 'coping style' when change through more impersonal business-like practices was seen to undermine traditional ideas. These mechanisms created a sense of continuity, slowing the pace of change, or highlighting tensions in a political struggle for participation. The findings within HARP suggest that 'acting out' by long standing members re-affirmed their bond and created a 'virtual continuity' in their common response to

change over the years. And yet within both Ybema's (1996) study and in this study of HARP, a common pride in the organisation was found to provide a sense of solidarity, belonging to a unique organisation where mutual understanding existed alongside discontent – cultural consensus was to be found within organisational conflicts. I concur with Ybema's (1996) assertion that a culture of unity and disunity within organisations can be understood from a both-and orientation, as opposed to an either-or orientation which simplifies what appears to be minor impasses in organisational reality as either good or bad relations.

This research also supports Jäger and Mitterlechner's (2004) argument that change accentuates organisational contradictions, and these 'zones of disturbance' should not attempt to be resolved by blaming non-conformist individuals. They propose that doing so would come at the expense of understanding the phenomena rather than to create the perception of a slower pace of change, which is required to ensure the organisation is able to act despite these contradictions. The findings within HARP do suggest that change as an essential requirement did not on face value cause resistance, but more the frequency or pace of change was the key issue and contextualised the innovative back stage tactics which appear to ensure HARP manages change at a sustainable level. There are certain growing pains to institutional and organisational evolution within an NGO under the push to professionalize. However, the required investment into organisational development to take care of internal functions is often a challenge for resource constrained NGOs under pressure to ensure their future sustainability. Among others, Edwards and Hulme (2002a) and Foster-Fisherman, Maynard, and Yang (2001) boldly call for NGO staff to embody a sense of 'venturesomeness', however a readiness for change is largely founded on providing a clear mission, continuous investment in improvement, flat management structures and participatory decision making. Perhaps this is a tall order for many resource constrained NGOs required to make quick strategic decisions to ensure the organisation's sustainability. Within these constraints, it appears to come down to the organisation being strongly 'mission driven' to ensure both leaders and staff members are sufficiently 'grounded' and feel safe to take risks and seek out new ideas. The mission does serve as a 'touchstone' in evaluating whether new ideas are a 'good fit' for the NGO's needs and environment (Foster-Fisherman, Maynard and Yang 2001).

8.8 The mission as moral compass

The mission statement within NGOs is often thought to represent the 'heart' of the organisation. Based on the assumption that the heart has pure intentions, it is not surprising that a mission statement often takes on a moral tone or authority within NGOs. The findings within HARP suggest that staff members relied on the mission as moral conscience for guidance in decision making. Many discussions within HARP included references to 'sacrificing the mission', or 'ethically or morally according to our mission', or the 'inherent not-for-profit philosophy within our mission'. These discussions revealed how the mission reflected on the moral fibre or

accountability of the organisation, and again among the NGO staff members themselves. With regard to the accountability of the organisation towards its mission, it did appear to pose a moral dilemma for staff when they believed the NGO was unable to deliver on its mission statement. In addition, the confidentiality clause within HARP's contracts had limited the organisation's ability to make findings known to the general public. This had led to staff members questioning whose interests the organisation was serving in relation to its moral obligation to the mission. One staff member went as far as to claim this clause was making a mockery of the mission. Being held accountable primarily by its contract obligations did reveal some level of mission confusion and moral dilemmas for many staff members within HARP. It could be argued that the need to survive and meet contract terms distanced HARP from its mission and complicated its moral obligation to all its stakeholders. With regard to the staff themselves, many informal discussions around the organisation's mission involved ideas of value, ethics, sacrifice, distinctiveness and its not-for-profit philosophy. There was consensus amongst staff that money was always tight and this showed itself in the informal remarks many of them made both with regard to the organisation, and their own behaviour. The mission formed a veritable yardstick that was used in guiding decision-making, justifying choices and even a form of moral discipline. The findings within HARP support Hilhorst's (2003) notion of moral accountability or 'moral contract' embedded in everyday organisational life, combining elements of discipline and sense-making.

