

The Role of Organisational Fit in Determining Performance: A Case Study Analysis of Heritage Visitor Attractions

by
Antony Richard Ward Nankervis
M. Bus. [Tourism Development] Vic. Melb.

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School of Hospitality, Tourism, and Marketing.
Faculty of Business and Law
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It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers'

James Thurber

US author, cartoonist, humorist, and satirist [1894 – 1961]

Dedication

Works of any substance are not produced without the encouragement of people who offer support and make personal sacrifices to see the task completed. In this respect I am eternally indebted to my darling wife Maria who has been a fellow traveller, medic, counsellor, and motivation coach. Without your strength of character, tolerance, and pure love, all this would not have been possible. I draw much of my strength from you and share my achievements with you.

Love conquers all things.

Declaration

I, Antony Richard Ward Nankervis, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *The Role of Organisational Fit in Determining Performance: A Case Study Analysis of Heritage Visitor Attractions* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, the thesis is my own work.

Signature

Date

Abstract

Attractions are both an essential element of the tourism product, and an important catalyst for economic activity, particularly in regional locations. The ability of competing tourist destinations to differentiate their tourism product by emphasising the distinctive nature of attractions within their domain, is central to tourism marketing, and thereby to viable tourism industry. Ensuring their sustainable operation is an important priority.

Like most organisations however, attractions are subject to a range of internal and external influences that impact on their ability to operate effectively. The ability to successfully respond to constant and pervasive change presents a significant challenge for this important sector of the tourism industry. Despite their importance however, the specific elements of change confronting the attraction sector, or the means by which they adapt to such shifts, are not well understood and this thesis seeks to help address this gap.

Drawing on the perceptions and opinions of key stakeholders in two regional heritage visitor attractions, the research seeks to identify structural and strategic responses to change. Aggregation of the data points to significant commonality between the two case studies, in terms of perceived success factors and impediments to the process of adaptation.

The research juxtaposes broader theory of organisational adaptation or organisational fit with the findings of the study. In addition it considers the relative importance of strategy and structure in the adaptive process contributing to the ongoing discourse in the management literature. The nexus between operational autonomy and funding reliance emerges as a significant factor given that this appears to be a defining determinant of strategic orientation, and of structural capacity. In particular the ability to reconcile the curatorial priorities inherent in the operation of a heritage based attraction, with financial imperatives, is identified as a critical success factor.

The relevance of broader management theory in this particular operational context is considered, and a conceptual framework is advanced which suggests a set of attraction centric priorities. The thesis concludes by articulating a set of research priorities which address shortcomings in the extant literature.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

Although attractions are a central component of destination appeal (Swarbrooke 2002), research devoted to their operation appears to lack conceptual depth due, in large part, to difficulties associated with arriving at a workable means of classification (Pearce 1991: Inskeep 1991: Swarbrooke 2002). As such, there appears to be little understanding of the range of operational challenges confronting the management of these facilities. More particularly, given the diversity of attraction types, any degree of commonality seems unlikely, rendering the identification of a generic set of issues problematic.

If indeed there is any factor common to attractions of all types it is the reality of a volatile operating environment to which they must adapt if they are to succeed. As such, the identification of key environmental factors, and the articulation of possible alignment mechanisms, would make a significant contribution to an understanding of the adaptive process; and assist practitioners in building the capacity required to respond effectively.

Although the strategic management of change has received little attention in the attraction literature, a broader body of research has examined the adaptive process in detail. Amongst the seminal work in this field, Miles and Snow (1978:1984) ascribe the term 'organisational fit' to this process, contending that "Organisations of different types can be successful, provided that their particular configuration of strategy structure and process is internally and externally consistent" (p.125).

This research fills a perceived gap in the tourism literature by juxtaposing broader theories of fit (Miles and Snow 1978:1984) with the findings of the study. By examining the strategic, structural and process factors that facilitate or impede effective adaption to change in the particular context of attractions, the study provides new insights into their management. Further it suggests representative measures which, hypothetically at least, constitute a prescriptive approach to particular aspects of change management.

Given the difficulties associated with arriving at a representative view across the diverse spectrum of attraction types, the study focuses in particular on small heritage based attractions. It will be argued that unlike their more commercial counterparts,

they are characteristically confronted with more complex management challenges (Garrod Fyall and Leask 2002), including attempting to reconcile commercial orientation with curatorial imperatives. Although it will be conceded that the findings can not necessarily be generalised across other attraction types, or, more particularly, other heritage based attractions, they provide a valuable basis for on-going research.

1.2 Aims, Scope, and Limitations

The overarching aim of the research was to examine how the strategic orientation, structural capacity, and processes of the attractions in focus, impact on their respective ability to adapt to changes in the external environment. Additionally, the study seeks to evaluate the extent to which these factors contribute to successful operation. By so doing, the findings will contribute both to a better understanding of the operational particularities of this type of attraction, and to a more holistic view of organisational adaption in general. Specifically the aims of the research are articulated as follows:

1. To ascertain the perspectives of key stakeholders as they relate to key catalysts and impediments to successful operation in heritage attractions
2. To investigate the extent to which the strategic and structural actualities of operation in heritage attractions match key theoretical perspectives of the 'ideal' organisation as postulated in broader management theory.
3. To evaluate the extent to which heritage attractions successfully adapt to environmental change

Although it was originally the intent of the researcher to take a more expansive approach by including a number of case studies, logistic problems, and the inaccessibility of suitable research subjects saw the study ultimately condensed to two sites. By intent therefore the research confined its discovery to two heritage based visitor attractions in regional Victoria. Apart from broad synergies in terms of an overall heritage theme, the case studies in question are in distinctly different operational circumstances, and depict quite particular aspects of the historical *mélange*. Sovereign Hill, in rural Ballarat, focuses on life on the Victorian Goldfields in the decade from 1850, whereas the Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum depicts the broader aspects of 'pioneer' life over almost a century from 1830. There were differences too, in terms of ownership, overall strategic orientatation, and operational capacity. Although not directly instrumental in the choice of these two case studies, such differences provided some interesting contrasts.

The research focuses on stakeholder perceptions of events and circumstances both from a retrospective and prognostic point of view. As such, the outcomes reflect the views of individuals with varying degrees and currency of involvement, and presumably with opinions based on a variety of agenda. Although a more expansive study may have broadened the outcomes, aggregation of the data revealed some distinct commonalities between the two case studies in terms of respondent perspectives strengthening the researcher's belief that the views expressed have greater currency.

The research was subject to some limitations insofar as many individuals, who were identified as having significant involvement with the respective attractions over time, were not accessible or were unwilling to participate in the study. Further, despite respondent anonymity, the sometimes sensitive nature of the material resulted in a reluctance to share full and frank views on critical issues.

From a purely logistic perspective the scheduling of interviews within a workable time frame was complicated by the significant distances between the two case studies necessitating numerous visits to complete the study. As a result the gap between early interviews and final aggregation of the data was longer than the researcher would have wished. In order to ensure currency it was necessary to repeat several of the interviews increasing the overall workload.

Finally the highly political nature of some issues placed greater demands on the researcher in terms of maintaining an objective stance. Although it was recognised that there would inevitably be partisan affiliations eliciting more personal views was sometimes problematic.

1.3 Importance of the research topic

The importance of heritage based attractions as a tourism resource (McKercher, 2001; Carter and Bramley, 2002) suggests that their on-going viability can be potentially critical to regional economies. The way in which they are constituted and managed, is, therefore, of vital importance. The management of change in particular seems central to continued survival, yet apart from a handful of articles (see for example Fyall and Leask 2002), little attention appears to have been paid their strategic management, particularly as it relates to the way in which they adapt to change.

Issues of public funding are also becoming an increasingly contentious issue, with the ideology of 'user pays' impacting on many attractions of this type. Since the two case studies under examination have one fundamental difference in that Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement is under direct Government control, and Sovereign Hill is an independent organisation, the whole issue of ownership and funding emerges as a critical factor in survival. Consideration needs to be given to a range of alternative funding models if the future of such attractions is to be ensured. The research makes an important contribution to an understanding of the ramifications of this issue. In particular, it affords a much more comprehensive view of the implications than has previously been available.

The research is also important in the context of broader management theory in two ways. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, it examines theories of organisational adaption and fit in hitherto unexplored operational contexts, providing a range of new perspectives. Secondly, it questions traditional perspectives of the strategy structure nexus and of the dimensions of fit by bringing these into a distinctly attraction centric context. This is viewed as being particularly important, given that it contributes to both 'mainstream' management theory, and to the management of a vitally important tourism sub-sector.

In summary, the intrinsic value of the research lies first in attempting to elicit the views of key stakeholders as to the issues which they view as being instrumental in successful adaption to change, and the perceived impediments to the process. This provides a foundation for an attraction centric model of strategic management. Secondly, the research contributes to the broader literature of strategic management and organisational adaption. In this way, the research makes both a practical and theoretical contribution.

1.4 Specific research issues

Chapter 3 compares and contrasts a range of theories with respect to the constitution of what was termed the 'ideal' organisation (Miles and Snow 1978, Mintzberg 1979:1983, Porter 1980). Although differing in their perspectives, an implicit element of all three studies is that the existence of appropriate structures and/or strategies renders an organisation more likely to remain aligned with its operating environment.

Miles and Snow (1978) take what is viewed as the more comprehensive approach in suggesting that the hallmark of a 'successful organisation' is the achievement of

alignment between strategy, structure, and internal processes. Further, and perhaps more importantly, they suggest that these organisational elements need to be both consistent with the internal characteristics of the organisation, and with the environment in which they operate. Such a process they termed strategic or organisational 'fit'.

Even though it will be suggested that Miles and Snow's theory enjoys broad acceptance in the annals of management research, the fact that their study was largely conducted in the context of industrial organisations, but appears to have attracted limited attention in other organisational forms or types, presents a clear opportunity for theoretical extension. Whether their conclusions can be extended to other types of organisations however, raises fundamental questions as to the relevance of such broader management theories to organisations with distinctly different missions and orientations.

Given earlier comments with respect to the complexity of the attraction sector, and the volatility of its operating environment, evaluating the applicability and utility of Miles and Snow's theory to this vital tourism sub-sector would appear to have significant potential. In pursuit of such an objective the research problem is articulated as follows:

To what extent does organisational fit contribute to the successful operation of visitor attractions?

Arriving at any supportable conclusion is, however, viewed as being potentially problematic, given the paucity of research into the strategic management of attractions. Adequately addressing the research problem requires a more detailed understanding of the dynamics of attraction management, particularly as they relate to the relative importance of strategy, structure, and process, and of the factors that impede an attraction's ability to achieve internal and external fit. In attempting to achieve such an understanding, the findings of the research are ultimately to be interrogated on the basis of four specific research questions, namely:

Research Question #1

What are the key performance variables that determine degrees of organisational fit in heritage visitor attractions?

Since it will later be contended that the management of attractions is inherently complex, and, thereby characteristically different than management in other organisational contexts, achieving a comprehensive understanding of the determinants of 'fit' in this particular context, is a fundamental requirement. Following Miles and Snow's framework (1978:1984), elements of strategy, structure, and process are explored in detail, with particular emphasis on their relative contribution to the achievement of fit. For example, what strategic orientations, structural forms, or internal processes foster a capacity to adapt to change? Combining researcher observation with an interview process directed at eliciting the views of key stakeholders, this particular question seeks to establish a framework of performance variables upon which the remaining questions may be considered.

Research Question #2

What are the main impediments to the achievement of organisational fit in heritage visitor attractions?

Just as an understanding of key performance variables underpins a conceptual understanding of fit in this particular context, an appreciation of those factors, both internal and external, that impede or retard the process is equally important. The fundamental premise that both the inclination and capacity to engage in proactive management is impacted by a range of factors beyond management control, suggests that the identification of these impediments is of profound importance. The significance of this moderating force is further supported by the data with a number of recurring operational barriers emerging from the research. As such, strategic and structural action may be as much about overcoming these barriers as consciously adopting a proactive stance.

A critical distinction needs to be made, however, between externalities in the broader sense, and those that directly constrain strategic action and the structural capacity needed to support it. Further, the research questions the relative importance of both external and internal impediments to the attainment of fit.

Research Question #3

In the context of heritage visitor attractions what respective roles do strategy, structure, and process play in higher levels of organisational fit and organisational performance?

This question addresses a central element of the research in that it offers the researcher the opportunity to identify the most important elements of management in this particular operational context. Although a fundamental tenet of theories of organisational fit is that these three elements must be internally and externally consistent, according each particular values or attributes in terms of their contribution to fit, offers what the researcher views as a more holistic view of key success factors. It also provides some insight into the fourth and final question in that it may elevate one or other of these factors to a position of eminence.

Being largely ignored in the literature of attraction research, the role of strategy in particular is a much needed area of focus. Little is understood of the efficacy of various strategic approaches, nor the value of proactivity versus tactical response. Anecdotally at least, operations in the attraction sector have traditionally been characterised by a largely reactive or remedial approach to strategy. Identifying and validating particular strategic approaches that attempt to 'shape' the operating environment, rather than merely responding to changes, has significant explanatory value. In addition it should point matches or mismatches between strategy and structure which may begin to define a model of best approaches. Such an outcome may also further validate one of Miles and Snow's (1978:1984) basic contentions, namely that successful strategy must be supported by appropriate structures and processes.

Research Question #4

In the context of heritage visitor attractions does strategy appear to dictate structure, or is the reverse proposition evident?

Almost as an extension of question three, this question makes a definitive attempt to establish a causal relationship between these two elements of management.

Although Miles and Snow (1978:1984) subscribe to the view that strategy dictates structure, the fact that their research was conducted largely in the context of industrial organisations questions whether the same can be applied to visitor attractions. For example, the distinctive operational nuances of heritage attractions might entrench equally distinctive structural forms that dictate or constrain strategy.

This begs the question as to whether the value laden nature of heritage conservation and presentation mandates certain structural forms which are inherently inflexible.

Under these circumstances, the formation and implementation of strategy may be correspondingly select.

Addressing the antithetical proposition, the research also questions the extent to which degrees of diversification might be characteristically restrained, given that heritage attractions operate within the constraints of themes which, by their very nature, defy major modification. This raises issues of the extent to which major structural changes are required in order to support strategies which do not fall within commonly accepted precepts of diversification.

Notwithstanding the complexities of this debate, arriving at a more detailed understanding of the nexus between strategy and structure in this particular organisational context, has the potential to enhance management effectiveness by framing appropriate strategic or structural responses to changing sets of circumstances. Were both propositions to be valid, depending on the particularities of the situation, it would challenge theories of fit at least in the case of heritage visitor attractions.

1.5 Research approach and method

Given the declared paucity of research in the area, little is understood of the dynamics of management in heritage based attractions, particularly as it relates to the way in which attractions of this type adapt to change and maintain some degree of fit with their operating environment. There being no 'reality' as such, the research was driven to discover the nuances of management practice in this sector. Recognising that site management and operative staff are valuable repositories of knowledge as to key operational issues, accessing a sample of individuals with the requisite knowledge and experience became the initial objective

Although the research is confined to just two case studies, the identification of appropriate respondents was problematic, given the researcher's initial lack of familiarity with the sites in question. As such, a 'snowballing' technique was considered the most effective means of obtaining access to key individuals. The resultant sample ultimately presented the researcher with a suitably eclectic mix of past and present employees and management plus a number of external stakeholders with valuable perspectives.

By means of a series of open interviews, the research sought to elicit the views of these individuals on a range of issues related to the process of change, principally with regard to the effectiveness of various management approaches, and the perceived impediments to their successful implementation. Chapter 4 provides a detailed explanation of the process of analysis and interpretation which yielded a number of significant outcomes. By means of a progressively intensive process of

manual coding, a number of recurring issues became apparent and these were used to guide the development of a conceptual framework.

Initially the intention was to conduct a comparative study of the two cases in focus, but despite significant differences between the two case studies in terms of structural and operational characteristics, aggregation of the data revealed significant synergies between the two on a range of issues. As a result the decision was made to reflect on the findings in a collective sense.

Finally, the research questions generated in chapter 3 were considered in the context of the findings [ch.7] fulfilling a declared objective of the work, which was to juxtapose broader theories of fit with the actualities emerging from the research. Although the researcher acknowledges that the outcomes could not be realistically applied to attractions in general, or even to other attractions of this type, the approach and method adopted yielded some valuable insights. A more detailed exposition of the research approach and method is provided in chapter 4

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis consists of eight chapters including two devoted to a detailed examination of two discrete bodies of literature. The following is a synoptic view of the contents.

Chapter 1 [this chapter],

Chapter 1 begins by providing a brief introduction to the background of the research, its aims scope and limitations, and its importance to both the management of attractions, and to the management of organisational change in the broader sense. The chapter also outlines a number of specific research issues, which formed the basis of the enquiry, and continues by detailing the research approach and method adopted. The chapter concludes by providing a synoptic view of the thesis

Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 begins by pointing to difficulties associated with defining attractions, and refers to various taxonomic approaches in the literature. The history and evolution of attractions are explored, providing some further insights into the complexity of the sector. The focus then turns to the environment within which attractions of all types operate both at general and specific levels. On the basis of a PEST analysis the chapter explores elements of change in the Political, Economic, Social, and Technological environments, and the broad impacts on attractions as organisational

entities. The importance of attractions to the overall tourism system is emphasised, and a set of management imperatives advanced.

Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 opens by exploring both traditional and contemporary literature as it relates to the roles and functions of management, with particular emphasis on the planning function in managing change. It proceeds to outline theories of organisation 'fit' as espoused by Miles and Snow (1978:1984) which proffer higher performance for organisations whose strategies, structures, and processes are internally and externally consistent. The chapter concludes by considering the efficacy of such theories to attractions, and articulates a research problem, and four research questions, arising from the literature review in this and the preceding chapter.

Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 opens by restating difficulties associated with classifying attractions, and the subsequent inability to arrive at a generic style of management. As a priority, the chapter considers a suitable research context, advancing heritage based attractions as displaying a number of characteristics which accentuate management challenge. Two case studies were selected as the basis for the study.

On-going sections of the chapter explore various research approaches as a means of selecting a methodology, and outline the precise method by which the research was to be conducted. Given the declared paucity of research in this particular aspect of attraction management, the importance of selecting a research paradigm with sufficient subtlety to elicit in depth views was emphasised.

Chapter 5.

Having selected heritage based attractions as a general research context and two specific case studies in particular, Chapter 5 provides a detailed overview of the two case studies, providing the reader with an understanding of their location, origins, and organisational characteristics. A brief rationale for their selection is provided and a set of observations and preliminary findings are advanced for each of the case studies. Based on this preliminary analysis the chapter reveals a set of key issues common to both sites and offers a justification for aggregation of the data.

Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 progresses the analysis of the data by bringing the issues raised in Chapter 5 into the particular dimensions of strategy and structure, which form the basis of the parent theory of fit outlined in Chapter 3. Making extensive use of supporting extracts from the research discourse, the chapter progressively assembles a conceptual framework, as a means of articulating a set of critical success factors in the attainment of fit.

Chapter 7.

Chapter 7 synthesises the research outcomes outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 with the research problem and questions outlined in Chapter 3, and offers a set of definitive conclusions drawn from the data. The Chapter concludes by addressing the research problem in particular from both an internal and external perspective.

Chapter 8.

Chapter 8 brings the thesis to a conclusion by considering the implications of the research to theories of organisational fit generally, and to the management of heritage based visitor attractions specifically. The chapter also reflects on the research methodology and its perceived suitability to attraction research. A conclusion is reached by advancing a number of opportunities for future research

Limitations & Future Directions

Although it is acknowledged that, in an overall sense, the limitations imposed by confining the research to two cases studies may negate any opportunity to apply the findings to a broader spectrum of attractions, chapters 5 and 6 point to significant commonality between the two sites, despite completely dichotomous operational circumstances. The researcher is also cognisant of the constraints resulting from empanelling research subjects with strong individual and collective agenda particularly in contentious situations.

Chapter 8 emphasises the need for broader research in a number of areas emerging from the findings. Since little appears to be known of the way in which attractions generally, and heritage attractions in particular, respond to change, attempts to validate all or part of the conceptual framework represents worthwhile directions.

Amongst the more important issues identified in the research are those of operational and funding independence, and the ability to reconcile curatorial priorities with revenue imperatives.

2.0 Visitor Attractions

2.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of the attraction sector, its characteristics and operational nuances. To that end it:

- Compares and contrasts various taxonomic approaches to classifying attractions
- Offers a synopsis of the evolution of attractions
- Describes the complex operating environment within which attractions operate
- Outlines the importance of attractions both to tourism and to the broader economic and social environment
- Advances a number of management imperatives in the operation of attractions

In so doing the discussion attempts to explain the nature and operational challenges of the modern attraction as a means of conceptualising synergies between broader management theory [as outlined in chapter 3] and attraction centric needs. In short the extent to which management theory in general can be satisfactorily applied to attractions requires a definitive understanding of the particularities of their background and management.

2.2 Attractions defined

Any study of attractions seems predicated on an ability to define the term. If by its broadest interpretation the term attraction could be taken to mean anything that attracts visitors, the problematic nature of any effective means of classification becomes obvious. It is of note that one of the few formal studies of tourist attractions ever conducted in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1990), concedes that “it is difficult to clearly define a ‘tourist attraction’” but that it may be generally construed as “a place or feature of interest to visitors” (p.32). Adopting a similarly broad perspective Lew’s observation that “tourist attractions consist of all those elements of a ‘non home’ place that draw discretionary travellers away from their homes” (1994, p.291), points to the complexity of this sector of tourism.

Pearce (1991, p.46) suggests that a tourist attraction is “a named site with a specific human or natural feature which is the focus of visitor and management attention”. Although certainly not exclusive, the fact that such a definition implies conscious

definition and management, and recognises both human and natural features as central elements of an attraction offers a more eclectic perspective. Although this contributes to a better understanding of attractions in a general sense, the absence of any universally accepted taxonomy renders research in the area problematic.

Given that the operational and environmental nuances of various types of attractions will differ, principally because of the dynamic nature of operating environments, strategic and organisational responses, arriving at some means of differentiation is vital. More importantly, considering whether any one attraction type is sufficiently differentiated to provide a workable research context underpins the direction of this research. Since, by their very nature, taxonomies differentiate by one or more specific characteristics an examination of various approaches and perspectives constitutes an essential starting point

By so doing, the contribution of this research is that it addresses a perceived gap in the literature with respect to the organisational characteristics of attractions which, according to Benckendoff and Pearce (2003) have received very little attention in academic tourism research.

Attempts to arrive at a workable taxonomy appear divided between the early work of MacCannell (1976) who analysed the semiotic or meaning of attractions; Leiper (1990), who essentially adopted a systems approach; and a number of later authors (see for example Inskip, 1991; Gunn, 1994; Wall 1997) who advanced a range of more specific approaches to a classification system. There had, however, been much earlier attempts at collectively examining taxonomic systems. In an early but valuable examination of research methods used in the study of tourist attractions, Lew (1987) synthesised the work of earlier authors (Ferrario, 1976; Ritchie and Zinns, 1978; Gunn 1994 et al) such that by the early 1990s, a number of broad conceptual frameworks were available to researchers.

Declaring “tourist attraction research [to be] in its early stages” Benckendoff and Pearce (2003, p.24) point to what they view as the main research in the area of definition and classification of attractions including that of Leiper (1990: 1997), Pearce (1991) and Lew (1987).

In what is considered by many to be the seminal offering in the field, MacCannell (1976, p.41) defines a tourist attraction as “an empirical relationship between a tourist,

a sight [the attraction itself], and a marker [a piece of information about the site]". Leiper (1990, p.370) observes however, that MacCannell's definition differs from conventional thinking in that it defines an attraction as "having three components whereas convention regards just one of those components (a site or some other phenomena) as constituting the attraction".

Preferring to view attractions as a 'system' which can be conceptually integrated within systemic models for the total tourism-related phenomenon", Leiper (1990, p.371) suggests that attractions are simply a subsystem of tourism as a whole. Such a contention is intuitively sensible given tourism's previously stated reliance on attractions and the attraction sector's reliance on supporting tourism infrastructure.

As alluded to earlier, amongst the more comprehensive studies of categorisation approaches is that of Lew (1987:1984) who synthesised the work of a number of earlier authors (Ferrario, 1976; Ritchie and Zinns, 1978; Gunn 1994 et al) and advanced a "three sided framework for categorising phenomena associated with tourist attractions" (Leiper 1990, p.368).

In summarising his findings Lew (ibid) declared "research on tourist attractions has been undertaken from one of more broad perspectives: the ideographic definition and description of attraction types, the organization and development of attractions, and the cognitive perception and experience of tourist attractions by different groups" (p.292).

Although there are some broad synergies between Lew's articulation of the organisational perspective and the focus of this work [mainly as they relate to scale, capacity and the way in which attractions integrate with the broader environment], Leiper (p.368) observes that these are "geographical notions not managerial notions of organisation". Similarly there are some useful parallels between the cognitive approach and the focus of this research, given the discussion later in this chapter with regard to attraction demand and visitor satisfaction, yet other than in a broad sense this approach lacks relevance to the work at hand.

Nominating the ideographic approach as the "most frequent form of attraction typology" (p.293), Lew observes that "the most basic distinction is "that between attractions which are nature-oriented and those with a human orientation" (p.293). Kelly and Nankervis (2001, p.42) observe, that "many attractions do not fit comfortably

into a single category and may be more realistically located in two dimensions – natural to artificial with respect to the extent of human intervention, and touristic to non-touristic with respect to the extent to which they are managed as tourist attractions”.

Conceding that there are some limitations to ideographic categorisation in isolation, Lew (p.556) suggests that “[attempts] to incorporate organizational or cognitive perspectives [into a more comprehensive view] render ideographic typologies more abstract”. Although, as Lew (1987, p.557) observes, there have been attempts to develop comprehensive typologies “The diversity of [these] classification schemes indicates a somewhat arbitrary methodology”.

Despite the depth of Lew’s examination, and the support his perspectives enjoy in following literature, it is held that the ideographic approach, however, fails to recognise a number of other organisational characteristics by which attractions might be classified.

For example Gunn (1994), amongst other approaches, advanced a classificatory schema based on ownership. Dividing attractions between those under the control of government; those run by nonprofit organisations; and commercial enterprises run by various elements of the business sector, the suggestion implicit in this approach may be varying degrees of profit orientation. Further, as has been suggested earlier, individual organisations differ markedly with respect to their size, organisational complexity, and the particularities of their specific environment.

On this basis it becomes possible to conceptualise a number of variables which, considered in combination may distinguish one attraction type from another. Since this work is directed at identifying critical success factors in the operation of attractions identifying those confronted by particular challenges has the potential to offer a contextually richer field of enquiry. Table 2.1 provides what the researcher regards as a more comprehensive view of these factors.

Broad Classification Lew (1987)	Nature Oriented	—————→	Human Oriented
Human Intervention	Natural	—————→	Artificial
Conscious Management	Non-Touristic	—————→	Touristic
Ownership Gunn (1994)	Public	—————→	Business
Profit Orientation Leask, Fyall & Garrod (2002)	Low	—————→	High
Organisational Complexity	Low	—————→	High
Environmental Turbulence	Medium	—————→	High

Table. 2.1 Hypothetical Typology. Attractions/Organisational Particularities

Assigning relative degrees of importance of these factors to individual attraction types is, however, somewhat more problematic being based more on intuitive logic than scientific reasoning. As has already been emphasised, the sheer diversity of attraction types renders such a process unscientific.

It is also conceded that there are some contradictions inherent in this process. For example, to conclude that ‘touristic’ attractions with highly elevated management focus would characteristically be solely driven by the profit imperative is to ignore attractions where conscious management has other implications. Purposeful management of attractions such as national parks, or heritage sites are cases in point, with conservation and protection equally important [and sometimes conflicting] objectives.

Further, the notion that various types of attractions can conveniently or intuitively be deemed to fall at various positions on the various continua is flawed given that attractions of most types may apply different emphases over time in response to environmental change. For example, degrees of public and private ownership, profit orientation, and structure [degrees of organisational complexity] are not static positions. Such ‘problems’ of allocation are also exacerbated by widely differing perspectives as to the elements of various ideographic types and the potential for over reliance on the ideographic approach.

Notwithstanding the diversity of these perspectives and the improbability of any consensus as to the best approach the fact that this research is to be conducted in the context of what are essentially commercial organisations suggests that subscription to a taxonomy based on the organisation and development of attractions presents the most appropriate approach (Lew 1987:1994). That this may be, in turn reflective of ownership (Gunn 1994), and of profit orientation (Leask Fyall and Garrod 2002) begins to distil the research focus. For example, the possibility of comparing attraction types of differing ownership and organisation mission; and with varying degrees of profit orientation points to some potentially valuable lines of comparison.

Apart from the research at hand, however, an understanding of the diversity of attraction types is perhaps best achieved by examining the evolution of attractions particularly as they reflect changing recreational preferences over almost two thousand years. The later observation that the proliferation of purpose built attractions is a relatively modern phenomenon (Swarbrooke 2002) supports the contemporary focus of the work

2.3 The history and evolution of attractions

Given later observations with respect to the co reliance between attractions and tourism, any examination of the evolution of attractions themselves seems inextricably tied to the way in which various forms of human recreation have evolved over time. More importantly, an understanding of attraction choice at various stages of the evolutionary process does much to explain the diverse range of objects and entities considered part of the modern 'inventory' of attractions. It is also illustrative of the link between the changing motivations and priorities of 'tourists' and the type of activity/attraction chosen.

Conceding that "no one really knows which were the first attractions in the world", Swarbrooke (2002, p.19) places the possible origins in the Greek and Roman civilisations which collectively range from as early as 146BC to the fourth century. Driven by architectural and artistic interest they are perhaps the earliest example of travel for pleasure. Visits to sites such as the Pyramids of Egypt which were constructed almost three thousand years before the birth of Christ were typical of the sites visited. That these remain a significant tourist attraction in the twenty first century is evidence of the enduring appeal of certain types of attractions. Early Roman travelers added yet another dimension by demonstrating an appeal for water based

activities such as spas and other water features. Interestingly as we enter the twenty first century a renewal of demand for attractions with restorative qualities is worthy of note

It was, as Swarbrooke (2002, p.18) goes on to observe, these tourism incidental features that constitute the earliest examples of attractions. Those attractions built specifically for tourism are, conversely, a relatively modern phenomenon. For example, amongst the earliest amusement parks, Coney Island in New York did not open until the late nineteenth century (Richardson 1999) beginning a trend that would see the capitalisation of US based amusement parks exceeding US\$100 million by as early as 1907 (Nye 1981). Although one could draw an analogy between the pleasure seeking motivations of the 'tourists' of ancient times and the visitors who flocked to early amusement parks, the evolution was in fact somewhat more complex reflecting increasingly complex tastes. In examining the evolutionary process it is also worth observing that attractions and attraction choice were broadly reflective of the social mores and environmental conditions of the period in which they dominated.

The same mix of hedonism and curiosity was, however, not representative of the next major spurt in attraction visitation that was to follow the Greeks and the Romans. In what Swarbrooke (2002) suggests is arguably the first example of mass tourism, the four centuries that were to follow the end of the Dark Ages [AD1000 – AD1400] saw an emerging interest in sites of religious significance, a trend that was to continue for almost the entire medieval period. "By the mid thirteenth century vast numbers of people were on the roads to share the benefits of pilgrimage" (Feifer 1985, p.29). In the ensuing two hundred years "pilgrimage became a mass phenomenon served by a growing industry of hospices and the provision of handbooks" (ibid). Interestingly, this represents what may very well be the first example of the conscious provision of services ancillary to the attraction itself. As such, it is viewed as being something of a watershed in the evolution of attractions.

Unlike the quite specific 'attraction' choice that characterised the pilgrimage period, the Renaissance period that followed brought with it a new interest in the world. As Feifer (1985, p.64) observes, "All kinds of people became tourists in the age of pilgrimage" yet as interest waned, following the Protestant Reformation of the early 1500s, "The enquiring spirit of the Renaissance generated great interest in the world and in seeing for oneself". As such, the emphasis on attractions shifted from sites of religious significance, to a vast range of natural man made, and cultural attractions, born of a

“penchant for the elaborate and the unusual” (ibid p.69). Of perhaps greater significance was a transition from the mass tourism that characterised the pilgrimage period to what Swarbrooke (2001, p.19) describes as “an elitist activity enjoyed by a few people”. Such a situation was to prevail until the early nineteenth century when the Industrial Revolution would bring with it greater democratisation and access to travel and tourism.

In what has been described as the romantic period, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, motivations for travel and attraction choice again took on a new direction engendered by the beginnings of industrialisation and desire to escape “to a world that seemed to be still authentic” (Berghoff and Korte 2002, p.1). In particular, the enjoyment of nature, landscape and culture sometimes with an emphasis on spiritual and physical wellbeing became the attractions of choice.

This gave rise to probably one of the most significant manifestations of tourism thus far. What was euphemistically termed the ‘Grand Tour’ was a form of cultural tourism with the aim of finishing the traveller’s education yet it remained the domain of a privileged few. During the same period Swarbrooke (2002) points to an emerging concern with health and well being which led to the development of spa and seaside resorts fulfilling a perceived medicinal role rather than purely pleasure. Although, as observed earlier purpose built tourist attractions would not appear until the late nineteenth century, such facilities arguably constitute tourism specific attractions.

The next stage in the evolutionary process is perhaps the most important given that it saw a shift from travel and tourism as predominately the domain of a privileged few, to what Baum (1996) describes as the popularisation of travel. The onset of the Industrial revolution was to revolutionise not only manufacturing and production but in many countries entire social structures and work practices. The mix of an emerging middle class with both available time and at least some discretionary income; early strides in transportation technology; and a desire to escape from increasingly crowded cities; was conceivably the foundation of mass tourism as we know it today.

Attractions, however, remained largely incidental in nature although there is some evidence of facilities being constructed for the amusement of visitors in the mid nineteenth century resort destinations. Such developments were indeed to be the precursor of an ultimate shift from attractions as largely incidental to tourism towards purpose built attractions. Although the natural and cultural features of an area

remained and remain a key element of any attractions portfolio, this represented a significant turning point in that the conscious management of attractions specifically designed to attract visitors called for distinctly different priorities.

Although the literature with respect to the management of these early attractions is disappointingly thin, even the fundamental shift to a more commercial orientation would have implied a need for greater sophistication in their management. Further, earlier observations with respect to the rapid growth of amusement parks during the late nineteenth century, points to what would undoubtedly have been increasing levels of competition which may, for the first time, have compelled the management of such facilities to embrace strategic thinking rather than simply cater to incidental arrivals (Nye 1981)

In what Nye (1981, p.65) describes as “a hysteria of parks followed by panic”, “fortunes were made and lost parks opened and closed [and] new rides and concessions were opened and closed”. The same author also observes that these early parks had a strong reliance on technology which remains one of the most important aspects of attraction management particularly in theme and amusement parks (Swarbrooke 2002). Such trends were also evident in Australia, albeit on a smaller scale with the first themed attraction, Melbourne’s Luna Park opening in 1912 followed by its Sydney namesake in 1935 (Tourism New South Wales 2005).

Despite the emergence of these new attraction forms, however, Pearce, Benckendorff and Johnstone (2000) point to a renewed interest in natural attractions characterised by the declaration of great national parks in North America in the closing stages of the nineteenth century. This, plus the revival of the Olympic Games in 1896, and what Swarbrooke (2002) observes were numerous ‘Great Exhibitions’ during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [beginning with London’s great exhibition in 1851] are indicative of the ever broadening scope of attraction choice occurring at this time. As if to mirror the conditions that were the catalysts for the first major spurt on mass tourism following the industrial revolution, the mass production of motor vehicles in the first two decades of the twentieth century and what Pearce et al (2000) describe as the proliferation of paid leave created a body of demand which further fueled attraction growth.

The similarities between this increasingly eclectic view of attractions and more contemporary taxonomic perspectives is interesting and may suggest that by the turn

of the century the attraction sector had begun to reach maturity. Although as Swarbrooke (2002) contends this would not be fully realised until the end of the 1980s, the foundations of the modern attraction industry had most certainly been laid.

The most formative period, however, was the four decades that followed the end of the Second World War when, as Swarbrooke (2002) reflects, the number and range of attractions available multiplied dramatically. More particularly, the emergence of new categories of attractions added to the diversity of the sector. For example, Nye (1981, p.67) observes a trend away from purely amusement parks to those with distinct themes based on “a transfer of Hollywood stage set skills to the park locale”.

Then, as now, technology continues to play an important role in the development of the modern attraction with attractions as diverse as theme parks and museums employing technology to create or enhance the visitor experience (Stipanuk 1993; Swarbrooke 2002). Of even greater relevance to this particular research Swarbrooke (2002) points to worldwide growth in heritage attractions as demand for more meaningful experiences increases

The maturity of the sector can perhaps be best demonstrated by the recognition on the part of governments at all levels of the potential for attractions to aid in urban regeneration and regional development (Swarbrooke 2002). Festivals and special events in particular can both play a significant role in place identity. Just as the Great Exhibitions at the beginning of the century were used to showcase the cultural and industrial achievements the host city and country this attraction sub-sector continues to provide governments with a tool to increase profile and provide economic stimulus.

If anything the evolved complexity of this tourism sector, and its economic potential, points to a need for more focused research into various aspects of attraction operation. In particular research directed at the application of broader management theory to specific attraction types is urgently needed. Chapter 3 will point to an enduring element of modern management theory which suggests that successful operation is predicated largely on the ability of an organisation to respond to environmental changes. As such, an understanding of the environmental trends or forces which influence management decision making seems central to a detailed comprehension of the management in this sector.

2.4 The Operating Environment

Having pointed to the complexity of attractions in a definitional sense, and the evolved sophistication of their form and management, this review turns to considering the various environments within which attractions operate. Since it has been suggested that attractions are a central element of the tourism product and a key factor in destination appeal it becomes important to consider the wide range of external influences that shape operational orientation and impact on strategic outcomes.

In the preceding section the apparent lack of cohesive research into these externalities was highlighted due, in large part, to problems associated with arriving at a precise definition of the term attraction (Pearce 1991: Inskip 1991: Swarbrooke 2002). More particularly, the same definitional problems also seem to preclude arriving at a generic list of external influences or offering a set of prescriptive solutions, which can be broadly applied across the spectrum of attraction types. Notwithstanding, a representative body of literature has examined the process of change and identified key challenges in specific attractions types such as Theme Parks (Milman, 2001), Leisure Parks (Oliver 1989), Museums (Lennon & Graham, 2001) and Heritage Attractions (Leask and Yeoman, 1999)

There is evidence, too, of some attempts to identify key challenges and external influences seen to impact on the operation and future of attractions in general (Oliver 1989: Martin and Mason 1993: Swarbrooke 2001). Other authors have chosen to focus on specific areas of perceived impact such as technology (Stipanuk, 1993), competitive environments (Lennon and Graham, 2001), the need for greater collaboration (Fyall, Leask, and Garrod 2001), socio-economic factors influencing visitation levels (Mc Clung (2000), and micro-environmental factors such as interest rates and earning power (Bramwell 1991).

If anything, the breadth of these perspectives supports the contention that the challenges facing the attractions manager are many and varied, and that their management demands a truly eclectic approach. Further, since it will later be contended that attempts at sustainable operation are largely vested in an ability to respond effectively to change, it seems necessary to first establish the scope and scale of environmental change confronting the attractions sector and to identify these areas deemed to have greatest potential impacts.

2.4.1 Broader Global Forces

In pursuit of such an objective, a broad distinction needs to be made between factors in the broader environment that impact on enterprise at large and environmental changes which by their very nature, impact directly on the tourist attractions. In the first instance, for example Pearce and Moscardo (1998, p.2) allude to wider global forces that continue to have a significant impact on the growth of tourism and by default attractions of most kinds. In particular they point to “the widespread economic growth that has made travel more feasible for an increasing number of the worlds’ population and the improvements in transport and communication technology that have made high volume leisure travel to distant destinations”.

Global economic factors can equally have less positive impacts with the forces of globalisation and internationalisation changing traditional ways of looking at tourism development. Milne and Ateljevic (2001) apply the vernacular term ‘glocal’ in describing the nexus between global business and economic development at a regional or local level. In short, they observe “[tourism] is essentially a global process which manifests itself locally and regionally” (p.386)

Although considered in the context the of small locally based attractions, the precise impact of such changes may seem obscure; by implication they suggest both the emergence of new markets, and shifts in existing markets, an understanding of which would obviously be integral to marketing orientation. Australia, for example, has witnessed increases in visitor arrivals from the People’s Republic of China of 122 percent in just the four years between 1996 and 2000 (Commonwealth of Australia 2001), which may present opportunities for even the smallest attraction to capitalise on this shift. There are implications too with respect to product development in creating and marketing attraction or destination products of particular appeal to individual markets.

Further, the changing face of global business suggests a need for increased sophistication in understanding the dynamics of global markets. The fact that this will frequently be beyond the resources and capabilities of small attractions is of note.

There are also negative forces at play which, despite their global dimension can affect tourism enterprise at all levels. Perhaps the best contemporary example is terrorism born of religious and ideological discord, which although country centric, impacts on

global travel flows and thereby demand for individual destinations of which attractions are a component part. A growing body of literature (see for example Sönmez 1998; Sönmez and Graefe 1998; Fainstein 2002) suggest that as a global force, terrorism, and political instability in general both represent a growing threat to tourism activity. Even if only anecdotally even attractions in Australian regional locations report downturns in the wake of attacks on tourists even when the site of the incident is at a distance

2.4.2 Direct external forces

Defined as the external entities (collections of persons groups or organisations), that interact directly (supply inputs to or receive outputs from) with the focal organisation, the specific environment seems an appropriate level at which to examine the more direct challenges facing the attractions manager on a day to day basis. At face value, such a process seems problematic since, as previously asserted, no two attractions are identical, nor interact with the same set of external entities. Indeed, as has been stated a number of times even decisions as to what constitutes an attraction further complicates the issue. It is considered possible, however, to identify a broad set of general micro environmental factors which can logically be applied to attractions of most kinds. These can generally be classified as changes in the political, economic, social, and technological environments.

2.4.2.1 The Political Environment

Although the extent to which changes in the political environment impact directly on attractions is largely predicated on the nature of the relationship between the two, none are completely immune from the policies and actions of government at various levels. For example, with some types of attractions almost entirely dependent on public money for continued operation, the implications are far reaching. An obvious case in point is museums which are increasingly being forced to accept the commercial imperative in the face of shrinking government funding. The transition from what Lennon and Graham (2001, p. 266) describe as “their orthodox social purpose in artefact conservation and educational interpretation” to a more commercial orientation has obvious implications in terms of management skill alone.

Considering the attractions sector as a whole however, there are a number of factors of a political nature that potentially [and actually] impact on their operation. Bramley

(2002) suggests government involvement in tourism has progressively come to include:

- Facilitation through the provision of regulations directed at simplifying the passage of tourists across international frontiers
- Promotion aimed at maximising foreign currency earnings
- Supply planning born of a recognition of the economic importance and growth potential of tourism
- Policy implementation directed at addressing regional imbalances
- Environmental protection based on a recognition of the growth and spread of tourism and its impact on the quality of life of host communities and on the natural environment

Since it is the policies and actions of government in these key areas that constitute the main political forces confronting the attractions sector they are fundamental to any examination of political issues. Although Bramley (2002) notes an emerging dimension of government involvement which sees them embracing a more entrepreneurial role, the fundamental areas of exercising governance, overseeing planning, providing vital infrastructure and direct stimulus through promotion is the essence of government policy as it relates to tourism.

From a wider perspective, reduced levels of government funding for tourism development and associated infrastructure can have far reaching impacts for both attractions clusters, and individual attractions which in some cases are widely dispersed. For example, many of Australia's key attractions are a considerable distance from gateways or core locations rendering them vulnerable to shortcomings in transportation access, supporting infrastructure, and overall levels of government support. To some extent this is being offset by an emerging realisation of the importance of tourism to regional development, and the subsequent decentralisation of tourism decision making to regional and local levels.

The situation may be further complicated by the intricate and, in Australia, duplicated, divisions of responsibility in various areas of governance and public funding. Regional and local governments which come within the focus of this study have traditionally played an active role in the development of regional tourism although Hall (1999) points to a discernable shift "[away] from a traditional public administration model

which sought to implement public policy for a perceived public good to a corporatist model which emphasizes efficiency” (p.274). Notwithstanding as Dredge (2001) observes, “Tourism is increasingly being flagged in many local government areas as a lynchpin for local economic development” (p.356) The resultant stimulus by means of marketing, network building and investment incentives would appear to augur well for attractions developers and operators (ibid).

Mc Kercher 1997 (in Dredge 2001, p.p.356-7) does, however, offer a cautionary note, by suggesting that, amongst other things, a lack of commitment may represent a significant impediment to the implementation of tourism planning and development. Whether, as Richins and Pearce (2000) suggest this is vested in the commitment of individual councillors, or is more a question of “values and beliefs that are deeply imbedded in the institutions of local government” (Dredge 2001, p.357), the vagaries of local government policy can represent a significant challenge to the operators of tourism enterprises. Restricted terms of office and the potential for decision making based on political expediency further complicate the situation.

It should also be observed that the ‘politics’ of tourism development extends beyond the policies and actions of government. As key stakeholders in the providence of the destination’s attributes host communities play a key part in shaping government policy particularly when this relates to funding of specific tourism facilities. McKercher (2001) suggests that “Community support for, or opposition to tourism will influence the level of public sector involvement in this area” (p.31). As a result “Public sector involvement in the direct ownership and operation of tourism attractions can be controversial, especially if the level of subsidisation is seen to be excessive for the community benefits provided” (Mc Kercher 2001 p.29). It would seem clear that this has distinct implications for the management of tourism facilities of most kinds in the sense that forging positive relationships with community as a means of garnering support or communicating ‘worth’ may be central to the maintenance of government support either directly or indirectly.

Amongst the more formal aspects of the relationship between government and tourism enterprise are those related to the wide range of regulatory frameworks within which they are obliged to operate. Of singular importance are those related to planning and land use which, by their very nature, tend to be rigid and adversarial. In this respect the statutory powers inherent in local government planning legislation constitute a significant political force. For attractions, particularly in rural settings this has wide

reaching implications particularly in areas where overuse may result. The obligation inherent in development and operation that is compliant with wider regional planning objectives rather than simply tourism centric priorities adds additional complexity to the operation of small tourism enterprise.

Although Bramwell and Sharman (1999) promulgate the values of collaboration between all stakeholders, the often divergent objectives of the public and private sectors can make any consensus problematic. Richins and Pearce (2000) paint an even more complex picture broadening the range of stakeholders to include tourists, residents, investors, and non-government organisations. The complex relationships and divergent priorities between these groups have created enormous challenges in meeting the needs of all concerned. This, Page and Thorn (1997, p.60) observe, “requires the tourism industry and public sector planning agencies to radically rethink both the way they operate and the effects of tourism”.

Gunn (1994) calls for greater integration of [the] policies and practices of the public and private sectors in tourism planning given their dependence on each other. Forging strong relationships with government would thus seem an inescapable priority for the management of attractions. A growing body of literature (Jamal and Getz 1995; Bramwell and Sharman 1999; Dredge 2006) calls for greater collaboration and networking in tourism policy making and planning as a means of giving greater ‘political legitimacy’ to the process. The ‘go-it-alone’ policies of many tourism sectors (Gunn 1994) are no longer sustainable, and need to be integrated into a broader vision of sustainable planning.

The political environment is thus conceptualised as not only the relationship between government and the management of attractions but the wider political tapestry in which attractions operate. Positive engagements with all stakeholders coupled with recognition of the value of collaboration represent vital directions. Since it will later be suggested that an ability to cope with change is central to successful management networking alone has the potential to provide vital information in the formation and evaluation of strategy.

2.4.2.2 The Economic Environment

Earlier discussion with respect to the broader global environment pointed to aspects of the economy both at a national and global scale which impact indirectly on the attraction sector. Such things as increasing globalisation; the emergence of hitherto non-existent consumer markets; and the entrance of countries such as China into the domain of free market economies all clearly have some impact on the demand for tourism. (Wahab and Cooper, 2001)

This section is, however, devoted to an examination of the more direct economic factors that impact on the operation of small to medium sized attractions specifically at a micro-level. Traditionally, this has centered on the way economic conditions or variables shape consumer behaviour [both as it relates to discretionary spending in general to specific product choice in particular].

Song and Wong (2008, p.57) allude to a large body of literature on tourism demand analysis that examines “the factors that influence tourism demand and the elasticities of tourism demand with respect to those influencing factors”. The utility of this research, they declare is “that it provides useful insights to the understanding of tourist decision making processes and gives relevant policy suggestions for both public and private sectors engaged in tourism development and marketing” (p.57)

Although as Uysall (1998) argues “income and price related factors are likely to play a major role in determining demand for tourism, as embedded in economic theory, the number of potential demand determinants in the tourism literature is almost unlimited”. Notwithstanding, as Song and Wong (2003, p.58) observe, although intention to visit a destination [or attraction] is influenced by a number of social, cultural and geographical factors [elements of supply], “realised demand is largely determined by economic factors”.

Although there appears to be some minor disagreements in the literature as to the most valid determinants, income levels, the actual and relative price of the destination product; and transportation costs, appear to be generally accepted measures (Lim 1997:1999). Uysall (1998) suggests that these are in turn influenced by wider economic forces including the prevailing business environment, overall economic growth and stability; the absence or otherwise of economic recession; and regulatory restrictions of a specifically economic nature. The realisation that shifts in the

economic environment are difficult to predict with any degrees of certainty, places attractions, which rely on sustained demand for their existence, in a potentially vulnerable position.

Much can be achieved, however, by simple market 'intelligence' in keeping abreast of external economic trends and events and postulating their likely impact. To some extent such a process can be augmented by internal trend analysis which may identify new or growing markets. Whilst far from an exact science, estimates of 'cause and effect' can sometimes be a useful way of conceptualising marketing strategies either in defence of existing markets, or in pursuit of new opportunities.

Although this invites a detailed examination of economic theory this is not considered to be within the scope of this study. Rather, a general discussion on the probable and possible impacts of various economic variables identified earlier is considered appropriate.

Income as a determinant

Uysall (1998, p.88) argues that "income is the variable most commonly used to explain and determine tourism demand", a view that appears to be shared by Ryan (2003, p.27) in keeping with "conventional micro-economic theory". The broad acceptance of income as the primary explanatory variable can be best demonstrated by the results of a survey of tourism demand modelling conducted by Lim (2006). Reporting on an analytical review of 124 empirical studies on the major factors influencing tourism demand, "income in the origin country [was] the most frequently used explanatory variable" (p.57). Ryan (2003), however, declares "that the relationship between tourism expenditure and gross personal income is indirect [and that] the links between 'discretionary' income and tourism spending are more pertinent" (p.31). The issue is complicated by the realisation that the availability of disposable and thereby discretionary income will not necessarily translate into tourism demand or, more particularly individual attraction choice. Competitive destinations and consumer goods generally vie for the same pool of available funds.

What becomes clear from this brief review is that upward income trends, although a reasonable predictor of increased tourist motivation and demand do not offer practitioners any reliable indicator of increased demand. The vast number of exogenous variables that dictate levels of disposable income [as opposed to gross

income] may be simply too complex for most small to medium sized enterprise to grasp.

Despite this complexity, however, the realisation that general economic conditions in current or potential source markets, possibly measured by such things as GDP (Lim 1997) as proxies of real income, provides operators of attractions with at least some indication of market potential. Further, the fact that as Lim (1997) observes there is an inevitable lag between economic shifts in the origin country, and variations in demand, market intelligence by whatever means becomes a vital direction. Earlier discussion with respect to the importance of forging relationships with government is again emphasised. As repositories of such data a range of government departments and instrumentalities can place such information at the disposal of even the smallest attraction. Although this information begs tactical responses such as pricing or promotional strategies, it also raises the bigger issue of continuously prospecting for new markets as a means of buffering against such changes. Such a proposition is central to theories of organisational adaption (Miles and Snow 1984) which posit greater success for organisations that find and exploit new market opportunities.

Pricing as a determinant

A number of authors (Uysall 1998; Ryan; 2003; Song and Wong 2008) agree that price is the next most important determinant of demand. In considering price it becomes important, however, to make a distinction between price as an element of the marketing mix of individual companies, and the relative price of competing products or destinations. Perhaps a better way of conceptualising price may thus be a matter of considering the competitive environment within which individual destinations or attractions operate.

