

# The Wave and the Anchor

Which presents the essential elements of CDRA's approach to organisational learning.

by Sandra Hill – September 2008



CDRA's internal, collaborative learning process takes the form of something we call home-weeks. Held almost every month, they are "a week long process of organisational connecting, strategising, action-learning, co-creating, managing, resource allocating, peer supervising, accounting, team building, record creating and practice developing."<sup>1</sup> More figuratively, home-weeks are the wave which moves us, shakes us up and brings growth. They are also a place of steadiness and strength – the anchor which provides a sense of equilibrium. A distinguishing feature of our organisation for almost two decades now, home-weeks were originally introduced to provide a forum for practitioners to learn from each other and from their own experience in a regular rhythm of action and reflection. Needless to say, our home-weeks have evolved over the years. Always a blend of the proactive need to plan ahead and the responsive need to work with what's living in the organisation and in our context, home-week's form, process and emphasis is inherently dynamic. There are however a number of enduring characteristics which have rooted it in our organisational life.<sup>2</sup> A clear and deliberate approach to learning is one such characteristic.

This paper provides an in-depth look at CDRA's approach to organisational learning. It reveals some of the thinking behind what we do and unpacks the theory behind our learning practice. Were we as clear in our thinking when we began with home-weeks 20 odd years ago as we are in this paper? Probably not. While our sense of purpose and commitment to action learning has always been clear, we have learnt a lot about internal and collaborative learning through this journey: the seven elements presented here are, in part, a retrospective sense making of our experience. These elements may coalesce in a huge variety of ways at different times and in different organisations, but in whatever way they come together, they will, we believe, help create vibrant learning and change processes.

The 7 elements of our approach to organisational learning

1. identify & appreciate your guiding principles
2. seek & clarify your individual & organisational questions
3. create opportunity to find & express voice
4. understand the nature of authentic community & nurture its qualities
5. move from reflecting on individual experience to include collaborative sense making
6. experience development as creativity & learn holistically
7. support collaboration with fitting leadership processes & forms

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<sup>1</sup> *Towards 'better evaluation' – an account of one internal practice*: Key note address to the Australasian Evaluation Society Conference (September 2007, Melbourne) by Sue Soal, CDRA

<sup>2</sup> Please refer to Sue Soal's paper, *Towards 'better evaluation' – an account of one internal practice* for a discussion on the five characteristic features of CDRA's internal learning practice. This paper and other articles on CDRA's home-week are available on [www.cdra.org.za](http://www.cdra.org.za)



1. **Identify and appreciate your guiding principles:** Make the principles, assumptions and values underpinning your approach to learning visible by identifying and naming them.

One of the key principles of CDRA's approach to internal, collaborative learning is, 'find your own answer!' This approach is an invitation to pay attention to one's own experience, to learn from one's own actions and aspirations. It requires an inquiring mind open to exploration and values a questioning orientation and an attitude of not knowing. Poet David Whyte explains; "This is not a prescription for feigning ignorance but for cultivating a sharp and attentive mind not given to easy answers." (2002 p95)<sup>3</sup>

Our approach to learning is based on the assumption that our knowing is more compelling when it is rooted in experience. It is based on the assumption that our learning is more likely to be transformative when it touches the 'whole' person. By this we mean our head (thinking, rational, conceptual), heart (feeling, intuitive, inner self) and hands (will, intention, action). Learning is intimately and inherently connected to change. According to Pedler & Aspinwall<sup>4</sup> learning is all about increasingly being flexible, adaptive and responsive to change. "Learning is all about how we change and become different from the way we were before." (1998 p41). Our approach is based on the assumption that personal change and development is essential to organisational and social transformation.