NGOs are said to increasingly struggle with finding balance between thinking with their 'heart' and thinking with their 'head'. This is particularly relevant for professional NGOs who are often criticised for taking on profit-seeking characteristics, the implication being that this comes at the expense of the mission. What is the cost of professionalizing on the NGO's mission, and how does this invoke notions of morality and ethics? The contention is that a management focus on business-like practices may require staff to invest in strategies they are ethically opposed to, or they may lack the skills base to assimilate these multiple roles (Feeney 2004). The challenge thrown down by many third sector specialists (Edwards and Hulme 2002a; Galaskiewicz, Letts, Sadler and Hall 1999; Tuckman, Rowe, Skloot and Jones 1999) is that in search for sustainability professional NGOs need to remain flexible and re-define their missions. To be sure this does not inherently imply flexible morals, but does result in the mission as a moral 'touch stone' possibly changing over time. As a consequence, the discomfort for certain staff members may not be due to a moral dilemma, but more over the fact that it requires a change in course set by the moral compass within the NGO and meant staff had to reconcile these changes against the very meaning of their work and identity. An emphasis on the mission statement of NGOs creates a coherent front stage narrative that encourages staff members to find coherence within the contradictions they experience. The ability of NGO staff to deal with change and feel sufficiently grounded to take risks is said to depend on a clearly articulated mission (Foster-Fisherman, Maynard, and Yang 2001). Critics of the impact of professionalizing and commercializing the NGO sector (Richmond

and Shields 2003; Goodin 2003) assert that it does indeed deviate or distance the NGO from its mission and by default alters the NGO's not-for-profit objectives.

The findings of this study suggest that the key becomes the intent of the mission. Does taking on flexibility as an organisation in the face of client pressure or funding compromise this intent? Are professional NGOs at times driven to 'prostitute the mission' or suffer 'value creep'? Staff members within HARP did question how new initiatives fit in with the mission and this indicated a moral concern within the organisation, despite the acknowledgement that due to sustainability issues HARP may 'not have a choice'. HARP had to create a balance between thinking with the head versus thinking with the heart and the organisation's financial drive could at times be argued as equivalent to its social counterpart, made more pronounced by a competitive market. There was however also evidence that HARP did not easily allow services in direct support of its mission to fall away despite their inability to realise profit, supporting Feeney's (2004) contention that NGOs can be 'in the market but not of it'. The findings from this study indicate that whether being seen to be adhered to or not, the mission statement provided a strong moral compass within the lived reality of this professional NGO strategizing to professionalize. The negotiations and dissonance within HARP relating to making concessions, diversifying, or chasing new markets meant that the organisation had to continually align and re-affirm its moral compass around its identity and sustainability (Hilhorst 2003). The reality within HARP finds support in the writing of Lurgen (cited in Motala and Husy 2001) in that NGOs must define their policy through balancing values against pragmatic considerations of the needs of the country and type of relationship shared with the state at various levels.

8.9 Arriving at a certain coherence

When undertaking the research for this thesis, I began to discover the many processes behind the production of the organisational realities within HARP and I soon learnt to appreciate that organisations are at the end of the day comprised of people, defined by people, and experienced through people. When at times overwhelmed by the complexity of the multiple realities, I took solace in Fisher's (1997:450) explanation that when shifting the emphasis from a set idea of organisations to a more fluid web of relationships, it does reveal the "connections of NGO actions to numerous levels and fields and draws our attention to the flows of funding, knowledge, ideas, and people that move through these levels, sites, and associations." And yet within these 'flows' and multiple realities, how exactly did HARP arrive at a certain coherence and maintain or renegotiate its identity as a point of distinctiveness over time?

The findings support the contention that due to the multiple realities within the organisation it represented many things for different staff members both simultaneously and sequentially (Hilhorst 2003). HARP was described as independent from government and yet its 'foot soldiers', as

representing the interests of the public and yet bound by contractual obligations, and not being motivated by profit and yet being run as a business. In addition, there was both confusion and a strategic play around referencing HARP as NGO *organisation*, a professional *company*, a not-for-profit *body*, or some hybrid combination of all three. Although a shared understanding of NGO identity was not guaranteed among staff members, it was clear that as a professional NGO HARP had learnt to master the 'both-and' reality within the organisation's evolution in order to find a certain coherence in the multiple realities of their environment. There was also an underlying process of 'identity work' (Alvesson and Willmott 2002) which revealed itself through the use of metaphor and discourses aimed at binding contradictions and producing a coherent front stage narrative, often using the mission statement as a moral yardstick against which agreements were reached. The more relevant finding therefore was actually how these multiple realities and labels were used to influence or support decision-making and either enabled or hindered HARP to successfully go about the business of NGO-ing.