Although essentially a construct of urban and economic geography, theories of spatial interaction applied to tourism suggest that complementarity between demand and supply, which is the essence of tourism flows, is tempered by intervening opportunity or “the existence of alternative sources of supply usually at a lower cost” Kelly and Nankervis (2001, p.20), plus what is termed ‘distance decay’ or “the decline in the number of interactions [visits] as the distance between locations increases” (p.23).

A number of authors (Ryan 2003: Uysall 1998) see price, consisting of two components, including the cost of travel which, it might be argued, is directly related to

distance, and the 'cost of living' at the destination which includes such elements as accommodation and activities. In observing the nature of the tourism product, Seaton and Bennett (1996, p.24) contend that "tourism is often a combinatory product which requires the deliberate or non-deliberate collaboration of several different parties". In essence this would suggest that small attraction operators have limited control over the end price of the visit.

If nothing else this implies that greater degrees of collaboration and networking would be conducive to the development of a competitive destination product. Bramwell and Sharman (1999) suggest that such collaboration "adds value by building on the store of knowledge insights and capabilities" (p.393). They acknowledge, however, that attempts at collaboration "give rise to difficult challenges" (p.393). Although these authors do not explicitly refer to pricing it is held that any collaborative arrangement would involve at least some agreement on pricing policy.

Nor, as might be implied, should such networks be confined to providers of the constituent parts of the destination product. A growing body of literature (Buhalis 2000; Dredge 2004) points to the importance of public sector involvement with others (see for example Jamal and Getz 1995) calling for greater community involvement in the process.

With the price of the destination product seen as critical to competitiveness (Dwyer, Forsyth, and Rao 2000; Forsyth and Dwyer 2009), reaching consensus and an air of cooperation rather than engaging in parochialism seems a vital step. Pointing to the work of Healey (1997), Bramwell and Sharman (1999, p.392) list, amongst the principal benefits of collaboration, "avoidance of] the cost of resolving adversarial conflicts in the long term".

Although destination pricing is merely one part of this collaborative process it is arguably amongst the most important. Murphy, Pritchard and Smith (2000) suggest that "perceived trip value will positively affect traveller intentions to return". With repeat visitation a critical element of successful destinations such an observation is of particular note. This has particular relevance to the focus of this research given that attractions are a discrete but important component of destination appeal. The extent to which they are able to forge positive relationships with other stakeholders, engage in collaborative pricing and product development, and capitalise on the broader resources of the destination would almost certainly be success factors.

2.4.2.3 The Social Environment

Perhaps the most complex set of environmental factors impacting on tourism in general and individual tourism enterprises in particular, are those of a social and nature. Changes both in the socio-demographic structure of society; and in social mores can be demonstrated to impact on the operational orientation of enterprise yet in quite distinctly different ways.

In the first instance, changes in the composition of society, particularly as it relates to the ability and propensity to engage in tourism, should shape product marketing and pricing as enterprises respond to emerging market segments or 'defend' existing segments. Conversely, changing social values, particularly when they are widely held can impose certain ethical standards on the enterprise operator and may even constrain strategic direction. Either trend has particular relevance to attractions given the importance of effective marketing to visitor capture, and the increasing realisation that ethical operation can even enhance market appeal.

Socio-demographic trends

In examining the changing face of Australian families Gilding (2001, p.6) presents a succinct view of these changes observing that in the relatively short period between Federation and the 1970s "there have been substantial changes and variations in family structure and values". Listing declines in the marriage rate, delayed marriage and childbirth; the broader acceptance of same sex couples, higher divorce rates and; proliferation of sole parent households Gilding's article paints a picture of an Australian population in a state of flux. For attractions such sweeping changes have significant implications given that they impact on the propensity and ability of respective market segments to engage in leisure activities including attraction visitation. Both from a product development perspective, and in terms of strategic marketing, an understanding of these market shifts is central to effective management.

Amongst the more significant of these segments are couples who, for various reasons make the conscious decision to remain childless and are projected to become the largest and fastest growing segment of all family types in Australia. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008). Likewise what has euphemistically been described as the 'baby boomer' sector, which now represents a significant proportion of the world's

population, is creating a burgeoning new market segment which the attraction sector can not ignore.

Although a number of authors (Ryan 2003; Dolnicar, Crouch, Devinney, Huybers Louviere and Oppewal, 2007) question the 'conventional wisdom' of assuming that these sectors have automatic market potential given the reasonable assumption that they will enjoy greater disposable time and money, this is countered by several studies (see for example Alegre and Pou 2004) which suggest that in households across the OECD, a higher proportion of older retired people, and an increase in childless couples can be demonstrated to increase the propensity to travel (p.142).

Although little research appears to have been conducted in the consumer behaviour of childless couples [in all likelihood because of age, income, and a myriad of other variables], the baby boomer sector has been the focus of considerable research and social comment. One of the more interesting aspects of this discourse has been not only their ability and propensity to engage in touristic activity but their specific preferences with respect to activities and attractions. Although it is conceded that this cohort is merely one sector of the overall market evidence of their potential for various types of is sufficiently significant to examine them in isolation.

Arguably the most significant socio-demographic trend evident in Western societies is a rapidly ageing population. As a result of the "20 year period of high birth rates immediately following World War II in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand" (Cleaver, Green and Muller 2000 p.274), United Nations estimates suggest that by 2050 2 billion people, or one in five of the world's population will be aged sixty years or over by the year 2050. (Paterson 2006).

Although Ryan (2003, p.65) questions the 'conventional wisdom' of this cohort representing a market with high levels of disposable income, there is some evidence to the contrary. According to a recent report released by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling [NATSEM], what is titled the 'baby boomer' cohort [people aged between 45 -64 years] "make up one quarter of Australia's population and hold half of the nation's household wealth" (University of Canberra 2007). Considered in combination with greater life expectancy which, according to Paterson (2006, p.1), had increased by more than 20 years in developed countries between 1910 and 1992, and, by any measure, they represent a very significant consumer group.

As notable as these considerations of scale might seem, of perhaps greater significance in the context of this study, are predictions as to the type of leisure activity or experience likely to be sought by this group.

Although to some extent mirroring a general trend towards activities which are experiential rather than purely hedonistic in nature, Mackay's observation that baby-boomers are, for the most part "inveterate travellers" seeking "heightened self – awareness and fulfilment" (1997 p.116-7) has clear implications for the management of attractions. Greater emphasis on authenticity and the provision of learning opportunities are but two directions necessary to capture this important market segment.

The implications for attractions in particular are far reaching. Although as earlier observed, a stronger demand is predicted for attractions with a futuristic theme (Milman 2001), a nascent demand for attractions, which romanticise the past should not be ignored. The realisation that this particular group has obvious affinities with past values, and has embraced the mantra of healthier life styles has interesting prescriptive value. Ryan (2003) supports such a contention. "The ageing of the population will create a demand for holidays associated with a quieter pace of life" [as such] products more oriented towards culture, or at least nostalgia, might become more important" (p.68).

Although there is clear potential for attractions to direct marketing activity at this group there is no intent to suggest that they should be pursued to the exclusion of other groups. For example, some types of attractions have intrinsic appeal to families, to various age cohorts, or to people with particular interests. A focus on population income and consumer trends should be an integral part of market intelligence for attractions management.

Changing patterns of work and leisure

In the preceding section, the impact of changes in income patterns on tourism demand was considered but, as Ryan, (2003 p.51) observes "another important factor is an increase in leisure time permitted by, in the early part of the twentieth century, increments in paid holiday time and free weekends". Perhaps more importantly the two factors are inextricably linked. As Ryan goes on to observe "People may obtain increases in leisure time but if those increases in leisure time are not accompanied by

proportionate increases in income then the available discretionary income per unit of available leisure time will fall” (p.51).

The relationship between work and leisure presents an interesting dynamic in that although both available leisure time and disposable incomes appear have generally increased in developed countries over the last decade there is a trend towards shorter holiday periods. This is reflected in increased levels of leave accrual, with 60% of full time workers in Australia holding accrued leave of eight weeks or more. According to data prepared by Tourism Australia accrued, leave now exceeds 70 million days. (<http://noleavenolife.com.au/facts-and-figures.htm>) accessed 18/2/08.

Although this would appear to augur well for those attractions close to major population centres it presents significant challenges for those in more remote locations. Although it might be concluded that a reluctance to take extended leave would be generally conducive to the selection of domestic rather than overseas destinations a recent report on overnight leisure travel released by Tourism Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 2005) points to a steady decline for several years in the overnight leisure market.

Of particular note in the context of this research was a 6 per cent decline in leisure travel with duration of 1-2 nights with some socio-demographic groups such as older non working couples contributing to the decline. Since many authors (Swarbrooke 2002; Ryan 2003; Cleaver, Green, and Muller 2008 et al) view this particular group as embodying potential such trends are concerning.

A moderating factor In the context of this research is Ryan’s observation that “The ageing of the population will create a demand for holidays associated with a quieter pace of life” with “products more oriented towards culture, or at least nostalgia [becoming] more important” (Ryan p.68). If anything, these observations highlight the importance of reading market trends, of maintaining close relationships with industry bodies as the generators of vital tourism data; and of developing products that will appeal to specific market segments.

It may also have implications in terms of supporting infrastructure, mainly in the form of transportation access. Given that this is primarily an area of public sector responsibility the ability of regional attractions to garner commonwealth and/or state support for the building or maintenance of transport linkages is of utmost importance.

Competing leisure options

Earlier discussion with respect to the economic determinants of tourism demand suggested that increases in disposable income will not necessarily translate into demand for tourism with competitive destinations and a wider range of consumer goods competing for discretionary spending.

Leisure options in particular offer the potential consumer a wide range of opportunities which might logically act as alternatives to in the use of both discretionary time and money. Despite this diversity, Lynch and Veal (2006, pp 209-210) suggest that “given the high level of home ownership in Australia” through subscription to “the great Australian dream” much of this leisure activity is home based with an increasing emphasis on technology.

Citing the findings of a Recreational participation survey released in 1991 by the Commonwealth Department of Arts, Sport, The Environment, Tourism and Territories [DASETT], Ip (2000, p.267) cites findings which suggest that “home based leisure activities have remained dominant since the 1980s”. “The continuous boom in sales of hi-fi equipment; the installation of home theatre, and the budding acceptance of DVD, attests to the persistence of this trend” (p.267). Despite the fact that alignment of these trends across a wide range of demographics is seemingly illusive, the trend can not be ignored. To what extent it competes with attraction visitation is equally unclear but it is worthy of note that, according to Ip (2000), much of this trend can be attributed to adolescent use of these technologies.

Although it would appear to present some immediate challenges to the attraction operator [in terms of general demand trends] it may present more significant challenges in the long term. For example the trans-generational transfer of interest in heritage, which it could be argued as central to the continuing popularity of attraction such as heritage based sites may well be diminished if these trends continue. Similarly interest in outdoor activities which underpins National Park visitation could be impacted upon it were to be subsumed by more sedentary pursuits.

As observed in following sections of the work, however, the fact that “technology provides a substitute for face-to face interaction, there is a growing demand for interactive experiences” (Milman 2001, p.242). This may suggest that a growing

emphasis on participatory forms of tourism is a logical direction. Although there are clearly varying degrees of emphasis on interactivity across the attraction spectrum, attractions of all types should be mindful of the potential to capitalise on this demand.

In conclusion, tourism in general and attractions in particular appear confronted with an increasingly heterogeneous market with many of the emerging sectors demonstrating greater degrees of complexity in terms of leisure choice. In short, as Ryan (2003, p.68) observes, "The market will be even less homogenous than it is with reference to discretionary income, thereby creating a greater number of market segments and more product differentiation". This emphasises the absolute importance of effective research, market analysis and product development. It may also imply a greater need for entrepreneurial focus as new segments are explored and their potential assessed.

Social Pressures

Having considered some of the compositional and behavioural aspects of societal change it now becomes important to consider a range of attitudinal factors that can potentially impact on the development and operation of the attraction sector and, more particularly influence market appeal. In short, this section of the work seeks to broadly examine some prevailing social attitudes and values and consider how these might shape the development and operation of small attractions.

From early impact studies which appear to have been restricted to economic analysis and the identification of benefits, Pizam (1978, p.8) pointed to growing concern of the negative impacts. In the thirty years that have elapsed since this article a vast body of literature has explored the social and cultural impacts on host communities (see for example Faulkner and Tideswell 1997; Faulkner and Fredline 2003).

In particular, a number of studies have examined resident attitudes to tourism development (see for example Brunt and Courtney 1999; McGehee and Andereck 2004) both as a means of identifying moderating factors, and of identifying less obvious negative outcomes. Given that impacts are specific to their spatial context and host communities arguably best equipped to gauge limits of acceptable change this avenue has proved most fruitful.

Amongst the critical issues identified in the literature are resident concerns with respect to degradation of the physical environment, and the possible diminution of local cultures and/or lifestyles resulting from tourism activity. Of eleven areas of resident concern [attitude items] emerging from research conducted by McGhee and Anderek (2004, p.1) these two issues were heavily represented.

Environmental Issues

Perhaps no single issue has received greater attention in the tourism literature than the importance of sustainable use of resources particularly components of the bio-physical and built environments. Whether this has been due to an increasing realisation of the finite nature of resources, or is a response to heightened community pressure remains unclear, but issues of environmental 'consumption' are now at the forefront of academic discourse. As such, sustainable management has become a significant social issue with tourism and residents effectively competing for resources.

Although as Holden (2007, p.69) reports, tourism "remained largely immune from environmental criticism" until the 1970s, a decade later "local pressure groups became concerned by the effects of tourism development on their physical and cultural environments" (p.69). As Holden (2007, p.70) goes on to observe "In the first decade of this century the relationship between tourism and the environment is more hotly debated than ever. The term 'sustainable' has become integrated into government policy and industry strategies".

The resultant pressure to develop and operate tourism enterprise in an environmentally responsible manner thus seems set to increase. Since tourism in general, and a number of attraction types in particular, seek to use only the most pristine and unique elements of the environment, the intuitive appeal of sustainable practice is its ability to reconcile use with conservation, thus ensuring the right of subsequent generations to equity of access and amenity.

Whether action to practice in this way is born of simple compliance with regulation, or is seen as logically self-serving, will obviously differ depending on individual management attitudes and situational priorities. Hu and Wall's contention there are tangible benefits flowing from sound environmental management (2005, p.617) in terms of destination competitiveness suggests that it is an element of sound business practice. As Mihalic (2000, p. 65) observes, "[the] environmental quality of a

destination is a prevailing issue in making travel related decision[s]”. What seems certain is that the attractions manager who either fails to recognise, or chooses to ignore these key social and market shifts shift may ultimately preside over commercial failure.

Cultural Issues

As observed earlier, even by the narrowest of interpretations the cultural and social attributes of a destination are integral to any classification of attractions. It is held that the challenges inherent in commodifying sensitive cultures as attractions may be more pronounced than maintenance of biophysical integrity.

Although it could be argued that most natural attractions are unique in some respects, the characteristics of individual cultures are rarely duplicated. That these ‘peculiarities’ are frequently a pivotal point of differentiation between competing destinations suggests that their maintenance is vital to successful management. As Pearce (1995, p.144), observes “socio-cultural resources are included in the total sustainability equation”.

The inevitability of some degree of change resulting from the process of visitor/host interaction, and the increasing realisation of the importance of authenticity to the visitor experience, presents quite particular challenges. Further, balancing commercial imperatives with host community aspirations is frequently problematic. A number of studies (Gursoy Jurowski and Uysal 2001; Besculides Lee and Mc McCormick 2002) report a significant level of concern amongst resident communities particularly as it relates to the potential for damage to local cultures. Although there was evidence of general support for the development of cultural tourism such concerns are a salient reminder of the imperative of cultural preservation.

A distinct social trend can be observed which sees local cultures as not only a key point of differentiation between destinations but an important element of community cohesiveness.

General Social trends

In considering the future of attractions Martin & Mason (1993, p.37) outline the social characteristics of what they term the 'thoughtful consumer' in terms of their more general personal priorities and values. Although some of these echo the preceding discussion they add another dimension in that they provide a snapshot of the specific benefits sought by 'consumers' of attractions. At this level it also becomes possible to conceptualise quite specific management responses which are outlined in Fig 2.2. A set of management challenges encompassing development, management, and marketing are used to demonstrate a set of probable priorities in response to these changes

By intention these are not prescriptive recognising that their application and desired emphasis will vary markedly between different types of attractions. Nor is the list of social trends necessarily exclusive. The complexities of individual motivation particularly in the field of recreation and activity choice preclude such an approach.

There are, however, a number of recurring themes, foremost amongst which are the apparent shift from hedonistic to experiential pursuits, a search for connectivity and social cohesion, and a concern for the sustainable use of resources. If indeed these trends continue their impact on the management and provision of attractions seems nothing less than profound.

Almost paradoxically it challenges the notion of attractions as merely sources of distraction or titillation and elevates them to an as yet largely unexplored plain. That this runs counter to prevailing recreational trends directed at mindless technological interaction in the form of video games and such like, presents the researcher with some interesting contradictions.

Social trends (after Martin & Mason 1993, p.37)				
Primary management challenges by function	<p>“New personal priorities”</p> <p>Quest for physical exercise & mental development</p> <p>Emphasis on personal health and safety</p> <p>Concern with global environmental problems</p>	<p>“Focus on quality time”</p> <p>Increased flexibility in work & leisure</p> <p>More careful choice of activities</p> <p>New approaches to retirement</p>	<p>“Shift in consumption”</p> <p>Rejection of status products</p> <p>Recognition of waste</p> <p>Valuing real usefulness</p>	
	Development/Design	<p>Environmentally friendly design and resource use</p> <p>Increased emphasis on interactivity/participatory attractions</p> <p>Learning as a key element of 41heming</p> <p>Attractions with environment as focus</p>	<p>Improved access to minimise time wastage</p> <p>Increased emphasis on local or moveable attractions such as festivals.</p> <p>Enhanced range of activities for wider range of age groups</p>	<p>Greater emphasis on authenticity</p> <p>Provision of ‘meaningful’ experiences.</p> <p>Focus on heritage conservation</p> <p>Visitation as a learning & experiential journey</p>
	Operations Management	<p>Visibly effective waste management & resource utilisation</p> <p>Visitor safety as a priority</p> <p>Excitement without risk</p>	<p>Flexible opening hours</p> <p>Eradication of annoyances/hindrances to maximise the quality of the experience</p> <p>Recognition of diversity of users</p>	<p>Increased need for staff knowledge and expertise</p> <p>Emphasis on interpretation & knowledge transfer</p>
	Marketing	<p>Trend towards ‘needs oriented’ marketing approach</p> <p>‘Green badging’</p> <p>Promotion of good ‘corporate citizenship’</p>	<p>Recognition of the competitive nature of the market</p> <p>Pricing increasingly important component of the marketing mix</p> <p>Communication of the value of augmented features such as parking and transportation</p>	<p>Positioning increasingly important as a means of conveying core values</p> <p>Honesty and probity in communication</p>

Table 2.2 Management challenges arising from predominate social changes

2.4.2.4 The Technological Environment

Of the many changes confronting attractions at a site-specific level, arguably the most pervasive and pronounced are those of a technological nature. Technological advances on almost every front have revolutionised the way attractions devise and present their product; disseminate information; optimise distribution channels; and enhance the visitor experience. Elements of both early and contemporary literature (Oliver 1989; Martin and Mason 1993; Stipanuk 1993; Milman 2001) all allude to technology as a significant influence in the success of visitor attractions.

Although it might be argued that certain types of attractions have little if any dependence on technology, its increasing use as an interpretive tool, particularly in museums, crosses the boundary between narrow perspectives of technology as a means of creating an attraction [as might be the case with a theme park] and technology as a means of enhancing the visitor experience. Given earlier discussion with respect to the importance of catering to a more discerning generation of tourists enriching interpretation seems a logical priority.

As an increasingly important component of the attractions inventory museums and art galleries provide possibly the best examples of the current and potential use of this feature. Evans and Sterry (1999 p. 113-114) see current developments in the area of interactive multimedia as extensions of the guidebook “which was the original portable interpretive medium”.

Rather than being a replacement, however, they view these developments not as “a replacement for traditional interpretive methods but as a complimentary application [which] can assist in placing exhibits and artefacts in their historical and cultural context” (p.114) In fact, they declare that it is “evident that much more can be accomplished in terms of applied new technology especially in the interpretation of heritage exhibits” (p.114).

For some considerable time recorded narrative along designated ‘trails’ have arguably elevated the enjoyment of historical exhibits, paintings, or other works of art to a completely new plain. Again a potentially superficial experience based on a quest for social capital (Mowforth and Munt 1998) may be transformed into a meaningful, educational, and perhaps even transformational experience. The difference between these two outcomes in terms of visitor enjoyment is not difficult to conceptualise. That

this could translate into positive word of mouth and, perhaps more importantly repeat visitation is a significant consideration in terms of attractions management.

In a contemporary sense, however, the seemingly simple act of providing information about an essentially static exhibit has taken on completely new connotations. Fuelled by advances in technology the ability to add sensory stimulation other than simple sight and sound can add completely different dimensions to an attraction visit. The ability to involve the visitor in simple scientific experiments in a science museum is a case in point. Earlier discussion with respect to the changing preferences of attraction visitors alluded to an increasing search for the experiential rather than the merely detached mental absorption of sights and sounds. It would seem logical to suggest that employment of this type of technology regardless of how simple it might be should be an intuitive direction for attractions management.

The interpretive process assumes even greater sophistication when the use of technology in replicating visual or experiential elements of history which have been rendered inaccessible by the passing of time, comes into focus. This observation questions traditional perspectives of attractions which, notionally at least, view them as existing in time and place.

If it is possible to dispel; the notion of certain types of attractions being confined to areas with certain geographical or cultural attributes, then the corresponding notion of attractions being fixed in time is equally questionable. One has only to consider events of various kinds that are arguably not necessarily fixed in either dimension, but which are indisputably attractions, to at least partially validate such a contention. In the context of the current discussion the re-enactment of events that no longer exist but enjoy historical significance is yet another example of the creation of visitor experiences by means of technology.

Although there are countless international examples, the re-enactment of the Eureka uprising in the Victorian rural city of Ballarat, makes extensive use of laser technology, pyrotechnics, and multi-media in the presentation of 'Blood on the Southern Cross'. That such an attraction relies almost entirely on a combination of technologies to recreate events that occurred almost 150 years ago, suggests that virtually no event in history is beyond re-enactment.

“Such a process permits the user to visualize the real environment but complements the reality with additional information that is displayed in parallel” (Gurau 2007, p.188). As distinct from virtual reality which replicates the event or experience in a total sense what is termed ‘augmented reality’ is now a widely used technique in attractions of all types. The preponderance of ‘sound and light’ performances on heritage sites similar to the above is evidence of the appeal of such technology. Although costly to implement, the resultant enhancement of the visitor experience can be a key point of differentiation and a factor in repeat visitation. Similarly, the employment of sophisticated building technologies facilitates the reconstruction of buildings and streetscapes that are virtually indiscernible from the original.

Such a process of replication also has value beyond the attraction visitor interface (Gurau, 2007). The use of technology for replication also has significant implications in sustainable practice, providing the opportunity to restrict access to elements of the attractions as a means of site hardening. The avoidance or amelioration of damage by either preparing the visitor for the experience in the case of a cultural attraction, or keeping the visitor ‘at arms length’ from natural or heritage attractions under duress, presents significant opportunities. The employment of increasingly sophisticated multi media presentations in visitor centres, either in situ or in the immediate surroundings, as a means of partial or even complete substitution for attractions use are evidence of such techniques.

It may even be possible to envisage the complete exclusion of visitors from attractions that have been subjected to unacceptable levels of damage by offering replication with degrees of reality that present an acceptable alternative to a reasonable percentage of visitors. Although it has earlier been suggested that a new generation of tourists are seeking more meaningful experiences (Mowforth and Munt 1998), MacCannell (1999) asserts that some tourists are knowingly prepared to accept the inauthentic and obviously contrived raises some interesting questions in terms of application.

There are also distinct possibilities in the use of such technology as a preparative process by educating visitors as to the significance of particular attractions or attraction features. Whether this is simply a matter of providing useful pre trip information as might be the case with a theme park, or is a process of educating and empowering the visitor as a means of preparation for a visit to a site of religious or historical significance, current applications in information technology present significant opportunities. The suggestion that such preparation, regardless of substance will

impact on the ultimate outcome in terms of visitor satisfaction suggests that it should be a priority for attractions management.

Garrod Fyall and Leask (2002, p.278) also hold the view that this preparatory process has implications in terms of managing visitor impacts by “educating visitors to think long term and respect the site”. This is particularly so in heritage settings or “attractions which are vulnerable” (ibid). Although by inference this would primarily apply to such things as built or natural environments which, [by virtue of their unique characteristics] are considered irreplaceable; as opposed to heritage sites which are consciously developed for tourism, even significant collections of artefacts are themselves at risk of damage.

It is, however, not purely at the attraction/visitor interface that technology has potential. In considering technological change and its impact on attractions perhaps no other area presents greater challenges and opportunities as that related to information and communication technology [ICT]. As Werthner and Klein (1999, p.256) observe; “ICT is probably the strongest driving force for changes within the tourism Industry”. This may in part explain why research and literature discourse is dominated by this focus.

It is argued that what Frew (2000, p.136) describes as “synergistic interaction” between tourism and these technologies may be due to the spatial nature of tourism with “decision making and consumption separated in time and space” (Werthner and Klein, 1999, p.256). In short, the means by which individual attractions, regardless of their location, have opportunities for connectivity that have previously eluded them. The internet has “empowered the distribution of multi-media applications, such as textual data, graphics, pictures videos and sounds. Search engines such as Google and Yahoo have provided unprecedented capability [on the part of the consumer] to find anything including destination and product information. An electronic marketplace has emerged and suppliers have developed Internet interfaces to sell directly to the consumer” (Buhalis and O’Connor, 2005, p.8). Given the highly competitive nature of the attraction market, embracing these technologies seems an inescapable reality.

In summary, attraction operators are confronted with a range of threats and opportunities arising from an increasingly sophisticated range of technologies. Although the scope and scale of technological reliance differs across the spectrum of attractions the enduring reality is that almost every management function can be enhanced by embracing supportive technology. What presents the greatest single

challenge is the rapidity of technological change and the attendant pressure to keep pace.

Considerations of a technological nature also re-emphasise the complex nature of the operating environment across the full spectrum of environmental forces discussed previously. Given that, as earlier stated, organisational survival is predicated on ability to adapt to these forces the focus of the work will ultimately shift to theories of organisational adaption [ch.3] yet it remains important to emphasise the importance of attractions to tourism and to articulate some fundamental management imperatives. Within such a framework it becomes possible to compare and contrast the imperatives of attraction management with broader theoretical propositions as to 'best practice' approaches to adaption.

2.5 The importance of attractions

An examination of the literature reveals that most attempts to substantiate the value of attractions to tourism centre on the pivotal role played by attractions in drawing people to a particular location. The role played by attractions in influencing tourist behaviour, and ultimately in levels of visitor satisfaction, makes the attractions sector a core element of the tourism product.

As Swarbrooke (2002, p. 3) observes,

Attractions are arguably the most important component of the tourism system. They are the main motivators for tourist trips and are the core of the tourism product. Without attractions there would be no need for other tourism services. Indeed tourism as such would not exist if there were not attractions

Such a view is echoed by a number of authors (Ferrario 1979; Mill and Morrison 1985; Stevens 1991; Gunn 1994; Benckendorff and Pearce 2003) all of whom assert the absolute importance of attractions to the existence and success of tourism.

In one of the most authoritative texts in tourism planning, Gunn (1994) states "The attractions of a destination constitute the most powerful component of the supply side of tourism" (p.57) enticing, luring and stimulating tourists and providing the impetus for development of other services which facilitate tourism. As such, their existence or conscious development has wide reaching implications beyond tourism itself.

From a developmental perspective the basic pulling power of destinations is clearly enhanced by the development of major attractions. Leask Fyall and Garrod (2002) cite as examples the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, and the National Museum in Wellington, as having “assisted in [a] dramatic increase in appeal of both destinations since their construction” (p.252).

Quite apart from being a primary catalyst for tourism activity, however, they frequently play a significant part in differentiating competing destinations (Prideaux 2002; Alhemoud and Armstrong 1996), can be a key instrument of economic restructuring particularly in rural settings (Wilson Fesenmaier Fesenmaier and van es 2008); are a catalyst for employment (Ferrario 1979) and are central to destination image (Beerli and Martin 2003).

Offering any quantitative evaluation of their importance is, however, somewhat more problematic due, in large part to problems associated with arriving at any universally accepted system of classification. As such major research in Australia has not only been sporadic (Commonwealth of Australia 1990; 1994; 2003) but defies any linear comparison principally because of differing research parameters. As such, key elements of Australia’s attraction inventory were excluded from these studies. Pearce (1991) notes the exclusion of national parks, while icon natural attractions, zoos and aquaria are also notable omissions from the earlier studies.

Attributing the absence of any reliable data to the fragmented nature of the sector, Leask Fyall and Garrod (2002, p.250) observe that “countries such as Canada and Australia conduct *ad hoc* surveys which provide ‘snap shots’ of the sector, yet there is little evidence of regular surveys providing operational or interpretive data. Notwithstanding, the same authors point to growth in the supply of attractions in the United Kingdom and suggest that the “top twenty attractions in the world are said to generate more than 150 million visits per annum” (Garrod Fyall and Leask,2002, p.265).

Swarbrooke (2002, pp.88-89) offers some comprehensive data derived from various sources pointing to the significance of attractions in a number of countries [including Australia] both in terms of raw visitor numbers; in the breadth of attraction choice; and in demonstrated growth. Making any judgment with respect to the significance of the

data is however, problematic, given the differing research parameters and the apparent absence of any large scale comparative studies between countries.

Perhaps not surprisingly research both in Australia, and overseas has chosen to concentrate on the amusement and theme park sector most likely because such attractions are easily identifiable and their performance more readily analysed using quantifiable variables. In particular, the researcher is drawn to the most recent Australian Government report (Commonwealth of Australia 2004) which points to data collected in 2001/2 recording almost 9 million visits to amusement and theme parks with revenue generated of 287 million Australian dollars.

It should be observed that the somewhat narrow focus of attraction research is not confined to Australia. As arguably “the global leader in the development, operation and management of attractions” (Milman 2001, p.139), research in the United States seems also to have largely been confined to studies of the theme park sector, due, in all probability, to the fact that “theme parks and attractions have become favorite modes of mass entertainment ” (ibid) in that country.

The significance of this sector can, perhaps best be demonstrated by recently released data from the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions [IAAPA]. Based on projections for the period 2007-11, “theme park spending world-wide is expected to grow from US\$ 22.8 billion in 2006, to 28.5 billion in 2011” (IAAPA 2008). In alluding to industry-based data reported by O’Brien (1999), Milman (2001, p.139) notes that “the world’s 50 most attended parks hosted about 240 million visitors in 1999”. Similar trends were also evident in the European Union with a study released in 1990 (Lavery and Stevens, 1990, p.55) revealing visitation levels of 5.7million to just 16 attractions in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, West Germany, and Belgium during 1988.

Although it should be repeated that this sub-sector is merely one component of the overall attractions ‘portfolio’, the temptation to accept such data as indications of significance is overwhelming. Further, if one is to adopt a truly eclectic approach to classifying attractions, and thereby extrapolate these indications of scale to include the vast range of other types of attractions which are not theme parks then the probable dimensions of this industry sector begin to emerge.

Despite the earlier contention that there is an apparent absence of quantitative research in the attractions field (most notably in Australia), there is evidence of a growing body of empirical and theoretical research, at both industry and academic levels. This seems to have been principally directed at issues of visitor motivation and marketing; (Middleton, 1989; Fodness and Milner, 1992) prognostications of future trends; (Oliver 1989; Loverseed, 1994) and attempts at classification (Pearce 1991; Inskip 1991). Given the declared intent of this work, it is also encouraging to note that an emerging body of literature (Braun and Soskin, 1999; Milman, 2001; Leask Fyall and Goulding 2000) is beginning to address the apparent shortage of empirical research into management issues.

Although presently somewhat narrow in focus, the increasing momentum of research activity alone, suggests an emerging imperative, namely, the effective and sustainable operation of attractions. It could be argued that this is born of a realisation that attractions are central to the future of tourism.

2.5.1 The Management Imperative

Having emphasised the importance of attractions as the fundamental catalyst for tourism activity, their identification and effective management seem central to a sustainable industry. More particularly since they frequently constitute critical points of differentiation between competing destinations failure to achieve continued viability places often reliant host economies at risk. From a more positive perspective optimising their potential can obviously have the opposite effect with considerable benefit flowing from successful operation.

As was earlier observed, however, attractions operate in a climate of significant change presenting attraction operators with a set of quite particular management challenges. These in turn largely shape organisational orientation and point to a range of management imperatives which guide decision making. In such an operating environment the ability or otherwise to adapt to change seems central to success.

Opening sections of chapter 3 will emphasise the overarching objective of management as a process of continually aligning the internal structures and processes of the organisation with changing environmental conditions. In this respect the management of attractions may seem to vary little from mainstream management

practice yet it is argued that the product and market characteristics of attractions are somewhat more complex in nature (Swarbrooke 2002) suggesting the need for an attraction centric approach. Development of such a model is, however, distinctly problematic. First, the sheer diversity of attraction types renders any attempt at articulating any one generic approach impractical if not impossible. Likewise the market for attractions either generally or specifically is anything but homogenous adding significant complexity to strategy formulation (Swarbrooke 2002).

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the successful management of attractions remains a key imperative. Whether the attraction is a vehicle of private sector enterprise, with normal and natural expectations of capital return; or is publicly funded with responsibilities vested in the conscientious use of public funds (Mc Kercher 2001), there is a fundamental pressure to operate at viable levels. For example, Leask Fyall and Garrod (2002) citing the heritage attraction sector in particular point to increasing funding pressure which emphasises the importance of sound management. Mc Kercher (2001, p.40) points to the imperative of “balancing community wishes with responsible fiscal management”. In both instances there may also be responsibilities vested in contribution to the broader good either economically or socially.

Although the pressures are arguably greater with publicly funded attractions positive community attitudes to tourism, and by implication individual tourism enterprises, are directly correlated to sustained visitor numbers. “Any decline in tourism numbers [engenders] negative attitudes to tourism” (McKercher 2001, p.31). If, as will later be suggested successful management is essentially about making optimum use of the resources and capabilities of the attraction towards realising greater market share the importance of effective management is emphasised.

It is, however, not simply the internal imperatives of individual attractions that demand prudent management. Attractions, and particularly those in rural settings, are frequently the catalyst for small business generation that might otherwise not exist because of small population concentrations. The indirect benefits flowing from the existence of a major attraction to rural communities (Ferrario 1979) suggests an implicit responsibility to remain viable. The implications of failure in terms of local employment and economic stimulus are considerable.

This is particularly so where there is some degree of reliance on tourism as an agent of economic development or as a substitute for declining industries. Breidenhann and

Wickens (2004, p.71) report on a number of studies that identify “tourism as an alternative development strategy for social and economic regeneration”, and “a catalyst to stimulate economic growth and increase the viability of underdeveloped regions”. Given that the same authors question the tenuous balance between benefits and ‘costs’ the pressure for attractions to provide a sustained contribution to local or regional economies suggests that optimising their potential is vital

The importance of effective management is further emphasised in considering the pivotal role played by robust differentiation in competing with alternative destinations. Sharpley (2007) suggests that larger or ‘flagship’ attractions can act as a ‘growth pole’ capable of increasing the number of visitors and underpinning the long term sustainable development of the area. Prideaux (2002), however, questions the assumption that the existence of attractions will necessarily cause tourism to flourish. In examining the role played by attractions in peripheral areas the author observes that despite increasing interest in attractions in rural settings. “Success has more to do with the decidedly unnostalgic issues of marketing, pulling power, viability and informed management” Prideaux (2002, p.380).

Economic considerations aside the effective management of attractions extends to ensuring their continued ability to draw visitors by maintaining fundamental elements of appeal. This raises critical issues of achieving a balance between visitation maximisation and the avoidance of negative impacts. Although to a greater or lesser degree this could be applied to attractions of all types, the challenge is most pronounced in the case of natural and heritage attractions where the essence of appeal is arguably more fragile. Garrod Fyall and Leask (2002, p.265) point in particular to the vulnerability of heritage attractions. This, the same authors suggest calls on management to develop more sustainable ways of managing their operation (p.266). Optimising the potential of attractions may thus be constrained by the seemingly dichotomous priorities of revenue generation and conservation. Although such a dilemma is more pronounced in heritage visitor attractions (Garrod and Fyall 2000), achieving a balance between these two management objectives is a challenge confronting attractions of all types. Garrod, Fyall and Leask (2002, p.266) do, however, see this as being attainable through the implementation of internally focused strategies directed at enhancing the visitor experience.

Rather than compromising conservation priorities in favour of a more commercial approach they contend that “an emphasis on the quality of the visitor experience must

start with a concern for caring for the site” (p.266). Nasser (2003) suggests that achieving a symbiotic relationship between tourism and conservation has become a major management objective in planning. Achieving such a seemingly intricate balance demonstrates the absolute importance of sound management.

Haber and Lerner (1998, p.198) bring an interesting perspective to the discussion linking the organisational and entrepreneurial attributes of management to visitor satisfaction and thereby business performance. From an organisational perspective they suggest that quality has the greatest impact on visitor satisfaction, encompassing the management functions of marketing, operations and human resource management. Their entrepreneurial dimension points to some of the more strategic aspects of management, linking management skills and the ability to manage risk to successful operation. Wilson et al (2001) appear to share this view including entrepreneurial activity as a key component for the development of tourism. Since it will be contended in chapter 3 that these functions are fundamental tenets of sound management, their fulfilment is nothing less than essential to attractions

Although the literature with respect to the importance of attraction management is both thin, and somewhat fragmented, the complexity of the attraction product, in both an individual and collective sense; and the equally complex set of environmental influences discussed earlier; underscore the imperative of sound management. The critical link between vision process and viability, although common to most organisational forms, is arguably more pronounced in attractions. As a dynamic ‘product’ consumed by a volatile market the process of maintaining alignment between product and market is problematic. In the absence of any cohesive ‘model’ of attraction management chapter 3 turns to more generic theories of organisational management in an attempt to explore their relevance to the attraction sector. In particular, the process by which organisations achieve congruence with their operating environment becomes a principal focus.

3.0 Organisational Management

In pursuit of those elements of broader management theory that can be satisfactorily applied to attractions, this chapter will:

- Explore both traditional and contemporary theories with respect to the roles and functions of management.
- Point to planning as the pre-eminent function of management
- Explore the processes that underpin effective planning
- Examine the dynamics of environmental adaption or the process by which organisations achieve and maintain alignment with their operating environment
- Consider the relevance of such concepts to attractions
- Articulate a set of research questions arising from the research problem outlined in chapter 1, and subsequent literature discovery

3.1 Management Functions

Chapter 2 placed considerable emphasis on the changing environment in which attractions of various types operate. This accentuates the absolute importance of effective management. More particularly, it suggests that adaptability [degrees of environmental fit] is a central element of survival. Although attractions share common characteristics with organisations generally it is held that there are some aspects of their mission and operation which render them unique. In considering the challenges associated with effective response to change this chapter is directed at considering the primary functions of management, and more particularly, theory as it relates to the adaptive process.

Apart from the functional aspects of planning and directing the day to day activities of the organisation Samson and Daft (2003) suggest that the overarching objective of management is the efficient and effective coordination of available resources towards the attainment of organisational goals. The simple, but profound, observation that organisations are “social [entities] that are goal directed and deliberately structured” (ibid, p.14) points to a fundamental distinction between strategy which is central to goal direction, and structural alignment as a means of making optimum use of resources. The defining factor, however, appears to be the inevitability of change both within the

organisation, and in the external environment in which it operates. As Chakravarthy (1982, p.35) observes “the essence of management is coping with change”.

Management is thus conceptualised as a more or less constant process of aligning the capabilities and functions of the organisation with the demands and opportunities presented by the external environment. Whether, as will be discussed later, internal structures and processes are dictated by strategic focus, or whether the antithetical proposition applies, the importance of effective management both internally and externally is emphasised. In short, effective management implies both the fulfilment of functional roles and the ability to conceptualise and realise strategic objectives.

More importantly, achieving a balance between the various aspects of management is central to successful business operation. In what is considered the seminal work in the field of systematic management theory Fayol (1984) conceptualised the functions of management as being five fold involving planning, organising, coordinating, commanding, and controlling (Fells 2000). Although Koontz (1961, p.174) observes that these were based more on a “distillation of experience” rather than empirical research, they remain an integral element of modern management theory. As distinct from specific functions Mintzberg (1973) envisaged three fundamental roles of management which, it is suggested, underpin the functions outlined by Fayol (1984).

- An *interpersonal* role which emphasises the need for leadership and liaison
- An *informational* role with management as disseminator and spokesperson
- A *decisional* role which includes the key functions of entrepreneur and resource allocator.

For example, management would logically assume a number of roles in the fulfilment of a particular function. Planning for instance could involve displaying leadership, disseminating information and making decisions with respect to strategy. As such functions are viewed as part of a physical process by which organisations are managed, whereas roles are more representative of the interaction which takes place in support of the process. Although there is considerable debate as to which of the two models provides the most accurate depiction of managerial ‘work’ (Mintzberg 1973; Chapman, 2001) it is held that the functional perspective is more reflective of a decision based managerial model.

Given earlier observations with respect to the volatility of the operating environment of attractions considering how the respective functions of management as outlined by Fayol (1984) foster effective management in this context, may hold some prescriptive value, yet it is what Camillus (1997) describes as the “predicament of discontinuity” that renders all management action in a more or less constant state of flux. In short, this author suggests that “the focus of strategic planning and management is shifting from attempts to adapt to a predictable future to flexible and speedy responses to a changing present” (p.2). At the same time Camillus (1997) points to a need to broaden the strategic horizon by “looking beyond a period of certainty where the organisation can expect to maintain its current strategy” (p.1). Strategy therefore needs to be viewed as a dynamic process requiring significant flexibility and dexterity on the part of management.

Strategy also needs to be viewed beyond traditional perspectives of being purely externally oriented to what Chakravarthy (1982, p.35) describes as the “strategy of structure”, which addresses the question of “how the resources of the firm are configured for effective response to unanticipated surprises”. This suggests that rather than being simply directed at such things as market alignment strategy encompasses a number of interdependent decisions and actions across the entire gamut of management functions. Such a process is supportive of later discussion with respect to the alignment of strategy, structure, and process as a means of adapting to change.

By adopting this more eclectic view of strategy it becomes possible to consider the nature of strategic action in each of the management functions outlined by Fayol (1984). By so doing, a more inclusive view of management actions and imperatives becomes possible.

3.1.1 Planning as a management function

Described by Koontz (1958 p.47) as “the selection, from amongst alternatives of enterprise objectives, policies, procedures and programs”, planning represents the most important managerial function in that it is directed at aligning internal resources and competencies with the opportunities and threats presented by external forces of whatever kind. Although earlier discussion suggested that this is largely a dynamic process with realignment a constant challenge, the absence of long range objectives seems completely counter to the nature of organised enterprise which it was suggested, is fundamentally goal directed. Perhaps more importantly Koontz (1958)

suggested that the establishment of goals is necessary for meaningful group effort. Without planning in all of its manifestations action is merely a random activity producing nothing but chaos (Goetz 1949, in Koontz 1958).

Although the value of planning seems obvious, the ability of management to exercise this vital function is, however not always entirely discretionary. The contention that strategies or goals need to be supported by adequate structures and internal processes is based on the assumption that the requisite resources are in place to facilitate the process. Moreover, Chakravarthy (1982) suggests that certain types of organisational structures are by nature more adaptable. There also appears to be an assumption that planning is an intuitive process which raises issues both of management skill and/or the ability of the organisation to engage in effective environmental scanning.

Resources in particular are a defining factor in both an ability and inclination to engage in strategic planning. In discussing adaptive capacity Chakravarthy (1982) suggests that those organisations that are poorly endowed with material resources are more likely to adopt defensive strategies and be less inclined to experimentation. Conversely, those with adequate resources are more likely to be proactive and to look for new business opportunities. As Chakravarthy (1982, p.37) goes on to observe, “the state of adaption that a firm aspires to is predicated on the resources that it commands, that is its adaptive ability”.

Recognising the value of proactive planning also questions the inference that planning is reactive in nature with planning decisions being made in response to environmental changes. The assumption that organisations cannot influence the environment is to completely dispel the value of proactive management styles which may even seek to create environmental uncertainty as a means of gaining competitive advantage. The assumption implicit in much of the literature that uncertainty is detrimental to satisfactory performance should be reconsidered particularly in industries where entrepreneurial activity, risk taking or innovation is essential (Jauch and Kraft 1986).

A representative body of literature (Bourgeois 1980; Chakravarthy 1982; Jauch and Kraft 1986; Chapman 2001) also suggests that the inconstancy and complexity of the operating environment is a significant determinant of propensity style and effectiveness of planning. Given comments in chapter 2 with respect to the operating environment of attractions such an observation has particular resonance.

Chakravarthy (1982) in particular points to a direct link between degrees of environmental complexity and strategic orientation ranging from purely defensive stances in unstable circumstances, to an active quest for new opportunities in more or less benign environmental conditions. Such a perspective echoes the seminal work of Miles and Snow (1978) who ascribed the terms 'defender' and 'prospector' to these strategic orientations.

Finally, since the alignment of strategy and structure is central to the notion of successful adaption the suggestion that certain types of organisational structure are more conducive to effective planning seems a logical conclusion. In essence this centres on the contention that organically structured organisations are more likely to be receptive to entrepreneurial strategies than highly mechanistic organisations. As Saleh and Wang (1993, p.14) observe, "An organic structure is expected to facilitate innovation through its flexibility and ability to respond to a fast changing and turbulent environment". To some extent this contradicts earlier discussion with respect to the process of making structural adjustments to match strategic planning but it is argued that this is more about shifts in emphasis rather than structural overhaul. It could be satisfactorily argued that shifts in emphasis would be easier to facilitate in organic structures than in their more formal counterparts.

In this section, planning was advanced as a pre-eminent management function given that it is the principle means by which organisations align themselves with changes in the operating environment (Miles and Snow 1978). Although it was suggested that proactive planning held greater prescriptive value, a number of constraints were identified, most notably a lack of resources, levels of environmental complexity, and inflexible structures. Since the work overall is directed at examining the fortunes of organisations in complex operating environments considerations of structural and resource capacity are advanced as key indicators.

3.1.2 Organising and commanding as management functions

Although Fayol (1984) articulated organising and commanding as two quite discrete managerial functions, their joint examination reveals some interesting correlations particularly as they relate to the distinction between those functions vested in authority and control, and those more particularly directed at operational and process issues. More particularly, the distinction reflects the changes in management style that have occurred since the first translation of Fayol's seminal text was published in 1949. A

body of contemporary literature (see for example van Oudtshoorn and Thomas 1995; Chapman 2001), points to significant changes in organisational culture and structure as a result of changing environmental conditions. Such changes, Chapman (2001 p.56) suggests “place further pressure on organizations to respond quickly to changing contingencies and markets”.

In contending that, despite criticism, Fayol's theories have ‘stood the test of time’, Fells (2000) offers a useful and concise summation of some of the key elements of these two functions which are illustrative of the point. Interestingly, there are some apparent contradictions between some of the functional aspects and Parker and Ritson's observation (2005 p.1350) that “in essence Fayol never believed that the practice of management was the exclusive prerogative of senior executives”. For example Fayol (in Fells 2000) includes the maintenance of discipline and control as central elements of both the organising and command function. More strikingly ‘eliminating the incompetent’ and ‘ensuring the subordination of individual interests to corporate interests’ both arguably have distinct connotations of an authoritarian ethos. Such an approach is also clearly inconsistent with the “new democratic type of organization which seeks to maximise the potential of every employee through encouraging their independence and initiative and seeking their commitment rather than obedience” (van Oudtshoorn and Thomas 1995, pp.30-31).

With respect to operational and process issues there are again a number of themes which appear common to the functions of organising and commanding. Fayol (1984) suggested that an integral part of organising was the clear delineation of duties such that resources could be aligned with objectives. Encouraging initiative and responsibility and ensuring proper plan execution were amongst the remaining functional characteristics. These appear to be more representative of more contemporary styles of management of which an emphasis on effective structures and employee empowerment are central elements. As Garvin (1998, p.42) observes “the focus is on the way that managers orchestrate activities and events and engage others in tasks so that desired ends are realized [sic].

The notion of leadership rather than command, which enjoys considerable currency in modern management literature, is however by no means a new phenomenon. Parker and Ritson (2005) point to a collection of the seminal writings of Mary Parker Follet (Follet 1941 in Fox and Urwick 1973) observing her advocacy for ‘facilitating leadership’ rather than ‘leadership by command’. Although there are clearly remaining

examples of bureaucratic organisations major studies that have attempted to synthesise the evolving literature of management (see for example Lamond 1995) emphasise a distinct shift from old paradigms of management characterised by discipline and inflexibility to newer approaches based on employee empowerment and facilitative leadership.

If indeed empowerment and the decentralisation of 'power' are central to the emerging paradigm, it is worth observing that they are in turn inextricably linked to the structure and culture of the organisation. As such, it could be argued that the facilitation of empowerment goes beyond simple ideology offering some significant prescriptive value. In a valuable examination of the literature with respect to employee empowerment, Honold (1997) points to the absolute importance of leadership focused on creating the structure and organisational culture that are conducive to real employee participation. "Management's job from this perspective is to create a culture of participation by creating a compelling mission, a structure that emphasizes [sic] flexibility and autonomy, rewards for participation and a lack of punishment for risk taking" (Honold 1997, p.206). Although van Oudtshoorn and Thomas (1995) are generally supportive of such a view they emphasise that management should impose limits to subordinate empowerment in the interests of eliminating any ambiguities and encouraging employees to take risks within prescribed boundaries.

Apart from the command function, which has clearly assumed quite different connotations over time, it appears that much of what Fayol (1984) viewed as the specifics of the organising and command functions continues to be relevant to the modern organisation. Whether the apparent shift in organisational characteristics and management styles has been simply an evolutionary process or is a response to an increasingly volatile operating environment is a matter for conjecture. Since it will be submitted that successful operation is almost entirely predicated on adaptive capacity there is some support for the latter proposition yet simple evolution remains a factor.

As Rausch (2003, p.979) observes, "though the word 'commanding' strikes us as somewhat odd today, in the early 1900s it was a fairly accurate description of the relationship between manager and subordinate". Either way the increasing sophistication of management practice provides the modern organisation with a blue print which, if properly implemented, potentially enhances the extent to which it can cope with change.

3.1.3

Co-ordinating as a management function

Described as “the harmonisation of resources in their optimum proportions in order to achieve results” (Fells 2000, p.359) the coordination function represents one of the most important aspects of the management agenda, insofar as it is directed at ensuring the efficient use of the organisation’s resources. Perhaps more importantly it underpins the process of aligning internal structures and processes with strategic objectives, which is central to environmental adaptation. Furthermore, the notion of harmonisation logically has implications in terms of the creation and maintenance of a positive organisation culture which, it has already been stressed, is integral to modern management practice.

Although as Van De Ven, Delbecq, and Koenig (1997) observe that coordination mechanisms have traditionally been viewed from an organisational perspective the fact that the majority of instrumental functions are performed at the work unit level points to a potentially richer level of analysis. Moreover, the fact that it is the coordination of these discrete but often interdependent units that is the essence of effective organisational structures and processes emphasises the need for skilful management of the process.

Focusing on coordination at this level, Van de Ven et al (1976) offer some valuable insights into the means by which coordination might be effected and the independent variables that influence and predict the process. Their paper focuses in particular on the level of communication distinguishing between impersonal, personal and group modes of coordination. Here a distinction is made between “impersonal coordination which embodies formalized [sic] rules, policies and procedures; and personal or group modes which foster vertical communication” (p.323). The former, they suggest, is achieved through a process of what is termed ‘programming’ and the latter by feedback and mutual adjustments based upon new information. The latter is consistent with the concept of a ‘learning organisation’ which is discussed in the following section.