From our experience we know that there are many different ways of learning and many different ways of knowing. Theories on learning and knowing support this. We also know that some ways of knowing have greater currency, for example conceptual or academic knowledge is highly valued in our society. We are committed to building the knowledge that comes from doing and which in turn contributes to practice. We connect strongly to the work on experiential and action learning and to John Heron's model of Holistic Learning<sup>5</sup>. He suggests there are four types of knowing: Experiential knowing is through direct encounters with person, place or thing; a knowing through empathy and resonance. Presentational knowing is an intuitive grasp of something and is expressed through imagery such as story telling, drawing, sculpture, or movement. Propositional knowing 'about' something, is knowing through ideas and theories and expressed in informative statements, and is also known as conceptual knowing. Practical knowing is knowing how to do something and is expressed in a skill or competence. These four types of knowing are interdependent, with practical, propositional and presentational knowing all based on and supported by experiential knowing.

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<sup>3</sup> David Whyte (2002) *The Heart Aroused: Poetry & Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America*. New York: Doubleday

<sup>4</sup> Pedler & Aspinwall (1998) *A concise guide to the learning organisation*. Lemos & Crane: London

<sup>5</sup> See (i) John Heron (1996) *Co-operative Inquiry*. SAGE: London; (ii) John Heron & Peter Reason *A short guide to co-operative inquiry* [www.human-inquiry.com/cishortg.htm](http://www.human-inquiry.com/cishortg.htm); (iii) John Heron *Helping whole people learn* in Boud & Miller (eds) (1996) *Working with Experience: animated learning*. Routledge: London & New York.

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2. **Seek and clarify your individual and organisational questions:** It is imperative to seek and clarify the questions you as an individual, as well as an organisation, are living with.

Working with questions is one of CDRA's most basic processes. We access those parts of ourselves that are continuously changing and developing through seeking and clarifying the questions we live with. Sue Soal<sup>6</sup> explains: "By 'question' we mean something quite different from an everyday question of fact or meaning. Rather, the questions we are referring to here are the conscious expression of those themes and recurring areas of concern that persist through our lives." (2004 p10) Formulating a question (or two) helps us set out on our learning journeys with intentionality and a sense of purpose. "To unearth the specific parameters of one's current question and to work with it as a question (not a prompt to a solution) offers focus and momentum to subsequent exploration." (ibid) Finding one's question is akin to knowing where to stop, where to focus one's attention. In his Seven Meditative Steps of Leadership, Nan Huai-Chin<sup>7</sup> stresses that there can be no resolution (no change, no transformation) without knowing where to stop and finding the right or essential question.

At CDRA we work with different kinds of questions. Questions which help us look inside and outside of ourselves. Questions to discover and describe our experiences. Questions to illuminate and help us understand. Questions to encourage us to movement, action and change. During the process of our self evaluation we have challenged ourselves to express our purpose as a question, to elevate questioning to the level of *quest*, with quest meaning both 'to search' and 'mission'.

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3. **Create opportunity to find and express voice:** Seeking and clarifying one's question is a powerful introduction to working with self. Finding one's voice is the courage to give expression to what you find there.

Voice is closely connected with identity. By giving voice to, or sharing our experiences, opinions, thoughts or feelings, we are revealed. Sharing from the self takes courage. It is far easier to deliver the organisational line or repeat conventional wisdom than it is to share from the mulling over of one's own experience. But it is that sharing from self which leads to new ways of seeing and thus to richer learning.

While voice is closely connected with identity it is also closely connected to power: the more *power-full* I feel in any particular gathering, the more *em-powered* I am to share from self. Development practitioner James Taylor asserts, "Finding and using one's voice is a very significant means of standing firmly in and using one's power." What contributes to sufficient comfort and confidence to find one's voice? We have found writing useful and use journals in home-week to help each of us find our own internal authority. Journals are more than note-books in which to record thoughts, observations and feelings. They are an opportunity to meet ourselves, to bring

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<sup>6</sup> Sue Soal (2004) *Holding Infinity: Guiding social process*. CDRA: Woodstock

<sup>7</sup> *Entering the Seven Meditative Spaces of Leadership: A conversation between Otto Scharmer & Master Nan Huai-Chin* (1999). See [www.dialogonleadership.org](http://www.dialogonleadership.org)

ourselves more fully to home-week, to be more consciously present. The purpose of journal writing is to keep ourselves in an ongoing relationship with whatever we are experiencing inside ourselves. We use journal writing to help us 'author' pieces of writing from the heart.