As suggested by Edwards and Hulme (2002a) and Zimmer (2002), organisational identity for NGOs can no longer be presumed, and staff members are required to work within increasingly multiple realities which may lead to conflict and uncertainty. This research showed there was the requirement for staff members to constantly reconcile a professional NGO model against the more traditional social model. However, it was within this very context of acknowledging a commercial focus within a flexible mission that opportunity spaces were found. HARP had branched into areas outside of its traditional programme, providing it with both seen and unforeseen funding as a result of being in tune with the environment within which it operates. HARP openly acknowledged that in certain functions it did resemble a for-profit company, employing professional strategies to remain credible and accountable, however this did not necessarily come at the expense of their motivational distinctiveness. I return to the analogy provided by Amnesty International's leader, Irene Kahn, that NGOs and companies are using the same 'hardware' as commercial ventures, but they operate on very different 'software' (cited in Williamson 2005). The findings within HARP validated this analogy; HARP's goal as a professional NGO was to optimise its 'hardware' in pursuit of its mission. This may be too far a stretch for Goodin (2003) from the comfort of the traditional 'grass roots' model of NGOs, and perhaps it does constitute a new breed. However, while acknowledging the possibility of abuse of representation; professional NGOs prove themselves an adaptable but different species to profit organisations that are motivated solely by the bottom line.

Although controversial, it may be useful to borrow from the experience of organised religion. Consider the diversification of many religious groups from the more traditional or Calvinistic ideologies to some of the wealthy modern day churches. Does this imply the latter have lost their motivational distinctiveness or commitment to their mission? Do preachers seek to grow their

congregation to increase the church coffers, or to spread the Lord's word? The answer to these questions will be as varied as individual opinion on the profit motives of professional NGOs and the intent of 'development'. Similarly, neither are professional NGOs clear-cut or free from controversy and accusations of profiteering. However, their intent remains not-for-profit. Tuckman, Rowe, Skloot & Jones (1999) state that NGOs can not afford to become narrowly focused on their missions if they are to survive. Research within HARP supported their contention that while companies maximise profit, NGOS maximise their social mission. Whether through flexibility, issue related alliances, moral authority, expert knowledge or respect of a community – it is indeed what professional NGOs do, and not always who they represent that makes them legitimate (Marshall 2002). Professional NGOs, such as HARP, have the opportunity to strengthen their political acumen, ensure contract relationships embody partnership, and 'get their houses in order' by taking responsibility for the impact of their work and ensuring honest reporting and evaluation (Lister 2004). How professional NGOs go about their business has indeed become as important as what they do and this will inevitably require they continually balance their economic and social directives.

In respect of their influence on this research, I conclude with key arguments as provided by Hilhorst (2003), Murdock (2003) and Fisher (1997). In arriving at a certain coherence, what became clear was that a professional NGO such as HARP does not appear to take it's identity for granted or show itself as unaware of conflicting or multiple realities within the organisation. In Hilhorst's (2003) view this ensures that an organisation remains open to alternative modes of NGO-ing and prospects for change. Murdock (2003) further advises that what it means to 'do good' for the NGO is not always entirely up to the NGO itself, and what becomes relevant are the constraints and affordances under which it strives to 'do good' as defined by the mission. The development of professional NGOs needs to be understood in context, and Murdock (2004) cautions that negative evaluations of their development may lead to resistance or hinder their ability to counter certain harmful tendencies they themselves acknowledge. And finally, in supporting the value of ethnographic research I refer to Fisher who stated that: "What is at issue is not what NGOs are good for, nor whether a specific association is or isn't an NGO, . . . but an understanding of what happens in specific places and at specific times" (Fisher 1997:449).