Although, at face value, personal communication seems more representative of the new management paradigm, and thereby the most desirable approach, the extent to which any or all of these options can be exercised is not entirely discretionary. As Van de Ven et al (1976, p.324) observe, “variations in the use of coordination mechanisms are not explained solely by administrative prescriptions. There are a set of more fundamental factors that may explain the use of alternatives”.

In the first instance the difficulty and variability of the tasks undertaken by individual units, [termed task uncertainty] is directly instrumental in determining whether task activities can be standardised and programmed. "As the task increases in uncertainty it becomes more difficult to coordinate by impersonal means" Van de Ven et al (1976, p.324). Since both difficulty and variability of unit tasks could, at least in part, be attributed to changes in the external environment, the use of personal lateral communication and a culture of organisational learning are yet again reinforced as the characteristics of organisations with the highest adaptive capability.

A number of authors (Mohr 1971; Van de Ven et al 1976; Clemmons and Simon 2001) suggest that interdependence between operational units is also a key predictor of the adoption of coordination mechanisms. Although interdependence assumes a variety of dimensions, and these will be discussed here, McCann and Ferry (1979) suggest that it can be conceptualised as "the condition where the actions taken within one unit affect the actions and work outcomes of another unit" (p.114). Since the overarching management objective, oft stated in various sections of this chapter, is the alignment of resources with strategic objectives, assessing and managing inter-unit interdependencies seems central to the process.

Such additional dimensions include the frequency, scale and value of exchanges between work units (McCann and Ferry 1979), whether the work flows are part of a unidirectional exchange process; are reciprocal in nature; or are characterised by work units producing independent outcomes as contributions to the organisation (Thompson 1967 in Victor and Blackburn 1987). Although to some extent this is viewed as being essentially 'production' centric, its applicability to service industries can not be ignored. In the context of this study for example, the contribution made by specific task units to the overall visitor experience can be clearly discerned.

Interdependence

Mc Cann and Ferry (1979) add yet another perspective in observing that interdependence may be moderated by each unit's perceptions of its transactional interdependence. These may be either congruent [both units perceive the same level of interdependence], or incongruent [one unit perceives one level of interdependence and the other a different level. (p.116)]. These authors suggest that this has quite particular implications in terms of internal cohesion with incongruent perceptions more

likely to give rise to conflict. Since discussion in other sections of this chapter have emphasised the importance of positive organisational culture and shared vision, overcoming such barriers to effective coordination appears central to effective operation. It has implications too, with respect to organisational structure either in terms of prevailing structures' impact on effective coordination; or the management challenge associated with ensuring that structures facilitate effective coordination.

The defining factor however, appears to be degrees of interdependence. Cheng (1983, p.158) was able to demonstrate strong support for the hypothesis that "the relationship between coordination and organisational performance will become stronger as the level of interdependence increases". The suggestion that a positive correlation exists between organisational size, complexity, and degrees of interdependence (Van de Ven et al 1976) points to the final determinant of coordination mode, namely the size of both individual work units, and the organisation overall.

Organisational size

Much of the early literature with respect to size as a determinant of co-ordination mode focused on changes in administrative intensity (see for example Pondy 1969, Klatsky 1970; Ford and Slocum 1977; Dalton, Todor, Sendolini, Fielding, and Porter 1980), the fact that this, in itself, may be a product of increased complexity and task differentiation offers some useful insights into the link between the intricacies of the coordination function and organisational size. Ford and Slocum (1977) declare that "the basic assumption that underlies research on administrative intensity is that increases in size [number of people] lead to increases in control and coordination requirements". Pondy (1969) in particular points to empirical research supporting the contention that increases in the ratio of administrative personnel are symptomatic of increased co-ordination problems arising from greater task complexity and greater division of labor.

The fundamental premise, namely, that as organisations increase in size and structural complexity there may be some diminution of flexibility, and thereby ability to adapt, suggests that performance may be challenged by coordination problems arising from increasing organisational size. Although Dalton et al (1980) point to some debate as to the causal link between increases in administrative intensity and productivity; on the basis of an exhaustive review of the literature they concede that "the relationship between administrative intensity and performance remains undetermined" (p.57).

With respect to organisational size specifically, Beyer and Trice (1979) point to a similar polarity of views divided between theories of organisational structure that treats size as the primary cause of complexity (principally Blau 1970; Meyer 1972); and studies which appear to support the contention that the relationship is somewhat more intricate (see for example Ford and Slocum 1977). There are theoretical issues too with respect to whether, as Meyer (1972 p.434) questions “size precedes other organisational attributes” or whether the antithetical proposition applies.

Expressed as a broad proposition, however, there appears to be broad consensus that, as an organisation increases in size, there will be corresponding increases in structural differentiation and organisational complexity rendering effective coordination more problematic. Blau’s authoritative work (1970) explicitly supports the causal link between size, differentiation, and effects on coordination.

Fayol’s (1984) vision of effective coordination as a force for internal harmony and resource maximisation elevates this management function to a position of importance. Arguably the entire process of devising and executing strategy; gauging the relative success of such initiatives; and taking corrective action is underpinned by management’s ability to foster collaboration and communication between designated work units.

3.1.4 Control as a management function

Despite opening suggestions that strategic planning may be the pre-eminent management function, the exercise of management control shares importance given that is the means by which strategic action is operationalised. By intent, therefore, ongoing discussion affords the function of control greater emphasis given that it encapsulates the wide range of managerial activities that impact on the outcomes of strategic action.

Simons (1990, p.128) describes management control as “a feedback process of planning, objective setting, monitoring, feedback and corrective action to ensure that outcomes are in accordance with plans”. As such, planning and control are clearly part of an inseparable process (Koontz1958) directed at optimising and evaluating strategic effectiveness. As logical as such a framework may seem, however, in reality management control is an inherently complex process in synthesising strategic, structural and organisational elements. Having set strategic objectives, the ongoing

challenge for management is to evaluate implementation, and to assess results such that corrective action can be effected. In what Schreyögg and Steinmann (1987) describe as the last step in the strategic management process these functions of review and feedback are arguably as important as the strategies which they support.

Effective implementation of this aspect of control relies, however, on certain structural and organisational characteristics which influence individual and collective orientation and facilitate information flows. On-going discussion will focus on literature perspectives as to the scope and scale of control; major impediments to its implementation; and to the essential 'qualities' of organisations best equipped to exercise effective control.

Definitional issues

A comprehensive understanding of the control process is perhaps best achieved by considering a range of definitions given that they point to the essential elements of the process. Amongst the more comprehensive definitions, particularly as it relates to monitoring and feedback is offered by Otley Broadbent and Berry (1995) alluding to the early work of Lowe and McInnes (1971).

A system of organisational information seeking and gathering, accountability and feedback designed to ensure that the enterprise adapts to changes in its substantive environment and that the work behaviour of its employees is measured by reference to a set of operational sub-goals [which conform with overall objectives] so that the discrepancy between the two can be reconciled and corrected for (Lowe et al 1971).

This definition encapsulates a wide range of functions ranging from environmental scanning, communication, human resource management, and strategic adjustment all of which have their own particular challenges. This in turn predicates particular organisational characteristics and orientations which are discussed in greater detail later in this section.

Although criticised on the grounds of being too accounting oriented, Anthony (1965) adds another dimension in suggesting that the process is resource dependant. Defining management control as "the process by which managers assure that resources are obtained and used effectively and efficiently in the accomplishment of the organisations objectives" (Otley et al 1995 p.32). Later discussion will consider the

relative merits of various criteria in evaluating performance, however this perspective is valuable in that it implies that adaptive capacity could be constrained by a lack of resources. In later examination of the impediments to effective management control, adequate resources are highlighted as a key determinant.

In citing the early work of Mundel (1967), Giglioni and Bedeian (1974) offer what is perhaps the most strikingly simple definition of control declaring it to be a “constant cyclic-type activity of plan-do-compare-correct with its continuous concomitant system of communication or flow of information” (p.293). Despite the beguiling simplicity of this definition it adds yet another two valuable dimensions by suggesting that management control is far from a static process; and that it relies on a constant flow of information. The inconstancy of the operating environment in particular will later be highlighted as a significant impediment to exercising effective control. As Otley et al (1995) observe, the management of change “should not be seen as a discrete event bounded by periods of stability; rather [it is] concerned with management in the context of continual change” (p.40). Additionally, a number of authors (Otley1995; Chenhall 2002) validate the importance of effective communication flows in facilitating control

The control function thus appears central to effective adaption insofar as the implementation of strategy seems pointless if outcomes are not measured and corrective action not taken. Moreover the process requires constant attention; open lines of communication; and an organisational structure and climate that fosters a collective vision. These and other issues are discussed in following sections of the chapter. More importantly they provide specific areas of focus in considering critical determinants of adaption to changing environmental conditions.

Dimensions of control

Later discussion will point to ‘traditional’ perspectives of the control function as being dominated by the accounting literature and suggest that a critical distinction needs to be made between financial control and management control. Various authors (Otley 1995; Langfield-Smith1997) see financial control as being more formal in nature encompassing such things as budgeting systems, standard procedure instructions, and the management of human resources. This, the author contrasts with informal controls that “include the unwritten policies of the organization [that are] often an artefact of the organizational culture” (p.208). Although he observes that “informal controls are not consciously designed” and are often a reflection of the values and

beliefs of the dominant culture or 'clan', the fact that they are seen to underpin formal controls is a point of some significance.

Ouchi (1979, p.833) suggests that this may present problems "in obtaining cooperation amongst a collection of individuals or units who share only partially congruent objectives" pointing to quite particular challenges for management. A representative body of literature (Prasad 1993; Parker Dipboye and Jackson 1995; Witt 1998; Witt, Andrews and Kacmar 2000) suggests that the problem may be exacerbated by organisational politics which constitute a threat to individual and organisational goals.

Witt (1998) contends that enhancing goal congruence and reducing goal ambiguity may in part be achieved by ensuring the management priorities are understood since "low levels of understanding are likely to compound the problems inherent in political environments" (p.667). "Increasing understanding and decreasing politics may [therefore] increase commitment and performance" (ibid p.667). This again emphasises the absolute importance of effective communication and participatory decision making. In the context of this research which specifically seeks to identify catalysts and impediments to successful operation [manifested as successful alignment of the organisation's internal and external environments], this is an area worthy of focus.

Levels of control

Finally, a critical distinction needs to be made between the various levels of control mirroring as they do the wide range of management responsibilities. In what is considered by many as the seminal work in the field, Anthony (1965) described control as having three distinct foci ranging from operational control directed at ensuring that immediate tasks are carried out, to strategic control which sets and operationalises strategic direction. The third dimension, namely managerial control, was seen as forming the link between the two.

Although achieving the necessary synergies between these areas has traditionally been the essence of management activity, Langfield-Smith (1997) contends that managerial and strategic controls are no longer the sole domain of management. Born of more organic structural forms "it is becoming more common for lower level employees to be actively involved, not only in the day-to-day processes that were once the domain of middle and senior managers, but in activities that are of strategic

significance” (p.209). This is seen as having particular implications for the management of organisations in terms of multi-skilling and employee empowerment and may mark a shift in emphasis from management as exercised power to the remaining functions of co-ordinating, organising and leading. There are implications too for organisational structure. If, as will be suggested later, less bureaucratic structures foster innovation and enhance environmental adaption, flexible approaches to organisational structure may hold some prescriptive value. Saleh and Wang’s (1993) observation that small organisations are more conducive to this type of structure has particular resonance in the context of this research

Monitoring and feedback

As arguably the most critical aspect of the control process, the means by which performance is measured relative to the established objectives raises issues of the criteria to be used. Although a number of authors (Gigliani and Bedeian 1974; Venkatraman and Ramanujam 1986; Eccles 1991; Kaplan and Norton 1992; Otley Broadbent and Berry 1995; Brignall and Ballantine 1996) point to the domination of accountancy based frameworks, “an important distinction needs to be made between management control and financial control given that financial management is one business function amongst many” (Otley et al p.33). This is not, however simply an ideological divide since both approaches embody quite particular priorities which ultimately influence every aspect of operations.

Financial management’s instinctive focus on such things as probability and return on investment, although obviously critical to sustainable operation, need to be balanced with non financial performance indicators such as market share, new product introduction, product quality, and market effectiveness (Venkatraman and Ramanujam 1986). An even more eclectic view of performance is offered by Kaplan and Norton (1992) in suggesting that performance is best measured by the adoption of what was termed the ‘balanced scorecard’ which evaluates performance not only on financial criteria but on customer satisfaction, internal processes, and levels of innovation. Brignall and Ballantine (1996) make the same observation with respect to service industries in particular, adding flexibility and resource utilisation to the mix.

Since, as Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986, p.804) observe, these key operational success factors might lead to enhanced financial performance it could be argued that they are, to a large extent, interdependent. Given the particular focus of this research

which seeks to identify factors that contribute to successful environmental adaptation, acceptance of this broader framework contributes to a more inclusive approach. An obvious difference exists, however, between performance assessment which is based on financial yardsticks and thereby quantitative in nature; and qualitative judgments of organisational characteristics. If anything, the latter presents a greater challenge, but is nonetheless considered important.

Regardless of which variables are used, obtaining feedback as to performance against objectives, involves a process of what Argyris (1977) terms organisational learning. Kloot (1997) sees this as “a process whereby members of the organisation respond to changes in the internal and external environment by detecting errors which they then correct so as to maintain the central features of the organisation” (pp.48-49). Such a process is seen as being central to the adaptive process. There are, however, a number of factors that impact on the extent to which respective organisations are successful in these endeavours

First, the capacity or propensity to engage in environmental scanning or surveillance [actively seeking external information] or the degree of participation in the decision making process [actively both seeking and communicating internal information] can partly determine the response to environmental change (Kloot 1997). Secondly, this suggests that organisational culture and structure may be significant determinants both in the learning process and in adaptive capability. Wang and Amed (2003) in fact see these two elements as being interdependent in that “traditional hierarchical cultures are anti learning and undermine the ability of organisations to match and survive increasing competition” (p.11).

Viewed from a structural perspective, a number of early authors (Fiol and Lyles 1985; Saleh and Wang 1993; Slater and Narver 1995) point to the need for more flexible decentralised organisational structures that foster the assimilation of new ideas and provide sufficient flexibility to meet modified circumstances. As Fiol and Lyles (1985, p.805) observe “a centralised, mechanistic structure tends to re-enforce past behaviours” rather than encouraging learning and reflective action taking. Although Stonehouse and Pemberton (1999 p.139) submit that “there is no single structure that uniquely supports learning”, flat network structures appear to facilitate knowledge management better.

In particular, the more or less continuous process of knowledge acquisition, information distribution and interpretation, and knowledge retention (Huber 1991), would be more effective where organisational structures are flat and organic. Issues of knowledge retention also have implications in terms of the dissipation of expertise due to high staff turnover, suggesting that stable structures may be a key determinant in building the 'organisational memory'. Moreover, since as Schreyögg and Steinmann (1987) suggest organisational structure and culture act as filtering elements which can potentially distort the process of data acquisition and handling, the importance of appropriate structures is emphasised.

The role of culture

Described by Wang and Ahmed (2003 p.11) as a "sense making mechanism that guides and shapes values, behaviours and attitudes of employees", culture is also an important element of the organisational learning process. In keeping with organic structural forms, Stonehouse and Pemberton (1999 p.137) suggest that "the [an] organisations culture must nurture a climate within which learning and knowledge are highly valued, motivating individuals to constantly question existing practice". From a management perspective this suggests a number of key priorities including valuing learning and knowledge, empowering individuals, and encouraging experimentation (Stonehouse and Pemberton (1999). Since Miles and Snow (1978) postulate that an organisation's strategic posture [ranging from defensive to proactive orientations] is tied closely to its culture emphasises the importance of fostering an open and communicative organisational climate. In examining the characteristics of the innovative and entrepreneurial organisation, Saleh and Wang (1993) point to the need for synthesis or integration between operative units and between hierarchical levels.

The prescriptive value of these observations in framing the 'ideal' learning organisation enjoy strong support in the literature, yet three final factors determine the extent to which organisations are able to adapt to a fast changing environment. Successful innovation, according to Saleh and Wang (1993 p.15) is predicated on a willingness to take at least some risk, on a proactive rather than reactive orientation and on an enduring and persistent management commitment to the chosen strategy.

Impediments to effective control

Despite control being a vital ingredient in the realisation of strategic objectives, there are a number of impediments to effective control that may render strategic action less effective. A body of literature points to the problematic nature of this management function because of the inconstant nature of the operating environment, a lack of management commitment; the possibility of ill conceived strategies the inevitable time lag between failed strategies, feedback, and corrective action (Schreyögg and Steinmann 1987; Field 1997) and issues of knowledge retention and utilisation Argyris 1976:1977; Stonehouse and Pemberton 1999). Moreover, “feedback can be seriously misleading since environmental circumstances may have changed significantly, thereby rendering strategic control standards obsolete” (Schreyögg and Steinmann 1987 p.92). Each of these aspects is worthy of brief examination given that they each have particular implications for management.

Despite earlier assertions (Saleh and Wang 1993; Witt 1998) that organic organisations characterised by participatory decision making, are more conducive to effective control mechanisms, a lack of management commitment to the process constitutes a significant impediment. In alluding to the earlier work of Saul (1992), Field (1997) observes that despite considering control related techniques to be very important, “a large sample of Australian supervisors attach little importance to getting employees to question the status quo and to make on-going improvements” (p.152). Field (1997) suggests that this is in part due to ambivalence on the part of management born of caution about the role of the empowered learner, and staff reluctance to assume power because of role ambiguity and possibly a climate of hostility or blame.

Arriving at a shared vision or a common understanding of the issues can thus be distinctly problematic. The situation is frequently exacerbated by motivational and cognitive differences (Simon 1991), and the prevailing technoculture which Field (1997) describes as the assumptions associated with the organisation’s human and technical systems. Such culture, Field declares “can perpetuate control-oriented ways of operating even if management has made a genuine attempt to foster empowerment and learning” (1997, p.149). Schein (2003) articulates a clear link between organisational effectiveness and the “evolution of shared mental models that cut across the sub cultures of the organization” (p.28). Overcoming the impediments

imposed by current cultural rules with respect to interaction and communication is, the same author suggests, first predicated on dialogue. In a very direct sense therefore, the existence or absence of internal cohesion can be seen as a key determinant in the organisation's ability to adapt.

The remaining impediments to effective control, namely the consequences of ill-conceived strategies, and problems associated with inevitable delays in the information loop between failed strategies and corrective action, both present a distinctive set of challenges to management. Here the nexus between strategy and internal process is most ably demonstrated, since delays in reacting to ineffective strategies may result in equally ineffective organisational responses. This may perpetuate a cycle of failed strategy which ultimately becomes increasingly difficult to rectify. Examining the most common reasons for failed strategies offers some worthwhile insights into the process of strategy formulation and the most commonly cited causes of failure. It also offers what the researcher views as some opportunities for avoidance or remediation which would contribute to more effective control. In addressing the reasons for strategic failure, Sterling (2003, p.27) suggests that "the causes can often be anticipated and the pitfalls can be avoided".

Sterling (2003) also makes an important distinction between strategy at a tactical or project level and organisation wide strategy suggesting that failure to integrate the two represents a weakness in the planning and control process. For example, the discovery that there are insufficient resources to implement the chosen strategy may result in only partial implementation (Snow and Hambrick 1980), may see support for the strategy evaporate (Sterling 2003), or may see senior management pull back from the strategy completely. Ensuring that strategies are in sync with organisational capacity constitutes an integral element of effective control.

Although Sterling (2003) argues that good strategies are, by nature, timely and adventurous and often the result of management intuition, perhaps the greatest single impediment to effective control is an absence of communication directed at developing an understanding of the strategy amongst those who need to implement it. In fact Giles (1991) suggests that it is much more than simply communicating the strategy to those charged with its implementation but actually encouraging 'ownership' of the strategy. Although Guffey and Neinhuis (2002) point to a shift towards sharing strategic plans with employees, traditionally, "top management has been reluctant to share knowledge of the strategic plan with employees for fear that competitors will learn about it" (p.23).

Such observations resonate with earlier discussion with respect to organisational culture. Developing a culture of participation and trust where control is not totally vested in top management has the potential to minimise, if not eradicate, this impediment.

Although this may imply a consultative process in the framing of strategy, Sterling (2003) reasons, however, that executive intuition should not be devalued particularly in situations of high uncertainty. Further, strategies may not even exist or may emerge unintentionally (Snow and Hambrick 1980; Inkpen and Choudhury 1995) suggesting that in certain situations uncertainty will prevail regardless of management intent. Having earlier asserted the value of organic organisations to adaptive capability it is difficult to completely ignore the value of independent decision making. Shared values may thus be more a matter of an enduring organisational culture than communicating the merits or bona fides of individual strategies. Given Miles and Snow's suggestion that strategy (1978) is a pattern the organisations important decisions and actions may suggest that in the truly organic organisation strategic direction is cumulative rather than necessarily tactical.

Timing of corrective action

Another significant impediment to effective control is the almost inevitable time lag that occurs between the formulation and implementation of strategy, feedback, and the opportunity for corrective action. The mere fact that the process is inherently post hoc in nature implies reactivity which should be based on timely and accurate information. As Schreyögg and Steinmann (1987, p.92) observe, however, "feedback may not come until the strategy has been fully implemented with years going by without any chance to intervene". Although they observe that "this may be mitigated by checking more frequently for deviations from planned performance", the process of learning is clearly problematic.

Argyris (1976) suggests that the problem may even be exacerbated by deliberate suppression of feedback information due to interdepartmental and interpersonal conflicts, avoidance of uncertainty and politics. Such a view is shared by Stonehouse and Pemberton (1999 p.141) in observing that "individuals may resist sharing knowledge, its release seen as a loss of personal power". Perhaps more importantly "the factors that inhibit valid feedback tend to become increasingly more operative as the decisions become more important" (Argyris 1976 pp.366-367). This suggests quite

particular challenges for the management of organisations both in terms of organisational structure and culture.

Even supposing that these problems are surmountable, the means by which organisations retain and utilise knowledge derived from feedback is yet another important factor in the control process. Argyris (1976:1977) makes an important distinction between 'single loop' learning which focuses on solutions to particular problems, and 'double loop' learning "which revolves around not only the immediate solution to the problem but the development of principles that may inform and determine future behaviour" (Stonehouse and Pemberton 1999 p.135). The former, Pemberton and Stonehouse (2000) argue, is more directed at survival rather than "inform[ing] and determining organisational behaviour and leading to new ways of doing business" (p.187).

Creating the learning organisation in this way would seem to have distinct implications in terms of the retention of key staff within whom at least part of the accumulated knowledge logically resides. Although a distinction needs to be made between individual and organisational knowledge, "one of the most important functions of knowledge management is to ensure that individual learning leads to organisational knowledge" (Pemberton and Stonehouse 2000 p.185). There is significant support in the literature (Senge 1992; Mintzberg Ahlstrand and Lampel 1998; Harvey and Denton 1999; Wang and Ahmed 2003) for the contention that such a process is largely predicated on the creation of a learning culture which prizes knowledge. This is about tapping people's commitment and capacity to learn (Senge 1992). That this in turn may lead to higher level levels of staff retention is worthy of contemplation.

It is contended that avoiding or ameliorating these, and other impediments is central to the way in which organisations, of whatever type adapt to changing circumstances. In reviewing the early literature, Giglioni and Bedeian (1974) emphasise the fundamental importance of control to the management process. Even by the simplest of interpretations the act of assessing degrees of strategic 'success' or 'failure' against predetermined objectives seems rudimentary to any process of continual adaption. Subsequently, organisations that fail to foster 'knowledge cultures' that contribute to the accumulation, retention, and transfer of knowledge seem doomed to failure. Although by no means a panacea such a culture may even have the potential to ameliorate the impact of environmental change, contribute to effective strategy formulation and facilitate quick and decisive action.

3.1.5

Overview

This chapter began with the fundamental or primary contention that management is principally directed at responding to change and remaining aligned with the external environment. Central to this objective is making optimum use of the organisations capabilities and functions. This is, however, far from a static process. As Kloot (1997) observes “Organisations must find ways of surviving in rapid transformative environmental change” (p.47), suggesting that the process of alignment is both complex and constant.

Although there is considerable diversity of opinion in the early literature (see for example Fayol 1984; Mintzberg 1971; Kotter 1982; et al) as to what best represents the myriad functions of management in addressing such operational challenges, there appears to be significant support for one author in particular. Carrol and Gillen (1987) sought to examine the utility of what is arguably the seminal work in the field (Fayol 1949, p.48) declared that “The classical functions [as outlined by Fayol] provide clear and discrete methods of classifying the thousands of different activities that managers carry out”

The foregoing examination, based on Fayol’s perspective, points to a number of quite specific indicators of what might constitute effective management. In particular the articulation of informed strategies [planning] based on a learning centred organisation which can quickly ascertain strategic outcomes and adjust in a timely and effective manner [control], appears to be a fundamental recipe for success. These two critical functions are, in turn, fostered by the remaining functions of organising, coordinating, and commanding; ensuring effective direction, communication, and collaboration.

In a collective sense, therefore, the effective organisation has the inclination, and more importantly, the ability, to align structure and internal processes with strategic direction providing the best possible chance of achieving what Miles and Snow (1984) termed ‘strategic fit’. Although as they concede “neither organisational success nor failure has an easy explanation”, they assert that “it is becoming increasingly evident that a simple but profound core concept [that of fit] is at the heart of many management research findings” (p.10). Such a concept has gained considerable momentum in the management literature and enjoys significant representation particularly in the more contemporary literature of strategic management.

The remaining section of this chapter will examine the concept of fit in greater detail. In the interests of objectivity, a number of theoretical perspectives of what constitutes the 'ideal' organisation will be compared and contrasted with particular emphasis on the relationship between strategy, structure and process and the extent to which each impact on the attainment of fit.

3.2 Organisational Fit

Chapter 2 pointed to the wide range of externalities that impact on the operation of attractions, and emphasised the inconstant and sometimes volatile nature of these factors. Paradoxically the only constant is that of change, compelling management to engage in a more or less continuous process of monitoring and reaction, in an attempt to realign with altered sets of circumstances. Based on this realisation, early sections of this chapter examined a set of key management functions directed at achieving this fundamental management objective (Fayol 1984). Here the focus shifts to a range of theoretical perspectives as to the characteristics of organisations best equipped both structurally and strategically, to adapt to change.

Although this work will focus on visitor attractions, the extent to which organisations of whatever type are successful in achieving such re/alignment seems integral to their survival. Doty, Glick and Huber (1993) allude to a growing body of organisational literature collectively termed configurational theory which posit[s] higher effectiveness for organisations that resemble various perspectives of what constitutes an 'ideal type'. As these authors observe, "the increased effectiveness is attributed to the internal consistency, or fit, among the patterns of relevant contextual, structural and strategic factors" (Doty, Glick, and Huber 1993, p. 1196).

Despite the general acceptability of such a thesis, there is considerable debate in contemporary literature as to what constitutes an 'ideal type' of organisation, and perhaps more importantly the relative 'values' and/or relationships between strategy, structure, and management process in achieving alignment or fit . In particular, disparity of opinion as to whether strategy dictates structure [or the reverse proposition] has received considerable attention. In reconsidering Chandler's seminal Paradigm for Economic Success (1962), Engdahl Keating and Aupperle (2000) use the analogy of chicken or egg to emphasise the complexity of the argument.

Although Miles and Snow, (1984, p.10) advance strategic action as the “principal alignment mechanism” by which the dominant coalition [management] attempt to adapt to environmental changes, it will later be contended that the successful implementation of effective strategies is impacted by the existence or otherwise of supporting structures suggests that these organisational characteristics are, for the most part, interdependent. In short strategic action by management is, in itself, strongly influenced by a wide range of internal factors including the structure, organisational culture, and the distinctive competencies of the organisation.

Further, although the strategy/structure nexus is both a key element of the literature of organisational fit and a central consideration of this work, there are other aspects which, in the interests of achieving a comprehensive view, should be examined. Such a contention is based on the following rationale.

- There may be other factors that are instrumental in determining organisational fit that can not be conveniently categorised as elements of strategy or structure;
- As either the qualitative or quantitative outcome of a process or processes, organisational fit must have dimensions, degrees, and means by which these might be measured;
- Just as there are factors that are instrumental in determining organisational fit, there must logically be impediments to its attainment.

On-going sections of this work are thus directed at an examination of these factors in detail.

3.2.1 The concept of organisational fit

Before proceeding to this examination however, it becomes important to examine the origins and basic tenets of theory relating to organisational fit, the term ascribed to the process of environmental adaption. As such the terms are frequently used interchangeably in much of the literature.

“One of the most widely shared and enduring assumptions in the strategy formulation literature is that the appropriateness of a firm’s strategy can be defined in terms of its fit or congruence with the environmental or organizational contingencies facing the firm” (Zajac, Kraatz, and Bresser, 2000, p.429).

It is, however, of note that the dominant theories relating to strategic fit have their origins in the strategic literature of almost two decades ago with little attention devoted to the concept in more contemporary offerings. As Zajac et al (2000, p.49) observe, “despite the concepts historical centrality and intuitive appeal, one finds relatively little explicit attention to strategic fit in the most recent strategy literature”.

Bemoaning the lack of any integrated model of strategy implementation, Olson, Slater and Hult (2005, p.50) also suggest that it is not about strategic action in isolation but rather management action directed at “[adapting] the organisations strategy to cope with changes in the external environment, or the organization’s structure and behaviour to address the requirements of its strategy”. In the context of earlier discussion with respect to the strategy structure nexus the contention that these two elements are interdependent is further reinforced. Further, they suggest that strategy is moderated by a number of other variables as depicted in fig 3.1. These will be discussed in more detail later in this section but it must be observed that they point to the complexity of fit and the need for a more dynamic model.

In the context of this research which seeks to identify critical success factors in the operation of attractions, consideration of these variables becomes vital, given that they may impact on strategic inclination or capability.

Although Olson et al (2005, p.49) identify Miles and Snow (1978) and Porter (1980) as “the two dominant frameworks “ of the organisational literature it is held that a third and equally important theory, namely (Mintzberg 1979:1983) is also worthy of examination. Collectively described as configurational theories, Miles and Snow (1978), Mintzberg (1979, 1983), and Porter (1980) are all widely represented in the literature. Although all these theories are similar in that they categorise and describe the ‘nature’ of the ideal organisation, they adopt quite distinct approaches.

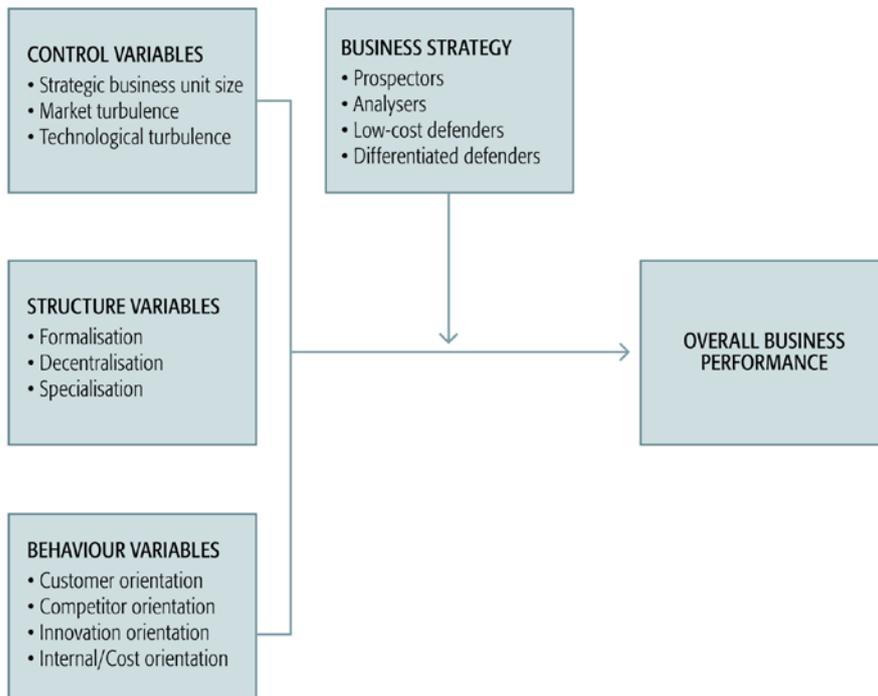


Fig. 3.1 Moderating variables in strategy: Adapted from Olson, Slater and Hult (2005)

Mintzberg (1979:1983) adopts a structural approach describing ideal types of organisations, while Miles and Snow (1978, 1984), and Porter (1980) take a strategic outlook by articulating a theoretical link between organisational orientation or strategic direction and effectiveness. A further distinction may be made between the theoretical perspective of Miles and Snow, who essentially articulated a set of broad organisational orientations; and that of Porter whose strategic ‘types’ appear more directed at the specifics of competitive strategies.

Since the overarching objective of this review is to validate a conceptual framework against which the findings of the research may be evaluated, comparing and contrasting the specific tenets of each of these frameworks becomes the continuing focus of this chapter. In particular, the discussion will focus on the relative merits of each of the models in explaining the process by which organisations adapt to changing circumstances. Such a process will not only facilitate the selection of an appropriate framework as the basis for this work, but will lead to a more detailed examination of the concept of ‘fit’. In addition to describing the means by which organisations seek to attain fit, impediments to its achievement, and the means by which it might be measured are also outlined in detail.

3.2.2

Seminal theories of organisational fit – a synoptic view

Miles and Snow (1978; 1984)

Miles and Snow (1978) classified organisations on the basis of the rate at which they change their products and markets. Broadly construed, the theory posits that organisations [and/or the individuals in effective control] will adopt differing organisational orientations [termed reactors, defenders, analysers, and prospectors] depending on the prevailing market environment, and that these will translate into a range of strategic actions directed at achieving the highest degree of organisational fit.

Apart from reactors, which the authors describe as being devoid of the necessary response mechanisms to face a challenging environment, the remaining three strategic types [termed defenders, analysers, and prospectors] all characteristically display different strategic orientations depending on the state of the environment. These three 'ideal types' were described, and are paraphrased, as follows:

- Defenders, who characteristically seek a limited product niche or domain and strive aggressively to prevent the entry of competitors. Characteristically, organisations adopting this orientation seek to grow through increased market penetration rather than scanning the environment for new opportunities. "Over time true defenders are able to carve out and maintain market niches within their industry which are difficult for competitors to penetrate" (Robbins and Barnwell 1994, p.116). The obvious correlation between this strategic category and attractions with unique or distinctive themes is emphasised.
- Prospectors who, as the term implies are the direct opposite of defenders in that they seek to identify, and exploit new product and market opportunities where competitors are generally not present. The drive for innovation sometimes even subsumes considerations of profitability although constant scanning of environmental conditions and trends frequently means that commitment to individual products or strategies can be ephemeral. Given the capital intensive nature of attractions development, the likelihood of this strategic 'type' having any significant representation in attractions is recognised. That said, the fact that the internal components or larger attractions can, and frequently are, altered or eliminated to reflect changes in demand makes this category worthy of examination.

- Analysers, who, as Miles and Snow observe, try to capitalise on the better of the two preceding categories. Adopting a 'wait and see' attitude they tend to move into new products or markets only after prospectors have proved viability. As such, they attempt to minimise risk and maximise profit. Recognising the highly competitive nature of attractions the relevance of such competitor-based strategies can be demonstrated. Further, there is the clear inference of decisions by this category being based on considerations of life cycle stage.

In a valuable summation of research evidence on the Miles and Snow typology Zahra and Pearce (1990, p.751) suggest that the typology is based on three premises, which are paraphrased as follows:

1. That over a period of time successful organisations develop a systematic, identifiable approach to organisational adaption;
2. That four identifiable strategic orientations exist within an industry, the fundamental difference between these types being the rate of change in the organisational domain;
3. That the Defender, Analyser, and Prospector strategies, if properly implemented, can lead to effective performance.

Although, as has been previously stated, the theory has been criticised on a number of grounds, Zahra and Pearce (1990) concede that it is at least comprehensive. Further, they observe (p.753), "typologies are not easy to replicate empirically" and that "consequently they tend to be imprecise". "Research on the Miles and Snow typology shows that it falls victim to these shortcomings". Conversely, Doty, Glick and Huber (1993, p.1197) offer limited support for the theory observing, "On balance the empirical work seems to provide moderate support for Miles and Snow's theory". These simple dichotomies of view aside, the appeal of Miles and Snow's typology is seen to lie mainly in the logic of the three premises and what is viewed as an essentially sound conceptual framework deserving of further empirical research.

Porter's Strategic types

Porter's central hypothesis (1980) proposed that management must select a strategy that will give its organisation a competitive advantage. Akin to Miles & Snow (1978), Porter conceptualised four 'types' including what he termed 'stuck in the middle' used to describe organisations that are unable to achieve competitive advantage. This is viewed as being analogous to Miles & Snow's conceptualisation of reactor. The similarities between the two theories continue with the remaining three of Porter's types all displaying similarities to those of Miles and Snow. An outline of Porter's types and their similarities to Miles and Snow's perspective is as follows:

The first of Porter's types are described as 'cost leaders', which, as the term implies involves offering a comparable product to competitors at lower cost. Perhaps of greatest relevance is the word leadership, which implies gaining, and maintaining market edge. In some ways this is akin to Miles and Snow's perspective of prospector in that this type is continuously developing new offerings and markets, yet it can also be compared to the category of defender, where relatively stable offerings and customer bases are maintained, and competition is primarily on the basis of low cost (Brock and Barry 2003).

The second category titled 'differentiators' typically seeks to be unique in its industry by emphasising high quality, innovative design, technological capability, or an unusual or distinctive image. Frequently the strength of this differentiation is significant enough to justify a price premium. This type has been likened in the literature to both defender and prospector. In the former instance both defender and differentiator seek to "maintain stable offerings and customer bases with competition being based on perceived uniqueness" (Brock and Barry 2003, p.543). Earlier observations with respect to the distinctive nature of various types of attractions and attempts at niche operation have distinct relevance in any discussion of this theoretical perspective.

The final category advanced by Porter is that of 'focusers'. In essence, this strategic orientation involves exploiting a narrow segment of the market by focusing on elements of cost focus and differentiation. Although the analogy may be obscure, some similarities with Miles and Snow's category of defender can be imagined. This involves selecting a segment or segments of the market and tailoring the strategy to serve them to the exclusion of all others. Whether there are examples of this kind of

strategy evident in attractions is unclear but the examples of a museum or art gallery come to mind.

Whilst there are clearly some synergies between elements of the two models, Porter's theory is viewed as being too narrow in that the basic tenets of its strategies have as their foundation, elements of the marketing mix such as pricing, positioning, and product development. Despite inherent conceptual value what such an approach fails to incorporate are the range of processes and structures that support such strategies. As Kumar and Subramanian (1998, p.2) observe, "there have been few systematic attempts [however] to develop an integrated and complete understanding of how the differences in the internal processes, goals and behaviours of organisations that pursue one or more of Porter's strategies effects their performance".

By contrast, Miles and Snow offer a more general perspective within which a wider range of management functions can be examined. The strategy structure nexus, which is germane to their theory, is illustrative of the point. This is considered to be important in the context of visitor attractions given the multifaceted nature of their management.

Mintzberg's ideal organisational types

Unlike Miles & Snow (1978) and Porter (1980) who both theoretically linked organisational success to strategic orientation, Mintzberg suggested that it is the structure of the organisation that dictates contextual fit. In a seminal work in 1979 and a subsequent piece four years later Mintzberg postulated that there are theoretically five ideal types of organisations.

These, he termed simple structure, machine bureaucracy, professional bureaucracy, divisionalised form, and adhocracy. The basic premise of the theory is that "an organisation that approximates one of these ideal types is hypothesised to be more effective than other organisations especially when its context fits the ideal type" (Doty, Glick and Huber, 1993. p, 1197).

Similar to the premises, which underpin Miles and Snow's theorem, Mintzberg's typology was presented in three parts forming what is viewed as the essential contentions of his theory. These are paraphrased from Doty Glick and Huber (1993) as follows;

1. A set of design factors that can be used to characterise an organisation's structure.
The identification of a set of structural and bureaucratic dimensions as a means of defining 'ideal' configurations
2. A set of contingency factors that can be used to characterise an organisation's context.
Evaluation of contextual issues including the organisation's age and size, particular attributes of its environment and the state of technology
3. Five ideal types of organisations described in terms of design and contingency factors
A synthesis of design and contextual factors to arrive at five 'ideal types' of organisations each based on unique combinations of design and contextual factors

Amongst the criticisms of Mintzberg's theorem is Doty Glick and Huber's (1993, p.1205) relegation of his work to the classification of typology as distinct from theory. Although, as they observe, "[it] provides a rich descriptive tool that identifies five potentially effective configurations of design and contextual factors," it is distinct from a theory which "[advances] a set of formal logical relationships amongst constructs and variables". Although they concede that Mintzberg's work does have theoretical applications, the systematical empirical investigation needed to validate the typology at a theoretical level appears however not to have been forthcoming.

Perhaps more importantly in the context of this work, Mintzberg's focus appears to be overtly directed at structural and contextual issues rather than matters of strategy. Although it may be argued that there is an implied element of strategic direction, Mintzberg is essentially describing ideal organisational forms rather than the inherent behaviour of each.

Whilst it appears to enjoy some support in the literature (Kumar and Subramanian (1997:1998; Robbins and Barnwell 1994, p.115), Porter's perspective is viewed as being too narrow in that its strategic orientations appear to almost totally confined to issues of pricing and positioning. Although these are important elements of management strategy and logical responses to heightened competition, the contention that the scope and scale of change goes beyond simple market conditions renders this model inappropriate for this study. Since the declared intent of this work is to test the impact of a wide range of strategic orientations and actions on visitor attractions it is held that selection of a broader conceptual model is essential.

Although Doty et al (1993) concede that the work of Both Miles and Snow (1978; 1984) and Mintzberg (1979; 1983) enjoy either “mixed or limited empirical support”, the fact that both have generated a great deal of interest and debate is of note. That both are firmly entrenched in the management literature, and have prompted a variety of empirical investigations is viewed as also affording them some credence if only because the theories appear to be basically robust.

Fortunately there appears to be some consensus in the literature as to the key research in the area. Doty, Glick, and Huber (1993, p.1196) point to the “widespread popularity” of two theories in particular, namely, those of Miles and Snow (1978) and Mintzberg (1979:1983), while Robbins and Barnwell (1994, p.1150) accord Miles and Snow’s work the accolade of “possibly the most important work on the strategy-structure relationship”.

Although this author is aware of other significant work in the field (see for example Miller 1987: Hambrick, 1983: Zahra, 1987) the fact that most of this research appears to have been prompted by the seminal work of either Miles and Snow (1978; 1984) and Mintzberg (1979; 1983) is, considered sufficient justification to pursue the same theoretical pathway.

Perhaps more importantly, Miles and Snow (1984) articulate a clear link between the strategic ‘types’ which are the basis of their model, and the ability of the organisation to adapt to changing circumstances. In so doing they extend what is essentially a strategic perspective to a holistic model of fit. Declaring (1984, p.125) that “organisations of different types can be successful provided that their particular configuration of strategy structure and process is internally and externally consistent” points to this more eclectic view.

Although it is not the intent of this work to empirically test Miles and Snow’s theorem the basic constructs of their theory are considered to provide a robust platform on which the results of this study may be examined.

3.2.3 Broader Determinants of fit

Having considered the origins and essence of key seminal theory as it relates to organisational strategy, structure and adaption, the discussion now turns to an

examination of the broader determinants of 'fit'. Although admittedly the foregoing discussion has largely validated strategy as the principal alignment mechanism, any objective examination of the determinants of environmental fit must include a range of broader variables which to a greater or lesser degree impact on the organisation's attainment of fit.

Earlier discussion centred primarily on the strategy structure nexus in determining organisational fit given both its central position in the theoretical discourse and the declared direction of this work. Opening sections of this chapter section examined the theoretical origins of the concept of organisational fit as a means of providing a context within which other dimensional perspectives may be similarly examined.

In what is considered the seminal work in the field Chandler (1962), postulated that the environment in which an organisation operates, effectively shapes its strategic position or strategic actions, and that this in turn dictates or influences the structure and internal processes of the organisation. More importantly, Chandler posited that "[each] new strategy required a new or at least refashioned structure if the enlarged enterprise was to operate efficiently – unless structure follows strategy inefficiency results" (p. 15). The logic of such a perspective is echoed by Miles and Snow (1984, p.124) who observed that, "Successful organizations [sic] achieve strategic fit with their market environment and support their strategies with appropriately designed structures and management processes".

Although as Engdahl, Keating, and Aupperle (2000, p. 21) observe, "Chandler's overall message [is] still very much alive in the literature", there has been some criticism of his thesis mainly centering on the implied linear and unidirectional nature of the relationship. "The construct is not so wrong as incomplete in that it implies a one-way relationship when it is becoming increasingly clear that structure has a significant impact on strategy formulation" (p.22). It is, as Engdahl et al (2000, p. 22) observe "becoming increasingly clear that structure has a significant impact on strategy formulation due to information gathering and processing effects imposed by the structure itself".

A review of the literature, however, reveals significant advocacy for Chandler's view. Although it will later be conceded that unqualified acceptance of the strategic imperative needs to be balanced against the realisation that structure will have at least some impact on strategy formulation, the fact that Chandler's theory has stimulated

numerous empirical investigations suggests that, if only as a conceptual framework, it enjoys broad acceptance amongst management theorists.

Although some of the early research is generally supportive of this contention that structure follows strategy (Miles and Snow, 1978; Mintzberg, 1979:1983), it has been criticised, mainly on the grounds of a perceived lack of empirical support for its findings, but its importance is not diminished. Zahra and Pearce (1990) point to no less than seventeen studies in the 1980s that sought to test Miles and Snow's research alone, much of which was empirical in nature. Although they concede that there are further refinements "that are necessary to enhance the quality of future research" (p.763) in this area, the proliferation of studies which seek to validate the strategy imperative is noteworthy, particularly in the context of this work. Such a debate becomes central to the thesis of this work seeking, as it does, to establish a relationship between various strategic orientations and organisational survival.

It seems clear for example that individual organisations differ markedly with respect to their size, organisational complexity, and the particularities of their specific environment. Further it must be conceded that the timing, scope, and scale of strategic options may in part be dictated or influenced by structural constraints lending support to the counter argument.

Firstly, it could be argued that the state of organisational complexity, may largely determine the degree of latitude which management has, in setting or altering structure. The obvious correlation between organisational size and maturity on the one hand, and organisational complexity on the other, suggests that a 'young' organisation offers management considerably more latitude in shaping structure to strategy than does a mature and usually more rigid organisation. The extent to which strategy can dictate structural change is therefore in question. Further, depending on size, and organisational complexity, organisations can have a complex matrix of strategies and supporting sub-structures, ranging from overarching corporate level strategies to those concerned with the business and functional levels of the organisation (Bartol, Martin, Tein, and Matthews 1998).

Since, therefore, neither strategy nor structure are uni-dimensional, articulation of a clear link between a given level of strategy and resulting structural change at a particular level, is difficult to identify. At the more functional level, for example, it should follow that the need for structural change would be minimal. Conversely larger

corporate wide strategies involving coordination between differing operational domains would almost inevitably involve some structural change in order to achieve alignment.

Additionally, structural formation may be as much about responding to the operational dictates of specific industries than to individual strategies. The particularities of the industry within which the organisation operates, may give rise to generic structural forms which may have little to do with strategy per se. For example, organisations that operate in highly competitive environments requiring continuous product innovation may incidentally foster decentralised structures, which are organic and capable of rapid response to change.

As such, the structure may well be a determinant of strategic direction. Such an observation has particular resonance in the context of a study of visitor attractions given the focus on innovation, which characterises this sector of the tourism industry.

Questions of product environment also point to yet another recurring criticism of the strategic line, namely, the clear link between product range or diversity and structure. It could be contended, for example, that structures built around a single product will characteristically have narrow and consistent strategies, dictated, for the most part by a lack of innovation. Although it should be conceded that levels of competition might evoke changes in strategy in such organisations, generally the prevailing structure can be seen to shape strategic orientation in terms of both scope and scale. Although visitor attractions, which are the declared focus of this work, generally have a fairly specific product orientation, the combinatory nature of the attractions product, and the diversity of market segments to which individual attractions appeal, render them, to some extent an exception to this rule.

Yet another consideration questions the means by which a clear link can be established between individual strategic actions and the structural changes that supposedly result. Establishing distinct correlations between the two may be problematic either because of an almost inevitable time lapse between strategy formulation and structural changes; or because of problems associated with distinguishing between strategy, viewed as a programme of clear and concise planning, and a “stream of significant [incremental] decisions” which collectively constitute strategy (Robbins and Barnwell 1974, p.108). That these logically occur over time may obscure any direct connection between single pillars of strategy and changes in structure. In short, there may not be any one, direct nexus between a single

strategic direction and identifiable structural reactions. More importantly, if strategy is not premeditated structural changes may be more subtle and harder to identify.

Levels of structural adjustment

Problems associated with identifying direct cause and effect in the strategy structure nexus, also points to a another criticism of the strategic view, namely, that associated with identifying the organisational level at which structural change may be necessary or desirable. An arguably more fundamental criticism of the strategic view lies in the realisation that prevailing structure can “impede strategic activity as` well as simply constrain strategic choices” (Robbins and Barnwell, 1994, p. 124) lending at least some credence to the contention that structure can be a powerful determinant of strategy. An examination of the basic tenets of organisational structure reveals some interesting correlations between certain structural characteristics and the strategic directions adopted by the organisation. The obvious dichotomy between an organisation with highly complex, formalised and centralised structure and that characterised by a simple, organic, autonomous structure in terms of strategic constraints are obvious. The mere fact that highly formalised structures are, by nature, not conducive to diverse input of ideas suggests that strategy formulation in such an environment will typically be less creative, entrepreneurial, or open to change.

Finally, and perhaps of greatest importance is the view that the operating environment may, in fact, influence organisational structure without any necessary change in strategy. The cyclical nature of demand could, for example, result in structural changes directed at achieving prevailing strategies in changed circumstance, rather than altering strategic direction as such.

Despite disparities of view, however, what the debate clearly demonstrates is there are a number of perspectives as to the determinants of fit. Although the previous examples infer a more or less simple relationship between internal [structure and management process] and external [environmental] factors as the basis of fit, it is clearly a matter of alignment between a much more diverse set of variables. As Miles and Snow (1984) observe, “fit is a process as well as a state - a dynamic search that seeks to align the organization [sic] with its environment and to arrange resources internally in support of this alignment. (p.125).

Although such a debate may appear to be mere semantics, the contention inherent in this thesis is that strategy, manifested as identifiable management actions, is the driving force behind the structure and management processes of organisations (in this case attractions). The obvious complexity of identifying the key determinants of fit and measuring the extent to which it is achieved presents a significant challenge. In essence, there appears to be a clear divide between proponents of the strategic perspective declaring strategy to be mainly instrumental in the attainment of fit (Chandler, 1962, Miles and Snow, 1978) and those who view structure as a principal determinant of strategy and hence fit (Porter 1980, Mintzberg 1979:1983, Miller & Friesen 1982).

In addition, there are a number of other perspectives worthy of note. In their examination of the concept of fit in the context of entrepreneurship, Naman and Slevin (1993) propose a normative model of 'fit' "based on variables and relationships found important in previous empirical studies" (p.141). "Measures of environmental turbulence, entrepreneurial style, organisational structure, mission strategy, and financial performance [were] incorporated" as key determinants of fit. (p.141). Described as the "driving force in the fit equation" (p.138) environmental turbulence in particular was emphasised as being directly correlated to [degrees of] entrepreneurship which, it was contended, would in turn dictate levels of fit or misfit. Since entrepreneurship is by any definition an instrument of proactive management such a perspective is viewed as being supportive of Chandler's thesis.