We have also found that the simple practice of giving time for everyone to think and then to share initial thoughts in pairs before making a contribution within the bigger group helps with both finding and using one's voice. The act of sharing itself is a useful practice too. It helps the speaker to clarify her thoughts and conveys to those listening an invitation to connect and contribute. The content of what is shared becomes significant in terms of what it triggers in both listener and speaker. Our response to what we hear indicates what is important to us and this in turn indicates a field of potential learning.

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#### **4. Understand the nature of authentic community and nurture its qualities:**

If, as we believe, relationships provide both the container and the spark for learning, then it becomes essential to understand the nature of authentic community and to nurture its qualities.

Pedler & Aspinwall<sup>8</sup> suggest that action learning is concerned with the learning which takes place between people, in other words, in relationship. To participate fully in our approach to collaborative learning we have to be in relationship with our self and with each other. Relationship with self is about a self awareness and an ability to go within. Relationship with others needs to extend beyond the functional to a deeper quality of connecting. Our approach to learning asks us to trust (self and other) enough to risk sharing our experiences honestly, to risk sounding out tentative ideas and insights, to risk thinking collaboratively. In this sense, it asks us to share not only what we do, but a little of who we are. The extent to which we are able to be vulnerable with each other and to support each other's vulnerability is a key characteristic of authentic community. In his book on creating true community, *The Different Drum* (1990) Scott Peck<sup>9</sup> suggests that all groups follow the same process in becoming a true community. The stages of this process include:

- Pseudo-community – *“The first response of a group in seeking to form community is to fake it.”* (p86)
- Chaos – *“Instead of trying to hide or ignore them [individual differences], the group is attempting to obliterate them.”* (p91)
- Emptiness – meaning to empty self of barriers to communication such as feelings, assumptions, expectations, prejudices, ideas and motives; and finally
- Community – where people speak and listen from the deepest parts of themselves, where silence is welcomed, where feelings are intense, where difference is respected and engaged with and where healing occurs.

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<sup>8</sup> Pedler & Aspinwall (1998) *A concise guide to the learning organisation*. Lemos & Crane: London

<sup>9</sup> M. Scott Peck (1990) *The Different Drum. The Creation of True Community – the First Step to World Peace*. Arrow Books: London

In their writing on building a learning-orientated organisational culture and deep change processes, Senge et al suggest “It’s really all about how a real sense of connectedness arises with one another and with the world”<sup>10</sup> (2004 p122).

It is easy to see the link between the state or stage of community and its more obvious potential for learning and change. As both individuals and the group itself become more autonomous, collaborative learning becomes more holistic and profound. However, this state of true community, this real sense of connectedness, is impossible to consistently maintain. A fundamental requirement of authentic community is a consciousness of and willingness to cycle through the stages. Each stage manifests in different time dimensions and can be experienced as fleeting or unwavering over months, within the course of a home-week, or even within a particular session.

Our home-weeks have a basic weekly pattern.<sup>11</sup> This rhythm can be seen as working with the impulses of community development, gently re-introducing us to each other at Monday’s breakfast and sharing session, working with and on our whole selves in the creative session, moving into reflective spaces on questions of practice, looking at strategic and business issues and ending with collaborative sense making and knowledge generation. We have, finally, come to see community development as an essential function of home-weeks. As we grapple with our own journey that is community, we are learning to pay greater attention in home-weeks to:

- Understanding personal and interpersonal power dynamics.
- Understanding our culture and patterns of communication.
- Improving the depth and quality of our conversations with each other – how we bring ourselves, our hearing and listening.
- Acknowledging and working with feelings – staying connected to what is going on inside of self and within others.
- Not shying away from difficult issues and questions.
- Giving both appreciative *and* critical feedback.
- Working with, rather than denying, our differences.