This thesis was an ethnographic study of the politics and micro-politics of one professional NGO at its interface with the state. Although it provides insights and collaborates the arguments of many development and anthropological authors, it is one study in context and caution needs to be taken in extrapolating its findings too broadly.

8.10 Recommendations for further research

As expected, it was impossible to explore all the anomalies, deviations and opportunities revealed through the fieldwork. There existed uncertainties and gaps within the study completed at the time, and recommendations for further research are as follows:

- If credibility arguably lies in what HARP has to offer as a professional NGO and not who they represent, in what way could HARP's new information system enable a flow of technology into the state through an audit approach to generate qualitative statistical reports as an instrument of diagnosis or 'technology of visibility'? Research could focus on the interpretation and use of statistics and numbers as technologies of 'truth' and explore how certain categories are created while at the same time erasing others in the politics of representation. Does technology depoliticize issues through blanketing reports in the discourses of quality assurance, and in Ferguson's view are NGOs "at risk of becoming the new 'technical' solution to development 'problems' . . ." (cited in Fisher 1997:445; Ferguson 1990)?
- Quality assurance and quality improvement programmes as a discipline could be further researched from a critical stance on audit culture, which speaks of the transfer of an accounting model with crude quantifiers and implied accountability. It is said to create a bilingual morality of both professionalism in service and care on the one hand, and business related indicators driving constructs of transparency, quality and accountability on the other (Strathern 2000).
- As mentioned within the study, although out of the scope of this research, the aspect of many healthcare NGO workers coming from a medical background or 'caring' profession could add to Littleton's (2002) study around understanding psychological contracts in not-for-profit organisations.
- Although this study held an organisational focus it could be expanded to reveal HARP's involvement at community level within the facilities on the ground, and their experience of integrating the NGO's programmes. Research exploring the perceptions of the impact of HARP's programmes at the coal face may go some way towards answering the question of whether the NGO 'does good' or not.
- There would be benefit in further researching the impact a highly politicized healthcare environment in South Africa is having on the NGO sector, and in what manner this may encourage or discourage various civil society bodies to collaborate or to alter their service delivery function in favour of a more advocacy or adversarial role. Alternatively, might this lead to professional NGOs converting to consultancy models to avoid the political fallout in an increasingly antagonistic relationship between civil society and the state?

8.11 Epilogue

Since completion of fieldwork in 2005 new developments continue to support HARP's organisational evolution. In taking care of its internal environment HARP is strengthening its staff training and feedback programmes, and the new Operations Manager is playing a critical role in supporting senior staff and improving the operations and communication within the organisation. This has freed the MD even more to act as a 'broker of meaning' and 'interface expert' with the external environment, and as a result HARP has continued to diversify its services and is pursuing a number of exciting research projects. Alliances have been forged with international donors and the WHO to further the research of patient safety in South Africa, and it is now collaborating with many of its provincial clients to implement these tools. HARP has also recently been invited to be part of a coalition with both local and international organisations to further the prevention and evaluation of HIV and AIDS in a number of African countries. With its growing profile and international recognition, the private sector has also shown increasing interest in utilising HARP's services as an affordable and locally based evaluation body.

HARP has also furthered its relationship with the NDOH through a joint research project in the field of infection control, despite this being funded by an international donor. It has also developed improved evaluation tools in line with the NDOH framework to suit the needs of its provincial clients in meeting their national objectives. HARP continues to receive support from long standing provincial clients for its core programmes, and it may soon be piloting these in first time provincial clients as a result of their exposure to HARP through donor funded research projects. Although the future opportunities for HARP appear promising, the daily reality of NGO sustainability is never far away. Provincial tenders are lengthy, payments are not always on time, international funding does not always deliver its full promise, and the impact of HARP's programmes continue to face the challenges of a public health sector in distress within a highly politicized environment. To date, HARP's sustainability continues to be assured for no more than the next twelve months, 'water cooler' mutters and strategies are alive and well in affecting the pace of change . . . and staff members remain ever committed to making a difference and ensuring the organisation is professional and one of the best in its field. This is the essence of fulfilling the not-for-profit mission and 'keeping it together' on the yellow brick road.

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