Management and leadership style

Chorn (1991, p.20) takes a somewhat different perspective in articulating a link between "competitive situation, strategy, organisation culture and [management] leadership style". Declaring that the concept of fit appears to enjoy wide support in the literature, Chorn further observes "research in the USA, Europe and Australia has revealed that superior performance (measured in a variety of ways) is associated with high degrees of alignment between [these] four elements" (p.20). What is of particular interest in the context of this work is Chorn's observation that management action directed at attempted alignment can (and frequently will) involve the conscious adoption of a range of strategic orientations as follows:

- Management “reacting to changes in the competitive environment by shifting strategy and culture.
- Management “pre-empting” competitive changes by proactively changing strategy and culture ahead of the market
- Management “creating” a shift in the competitive environment by altering strategy and culture and so influencing customers and competitors (1991, p. 24)

Clearly, attempts at preempting competitive change and enacting alignment strategies is inherently proactive yet it is held that attempting to ‘shape’ the competitive environment also constitutes proactive action. The implied, if not explicit thesis of this work is that a proactive strategic orientation is central to organisational success. Such a perspective is supported in the broader literature by Zahra and Pearce (1990) who, in a comprehensive review of the research literature, identified significant advocacy for the link between proactive management strategy and degrees of organisational performance.

Debates as to the comparative influence of strategy and structure on organisational fit aside, the ability of individual organisations to adapt to changing circumstances seems logically predicated on the size of the organisation in question. As will be suggested later in the chapter there are clear differences in strategic ‘capability’ between an organisation characterised by a simple informal structure and that with highly a formalised and centralised configuration. That the former is, by nature generally characteristic of smaller organisations, and the latter a product of larger bodies with more diverse operational orientations, suggests that the extent to which environmental fit is either attempted or achieved may be contingent on the size of the organisation.

Amongst the numerous empirical studies investigated stimulated by Miles and Snow’s seminal thesis (1978), Smith, Guthrie and Chen (1989) found that the extent to which various of Miles and Snow’s ideal types were effective could be directly correlated to the size of the organisation. Akin to the earlier observation that organisational fit will vary according to the particularities of the organisation a link between size, structure, strategic capability, and organisational effectiveness can be conceptualised adding another dimension to the concept of organisational fit.

3.2.4

Impediments to the attainment of fit

Having examined various perspectives as to the factors that determine degrees of organisational fit it becomes necessary to consider those factors, which can impede and influence the attainment of fit. Chapter two examined the wide range of externalities that can impact on management's ability or inclination to adapt, yet there are a range of management and organisational characteristics that may similarly influence the extent to which fit is achieved. The following represent some of the more significant impediments

It was earlier contended that the relative size complexity and maturity of an organisation determine degrees of management latitude in effecting structural change. This suggests that regardless of management orientation, attempts at fit, and the extent to which it is achieved, may be predicated by prevailing circumstances rather than the strategic direction per se. It also points to issues of actual or perceived control on the part of management also mentioned earlier.

Earlier sections of this chapter also pointed to the dichotomy between an organisation with highly complex, formalised and centralised structure and that characterised by a simple, organic, autonomous structure in terms of strategic constraints. The suggestion that highly formalised structures are, by nature, not conducive to diverse input of ideas suggests that strategy formulation in such an environment will typically be less creative, entrepreneurial, or open to change. Since the attainment of fit is arguably almost entirely predicated on openness to change and an ability to respond, the prevailing structure of the organisation can be either a key catalyst in achieving fit or a significant impediment. To some extent this is viewed as lending weight to the argument that structure dictates [or at least significantly influences] strategy.

Zajac et al (2000, p.430) contend that fit is a multi-dimensional concept which raises issues of the difficulties associated with conceptualising fit in organisations with more than one product orientation. "Simple bivariate approaches [one strategy] do not permit an accurate conceptualisation or measurement of strategic fit given that organizations face multiple environmental and organizational contingencies that can affect strategic fit" (p.430).

Since it could be argued that fit is predominately a market based concept, attempts at its attainment are seen as being generally involved with responding to fluctuations in

demand for individual products or services. That said the objectives, strategies, and measurement of fit will logically differ from product to product. At any one time, therefore, organisations with a number of products may be attempting fit on a number of concurrent fronts requiring high degrees of innovation. Conversely, as was suggested earlier, organisations built around a single product characteristically have narrow and consistent strategies with correspondingly low levels of innovation.

Although it would be easy to conclude that the management of fit on a number of concurrent plains presents the greater challenge, the fragility of fit in a single product domain is arguably more pronounced rendering the management of fit a more critical objective. Either way product orientation appears to present some recognisable challenges in the management of fit

Such complexities also extend to the environment itself. Depending on resources and corresponding degrees of operational sophistication the ability of respective organisations to 'read' environmental shifts arguably differs markedly between individual organisations. The ability or inclination to engage in market intelligence or broader environmental scanning, which are the very basis of preemptive action, will likewise vary between individual firms and individual managers. If nothing else this creates a divide between those organisations that can anticipate environmental change and take preemptive action, and those that simply react to shifts. A divide can also be conceptualised between early stage preemptive strategy and delayed action that may be partly proactive and partly reactive in nature. As such, the combined factors of knowledge and timing are viewed as significant limitations to the achievement of fit.

The prevailing scope and scale of competition is also viewed as a significant influence in the attainment of fit. Although this may be dismissed as simply one of a number of externalities impacting on the ability of an organisation to adapt it assumes particular importance because of the emotive quality that the actions of competitors have on strategic direction. For example, it may be contended that organisations operating in highly competitive environments requiring continuous product innovation may unwittingly assume an over competitive focus which fails to recognise resource or structural limitations. As suggested earlier, the compulsion to be highly innovative may infer diminished focus on one strategic direction rendering lasting fit more difficult to achieve. Such an observation has particular resonance in the context of a study of

visitor attractions given the focus on innovation, which characterises this sector of the tourism industry.

Scope and scale are also important considerations in the context of change itself. Given that organisational fit, or degrees thereof, is seen to be vested in an organisation's ability to adapt to change, the pace and severity of such change clearly become defining factors. To some extent this is allied to the opening observation in this section with regard to knowledge and timing, since the rapidity and severity of change may largely dictate its visibility and malleability. This is seen as a significant impediment to the attainment of fit since it may diminish the ability of management to respond in a timely and effective way.

The opening observations with respect to organisational complexity also raise issues of the impact of organisational structure on both the decision making process and the implementation of strategy. Although the formulation of strategy is viewed as being the domain of the 'dominant coalition', its effective implementation at a functional level (Bartol, Martin, Tein, and Matthews 1998) can vary considerably depending on communication, autonomy, and such like. The willingness and ability of various levels of management to implement strategic vision is likewise variable. The ability of management to communicate strategic values and to achieve consensus of vision can have a significant influence on attempts to achieve organisational fit.

Similar differences in perspective can also be conceptualised when considering the means by which success [measured in perceived degrees of fit] is measured or evaluated. Since conceptually, if not actually, responsibility for the formulation of strategy is not necessarily vested in one individual the attitudes and perceptions of joint decision makers, both in terms of strategy formulation and outcomes will almost instinctively vary. The process of conceptualising fit as a set of objectives, framing appropriate strategies directed at their achievement, and adjudicating on the most appropriate 'indicators' of success may thus be complicated by the almost instinctive subjectivity of individual views.

This may be further complicated by varying degrees of expertise, conditioning as a result of previous experience, and even conflict arising from other issues. Although it is conceded that in most organisational domains the achievement of consensus on these issues is a basic tenet of directorial activity, any degree of discord can present a significant barrier to the achievement of fit.

The last and arguably most significant impediment to the achievement of organisational fit is that of the vast range of externalities confronting the typical organisation in general and tourism organisations in particular. These were discussed in considerable detail in chapter 2. In the context of organisational fit however the distinction needs to be made between external changes that impact directly on the subject organisation, and indirect influences that despite being oblique can also impact on fit.

Since, in a conceptual sense attempts at achieving fit are essentially directed at responding to direct influences, the tendency to ignore or marginalise broader change in the process of strategic thinking should be assiduously avoided. Either individually or collectively, change which appears to be irrelevant in the context of specific issues of organisational or product adaption can often emerge as significant barriers to the realisation of strategy and subsequently to the attainment of fit.

3.2.5 A dimensional perspective: measuring and evaluating fit

It is also relevant to observe that fit, “although fundamental to organisation success is enormously difficult to achieve and/or maintain” (Miles and Snow 1984. p. 125) rendering it more a critical objective of management than an attainable state. The realisation that neither an organisation nor the environment with which it interacts are in any way static, suggests a more or less constant process of attempted alignment. As Glaser (1994, p.31) observes, “If markets are dynamic and uncertain how can it be possible to establish canons of strategic behaviour?” As discussed earlier even the attainment of minimal fit seems a key determinant in organisational success.

Further, one of the principal criticisms of Chandler’s thesis, (1962) and to the range of configurational theories that followed it (see for example Mintzberg 1979, 1983; Miles and Snow, 1978) is that there has been little in the way of empirical investigation seeking to measure degrees of fit. Some valuable work has been undertaken in an attempt to address this shortcoming (Naman and Slevin, 1993; Doty Glick and Huber, 1993) but quantifying fit remains an elusive objective. Some common threads are evident in the literature with indicators of fit being described as “successful organisations” (Miles and Snow 1984), “performance” (Chandler 1962), “unique competitive situation” (Chorn 1991), “economic success” (Engdahl et al 2000), and

“economic efficiency” (Chandler 1962), yet clearly quantitative measures need to be applied to this terminology if attainment of fit is to be an estimable entity.

Although, as previously stated the central argument relates to the determinants of fit, the success or otherwise of management in achieving this objective seems predicated on an ability to offer some means of evaluation. Earlier discussion alluded to a body of literature that adopted various perspectives as to the indicators of fit (Miles and Snow 1984; Chandler 1962; Chorn 1991; Engdahl et al 2000; Chandler 1962) mostly in terms of qualitative outcomes.

The earlier suggestion, however, that attempting fit is a dynamic process which is “enormously difficult to achieve and maintain” (Miles and Snow, 1984, p.125) suggests that there is need to consider not only perceptual and evaluative outcomes but also degrees or dimensions. If it is possible to contend that the attainment of fit can either be partial or total then a bipartite approach that includes some degree of conceptual scaling seems appropriate.

Miles and Snow (1984, p. 124) conceptualised fit as having four dimensions.

- Minimal fit among strategy, structure and process
- Tight fit both internally and externally
- Early fit through the articulation of new patterns of strategy providing powerful competitive strategy
- Fragile fit characterised by vulnerability to shifting external conditions and inadvertent internal unraveling

Although at face value this may appear to somewhat simplistic it is viewed as having strong conceptual value in that it:

- Articulates a clear link between the internal dimensions of strategy structure and process, which, they contend, “is essential for all organisations operating in competitive environments” (p.125). “If a misfit occurs for a prolonged period the result usually is failure” (p.125). Given earlier criticism of the linear nature of organisational theory with respect to the strategy/structure nexus, the fact that the authors obviously seem to view these elements as being interdependent is of particular note.

- Expands the concept of fit beyond the unidimensional perspective of an organisations fit with its external environment to suggest that both internal and external fit is necessary for organisational success. Described as a key causal dynamic in 'tight fit', the "essential flow from fit with the environment [to] strategy structure and process" (p.130) is advanced as being central to organisational excellence.
- Adds a temporal dimension by suggesting that fit involves different strategic orientations at different stages of the organisational life cycle. This is also echoed in the broader literature with Koehler (1990, p.17) observing, "the organisations evolutionary stage is another important consideration", "the structure should fit the unique requirements of a particular time". Such a perspective has particular relevance in the context of this study given the contention that direct correlations can be established between strategic stance and stages of product development
- Makes a clear distinction between degrees of fit and the nature of fit by acknowledging that even organisations with minimal fit are capable of survival in the short term but that "sooner or later they must adjust their behaviour or fail" (p.126)

Based on earlier studies (Drucker, 1954; Peters and Waterman, 1982), the same authors proceed to articulate a set of causal dynamics for tight fit, foremost amongst which is the "discovery of basic structure and management processes necessary to support a chosen strategy". Such a perspective is supportive of Chandler's seminal thesis (1962) mentioned earlier in the chapter and falls generally within the theoretical position, which posits that structure follows strategy.

3.2.6 Conclusion

Discussion in this section focused on the more or less constant process of adaption to changing sets of circumstances towards attainment of what has been termed 'organisational fit'.

Although at face value such a process may seem both a logical and instinctive function of management, the sheer diversity of organisational types, and an equally diverse taxonomy of products, suggests that degrees of success will vary markedly across the

organisational spectrum. Such complexity also questions the ability or inclination of management to achieve organisational fit. The supposition that there is any one 'ideal type' of organisation, or a generic 'best practice' approach to product management seems logically flawed.

A number of configurational theories which posit greater success for 'ideal types' of organisations (see for example Miles and Snow 1978; Mintzberg 1979; Porter 1980), were examined in the process. Although the discussion was characterised by theoretical differences over the comparative influences of strategy and structure, the conclusion was drawn that strategic orientation is more directly instrumental in achieving environmental 'fit' than is organisational structure. Further, it was recognised that the attainment of fit and the extent to which it can be achieved are subject to a wider range of variables than simply particularities of strategy and structure.

The foregoing discussion pointed to a diverse range of variables which, it was suggested might impact on, and in some cases impede the attainment of fit. It was suggested that a dynamic model of fit which recognises the link between both organisational and environmental contingencies, the desirability of change, and the specifics of implementation would add much to an understanding of the process. Fig. 3.2 depicts what Zajac et al (2000) view as the key contingencies [antecedents] and consequences [resultant actions and orientations of management] which dictate fit or misfit and thus organisational performance.

The synergies between this contemporary view of strategic fit, and Miles and Snow's articulation of a dynamic model of the adaptive process (1978, p.9) which offered a range of strategic 'options' best suited to various contingencies, are notable. Identification of these contingencies and how they shape management orientation becomes a central element of this research. More particularly, it should be possible to identify how specific responses to environmental conditions or change are successful or otherwise.

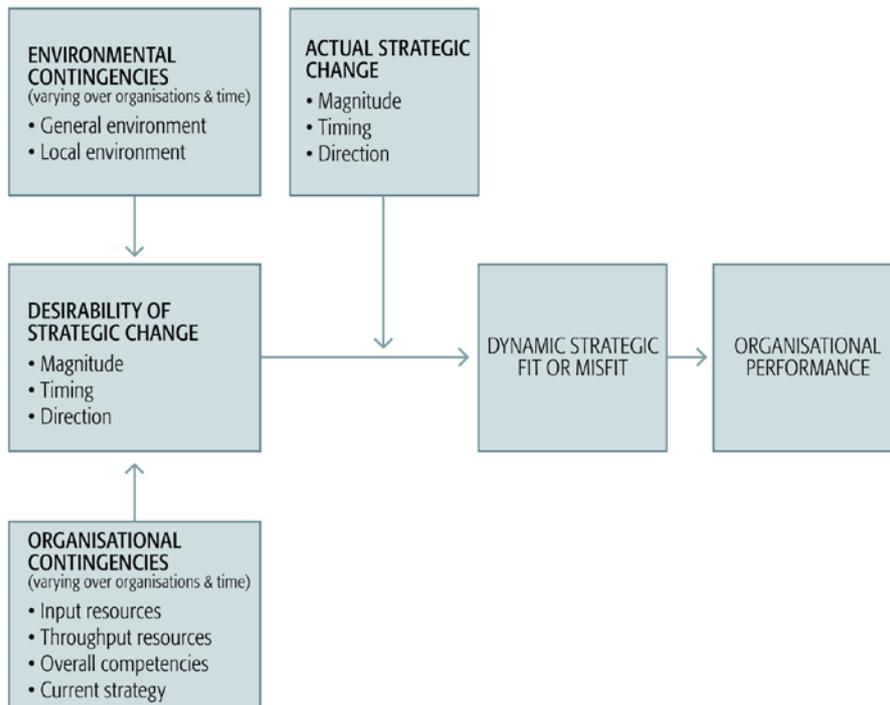


Fig. 3.2 Adapted from Zajac et al (2000): "Towards a generic model of dynamic strategic fit: Antecedents and consequences"

Further, with respect to Miles and Snow's model in particular the question of whether various types of attractions fit within their typology of successful orientations is worthy of examination. Closing sections of the work will broadly juxtapose their theoretical perspective of fit with the structural and strategic specifics of attractions in an attempt to validate certain practices [critical success factors], and to identify impediments to successful operation.

Given the opening assertions as to the diversity of attraction types it may be possible to identify particular types of attractions with unique operational contingencies and structural characteristics. By so doing, the dynamics of strategic fit may best be demonstrated.

Research Questions

Chapter 2 examined the nature of attractions and emphasised the complex environments within which they operate. The suggestion that successful operation is largely vested in an ability to anticipate, or respond to change, raises issues of what, if anything, constitutes a 'best approach'. The point was made, however that the diversity of attraction types and operating environments rendered any such attempt

problematic at best. Further, the apparent absence of any attraction centric model of management suggested a need for both a specific research context, and a framework of organisational adaption drawn from the wider literature.

With respect to the latter objective, this chapter was directed at an examination of broader management theory with respect to management functions, and that specifically related to organisational adaption, of 'fit', in an attempt to identify an appropriate research framework with which to guide the research. The juxtaposition of widely accepted theories of organisational adaption or fit, in the context of attractions appears to offer significant explanatory possibilities. More particularly it becomes possible to articulate a set of specific research questions directed at addressing the research problem outlined in chapter 1, namely:

To what extent does organisational fit contribute to successful operation in visitor attractions?

Towards a fuller understanding of the problem, the fundamental assumptions of broader theories of fit were examined particularly as they relate to the relative importance of strategy structure and process in achieving internal and external consistency. In addition, key performance indicators were identified as were major impediments to the adaptive process. Although not necessarily sequential the research findings are to be interrogated by means of the following four specific research questions.

RQ1:

What are the key performance variables that determine degrees of organisational fit in heritage visitor attractions?

In addressing this question the research seeks to identify those elements of strategy structure and process which, in the view of the research respondents, are critical determinants of successful operation.

RQ2:

What are the main impediments to the achievement of organisational fit in heritage visitor attractions?

Just as the key determinants of high levels of performance have some prescriptive value in setting a potential agenda for successful operation, identifying what respondents view as barriers or impediments to achieving alignment with the environment is of equal importance. Despite the almost intuitive logic of assuming that these were simply predicated on a lack of performance in the areas identified in RQ1, the principal aim of the research in this respect is to obtain as an inclusive view as possible such that the findings could be synthesised into key factors.

RQ3:

In the context of heritage visitor attractions what respective roles do strategy, structure, and process play in higher levels of organisational fit and organisational performance?

In addressing this question the aim of the research is to examine one of the basic tenets of Miles and Snow's theory of organisational adaption (1978; 1984), which advances strategy as the basic alignment mechanism. Structure and process, they contend is simply a process of arranging resources internally to support the chosen strategy. Although this generally appears to be supported by their early research, primarily conducted in manufacturing organisations, the exercise of this research in a new context begs the question as to whether this can be assumed in the case of service industries generally, and visitor attractions in particular. The researcher was alerted by these authors' concession that structure and process can constrain strategy suggesting that structural inadequacies may be a defining factor in the extent to which the case studies are able to articulate and implement effective strategies. An ability to reach at least some conclusion on this issue is seen as being assisted by considering the indicators of performance, and impediments to fit identified in RQ1 and RQ2

RQ4:

In the context of heritage visitor attractions does strategy appear to dictate structure, or is the reverse proposition evident?

Although to some extent adjunct to question 3, the articulation of this question is intended to offer what the researcher views as a necessary adjudication on the relative importance of these two factors. This was directed at contributing to a conceptual extension of Miles and Snow's (1984) framework, but perhaps more importantly at suggesting particular areas of focus or relevance to visitor attractions under examination. This is viewed as being particularly important given that the research seeks to offer some tangible prescriptions for successful operation. Whether the

strategic behaviour of these attractions is dictated by structural capacity or the reverse proposition seems central to this proposition.

Summary

In addressing these four research questions, the study will provide some valuable insights on the extent to which internal or external fit impact on successful operation. Moreover, it suggests that there are a number of common factors which encourage or impede the attainment of fit. Although the absolute validity of the findings can not be established it seems important to develop conceptual frameworks of the adaptive process such that they can be subjected to empirical testing. Even the lack of generalisability does not detract from the value of these observations since it is held that they provide a 'toolbox' of indicators which, used selectively might assist management in anticipating and coping with change.

4.0 Research Context, Paradigm, and Method

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 concluded by advancing four research questions arising from the research problem identified in chapter 1, and the literature discovery conducted in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2, in particular, emphasised the diversity of attraction types and the equally diverse set of environmental influences that shape individual strategies and structures pointing to a complex research environment.

Further, given the paucity of tourism centric literature in the field of strategic management, any attempt to evaluate the relative merits of various approaches is, likewise elusive. In calling for a change of focus towards the broader management literature, Benckendoff and Pearce (2003, p.25) cite the views of a number of authors (Gilbert and Kapur, 1990; Athiyaman, 1995) observing that “gaps exist in almost all areas of strategic research” with “strategic planning rarely discussed in journals applied to the tourism industry”.

In an attempt to address this apparent gap in the literature, the preceding chapter undertook an examination of extant theory (Miles and Snow 1978; Mintzberg 1979, 1983; and Porter 1980) as it relates to the strategic management of organisations, with particular emphasis on strategic action vested in attempts at realigning the organisation with changed environmental circumstances. Although frequently more of an intuitive process rather than a single strategic objective per se, attempts at achieving what has been termed ‘organisational fit’ became the focus of the discussion.

The problem, however, remains. Regardless of the relative merits of broader management theory, attempts at generalising its effectiveness across the disparate set of structural and strategic entities which collectively constitute attractions would appear to be unsupportable. Although not solving the problem of generalisation, examining such theory in the context of a particular type of attraction provides sufficient focus to offer some worthwhile conceptual reflections. This chapter overviews the selection of a research context, various research methodologies, and outlines a precise method by which the research is to be conducted.

4.2 Rationale for the selection of a specific research context

Table 4.1 offers a matrix based evaluation of the ideographic variables mentioned earlier as they relate to a spectrum of attractions. Although the attraction types chosen are clearly not exhaustive they are intended to demonstrate the natural to contrived continuum, and examples of attraction types that do not comfortably fit either of these extremes. The obvious polarity between a national park on one hand and a contrived attraction such as an amusement park on the other [specifically as they relate to the variables] provides a useful means of comparison.

Hypothetically as human intervention and conscious management for tourism increase, profit orientation and organisational complexity increase accordingly. Similarly, organisational complexity may increase as environmental turbulence increases. This is of particular note given extensive discussion in earlier sections of this thesis with respect to the environmental influences.

Attraction type	Degree Human Intervention	Conscious Management for Tourism	Public vs Private ownership	Profit Orientation	Organisational Complexity	Environmental Turbulence
National Park	Low	Medium	Generally Public	Low	Low	Medium
Museum	Medium	Medium	Generally Public	Medium	Low	Medium
Heritage Site	Variable	Variable	Generally Public	Medium	Medium	High
Heritage Theme Park	Low	High	Variable	Variable	Medium	High
Festivals	Low	High	Mixed	High	Low	High
Amusement Park	Low	High	Generally Private	High	Low	High

Table 4.1 Classification of Attractions by Operational Characteristics

Although it has been necessary to make what are obviously broad generalisations; the researcher's prior knowledge of the attraction sector and an overview of the literature suggests that these generalisations can be largely substantiated.

Conversely, the ability to generalise findings with respect to critical success factors across such a disparate range of operational particularities makes it necessary to confine the research to a particular type of attraction.

Attractions with a heritage theme appear to provide just such a vehicle. As opposed to either end of the continuum where operational orientations and priorities are, for the most part, clear "[This] sector exhibits distinct market and structural characteristics and

frequently serves a broader set of organisational objectives the purely commercial or profit related targets. Indeed in some cases stakeholders do not consider the pursuit of revenue maximisation or revenue management as a priority” (Leask, Fyall, and Garrod, 2002, p.248).

Further, they appear to be subject to greater environmental volatility. As Leask, Fyall, and Garrod observe, “[Although] heritage attractions form a core component of the tourism product [they] are increasingly under threat from the environment in which they operate (p.247).

The complexity of this particular attraction sub-sector is further emphasised by differing perspectives as to the fundamental mission of heritage attractions, issues with respect to the imposition of entry charges for what may be public goods; and, as an overarching consideration views as to degrees of public responsibility for funding heritage sites (Garrod and Fyall, 2000).

From a funding perspective in particular Garrod and Fyall (2000, p.684) go on to observe that “the ideological and institutional context of heritage tourism is fundamentally different from that of general tourism, with the curatorial approach generally subsuming considerations of solvency. Although a face value these would appear to be completely dichotomous objectives incapable of reconciliation, reductions in government funding and a shift towards the ideology of user pays appear to be forcing heritage attractions to adopt a more commercial orientation.

Issues of funding also appear to be inextricably tied degrees of reliance on government at various levels which raises important issues with respect to a critical link between self sufficiency and independence. Although as Millar (1999, p.ix) observes “Heritage visitor attractions vary enormously in type and form management issues relating to the range are often surprisingly similar. Most appear to be working within an increasingly competitive environment with decreasing resources and on-going conflict between conserving the heritage and allowing access to visitors”. Adapting to such changes clearly presents quite significant challenges

Given that the fundamental focus of this work is an examination of how attractions, and more particularly heritage attractions, adapt to changes in their operating environment such fundamental issues present the researcher with a framework within which the entire adaptive process might be brought into quite particular focus.

Since this work is primarily directed at identifying strategic actions and orientations which contribute to operational success, conducting the research in a sub-sector characterised by conflicting priorities and a volatile operating environment appears to present some significant opportunities.

4.3 Justification for the Research

Despite Benckendorff and Pearce's assertion that "strategic planning research in the attraction sector can be best described as meagre" (2003, p.25), a growing body of literature continues to address a wide range of other issues in attraction management. Of particular relevance to this research, Drummond (2001) examined critical success in the context of quality and offered some valuable perspectives on issues relating to funding and presentation both of which are intuitive components of this research. Similarly, Laws (1998) examined broader issues in managing heritage sites yet mainly as they relate to site interpretation and presentation.

Apart from these examples, research in the field appears, however, to have largely been confined to quite specific areas, including feasibility and revenue management (McKercher, 2001; Leask Fyall and Garrod, 2002; Fyall and Leask, 2002; Frost, 2003), and resource management (Ho and McKercher 2004). There are also examples of monographs (see for example Leask and Yeoman, 1999) that offer valuable discussion on a range of issues all of which have direct relevance to this research. Fyall and Leask (2002) in particular, make an important distinction between large scale and small scale attractions which offers some useful insights.

There appears, however, to be little existing research which seeks to elicit management perspectives of critical issues in the context of small heritage attractions. Although admittedly not directly related to the work at hand, Milman (2001) sought the views of theme park management on the future of attractions. The fact that this revealed quite significant consensus on a number of issues is of note.

Additionally, as was observed earlier, there appears to have been very few attempts to juxtapose broader management theory with that of tourism enterprise [in this case attractions]. Given that, as Benckendorff and Pearce (2003, p.25) observe "a vast majority of tourist attractions, at least in Australia, can be classified as small businesses", the need to redress this situation provides justification, at least in part, for

this research. Page, Forer and Lawton (1999, p.435) also recognise this shortcoming calling for a “greater tourism focus [in the small business literature] than currently exists”.

Given earlier assertions that this particular sub-sector is subject to greater environmental pressures and operational challenges than mainstream attractions, the absence of any clear understanding of what contributes to, or impedes, successful operation represents a significant problem. More specifically, what constitutes successful or appropriate management responses to these actualities or externalities appear to be largely unexplained. Although it is acknowledged that there are a number of exogenous environmental factors that are beyond the influence or control of management even the means by which management attempt to minimise their impact is worthy of consideration.

4.4 Research objectives

The objectives of this research as articulated in section 1.2 are thereby as follows:

4. To ascertain the perspectives of key stakeholders as they relate to key catalysts and impediments to successful operation in heritage attractions
5. To investigate the extent to which the strategic and structural actualities of operation in heritage attractions match key theoretical perspectives of the ‘ideal’ organisation as postulated in broader management theory.
6. To evaluate the extent to which heritage attractions successfully adapt to environmental change

4.5 Justification for the selection of research paradigm

Earlier discussion with respect to heritage attractions pointed to their distinct market and structural characteristics and the contention that they characteristically have a broader set of organisational objectives than the purely commercial or profit related targets. Emphasis too was placed on the complex operating environment in which attractions of all types operate, and the imperative of effective response to environmental change.

Given these observations, it is held that heritage attractions are confronted with a unique set of challenges in that they must not only respond effectively to external change, but must resolve what is essentially an internal conflict, in reconciling dichotomous operational objectives.

Any comprehensive understanding of how individual heritage attractions confront, and potentially overcome these challenges seems elusive. The absence of any focused research, and the realisation that individual attractions will almost intuitively respond to these issues in different ways, suggests that any generic pattern of cause and effect simply does not exist.

The quest for a research paradigm with the necessary sensitivity to construct a set of realities or actualities in the specific context of the research thus becomes the focus of this chapter.

As such it behoves the researcher to consider the relative merits of various research paradigms such that the most appropriate approach informs the research.

Defined as an “interpretive framework or as a basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba 1990, p.17), the research paradigm encompasses a set of “ontological and epistemological premises which regardless of ultimate truth or falsity become partially self-validating” (Bateson 1972, p.314 in Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p.22).

The relationship between ontological premises [hypothetical perspectives as to the nature of reality], and the epistemological premises [the nature and validity of human understanding] guides the research methodology which, in simple terms is the means by which the researcher might go about obtaining the necessary information to validate [wholly or partially] a set of research propositions.

Before embarking on an exploration of these elements as they relate to the research at hand, a fundamental distinction needs to be made between the positivist or scientific approach [which presumes the existence of certain realities, immutable laws or truths] and constructivist paradigms which are based on the premise that there are multiple realities which must be observed and interpreted in order to literally construct a collective reality (Guba, 1990).

Given earlier observations with respect to the paucity of broad management research into attractions a comprehensive understanding of the particularities of their operation seems elusive. Since it is the express intention of this work to elicit the views of key stakeholders as a means of framing a conceptual model of critical success factors, engaging in an organic interview process which permits a truly subjective view of actualities or realities seems a logical direction. As such, the constructivist paradigm is deemed most appropriate for this research.

Although the research may have accommodated a purely grounded approach in seeking to generate theory from observation, the research was in part shaped by the researcher's knowledge of the operational domain, and in part informed by both 'parent' and tourism centric literature on critical success factors. Although this gave rise to a basic set of theoretical assumptions which guided the interview process, the work remained largely inductive in nature such that the widest possible diversity of views could be accommodated. As Guba (1990, p.25) observes, "Reality can be seen only through a window of theory whether implicit or explicit".

Quite apart from the apparent suitability of such an approach to the research at hand, Hobson (2003, p.74) points to the domination of scientific research and the proliferation of "quantitatively based research papers that seem to add little or nothing to our understanding of the tourism phenomenon". As he goes on to observe, "The complex set of relationships and interactions that form the tourism experience cannot be quickly distilled into short hypothesis statements and then readily reduced to a few survey questions" (p.74)

The fundamental decision to adopt a qualitative approach needs, however, to be based on a thorough and rigorous evaluation of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the constructivist paradigm as it may be applied to the specific directions of this research. Apart from ensuring that the most appropriate paradigm is

used to guide the research method, such a process is also directed at ensuring that the outcomes of the research are as rigorous as possible.

4.5.1 The Ontological Perspective

Primarily due to a paucity of research in the area, any sense of what constitutes 'reality' or 'normalcy' in this particular theatre of attractions operation remains obscure. More particularly, as Guba (1990, p.p.27-28) observes, realities "exist in the form of multiple mental constructions [that are] socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependant for their form and content on the persons who hold them". In early considerations of an appropriate research approach, realities were logically seen to reside in the experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders.

The essence of constructivist ontology is for the researcher to adopt a relativist stance (Guba 1990) deeming the existence of truth to be dependant on the beliefs of individuals holding them. Such an approach seems entirely appropriate to the research at hand in that it seeks to aggregate a diversity of views into broad consensus as a means of framing a conceptual model.

There is also some support for the contention that the constructivist view of reality has particular utility in research involving small to medium sized enterprise (Hill and Wright 2001) given that this sector reflects nuances and subtleties which may be more difficult to identify, given the often organic nature of their structure.

Considered in the context of heritage attractions in particular, substantial attention has already been paid to the environmental and organisational complexities that characterise this attraction sector. Further, the fact that attractions of this type have perceived or actual cultural 'value', may be perceived as a community 'asset', and may be the recipients of some degree of public funding, suggests a potential polarity of views.

From an ontological perspective, therefore, the constructivist paradigm has the potential to enhance the research in that it implies some particular priorities in the framing of an appropriate research method. The realisation that any theories with respect to critical success factors defy a priori identification supports an approach that seeks the emergence of theory "from field research, interactions with research participants, and observations in the research setting" (Hill and Wright 2001, p.436).

In that regard, distinct synergies are perceived between the basic assumptions inherent in relativist ontology and the objectives of this research

4.5.2 The Epistemological Perspective

Just as individual truths were seen to reside in the minds of the people holding them, the adoption of a subjectivist epistemology which Guber (1990) suggests is central to the constructivist paradigm, is predicated on the doctrine that knowledge and value are dependant on, and limited by, subjective experience. As Sarantakos (2005, p.40) observes “here the qualitative researcher is interested in the subjective meaning, namely the way in which people make sense of their world, and in which they assign meanings to it”.

If, as Guba (1990, p.26) suggests “realities exist in respondents’ minds subjective interaction seems to be to the only way to access them”. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) share this view suggesting that constructivist epistemologies are both transactional and subjectivist with the findings co created [by inquirer and inquired].

Since, by its very intent, this research is directed at capturing a diversity of views on critical success factors, adopting a subjective view of reality seems a logical direction. More particularly, since such capture will involve a range of stakeholders with differing degrees of involvement, in different time frames, and with a range of agenda, anything other than a subjective view seems counterproductive to the research.

Amongst the more significant benefits of the constructivist paradigm, from an epistemological standpoint is the absence of any pre-supposed value system, which, according to Guba (1990) is characteristic of the bundle of paradigmatic options collectively titled critical theory. Although Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.195) point to a similarity between critical theory and constructivist approaches, in that they share a common subjectivist epistemology, the fact that the findings of studies based on critical or ‘ideologically oriented enquiry’ are value mediated suggests that they may not be truly subjective in their application. As Guba (1990, p.24) observes, “if the findings of the study can vary depending on the values chosen, [it becomes a question of] what values and whose values govern”.

Although it seems, to some extent, inevitable that prior knowledge of the operational domain and immersion in the literature creates at least some notional pre-suppositions as to outcomes, it is held that this is not an imposition of values per se.

As such, some degree of objectivity seems possible without compromising the research process. Long, White Friedman, and Brazeal (2000, p.191) suggest that objectivity and subjectivity are not mutually exclusive and that these approaches sometimes tend to fuse. As they further observe, “the observation of objects itself involves a certain personal perspective, for all observations are positional [that is] they are taken from a certain standpoint” (p.190).

From the perspective of knowledge accumulation which is, after all, the ultimate objective of the research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.194) point to another significant difference between outcomes of constructivist and critical theory based research. Noting that the constructivist approach permits “more informed and sophisticated reconstructions”, suggests that achieving greater subtlety from the data is within reach.

The subjective approach also calls for an inquirer posture that places the researcher in the role of ‘passionate participant’ facilitating multivoice reconstruction (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p.196). Such a stance appears conducive to the intent of the research in that deeper immersion in the research process seems integral to capturing more subtle nuances.

4.6 Methodology

It is, perhaps at no other level that the importance of selecting the most appropriate research paradigm becomes apparent. Prior discussion has pointed to the perceived suitability of the constructivist paradigm to this research based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin this particular model. As Sarantakos 2005, p.29 observes, “Ontology and epistemology underlie the methodology which in turn guides the research”. “Methodology is a research strategy that translates ontological and epistemological principles into guidelines that show how the research is to be conducted (Sarantakos, p.30). In short, both the overarching methodology and the specific method by which the research is to be completed are based on this set of critical assumptions about the nature of what is to be researched.

With respect to ontological assumptions, it was observed that since neither extant research nor simple observation appear to throw much light on stakeholder

perceptions of what does [or does not] represent critical success factors, the ability to identify and contextualise multiple realities as they reside in the minds of key stakeholders, presents quite particular challenges. Adopting this relativist stance which, according to Guba (1990), is central to the constructivist paradigm, alerts the researcher to the absolute importance of being receptive to a diverse range of views. From an epistemological perspective the realisation that 'truth' or actuality not only resides in the minds of the individuals holding them but is entirely subjective, shaped by the experiences of the individual concerned, imposes even greater pressure on the selection of an appropriate paradigm.

In this respect it becomes instructive to consider the methodological prescriptions of the constructivist paradigm as they relate to the research objectives. In promulgating the constructivist paradigm, Guba (1990) suggests that it embodies a methodological approach in which "individual constructions are elicited and refined hermeneutically, and compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of generating one [or a few] construction/s on which there is substantial consensus" (p.27). "The hermeneutic/dialectic methodology aims to produce as informed and sophisticated a construction [or, more likely constructions] as possible (p.26).

Although the researcher is cognisant of some parallels between hermeneutic forms of interpretation and the dialogic approach which is characteristic of critical theory paradigms, it is held that the ability to achieve a synthesis of views is best facilitated by the dialectic method which is integral to the constructivist paradigm.

As Guba (1990, p.78) observes,"The theory must arise from the data. The method must be hermeneutic and dialectic, focusing on the social processes of construction, reconstruction and elaboration". Conversely, the dialogic appears to imply a participatory dialogue without any necessary synthesis of views.

The utility of a hermeneutic methodology can, however, best be demonstrated by examining the steps in what Sarantakos (2005) describes as the 'hermeneutic spiral'. Consisting of a dialectic rather than linear process it not only appears representative of accepted practice in qualitative analysis, but also entirely appropriate to the objectives of this research. These are paraphrased as follows

- Eliciting and understanding the meanings of individual texts [transcripts]
- Identifying and linking themes and sub themes

- Identifying thematic clusters according to their own internal cohesion and logic
- Contrasting them with other interpretations of the issues discussed [extant literature and theory]
- Scrutinising the findings for perceived reliability and validity
- Reconceptualising the findings with the context of which they are a part
- Articulating a set of findings

The fact that, by its very nature, the dialectic process has the potential to support the discovery and contextualisation of hitherto obscure concepts, and to coalesce these into broad consensus, has particular value.

Although it is accepted that other paradigmatic options, most notably those of the critical theory genre, offer methodological approaches which may have been workable here, the constructivist methodology as promulgated by Guba (1990) provides what the researcher views as workable prescriptions.

In addition to providing valuable direction these methodological prescriptions also dictate, to a large extent, the means by which the data may best be obtained. As Sarantakos (2005, p.29) observes, "Methodologies produce different research designs because they follow in their theoretical structure different ontological and epistemological prescriptions". As distinct from the overarching methodological approach, research methods are the "instruments employed in the collection and analysis of the data" (Sarantakos, p.30).

Selection of the most appropriate method by which various perceptions of critical success factors may be elicited, interpreted, and contextualised, with the highest possible degree of validity and reliability, becomes an absolute imperative. (Ying 2003).

4.7 Research Method

Although as Creswell (2003, p.14) suggests, there are multiple strategies in conducting qualitative research, as few as five approaches appear to dominate the research agenda. Despite their individual value in the overall research 'armoury' is not disputed, from a purely practical standpoint some of these may be discarded purely on the grounds of their quite specific and, to some extent, obvious applications.

The five approaches, according to Creswell (2003, p.183) “represent an encompassing focus from narrow to broad. Researchers might study individuals [narrative, phenomenology]; explore processes, activities and events [case study, grounded theory]; or learn about broad culture-sharing behaviour of individuals and groups [ethnography]. Apart from these foci, the specifics of the information sought, the probable research population, and required degree of researcher immersion in the process also appear to be valuable points of differentiation.

Whilst there are clearly aspects of all five approaches that could be accommodated within the objectives of this research, the obvious parallels between case study research which Yin (2003, p.13) describes as “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and where multiple sources of evidence are used” and the focus of this research are clear.

Insofar as a distinction needs to be made between grounded research and case study research [given their like assumptions and approach], a dichotomy can be conceptualised between grounded theory which Perry (1998, p.788) describes as ‘pure induction’, being “at one extreme of the induction versus deduction continuum and emphasizes [sic] generating theory from data alone”; and case study research which according to Perry can, and “should incorporate aspects of both induction and deduction”.

As was conceded earlier the inevitability of bringing some prior knowledge of the operational domain to the research process suggests that some degree of deduction is unavoidable. As Perry (1998, p.788) goes on to observe, “starting from scratch with an absolutely clean theoretical slate is neither practical nor preferred”. “Pure induction might prevent the researcher from benefiting from existing theory, just as pure deduction might prevent the development of new and useful theory” (p.789).

As such, a case study approach clearly offers the researcher the opportunity to design and administer an interview protocol which is broadly reflective of existing thinking, yet sufficiently free ranging to elicit diverse views. More importantly it could be contended that it adds greater depth to the process of analysis and interpretation.

4.8 Research Design

Although as Yin (2003, p.1) observes, “case studies for research purposes remain one of the most challenging of all social science endeavours”, “the method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – [including] individual life cycles, organizational [sic] and managerial processes” (Yin 2003, p.2).

Despite being criticised on a number of grounds including the suggestion that case studies can only be used in the exploratory stages of research requiring ultimate verification by survey or experiment (Yin 2003), their increasing acceptance as a research method suggests that, properly conducted, they represent an effective means of achieving an understanding of complex organisational characteristics. In the specific context of this research which seeks to identify critical success factors in a specific attraction type, examining one or more individual enterprises in depth seems a logical direction, even though it is impossible to generalise the findings to other cases (Jennings 2001).

This raises the issue of what constitutes an appropriate number of cases to be examined. Although, as Perry (1998) observes “there are no precise guides to the number of cases to be included”, Yin (2003) asserts that even two cases provide better outcomes than single case designs. Regardless of whether this is directed at a process of replication, or, in cases where the sites are deliberately selected because they offer contrasting situations, supporting various theoretical perspectives as to the reasons for the contrast, drawing information from stakeholders in contrasting circumstances is rich in context. As a result of this ‘cross case synthesis’ “The analysis is likely to be easier and the findings likely to be more robust than having only a single case” (Yin 2003 p.133).

Case study selection

In the particular context of this research any decision as to the number of case studies was, however, not considered to be a defining feature of the research. Rather the researcher sought to identify heritage attractions which, at face value would be likely to demonstrate a range of operational nuances given their size, location, and operational reputation. On the basis of some initial observation four heritage based attractions in regional Victoria were initially selected for possible inclusion in the study. Apart from

the essential criteria of regional location, and broad heritage theme, a conscious attempt was made to select a range of attractions that would intuitively be confronted with differing challenges due to their location, particular theme, and general profile. Table 4.2 outlines the initial list from which the ultimate selection was made.

Attraction	Location	Road Distance [from Melbourne]	Specific Theme
Historic Port Of Echuca	Echuca Victoria	215km	Working River Port circa 1865
Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum	Swan Hill Victoria	350km	Pioneer life in inland Australia 1830-1930
Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village	Warrnambool Victoria	264km	Recreated maritime village circa 1850
Sovereign Hill	Ballarat Victoria	112km	Life on the Victorian Goldfields 1850-60

Table 4.2. Initial Case Study List

By means of a program of initial discovery, each of the case study sites was approached, both to gauge willingness to participate in the research, and to ascertain the availability of research respondents with the necessary span of experience to facilitate the interview process. Although there was almost universal willingness to contribute to the research, operational obstacles, particularly as they related to respondent availability and diversity, rendered both Flagstaff Hill, and The Historic Port of Echuca unsuitable for the purposes of the research. It also became progressively obvious to the researcher that the remaining attractions, namely Sovereign Hill, and The Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum, were, from almost every aspect, in sharply differing operational circumstances. The explanatory possibilities of examining two case studies with what appeared to be completely dichotomous management orientations, and rates of apparent success, were considered significant. Further justification for the selection of these sites and a comprehensive outline of their respective compositions and orientations are outlined in the following pages

Although the researcher was cognisant of the range of extraneous variables that could impact on their successful operation [for example the distance from major source markets which is characteristic of the two selected sites], it was considered essential not to ignore what the literature suggests is a complex set of environmental influences and strategic responses. For example, the means by which the management of the

sites in question respond to challenges, such as remote location, is the very essence of this work.

4.8.1 Rationale for the selection of Sovereign Hill

The success of Sovereign Hill, both as a visitor attraction and as a living museum is beyond question. Its apparent ability to reconcile absolute faithfulness to its core theme, and at the same time operate profitably, makes it somewhat unusual in an attraction sector characterised by a more or less constant struggle to survive. Whilst there are undoubtedly a number of reasons for its success, the fact that it operates autonomously, and continues to innovate, are amongst the most obvious examples.

Given what arguably exemplar status, the selection of the site as a focus for this research seems appropriate. By any measure, its comparison with other heritage based attractions should reveal some clear dichotomies. As a community based organisation with many of the original stakeholders still involved in its operation after almost 40 years, it represents a rich resource for the researcher. The ability to obtain the perspectives of individuals who have been instrumental in some of the key decisions and can relate these to the evolution of the attraction is central to the work at hand.

4.8.2 Rationale for the selection of Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement

Both on the basis of anecdotal evidence, and as a result of simple observation, Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Village presented the researcher with a wide range of contradictions when compared with Sovereign Hill. With visitation levels apparently in decline since 1996 the museum's reliance on local government for recurrent funding appeared to be an ongoing problem. More specifically, the fact that the site has, for some time, been under the direct control of local government, appeared to create significant problems in terms of strategic priorities. Discussions conducted as part of the preliminary discovery revealed a distinct polarity of views as to objectives particularly as they relate to profit orientation. This appeared to largely stem from disagreement over the identity and purpose of the settlement creating an 'ideological divide' between those who view the attraction as a commercial operation, and those for whom heritage conservation is the dominant objective. Anecdotally pressure from

local government for the attraction to establish a commercial footing generally appeared to subsume curatorial considerations.

Comparisons between this attraction, which seems compelled to adopt such a uni-dimensional focus, and Sovereign Hill which evidence suggests, has managed to reconcile these two objectives, presents the researcher with some interesting dichotomies. In particular, it becomes possible to compare the performance of the two attractions, one of which is, by any measure, successful; and another which continues to struggle for survival. More particularly, the selection of the site for inclusion in the study, presents an opportunity to examine an attraction beset with a range of operational challenges and ambiguities.

4.9 Research Approach

“An important part of conducting fieldwork is having access to informants who can serve as ‘guides’, to provide information concerning the research site” (Nagy Hess-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p.71). The means by which an appropriate sample of stakeholders is identified and engaged is thus a vital component of the research process.

Although as a general principle the research frame was restricted to individuals with at least some connection to the cases in focus, the desire to obtain the widest possible range of views called for a sampling method or selection criteria broad enough to capture a variety of perspectives. Rice and Ezzy (1999) point to a variety of sampling strategies, but suggest that sampling in qualitative research is characteristically purposive in nature in that potential respondents are selected for their knowledge, experience or relevance to a particular setting. Such a process is often, but not always, predicated on the researcher’s knowledge of the individuals concerned, yet the researcher was not sufficiently familiar with the key ‘players’ to make such critical decisions.

4.9.1 Identification of research subjects

As a result, the research adopted a ‘snowballing’ technique, whereby an initial respondent was asked to identify other people with the requisite knowledge and experience and a willingness to participate in the research. By virtue of the differing nature of the two case studies it became necessary to adopt a slightly different approach in each instance.

In the case of Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement, initial approaches revealed a quite distinct polarity of views as to the mission and strategic direction of the site, requiring the researcher to exercise some personal judgment in the selection of respondents. In order to achieve a comprehensive view of the situation, it was necessary to make independent approaches to individuals representing various stakeholder categories broadly divided between local government [Swan Hill Rural City Council]; current and past management and staff of the site; and community stakeholders past and present. The process of enquiry identified one subject in each category who, in turn, identified other potential respondents. Although the resultant sample was smaller than originally intended, due mainly to inconstancy of management and control, a total of twelve interviews were conducted, which on the basis of initial analysis provided eight useable transcripts . This was, however, more than offset by the diversity of views on the critical issues.

With respect to Sovereign Hill the identification procedure began with a senior member of current management who was provided with a research brief and was able to identify a list of ten individuals covering a variety of roles and tenures who were deemed appropriate to the research. Some emphasis was placed on achieving both retrospective and current coverage and the inclusion of both internal and external stakeholders. A number of preliminary interviews were conducted during April 2005 both to refine the interview framework and to identify additional participants. From the additional contacts generated a number of further interviews were conducted in May and June of 2005 resulting in a total of fifteen interviews. In the process of initial data analysis and interpretation saturation was reached after examining nine interviews with the data yielding no new information.

Coverage included past and present staff/management, past and present members of the governing board, and outside stakeholders representing local government, Tourism Victoria, and the History Council of Victoria. Internal coverage was likewise diverse covering individuals involved in management, marketing and curatorial operations.

4.9.2 Interview Structure and Process

Recognising the diversity of the respondents and the breadth of the information sought it was necessary to construct an interview format that would guide rather than be overly prescriptive. As Yin (2003, p.90) observes, "Most commonly case interviews are

of an open-ended nature in which you ask key respondents about the facts of the matter as well as their opinions about events”.

An interview schedule was developed [See Appendix A] which sought to elicit individual perspectives in a number of key areas including aspects of the organisational culture; key management decisions over time ; key success factors; organisational direction; operational impediments, and visions as to future directions. The framing of these broad areas of potential discussion was based both on the researcher’s knowledge of the operational domain; perspectives gained from the literature; and the stated objectives of the research

The potential respondents identified by means of the snowballing technique were contacted, the purpose and aims of the research explained; and appointments scheduled. Where possible interviews were conducted within the confines of the attraction although given the potential sensitivity of some of the discussions a number were completed elsewhere. In the interests of obtaining some consistency attempts were made to follow the interview schedule as closely as possible but the researcher was cognisant of the need to be flexible and to reformulate the questions depending on individual responses. Such an approach was consistent with the methodological stances mentioned earlier.

Balancing the need for depth with focus ninety to one hundred and twenty minutes was allowed for each interview. In total seventeen interviews were conducted across the two case study sites, all of which were recorded and transcribed in full. Mandatory requirements with respect to participant permission were completed in each case.

The process was augmented by the maintenance of a journal which recorded anecdotal information gleaned outside the structure of the interview. This included such information as personal history and involvement with the site under examination, associations with bodies and individuals in the immediate location
This was useful not only in terms of developing an understanding of the individual concerned but guided both the interview process and to some extent the ultimate analysis of the data by placing responses into context.

4.10 Data analysis and Interpretation

Typed transcriptions of the interviews were completed with each respondent being allocated a participant code. Given the sometimes contentious nature of individual perspectives on a number of issues, and a desire on the part of the researcher to elicit full and frank disclosure; the maintenance of anonymity was viewed as an absolute priority. This was also in accordance with undertakings given in applying for ethics approval.

Although the researcher was aware of the possibilities afforded by the use of computer aided analysis [Nud.ist], the decision was made to manually code the transcriptions in the interests of capitalising on both interpretation and researcher's own observations. The decision process was in part influenced by reference to a study (Anderson and Shaw 1999) which triangulated three analytic techniques in processing responses to research based on open ended questions. Comparing simple key word searching with a process of manual coding and finally qualitative computer software, the research sought to compare the outcomes. Although the three approaches varied significantly in their sophistication, the researchers reported significant convergence of the results. The findings of this study are also born out by other work (see for example Bong 2002; Davis and Meyer 2009) who both question whether the use of computer aided analysis necessarily facilitates rigour. On the basis of these observations it was felt that an inductive approach based on manual coding had the potential to offer greater subtlety to the interpretive process.

4.10.1 Data Coding

Coding of the data adopted a two step process based on accepted practice for the analysis of qualitative data. In the first stage, each of the interview transcriptions were re-read in full and notes appended to each interview based on the researcher's journal and recollection of particular circumstances. These were then subjected to a rigorous process of open coding which sought to translate the raw conversational data into a set of concepts.