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5. **Move from reflecting on individual experience to include collaborative sense making:** Collegiality plays a large part in making sense of what we know, in making knowledge explicit and in checking for soundness.

Our learning approach moves from reflection on individual experience to collaborative sense making. This is based in part on a group facilitation principle of working from the known to the unknown, but also on the belief that relationship is central to research and learning as described above. In their paper on learning as a community of practitioners, Senge and Scharmer<sup>12</sup> emphasise the collaborative nature of research, calling it “collaborative knowledge creation” – with knowledge defined as theory, tools and practical know-how. The outcomes of such learning cannot be

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<sup>10</sup> Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers (2004) *Presence. Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*. SoL: Cambridge, MA

<sup>11</sup> Please refer to appendix two for a description of CDRA’s home-week’s process.

<sup>12</sup> Senge, P. & Scharmer, O. (2001) *Community Action Research: Learning as a Community of Practitioners, Consultants and Researchers* in Hand Book of Action Research edited by Reason & Bradbury (2006) SAGE: London

fully measured in terms of what each individual takes away with them, but by what is created together.

In CDRA we have increasingly turned our attention to surfacing that which is created together. We are putting more effort into making our learning (or at least some of it) explicit. We do this by dedicating the last day of home-week to collaborative sense making of all the week's findings – and call this session harvesting. Introduced mid 2007, harvesting represents three significant shifts in our practice: (i) from action learning to action research where findings or learning are checked for soundness within the group, (ii) from individual learning to collaborative learning where collegiality plays a large part in making sense of what we know, and (iii) from intuitive or implicit learning to *also* include explicit, identifiable learnings.

The process carried out in these harvesting sessions is simple, following a basic pattern. We begin with a creative exercise such as free writing or analogue drawing to help shift everyone into a reflective mode. We spend some time re-creating the week's programme in a round, and then quietly alone with our journals, reading and writing – time to reconnect with the week and what was important in it to us. Our journals are our primary material, providing us with raw data from the week. Working with this material we ask questions such as (i) what matters to me? (ii) what about these things catches my attention? and (iii) why are they significant to me? Each person identifies a theme or question from the week that they would like to pursue further. Working alone or in small groups, the task here is to look for insights, contradictions, challenges and implications for self and for CDRA. Questions which sometimes help us interrogate our learnings include:<sup>13</sup>

- Is it fresh: am I seeing the issue in a different light?
- Is it penetrating: does it go beyond surface or conventional wisdom?
- Is it inspiring? If so, what does it inspire in me?
- What assumptions am I making?
- What are the implications? (in other words, so what?)

We close the session with time to share 'findings' in plenary – dialogue style.

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## 6. **Experience development as creativity and learn holistically:** incorporate creative processes and art forms in your learning practice.

Our understanding of development is closely connected to our understanding of creativity and art as “an impulse that results in the emergence of the new.”<sup>14</sup> By practically engaging in the creative arts, whether it is dance, movement, painting, sculpting, writing, or making music, we tangibly experience working into the unknown. In the same way that an artist cannot predict the final outcome of her creative endeavour, we as development practitioners cannot pre-determine the results of our interventions, nor forecast all the features along the way. We know this. Yet working with different art forms helps us to really understand and internalise this knowing – to remember it in the face of clamouring demands to manage and deliver

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<sup>13</sup> From the *Making Sense of What we Know* workshop handout by Linda Price. November 2007

<sup>14</sup> James Taylor (2007) *Claiming our Place*, re-imagining purpose. Excerpts from a reflection on the CDRA Biennial Practice Conference. CDRA: Woodstock

according to plan. Using creative art forms helps us keep faith in our way of working and hones our ability to engage with open-ended processes.

There is the kind of knowing that comes from doing...whether it is riding a bicycle, burning your fingers or facilitating a group process. In John Heron's model of holistic learning, this is known as practical knowing and is grounded in experiential knowing. However, when you 'do' something creative, another kind of knowing kicks in. Somehow, somewhere we intuitively know the answer, or see a little further into our question. Heron calls the intuitive grasp of something presentational knowing, because it is often shared or presented in imagery. But before looking at how we use different art forms to share insights or present findings at CDRA, I want to concentrate on how these same art forms and creative processes help us reach insights in the first place.

Creative processes help us penetrate the dominance and limitations of ordered, linear left brain thinking (home of logic & the intellect) and into the colourful, chaotic world of the right brain (home of creativity & intuition). I remember one home-week's creative session, facilitated as always, by an artist. We were painting wet, vibrant colours onto wet, heavy art-paper. On one side of my page, I paint reds, oranges and yellows. On the other side, purples and blues. Two spectrums of colours moving closer and closer on the wet paper until they mingle – and in that simple interaction – a new colour is created, green. This will not surprise you, nor did it me. But what did surprise me was understanding that green is not the blasé mix of blue and yellow I thought it was – it is the mix of light, (with its spectrum of colours – reds, yellows and oranges) and dark, (with its own spectrum of colours – purples and blues). Colour exists because of a relationship between light and dark. Unlike Newton, who believed that all colour is contained in light, Goethe figured out that colour arises in the meeting of dark and light. Why is this important for development practitioners to understand? Because like colour, development does not happen at the poles but in the between spaces, in the places where contrasting impulses act on each other and reactions are transformative. In his telling of the story of Newton and Goethe's contention about colour and light, development practitioner Allan Kaplan<sup>15</sup> pointed out that in fact everything arises out of the meeting of polarity and that even polarity itself, is inseparable. Newtonian thinking is pervasive. It is evident in our tendency to see things as separate from each other and from our selves, a phenomenon Henri Bortoft<sup>16</sup> refers to as 'spectator awareness'. It is evident in our tendency to polarise, to see things as opposites. "In a polarity headspace, the relationship between differences becomes competitive, confrontational, aggressive even."<sup>17</sup> Working with colour, as we did that creative session, was one way of making the idea that everything arises out of the meeting of polarity, clearly visible to us.

The use of creative mediums to share insights is widespread and familiar to many. In CDRA, we for example, write and tell stories, work with visual or word images, draw maps and pictures, make body sculptures, use mime, drama and song to depict the essence of our learning or experience. Using creative processes and art forms to present one's findings has two primary benefits. It routes the information through the heart, not only the head, thereby helping us integrate and retain the knowledge. And it

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<sup>15</sup> From notes on a lecture by Allan Kaplan to the CDRA Fellowship Programme, September 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Bortoft, H. (1996) *The Wholeness of Nature*. Lindisfarne Press: New York

<sup>17</sup> Sandra Hill (March 2008) *A Comment on February 2008 Home-week* (CDRA: unpublished paper)

captures the attention of the audience – making it more likely that they too will engage with the message.

So, creative processes and art forms help us reach insights, to internalise them and to share them. There is another real benefit to including creativity in our learning process. Building community. Eurhythmy teacher Liz Smith<sup>18</sup> explains that creative exercises enable us to experience ourselves fully, as rational, non-rational, physical, emotional, and spiritual beings – a necessary, but oft overlooked precursor to bringing oneself into commune with others. When you are better connected to self, you are better able to connect with others.<sup>19</sup>

And lastly, creative art processes are fun. They allow us to meet and work together on a different footing and in a different climate. There are no experts, only novices. There is no deadline, only a sense of adventure. There is no product expectation, only affectionate curiosity.