In so doing, the researcher was guided by the seminal work of Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.63) who describe it as a process of "taking apart an observation, a sentence, a paragraph and giving each discrete incident, idea, or event, a name, something that

stands for or represents a phenomenon". A coding 'map' was developed [see appendix B] and progressively amended as new themes emerged. Individual codes were ascribed to each category to facilitate efficient retrieval as analysis progressed.

This early process yielded a significant number of conceptual labels given the diversity of respondents and an equally diverse range of views. A number of recurring themes was evident pointing to distinct commonality of view on certain issues. Although no attempt was made to ascribe any dimensional profile to the responses [proffered as the final stage in pure grounded theory], these recurring themes guided the formation of both concepts sub-categories and categories.

For example, in considering strategic direction a number of respondents made reference to the importance of innovation, a clear vision or direction; and a proactive rather than reactive stance. Stability and constancy of strategic direction were also identified as critical factors. These and a number of other concepts were assigned to a collective category of 'orientation'. The data were then subjected to further scrutiny looking for associated categories.

In the second stage a process of what Strauss and Corbin (1990) define as axial coding was undertaken directed at conceptualising degrees of interconnectedness between various of the concepts in searching for a central category or central phenomenon (Sarantakos p.119-120). As Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.97) observe, "open coding fractures the data and allows one to identify some categories [concepts] their properties and dimensional locations. Axial coding puts those data back together by making connections between a category and its sub-categories".

By applying this process of distillation it was possible to reduce the units in number by grouping similar phenomena into categories. In so doing, it moved these to what Strauss and Corbin describe as a higher order, more abstract level of conceptualisation. On that basis it was possible to observe a range of quite distinct recurring phenomena, issues and attitudes. There were also, as anticipated, some clear dichotomies between the two sites offering the researcher the opportunity to contrast the impact of various phenomena and responses in different operational settings.

Pursuing the example provided previously, 'orientation' was grouped with 'qualities', 'competencies', 'priorities', and 'externalities', under the collective category of strategy

due to a perceived interconnectedness between these concepts. Ultimately three major categories and sixteen sub-categories emerged from the data. These were not absolutely discrete with some crossovers obvious to the researcher.

In a parallel process, sections of the interview transcripts were extracted for their relevance to each particular concept and grouped under the most relevant category or categories. In this form the data became infinitely richer permitting in-depth consideration of meaning and importance. This in turn facilitated the development of a conceptual framework which was used to guide the detailed interpretation of the data contained in chapter 6.

The process was guided by the construction of a coding map which assisted the researcher in conceptualising links between various categories [see appendix B]. Although the researcher was confronted with data of significant complexity, the use of this diagram permitted constant comparison between various categories in terms of respondent discourse. Degrees of commonality between the two sites often made it necessary to include particular sections of transcripts in a number of categories causing the researcher to constantly consider where they might most appropriately be placed. In an overall sense the complexity of the process although challenging, did yield what the researcher views as quite definitive outcomes

4.11 Limitations

In generating a conceptual framework, the researcher was cognisant of the limitations of case study research. An inability to generalise the findings to other attractions was acknowledged as were the limitations imposed by restricting the research to two cases studies.

Unlike the basic assumptions of quantitative research which hold that a physical experiment is capable of being replicated, no theory that deals with social/psychological phenomenon is actually reproducible insofar as the conditions in which the research is conducted can never be totally replicated (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Quite apart from diminishing the value of the research however, the fact that the results can not be generalised does not reduce their contribution to theory generation. Since the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the chosen research paradigm are predicated on this fundamental objective, the contribution of the findings in setting a conceptual framework as a basis for on-going research fulfils a key

objective. Chapter 7 sets a number of such directions which, in the researcher's view, deserve greater research focus.

Nor, in the view of the researcher are the outcomes diminished by restricting the study to two cases. Although Yin (2003, p.53) suggests that having more than two cases will contribute to a stronger result, he offers distinct support for a two case approach even suggesting that data derived from two contrasting situations [as is representative of this research] have the potential to strengthen the external validity of the findings where "findings support the hypothesised contrast".

Paradoxically, the outcomes of this research point to a commonality of views between the two cases despite markedly different circumstances which, it is contended increases the reliability of the findings. It also lends support to the decision outlined in chapter 4 to aggregate the data such that management responses to contrasting operational realities may be conceptually weighed in terms of their effectiveness.

4.12 Validity/Reliability

The nature of inductive case study research in terms of its focus on constructed reality is often criticised on the grounds that the interpretation of the data is purely subjective and, as such, may lack validity or reliability. Previous discussion pointed to significant commonality of outcomes across the two cases suggesting that the findings may be accorded at least some acceptance in terms of their reliability.

Although the discussion here focuses on what are viewed as essentially interdependent criteria, a number of authors (Stenbacka, 2001; Golafshani 2003) suggest that in qualitative research a distinction needs to be made between validity and reliability. In fact, these authors question whether the notion of reliability has any utility in qualitative research in that, unlike positivist paradigms that employ quantifiable data as a measure of reliability, qualitative research postulates generated theory which can never be conclusively proved or disproved.

Notwithstanding, as Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.316) observe "Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter". Stenbacka (2002, p.552) suggests that "in qualitative research the answer to the question of how to create good validity is actually very simple" in that its achievement is vested in "selecting informants who are part of the 'problem area', and

giving them the opportunity to speak freely according to his/her own knowledge structures”.

As detailed in earlier sections of this chapter, enlistment of experts in the identification of potential respondents was intended to ensure that that all had direct relevance to the research domain. Further, the construction and execution of an interview process designed to ensure an organic elicitation of views satisfied the second of the criteria.

A rigorous approach also extended to the analysis and interpretation of the data. The conscious decision to undertake a process of manual coding permitted considerable immersion in the data. The researcher was able to not only physically identify commonalities in theme but to reflect on personal observations and interpretations made during the interview process. This was important in making sense of what are essentially subjective and idiosyncratic views.

Patton (1980) suggests that “retuning to the data over and over again to see if the constructs, categories, explanations and interpretations make sense” (p.125) provides a ‘lens’ through which the researcher perceives credibility. Given Creswell and Miller’s observation (2000, p.125) that validity refers not to the data but to the inferences drawn, such a process, which Altheide and Johnson (1984, p.489) refer to as ‘validity as reflexive accounting’ affords the outcomes greater credibility.

Apart from procedural rigour, the initial selection of a research paradigm was also instrumental in the researcher’s endeavours to ensure credible outcomes. The choice of a constructivist paradigm was considered most likely to elicit candid perspectives, as a basis for ‘thick, rich description’ of the setting, the participants, and the phenomena under observation. “With this vivid detail the researcher[s] help readers understand that the account is credible”.

In summary, the selection of an appropriate research paradigm, thorough and rigorous analysis of the data, and production of ‘rich’ interpretations underpin what the researcher views as a credible outcome. Although, as earlier stated the work was largely inductive in nature the interpretation was enhanced by considering the relevance of the findings to extant literature both in attractions specifically, and in broader management theory.

4.13 Ethical considerations

In considering the ethical implications of the work it is important to make a distinction between what Guillemin and Gillam (2008, p.268) describe as procedural ethics and ethics in practice. As the titles imply “Procedural ethics usually involves seeking approval from relevant committees” whereas ethics in practice is concerned with “the everyday ethical issues that arise in doing the research”.

Although the subject matter was not considered highly contentious the realisation that some of the observations may be to some extent ‘commercial in confidence’ highlighted the importance of maintaining the highest ethical standards. Issues of confidentiality and respondent anonymity were foremost in these considerations.

From a procedural standpoint, formal ethics clearance was sought and obtained from Victoria University Melbourne. Such procedural requirements, although primarily intended to protect the basic rights and safety of research participants can also serve as an ethics ‘checklist’ by “reminding the researcher to consider such issues as potential risks to participants, the balancing of the benefits of the research against those risks, the steps needed to ensure confidentiality of the data, and the inclusion of consent forms and plain language statements in the material provided to participants” Guillemin and Gillam (2008, p.268).

Being mindful of such imperatives, respondents, once identified were briefed as the purpose and intent of the research and signed agreement to participate was obtained in each instance. A ‘plain language’ synopsis of the research objectives was handed to each participant. Both as a courtesy, and to comply with ethics policy, respondents were advised of their right to withdraw from the interview process at any point.

An ethical focus also extended to the interview process. Although it was obviously necessary to maintain some degree of control over the interview, in the interests of eliciting meaningful insights the researcher allowed each respondent to exercise some control over the direction and content of the discussion. Although a reflexive stance is usually considered to be a purely epistemological consideration (Guillemin and Gillam 2008) its relevance to ethics was also an important consideration. Mason (1996, p.6) exhorts researchers to “constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their

data". The challenges associated with this research, particularly as it relates to divergent opinions on some issues caused some reflection on the neutrality of the researcher and the way in which the discovery was conducted.

Although Shaw (2008) points to Lincoln and Guba's (1989, p.233) assertion that 'confidentiality and anonymity obviously can not be guaranteed in naturalistic enquiry,' all reasonable efforts were made to protect the identity of respondents. Where possible, interviews were conducted in private, facilitating a free and frank exposition of views. Considerations of privacy also extended to the transcription process with each respondent being allocated a code which was subsequently used in reporting the data.

Normal procedures with respect to the storage and security of the data are being observed. Apart from some minor assistance with transcription of the interviews, handling of all material has been the sole domain of the researcher. It is the intent of the researcher to present the outcomes of the research to the 'sponsoring' organisations such the partnership that began with agreement to participate is brought to a rightful conclusion.

4.14 Conclusion

The importance of the attraction sector to tourism can not be overstated. As Swarbrooke (2005, p.3) observes, "Without attractions there would be no need for other tourism services. Indeed tourism, as such, would not exist if it were not for attractions". Despite their pivotal role in the tourism system, however, they appear to be a largely neglected area of research, particularly as it relates to the way in which they strategically respond to changes in the external environment.

Recognising this fact the current research attempts to address the gap in the literature by juxtaposing broader management theory with the operational realities of heritage based attractions. More importantly, the research seeks to explore how elements of the external environment impact on specific operational settings and stakeholder perceptions of what constitutes effective responses.

The current chapter began by examining a broad taxonomy of attractions with the overarching objective of considering whether any one particular attraction type is sufficiently differentiated to provide a suitable research context. Although no attempt

was made to validate one particular approach a continuum was conceptualised between various types of attractions based on ownership and thereby profit orientation. On this basis, it was observed that some types of attractions logically fall at one or other end of the continuum but that heritage attractions present a curious mix of revenue focus and curatorial priorities. Since it was considered that this may result in quite particular management challenges, small heritage based attractions became the declared focus of the study. On the basis of that realisation, a number of specific research objectives were outlined.

Despite the perceived potential of this research environment, however, it was recognised that due to little specific research, any sense of what constitutes actual practice in small heritage attractions was not clear. As such, the search for a research paradigm capable of forming an understanding of reality became a priority. Based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a constructivist paradigm [multiple subjective realities exist in the minds of those who hold them], this approach appeared to lend itself to the objectives of the research. More particularly, the hermeneutic/dialectic methodology which characterises the constructivist model was deemed entirely appropriate to the framing of a research method capable of eliciting and interpreting a wide range of views.

As a means of “exploring processes, activities, and events, Creswell (2003, p.14) points to grounded or case study method as the most appropriate direction. A distinction was made between the purely inductive nature of the grounded theory approach and the process of induction and deduction permitted by the constructivist paradigm. Given the conceptual juxtaposition of the literature and the researchers declared knowledge of the operation domain, the need to admit some degree of subjectivity validated the choice of case study method as the most appropriate means of conducting the research.

Within the case study framework, the chapter examined the means by which individual respondents were identified in an effort to ensure their direct relevance to the research context. The resultant sample, although relatively small in number was sufficiently diverse to yield the desired range of perspectives rendering the process more than effective. Although there was some pre-determined structure to the interviews, a series of open-ended questions was used to elicit views on a number of issues.

The process of data analysis and interpretation was outlined including the decision to engage in manual coding of the interview transcripts. Based on what Patton (1980) describes as 'reflexive accounting', repetitive examination of the data was undertaken to refine categories and to 'validate' interpretations. This was directed at enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

Finally, steps taken to ensure ethical conduct of the research were discussed. An important distinction was made between the obligations of the researcher in a procedural sense and what Guillemin and Gillam (2008) describe as 'ethics in practice'. Being mindful of the potential sensitivity of some views maintaining respondent anonymity and ensuring that the interviews were conducted in a non coercive fashion were priorities.

In the following chapter the two case studies are described in more detail and a set of preliminary findings outlined. These are then used to inform deeper analysis of the data.

5.0 Case Studies and Preliminary Findings

5.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the justification for adopting a case study method was outlined. Although as Yin (2003, p.1) observes, "Using case studies for research purposes remains one of the most challenging of all social science endeavours", they remain an effective way to "investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Ying, 2003, p.13).

This research is directed at examining a set of phenomenon [organisational strategies and orientations], in the context of heritage visitor attractions in an attempt to determine their impact on successful operation. In pursuit of that objective four such attractions were identified, from which two were ultimately selected for inclusion in the study. A rationale for the selection process was also offered in the preceding chapter. This chapter provides an introduction to the two case studies, and outlines a set of preliminary findings which will be used to inform more detailed analysis in chapter 6.

5.2 Case Study Description - Sovereign Hill Museums Association [Sovereign Hill]

From its beginnings as a community based project in the 1960s, Sovereign Hill has grown to become arguably Victoria's most successful regional visitor attraction. Recipient of numerous accolades including the 2003 and 2004 Victorian Tourism Awards and the prestigious 2006 Major Tourist Attractions prize at the Australian National Tourism Awards, the site is now an integral element of Victoria's tourism inventory. Located in the rural city of Ballarat just over 100 kilometres North West of Melbourne, the attraction is within easy reach of major population concentrations.

Consisting of a re-constructed gold mining township of the 1850s; an elaborate sound and light show depicting the Eureka uprising of 1854; and a museum housing significant collections linked to the museum's central theme of gold, the site now attracts over 450,000 day visitors, and 560,000 night visitors per year contributing more than M\$50 to the regional economy. <http://www.sovereignhill.com.au/?id=corpmedia>: accessed 31 July 2006),

Early community commitment to the concept of “an outdoor museum that would capture some of the diversity and vibrancy of the gold rush era” is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that over \$200,000 was raised by the local community over forty years ago, an amount which, despite some degree of scepticism as to the viability of the project, was matched by the government of the day. That successive governments on both sides of the political spectrum have continued to support the attraction is testimony to the important role it plays in the economy of the state and of the goldfields region.

From its very inception, however, maintaining independence from government particularly at a local level has been a cornerstone of the operational ideology of the attraction. Apart from a number of government grants, most notably the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund [RIDF], the attraction has always managed to be self sufficient with operating revenues from ordinary activities now approaching M\$1 per year.

Administered by the Sovereign Hill Museums Association, a not for profit community based organisation which re-invests operating profit back in to the enterprise, the association continues to maintain its independence and to nurture its community origins. This fact, plus an unswerving commitment to ‘authenticity’ in its presentation and interpretation; a dedication to keeping the attraction ‘fresh’ and interesting; and an emphasis on interactivity with its visitors are amongst the key reasons for its success.

The ability to focus on historical accuracy is aided in part by the short historical timeframe which forms the cultural tapestry of Sovereign Hill. The diggings and township which are the major focus of visitors depicts the buildings, activities and artefacts of just ten years in history from 1851 to 1861 when the gold rush in Ballarat was at its height. Although the attraction has assembled a significant collection of authentic artefacts, the fact that virtually none of the buildings are original speaks volumes for the curatorial integrity underpinned by sound scholarship. Working from original drawings and photographs the meticulous attention to detail has resulted in a display which is virtually indiscernible from the real thing.

Quite apart from representing a limitation, the ability to concentrate on the events of this relatively short period of history has resulted in degrees of accuracy that if anything enhance the visitor experience. Unlike many similar attractions which present the visitor with a confusing mix of sometimes disparate themes, Sovereign Hill’s

concentration on this relatively narrow period affords greater depth of interpretation. Amongst the guiding principles articulated by the association is the need to inform, entertain and involve visitors. Although these may seem like dichotomous objectives, the fact that Sovereign Hill manages to successfully integrate these outcomes is worthy of note.

The attraction makes a tangible contribution to the wider education process offering a comprehensive educational programme for Victorian primary school children. Three on site 'schools' replicate school life in the 1850s and even include an opportunity for participants to dress in period costume. Although not explicit, the underlying ideology appears to foster a generational transfer of interest in Victorian Heritage.

The twin values of historical accuracy and the recognition of its role as an educational resource are embodied in a mission and set of guiding principles which appear to underpin all facets of the attraction's operation. In successive annual reports, (Sovereign Hill Museums Association 2004-5) and in the public domain of the internet, (<http://www.sovereignhill.com.au/?id=corpmedia>: accessed 31 July 2006), these values are succinctly articulated as follows:

Mission

Our Mission is to present, in a dynamic group of museums, the mining, social, cultural and environmental heritage of the Ballarat region and its impact on Australia's national story.

Guiding Principles

We will carry out our Mission according to the following Guiding Principles.

That we will:

- Ensure that our visitors are engaged, informed, entertained and become our best advocates;
- Nurture our integrity as a museum, whereby we acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material pertinent to the history of Ballarat and its environs;
- In the Diggings and Township, research and interpret the mining and social heritage of Ballarat, specifically of the 1851-1861 period; and in the Sovereign Quartz Mine present the mining history of the era specifically to 1918; in the Gold Museum present the social history of the region from the earliest times to present

day and maintain a vigorous exhibition program; and at 'Narmbool' present the story of its custodians and the environment;

- Inform, entertain and involve our visitors without compromising our integrity as a museum, with an emphasis on Australian history and underpinned by good scholarship;
- Achieve the highest standards of customer service in all aspects of our work and measure our success as an organisation by the quality of visitors' experiences;
- Ensure our independence, commercial viability and business integrity;
- Promote our identity as a not-for-profit, community-based asset;
- Ensure dignity and respect for our colleagues, and ensure a happy and safe working environment where innovation is encouraged and where the contribution of each member of the Sovereign Hill community is valued;
- Promote our links with, and involvement in, the local, state, national and international communities;
- Develop our role as a centre of learning and education.

These principles extend both to the public face of Sovereign Hill and to a strong organisational culture to which both staff and volunteers clearly subscribe. With over 200 fulltime staff and access to another 300 volunteers under the auspices of the 'Friends of Sovereign Hill [FOSH], the commitment to presenting the highest levels of historical interpretation is a shared vision.

The volunteers in particular make a significant contribution to the day to day operations of the site dressing in period costumes and providing the front line contact with visitors. Preparation for this interaction is considerable with each volunteer encouraged to develop a strong knowledge of the historical nuances of the period. Staff at all levels also take an active role in the 'front stage' of the township, regularly donning costumes of the period and spending time mingling with the visitors. This human element and an emphasis on depicting the ordinary everyday activities of 1850s goldfield residents, is pivotal to the way in which each day unfolds.

This focus does not, however, restrict Sovereign Hill's ability and inclination to continuously re-invent the visitor experience. Being conscious of the need to keep the attraction 'fresh' and appealing to returning visitors, management have been very innovative in adding new features on a regular basis.

Perhaps of greatest note was the inauguration, in 1993, of Blood on the Southern Cross, a multi million dollar sound and light show depicting the events of December 3, 1854 when disenchanting miners fought a dramatic battle with Government forces.

Utilising significant computer and audio-visual technology, this feature has now become an integral element of the experience, attracting more than a million visitors and accounting for a significant proportion of the association's operating revenue. Operating nightly, the performance has not only seen significant gains for Sovereign Hill, but has intentionally or otherwise made a recognisable contribution to the profitability of local accommodation providers. Anecdotally at least, this equates to a direct regional income of M\$6 per year and generates 1400 bed nights each week. This is augmented by a range of onsite accommodation which supplements Sovereign Hill's operating revenue.

The obvious success of Blood on the Southern Cross which attracted between 80,000 and 90,000 visitors per year in its first nine years of operation, resulted in 2002, in a M\$1.2 grant from the State Government [matched by Sovereign Hill] to undertake a significant enhancement involving the provision of a six language narration and hearing impairment service. <http://www.sovereignhill.com.au/?id=corpmedia>: accessed 31 July 2006),

The attraction continues to innovate, adding a Cantonese mine exhibit in 2003 in response to significant growth in the Chinese market, and an underground mine tour in 2005. Plans were also unveiled in April of 2006 for a M\$3.8 re-development of Sovereign Hill to incorporate a number of new features including the construction of a tramway ride, as part of the existing mine tour, and a new state of the art multi-media presentation detailing the 1882 mine disaster in nearby Creswick. Titled 'Re-inventing the Magic', the project is further proof of government support and the ongoing commitment of the association to maintaining Sovereign Hill's pre-eminent position as a successful visitor destination.

The acquisition by bequest, in 1999 of 'Narmbool' a 4,800 acre rural property in neighbouring countryside twenty minutes from Ballarat, brings a whole new dimension to the operations of the association. Although it may be viewed as a significant departure from the central theme of gold and of the history of the gold rush, the synergies between the Sovereign Hill as an educational resource and the use of Narmbool as a centre for the ecological education of school age children can not be

ignored. There are direct synergies between education programmes at Sovereign Hill set in the 1850s and farm activities at the property which date back to first European settlement in the 1840s. Although opinions seem sharply divided, whether this diversification will prove to be problematic remains to be seen.

5.3 Case Study Description – Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum

Located just over 300 kilometres North West of Melbourne in the rural city of Swan Hill, the Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum [SHPSM] opened in 1963 on a 2.84 hectare site abutting the Murray River.

Claiming to be the first outdoor folk museum in Australia, the museum is home to an extensive collection of buildings, machinery, and paraphernalia representative of pioneer life in the region in the century between 1830 and 1930. At its core is the 'Gem', a 28 metre Murray River paddleboat which was initially used as an art gallery, museum office, and entry point. A restaurant was eventually added serving what is now termed 'bush tucker'. The vessel was subsequently placed on the Victorian heritage register in 1998 and continues to be the subject of restoration.

The museum also lays claim to the first sound and light performance as part of a heritage theme which was inaugurated in 1971 and has recently celebrated its thirty-fifth anniversary.

The project was mainly the 'brain child' of Eric Westbrook the then director of the National Gallery of Victoria who fanned local interest in moving the rapidly decaying Gem from Mildura. The council of the day vigorously opposed the acquisition and, by inference the creation of the village, but the intervention of the State Government in purchasing the Gem for two thousand pounds in 1962 'kick started' the museum.

In the forty years since its inception the museum has progressively collected more than 60 original buildings re-located from other sites; added agricultural equipment and machinery; and extended its collection of documents, photographs, maps and other archival material. The collection now boasts an inventory of over 20 thousand items that relate to rural life in the Mallee and Riverine regions. Many of these items are of national and international significance.

This process of incremental acquisition is perhaps more akin to the normal processes of a museum rather than of a visitor attraction per se. Such an observation is important in the context of the culture and orientation of management and staff, and of the perceptions of external stakeholders which form the focus of this research. Little if any developmental spurts can be identified.

Although presenting such a seemingly disparate collection could be viewed as problematic, some degree of cohesion has been achieved by zoning the site to represent various stages of historical evolution. In deference to the traditional land owners the representations extend beyond the century from 1830 to incorporate the history of aboriginal culture both before European settlement, and in the following years to 1840.

Mirroring what are defined as the development 'waves' of the region an additional five 'zones' form the focus of the museum. Specifically these are;

- Explorers of the region; Major Mitchell, Burke & Wills & Sturt (1836 – 1861)
- The first wave of settlers (1860 – 1890)
- Towaninnie Homestead (1860 – 1930) the house and outbuildings and domestic artefacts of a large sheep station moved to the Pioneer Settlement in the 1960s
- Mechanisation of wheat farming (1890 – 1930)
- Township (1920 – 1930)

As is appropriate to each zone a number of thematic threads can be identified including:

The history and evolution of transport

The impact of immigration & cultural diversity in the development of the region

Communication technology

Agricultural technology

Indigenous culture

The domestic & social aspects of rural life

Technology & innovation

The working lives of settlers

Australians at war

[\(http://www.pioneersettlement.com.au/\)](http://www.pioneersettlement.com.au/)

Operating as a sub-business of The Swan Hill Rural City Council, the museum currently employs 8 full time and 19 part time and 6 casual staff. This is augmented by a small but dedicated band of volunteers [55 active] who contribute to the interpretive process by manning the township in period costume and interacting with visitors. Unlike similarly themed attractions that place considerable emphasis on a volunteer workforce this appears to be a largely neglected resource in this instance. Given the declared vision and goals of the museum detailed below, an element of which is community engagement, this may represent a significant impediment.

- To develop and manage the Pioneer Settlement as a world class Heritage Museum that preserves, interprets and activates the Murray-Mallee pioneering life from 1830 – 1930.
- To preserve the Murray-Mallee heritage through collection and care of appropriate artefacts.
- To interpret and activate our heritage enabling the community to appreciate what pioneering life was like in the era of 1830 – 1930.
- To operate financially on an annual breakeven basis excluding depreciation and capital works

In reality, the museum struggles to fund recurrent costs which anecdotally at least creates pressure for profit orientation to subsume curatorial priorities. The resultant ideological divide between council personnel and site staff has not been conducive to shared vision or strategic thinking.

Apart from nominal admission charges, additional revenue is generated from a café and souvenir shop; working exhibits producing a range of items for sale ; and the Paddle steamer 'Pyap' offering river cruises twice daily for visitors.

Additional revenue is also derived from The Sound & Light Show which is offered at a premium above day admission prices. Unlike Sovereign Hill where the addition of Blood on the Southern Cross has made a contribution to regional accommodation receipts, the relative isolation of Swan Hill as compared to Ballarat appears not to have had the same effect, as patrons were already staying overnight. The absence of any economic impact study to ascertain the precise contribution of the museum to the regional economy perhaps explains council and community scepticism as to the 'value' of the facility.

In terms of broader community contribution, the facility offers educational programmes for Victorian school children of all levels under the direction of fully qualified teachers. Despite obvious problems associated with distances from major population centres there is provision for accommodation albeit in need of significant restoration.

Apart from government providing seed funding for the 'Gem' restoration, the museum appears to have been relatively unsuccessful in accessing government grants either because of a lack of focus or because there are conflicting views of whether the site is a museum in the true sense of the word, or a visitor attraction.

5.4 Preliminary Analysis

Transcriptions of the interviews from both case studies were manually analysed in an attempt to identify patterns in the data. Open codes were ascribed to emergent themes. A second stage of preliminary analysis termed axial coding began to conceptualise the relationships between categories and to make hypothetical connections between them (Strauss and Corbin 1997).

The process was intended to inform a more detailed level of analysis to be conducted in Chapter 6. Chapter 4 provides a justification for the selection of a research paradigm and a more detailed explanation of the process. Although the field research was largely inductive in nature in that it sought to construct meaning from complex situations the researcher began with a set of basic research propositions formed from the literature review. To that extent the interview framework sought to elicit views on specific areas of focus

Although there is some support for the process of reporting and interpreting effect sizes or response frequencies in the analysis of qualitative data (see for example Onwuegbuzie, 2003), no attempt was made to apply any quantitative weight to response levels other than in a purely interpretive sense

5.4.1 Preliminary findings Sovereign Hill

Given earlier comments with respect to the demonstrable success of Sovereign Hill, the analysis yielded some valuable perspectives particularly as they relate to the connection between certain actions or orientations, and what appear to be largely positive outcomes. Examining these relationships in other settings provides a

potentially rich research environment within which elements of best practice may be identified

Almost all respondents felt that Sovereign Hill's detachment and independence from local government, particularly from a financial perspective, was a strong factor in successful operation. The maintenance of this independence was both a central element of its original charter and remains a core management principle.

This view was shared by a number of key staff and council members with comments like [SHS5] "I think that's what makes Sovereign Hill quite strong because it is independent; it's not at the behest of local government or intervention by an overarching body", and [SHS1] "One of Sovereign Hill's greatest successes I think at the outset was that it was established independent of government and independent of local government".

Although the attraction has been the recipient of a number of government grants [mainly directed at major projects], it is not reliant on outside sources for any recurrent funding. Both day to day and strategic decision making are thus vested in the site management, encouraging a strong and evident entrepreneurial spirit.

Equally important has been the obvious determination to maintain interpretive integrity in the presentation of the ten year time frame [1850-60] that the site depicts. Although many of the respondents had an aversion to the term 'authenticity' they are nonetheless dedicated to presenting life on the diggings in as honest a form as possible. As respondent SHS3 observes "I tend not to talk about historical authenticity, it's about being plausible, and it's about being credible". "... I think people understand what we've tried to do at Sovereign Hill is to make sure that what we do is underpinned by good scholarship, so that it is trusted and people can have confidence in it". That this translates directly into visitor appeal is clearly instrumental in the site's success. And further "I think there is integrity, there's no doubt about that, but we do stand for what we preach and we deliver on it and we take it very very seriously".[SHS3]

Such an approach appears to have been underpinned by a strong and cohesive management structure. The fact that Sovereign Hill has effectively only had three managers in it's almost 40 years of operation; and still has a number of board members who have served from the very beginning is of significance. As respondent

SHS2 reflects, “We had a pretty consistent board for many, many years, in other words stable people on that board. I think that has to be a plus. It’s always nice to have newness and introduce new blood and visions and sort of stuff but some of those stabilities have been there”.

Although it was recognised that the absence of ‘new blood’ can be detrimental in some cases it appears to have been directly conducive to success in this case. Although a ‘changing of the guard’ appears imminent, due mainly to ageing board members, retention of expertise has been a critical factor. Such a perspective was shared by a number of key respondents, characterised by comments like “There are certainly people within the group [board] who are the natural leaders and a lot of that is to do with their knowledge and expertise” [SHS3].

Succession planning will assume increasing importance over the next five years but it was evident that the process has already begun. “I think given the board’s track record they’ll work their way through it, I mean we have lost good people over the course of 35 years as you do any way, but it will be a bit of a ‘water shed’ in the fact that the originals will be gone” [SHS3].

The overall management structure of Sovereign Hill was likewise viewed as being critical to its success. A common view amongst respondents alludes to a flexible organisation with very effective internal communication. “ I think what has driven success from the internal perspective, has been the management structure; its been a matrix style, and by being a very flat management structure, instead of there being a remote administration, everything about Sovereign Hill is open door” [SHS1].

It is worth observing that such a structure facilitates an ability to respond quickly to change and to utilise the talents of a diverse range of people. In discussing this flexibility, SHS3 offers insights into an active process of consultation which goes on continuously. “[If] we did have an opportunity to do something, to invest our capital, to take advantage of a market opportunity, we’ve already had the discussion, to some degree so nothing comes up as a surprise, it has been talked about at least in some form before, and that has been so necessary in us being agile, to be able to respond very quickly as an organisation”.

Given the rapidity of change facing tourism in general, and visitor attractions in particular, this was viewed by most respondents as being critically important.

Integral to the management of change has also been Sovereign Hill's ability to almost continuously innovate as a means of keeping the attraction fresh and appealing. Although there have been significant milestones such as the advent of 'Blood on the Southern Cross' in 1993, there are numerous examples of incremental innovations that have directly contributed to the success of Sovereign Hill.

The observation that Sovereign Hill has been in a constant process of evolution was echoed by a number of respondents, for example: "I actually see it as an institution on a journey, it's on a continual journey, and I think it's not so much that it reinvents itself; but it just finds new way of expressing what it is" [SHS1]. "I think you've got to [reinvent yourself], I mean we've just got a new version of Blood on the Southern Cross and that's terrific. Now, something will emerge but it's quite a different experience" [SHC2].

"[It's about] being innovative and creative about the ways in which we do programming, and use the asset that we've got much more effectively. This is why I'm revisiting the static experiences, its why we're going into another school building because it is a good solid market, its got a great program and the impact of that program in communicating our interpretive goals is just fantastic so that really is building something" [SHS1].

This comment points to yet another factor which was viewed as being critical to attractions of this type, namely the extent to which they offer an interactive rather than static experience to visitors. Sovereign Hill's ability to blend entertainment with education and experience has been a key factor in its popularity and thereby its success. Recognition of the expectations of visitors seems central to both the sites curatorial pursuits and its operation as a visitor attraction.

As SHS1 observes, "People don't engage with static or dead things, they'll look at them and enjoy them very quickly as a passive experience, they want active experiences. They want more now, hands on, they don't want to be sort of tagged around with a guide, and they actually want to participate".

A key element of bringing the attraction to life in this way has been the involvement and training of a large cohort of volunteers. With approximately 300 volunteers for the

outdoor sections of the museum, and a further 30 or 40 at the Gold Museum, their contribution to the historical presentation is vital. Sovereign Hill's ability to engage with such a large volunteer workforce, and more importantly to imbue them with a strong and unique organisational culture, was seen as a significant factor in their success.

The organisational culture of Sovereign Hill was noted by many respondents as central to its operation. As several observed "[It's about bringing] our interpreters towards a view of understanding how historical research works and how that is then applied. Making sure that the emphasis is on communication so that again involves another process which is more about learning and engaging our staff in learning and not just parody process's that have been repeated time in and time out" [SHS3].

Perhaps the most important competency demonstrated by Sovereign Hill, however, has been the apparent ability to reconcile commercial imperatives with curatorial priorities. Anecdotally at least, this appears to have been due to the simple realisation that these priorities are interdependent, rather than dichotomous objectives. Even staff involved in the museum rather than general operations who, might logically subscribe to the priority of maintaining the attraction's collection, concede "I think we've been able to mix revenue raising strategies, so the accommodation, Blood on the Southern Cross, and the things that are associated with it, like our catering, our meals, have all been ways of generating revenue which has enabled us to then keep providing a great museum experience" [SHS3].

It was worth observing that this process of reconciling objectives was not a new phenomenon at Sovereign Hill. .Even management involved at the very formative stages of development appears to have always held these directions as central to success.

In reflecting on early management [SHC2] observed "It often took about 2 or 3 years to get a good museum, exhibit, project, orientation centre or whatever up. It's surprising just how long the gestation period is and there's no way you're going to do that unless you can really get the commercial stuff running a bit more productively".

Apart from recognising the interdependent nature of these priorities, the ability to articulate a clear vision of what constitutes its core business appears to have contributed to Sovereign Hill's success. The interviews, and anecdotal discussions during several visits to the site, suggested that both the board and site management have a clear and unambiguous vision of their central objective.

Reflecting on a more or less constant process of reevaluating the nexus between the museum and tourism as a source of revenue, [SHC2] goes on to observe, "The board [has been through] quite an extensive deliberation about how complex an organisation Sovereign Hill had become, and looking at what its core business was and those things which were the value adds to its core business as a museum; tourism is clearly a very strong part of what we do as our core business".

Anecdotally, there are other attractions of this type that struggle to achieve this process of reconciliation or to arrive at a clear articulation of their core business.

Recognising that its tourism activities underpin financial viability and, thereby, the ability to maintain its integrity as a museum, Sovereign Hill has also achieved considerable success in maintaining alliances with key industry bodies and in reading market forces. Although both seem instinctive directions for an attraction of this kind, the fact that many do not achieve these ends may explain their relative lack of success.

Sovereign Hill's relationship with the Victorian Government, and with Tourism Victoria, has discernibly contributed to their success. At a state level this has translated into levels of government support, primarily by way of major project driven grants, which have supported some key initiatives such as Blood on the Southern Cross. Although, as previously stated Sovereign Hill has never been dependant on any level of government for recurrent funding, some of its key development spurts would arguably not have been possible without government.

Nurturing this relationship appears always to have been on the agenda of management. As [SHS3] observes, "When I was saying before that we don't get recurrent funding, we certainly don't, but the government has been extraordinarily generous to us with capital because they recognise that we use capital well and that the investment that they make here they get a return on principally through tourism and economic development in the region".

Government's faith in Sovereign Hill as a catalyst for regional economic development appears well founded. Although the raison d'être for the development of Blood on the Southern Cross was clearly "to generate a product that would support the Sovereign Hill interpretive story, the happy coincidence is that it generated a huge market in destinational tourism" [SHS1]. "It has eventuated that the 90,000 patrons that come on to the Southern Cross, there's 82,000 bed nights that come to Ballarat and these are distributed right throughout the community". Whilst there are detractors, community attitudes to Sovereign Hill are consequently reasonably positive.

Given that many smaller attractions which, by origin or circumstance, are reliant on local government funding for their existence, suffer negative community perceptions this appeared to be an extremely important factor in Sovereign Hill's success.

Indirect government support has also been forthcoming in the form of marketing support from key industry bodies such as Tourism Victoria. Sovereign Hill maintains a memorandum of understanding with Tourism Victoria which underpins a strong working relationship. As SHS1 observes, "the memorandum of understanding has really been a crucial part of our sense of where we could be exposed is just not being on the mainstream of what's happening in tourism development planning, we just rely so much on you know, the government getting the tourism settings right, so having that information early, getting a good heads up on things certainly helps in our planning. Having access to the sort of information they've got [Tourism Victoria] to inform our business planning is just absolutely critical and also for making sure that we are in touch with government policy" [SHS3].

As with the relationship with government generally, the relationship appears to not have been entirely one-sided. "Tourism Victoria recognised that it had to be more engaged with regional tourism and had developed its own strategic plan for identifying key regional areas, we were right at the intersection of two of those, The Great Ocean Road and the Central Highlands, Central Goldfields. So at that time it was kind of looking for the winners I suppose, the good investment places and we were one of those because we've sat at the nexus or the cross roads" [SHS3].

The relationship with government and Tourism Victoria in particular, has also been instrumental in Sovereign Hill being at the forefront of market intelligence with respect to emerging and prevailing markets, and in capitalising on government initiatives with

respect to state tourism at large. Over time, Sovereign Hill has been extremely successful in tapping into the market for arrivals from Mainland China but recognises the need for continual market diversification.

As SHS5 concedes, “We have a heavy reliance on China, [and] we are looking at expanding other markets but with any overseas initiatives, it’s expensive and it’s also quite a long lead time”. The sensitivity to the Chinese market is another reason why we’ve been into the inner view of Tourism Victoria, because it’s such an immature market, its high risk but it’s also got great potential, but you can miss a whole cycle and pay for it, and we were really exposed to that with the SARS epidemic”.

Sovereign Hill’s apparent ability to balance relationships with governments at all levels; to reconcile its organisational priorities; and to continue to deliver an innovative product which exceeds consumer expectations are all seen as key factors in its success.

The foregoing analysis of the data, although preliminary in nature, has identified a number of important factors considered by key stakeholders as contributing to the success of Sovereign Hill. Although these are not considered exclusive, their repetitive emergence throughout the interviews is cause for attention. In later sections, in depth analysis will also consider a wider range of factors many of which appear connected with this fundamental framework.

5.4.2 Preliminary findings Swan Hill Pioneer Village

Described on its web site as a “sub business of the Swan Hill Rural City Council” the attraction appears to be almost entirely dependant on local government for recurrent funding. From its origins in 1963, its relationship with variously constituted councils has been tenuous at best. As a council bureaucrat and directly involved in the operation of the museum observes “The Pioneer Settlement has been in defensive mode for a long, long, time” [SPC1].

Akin to Sovereign Hill, it began its life as a community project in 1963 but was ultimately ceded to the then city council because; in the community view it had become too big for the community to operate [with] volunteers. The village was in turn placed under the control of the State Government from the mid 70s until the early 90s, under the auspices of what was termed the Pioneer Settlement Authority.

By 1984, however, it had begun to run at a deficit and came under increasing pressure to justify its existence. The absence of any systems for even the tabulation of visitor numbers made budgeting and planning an impossibility. Anecdotally, at least there was a general reluctance on the part of government to provide further funding.

Amalgamation of many rural councils in 1992 resulted in the Settlement returning to the control of the newly constituted Swan Hill Rural City Council from what had previously been a community board of management established under section 86 of the local government Act (1992). Effectively what this meant was a centralisation of control within council with the incoming CEO assuming direct responsibility based on his apparent perception that the Settlement was literally 'haemorrhaging money'. Anecdotally this was not, at least an overstatement.

Despite the commitment of a small band of people, many of whom are still involved today, the absence of money for maintenance, curatorial, or capital works resulted in the Settlement falling into decay.

So began a period of dependence on local government which in the view of many people has severely retarded the success of the attraction. According to a number of stakeholders involved in the interview process, the problem has been exacerbated by a lack of clear direction, and to some extent disagreement, as to whether the Settlement is a 'theme park' or a museum.

Given that the latter category is a traditional recipient of public funding, and the former generally considered a commercial enterprise, the distinction becomes critical. Many respondents considered that this remains an unresolved issue despite the Settlement recently appending the word 'museum' to its operating title.

As early as 1995 there is evidence of a significant division of opinion amongst councillors of the time over the definitional problem. Although many felt that the responsibility vested in the protection and conservation of local heritage was inescapable, there was a reluctance to ascribe the title museum [anecdotally because of the funding implications], and an almost equally strong conviction that it should not promote itself as a theme park which, in the view of many had connotations of 'false'.

In reflecting on the events of the last eight years, site management [SPS1] observes that there has been a gradual shift towards designating the Settlement as a museum. "I think that when the council finally decided it was a museum and not a theme park [it was a significant turning point], in that it had "professional connotations" with respect to collections management and a "professional attitude".

Such a change of direction culminated in 2002 with the Settlement being moved from the business arm of council to the cultural arm, which, although a significant shift appears not to have substantially changed council's attitude to funding. One respondent's observation perhaps best depicts the current mood.

I mean they made a decision it was a museum but they wanted it to be a museum that made money. There are still council members who think that it should be self funding but the bulk of council understand that its like the library, the gallery and the performing arts in that you need to contribute, it will produce money in the community but it needs to have back up. [SPS1]

According to SPS1, there was even a push to gain museum accreditation which may have opened the way for grant funding from other sources than council.

Many respondents felt that such an attitudinal shift, although at the mercies of inevitable changes in council composition, represents a glimmer of hope. That said, it should be observed that as recently as 2005 there was still discussion amongst council and Settlement staff as to threatened closure.

There have been direct attempts to place the site on a more commercial footing including a somewhat ambitious plan in 1995 which saw council entering into a joint venture with William Angliss Institute of TAFE which, by agreement was to operate the Settlement as a training facility for tourism and hospitality students. This was unfortunately short lived and once again the Settlement returned to direct council control.

Although the precise history of the Settlement from its inception to the present day was elusive, mainly because of differing perspectives of events, and the attrition of key stakeholders, the recurring theme appears to be an inescapable dependence on local government. The resultant lack of autonomy and a culture of uncertainty have done little to enhance the stakes of the Settlement.

It is perhaps for the same reason that management of the site has been, at best inconsistent with little if any line of continuity. This has, and will continue to present a significant barrier given the dichotomous priorities of council and on-site management. Even the priorities of on-site management have lacked consistency over time with successive incumbents having either a management or curatorial background but rarely, if ever, both. Indeed as SPC1 observes “it didn’t matter what calibre of management you put in the Settlement, the systems weren’t there for a person to manage”. It is also worth observing that council has frequently designated responsibility within council for the overall operation of the site to people with little or no expertise in the area.

Since the research interviews by intent captured as wide a variety of stakeholders as possible, it is of note that almost without exception most viewed these issues as significant barriers yet there appears to be little resolve to address them. Most felt that council’s attitude is largely born of constituent pressure. Despite a broader community that is generally “very supportive of the Pioneer Settlement” as SPC1 expresses it “they just don’t want to know how much it costs”.

As a former member of the community committee which operated under government mandate observed “we have to justify why it is we’re having to cough up 350-400 thousand per year. That’s four percent; you know four percent increase every year in our rate payer’s money” [SPO1].

The link between the fortunes of the Settlement and community attitudes was palpable. As SPS1 observes “when it started to struggle, the community started to criticise, and the more the community criticised [the greater the pressure on council to justify resource allocation]”.

It may therefore seem somewhat trite to suggest that the Settlement should invigorate attempts to engage with the local community although there was some consensus that communicating the ‘worth’ of the site as a community resource would go at least some way towards overcoming community opposition. This appeared to be a current management direction. “We’ve actually been going through the process of community consultation because we want to put together a future vision. I see this as a cultural asset that the community should utilise” [SPS1].

A worthwhile direction in this area may be a greater utilisation of the community as a volunteer workforce. This not only has the potential to engage with a larger proportion of local residents but would have the added benefit of enhancing the interactivity of the site. With barely 50 active volunteers, bringing such a large and extensive collection 'to life' presents significant challenges. Further, since the site is desperately in need of greater levels of interactivity and engagement with visitors, the need to build a volunteer workforce is accentuated.

It is perhaps the breadth of the Settlement's collection that makes this problematic. Unlike Sovereign Hill, that deliberately restricts its interpretive framework to just ten years; the Settlement depicts 'pioneer life' over more than a century, resulting in a disparate and sometimes confusing collection of themes. If anything, this increases the necessity to offer strong interpretation but equally it dissipates the possibility of strong scholarship in the level and sophistication of delivery.

Earlier discussion with respect to the appointment of a curator, and to the gradual move to the nomenclature of 'museum', has the potential to address these challenges. In some respects, however, this shift may be simply perpetuating the divide between profit orientation and curatorial priorities as once again the pendulum swings to the latter focus. Given that the reconciliation of these two objectives is seen as central to successful operation, this may be problematic.

From a positive perspective, current management's vision for the future of the site appears set to bring with it a new wave of innovation. The fact that the Settlement's collection has been gathered in a more or less incremental fashion, and that the Settlement has had little in the way of major innovation since early initiatives with the Sound and Light performance, and restoration of the paddle steamer "Gem", suggests that the site has lacked the kind of innovation that generates and maintains consumer focus.

Unlike other attractions that hold the process of constant re-invention as central to the maintenance of market appeal, the Settlement's inability or inclination to engage in this process has been yet another impediment to growth and survival. This is not to say that current management is not cognisant of the need for currency. As SPS1 observes, "I think cultural organisations need to reinvent constantly because your visitor profile is changing. There's a whole new savvy consumer out there looking for a different kind of experience". Although many of the respondents shared this vision there was

widespread doubt as to the likelihood of being able to meet this objective given budget constraints.

What the site needs, according to SPS1, is a major infrastructure project that “includes a conservation restoration area and archive and an exhibition space so that we can then start doing internal exhibitions, telling the story, and also get traveling exhibitions because you find that people in this region don’t get access to lots of things that happen in the major centers”. Whilst this seems unlikely given funding pressures, the shift towards classification as a museum opens new opportunities for external funding by way of grants from bodies such as Arts Victoria.

Unlike Sovereign Hill, which has enjoyed considerable success in this area, there appears to have little effort or success in applying for such grants. Although there has been a shift in this direction in recent times anecdotally early applications have been refused on the grounds that ‘you don’t have the council behind you’. Many respondents viewed this as being distinctly problematic given that without major funds for innovation the Settlement’s ability to generate recurrent funding is correspondingly diminished. That this in turn exacerbates reliance on council completes a ‘vicious circle’ from which the Settlement appears unable and unlikely to extricate itself.

Despite the limitations imposed by this seeming litany of operational issues the simple destiny of the site rests on its ability to maintain and build its market share. Not only are visitation levels declining but there is some consensus that the site has little knowledge of potential markets beyond those of a local or domestic nature. Although there are reasonably accurate data as to raw visitor numbers, any demographic or geo-demographic information is virtually non-existent. One external stakeholder commented that “[they] have no knowledge of the tourism market” [SPO1]

This may in part be a product of the Settlement’s apparent inability to forge critical alliances with key industry bodies. Taking the case of Sovereign Hill, the market intelligence and support flowing from its close relationship with Tourism Victoria is demonstrative of the point. There even appears to be some degree of animosity which has certainly not been conducive to a collaborative relationship. Comments similar to the following demonstrated a degree of frustration which is a serious impediment to the Settlement’s future success. As one respondent bluntly said, “that’s what I find so frustrating about Tourism Victoria because they seem to market to the chardonnay set” [SPS2]

From almost every conceivable perspective, therefore, the Settlement has some significant problems to overcome, many of which sadly appear to be almost intractable. Most if not all of these appear to stem from the Settlement's adversarial relationship with Council and the resulting lack of adequate funding and operational autonomy. These in turn can be attributed to a lack of essential identity born of disparate opinions as to the implications of various nomenclatures.

There was a view that a clear articulation of mission and purpose would go a long way to resolving some of these issues. Were the Settlement to assume the mantle of a museum in a comprehensive sense the potential for attracting grants for capital works would be enhanced. It may also raise the profile of the site as a community resource and encourage council to contribute to its recurrent costs in a similar way to other community resources. Although there was a small but discernable move in this direction, with the change in title, and the employment of a curator, sustaining such a focus is somewhat more problematic. The inconstancy of local government structure and composition has resulted in significant shifts in the tenuous balance between support and opposition. Increased curatorial focus also has the potential to support development of greater levels of interpretation and interactivity which at present are viewed as being inadequate.

Even basic resolution of these issues would enable the articulation of a strategic plan; would facilitate more focused marketing; and may foster the development of key alliances with peak bodies whose influence could improve the Settlement's stakes.

5.5 Justification for aggregation of findings

In the preceding section, key findings from the preliminary analysis of the data were outlined. Apart from providing a vital framework to guide more detailed analysis, the emergence of similar dimensions across the two sites was of note.

Although the two sites were seen to be clearly dichotomous in their operational orientation, the fact that key stakeholders in both locations identified similar issues as being central to successful operation provides an environment in which the findings can be aggregated to demonstrate a continuum between catalysts on the one hand, and impediments on the other.

The fact that the two sites are clearly polarised in this respect serves to demonstrate how the presence or absence of certain conditions or organisational orientations translate directly into an ability to adapt to changing circumstances and thereby achieve successful operation. Highlighting the differences and similarities provides a rich research environment which would be absent were the two case studies to be examined in isolation. Table 5.1 outlines the key issues which emerged from the data and provides a summary of the contrasting circumstances between the two sites.

Factor 1: Independence from local government/funding dependence

Perhaps the most significant factor, and that which was clearly identified by respondents across both case studies was degrees of independence from government in general, and local government in particular. Given that this generally goes hand in hand with reliance on external funding it emerged as the single most important issue both from a positive and negative perspective.

This can, perhaps, best be demonstrated by Sovereign Hill's quite deliberate decision from the very point of foundation, to maintain its independence from local government and thereby achieve complete control over its strategies and decision making processes. Whilst there are undoubtedly a number of other factors that have predicated its obvious success the fact that it has essentially been able to make key decisions without outside interference or influence is clearly an integral element of its ability to adapt and grow. A range of respondents both directly and indirectly involved in the operation of the site considered this independence to be the single most considered by most interviewees to have been central to management's ability to adapt, and to think and act strategically.

Common issue	Case [A] Sovereign Hill	Case [B] Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum
Independence from local government/dependence on external funding	<p>Independence central to original and continuing charter.</p> <p>No dependence on external sources for recurrent funding.</p> <p>Recipient of a number of government grants which has facilitated major development initiatives</p>	<p>Operated as a sub business of local government body</p> <p>Largely dependent on local government for recurrent and capital funding</p> <p>Limited success in obtaining development grants.</p>
Continuity of management structure/purpose	<p>Only three managers since inception</p> <p>Retention of original members of governing board.</p> <p>Stable organisational culture and collective commitment to mission</p>	<p>Volatile management structure and locus of control</p> <p>Inconstant direction/mission</p> <p>Unclear lines of authority</p>
Ability to reconcile operational objectives	<p>Operational autonomy</p> <p>Realisation that curatorial integrity and profit generation are interdependent</p>	<p>Conflicting imperatives of local government and site management</p> <p>Fluctuating imperatives.</p>
Internal cohesion	<p>Cohesive and collaborative approach to management and decision making</p> <p>Decentralised management structure</p>	<p>Adversarial rather than collaborative climate.</p> <p>Dichotomous views as to the purpose and direction of the museum</p> <p>Little operational autonomy with key decision making vested in local government</p>
Market knowledge/focus	<p>Proactive market focus which has enabled the site to capitalise on new and emerging markets</p> <p>Good market mix providing some resilience from shifting patterns of demand</p>	<p>Narrow market focus</p> <p>Little apparent inclination to broaden market appeal</p> <p>Reactive rather than proactive stance</p>
Reading/meeting consumer expectations	<p>Demonstrated knowledge of consumer expectations</p> <p>Highly developed understanding of the relationship between standard of presentation and the visitor experience</p> <p>Reflective and responsive to changes in visitor characteristics</p>	<p>Less focused view of visitor expectations</p> <p>Acceptance of interactivity as a key expectation but hampered by a lack of resources</p>
Ability/propensity to engage in innovation and/or reinvention	<p>Semi-continuous process of innovation directed at keeping the attraction 'fresh'</p> <p>Strategic vision of ongoing stages of development</p>	<p>Propensity to innovate hampered by funding issues.</p> <p>Incremental rather than strategic assembly of the museums collection</p> <p>Little in the way of major innovations since inception</p>
Clarity of/adherence to dominant theme	<p>Focused depiction of restricted period in history [1851-1861] enabling focus on faithfulness of presentation</p>	<p>Wide range of sub-themes and historical windows which obscure any one dominant theme</p>
Engagement with community	<p>Strong volunteer network.</p> <p>Perceptions of attraction as community resource</p>	<p>Negative community perceptions</p> <p>Sporadic volunteer support</p>

Table 5.1 Comparative orientations/competencies adapted from preliminary analysis

There was a view too that this independence had fostered closer working relationships with peak government bodies such as Tourism Victoria, given that its reputation as an entrepreneur, and a vehicle for regional economic development, has encouraged the appropriation of capital grants which have been pivotal to its ongoing success.