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**7. Support collaborative learning with fitting leadership processes and forms:** Collaborative learning processes require leadership and are in themselves, an expression of leadership.

In CDRA we emphasise the idea of leadership rather than of leader. Leadership is viewed as an organisational function rather than as a position. Leadership takes effect in organisational processes and interaction between autonomous people – people who have the freedom and capacity to work out of their own, personal leadership. “This view of leadership has resulted in the organisation creating spaces and processes through which individuals bring themselves fully in a way that contributes to the development, growth and learning of the organisation – leadership roles and responsibilities are dispersed...”<sup>20</sup> Leadership in CDRA is exercised through the expression of individual will and through process.

Leadership is assumed through the expression of individual will through mandating.<sup>21</sup> Staff members develop a mandate for a particular area of work they have the will to take responsibility and accountability for. One such area of work is home-weeks. Here the mandate holder is supported by a small group including both practitioner and administrative staff. Working together, and in consultation with their colleagues, the group develops a long term, but lightly held plan for home-weeks. They are also responsible for the more detailed planning of each home-week. The politics of this planning dimension of home-weeks is co-operative where power and decision making are shared. Consultation on some decisions may be with all staff, or just with

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<sup>18</sup> Sandra Hill (September 2007) *The Biennial Practice Conference Process Inquiry Group Report* (CDRA: unpublished paper ). See also: Liz Smith (May 2007) *A phenomenological Approach to Exploring Space & Movement – Eurhythmy at the Biennial Practice Conference* (available on [www.cdra.org.za](http://www.cdra.org.za))

<sup>19</sup> See also Nomvula Dlamini (June 2008) *Facilitating the becoming of healthy community* (available on [www.cdra.org.za](http://www.cdra.org.za)) in which she discusses the importance of artistic processes and expression in becoming community.

<sup>20</sup> *Leadership Reflective Process – November home-week 2007: Insights & conclusions* by Nomvula Dlamini. CDRA unpublished paper

<sup>21</sup> For more information see *Developing mandate groups: a different approach to participative decision making* available on [www.cdra.org.za](http://www.cdra.org.za)



practitioners or within a smaller ad-hoc circle. Some decisions are taken by the mandate group and are more hierarchical in nature, for example the focus of the creative session or the introduction of a new learning or inquiry technique.

We operate in a more autonomous way during the implementation dimension of the home-week plan. Different people take responsibility for aspects of the programme and for how that aspect is implemented. For example, facilitating reflective reports, case study or harvesting sessions. The autonomous individual has the space to make their own decisions on how to facilitate their session, but may, from time to time subject their autonomy to that of the group's, consulting in-process on the way forward. Perhaps it is important to note here, the valuable in-house resource we have in our practitioners, all of whom are accomplished facilitators, and who bring this expertise to home-weeks.

In CDRA's home-weeks, leadership shifts then in two significant ways: Firstly it shifts between people. Secondly, leadership shifts, both forwards and backwards on the continuum from directive to non-directive, from hierarchical to autonomous. We have found that the kind of leadership we require is a non-linear blend of the three different modes of authority (hierarchical, co-operative & autonomous) artfully aligned, each time we meet, with the needs and mood of the group.

Leadership in CDRA as a whole is also expressed through process – and in particular, our organisational learning process. In other words, home-weeks have become an expression of leadership and organisational authority. Commenting on the standing of home-weeks and the changes in CDRA's leadership practice over the past 21 years, a practitioner commented: "We are no longer subject to an individual's authority but to a practice and an organisational authority." When we describe home-weeks as a process of "organisational connecting, strategising, action-learning, co-creating, managing, resource allocating, peer supervising, accounting, team building, record creating and practice developing"<sup>22</sup> – we are also describing how these various aspects of leadership are expressed and held in our process of organisational learning.<sup>23</sup> Internal learning is then not only the single most important feature of our practice, but also of our organisation.

### Future learning

It is our belief that these elements can coalesce in a multitude of ways, creating a variety of different learning opportunities and forums bearing little resemblance to the manifestation that currently works for us, as described in appendix two. It is our fervent hope that working with these elements will help you introduce, shape or renew your own organisational learning process, and that they will continue to serve us well in our own learning journey too. We invite you to help us further our inquiry into collaborative learning<sup>24</sup> by supporting, challenging or adding to our findings and would welcome hearing from you<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> *Towards 'better evaluation' – an account of one internal practice*: Key note address to the Australasian Evaluation Society Conference (September 2007, Melbourne) by Sue Soal, CDRA

<sup>23</sup> CDRA practitioner Rubert van Blerk, has embarked on an inquiry to further explore the inter-connection between leadership and learning processes and the organisational forms that support it. Watch our website for publication of his report in 2009.

<sup>24</sup> See appendix one for a brief description of the inquiry and its methodology.

<sup>25</sup> Please feel free to send your comments to [Sandra@cdra.org.za](mailto:Sandra@cdra.org.za)

## Appendix one:

### Methodology

This report is based on an inquiry into CDRA's home-weeks conducted during 2007 and 2008, using the following methodology:

#### **-Participant Observation<sup>26</sup>**

Participant Observation (PO) is perhaps this inquiry's closest methodological home. PO is considered good methodology for inquiring into relationships between people, between people and events, processes, patterns and organisation of people over time, from an insider's perspective. While other methods of gathering data are used in PO, Jorgenson<sup>27</sup> identifies "direct experience and observation as the mainstay of this methodology" (1989 p94). I participated in and observed all of 2007's home-weeks as a *member* of CDRA. Membership is important as it allowed me to gain access to and participate in the interior world of CDRA. Jorgenson stresses personal experience from direct participation in the insiders' world as a valuable source of information. It allows the researcher to "feel it from the standpoint of an insider" where emotions and feelings, so pivotal in their contribution to meaning, are otherwise difficult to investigate (1989 p93).

#### **-Co-operative inquiry**

This study has been influenced by John Heron's approach to action research called co-operative inquiry<sup>28</sup>. This approach is all about people with a shared interest in a topic researching it through their own experience of that topic, using a series of cycles in which they move between the 'experience' and reflecting on it. This approach has been used on two levels; (i) as a participant in CDRA's home-weeks and (ii) as a member of a collaborative action research group (CAR) on horizontal learning.

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<sup>26</sup> Spradley, James (1980) *Participant Observation*. Harcourt, Brace & Co: Florida

<sup>27</sup> Jorgensen, Danny (1989) *Participant Observation – A Methodology for Human Studies*. SAGE:California

<sup>28</sup> Heron, John. (1996) *Co-operative Inquiry – Research into the Human Condition*. SAGE: London

## Appendix two:

### Process description: an overview of CDRA's home-weeks

CDRA's internal collaborative learning process takes the form of something we call home-week. We meet together as an organisation for a whole week, almost every month. It is "a week long process of organisational connecting, strategising, action-learning, co-creating, managing, resource-allocating, peer-supervising, accounting, team building, record creating and practice developing."<sup>29</sup> The week's programme consists of a variety of meetings each aimed at performing an essential organisational function. Sometimes it's the whole staff that meets, sometimes just the practitioners.

Historically, home-weeks were introduced to provide a forum for practitioners to learn from each other, and more importantly, were a dedicated opportunity to learn from their own experience. Based on the belief that practice is best built through regular reflection on that practice, CDRA chose a monthly cycle – ensuring that action and reflection happen in steady rhythm. According to development practitioner Sue Soal, "rhythm is what makes learning an organisational practice in its own right" (ibid). Apart from a monthly rhythm, each week follows a standard process or rhythm:

*Mondays* start with a simple meal and time for sharing personal and professional 'news'. This is an essential part of home-week in which each member of the organisation can, in some small way, "connect their full, unique life to the experience of others, and to the organisation as a whole" (ibid). We wrap up the session with a quick look at the week's programme, and since August 2007, also make time here to read a short article on the previous home-week as a means of reconnecting with important themes or insights. The second session on Mondays is a creative one. Facilitated by an artist, we spend 1.5 – 2 hours, painting, sculpting, singing, playing instruments, or writing poetry. On occasion we walk in nature or visit an exhibition. Monday afternoons are dedicated to writing reflective reports. This usually involves practitioners only, but may also include core team members, depending on the topic under review.