As almost a direct contradiction, Swan Hill has, from its very inception, been subject to the direct control of successive governments both at state and regional levels rendering it vulnerable to the changing priorities of management not directly involved in the operation of the site. In particular resultant restrictions on the appropriation of recurrent and capital funding were identified as key issues.

Anecdotally, the reluctance of regional government to adequately fund the museum's operation is in part shaped by constituent pressure, and in part by disagreement as to whether the site is a public resource [and thereby deserving of public funding]; or heritage based theme park which was viewed as being tantamount to a commercial enterprise.

The latter issue in particular was suggested as having hampered the museum's ability to source grants for major capital works. Evidence suggests that this lack of definition has precluded any attempt to elicit financial support from bodies such as Arts Victoria, which customarily offers grant based funding to regional museums; or the state government, which funds tourism specific initiatives perceived as contributing to broad regional economic development.

Factor 2: Continuity of management structure/purpose

An interdependent issue in both case study sites was perceived to be the constancy or otherwise of management incumbency and, correspondingly a stable sense of priorities and directions.

The fact that Sovereign Hill has effectively had only three managers in its almost forty years of operation; and still has a number of board members who have been instrumental in the site's direction since its very inception, points to a continuity of purpose and direction that has clearly impacted on its success.

From this stable base, the inculcation of an unswerving organisational culture which underpins both strategic and operational ideologies was viewed by many as being central to the sites ability to meet environmental challenges. Many also felt that the

retention of expertise in the form of longstanding board membership had contributed to this stability.

An alternative view pointed to the challenges associated with achieving a transition from long standing board and management structures; but there was general consensus that the organisational culture was now sufficiently well entrenched, and succession planning sufficiently well advanced, to cope with this transition.

Conversely, Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement appears to have had little in the way of permanent structure, with control and decision making oscillating between variously constituted regional governments. Of particular note was the apparent absence of any autonomy afforded to site management at virtually any stage of the site's history, other than in what appears to be a purely token way.

Such an absence of control or decision making power at an operational level has, in the view of many respondents, been a defining impediment to the site's development, with critical forward planning being impeded by conflicting government priorities. Although there is some evidence of successive site managers having clear priorities and strategies, they appear to have been generally unable to win the sustained support of local government and, as a result to implement these directions.

Factor 3: Ability to reconcile operational objectives

Although there are discernable differences between the two sites in most respects, one pervasive factor was considered to be critical in successful operation, namely, the ability to reconcile the seemingly dichotomous objectives of profit generation and curatorial integrity. The allied issues of clarity of theme, faithfulness of presentation, and meeting consumer expectatations all appear to be tied to this ideological conundrum.

Although respondents in both sites agreed that even partial reconciliation would have a positive impact on overall operation, there was significant disparity of opinion as to whether such an objective was attainable. There was a widely held view that one objective would naturally subsume the other depending on the priorities of the dominant management group.

Such an observation has particular resonance given earlier observations with respect to the Swan Hill settlement, where the conflicting imperatives of council and site management distribute themselves over the same divide. An opposing view suggested that in fact, one follows the other, given the contention that by achieving high standards of presentation, visitor appeal and thereby profitability would increase correspondingly.

Perhaps because of the seemingly intractable problems besetting the Swan Hill Settlement the consensus across respondents at this site appeared to be that the pursuit of curatorial integrity, being capital intensive, could only occur if the site was able to generate sufficient capital or attract recurrent funding from the governing body in the form of the local council.

Since site management operates largely at the behest of council, which clearly holds a profit orientation, it was considered that any reconciliation of these two objectives was unlikely in the short term. Although over recent times there appears to have been some concession to the curatorial objective with the appointment of a museum director, council's apparent lack of resolve to adequately fund the settlement, may render such an appointment counter productive.

The disparity between these circumstances and those at Sovereign Hill could not be more pronounced. Even by the simplest of observations Sovereign Hill enjoys a standard of presentation and a dedication to conservation that is evident in every facet of its operation. At the same time the site has never been dependant on outside sources for recurrent funding and has, in fact, been profitable since its inception.

Despite the simplicity of these observations there appears to be a complex set of reasons why this reconciliation has seemingly been achieved. These appear to stem, in the first instance from Sovereign Hill's independence which affords it complete discretion over strategic decision making. Although some respondents conceded that there are a number of externalities that have contributed to its success; not the least of which is its proximity to major source markets, it was held that the ability to respond effectively to these markets requires the kind of operational autonomy which prevails at Sovereign Hill.

The almost complete absence of any outside influence has also permitted the evolution of an organisational structure which, over time, has become progressively more focused on reconciling these objectives. The decision, in early 2001, to divide

executive responsibility between a CEO charged with achieving ongoing financial viability; and museum curator with responsibility for the maintenance and integrity of the site's collection, is a clear indication that these twin objectives are cornerstones of their operational ideology.

This seems logically born of the fundamental realisations that profit generation, maintenance of the collection, and the opportunity to innovate, are all interdependent and collectively constitute the most important factors in a successful operation.

A more idealistic perspective, proffered during the interview process, suggested that the curatorial priority has become pre-eminent, and that the generation of profit is simply seen as a 'means to an end'. Either way, Sovereign Hill embraces, and appears able to fulfil the challenge of balancing the two.

Factor 4: Internal Cohesion

As a direct consequence there were distinct differences between the two sites in terms of internal structure and processes. In particular, the ability to work collaboratively was viewed as being an important factor as were a shared sense of purpose and the empowerment of operational staff to make fundamental decisions.

Despite general agreement that a cohesive and fluid working environment was a critical success factor, there was a discernable difference between the two sites in the extent to which a positive and cohesive working environment was a reality.

Earlier discussion with respect to operational independence and the continuity of management structure highlight the interdependence between a number of the success factors. Although somewhat obvious, a connection was observed between the stability and independence which characterises Sovereign Hill and its continuing success; and the difficulties which beleaguer attempts to achieve the same end at Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement.

With a decentralised management structure, and a set of largely autonomous operating units, Sovereign Hill enjoys the kind of flexibility which many respondents felt was directly instrumental in the maintenance of a cohesive working environment.

Perhaps more importantly, open lines of communication encourage a consultative process between varied bodies of expertise which resulted in informed decision making. There was evidence too of a clear connection between the retention of

expertise, vested in long serving members of the governing board, and a sense of unity and collaboration.

In almost direct contradiction, Swan Hill operates in a largely adversarial environment due, in large part, to differences of view as to the mission and direction of the site. As a consequence there was evidence of a significant divide between the priorities of successive operational management and local government which maintains control of funding and major decision making.

Anecdotally, there have been attempts over time to improve and increase levels of collaboration between site management and individuals within council but this appears to have been largely unsuccessful. As a result there was clear evidence of persistent negativity amongst operative management and staff, which has been counter to cohesive or unified vision.

The problem appears to have been exacerbated by successive site management with differing orientations and priorities ranging from tight financial management at the behest of council, to curatorial objectives as a dominant priority. The fact that a number of respondents viewed these as dichotomous rather than interdependent objectives highlights an essential difference between the two sites both in terms of stakeholder perceptions, and operational reality. Since Sovereign Hill appears to have reconciled these two objectives and that this is a defining factor in its success, is illustrative of the point.

Factor 5: Market knowledge/focus

Despite respondents in both case studies acknowledging the importance of reading existing and potential markets, there were again distinct differences between the two sites in terms of a demonstrated ability or inclination to analyse market forces; and more importantly, to capitalise on emerging or untapped potential.

Although it is acknowledged that proximity to major population centres is a key determinant in market reach, and that this arguably assists Sovereign Hill in capitalising on both domestic and international markets, there was strong evidence of a distinctly proactive approach to market segmentation and a clear focus on both existing and potential markets. Sovereign Hill's foresight in anticipating growth in the inbound market from the People's Republic of China long before there was evidence of

significant growth trends is a case in point. Assisted by market intelligence from Tourism Victoria, Sovereign Hill continues to adopt a watching brief on market trends and to plan accordingly.

There was evidence too of a general recognition of the need to maintain market balance by fostering both domestic and international markets concurrently. The fact that this has afforded Sovereign Hill vital resilience from shifting patterns of demand has been clearly instrumental in its success. A widely held view that the domestic market underpins its success in the international arena was of particular note.

Citing its relatively remote location as a major impediment to successful market capitalisation or diversification, many of the respondents connected with the Swan Hill site felt there was little scope for any major initiatives in this area. This apparent resignation to restricted market appeal has clearly been a major impediment to growth. The problem has been exacerbated by the absence of much needed marketing funds and a seeming inability or lack of inclination to forge vital relationships with peak industry bodies such as Tourism Victoria as a means of gaining vital marketing support. As a result, the attraction appears to have taken a distinctively reactive stance to marketing rather than seeking new opportunities.

Factor 6: Reading and meeting consumer expectations

The reliance of attractions of whatever type on the maintenance of market appeal is inextricably tied to reading, meeting and possibly exceeding consumer expectations. Whether this translates into the provision of new features for an increasingly sophisticated market; enhancing the experience by increasing levels of interactivity and visitor involvement, or providing a range of ancillary services, the ability to anticipate the needs wants and expectations was almost universally recognised as a critical factor in successful operations.

Although there was general agreement between respondents at both case study sites as to the importance of this objective, there were discernable differences in the extent to which each was perceived to be meeting this goal.

A wide range of interview responses at Sovereign Hill revealed that this is considered a cornerstone of the attraction's mission and direction and that this manifests itself in a dedication to blending learning, participation and enjoyment in a way that engages

visitors. As such, Sovereign Hill demonstrates a highly developed understanding of the relationship between the style and standard of presentation and the quality of the visitor experience. Although the site is largely contrived in that, apart from artefacts of the period, most of what is presented has been copied [albeit faithfully] from original drawings, appears not to diminish a quite evident dedication to faithfulness of presentation.

The same apparent dedication to enriching the visitor experience extends to the training and acculturation of a permanent and volunteer workforce that forms an integral part of the attraction's interface with visitors.

It was noted in particular that although the same ideology appeared to prevail amongst operative staff at Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement, there is little evidence of any attempt to implement a concerted programme of improving interaction with visitors, or to imbed these objectives in strategic direction. Although it was conceded that this may change as the Settlement moves toward a more curatorial orientation, a number of barriers were identified, including the relatively small volunteer workforce, the eclectic nature of the collection, and, as previously mentioned, a lack of resolve on the part of local government to adequately fund the site.

Most respondents considered that the static nature of the attraction represented a significant weakness, given the size of the site and the mixture of sub-themes which, without adequate interpretation, could potentially leave visitors unsure of the significance of what was being presented.

Factor 7: Ability/propensity to engage in innovation and/or reinvention

Described by several respondents at Sovereign Hill as the 'wow factor', the drive to keep attractions fresh and appealing as a means encouraging repeat visitation emerged as a significant factor in the success of the attractions under examination. As with the other lines of comparison, however, subscription to this ideal, and actually achieving it seems to characterise the divide between the two sites under examination.

Paradoxically, it was the Swan Hill Settlement which, in 1963, introduced the first Sound and Light performance in Victoria, an innovation which was followed seven years later by Sovereign Hill in inaugurating Blood on the Southern Cross. This has

subsequently been copied by a number of other attractions. In the same year the re-location of the paddle steamer 'Gem' as gateway to the settlement represented what many viewed as the establishment of a significant icon which would draw people to the attraction.

These early displays of innovation seem, however, to have been unsustainable with the growth of the settlement having been more incremental in nature rather than being driven by any strategic direction. The suggestion that current management has no precise inventory of the collection illustrates the sporadic way in which the collection has been assembled.

This apparent lack of innovation was not seen, however, as being necessarily due to a lack of resolve on the part of site management. There is evidence over time of attempts at innovation but as with many of the site's other shortcomings, these seem to have been thwarted by external constraints and the lack of any continuity of direction. Some respondents felt that there had been examples of innovation in the acquisition of new machinery or buildings but that these had gone largely unnoticed by external audiences as a result of inadequate marketing and promotion. That this too was a result of funding limitations raised yet again, the issue of funding dependence and its impact on successful operations.

In the case of Sovereign Hill, the absence of these constraints has conversely been one of the driving forces behind a more or less constant process of re-invention and innovation. The ability of management to articulate a vision for the growth of the site and perhaps more importantly to realise key objectives in the site's development, has not only made a significant contribution to its success but has been a key catalyst in achieving government support. That this in turn has part funded some of the key innovations including the Blood on the Southern Cross sound and light show has further fostered its growth and success.

Clearly, the freedom to make such strategic decisions has been due in large part to Sovereign Hill's independence, the retention of valuable expertise, and the development of an organisational culture that encourages creativity.

Factor 8: Clarity of/adherence to dominant theme

It is, perhaps here that the differences between the two case study sites came into greatest focus given the simple distinction between Sovereign Hill, which quite pointedly restricts its historical presentation of life on the diggings to just ten years from 1851 to 1861; and Swan Hill that records the history of the region from pre-settlement indigenous natural environments to the built environment of the 1930s.

Opinions seemed sharply divided as to which represents the best approach but a number of respondents at Sovereign Hill identified their relatively narrow window of historical depiction as a key factor in its success. According to individuals directly involved in the 'production' of the visitor experience this has facilitated a level of scholarship and research which translates directly into faithfulness of presentation and, it was contended, the high quality of the visitor experience.

This quite specific focus has also facilitated the identification of focused and unique aspects of life on the diggings which further contribute to visitor appeal. Such things as the depiction of circus performances of the period during school holidays is demonstrative of the way in which Sovereign Hill has been able to capitalise on this clarity.

Although it was observed that Swan Hill seems equally dedicated to a faithfulness of presentation, the research pointed to some confusion amongst the interview subjects as to precisely what constitutes the dominant theme. Although the overarching theme is 'Pioneer Life' in and of the region, the presentation of multiple time frames within a relatively confined area sees visitors exposed to replications of the housing for the first wave of settlers circa 1860, adjacent to collections of farm machinery some of which dates from 1930.

Although it was difficult to determine whether this has any significant impact on visitor amenity or enjoyment, the lack of any defining theme may have had some effect on the settlement's apparent lack of consumer profile. Perhaps more importantly, the site may lack definition in the eyes of the host community and council further exacerbating issues of support and funding. Anecdotally, some people see it as little more than 'collection of curiosities' which also seems to have done little to resolve the issues of self definition mentioned earlier.

Earlier discussion pointed to the inconstant nature of management and, as a result the absence of any prevailing mission. There was evidence that this has impacted negatively on attempts to position the settlement in the minds of consumers, which may in turn have contributed to its lack of success. The clarity also appears to have precluded the development of any recognisable organisational culture with individual staff members, both past and present, having distinctly different perspectives as to identity and best direction.

Factor 9: Engagement with community

Although both case study sites have their origins in their community, there were pronounced differences in the extent to which each engages with these important stakeholders. The way in which attractions interact and engage with community has important implications for successful operation both from the perspective of general acceptance and support, but also because host community attitudes appear to shape and drive the policies of local government.

Regardless of whether the attraction is dependent on local government for funding, constituent pressure on councils can also shape a wider range of policies which may impact both directly and indirectly on operations. The problem is, to some extent, exacerbated by the heterogeneous nature of community with a range of vested interests complicating the relationship.

Engagement with community was seen to take various forms ranging from direct involvement in governance through boards of management, loyalty programmes for residents, to participation of a volunteer workforce. Although difficult to articulate precisely, there appeared to be a direct connection between successful community engagement and successful operation.

Again, Sovereign Hill appeared to be the exemplar in this respect with a strong and growing volunteer workforce, largely positive community perceptions, and a strong relationship with local government. Although there was evidence of some detractors most notably amongst local accommodation operators, the attraction appears to be generally viewed in a positive light.

Volunteer participation in particular seemed to play a positive role both in fulfilling a key function in the interpretive process, and disseminating the message of community

value. With over 300 volunteers under the banner of 'friends of Sovereign Hill', this vital resource was viewed as being integral to its operation. In a more direct sense, the long standing involvement of a governing board comprised of key community figures has fostered positive relationships with high level decision makers.

Management at various levels also makes a conscious effort to contribute to community through membership of a range of local organisations. Although this was justified as being altruistic in intent some respondents conceded that it was both logical and valuable strategy in building community relationships.

By contrast the Swan Hill Settlement, which had almost identical origins, appears not to have been able to maintain the levels of community engagement and support that Sovereign Hill has cultivated. Although there may be a range of reasons why this is so, the fact that the site was widely seen as drain on public resources obviously does little to foster positive attitudes. Given that the funding issue appeared to be an intractable problem, any solution was viewed as being elusive.

Apart from a small cohort of local enthusiasts with a bent for local history, residents appear to be ambivalent at best. This presents significant challenges both for local government and for the site itself as both wrestle with the vexing problem of ensuring the settlement's continuance.

There appeared to be little vision as to how these problems might be addressed apart from expanding the volunteer workforce as a means of garnering at least a pocket of community support. However, with only a handful of active volunteers and a volunteer programme which appears to have been a fluctuating priority, even this direction appears problematic.

The contentious nature of the Settlement's existence has also drawn a good deal of negative media comment given its prominence as a public issue. This was viewed as being directly instrumental in fostering negative community attitudes.

Until such time as the settlement becomes at least partially self supporting, the generation of positive community attitudes seemed to be unattainable.

5.6 Conclusion

Although these factors are by no means exclusive, their emergence in the process of top level analysis provides a provisional framework within which more detailed analysis can be conducted.

Table 5.1 provides a synoptic view of the key issues that emerged from the analysis of the interviews and highlights the differing sets of circumstances prevailing at the two case study sites. The clear dichotomies that exist between the two, points to a conceptual divide between success factors and impediments. In Chapter 6 this divide will be explored in greater detail particularly as it relates to their respective impacts on the process of environmental adaption or organisational fit. By so doing the relevance of theories of 'fit' (Miles and Snow 1984) to heritage attractions will be placed under scrutiny.

6.0 Research Findings

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 provided an overview of the two case study sites and offered a preliminary analysis of the interview data. A number of emergent themes were identified [see table 5.1] which, by process of aggregation, pointed to a significant commonality of issues between the two sites. In this chapter a more detailed analysis of respondent views will be conducted informed by the preliminary findings in the previous chapter. This process of refinement provided the researcher with greater subtlety of interpretation and enabled a deeper conceptualisation of the critical links between various of the factors.

Given that the research seeks to identify those factors that impact on the case studies' ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions however, it also becomes necessary to provide some synthesis of these themes with the structural and strategic dimensions that are central to theories of fit outlined in chapter 3. To that end table 6.1 provides a more expansive view of the issues within the twin dimensions of structure and strategy. This conceptual extension is based on the researcher's own observations of actuality, and initial interpretation of the data conducted in the preceding chapter.

Since it was indicated that the existence or otherwise of positive structural dimensions and/or strategic orientations was directly instrumental in framing successful operation, a continuum was conceptualised between a positive set of circumstances, which manifested themselves as 'capabilities', and negative circumstances which were clearly 'impediments' to successful operation. The third and defining factor appeared to be an ability or inclination to sustain positive direction which suggested that consistency of approach completed the trilogy.

Overall outcomes of the research suggests that structural and strategic capability have their foundations in a set of micro-environmental conditions which form and entrench organisational cultures; shape capability and capacity; and impact on the organisation's ability to overcome internal and external impediments. As such the chapter examines both the factors that shape organisational structure and strategy, and the way in which the resultant strategies and structures form key competencies

Common issue	Structural Dimension	Strategic Dimension
Independence from local government/dependence on external funding	External vs internal decision making Bureaucratic vs organic structures	Re-active vs Proactive orientations Shared vs Conflicting Priorities
Continuity of management structure/purpose	Stability of structures Capacity building Succession planning	Long term vs short term vision Realisation of objectives
Ability to reconcile operational objectives	Breadth of expertise	Profit vs curatorial ethos
Internal cohesion	Effective communication De-centralised structure	Consensus vs disputed objectives
Market knowledge/focus	Key alliances Flexibility	Pro-active vs re-active strategies Market Leadership
Reading/meeting consumer expectations	Flexibility Effective communication Research capacity	Market intelligence Encouraging staff/visitor interaction
Ability/propensity to engage in innovation and/or reinvention	Multi-skilling Retention of expertise	Targeting repeat visitation Reading competitors
Clarity of/adherence to dominant theme	Breadth of expertise Scholarship as skill	Building enduring images
Engagement with community	Involvement of volunteers	Dissemination of community value Encouraging community 'ownership'

Table 6.1 Structural and strategic dimensions of emergent themes

6.2 Analytical direction

As distinct from grounded theory which is “inductively derived from a study of the phenomenon it represents” [Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.23], this research has its origins in the literature particularly as it relates to various perspectives of the ‘ideal organisation’. Chapter 3 examined extant management theory with particular emphasis on the means by which organisations [and the dominant coalition therein] adapt to changing circumstances. It was suggested that appropriate structural and/or strategic responses to environmental change underpin successful adaptation.

Axiomatic as such a contention may be, there appeared to be significant disparity of opinion as to precisely what represents appropriate responses given the enormous range of circumstances and contexts within which organisations operate. This is particularly so with tourism which, as a combinatory ‘product’ is characterised by

significant diversity in organisational structure and strategy. Any attempt to articulate critical success factors in the particular context of heritage attractions thus seemed logically predicated on a set of basic research propositions derived from the literature.

It was not the intention of the researcher to specifically test particular tenets of management theory in this context. Rather the intention was to use these as guiding principles in the design and administration of a research instrument which sought to elicit stakeholder views of success factors, and generate a framework within which a tourism centric view could ultimately be contrasted with the broader literature.

Although essentially inductive in nature, Taylor and Bogdan's observations that "pure induction is impossible" and that "qualitative research operates within theoretical frameworks", [1998, p.8] pointed to the necessity to draw the wide range of observations and interpretations emanating from the research into a structure that would underpin ongoing discussion.

As the researcher became immersed in the analysis of the data, it became possible to identify a number of recurring themes, to conceptualise the interrelationships between these, and to progressively construct a diagrammatic representation intended to guide more detailed analysis of the data.

6.3 Process of analysis

Analysis of the data adopted a two step process with the interview transcripts firstly being manually open coded. Although the researcher was cognisant of the research propositions proffered in opening sections of the thesis, an organic approach was taken with the narrative of the interviews in order to facilitate the widest possible range of interpretations. Open coding, described by Strauss and Corbin [1990, p.97] as a process by which the data is 'fractured' to "identify categories, their [respective] properties, and dimensional locations", the process revealed a significant number of recurring themes which later informed higher level analysis. In simple terms, the process involved breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data in the form of recurring concepts.

These were then notionally grouped under what Glaser [1998] termed 'substantive codes' by considering theoretical relationships between various sub-categories. As a framework, the research adopted a grounded theory approach [Glaser 1998: Strauss

and Corbin 1990] which sought to distil a large number of sub-categories into a smaller number of more specific categories each “denoting causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies and consequences” [Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.99].

This afforded the research considerable clarity in that it not only reduced the categories to a more manageable level but “enabled the researcher to think systematically about data and relate them in very complex ways” [p.99]. As anticipated, the earlier decision to aggregate the data across the two case studies provided some contextually rich variances in respondent views in many areas. It also provided the basis upon which a conceptual framework began to emerge in which the relationship between various categories could be presented in diagrammatic form.

On the basis of this detailed analysis of the interview data, a number of key factors were identified as being central to successful operation in terms of an ability to respond to internal and external change. Although a majority of these were identified as being vested in strategy and organisational orientation, the importance of structure, and more specifically foundation structure, emerged as being a pre-eminent factor.

For convenience, the work is presented in two sections; the first describing a set of macro environmental factors which, the research suggests impact on the operation of both case studies. In a second and subsequent stage findings with respect to resulting competencies and orientations are then discussed in detail.

6.4 Detailed Findings

When considering initial structures, two factors became evident, namely, the extent to which the case studies had their foundations in community and the extent to which each was able to establish and maintain operational independence. Further, there appeared to be a discernable connection between origins, foundation ethos, and independence. The importance of these determinants in shaping a wide range of structural and strategic decisions and in building organisation competencies suggested that their examination should underpin ongoing discussion.

6.4.1 Conceptual link between Origins, Foundation Ethos and Operational Independence

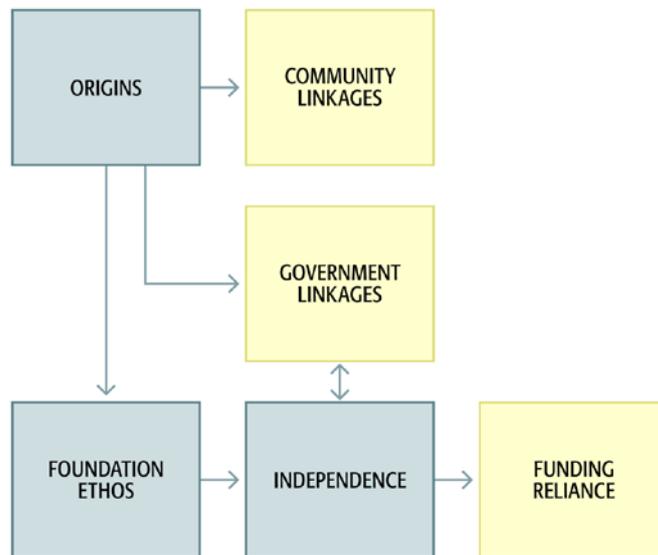


Fig. 6.1 Origins, Foundation Ethos and Operational Independence

Amongst the key findings which emerged from the analysis of data is a recognisable link between the original charter or orientation of the respective case studies and success, given that it appears to predicate many of the other key factors such as financial and operational autonomy; enduring and cohesive management structures; strategic vision; commercial orientation; and community engagement. In reflecting on the history and growth of the attraction, a key respondent [SHO3] observed “Virtually everything stems from having the freedom to make key decisions. If you’re subject to outside control, the culture of the organisation is completely different”.

In short, the founding principles or operational ethos of each of the cases studied appeared to have largely shaped the way in which each has unfolded over time. Two factors were identified as being central to this ideology. Although, to some extent interdependent, operational independence and linkages with community stakeholders emerged as two key factors

It should be said, however, that although both case studies have their origins as community based projects the point at which a strategic vision took hold differs between the two. The research suggests that from its inception Sovereign Hill clearly articulated a firm vision of independence and detachment from government control. Asked to identify critical success factors a number of respondents were quite emphatic about the value of independence; “One of Sovereign Hill’s greatest successes, I think

at the outset was that it was established independent of government and independent of council” [SHS1]. The impact on operational issues was equally clear with a foundation councillor observing, “No government involvement means an independent board; you don’t have to answer to a political master for whatever subtleties or for whatever bureaucratic idiosyncrasies occur...” [SHC2]

The veracity of these views was further emphasised by the converse situation that appeared to prevail at Swan Hill. Despite similar origins to Sovereign Hill the attraction was relatively quick to relinquish community ‘ownership’ because, in the community’s view “it [had] got too big for the community itself to operate as volunteers” [SPC1]. Passing first into State Government control and ultimately to that of the council whatever operational autonomy had existed was logically eliminated.

Whilst the council “recognised the importance of the settlement to the local community ...they had to accept the fact that it wasn’t working well” [SPS1]. “With the settlement literally haemorrhaging money”, the need to convert it into a profit making entity became the logical focus of council bureaucrats. Although a number of respondents accepted the inevitability of economic imperatives some felt that it was more an ideological divide.

We realise that the attraction should not be a serious drain on public money but you’ve got to weigh up the value of conserving these things against a positive bottom line. When you’ve got outside control with one set of priorities, and operatives with another, it obviously doesn’t make for smooth operation [SPS2].

The fact that the economic imperative appears not to have dissipated significantly since 1995, has shaped almost every facet of the sites operation. In particular it appears to have entrenched a defensive culture on the part of operating staff which has not been conducive to strategic vision or to the establishment of effective structures. There was evidence of some attempts to break the hiatus with a key operative recalling periodic attempts to take limited strategic initiatives. Almost defensively, one respondent contended “Despite significant budgetary constraints, from time to time we’ve taken small strategic decisions, but anything ground breaking is simply beyond us” [SPS3]. Operating with constant and pervasive internal change has also clearly reduced the attraction’s ability to respond effectively to changes in the external environment. The allocation of adequate funds for marketing in particular

appears not to have been a priority. In commenting on the attraction's relatively remote location one respondent commented... "If we not only had the funds, but the freedom to market this place properly it would go a long way towards increasing public awareness of what's here" [SPS3]

Paradoxically, Sovereign Hill's determination to remain independent, although largely an internal decision, appears to have been influenced in part by the Swan Hill experience.

[We made the decision] not to be beholden to local government because we were talking to our friends at Swan Hill and we were seeing that they had trouble. It was just another headache for the local council up there, the Pioneer Settlement, and continues to be. There were no locals of any [note], who would stand up to the council. We felt we learnt a lesson from their mistakes [SHC1].

The abject differences between the two sites, with respect to degrees of operational autonomy, is illustrative of the importance of framing, and perhaps more importantly maintaining an ethos or charter of independence. Despite the fact that, as was observed earlier, both case studies had quite similar origins the loss of such autonomy in one instance has had a demonstrable effect on its successful operation

Although a majority of respondents recognised the merit of such an objective, most conceded that this was in turn almost entirely dependant on viability. Taking an objective stance one respondent conceded, "It's really a catch 22; If you want independence you've really got to be operating viably; I concede that; however, at the same time I'd argue that unless you've got control over what you do the chances of operating profitably are reduced" [SPC1].

Later discussion will articulate a further critical link between degrees of independence and funding reliance and will assert that this, in turn, largely shapes the structure and operational orientation of organisations in general, and the attractions in focus. That structural and strategic considerations were highlighted in the literature review as being central to the achievement of 'fit', independence, either as foundation ethos, or as an ongoing principle seems vitally important.

6.4.2 Origins and Community Linkages

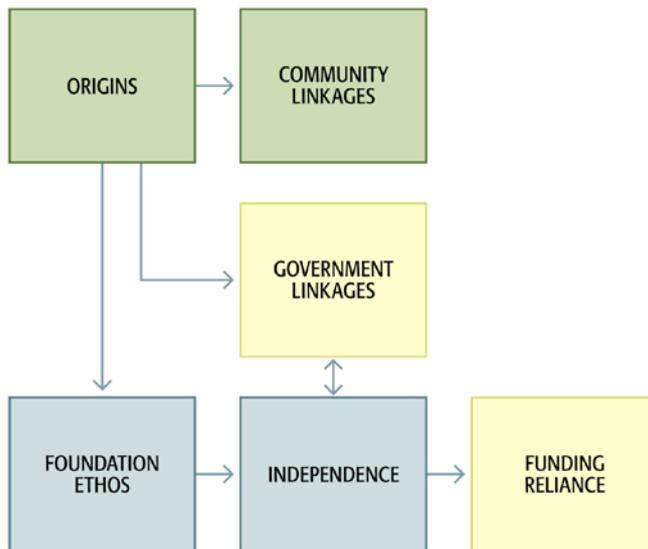


Fig. 6.2 Origins and Community Linkages

Previous discussion with respect to the origins of both case study sites pointed to a strong connection with community. Although this has not prevailed to the same extent in both cases the view appeared to be held that maintenance of good relationships with host communities and the generation of a sense of community ‘ownership’ had a significant impact on successful operation. As one respondent observed “You simply can’t operate in isolation. The local people not only influence local government policy but act as ambassadors for the attraction and can really have a huge influence on your operation”[SHO3].

Another, reflecting on the value of volunteers, commented that “Without the involvement of the local community as a volunteer workforce, this place simply wouldn’t operate” [SPS3]. Although, as was observed earlier, both of the case studies had their origins in community, an enduring sense of ownership, if only in a notional sense, had discernably positive outcomes. The comparative size of the volunteer workforce between the two sites, although admittedly due to a number of factors; can, at least in part be attributed to the foundations of the attraction and the community culture that surrounds it.

More particularly, it appeared that successful operation itself fostered positive relationships as community stakeholders tended to view the attraction in a positive light when it either made a contribution to the regional economy, or was not a drain on

public money. Although such an observation may be axiomatic, as one subject observed, “If [you] don’t have community on-side] you pretty soon become a millstone around the neck of the community” [SHO2].

Negative community perceptions in this regard appeared to have the potential to be quite destructive. Reflecting on some less favorable times, one respondent observed. “We were isolated from the community in the 80’s and then we went on a spiral down, they all just kind of kicked us when we were down, you know the paper criticised us and they were all keen to back up the paper’s criticism” [SPS1]. Interestingly a perspective suggesting that even success did not necessarily guarantee community acceptance.

You can encounter the old tall poppy syndrome to an extent, because [if] its successful it develops jealousy within the community, and everyone says well they get everything and the accommodation providers and other people in the tourism industry and local government and whatever get jealous about the success that it has [SH02].

Notwithstanding, there was a view that this could be turned around with concerted attempts to engage with community. The fruits of such a direction were abundantly clear to a number of respondents including one who, even in the face of pockets of opposition, could see the positive outcomes of such a process. “Because I think we’ve made a real effort to be involved in the community, people are talking with their feet, and we don’t get the negative feedback. In fact, wherever I go now I raise, you know, if that issue comes up in a meeting people say no we’re really pleased, we like what you’re doing” [SPS1]. This, as another respondent observed is not achieved without conscious effort and direction. “We push so hard in this community to make sure that there’s community feeling out there we’re worth supporting” [SPS2].

Reflecting on the importance of nurturing a feeling of community ‘ownership’ a key respondent observed, “I think they really enjoy the place now and sort of feel a central feeling of ownership” [SPS2]. This not only appears to translate into acceptance but may even impact on visitation. “[We] have done wonders in actually getting the broader community to accept it for what it is and our attendances are up significantly” [SPS3]. Although difficult to quantify precisely, there was anecdotal evidence to suggest that such support translated into increased visitation through VFR and as a result of positive word of mouth between locals and visitors. Commenting on the link

between the attraction and the broader business environment [SHS4] emphasised the positive effects of recommendations flowing from local business operators. “The local business community represents a largely untapped sales force; I mean if they are prepared to recommend you can’t buy marketing like that” [SHS4].

The ability to attract external funding also seemed vested to some extent in community engagement with discussion revealing the perceived value of direct consultation. “We wanted to consult with the community [as a means of preparing] a document to go to funding bodies and say the community has made its decision”. [SPS1]. Given earlier discussion with respect to funding as a key determinant of positive strategy and structure, such informal partnerships appeared to have significant value.

There was potential too for community support in a direct sense, “I think that genesis of it being community based has also enable it to maintain that. Its done a really good job of continuing to nurture the community along with it, so the philanthropic interests that have been attracted to it, that have put capital into it, that have recognised that they actually deliver a quality product and that they are reputable and that they have a good management team, all of those things have encouraged the community to continue to support” [SHO2]. The observation that there is a true connection between community support for an attraction for and its ability to thrive and grow was a recurrent theme in informal discussions with key stakeholders.

Grounding community relationships in this way also appeared to have an ongoing impact on community engagement, and in particular the commitment of some residents to providing volunteer support. Not only was this important in terms of providing much needed manpower, but it appeared to be a significant conduit in the dissemination of positive messages about the ‘value’ of the attraction to the community at large.

Across the two case studies there was a significant variation in this respect with positive community linkages ranging from the sporadic in one instance to a sustained and purposeful programme in the other, with positive outcomes differing accordingly. “The thing is you can never rest on your laurels, we’re got to continue to focus on the local community, if we stop doing that for six months we can lose all that good work we’ve done. Whatever you do you’ve got to keep in peoples faces all the time, get on the radio, in the paper, get things happening” [SPS2].

“ Vision 2020 for [the attraction] is to engage the community in looking long term to identify what they want it to be in 15 years time as the basis for creating some realistic business plans” [SPC1]

6.4.3 Independence and Government Funding Reliance

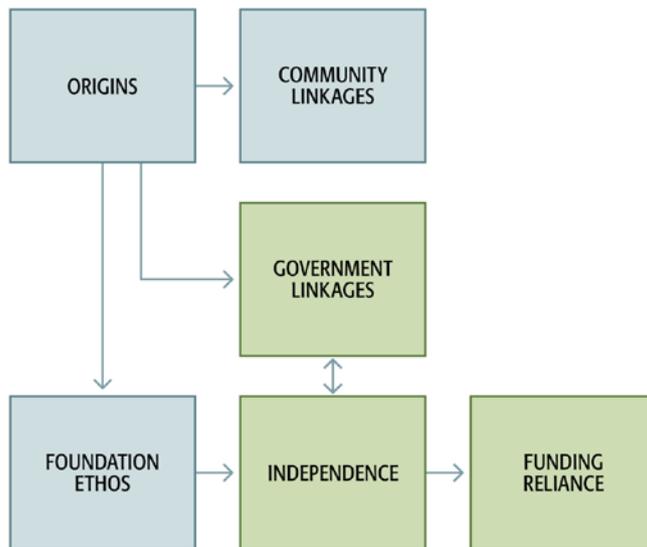


Fig. 6.3 Independence and Government Funding Reliance

Whether it is degrees of independence that predicate funding reliance or the reverse proposition, the ability to operate autonomously and to control strategic decision making seems largely dictated by the extent to which the attraction relies on outside sources, most notably government, for recurrent funding. This in turn shapes the extent to which the organisation adopts a commercial orientation, and, thereby creates or exacerbates a conflict of priorities between a drive for profit and the imperative of conservation.

Despite significant differences between the two case studies in this respect there was striking consensus on this particular issue. A number of respondents referred to the nexus between reliance and independence as a “catch 22”, emphasising the cyclical nature of the relationship. Most respondents attributed degrees of independence and thereby external funding reliance to the original charter but it was conceded that maintaining a profitable operation was the defining factor. Such a view was, perhaps, best articulated by a key respondent who, in reflecting on an inability to take key strategic decisions observed, “As soon as you rely on external sources for recurrent funding you enter a cycle of dependence and ever diminishing control” [SHS3].

Such a strategic 'divide' also appeared to be instrumental in the way in which a range of stakeholders viewed the attraction, its core roles and functions; and its strategic direction. Almost intuitively, the mantle of financial responsibility, particularly when this was vested in local government, emerged as a key factor in constituent pressure bringing about a shift from viewing the attraction as a public resource, to demanding that it be financially free standing. Earlier discussion with respect to the importance of community attitudes, is again emphasised. In reflecting on those factors that shape community attitudes respondents with both internal and external involvement shared a common view that any perception of the attraction being a drain on public money was a significant factor. "Community support, at whatever level quickly evaporates if they think their rates are going towards something that they don't view as a public resource' [SPO1]; and "government quickly bows to voter pressure and it simply becomes increasingly difficult to get proper funding" [SHO1].

Conversely, there was evidence that financial self sufficiency in itself created positive attitudes both at a government and public level which, in themselves, contributed to the success of the attraction. "It's no surprise that government is more willing to support you if you can demonstrate an ability to run a profitable operation; no one wants to put good money after bad" [SHC1]. And from a government official instrumental in supporting one of the case studies; "When you're accountable for public money you need to be confident that your investment is sound. People expect, and deserve care in making such decisions" [SHO2].

Although it was evident that high degrees of dependence on local government translated directly into reliance on council for recurrent funding, even total autonomy appeared not to diminish reliance on higher levels of government for capital grants as a means of managing major initiatives. Although Sovereign Hill is both autonomous and financially self sufficient in an operative sense, it is worthy of note that most, if not all, major infrastructure initiatives have been funded by state or federal governments in the form of grants of various types. Since Sovereign Hill's ability to constantly re-invent the experience has been central to its success without these contributions it may not have enjoyed the success that it has.

The nexus between operational autonomy and successful operation, although strongly implied across these two cases, can obviously not be generalised, The ability to make independent decisions however appears to have been a significant catalyst for

operational success. Since successful operation obviously communicates a sense of reliability and certainty this was also a key factor in the willingness of the state government to provide capital funding.

Broader discussion with respect to the perceptions of government is conducted in other sections of this work but there was significant advocacy for the contention that trust in management ability and vision underpinned grant allocations. In reflecting on Tourism Victoria's support for Sovereign Hill over a number of years, one respondent observed; "it had a good stable solid management record, so it was true to what it was doing, and therefore there was a confidence that it would deliver, there's [was] a confidence that [they] can actually do it ...State governments continue[d] to put funds in on the basis that it was a not-for-profit organisation, it was profitable and therefore it was investing itself so it wasn't just a handout, it was actually saying this is our business model, this is how successful we are, here is the rationale for why government should continue to invest because of all the benefits that it brings" [SHO2].

An additional observation was the link between poor relations with local government which in at least one instance appeared to influence decisions at a state level. Anecdotally there were instances of state government justifying a reluctance to provide funding on the basis of what they perceived as a lack of commitment or support from local government.

6.4.4 Independence, Funding Reliance and Commercial Orientation

Earlier discussion pointed to the obvious nexus between operational control, funding reliance, and the extent to which the objective of profit or cost recovery subsumed curatorial objectives. Government linkages, particularly when they were vested in direct control were seen to result in almost total funding reliance and with it the imposition of pressure to be self supporting in a financial sense.

If it can be contended that commercial orientation in large part instructs strategic action and that this is in turn either encouraged or impeded by the availability of funding, these two factors seem critical. Despite the ongoing discourse as to whether strategy dictates structure or vice versa, the structure of the two case studies too was also seen to result directly from these two factors.

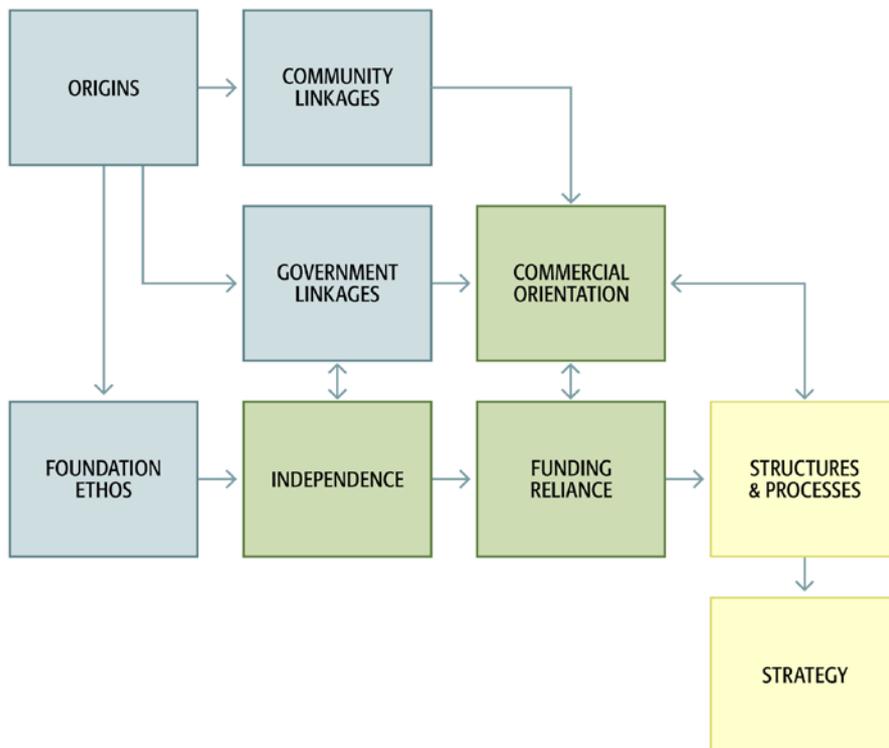


Fig. 6.4 The link between Independence, Funding Reliance and Commercial Orientation

Curatorial priorities were articulated as the maintenance of the ‘collection’ and, as was the case with Swan Hill, a perceived responsibility on the part of local government to fund what was viewed as a cultural and community ‘asset’. Conversely, a commercial orientation appeared to have connotations of placing profit generation above other priorities. In later sections of this work, the ability to reconcile a profit orientation with curatorial integrity will be explored in further detail, but there appeared to be a clear dichotomy between the two case studies in this respect. This related not only to an apparent subscription to either of these two objectives, but perhaps more importantly the degree to which the relative objectives prevailed over time.

A persistent view in the research dialogue appeared to be that these objectives were, in fact, mutually exclusive although this may be in part driven by individual agenda rather than rationality. The feeling that the pursuit of curatorial objectives necessarily subsumed profit orientation [or the reverse proposition], appeared to represent more of an ideological divide than an objective perspective. Two sharply contrasting views drawn from the research are illustrative of the point. In bemoaning the absence of adequate funding to catalogue a collection of historic artifacts, one respondent observed “It’s not about money. You can’t put a price on the conservation” [SPS1], and conversely from an individual with more commercial orientation, “One of these

objectives instinctively must prevail. Unless you accept that attractions of this type should be publicly funded then profit, or at least cost recovery is an inescapable reality” [SPC1]

Regardless of the dominant objective, some degree of constancy appeared to have at least some positive impact. That said, a shifting focus, provided it was properly managed, appeared to be workable. “[We decided to] attack the museum exhibit side for a period of about three years and then switch to the commercial because one had to fortify the other” [SHC2].

In the context of one case study there was evidence that the problem had been exacerbated by changing consensus amongst key stakeholders as to whether the site fits within the definition of attraction [with connotations of being entirely profit driven], or is a public resource and thereby deserving of the title ‘museum’. This appears to be more than a question of semantics since it mirrors an ideological divide between key decision makers with a profit orientation and those for whom conservation is a dominant objective.

The ethos of attempting to reconcile these objectives is, perhaps, best demonstrated by one respondent who observed “they decided that it was a museum...but they wanted it be a museum that made money. There are still council members who think it should be self funding but the bulk of council understand that its like the library, the gallery or the performing arts centre...you need to contribute; it will produce money in the community but it needs to have back up” [SPS1].

A more balanced view saw the two objectives as being interdependent. “We went through quite an extensive deliberation about how complex the organisation had become and looking at what it’s core business was and those things that were the ‘value adds’ to its business as a museum. Tourism is [also] a very strong part of what we do as our core business” [SHS3].

I actually think that its an equal partnership; if you let one go the other fails, if you don't attend to the financial side, the bottom line [becomes an issue of] if you're spiraling down there, you don't have the money to put it back into the museum, but if you're not putting into the museum, you're product's not there and you're spiraling any way, so you've got to keep the balance [SPS1]

There appeared to be attendant risks in adopting too commercial an orientation however. "It can be dollar driven and err on the side of being too much dollar driven compared to the quality of the experience itself" [SHS1]

6.4.5 Structural, Strategic and Process Responses to Commercial Orientation

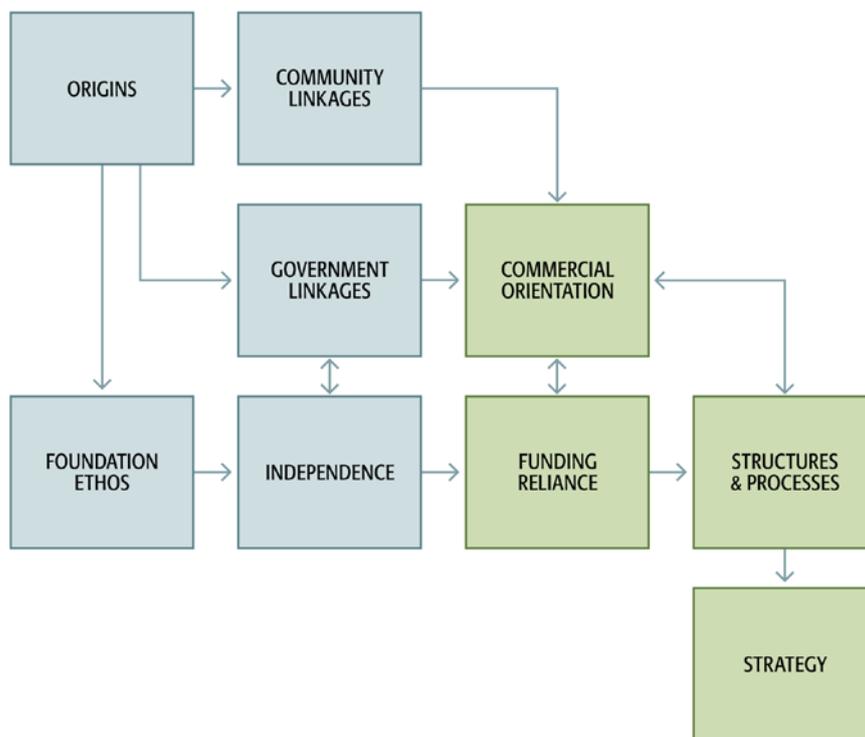


Fig. 6.5 Structural, Strategic and Process Responses to Commercial Orientation

Having considered the critical/notional/conceptual link between autonomy, [generally manifested as funding reliance]; and operational orientation [ranging from a singular focus on revenue generation to objectives directed at curatorial integrity]; ongoing analysis revealed a link between the basis on which the individual case studies form and articulate strategies and the formation of structures and processes directed at supporting and realising these initiatives. In short strategic priorities appear to be totally predicated on this fundamental divide.

Given that commercial orientation is, in itself, a strategic position, the extent to which either case study maintained profit direction appeared to predicate internal structures and processes. Although earlier chapters pointed to a persistent debate surrounding the relationship between strategy and structure mostly in terms of which is the defining factor, the research appears to support the contention that strategic orientation drives the internal dynamics of the organisation rather than the reverse proposition. This is particularly evident in the context of this research given that strategy was revealed as a defining factor in the formation and evolution of the structure and internal processes of both organisations.

A clear dichotomy was evident between the inadequate processes and structure born of a lack of strategic direction on the one hand and highly functional structures and processes positioned in support of clear strategic direction on the other. It was equally evident that this was a distinctly conscious process supporting the contention that successfully aligning strategy, structure and process is the essence of effective management. Responding to questioning with respect to the reasons for successful strategies, one respondent observed “You can have the most creative strategies in place but it stands to reason that if you don’t have the resources or work practices that you need to make them work it just isn’t going to work. That’s what sound management is all about” [SHS5]

Constant and pervasive change which was evident in both the case study sites pointed to an equally constant process of re-alignment in an attempt to achieve what was termed ‘organisational fit’. According to one respondent this points to the imperative of flexible structures and processes which can respond quickly to change. “You simply can’t put structures and processes in place and assume that it’s one size fits all. I think there’s a lot to be said for more organic structures and staff who can perform a number of roles. That way, responding to change is smoother” [SHS1].

There was evidence, however, of a marked disparity between the two sites in terms of successful realignment mainly due, evidence suggests, to the existence or absence of constraints [in particular operational autonomy] and inclination to either take a proactive stance or merely respond to change as an inevitability.

The creation and maintenance of a positive organisational culture similarly emerged as being a central factor. Although perhaps an intuitive observation the researcher perceived a strong link between successful adaptation to changing circumstances and positivity. Equally evident was the reverse proposition with clear and positive direction

underpinning an ability to respond successfully to change. Although many respondents felt that organisational culture was an elusive concept it was generally agreed that effective processes and structures were directly contingent on a cohesive workforce. Attributing at least part of their success to the way in which staff worked together one manager observed, " Sometimes you can't organise these things, the culture just evolves over time; but I still believe it's a key element of making strategy work. Just think about it; if people share a sense of direction they are clearly going to be more effective" [SPS3].