*Tuesday* is dedicated to discussing the reflective reports and this takes the following form: each author presents the essence of her report in a sentence or two. Reports are grouped in some way which makes sense to the group. Each person then reads a 'group' of reports, noting what is most significant to them. Sometimes we look for a characterisation of the report, some times for values, some times for whatever strikes us. These comments are shared in a round within the whole group, before repeating the process with the next set of reports. Soal notes, "the processes are characterised largely by an absence of problem solving or advice giving. Rather our task is to focus on listening and observing. The task of the speaker (*author*) is to focus on truthfully and accurately presenting their account of themselves. Between the two task orientations, there emerges astonishing moments of honesty, clarity and resolve" (ibid).

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<sup>29</sup> *Towards "better evaluation" – an account of one internal practice*: Key note address to the Australasian Evaluation Society Conference (September 2007, Melbourne) by Sue Soal, CDRA (available on [www.cdra.org.za](http://www.cdra.org.za))

*Wednesdays* may be used for case studies or peer review of papers, where one or two practitioners bring a paper or a case from the field for the whole team to work on. It may be used for a workshop on, for example, power and leadership, shadow work, or culture. *Wednesdays* may be used in part for a meeting of our book club where practitioners share readings that have impacted them. It may be used for teams to get together to work on a course or programme, or it may be used for individual supervision sessions.

*Thursdays* are generally a business day. Our centre business meeting, attended by all staff, focuses on the management of programmes, sharing of information, including financial and internal matters. Allocation meetings are the place where “practitioners manage and respond to all the requests, queries, networking contacts and invitations that have come to us in the month before and responsibility for following up or responding is allocated to individuals” (ibid).

*Friday* mornings are used to wrap up outstanding conversations and for harvesting. It is the space where learning and insight from the week is harvested. This is a relatively new innovation, introduced mid 2007. It represents three significant shifts in our internal practice: (i) from action learning to action research where ‘findings’ or learnings are checked for soundness within the group, (ii) from individual learning to collaborative learning where collegiality plays a large part in making sense of what we know, and (iii) from intuitive or implicit learning to *also* include explicit, identifiable learnings.

This weekly rhythm within the monthly rhythm is also relatively new and we are still experimenting with a balance between long term planning of home-weeks and leaving space to work with whatever emerges during any given month. In its various forms, rhythm, along with dedicated space (time), a champion, an approach to learning and the value of collegiality form the five characteristic features of our internal learning<sup>30</sup>.

Visit [www.cdra.org.za](http://www.cdra.org.za) for the following CDRA articles on learning:

1. Towards better evaluation – an account of one internal practice by Sue Soal 2007
2. Monitoring and evaluation in learning organisations Annual Report 2005/2006
3. Real Learning Requires Attitude by James Taylor 2006
4. Experiencing freedom’s possibilities: horizontal learning in CDRA’s home-weeks by Doug Reeler 2005
5. Who asked you anyway? Some feedback on feedback by Sue Soal 2004
6. Making the learning organisation literal by Sue Soal 2001
7. Exploring organisational culture by Sue Soal 2000
8. NGOs as Learning Organisations by James Taylor 1998

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<sup>30</sup> For detail on these characteristics, see *Towards better evaluation – an account of one internal practice*: (2007) by Sue Soal, available on [www.cdra.org.za](http://www.cdra.org.za).