It would be dangerously simplistic, however, to attribute successful change purely to internal cohesion or collective vision. Although this clearly provides a much needed sense of direction the scope and scale of change, and the presence or otherwise of requisite resources to respond were clearly influencing factors.

It was observed, however, that even when attempts at change response were thwarted by the absence of resources or by a lack of operational autonomy, subscription to base ideals was not necessarily diminished. Paradoxically, the absence of operational autonomy appeared to entrench internal organisational culture albeit in an adversarial way. It was possible to observe one organisational culture vested in those holding external control, and another at an operative level. This was seen to result in strategic direction frequently being framed by individuals with little understanding of the operational nuances of a heritage attraction further entrenching the ideological divide between the two. A number of key respondents viewed this as being decidedly counter productive in that not only conflicting, but contradictory, strategies almost inevitably negated each other. Although reluctant to be entirely frank on the issue one respondent's admission that "there are even examples where one strategy is framed to thwart the other" [SHS3] says a great deal about the potentially damaging effects of a lack of collaboration

Perhaps because of this lack of cohesion the two case study sites differed markedly in terms of both strategy and structure. Where operational autonomy prevailed, strategies were clear and unambiguous and supporting structures and internal processes well established and effective. Conversely, the absence of autonomy at an operational level, particularly when curatorial focus was subsumed by the priorities of external shareholders, resulted in a decidedly reactive orientation and a somewhat haphazard approach to structure and process. The ability to respond to change in a timely and effective manner appeared correspondingly diminished. Although there were

numerous examples of respondents being willing to point to exemplary situations, there was an almost universal reluctance to discuss the negative proposition. To the researcher, this has particular implications given discussion in chapter 3 with respect to management control.

Although the differing size of the two sites was a key structural determinant, the absence of both autonomy and strategic direction appeared to predicate a lack of consistency in structure with shifting priorities driving day to day decision making. In the case of Swan Hill such lack of consistency was exacerbated by apparent confusion over self identity with dichotomous views of the charter and purpose of the organisation. This clearly contrasted with Sovereign Hill which has a highly developed understanding of both its purpose and direction; is able to frame and execute effective strategies; and to support them with appropriate structures.

Structural and Strategic Dimensions

Chapter 3 provided extensive discussion on the concept of organisational 'fit' the very essence of which, it was suggested, is the maintenance of alignment between strategy, structure and process in the face of constant and pervasive change. Further, the discussion suggested that the ability to maintain a consistent approach is moderated by a wide range of organisational competencies, and the extent to which the process is impeded by both internal and external factors. In this respect the findings of the research of broadly supportive of the literature in that that preceding discussion points to a similar set of dynamics.

The researcher was thus able to conceptualise the strategy structure nexus as having three clear dimensions, namely consistency, capability, and impediments. These in turn were found to have a number of other dimensions which will be discussed in ongoing sections of this chapter. Ultimately these translate into a model of competency which, it will be contended, constitutes a model of best practice. It is perhaps at this point of the analysis that a clear set of micro environmental factors began to emerge contributing to distinctive competencies. Although at face value some of the discussion may seem repetitive, the constantly recurring nature of themes emerging from the research, and the desirability of juxtaposing these within the emerging discourse, offers some justification for the approach

Dimension 1: Structural and Strategic Consistency

As outlined earlier, consistency of strategy and structure in particular, emerged as a key success factor resulting, as it did, in the realisation of long term goals. The ability and/or inclination to think and act strategically rather than tactically not only underpinned solid vision but assisted in preparing and cushioning for change

Constancy and consistency appeared also to underpin the accumulation rather than dissipation of expertise which was seen as being central to successful operation. It was also seen to be directly conducive to internal cohesion, which facilitated lateral communication and the sharing of expertise both of which enhanced the ability to respond to change.

One respondent, reflecting on a long involvement with the attraction observed, "We really wouldn't be where we are if it wasn't for the accumulated skill of the staff. Sure we've had to bring in new blood as we've grown but there's still that solid base of people who've been here since the very start" [SHC1]. Emphasising the positive in this way contrasted starkly with more negative views. "People just don't stay around long enough to build any kind of skill base. In a field like this where knowledge is the name of the game we sometimes don't have it. As soon as we start to build a cohesive team someone gets jack of it and leaves" [SPS2].

Earlier discussion with respect to the importance of a strong and enduring organisational culture again became apparent. A wide range of respondents felt that a positive organisational culture can only evolve over time which implicitly requires some degree of operational consistency. The ability to reflect on successes and failures and to test the effectiveness of various strategies was seen as a critical building block in the establishment of a shared vision. This resonates with discussion in chapter 3 which emphasised the importance of stable structures in facilitating the planning process.

By contrast, the lack of any consistent strategy or structure and with it a failure to realise even the most basic goals, resulted not only in a general sense of negativity, but was not conducive to the accumulation of expertise or to pride in the organisation, both of which are integral to a positive organisational culture. There was almost universal agreement that organisational culture, structure, and process were inextricably linked. For example as one respondent observed "Regardless of how you structure the place if the people involved don't share a common set of goals the kind of

collaboration you need to achieve your goals simply won't happen. That's what I see as the main role of management; pulling all that together" [SPS2].

Although the researcher did not seek the views of visitors other than on a strictly informal basis, consumer perceptions of the attraction seemed to be shaped to some extent by a consistency of management approach. This was particularly so with local residents who, as both stakeholders and potential visitors, viewed erratic changes in management as a sign of weakness. If, as suggested earlier, community engagement and support are critical to successful operation then a consistent public persona is likewise a critical factor.

Maintaining a consistent approach to strategy and structure was not, however, always within the control of operational management. It is worthwhile to re observe that the fiscal priorities of those exercising financial control [if they were external] almost totally shape the way in which the organisation conducted itself. Any attempts at maintaining a consistent strategic line on the part of operational staff were thus thwarted by decisions made elsewhere. This again re-emphasises the absolute importance of operational autonomy to successful operation. The difference between the two sites in this regard made it possible to observe comparative outcomes with significant clarity.

In addition to building a positive organisational culture there was evidence that a consistent strategic position and supporting structures also contributed to longevity of tenure for management and key staff. Although perhaps stating the obvious, there was significant evidence to suggest that a positive working environment was a contributory factor in fostering long term commitment to the organisation. That this in turn retained vital individual and collective expertise was seen as yet another critical success factor. The point may be demonstrated by contrasting one case study site which has retained much of its foundation expertise [and enjoys relative success] and the other that has progressively lost expertise over time and struggles to assert much control over its destiny.

Dimension 2: Structural and Strategic Capability

Building and maintaining expertise, points to the second dimension, namely structural and strategic capability. Earlier discussion with respect to consistency suggests that the maintenance and retention of key staff in particular is conducive to building structural capability. Although it is conceded that organisations that fail to periodically

introduce 'new blood' by recruiting individuals with contemporary expertise will stagnate over time, this should be a strategic rather than reactive process.

There was evidence that the augmentation of core expertise with contemporary expertise was the most successful recipe. The example of Sovereign Hill which still retains foundation directors, yet has strategically built a body of contemporary and specialist expertise is a case in point. A more reactive process is evident at Swan Hill where shifting imperatives appear to have dissipated the accumulation of such capabilities. "If you are going to keep pace with the times you need both a solid management base but also the kind of evolving expertise to diversify and be innovative. One of our key successes has always been ensuring that we don't rest on our laurels, being open to new ideas" [SHS2].

Although perhaps at odds with broader management theory which broadly proffers an organic, informal structure as the best approach in small to medium sized organisations, the research suggests that a more formalised approach to structure is more effective. Since both case study sites are broadly of the same vintage and are arguably at a stage of organisational maturity, Robbins and Barnwell's suggestion [1994, p.17] that the organisation should hypothetically be characterised by some degree of formalisation with a more complex structure than would be evident in less mature organisations, points to a dichotomy between the two sites under examination. The apparent absence of such characteristics at Swan Hill may suggest that its apparent lack of success stems from an inappropriate or perhaps ineffective structure. The observation of a key respondent is demonstrative of the point. "Despite our relatively small size we do need some degree of structure where everyone has clear duties and responsibilities. Sadly changing priorities and sometimes even just the fight for survival mean that this all goes by the wayside" [SPS2]

Amongst other things this appears to be largely predicated by the size of the respective organisations. The complexities of an organisation such as Sovereign Hill which employs approximately 200 people equivalent full time, and Swan Hill where operational staff are less than ten percent of this number, obviously gives rise to differing structural priorities. Further, since it was earlier contended that strategy largely dictates considerations of structure, the dichotomy between an organisation in a constant state of flux [as is the case at Swan Hill] and the more stable environment at Sovereign Hill, suggests that inconsistency, in all of its manifestations will result in an inappropriate structure.

From a strategic perspective, the notion of capability is somewhat more complex and goes hand in hand with the following section which examines the impediments to strategic vision. The ability of either organisation to frame and operationalise specific strategies is influenced by both internal and external factors. Earlier discussion with respect to operational autonomy and funding reliance are arguably analogous to the notion of strategic capability since the extent to which these impact either negatively or positively on the attraction either fosters or constrains the ability of the respective attraction to exercise strategic discretion.

Definitional dimensions of capability

Although delving in the semantic, examining the word capability divides between the notion of ability and power. Ability in turn also implies power but more importantly the capacity to exercise that power.

As such we are confronted with the combined concepts of ability, capacity, and power all of which can be directly related to the findings of this research. Figure 6.2 demonstrates a conceptual link between these concepts

Definitional Dimension	Hypothetical convergence with research findings
Ability	Existence or absence of financial constraints [manifested as the necessary resources to operationalise strategy] Ability or propensity to engage in innovation and/or reinvention
Capacity	Continuity of management structure/purpose Market knowledge/focus Reading consumer expectations Internal Cohesion Clarity of/adherence to dominant theme
Power	Operational Autonomy

Table 6.2 Convergence of structural and strategic capability and research findings

Capability can thus be elevated to a key component of the model since it is shaped by a set of micro environmental factors [internal], and, in turn, shapes the ability of the organisation to effectively respond to external change and achieve environmental 'fit' [alignment with the external environment]. Considering 'capability' in this multi

dimensional way assists in making this conceptual connection between the two sections of the findings.

It was felt that strategic thinking and strategic capability were distinctly different. Recognising this difference one respondent observed “Having strategic vision is pointless if you don’t have the wherewithal to translate it into action” [SHS5]. The ability to think and act strategically although clearly instrumental to success relies on the requisite manpower and expertise if it is to be realised. As detailed in table 6.2 these relate not only to a capacity to meet external change but to the power to mobilise such capacity. Given a significant body of earlier discussion with respect to operational autonomy as a critical success factor this has particular resonance.

Dimension 3: Structural and Strategic Impediments

As such, structural and strategic capability was seen to be moderated by the third of the dimensions which identifies the key impediments to the formulation and realisation of effective strategy, and to the establishment of supporting structures and attendant processes. Since the establishment of effective organisational structure is, by definition, resource intensive, the need for adequate funding is paramount. This emerged as a major issue in the research with participants across both case study sites considering issues of funding as paramount. “It’s just common sense” one respondent observed; “having enough manpower and, more importantly the right skills, requires money. Operating from hand to mouth simply doesn’t work” [SPC2].

In considering the entire area of impediments it becomes valuable to draw some quite particular contrasts between the two case studies. The data and the researcher’s observations suggest that the existence, scope, and scale of impediments largely dictated both strategic consistency and capability and, as such constitute the defining factor in the equation. As such discussion with respect to operational impediments is considered deserving of additional emphasis. By examining the two case studies in turn the contrast becomes evident.

Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum

Earlier discussion has been dominated by the contention that operational autonomy or independence [and the antithetical proposition of external reliance] has a significant impact on the operation of the attractions of this type, particularly as it relates to

recurrent funding. In addition, the impact of under funding on the organisation culture often renders structures impotent as opposing factions vie to have their individual aspirations met. Such a contention can be supported by the examination of Swan Hill as a case study where constant vacillation by council over funding priorities has created an adversarial relationship between council and operational staff. Not only is this contrary to a cohesive structure but appears to have created a situation where structures are defensive rather than organic in nature. There was evidence too of a result lack of identity with similar fluctuations in stakeholder perceptions of the mission and purpose of the site ranging from commercial attraction to museum. Whilst it may be stating the obvious the widely differing priorities of these two missions demand different structures. Preliminary discussion in chapter 5 placed considerable emphasis on the distinct ideological divide between those in effective versus operational control, and an apparent inability to reconcile the need for commercial viability with curatorial objectives.

Operating in such a volatile environment was clearly not conducive to the formation of effective structures of for that matter identifiable structure of any kind. Over time there is evidence that this problem has been exacerbated by the election, tenure, and rotation of councillors either disposed towards the site or opposed to its funding. "Forging positive relationships with council, or individual councillors", one respondent commented, "is a moving feast. As soon as you establish a good working relationship along comes an election and you've got to start all over again" [SPO1].

Structural impediments were not, however, seen to be confined to those of a financial nature. Earlier discussion with respect to the importance of consistency of structure points to the additional proposition that Swan Hill's apparent inability to retain staff over time has negated any attempt to build effective structures. Further, it was observed that not only was staff retention a contributory factor, but the widely differing skill sets of the employees [both in terms of diversity and level] also made effective structure problematic. In fact a number of respondents viewed this as being an even more significant impediment than resource limitations. Expressing some dismay at the constant 'brain drain', the observation of a key respondent highlights the perception that this is a significant barrier. "You can have all the resources in the world but like all organisations if you're constantly bringing new people in just imbedding them into the existing structure is time intensive. Good structure needs at least stability". [[SPO1]

Finally, in describing the respective case studies in chapter 5, it was observed that the acquisition and assembly of the Swan Hill's collection had arguably been haphazard resulting in a seemingly disparate collection of exhibits. To some extent, this has also impeded effective structure given the resultant difficulties associated with prioritising key areas of focus with limited resources.

Comparing such a situation with Sovereign Hill it would be deceptively easy to conclude that there are few if any structural impediments given the apparent success of the site. More subtle interpretation of the interview data however, points to some aspects of Sovereign Hill's evolving operation which, if not an actuality, have at least the potential to impact on effective structure.

I think as you get bigger and more sophisticated in your operation there's a tendency to view innovation almost as being vested in diversification. That's good but it places demands on structures and procedures as you attempt to come to grips with new demands and new markets. I don't think that should necessarily deter you from trying new things but you've got to think it through before you invest time and money and perhaps more importantly place extra pressure on your operation. [SHC1]

The recent acquisition of Narmbool, which was discussed in chapter 5, represents what the researcher views as a diversion from the central theme which may ultimately dissipate structural focus. Such a view was not, however, shared by management. Declaring there to be at least some synergies between the themes of gold and pioneer rural life a key respondent viewed both as "depicting aspects of history that are quintessentially Australian". Notwithstanding, the respondent conceded that differing operational demands would require different structures and that this would ultimately place additional pressure on management. [SHS2]. Earlier discussion with respect to the mixture of themes at Swan Hill is however a salient reminder of the difficulties associated with the establishment of structures supporting disparate themes.

Although earlier sections emphasised the intrinsic value of retaining the collective expertise of long standing staff Sovereign Hill pointed to a possible structural impediment, namely, the apparent reliance on long standing board members for whom retirement is now imminent. Although largely predictable, failure to prepare for such contingencies represents what many respondents viewed as a significant impediment to structural integrity. "Although we place a lot of value on the expertise of those

foundation people” one respondent observed, “we’re realistic enough to accept that they’re not going to be there forever. Knowledge transfer doesn’t happen overnight; you’ve got to think about the kind of skills and knowledge you’re going to need when these people are gone. You’ve simply got to think in advance”. [SHS3].

Finally, since at their own admission, the organisation that supports Sovereign Hill is becoming increasingly large and sophisticated, the pressure to adopt a more complex, decentralised structure may complicate the organic, communicative climate that is characteristic of the current structure. That said, there were some apparent contradictions inherent in comparing the two case studies in that there appeared to be no necessary correlation between small organisations and organic structures.

Just because we’re growing doesn’t mean that we need to abandon our current style of management. It’s all about ensuring that the lines of communication are kept open and that we continue to encourage people to contribute to the management process. Notwithstanding, it was accepted that increased size inevitably increased complexity adding to structural demands. “Whether this represents a structural impediment is a matter of judgment, it certainly presents some challenges. I suppose it becomes an impediment to effective structure if you don’t read the signals correctly or anticipate what your needs might be. In essence it’s all about thinking strategically [SHS3].

The value of proactivity

Although some impediments to the establishment of effective structures appeared easier to overcome than others, the divide appeared to lie in the extent to which the respective organisations had the inclination or capacity to think and act strategically. The process of aligning structure and process with the strategies of the organisation, which is germane to theories of organisational fit, suggests that structural adjustments as a proactive, rather than reactive, function has considerable value. Much of what was observed is supportive of such a contention. Recognition of the value of proactivity was, however, widespread. This was perhaps best summed up by one respondent who observed; “You’ve really got to think about the structure you might need in five years, not just current requirements. An integral part of strategic planning is thinking about whether you have the manpower and expertise to pull it off” [SHC2]

Issues of strategic thinking logically draw the discussion towards considerations of impediments to the entire process of organisational strategy. Although strategy appears generally construed as being externally focused the foregoing discussion points to the benefits of forward thinking in terms of structural issues. Here, however, the focus remains on impediments to strategy as a process of alignment with the external environment given the focus of the study and the research questions articulated in chapter 3.

Operational autonomy

Earlier discussion was dominated by the impact of a wide range of externalities on the operational 'freedom' of the respective case studies. In particular, it was emphasised that autonomy in large part shapes management's 'view of the world' and set the strategic agenda. Freedom to set individual strategies is, however, not confined to the notion of power. Discussion with respect to structural and strategic capabilities [see table 6.2] pointed to an additional two dimensions, namely, ability and capacity, and suggested that these also define organisational competence or capability.

Considered in the context of structural and strategic impediments which is the inverse proposition of capability, diminished power, capacity, or ability to set and operationalise strategies clearly has a significant impact on organisational effectiveness. Chapter 5 placed considerable emphasis on the differing circumstances of the two case studies and presented evidence as equally different outcomes. The earlier contention that organisations establish structures in support of strategies arguably supposes a proactive process, which may not be the case where structures are reactive or defensive in the face of a lack of power, capacity or ability.

Such a contention is supported by the findings of the research in that a clear dichotomy was observed between the two sites in this respect. It was observed that Sovereign Hill takes a decidedly proactive approach to strategic planning and foresight, contrasting with Swan Hill Pioneer Village, where strategy formulation is mainly reactive in nature responding to a volatile environment. This was seen to be largely a result of the extent to which either site enjoyed power [operational autonomy]; or had the necessary resources to capitalise on strategic vision. In short, the scope and scale of both external and internal impediments was seen to be the defining factor.

This is, however, not purely an observation. Respondents across both case study sites recognised the value of proactivity but accepted that it was entirely dependent on the prevailing environment. Reflecting on lost opportunities one respondent observed “You’ve really got to frame realistic strategies that recognise limitations. It’s no good setting yourself targets that are going to fail because you don’t have the support or the resources. Sometimes I think we’d be better off addressing the things that hold us back rather than looking forward” [SPS2]. Interestingly, such a pragmatic view was generally shared by respondents for whom the exercise of strategy was largely unfettered. “Sometimes you have a lot of strategic options” a respondent observed, “so you’ve still got to match your choices to the resources at your disposal. Part of that is addressing or at least recognising potential barriers” [SHC2].

Swan Hill is, perhaps, the best example of an attraction beset with a high level of both external and internal impediments, the specifics of which were outlined in earlier sections of this work. This clearly constrains any attempts at strategic formulation or realisation. The site appears to have neither the power, nor the capacity/ability to engage in long term strategic thinking. There were, however contradictions to this observation. One respondent had what appeared to be a clear and unambiguous vision of best direction but considered the chances of ever getting there as being virtually non-existent. “Sure we have a clear vision of where we’d like to take this place but at the moment it’s just not possible. I guess all you can do is work at it in small ways and hope that eventually you get at least some of the way” [SPS2]

Funding impediments

Earlier sections of this work also provided perspectives on the critical link between operational autonomy and financial dependence or funding reliance. This was seen to be Swan Hill’s most significant strategic impediment both in a direct and indirect sense. Directly, the almost complete absence of both grant money to fund strategic site development and inadequate recurrent funding to foster a stable working environment, were seen to significantly impede attempts at strategic vision. Although understandably, some respondents were reluctant to be specific on these points, the views of external stakeholders cast some light on the dimensions of the problem. “I’m not saying that money is an automatic solution but the place is starved for even the most fundamental requirements. For them it’s all about survival not growth” [SPO1]. Another reflection on the absence of major infrastructure initiatives was “They just haven’t been able to attract the support of government by way of major grants to

support new projects. Unfortunately, if you're seen as struggling to survive government are reluctant to invest large amounts of money. It's a viscous circle unfortunately" [SHO1].

Indirectly, the absence of such funding was seen to impact negatively on organisational culture; to result in high turnover of staff; and generally to create an environment where considerations of strategy were subsumed by the primary objective of survival. The problem was seen to be exacerbated by inconstant and divided conceptualisations of mission and a general lack of strategic clarity. These can be directly related to many of the perceived success factors outlined in the preliminary findings [see table 5.1]. Being almost compelled to adopt such a defensive orientation has, in the view of most respondents, rendered the attainment of key strategic objectives distinctly problematic. "I think it all boils down to what one sees as the main objective of the attraction is" one respondent observed " on the one hand you've got people who's strategic objectives are directed at covering costs, and on the other people who see the strategic direction being the protection of a public resource. That's a fundamental divide" [SPC2]

Markets and stakeholders

A lack of inability or inclination to be proactive has also resulted in a narrow market focus; and has hampered any attempts at innovation or re-invention, both of which were identified as critical success factors. An earlier comment with respect to an inability to attract infrastructure grants is illustrative of the point. Some felt that a lack of innovation was by far the largest problem. Questioned on the extent of repeat visitation one participant commented, "Once people have made a visit they're really unlikely to come back unless you are constantly adding something new. Also you've got to be constantly looking for a way to make yourself more prominent. Sadly we just haven't been able to pull that all together; it's all a question of resources" [SPS3].

In addition, the existence of such pervasive strategic impediments was also seen to have impacted on the ability of the site to engage with community who appear to view its continuing lack of success with some suspicion. Anecdotally local news papers in the area regularly run negative articles on the site but rarely paint in a positive light. "If you just sit there year after year without doing anything in particular" one respondent reflected, "you become an easy target for criticism. I bet if you suddenly got a grant and embarked on an exciting new development they'd be the first ones to spruik the

benefits to the local economy...If people are constantly seeing bad story lines it can do a lot of damage” [SPS1]

In an almost classic cycle of cause and effect, negative community perspectives result in constituent pressure on council, which in turn results in funding pressures that increase the vulnerability of the site which ultimately exacerbates negative community attitudes. Despite sporadic attempts over time to break this cycle by articulating grand plans for the future of the site, little has been realised. The fact that some of these strategic spurts have been profoundly unsuccessful seems to have done little more than simply entrench negative attitudes. The strategic alliance with William Angliss in 1995/6 mentioned in chapter 4 is a case in point. Reflecting on these events one participant observed “If you sit and do nothing they criticise you but if you take some pre-emptive action and it doesn’t work it’s even worse; you can’t win” [SPS1].

In summary the impediments to Swan Hill articulating and realising key strategic goals are significant indeed. Whether this all stems from the absence of operational autonomy and with it funding reliance, is open to conjecture. Having examined the site and its circumstances at close range, it appears more likely that it is the resultant lack of internal cohesion and ability to balance operational objectives that have impeded the site’s progress. These too were identified as critical success factors. Attempting to obtain some consensus amongst the research subjects as to long term solutions was difficult given clearly polarised views as to priorities. The somewhat stark difference between a view that “this is a museum, a public resource, and should be funded as one” [SPO1], and “It’s a hard cold reality; the village has got to be self-sufficient or it won’t survive” [SPC2] emphasises the ideological divide.

Although such circumstances appeared to contrast sharply with Sovereign Hill, the question of impediments remained an issue albeit on a different plain. The research reveals that both strategically and structurally there were some identifiable impediments which a majority of respondents felt could present a barrier if not properly managed. “You can afford to become complacent here. We realise that we are running a large and increasingly complex organisation and that this requires us to constantly look at ourselves; to look for potential problems” [SHC1].

As such, earlier depictions of Sovereign Hill as an exemplar, particularly as it relates to strategic capabilities demand a re-focus when considering impediments. Although it would be easy to conclude that there are few if any impediments to the framing and realisation of strategies, a more eclectic view points to some actual and potential obstacles which are worthy of consideration. Interestingly, none of the respondents connected with this case study viewed these as impediments per se; rather operational challenges or acceptable risks in attempts at realising strategy. “I don’t see these things as holding us back “a key respondent observed. “it’s more a question of moderating the direction you might take. They’re part of the evaluation process” [SHS5].

As has been suggested previously, the increasing size and complexity of Sovereign Hill as a commercial entity has been characterised by an increasingly decentralised management structure with autonomous areas of specialist operation assuming more or less total control over their own operation. Although there was strong evidence of open and effective lines of communication, and of a consultative process directed at ensuring cohesive decision making, it was observed that there were some differences between the strategic views of various operative units. Not that there was any suggestion of animosity. By way of assurance, one respondent was quick to point out “Logically we’re pretty focused on our particular part of the operation and I guess that tends to make us just a little parochial. Deep down we realise, however, that we’re part of the larger unit so cooperation with other areas is kind of instinctive” [SHS2].

Despite the anonymity coding adopted here some respondents remained reluctant to have particular views attributed to any one entity yet the main divide appeared to be between those who considered the central theme as inviolate and those who viewed diversification or innovation as a ‘necessary evil’. “Attention to detail is what we’re about. This has been our strength but I think as soon as you depart from your central theme you make a rod for your own back. Your strategic direction gets a bit watered down” [SHS3]. As discussed earlier the acquisition of the rural property ‘Narmbool’ has given rise to divisions of opinion on the merits of this departure from the central theme of gold. Given that adherence to a central theme emerged as a key success factor this is of particular importance.

Strategic considerations aside, some concerns appeared to have their foundations in uncertainty as to how the structure and internal processes would cope with two essentially different historical presentations. Although hasty to resile from the role of detractor, one respondent best reflected the views of a number of people. “The entire structure of this place has been built around faithfully presenting just a ten year period on the goldfields. It’s a unique structure in a functional sense so I think we’re faced with building a completely new structure with different focus and priorities. Running the two in parallel might be difficult” [SHC3].

Balancing priorities

Some emphasis too has been placed on Sovereign Hill’s apparent ability to reconcile considerations of profit with those directed at the maintenance of the curatorial integrity. Although, as has been pointed out, few if any of the buildings are of historical value per se, a dedication to faithful representation of a ten year period in history [1850-1860] constitutes a curatorial priority. At the same time there was a more pragmatic view which recognised that the site was also a commercial operation with connotations of profit and revenue generation. Questioned on the importance of achieving a balance between the two priorities, one research participant offered a succinct view which perhaps best represents what were widely held feelings. “Purely and simply, if you’re not profitable your standard of presentation will be compromised. I don’t think it’s a question of them being conflicting directions; they depend on each other” [SHC3]

Various respondents suggested that in fact any curatorial priority is/was driven by the quest for profit and that in reality any decisions as to the integrity of what is being depicted is entirely profit driven. As if to counter such a view however, there appeared to be a pervasive culture of pride in the standard of presentation. “It’s not necessarily about making the conscious decision to focus on the integrity of what we present. If you take any pride in your work at all it’s something you do almost without thinking” [SHS2].

Although many were prepared to concede that a profit orientatation seemed completely logical and appropriate in any commercial enterprise, the thinking was that any future conflicts as to which of these should prevail could impede strategic thinking. “Were we ever to be confronted with a choice between running a successful commercial enterprise and presenting something that’s historically faithful I wonder

which way it would go. Certainly there would be people who would have quite decided views on the issue so clarity of strategic direction might be compromised” [SHS5].

Since it has been suggested that the process of innovation and reinvention was also amongst the key success factors, maintaining consensus as to which of these priorities drives the other constitutes a potential impediment to a cohesive strategy.

Discussion in chapter 5 also centred on the close links, vested in a memorandum of understanding, between Sovereign Hill and Tourism Victoria. Although to date this appears to have been nothing but a positive relationship, were the broader objectives of government, particularly as they relate to regional tourism, to subsume Sovereign Hill’s individual strategies, this could represent a significant impediment to independent strategy formulation.

The fact that most, if not all, of Sovereign Hill’s larger strategic initiatives have been funded by Government grants may ultimately result in a level of dependence which may see the attraction fulfilling the government’s agenda rather than its own. Although Sovereign Hill’s independence has been repeatedly stressed, and has been highlighted as a key success factor; the attraction clearly does have some reliance on government which could ultimately impact on its command of strategy. Although this was viewed as being unlikely there was at least a concession that over reliance on government funding for strategic initiatives, particularly those related to major capital works, could compromise strategic independence. This is an interesting observation given the discussion with respect to Swan Hill that points to the impacts of almost dependence on government for funding. Reflecting on some strategic ‘milestones’ one participant conceded that “ If government are funding major initiatives then, if only implicitly they have some degree of control over decisions, and I think we obviously have no alternative but to concede that control. If that means a loss of power, then I guess that’s a price we have to pay” [SHC1].

There are other aspects of Sovereign Hill’s relationship with government which appear to serve as direct impediments to its strategic objectives. For example a key element of Sovereign Hill’s current strategy is the expansion of its education programme catering to Victorian school children which involves considerable investment in specialist infrastructure including accommodation, teaching facilities, and the employment of qualified staff. Support for this strategy was evident with SHS3 observing “it’s why we’re going into another school building because it is a good solid

market, it's got a great program and the impact of that program in communicating our interpretive goals is just fantastic".

Although seemingly insignificant, the fact that government fund transportation for country students to undertake visits to city facilities such as the museum, yet will not meet the cost of city students to visit Ballarat and Sovereign Hill, obviously presents a significant impediment to the realisation of this key strategy. As SHS5 observes, "We're only an hour out of Melbourne but we don't get any of the benefit of those travel subsidies. So we've got kids from our region to travel to Melbourne free because they're from a region but they cannot travel with subsidy from their local area to visit their local attraction, you know, you tell me that makes sense".

In summary although the scope and scale of strategic and structural impediments appeared to differ markedly across the two case studies, the reality appeared to be that both were subject to impediments of various kinds. Notably, the dominant issue was the issues arising from reliance on external funding which were seen to either restrain or impede strategy and to dictate structure. There appeared to be almost total consensus that the ability to be self sufficient was the defining factor in almost every aspect of strategic and organisational planning. Regardless of profit orientation most felt that this was an unavoidable reality. The observations of a key participant are indicative of the consensus view. "If you can maintain a profitable operation everything else follows. Having the necessary financial resources allows you to plan strategically and to build your capacity in terms of structure and manpower. It's as simple as that" [SHC2].

6.4.6 Conceptual Extension

In the preceding section emergent themes in the research conceptualised strategy and structure as each having three common dimensions. In the first instance consistency of strategy, and with it the longevity of structure and process, was considered to be a pre eminent success factor given that it appeared to underpin a wider range of operative issues. It is contended that most, if not all, of the success factors discussed in earlier sections arguably have their origins in either focused strategic direction or stable structures.

An ability to achieve consistency of strategy and structure appeared, however, to be almost totally resource dependant. Grouped together under the broader theme of capability considerations of ability, capacity, and power were discussed with respect to their respective impact on strategic thinking, and resource provision. The absence of financial constraints, the organisational capacity of the attraction, and the power to exercise strategic discretion were all closely aligned with the success factors emerging from the preliminary analysis of the interview data.

The third dimension pointed to the counter proposition, that of impediments. The data strongly suggested that that a range of internal and external factors impact on, or constrain organisational capability and contribute to strategic and structural inconsistency and inconstancy. Discussion with respect to the limitations placed on Swan Hill Pioneer Village because of resource dependence, and a lack of operational autonomy was offered as being illustrative of the point.

Table 5.1 brought together the set of common issues identified in the preliminary analysis with the dual dimensions of strategy and structure, and advanced a number of operational characteristics drawn from the data. Having deconstructed the data to this level a vision began to emerge of critical success factors. A further round of analysis resulted in a set of six semantically derived categories which collectively encapsulate these factors. These are outlined in Fig. 6.6

In arriving at these categories it became possible to articulate a condensed, yet more inclusive, view of the factors impacting on successful operation, thereby ascribing a higher level of meaning to the findings. On going discussion will focus on the theoretical link between each of these six categories and the dimensions of consistency, capability, and impediments. In advance of this discussion, however, a brief exploration of the rationale behind the process of categorisation offers some insights into the interpretive process. Although clearly differentiated it should be said that these categories are not discrete. The fact that they are clearly interconnected lends support to the researcher's belief that they collectively constitute a comprehensive framework.

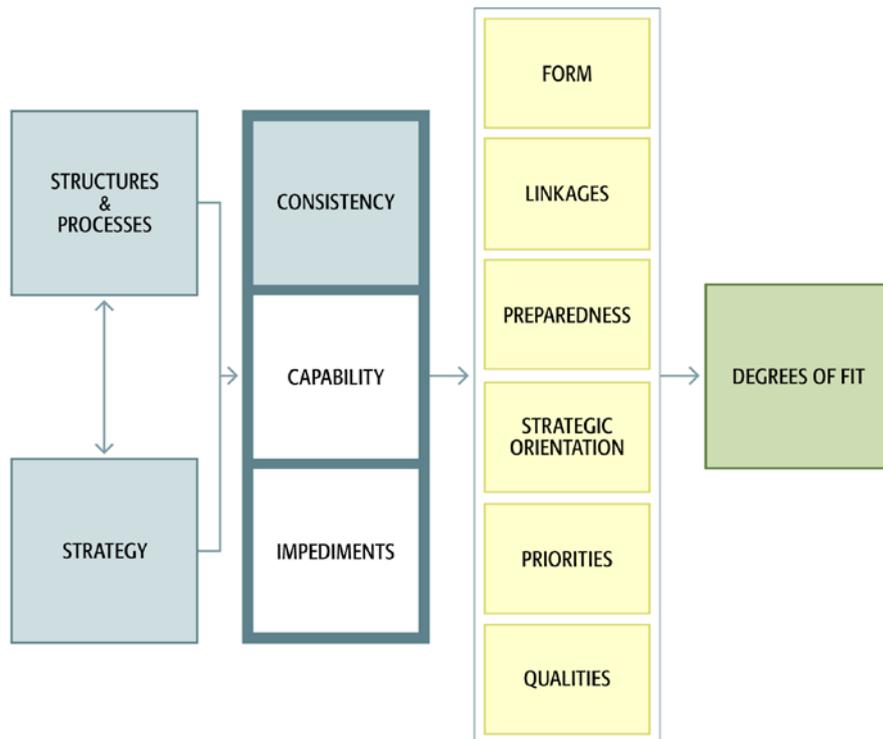


Fig. 6.6 Dimensions of Consistency in Organisational Competency

As will be outlined in the discussion the category ‘form’ is intended to support a perspective beyond simple considerations of structure to include elements of the organisational culture. There was significant evidence in the data to suggest that collective subscription to an operational ideology was directly instrumental in a cohesive and productive form.

The second category, ‘linkages’ was framed to highlight the importance of maintaining positive relationships with key external stakeholders including government and host communities. As arguably the most important factor emerging from the data relationships with government in particular was identified in chapter 5 as being integral to success.

‘Preparedness’ was seen to encapsulate considerations of reading shifts in markets or environmental conditions and addressing these in a proactive rather than reactive way. There was strong evidence to suggest that anticipating future needs and planning in advance was central to success. An important element of this process was identified as continuous innovation. Preparedness can thus be conceptualised as a combination of reading demand and shaping supply accordingly.

In some ways connected to the notion of preparedness, the fourth category of 'strategic orientation' emerged from considerations of the impact of a strong, clear and abiding strategic direction on successful operation. The data were strongly supportive of the notion that this was a central plank of successful organisations. Evidence of a clear dichotomy between the two case studies in this respect reinforced the importance of this factor.

Given earlier observations in this chapter that small heritage attractions customarily suffer at the hands of conflicting priorities, the inclusion of this category is intended to highlight what was clearly amongst the most important success factors. Both from an observational point of view and trends in the data, this emerged as a key consideration. Discussion in chapter 2 with respect to the political environment pointed to increasing pressure on cultural and heritage attractions to be financially self sufficient in the face of smaller government. Discussion will identify the ability to reconcile a necessary drive for profit with curatorial priorities as a significant success factor.

The final category, that of 'qualities' is conceptually based on trends in the data which suggest that thematic focus and a commitment to core values are directly instrumental in the quality of the visitor experience and thereby successful operation.

A consistent approach to ensuring that presentation and interpretation are of the highest possible quality translates not only into overall appeal, but impacts on repeat visitation.

Within an evaluative framework of consistency, capability, and impediments, ongoing sections of this chapter will examine these categories in turn, with particular emphasis on the extent to which each contributes to the alignment of strategy, structure, and process; and thereby environmental fit.

6.5 Evaluative analysis based on the conceptual framework

Based on the foregoing categories, the final section of the conceptual framework comes into focus. The coded data respondent views will be used to demonstrate the veracity of these interpretations and to demonstrate their relevance to a model of best practice. These views are, by necessity augmented by the researcher's own observations in an attempt to bring the findings into a conceptual and theoretical

context. Further, given the sometimes contentious nature of the discussion, responses have been edited to highlight key points.

6.5.1 Consistency of form

Earlier discussion pointed to the importance of a consistent and prevailing structure to organisational success. This proposition is strongly supported in the interview data. In this section the discussion is expanded, moving narrow considerations of physical structure into an examination of the various elements that dictate or shape structural needs and contribute to the organisation's ability to prevail.

Although it has been argued that strategy is the main determinant of structure, to assume that a unilinear relationship exists between the two is to ignore a number of other defining factors that impact on management decision making as it relates to structures and processes. In one case study, structures were seen to evolve and entrench themselves over time with little if any relationship to strategic thinking, particularly when strategic direction was weak or ambiguous. Reflecting on this process one respondent observed, "I think there's a subtle difference between formal structures and the kind of relationships that simply get things done. We obviously make decisions as to who does what but it's not formal at all" [SPS3].

Although this was seen to fulfil the functional requirements of the organisation, the link between this organisational form and any kind of collective vision appeared weak. "I guess we all just get on doing what we do everyone probably has their own view of where we should be going but I guess we never really discuss it" [SPS2]. More importantly in these circumstances any enduring approach to maintaining consistency of form seemed elusive as individuals or work units pursued largely discrete agenda and organised themselves according to functional requirements.

There was evidence too that a simple relationship between strategy and structure assumes a degree of management control over the decision making process. Earlier discussion with respect to external vs internal control, as was the case at Swan Hill is demonstrative of the point. To some extent this can be best conceptualised as the organisational culture of the organisation where processes and practices established over time become inalienable components of organisational thinking. That these can not always be conveniently grouped under either capabilities or impediments suggests

that their identification is vital. As the research progressed a number of recurrent themes pointed to this subtle difference between structure and form.

Amongst the more important themes emerging from the research was the widely held view that consistency of purpose, which, it is argued is an integral component of form, was a defining feature in organisational success. Earlier discussion in chapter 5 has pointed to the dichotomy between the two sites in terms of what can perhaps best be described as self perception, or the ability to articulate a clear vision of the purpose and mission of the organisation. Although neither an impediment nor a capability per se, the values of introspection, clarity and commitment were seen as being directly instrumental in the way the respective organisations were structured.

The contrast between Sovereign Hill which engages in a more or less constant process of self evaluation; has a clear vision of its own strengths and weaknesses; and a commitment to a particular path; and Swan Hill that is forced by circumstance to be defensive rather than self critical, emphasises yet again the critical role played by organisational culture in shaping strategy and structure. Some held the view that introspection or self evaluation was not necessarily a positive process. Being forced to constantly concentrate on a seemingly intractable set of problems, appeared to simply entrench negativity. Questioned on the value of constantly taking stock of systems and processes one respondent observed, "It's human nature isn't it. You simply don't want to face the hard cold problems so you put your head down and just try to get your job done" [SPC2]. Under these circumstances structure or form was seen to be a moving tapestry with little chance of any cohesive culture or structure evolving.

Earlier discussion with respect to structural and strategic consistency identified longevity of tenure for management and key staff as a key element of organisational success. Although the veracity of such a proposition seems beyond question, there was some evidence that this could also be counter to an introspective view as 'ways of doing things' became so deeply entrenched that there seemed little reason for, or possibility of, change. Reflecting on the impacts of working in a negative environment SPS2 observed "When you are operating in such an environment, there is a real danger that protecting what you have becomes more important than thinking proactively or attempting to change things ... The tendency to give up and just let things run their course, rather than try to pull ourselves out of the mire, was a huge temptation".

There was also some evidence that even a positive culture, as exists at Sovereign Hill, if allowed to prevail over time could have negative outcomes. The observation [SHS4] that “it’s all very well to rely on the collective knowledge of the original board members, but it’s equally important to constantly re-vitalise your skill base” supports such a view ...I think the succession planning has been the most important element. The board has understood how it has needed to change and how it’s needed to recruit and put in place a strong management team” [SHS1].

The ability and inclination to be constantly self critical, to have a clear view of purpose and direction, and to demonstrate commitment to a vision were thus identified as critical success factors. To some extent these constitute traditional perspectives of organisational culture which is more akin to the notion of form than mere physical structures.

6.5.2 Consistency of Linkages

In the preceding section the key components of a strong and abiding form, at least as they relate to the two case studies at hand were outlined. Adopting an introspective view of the organisation was seen to underpin both clarity of, and commitment to strategic vision, and to foster effective structures and processes.

This section adopts the opposite but interdependent view, namely, the need to foster and maintain effective linkages with a range of external stakeholders. The extent to which the respective case studies were able to interact positively with a range of individuals or organisations that had the potential to impact on their operation emerged as a key factor in successful operation. Such an observation is supportive of the literature review conducted in chapter 3, which identified environmental ‘fit’, or the ability to adapt to shifts in the external environment, as vital to maintenance of market equilibrium.

In the context of the two case studies under examination this included relationships with government at various levels; the tourism industry; host communities; and, as a subset volunteers, all of whom were seen to have either direct or indirect impacts on the way in which the respective attractions operated. In describing the two case studies in chapter 4, the role of government in particular was emphasised, mainly from the perspective of independence and funding implications. Deeper analysis of the

data, however, reveals other dimensions to this relationship which clearly impact on successful operation.

State Government linkages

There was evidence that an ability to anticipate market shifts or to respond to them in a timely and effective manner was strongly vested in relationships with government particularly at a state level. Earlier discussion alluded to the memorandum of understanding established between the Victorian State Government and Sovereign Hill which formalises an on-going relationship, a key element of which is the sharing of market intelligence.

In the process of discussing this relationship between themselves and Tourism Victoria, the peak government body in state and regional tourism, SHS1 observed “Because 95% of our visitors come from somewhere else than Ballarat, we have to recognise that we are in tourism, and having access to the sort of information they’ve got to inform our business planning is just absolutely critical and also for making sure that we in touch with government policy”.

Such a perspective was echoed by another of Sovereign Hill’s executive. “So that linkage, with Tourism Victoria and the memorandum of understanding has really been a crucial part of our sense of where we could be exposed is just not being on the mainstream of what’s happening in tourism development planning, we just rely so much on you know, the government getting the tourism settings right, so having that information early, getting a good heads up on things certainly helps in our planning” [SHS4]. It was clear that Sovereign Hill’s success at tapping into the market from the PRC was a direct result of this association. Given that this now represents a substantial part of their market the direct benefits of the alliance is abundantly clear.

Conversely, the relationship between the Swan Hill site and state government appears to anything but positive from either perspective. Earlier suggestions that successive state governments have been openly reluctant to contribute to recurrent funding shortfalls because of the perceived lack of support from local government can not be construed in other than a negative light. As such, building a consistently positive relationship with government appears not to have been on the agenda.

There is even evidence of open hostility towards government in general, and Tourism Victoria in particular. The extent of this animosity is evidenced by the following

statement which emerged from the interviews. “That’s what I find so frustrating about Tourism Victoria because they seem to market to the chardonnay set ... We don’t get any benefit out of them at all, so we’re really on our own” [SPS2]. From this base the likelihood of even establishing, let alone maintaining consistent linkages seemed beyond reach. Notwithstanding this negativity, the value of a collaborative relationship with State Government was at least acknowledged. “Don’t get me wrong; I know that forging a stronger relationship with the State Government would pay dividends, but I guess that we don’t figure high on their list of priorities” [SPC1].

Local Government linkages

In a more direct sense, maintaining positive linkages with government at a local or regional level was a clear factor in successful operation. A distinction needs to be made, however, between linkages in terms of relationships and communication, and linkages in terms of control given that this emerged as a critical success factor. This can, perhaps, best be conceptualised as a question of degree. Much has been made in earlier sections of this work of the negative connotations of external control as a significant impediment to successful operation.

The clear dichotomy between Swan Hill where linkage with local government is vested in direct control, and Sovereign Hill where an ‘arms length’ yet positive relationship with local government is central to strategy, is demonstrative of the point. There was a widely held view that achieving a workable balance between independence and formal collaboration presented the best direction. “I don’t think that you can operate completely in isolation, there are so many areas where we depend on local government and, let’s face it they have considerable power and resources, so it makes sense to collaborate. You don’t have to sell your soul” [SPO1].

In the case of Sovereign hill there was evidence of a distinctively positive linkage with local government

We definitely see them [local government] as a partner and we do have a very good relationship with them. We do have involvement with the council and the management of their assets. For example the state is now developing a new master plan for our precinct and the council officers were involved in our strategic planning workshops with other community representatives as well, so its that sort of relationship where we keep each other informed about what’s

going on in areas of mutual interest so it's a very strong supporting one".
[SHS3].

By contrast, Swan Hill's linkage with local government quite apart from being vested in direct control was noticeably inconsistent. Earlier discussion with respect to the changing priorities of council highlighted the difficulties arising from what can only be described as constantly fluctuating council policy with respect to the Pioneer Settlement. There was clear evidence that a lack of any consistency in the relationship was detrimental to almost every facet of the settlement's operation. Most notably it negated any attempts at strategic planning which, it is held, is central to successful operation.

In reflecting on the views of an earlier colleague SPO1 observed "He was very frustrated because of lack of funds and working for council wasn't an easy trip ... Just when you think you have reached consensus with council over the identity and direction of the site it changes. Key supporters lose their seats and the new guard often takes some convincing of the value of the settlement to community or its worthiness for adequate funding".

"Every three years, depending on the result of the council election, it's process of re-education for the council as they come in here and they can't understand what its about and so every three years you get a renewed agitation that's it's a commercial proposition. In the last change over we had six new councilors out of seven and it was a total re-education process. So there's nothing continuous about how the community perceives it, how it needs to be run, it had its ups and downs depending on who's been elected, who the councilors of the day are and where their agenda is. We've probably got two out of the seven councilors at the moment that would close it if they could, they just see it as something that is not for the council, the rest of them are supportive" [SPS1].

There was evidence that this lack of consistency had been further exacerbated by fluctuating perspectives as to which arm of council most appropriately reflects the settlement's operational objectives. Successive control of either the business or cultural arms of council, the objectives of which were clearly different, reflects the inconstant nature of the relationship. "This creates all manner of problems particularly as regards the funding model. In an overarching sense the council has responsibility for the use of public money but museums and galleries seem to be a legitimate part of

spending” [SPC2]. Given earlier contentions that designation as a cultural asset seemed to more conducive to adequate funding, transfer of responsibility to the cultural arm of council appeared to generate some optimism amongst operational staff, at least in the short term. It was clear, however, that any positivity resulting from such moves was quickly dissipated by persistent vacillation on the part of council in response to a range of pressures and priorities.

As [SPS1] observes. “Recognition of the settlement as a cultural and community asset gives us reason for some optimism regarding the future of the site. In the back of your mind, however, is the constant threat that council priorities will change and that once again the site will be placed on a more commercial footing”.

Although individuals involved at a council or regulatory level acknowledged the negative impacts resulting from of a lack of consistent direction, they cited a number of external and internal pressures which it was contended compel council to regularly shift emphasis between a perceived responsibility to safeguard a community resource, and the need for the site to be financially self sustaining. Constituent pressure in particular was seen to be a key factor in shaping council attitudes in this regard.

As an individual involved over time in both an internal and external capacity, SPO1 observed “Although there is clearly a shifting emphasis between profit and conservation priorities, you must remember that council is beholding to a wider range of stakeholders who can and do exercise considerable power over policy. Like any government the adoption of populist policies directed at staying in power are more often than not the results of voter pressure”.

Community linkages

Such an observation has particular resonance in considering the extent to which either of the sites maintains consistent linkages with host communities. As discussed earlier, there appeared to be an identifiable link between successful community engagement on a number of levels, and successful operation. Whether such linkage took the form of direct involvement by way of volunteer participation, or was simply a process of generating positive community attitudes through the dissemination of positive ‘messages’, linking with community aspirations and attitudes was identified by many respondents as a critical success factor.

As one respondent stated “You’ve got to continue to focus on the local community, if we stop doing that for six months we can lose all that good work we’ve done, whatever you do you’ve got to keep in peoples faces all the time, get on the radio, in the paper. We push so hard in this community to try and make sure that there’s community feeling out there that we’re worth supporting”.

Although it was conceded there are inevitable detractors, Sovereign Hill appeared to enjoy strong community support which has been consistent over time. Although, given its almost complete independence from local government, the attraction is not subject to indirect constituent pressure per se, the fact that it appears to enjoy vital ‘concessions’ from council does not diminish the importance of positive community linkages.

There was also a view that maintaining consistent links with local people contributed to a significant market sector, namely visitors introduced to the site by resident relatives or friends. “Although local people don’t really represent a significant source of visitors themselves they are proud to show it off to visiting friends or relatives, so they tend to be of real value” [SHS4]. “Even though they might not say it openly there’s a real sense of community pride in Sovereign Hill’s success”. [SHC2].

Community and volunteer linkages

In a more direct sense consistent linkage with community appeared to be significantly enhanced by volunteer participation. Not only did this appear to reinforce a sense of community ownership but assisted in the dissemination of positive images of the attraction. It was clear that issues of consistency assumed even greater importance with volunteer programmes than was the case with community engagement generally. As a critical element of organisational culture, recruiting and retaining volunteers was seen to be a critical success factor.

Aggregation of the data pointed to a significant difference between the two sites in this respect. Chapter 5 alluded to the pivotal role played by volunteers at Sovereign Hill in enhancing the visitor experience. The sites origins as a community based project appeared to have fostered an enduring and consistent link with community as a source of volunteers. “We’ve got about 300 volunteers for the outdoor museum and another 30 or 40 out at the Gold Museum at any particular time. The majority of them are

drawn from local people, which is not bad for a local population of about 80,000” [SHS3]. Almost universally this was recognised as being central to the site’s success.

The importance of volunteers was continuously emphasised. “Our volunteers bring the attraction alive, create the experience and provide a level of interaction that blends learning with fun” [SHS2] “People are no longer interested in a static collection of buildings or artefacts, they want to learn and involve themselves in the experience and volunteers provide the vital bridge” [SHS3].

Although not quite as successful at maintaining a consistent volunteer force, Swan Hill has nonetheless always recognised the importance of this form of community linkage. Despite having its origins as a community based project attempts at any consistent or enduring volunteer programme appear to have been thwarted by the inconstant nature of management and control mentioned in earlier sections. There was evidence of periodic attempts to revive volunteer participation with various individuals charged with this task. “The challenge I was given was to get volunteers which they said they couldn’t get, and to get the community on side with the museum which it definitely wasn’t” [SPS3].

Although there was evidence of some recent successes in this respect it was generally felt that the absence of any enduring or cohesive program of recruitment was problematic. Alluding to recent successes, SPS3 observed “I’m pretty happy about that achievement at this stage, I’ve actually got more volunteers than I can handle. I’ve had no trouble getting them and in turn that’s a sign that the community is much more on side. I would think we have about 55 that I regard as active, there are a range of activities. We’ve taken over a lot of the activation on the site; again it’s been done slowly, its one of the obstacles I’ve struck”.

Despite what was clearly varying degrees of success in engaging with community in this way it was noteworthy that respondents at both sites held strong and consistent linkages with community as a critical success factor. Whether the focus was on nothing more than the generation of positive public relations, or was participatory in nature, remaining cognisant of community attitudes and aspirations and responding to them was considered a paramount objective. “Without community support, in whatever form, the operation of this type of attraction loses meaning. After all the elements of the culture and history being depicted are the culture and history of the locals so they

have a strong attachment to it” [SPS2]. “If you can generate a sense of community ownership it can reduce pressures in lots of areas” [SPS1].

Industry Linkages

It was also recognised that establishing and maintaining linkages with local industry in general, and the tourism industry in particular was directly instrumental in successful operation. Earlier discussion pointed to the value which Sovereign Hill derives from its formal linkage with Tourism Victoria in terms of market intelligence and strategic planning. The importance of such linkages also appeared to extend to the local tourism industry, most notably tour operators and accommodation providers with whom the maintenance of strong linkages directly influenced ‘the bottom line’.

Although there was evidence of small tensions, mainly over reciprocity of benefits, both sites recognised that positive linkages with local accommodation providers potentially, if not actually, had the potential to increase visitor numbers. “Convincing the motel and hotel operators that the existence of the attraction encourages extended visitation has not always been easy. They tend to think that it’s the reverse proposition” [SHS4]. “There’s a feeling in some circles that they should be rewarded for referrals by way of commission” [SHO3]. The situation differed slightly between the two sites since, anecdotally at least, distance appeared to play a part in purposeful versus incidental visitation.

There was evidence too that the maintenance of strong linkages with local and regional tourism bodies was directly instrumental in attracting visitors. Visitor Centres in particular appeared to play a key role in this respect. Given that these centres are characteristically staffed by volunteers with a vested interest in local tourism there appeared to be flow on effects from overall industry perceptions of the attraction.

“We should remember that not all visitors are aware of the existence of the attraction so the willingness or inclination of visitor centre staff to recommend a visit can often make the difference between them coming or not” [SPS3]. This appeared to be particularly so in the case of Swan Hill where transit rather the purposeful visitation to the city appeared to predominate. “Given the distance from Melbourne I think there are very few visitors who come with the express intention of visiting the settlement. It’s more inclined to be visitors in transit from say Adelaide to Melbourne who will make an overnight stop”. [SPS3]

Although this seemed to contrast with Sovereign Hill where proximity to Melbourne fostered deliberate visitation, the fact that Ballarat has a number of other attractions appeared not to diminish the degree of reliance on visitor centres to direct visitors by way of recommendation. “We can’t simply rest on our laurels and assume that visitors will be naturally drawn to Sovereign Hill. Keeping ourselves at the forefront in terms of linkages with gatekeepers such as visitor centres and tour operators has been critical to our success” [SHC1].

Thus strong and consistent linkages emerged as yet another critical success factor. Such an observation has resonance with the literature given the fact that adopting an extrospective view was observed as being central to achieving environmental fit.

6.5.3 Consistency and preparedness for change

In the preceding section the importance of maintaining consistent linkages with a number of key external stakeholders was emphasised. Such linkages, it was observed, have important implications at almost every level of operation. The discussion also pointed to the often volatile nature of these relationships due to a number of extraneous forces.

An ability to read changes in government, community, and industry attitudes appeared to be largely vested in a sense of preparedness such that shifts could be identified and addressed in a proactive rather than remedial way. Given suggestions in the literature that the chances of achieving ‘environmental fit’ are significantly enhanced by pre-emptive action, the extent to which the respective attractions were prepared for change appeared to be central to successful operation.

Earlier discussion with respect to the market intelligence afforded by Sovereign Hill’s strategic alliance with Tourism Victoria is demonstrative of the point. “Our success in capitalising on an emerging market from the People’s Republic of China is just one of the advantages of our alliance. Having access to the sort of information they’ve got [Tourism Victoria] to inform our business planning is just absolutely critical and also for making sure that we are in touch with government policy” [SHS1].

A dichotomous situation was evident at Swan Hill where resource constraints, a lack of any consistent form or structure, and an absence of operational autonomy have

severely hampered the articulation of any clear strategic vision or the formation of critical alliances. “Sadly when major changes do occur we simply don’t have the resources to cope with them but more importantly we simply don’t see them coming” [SPS2].

Some attempts have been made in more recent times to forge strategic alliances although these appeared to be more directed at enhancing curatorial integrity rather than market intelligence per se. ‘We have this relationship with Museum Victoria that we’ve created, we’re a bit of a pilot programme...so we get the advantage of having some of their experts. We’ve actually had their head of marketing up here to go through things with us” [SPS1].

Although such initiatives were viewed as being promising, the criticism was made that these may have been more about individual agenda than strategic thinking. “It’s a sad fact that the place is constantly in defensive mode. Successive managers have attempted to establish the settlement’s credentials as a museum but not with much success” [SPO1]. In short, it appeared that adopting such a parochial view [although in some ways intuitively sensible] failed to recognise the importance of broader preparedness for change. Later discussion will identify parochialism as a significant impediment to success operation.

A clear dichotomy was discerned between the two sites in terms of their respective ability to maintain a consistent culture of preparation for change. Although to varying degrees both sites appeared cognisant of the need to think and act strategically, resource limitations and ideological divisions appeared to have seriously hampered the ability to respond to change in a timely and effective manner. On the basis of the researcher’s observation, and of the data, the realisation of strategies appeared to be inextricably linked to levels of preparedness. Addressing a question with respect the timing of strategic action one respondent observed, “to me the whole process of launching a strategy supposes that you are prepared in the sense that that you have the resource capacity to back up your actions” [SHC2]; and another “even if it sneaks up on you and you need to respond in a tactical way, if you’re not prepared then you’re in trouble” [SHC3].

From an internal perspective, preparedness also appeared to take on connotations of anticipating changing recreational preferences and adding features and infrastructure which will meet the needs of future, as distinct from current, visitors. The obvious time

lag involved in devising and assembling new features or in providing additional infrastructure suggests that preparing for future trends in consumer tastes and preferences is a key element of successful operation. “It’s no good waiting until the attraction becomes stale and lacking in appeal. You’ve got to constantly be preparing for the next wave; thinking ahead to what visitors in ten years will expect and want” [SHO3]. Given the obvious importance of repeat visitation, continuing to draw people appears to be strongly vested in research and innovation.

Although it was argued that the core theme of heritage attractions arguably holds an intrinsic appeal which subsumes simple gimmickry, the increasing sophistication of tourists and their changing expectations with respect to presentation and interpretation suggests that preparing for future generations of technology savvy visitors may be a priority. “We all know that static attractions, no matter how historically significant will not hold their appeal over time. Preparing for the future may not be a matter of simple adding additional features but rather enhancing the quality of the experience”[SHS4].

Preparedness can thus be conceptualised as a combination of reading demand and shaping supply accordingly. The suggestion that such a process is enhanced by strong linkages repeats the theme which emerged in the previous section.

6.5.4 Consistency of Strategic Orientation

Inextricably linked to the notion of being prepared for change is the maintenance of a clear and abiding strategic vision or orientation. Perhaps more importantly, degrees of readiness are in turn underpinned by forward thinking which is the essence of strategy. The power to anticipate and plan strategically rather than to simply react emerged as a critical success factor. More particularly there was evidence that the maintenance of a consistent approach to strategy formulation was a significant factor in the process of adaption to change.

Despite widely differing sets of circumstances across the two case studies, there was significant agreement on this point. Even in circumstances where strategic orientation was hampered by a range of constraints respondents recognised the value of an abiding sense of direction. “I think you’ve got to set yourself a clear set of directions and stick to them. Unfortunately we don’t have that luxury, but it doesn’t mean that we don’t recognise how important this is” [SPS1].

Given that an implicit focus of this work is the value of a proactive orientation the findings in this section have a particular resonance. It is here too that the difference between the two sites comes into strongest focus. In chapter 5 similarities were drawn between the two sites with respect to their origins, with both having their foundations as community based projects.

Although in both cases a sense of community ownership appears to have prevailed in the fledgling stages of development Swan Hill's decision to cede control to local government because "it [had] got too big for the community by themselves to operate as volunteers" [SPC1], was reflected on by a number of respondents as a defining decision that would have long term repercussions. "In some ways the settlement would have best stayed in community hands. Viewing local government control as a solution to the settlement's problems has turned out to be quite the opposite". [SPS2]

The legacy of this decision in terms of fluctuating priorities has already been discussed in detail, but in essence any consistent approach to strategic orientation or direction appears to be thwarted by the absence of a clear vision of the role and purpose of the settlement. "I doubt we'll ever have a clear vision of where we are going until we ourselves can agree on just exactly what the site is; a theme park or a genuine museum" [SPS2].

Such consensus appeared, however, to be elusive with a seemingly intractable division between council, for whom profit or cost recovery is an almost intuitive priority; and individuals directly involved in the operation of the site who appear to hold curatorial integrity as a dominant objective. "I think it's extremely difficult to plan confidently for the future when you don't even know what the situation is going to be tomorrow. Unfortunately that encourages a climate of simply going with the flow" [SPS1]. "Some of us have a vision of where the settlement should go and the strategies necessary to realise those goals but the realities of the situation mean that they are often little more than pipe dreams" [SPS3]

Conversely, Sovereign Hill appeared to have maintained a consistent approach to both its operational independence and strategic direction. "We haven't changed our direction in the last 35 years. We always stuck to our philosophy and our direction, I think that's been strength because it's been continual um, reinforcing and building of the same foundation [SHS2].

Whilst it is conceded that there are undoubtedly other factors that have contributed to Sovereign Hill's success, the evidence is simply too compelling to discard autonomy as a critical success factor. "our destiny is in our own hands, we're not encumbered by any of those sorts of other bodies making those decisions, we make those decisions ourselves [SHS3].

Freedom from outside control or interference, although obviously a defining factor, appeared not to be the only influence on consistent strategy. The research revealed that the existence or otherwise of internal cohesion had a strong influence on strategic orientation in that consensus and collective subscription to a vision were seen as being central to consistent strategies.

The divisive nature of the situation outlined at Swan Hill appears to be not only the result of an adversarial relationship between council and site management but has also resulted in internal division as to the best directions. "A survival mentality means that everyone has a different agenda so it's hard to get agreement on positive directions" [SPS2]. "It seems pointless having a vision when in your heart you know that it will never be realised" [SPO1]. The absence of internal cohesion appears to have been further compounded by sporadic management structure and successive managers with widely differing agenda. "Over time a succession of managers have come and gone. Just when we seem to settle down to one set of directions it all changes again" [SPS3].

The critical link between structural stability, internal cohesion, and the maintenance of consistent strategies was also evident in the case of Sovereign Hill. The continuing tenure of original board members, effective processes of communication, and an environment which fosters collective decision making, appears to have resulted in an effective and cohesive structure. This in turn appears to have contributed to a shared vision. "We still have three of the originals on our board. And they are remarkable too. Sometimes we see there can be people who tend to hold very dearly to what happened in the past, but they have moved on with us and they have been really very effective touch stones who ask good questions, they don't make assertions or put positions, they ask questions, and that's a very productive process" [SHS3].

Such consultation also extends to operational staff who are encouraged to advance ideas as a means of informing strategy. "We encourage staff at all levels to contribute to strategy formulation. Not only does this give them a sense of ownership over where

we are heading, but it means that our strategies are almost universally accepted. In my view it simply wouldn't be possible to have clear and consistent strategies without this sort of spirit" [SHS4].

The existence of clear, and perhaps more importantly, enduring strategies, thus emerges as yet another critical success factor. There also appears to be a strong causal link between consistent strategic direction and the structures and processes of the respective case studies. Whether a lack of consistent strategies results from ineffective structures and processes as has been suggested here or the reverse proposition, it seems clear that strong and consistent strategies are a key factor in the success of attractions of this type.

6.5.5 Consistency of priorities

Just as clear and consistent strategy appears to underpin successful operation, there was also evidence that a clear and unambiguous sense of identity was a vital factor. In the context of heritage attractions generally, and the two case study sites in particular the ability to reconcile a necessary drive for profit with curatorial priorities emerges as a significant success factor. It was apparent, however, that such reconciliation may be problematic with some respondents holding that oscillation between these two equally important priorities was clearly not conducive to a consistent set of priorities. Reflecting on a history of more or less constant change one respondent was well placed to see the negative impacts at first hand. "It's really so disruptive. Strategies need a long term commitment but if your objectives change every five minutes, there's absolutely no chance of carrying anything to fruition" [SPS2].

Although a number of respondents submitted that these were certainly not the only operational priorities there was a general view that they underpin a wide range of other imperatives and are, thereby, a defining factor in successful operation. "Obviously if your operation is mainly profit driven then by implication your day to day priorities are different than if you are dedicated to the integrity and conservation of historical artifacts. If you can achieve a balance between the two you've got it made" [SHC2].

Such observations have strong foundations in this research revealing, as they do, the apparent ability of one case study to reconcile these priorities and the comparative case where such attempts seem not only beyond achievement, but are the basis of an intractable ideological divide. It could, of course, be argued that there is a fundamental

difference between the two case studies in that Sovereign Hill is almost totally contrived affording greater flexibility in the presentation and operation of a commercial entity, whilst Swan Hill settlement is a repository for historical buildings and artifacts demanding greater curatorial focus. Although there was evidence of periodical concessions to this priority, the lack of consistency was palpable.

In the process of examining the two sites, however, it was clearly evident that Sovereign Hill, although based on a reconstructed reality, devoted considerable energy to ensuring curatorial integrity, with a strong emphasis on scholarship and the faithful presentation of history. As such the two sites were deemed to share common characteristics with respect to curatorial priorities albeit in a slightly different way and to a different extent.

Paradoxically there were similarities too between the two case studies with respect to profit orientation although, as has been discussed earlier, such a priority appeared to periodically subsume curatorial focus in the case of Swan Hill. Perhaps more importantly, the apparent inconsistencies inherent in Swan Hill's prioritisation process outlined earlier appeared symptomatic of the problematic nature of the reconciliation process. "Were we able to generate adequate concurrent funding it might take the pressure off and allow us to focus on our primary objective, attending to our collection" [SPS1]. "Achieving both just seems beyond our reach" [SPO1].

The ideological divide between council which, as a result of constituent pressure, appeared to have adopted a somewhat intuitive focus on self sufficiency, and site management for whom the strength and integrity of the 'collection' remains a pre-eminent objective, appears to have resulted in a more or less constant process of shifting emphasis. Such an observation serves as a salient reminder of the nexus between effective strategy and an organisation's ability to respond to change and achieve environmental fit, which formed the basis of earlier discussion.

By almost direct comparison Sovereign Hill appear to hold both curatorial and financial priorities of equal if not interdependent importance. Perhaps more importantly there is evidence that such a focus has been a consistent part of the attraction's strategic direction over time. "The board felt that the development of the museum and tourism had to go hand in hand but in a much more sophisticated way I suppose, it's not the right word but, there was so much more risk in the tourism development side" [SHS3].

Reflecting on the early stages of development at Sovereign Hill, one respondent observed, “It often took about 2 or 3 years to get a good museum, exhibit, project, orientation centre or whatever up. It’s surprising just how long the gestation period is. There’s no way you’re going to do that unless you can really get the commercial stuff running a bit more productively” [SHC2].

Although a majority of respondents across both case studies recognised the importance of achieving such an objective, the presence or otherwise of major constraints, most notably operational autonomy seemed to be the defining factor. “You can be as dedicated to creating a quality experience as you like; unless the attraction is properly funded and you have the freedom to make strategic decisions, it just isn’t going to happen” [SPO1]. “I see it as a sort of catch 22 situation. The ability to take a strategic approach is vital to mounting and maintaining a quality experience. If you can do that greater financial viability obviously follows to some degree” [SPS1].

A concerted and consistent reconciliation of these priorities thus emerged as perhaps the most important success factor in attractions of this type. Regardless of whether the attraction was contrived or not the fact that curatorial integrity appeared to underpin visitor appeal and thereby financial viability points to the importance of successfully aligning these objectives.

6.5.6 Consistency of qualities

Considerations of curatorial integrity point to the last form of consistency emerging from the research, that of specific qualities. Although there is clearly a multitude of qualities that could be deemed to typify the successful organisation, in the context of this research, quality was conceptualised as being related almost entirely to the visitor experience. The particularities of heritage attractions in terms of the intrinsic value of what is being presented suggest that quality of presentation and interpretation are critical to successful operation. The researcher’s own journal entry reflects on the challenges associated with presenting aspects of history in an entertaining way, in that it becomes necessary to mesh learning and entertainment into a collective experience.

Unlike previous lines of comparison in this respect, the two case studies displayed similar characteristics with both seemingly committed to presenting aspects of their respective attraction in as faithful and engaging a form as possible. Echoing previous discussion however, degrees of operational autonomy and issues of funding priorities

were seen to impact on real commitment to these ideals and the extent to which they were being realised.

Sovereign Hill's commitment was strongly evident. "We've always taken the time to go that little bit further from the research to the presentation and develop the exhibitions with a real quality to them [SHS1]. "We haven't changed our direction in the last 35 years. We always stuck to our philosophy and our direction; I think that's been strength because it's been continual, reinforcing and building of the same foundation" [SHS2].

Although, as mentioned earlier, Swan Hill's commitment appeared to have wavered at times, mainly due to external pressures, there was evidence of a seemingly indomitable commitment to the core values of the attraction. "Despite ups and downs I think everyone involved in the day to day operations of the site is genuinely committed to delivering a quality experience. Any departure from that has generally been caused by the actions of outsiders" [SPS3].

On a more tangible level, a consistent approach to quality also appeared to have connotations of adherence to a dominant theme. In describing the two case studies in chapter 5 it was observed that, unlike Sovereign Hill, where a deliberate focus on just ten years of history seemed to foster greater depth of interpretation, Swan Hill's somewhat disparate collection may have resulted in a diminution of quality. Such an observation is, however, purely subjective. Anecdotally, many of the visitors appeared to enjoy the variety of exhibits despite the significant time span which the collection represents. In defense of this thematic diffusion a key respondent submitted "I think you've got take a pretty broad view about what's important in depicting the history of an area. We're not looking at just one aspect but the whole kind of tapestry of how life has unfolded" [SPS2].

Sovereign Hill appeared to take a more focused view

When we are dealing with history, we are interpreting history but at the same time we feel very responsible for the way you portray history because people will believe you possibly that that is a fact so the way we portray our ten years, we do a lot of research by professional people, professional researchers, historians, curators and we try to interpret as much as we can as accurately but none the less I think we would be fools and kidding ourselves if we can recreate history the way it was, it will never be the way it was [SHS2].

Similarly, an enduring commitment to enhancing the visitor experience through greater degrees of interpretation and engagement was also seen to be integral to quality and thereby success. “We want visitors to be part of it, we like our visitors to really step into it, so to step into it they touch and feel. The key thing is to be true to the core business, you’re sticking to history [and] you can tell that history many, many ways. It could be theatre, it could be lots of ways but we chosen as a subject, to do it right” [SHS2].

A consistent approach to ensuring that presentation and interpretation are of the highest possible quality translates not only into overall appeal but appears to impact on repeat visitation. Opening discussion in chapter 2 with respect to the social changes that impact on attractions, pointed to the emergence of a new generation of tourists for whom the experiential rather than the static elements of an attraction are a priority.

In an environment characterised by high levels of competition perceptions of value for money also play an increasingly important role in shaping consumer preferences. “People want an experience but they also want to feel that they have received value for their admission. Delivering a quality experience sends them away happy and creates positive word of mouth” [SHS2].

In summary, there was clear evidence that a consistent commitment to quality, particularly as it relates to the visitor was a critical factor in success. The fact that this view was shared by two attractions with varying degrees of success is of particular note.

Issues of Capability

Since fundamentally the recognition that any consistent approach to the various aspects of management supposes the requisite resources to support their implementation, draws the focus of the chapter to considerations of what was collectively termed capability. Adopting a more eclectic view of the term, earlier discussion suggested that capability encompasses not only physical resources, but the ability, capacity, and power to exercise effective managerial functions. By necessity the ongoing discussion involves some degree of repetition, since issues of consistency and capability are inextricably linked, yet this simply serves to reinforce the strength of the themes emerging from the data.

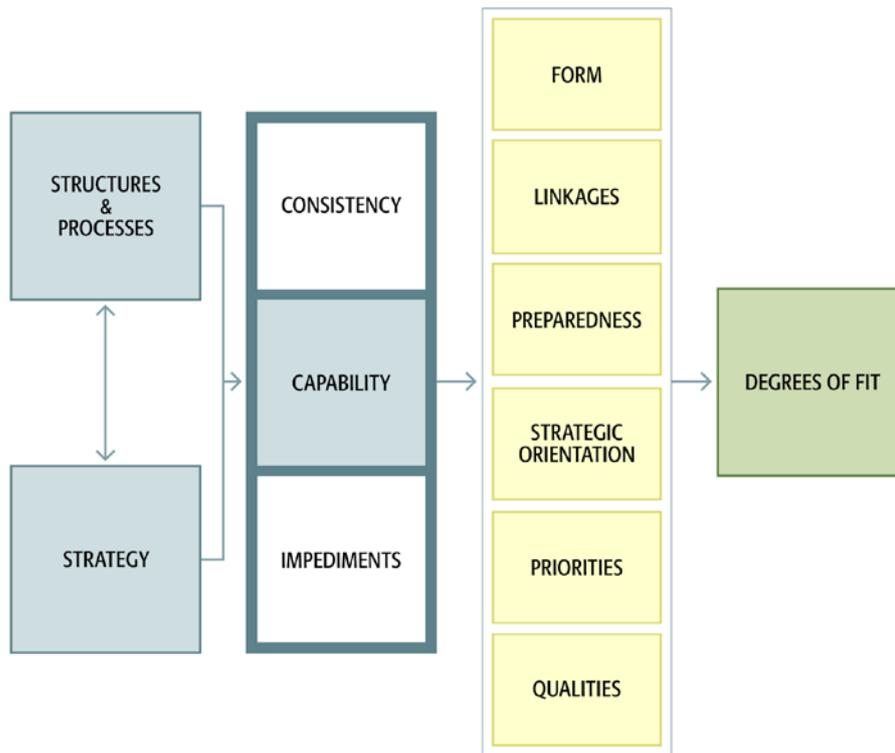


Fig. 6.7 Dimensions of Capability in Organisational Competency

6.5.7 Capability of form

Earlier discussion focused on consistency of form as a central element of successful operation. In particular, it was emphasised that an organisational culture that enshrines introspection and a clear sense of organisational norms and values is more conducive to successful operation. In short, it was seen not to be so much about structure per se but rather a set of deeper seated values which made the organisation unique. Deeper analysis of the data also suggests that the extent to which organisational form or structure fosters capability building is integral to successful operation. To some extent the notions of consistency and capability are inextricably linked in that enduring form was seen to be directly conducive to skill retention and thereby to operational capacity.

This again highlights the distinct difference between the two sites under examination, with a lack of consistent structure being seen to directly impede the retention of skill or capability in one instance and the antithetical proposition being clearly evident in the other. A comparison of respondent observations perhaps best illustrates the point. "Much of what we have achieved here has been due due to a conscious accrual of knowledge, of capitalising on our experiences and learning from our mistakes. The fact that we have been blessed with a reasonably stable structure has made this possible"

[SHC3]. And by contrast; “Any chance of building expertise has been largely dissipated by an almost complete lack of constancy on the part of decision makers. Just as you think things are settling down and there is some sense of team cohesion the priorities shift, people become disenchanted and they walk away. It’s hardly conducive to capacity building” [SPS2].

It could be argued that the ability to articulate and operationalise effective strategies is directly related to the accrued capabilities of the organisation and its management and staff. Whether such capabilities are vested in individual or collective expertise or are based on experience gained over time, the extent to which individual organisations can draw on stocks of accrued expertise is clearly a critical success factor. Further, it was felt that, if anything, the very specialised nature of these attractions not only placed additional importance on expertise in an overall sense but on the breadth of the expertise required. As one respondent observed, “Hopefully it all looks pretty seamless, but behind the scenes there’s a vast range of skills needed to make it all happen. Making sure that these things are at your fingertips doesn’t happen accidentally” [SHS3].

Earlier discussion with respect to the reconciliation of priorities is supportive of such a notion. In relating the operational circumstances at Sovereign Hill [ch.5] the equal emphasis placed on curatorial and commercial capacity through the management structure may in part explain their apparent capacity to reconcile the two. As such, capability of form is conceptualised as the accrual, retention, and breadth of expertise

6.5.8 Capability of Linkages

Just as the accrual of organisational expertise appeared central to operational and strategic competence, the establishment and maintenance of links with a wide spectrum of stakeholders emerged as a key success factor. Earlier sections of this chapter emphasised the impact of effective government linkages in particular but the ability to foster and maintain linkages with volunteers and host community at large were also advanced as integral to successful operation.

Capability in this context was also seen to have connotations of stakeholder perceptions of capability as opposed to capability in an actual or tangible sense. Earlier discussion with respect to the positive support flowing from government based on perceptions of success, as was the case at Sovereign Hill is illustrative of the point.

As such the capability to maintain positive linkages was seen as being vested not only in the ability and inclination to develop such connections, but also in the way the organisation is viewed by those not directly involved in its operation. Although the research was, by intent, not directed at residents, informal discussions revealed that people's perceptions of the attraction were almost entirely based on the dissemination of positive images.

Since such perceptions are, in turn shaped by more overt indications of success suggests that being capable of building and maintaining strong linkages is much more than simply internal capacity to communicate effectively. In all probability the ability or capability to establish and maintain vital linkages is based on successful operation in all of its permeations. "I think it's all about the capacity or capability to maintain effective linkages. It's one thing establishing them but on the ongoing ability to maintain and grow them is the name of the game" [SHS4].

As arguably the most important external stakeholder, government perceptions were identified as being directly instrumental in successful operations from several perspectives. A significant body of discussion in earlier sections of this work pointed to key differences between the two sites in terms of their ability to attract major developmental grants. That, in the case of Sovereign Hill such grants have facilitated an incremental process of major innovation that has been an integral part of their success demonstrates the importance of such linkages.

"The government has been extraordinarily generous to us with capital because they recognise that we use capital well and that the investment that they make here they get a return on principally through tourism and economic development in the region" [SHS3]. "[The] linkage with Tourism Victoria and the memorandum of understanding has really been a crucial part of our sense of where we could be exposed" [SHS3].

If the decision to aggregate the data derived from the interview process requires any further justification, the identifiable differences between the two sites in this respect could not be more pronounced. Earlier sections of the work alluded to a general reluctance on the part of government at a state level to support the Swan Hill settlement based on an apparent lack of support at a local government level. "It's simple buck passing. The state government justified its reluctance to support by way of

grants for capital works on the premise that if the settlement didn't enjoy the support of local government then there must be significant risks involved" [SPC1].

Interview data pointed to a widely held view that the ability to innovate and keep the attraction 'fresh' was a critical success factor even in the context of heritage attractions where the 'core' of the attraction was not the infrastructure per se. Clearly the capability to maintain positive linkages with government was of vital importance given funding considerations alone, but as stated earlier this appeared to be as much a matter of perceptions as intent. A unilinear perspective might see success resulting from such linkages when in fact it may also be the reverse proposition.

Equally problematic, yet quite different in nature was the ability to maintain positive linkages with the wider community and, at a more specific level, with individuals who potentially or actually have some involvement in the running of the site. Analysis of the interview data suggested that again this was as much about external perceptions of the attraction as organisational acumen. In chapter 5 the issue of constituent pressure arising from perceptions of the attraction as a drain on public money was explored. As one respondent observed "The extent to which local government feel compelled to put the site on a commercial footing is directly related to community attitudes. If community feels that it's a drain on public money then they'll pressure council to address the problem" [SPC1]. "If the attraction is perceived to be on a firm footing it seems to automatically engender a sense of ownership and pride" [SHS3].

Given earlier observations of the pressures that beset Swan Hill resulting from such issues, positive community perceptions emerged as a significant success factor. In addition, it further emphasises the interrelated issues of operational independence and funding reliance which were at the forefront of opening discussion.

At a more direct level there was evidence that 'capability' on the part of either attraction to foster positive linkages with individual members of community disposed towards participating in the running of the site, also made a measurable contribution to successful operation. Anecdotally this was not simply a matter of substitute labour resources, but the value such a process holds in engendering positive attitudes. As with many other factors outlined here the two sites demonstrated varying degrees of success in this regard.

Quite apart from the contribution our volunteers make in terms of fulfilling vital roles, they spread the word...they take the message out to community and talk about their involvement with pride. They are, in a way, ambassadors for the attraction which no amount of marketing money could achieve" [SHO3]. "It's not about the size of the volunteer workforce but the fact that these people arouse curiosity amongst the larger community. It creates the perception that this is a worthwhile community asset. If people are willing to give up their time, perhaps the community should be more supportive [SPS3].

Perhaps more importantly there was strong supporting evidence that the nucleus of community support vested in a volunteer programme had the potential to dissipate constituent pressure where there was reliance on external funding. " It may be a voice in the wilderness but if you have even a small community group prepared to talk up the value of the site it can go a long way towards turning the tide" [SPS2].

Rather than being unidimensional, capability was conceptualised as not only a set of internal strengths and foci, but also the collective organisational attributes which communicate success and are instrumental in creating positive perceptions of the organisation. From either perspective the implications were seen as being far reaching impacting on a whole range of operational challenges, most notably that of capital funding.

6.5.9 Capability and preparedness for change

In chapter 2 the myriad changes confronting attractions were discussed at length. These included changes to the political, economic, social, and technological environments which to a greater or lesser degree encourage or compel management to respond. Given that change response is a central element of this work the research sought to elicit quite specific views on the critical elements of an adaptive process.

Although a number of factors were identified, including the existence or otherwise of necessary resources; management experiences and biases; and the existence or otherwise of strategic vision; the dominant view was that successful change management, and thereby successful operation was largely vested in levels of preparedness. A widely held view that effective response to change "could only be achieved if the necessary mechanisms [are] were in place" [SHC3] pointed to a need for contingency planning based on solid market intelligence and trend analysis.

Again, the aggregation of data across the two case study sites made it possible to draw direct comparisons between reactive management styles on the one hand, and a strategic proactive approach on the other. More particularly, it became possible to conceptualise a direct link between preparation for change and the ability to respond effectively. Respondent views appeared to centre on three principle areas, namely, the extent to which the attraction was able to anticipate market shifts; the strategic accumulation of resources necessary to facilitate change; and the value of incremental change as a means of keeping pace.

Anticipating and detecting market shifts, in particular, was held to be critical given what was viewed as a volatile marketplace and high levels of competition. Given earlier observations that, in the case of Sovereign Hill this has in part been facilitated by a strategic alliance with Tourism Victoria re-enforces the value of linkages.

It's simply no good waiting until established markets evaporate and wondering why... as best you can you need to use all means at your disposal to read and analyse subtle changes in demand. In the same way identifying emerging markets and being ahead of your competitors is what it's all about. For example we saw the potential of the Chinese market long before it was generally accepted and we took key strategic decisions based on assessment of the situation [SHS4]. That this sector of the market now represents a significant proportion of our market has really vindicated these decisions [SHC3].

There was clear recognition too of the negative implications of not effectively reading the market. "The paucity of data on the origin of our visitors severely hampers our marketing efforts but the cost of conducting this kind of research is simply outside our grasp" [SPS1]. "I suspect that we've missed out on numerous opportunities simply because we don't understand what's happening out there" [SPS2].

Discussion earlier in this section pointed to a perceived link between knowledge accrual and retention, and successful operation. A similar theme emerged with questions relating to preparedness in that there appeared to be broad consensus of a link between knowledge as a resource and the organisations ability to adapt to change. "Every time we've been confronted with major change we've been able to draw on the experiences and knowledge of staff many of whom have been here for a long time" [SHC3]. Such a contention is supported by the negative perspective. "In

periods of major change you instinctively try to draw on lessons learnt from similar circumstances in the past. When you look around and discover that none of the staff have been involved for more than a few years, you don't have that opportunity" [SPS2].

Knowledge was not however, the only resource that appeared to impact on the respective case site's state of preparedness. The availability or otherwise of more tangible resources, particularly funds for capital development, was seen to directly impede readiness for change. "Even if we could anticipate opportunities, the fact that there simply aren't the funds to implement projects is frustrating. You've really got to be forward thinking and be prepared to risk capital on the basis of best judgment" [SPS1].

Conversely, where strategic planning and proper capital budgeting were the order of the day there was evidence of strong levels of preparedness for change and a demonstrated ability to capitalise on opportunities. "My involvement has been to make sure that we provision ourselves financially strongly enough to endure any shock, to rebuild our infrastructure. Our board has always been visionary by ensuring that the funds are there when required" [SHS1]. "Opportunities to capitalise on new markets or to increase your competitive advantage are often short lived. By the time you do the necessary planning and raise the required capital the opportunity may have passed you by" [SHO2].

A number of respondents also held the view that an ability and preparedness to cope with change was not entirely a matter of amassing the necessary resources to implement major capital works. It was held that small but considered incremental change also contributed to an organisation's ability to adapt by keeping pace with external forces. "It's surprising how implementing gradual change over time puts you in a much better situation when it all comes to a head. I like to think of it as a means of making yourself more resilient by gradually moving with the times" [SHC2]. "It's obviously much harder to implement sudden dramatic change than to gradually move with the times. Also it doesn't create the same financial pressures" [SHS2].

Since the concept of organisational adaption is central to the thesis of this work, the extent to which the respective case study sites had the necessary resources and orientations became an issue of critical focus. It also highlights issues of operational autonomy and funding reliance which have previously emerged as critical success factors.

6.5.10 Capability and strategic orientation

Amongst the more important issues arising from the interviews the capacity to think and act strategically was considered to be critical to success. There was some divergence of opinion as to an appropriate definition of capacity in this context, given an obvious divide between organisational and individual capacities but it was generally held that capacity could be conceptualised as the sum total of knowledge and resources necessary to foster proactive rather than reactive attitudes. Interestingly a representative body of respondents felt that capability was not only a physical but also an attitudinal concept. More importantly, there was a feeling that strategic orientation was not entirely vested in the inclinations and actions of management alone but rather tied to organisational culture. As one respondent observed, “If you’re going to realise strategies, whoever thinks them up, you’ve got to have the support of everyone in the place. In that sense the culture of the place is at the very centre of capability” [SHC2].

Discussion in chapter 2 with respect to the attributes of ideal organisational types almost universally identified proactivity and strategic direction as central to success. (Mintzberg, 1979: Miles and Snow, 1978: Porter, 1980). That this fundamental premise appears born out by much of the research discovery is of particular note.

Although respondents in both case study sites agreed that strategic orientation was a desirable attribute, the divide between inclination and capability was accentuated. Reflecting on impediments, one respondent observed, “No-one would dispute the value of thinking ahead and trying to anticipate the next stage but being truly proactive involves having some degree of optimism. Even the most optimistic outlook is quickly dampened by the realisation that it’s simply not possible because of a lack of resources” [SPS1].

There were issues too of strategic capacity being diminished by a lack of experience amongst key decision makers. This was particularly so when the locus of control was not in the hands of site management. Lamenting what were termed ill conceived strategies, one respondent declared “Making the correct strategic decisions requires an intimate knowledge of site specific issues and of the particularities of the tourism market. Unless there’s a proper consultation process decisions can unfortunately often be made by people who lack the necessary understanding” [SPS2].

The positive outcomes of un-encumbered strategic capability were equally evident. As one respondent commented “We’re really the masters of our own fate. Being able to make independent decisions and draw on the necessary resources has enabled us to keep that one step ahead; to innovate, and to keep the appeal going” [[SHS3]

It was also widely recognised that strategic capacity and orientation relied on sound and timely information. As a fundamental tenet of all decision making, access to data and market intelligence was viewed as a key determinant. Earlier discussion with respect to effective linkages pointed to the benefits accruing from collaborative arrangements with peak tourism bodies a key part of which was information sharing. The two sites varied markedly in this respect ranging from a purposive agreement on the one hand, to a declared resignation to being unable to forge such relationships.

Despite this divide the importance of this information flow on capacity for strategic orientation was broadly recognised. A previously reported response is illustrative of the point. “Because 95% of our visitors come from somewhere else than Ballarat, we [have to recognise that we are in tourism, and having access to the sort of information they’ve got [Tourism Victoria] to inform our business planning is just absolutely critical and also for making sure that we in touch with government policy” [SHS3].

Also reflecting on the value of such information a respondent at Swan Hill settlement commented “Despite the constraints of our current situation, were we to have access to the sort of information that the larger attractions have it would at least shape our strategic thinking. Even informing the most basic decision making is at least a step towards conscious thinking about where you’re heading” [SPS1]. Constraints in this context were identified as a lack of operational autonomy and deficiencies in recurrent funding both of which were identified earlier as critical success factors.

The establishment of strategic alliances appeared not, however, to be simply a matter of resolve on the part of the attraction in question. Earlier discussion with respect to a capacity or capability to establish linkages alluded to government’s propensity to engage in such arrangements being in part shaped by overall perceptions of ‘success’. The oft used adage of success breeding success was a recurring comment. “It’s almost a self fulfilling prophecy. If you’re struggling to say afloat government won’t support you; and if they don’t, you continue to wallow in problems. I can sort of see their point but some things are just worth preserving as a community asset” [SPS3].

Justifying their ongoing support of Sovereign Hill, a respondent in government explained the thinking behind incorporating the site into broader tourism strategies.

So that led us to identify what are the key destinations and attractions in Victoria that are attractors in the true sense, and Ballarat and Sovereign Hill both come out of that, if we can make Sovereign Hill continue to work effectively as an attractor, then the region benefits and Victoria will benefit. If you look around there simply aren't that many attractions of this type that are a draw card in the real sense. To me it's simple commercial sense to build on success rather than directing 'bail out' money at attractions that are struggling" [SHO2].

Finally, in discussing capacity or capability for strategic orientation, the issue of a sense of identity emerged yet again with the view that capacity and/or inclination for strategic orientation was probably more likely to prevail in an attraction with a fully developed commercial orientation than one that viewed itself as a museum and thereby a community resource. Given earlier discussion with respect to fluctuating definitional perspectives in one case study site and the apparent impact this had on strategic priorities such an observation has particular resonance.

The divide is, perhaps best illustrated by a comment from a stakeholder with long experience in the field. "If you're viewed as an attraction, as opposed to an open-air museum there's an expectation that the operation should be on a commercial footing; that it should generate recurrent funding. The quest for profit and strategically looking for business opportunities logically go hand in hand. Strategy in the context of a museum tends more to about enhancing and protecting the collection rather than looking for commercial opportunities" [SPO1].

The capability or capacity to exercise a strategic orientation was thereby clearly vested in a range of internal and external factors including the provision of resources; the experience of key decision makers; information flows as a means of informing decision making; and degrees of commercial orientation in an overall sense. These findings form an interesting conceptual link between strategy identified in the literature as the "principal alignment mechanism" [Miles and Snow 1984, p.10] by which organisations align with their environment [organisational fit], and two pre-eminent success factors, namely independence and funding reliance.

Issues of organisational identity and priorities in particular drew the attention of the researcher in that reconciling commercial orientation with curatorial priorities has already been advanced as amongst the most important benchmarks of success. The work has pointed to a clear dichotomy between the two sites in this respect.

6.5.11 Capability and priorities

Closing discussion in the previous section suggested that reconciling the seemingly divergent priorities of profit orientation and those of a curatorial nature appeared central to success in the context of this type of attraction. In considering priorities this fundamental divide represents the best example. That said, an important distinction needs to be made between strategic and operational priorities, although it was argued that clear priorities at an operational level are the 'building blocks' of overall strategic direction.

Questioned on the relationship between capability and priorities, recurring discussion pointed to a perceived link between the structure and processes of an organisation and the priorities it might assume. "It seems to me that it's kind of like a circle. You tend to prioritise on the basis of what you've got at your disposal in terms of manpower and systems; and your internal resources more or less dictate your priorities" [SHC3]. This has interesting resonance with discussion in chapter 3 insofar as the alignment between strategy structure and process was advanced as the essence of theories of strategic fit.

Earlier sections of this chapter examined the importance of consistent priorities in operational success but it is here that issues of clarity and conflict emerged as key factors shaping the ability or capacity to prioritise. Taking Swan Hill Settlement as a case in point, a clear conflict could be discerned between the priorities of external decision makers and those of operational staff. Exacerbated by what appears over time to have been ineffective lines of communication clarity of priorities has been almost continuously compromised. Similarly the fact that the respective priorities of council governors and site staff have largely been at odds with each other collective commitment to a conflicting range of priorities appear to have been distinctly problematic.

Reflecting on the history of the relationship from a detached perspective a research participant echoed the views of a number of people. "When such conflicts go on for a

long time they just become so deeply entrenched that there doesn't seem any way out. If each were to compromise a bit even if only to recognise the priorities of the other I think it would go a long way towards meeting both". In reality this appears to be far from the case with a respondent directly involved commenting, "When the priority is to simply survive on a day to day basis, it's difficult to have a clear view of the bigger picture. It's a little idealistic to have clear priorities that are constantly under threat" [SPS2]. If, indeed, there was any synergy between council and site staff on priorities it appeared to be little more than a survival mentality with each group doing what they deemed necessary to prevail. Axiomatic as such a statement may seem, in such a climate, reconciling the priorities of profitable operation and curatorial integrity seemed elusive to say the least.

To the researcher, this highlighted yet again issues of operational autonomy and independence which permeated the entire research discovery. Whilst it is conceded that the ability to form operational priorities free of external interference does not necessarily translate into clarity, there was consensus amongst a number of respondents that being intimately involved with micro-operational priorities was the foundation of good strategic thinking. "Let's face it; who's best placed to decide what should be our priorities, people with their finger on the pulse, or people who can't see past the bottom line?" [SPS2].

Some viewed such a perspective as being a little naïve commenting that "It doesn't matter how lofty your objectives and priorities are, at the end of the day if you're not able to generate enough capital to pay the wages then your objectives are little more than pipe dreams" [SPC1]. Notwithstanding, there was general consensus that clarity of priorities and the absence of conflict or ambiguities in direction certainly made a positive contribution to successful operation.

Aggregation of the data which permitted a process of contrasting the findings across the two sites supports such a contention. The data derived from Sovereign Hill presented ample evidence of a positive link between a well conceived set of priorities which were understood and embraced by all stakeholders, and operational success. There was evidence too of a clear link between micro-operational priorities and the overarching priority of profitable operation underpinned by scholarship and honesty of presentation.

Every facet of our operation is directed at the larger objective. We're conscious that what you do at even the most basic level underpins the quality of the experience. After all what we deliver to the visitor is what makes us successful or not. [SHS4] We've always had a clear collective vision our priorities. Also the fact that these have been arrived at by a process of consultation means that they are shared rather than being simply directions. People understand why these priorities are important and can see the positive outcomes [SHC3].

Despite this apparent cohesion although not explicitly stated there was some evidence however of conflicting perspectives as to strategic priorities mainly centering on a departure from the central theme of life on the Ballarat goldfields in the quite specific timeframe of 1850-60. As reported in the initial findings and reiterated in earlier sections, the acquisition by bequest of Narmbool a pastoral property in the same region, and the decision to manage this as an ecological learning centre for school children, was felt by some to represent a conflicting priority. Anecdotally this was seen as a departure from the 'core business' which could ultimately have negative impacts on the operation of Sovereign Hill. Notwithstanding there was clear and present evidence of a positive link between the capability to prioritise and successful operation

There was some evidence too, of the ability or capability to prioritise effectively being directly related to effective information systems. For example, the existence or otherwise of timely and accurate data on such things as visitor trends were viewed as being central to the process of strategic prioritisation.

"Good visitor data enables us to identify subtle shifts in consumer preferences and tastes and to make key decisions based on that information. Obviously you don't respond to every twist and turn but from time to time there will be significant trends that should and do inform direction" [SHC1].

In summary the ability, [capability] to conceptualise and operationalise a set of priorities appears vested in clarity of direction and purpose combined with an absence of conflict and contradiction. Since there was evidence that conflicting priorities appeared to result directly from a lack of operational autonomy supports earlier contentions that independence was amongst the preeminent success factors.

6.5.12 Capability & qualities

Although earlier discussion in this chapter focused on the importance of maintaining a consistent commitment to quality there appeared to be subtle but important differences between consistency and the capacity to achieve 'quality' outcomes. Although quality is an elusive concept, in the context of this research it is viewed as being vested in the quality of the visitor experience given that measures of success are arguably tied to the ability of the attraction to attract [and re-attract] visitors. In particular maintaining the cultural and historical integrity of what was being presented appeared to be the key to visitor satisfaction and thereby a quality experience. Asked to define quality in the context of heritage visitor attractions there was an almost universal view that quality although largely subjective, was vested in the extent to which the expectations of visitors were met or exceeded. "The proof of the pudding is whether they go away happy and, I guess what they tell other people. Sometimes that's difficult for us to measure. I guess you can only do your best" [SPS1]

Detailed analysis of the interviews from both sites suggested, however that quality was not considered solely dependant on the standard of the visitor interface. Rather, quality appeared to encompass most if not all management functions which logically underpin this end result. Although these functions were clearly multifarious in nature, respondent views identified three key dimensions of capability or competency which were viewed as being central to quality. These were viewed as being scope, scale, and balance of capability.

The researcher noted in particular that the dominant factor appeared to be issues of balance, given the oft repeated contention in this work that the ability to reconcile fiscal and curatorial priorities is a preeminent success factor. Although the two sites varied markedly in this respect, it was almost universally held that the ability to self generate adequate recurrent funding was the very essence of a capacity to deliver a quality product. The fact that the antithetical proposition also applies demonstrates the veracity of such an argument. Asked about solutions to the reconciliation process one participant stated "Quite frankly the answer is money. If you're better than solvent you have the money to devote to those finer points. If you're not, it's a fact of life that you'll be forced to compromise" [SHC1]

Extensive discussion in previous sections of this chapter also alluded to the negative impacts of funding reliance on external entities particularly as it relates to a resultant

necessity to compromise quality delivery. There was discussion too with respect to conflicting priorities which ran counter to achieving this vital balance. “Our ability to focus on quality delivery is underpinned by sound management which ensures that we have the necessary resources to focus on the finer points, to innovate and to deliver a quality experience. Achieving a balance between income generation and maintaining the integrity of the site is not always easy but if you can make it it’s the key to success” [SHC1].

In considering ‘sound’ management from the perspective of balance there was clear and present evidence that separate, and dedicated expertise [in fiscal and curatorial matters] operating in concert was a key to success. Pointing to the equal emphasis afforded to the two arms of its operation [SHS3] observed “The appointment of a museum director as deputy CEO recognises the equal and interdependent importance of both our operation as a museum and as a business. This brings together quite specific expertise in two very important areas”.

Contrasting such a situation with the comparative case study which was characterised by conflict rather than concert, [resulting from divergent priorities amongst the various stakeholders] and the importance of balancing capabilities became abundantly clear. The simple polarity of views between stakeholders on the one hand who view the site as a museum; and those on the other that view it as a commercial ‘theme park’ has rendered the reconciliation of the twin objectives of profit and curatorial integrity almost impossible. Perhaps more importantly any attempts at quality were likewise compromised. “The whole idea that you must have one objective or the other is to ignore the reality that the two things are interdependent. If we had a balanced emphasis and the internal capabilities to attack both objectives I’m sure the outcome would be much more positive. If nothing else we’d have the resources to focus on growing and improving” [SPS1].

It was clear to the researcher, therefore, that a balance of capabilities appeared to translate directly into quality outcomes although this was difficult to quantify in precise terms. It is conceded, however, that the assertion that quality [of operation] could best be measured by the attraction’s ability to attract and re-attract visitors is largely only supportable by analysis of quantitative data on visitor numbers and demographics. The fact that this was lacking in one case made such comparison impossible. Notwithstanding there was strong anecdotal and observational evidence that growth in both original and repeat visitation was related directly to quality of operation and that

this in turn was dependant on a balance of capabilities, particularly as they relate to reconciling the quest for profitable operation with curatorial integrity.

Considerations of capability and quality were not however simply confined to a balance of these pivotal skills. In the process of analysing the data the researcher was also able to conceptualise the capability to achieve quality of operation as also being vested in the range [scope] and the dimensions [scale] of capabilities necessary to achieve this end. Although the two case studies clearly differed in many respects there was some degree of commonality in operation mainly as it related to the complexities of presenting, with any degree of accuracy, historical themes or artifacts.

Reflecting on key differences between heritage attractions and attractions generally there was a widely held view that the range of skills necessary to present aspects of heritage was by nature extensive. More particularly the ability to combine entertainment with learning presented additional challenges. "I think heritage attractions are quite unique in that respect. The fact that it involves such attention to detail means that you need quite particular expertise in a number of areas. Also being able to present history in both an informative and interesting way is absolutely dependent on knowing all the finer points. In that respect quality is definitely dependent on a range of capabilities" [SHO1].

Although there was a surprising reluctance on the part of a number of respondents to classify this as authenticity most agreed that integrity of presentation was of paramount importance.

I tend not to talk about historical authenticity, its about being plausible, its about being credible, and that becomes the hook for what you can then communicate, and I think people understand what we've tried to do, is to make sure that what we do is under pinned by a good scholarship, so that is trusted and people can have confidence in it, and then what we interpret at the top of that is good solid information and that we go to the effort of making sure that our presentation is credible, consistent with that scholarship [SHS3].

Most respondents agreed that 'faithfulness to the theme' should be an intuitive objective given the sensitivities of what was being depicted and presented. Although there were examples of replication the importance of maintaining this integrity appeared not to be diminished.

An examination of the internal workings of both sites revealed that such scholarship was underpinned by a diverse range of capabilities. The breadth or scope of skills necessary to ensure quality of presentation was apparent in both cases. Within their respective resource capabilities both sites employed a range of skills in the maintenance, restoration, or replication of artifacts and buildings.

Whether this was achieved by means of a volunteer workforce or was the function of permanent staff the multi-faceted nature of both operations clearly required capabilities of corresponding breadth. These ranged from the skills of architects, builders, costume and carriage makers, specialised curators in such fields as machinery and historical 'technologies', and historians, upon whose scholarship the accuracy and quality of presentation clearly relied.

"I can't think of a type of attraction where specialised expertise is so important. Whether it's interpreting early photographs or plans in the process of replication; restoring machinery based on superseded technology; or depicting a particular aspect of life during the period in focus, it's really important to have people who know what they're doing" [SPS3]. Providing an example, one respondent pointed to the attention to detail devoted to just one aspect of operation. "With costumes we have a curator and we have a costume factory there is probably close to 300 people plus on the payroll. Working from photographs and drawings of the period things are religiously reproduced in the finest detail. It's a large scale operation that requires large numbers of people and attention to detail" [SHS2].

As the extent to which the respective attractions were in a position to take a truly forensic approach it was obvious to the researcher that this was simply a question of scale, or more specifically the numbers of people engaged in these various activities and amount of dedicated time expended in their pursuit. Time in particular emerged as an issue since it pointed to the divide between a paid or volunteer workforce. The apparent correlation between successful operation and the ability to support large numbers of permanent employees or attract a significant cohort of volunteers suggested that the scale of capability appears to be an important consideration in quality delivery.

Based on that premise, there was a natural expectation that the two case study sites would differ markedly in this respect. In reality, this did not appear to be the case with

the smaller of the two apparently managing to deliver a quality experience despite comparatively small numbers of employees and volunteers. Anecdotally this is a result of simple dedication to the ethic of conservation. “Even with limited resources the dedication of volunteers in particular is spectacular. You don’t work here unless you have an abiding passion about the history and culture of the place. Despite being on the defensive we all strive to make the experience for visitors a good one” [SPS3].

Purely on the basis of the researcher’s observations, however, the ability to call on significant human resources in the production and presentation process did appear to have an identifiable impact on the quality of the visitor experience measured by visitation levels. There was evidence too that the ability to call on a large multi-skilled workforce fueled innovation which again was instrumental in quality of presentation and the generation of visitation. Commenting on the importance of local knowledge one respondent pointed to the value of volunteers in this respect. “Not only could we arguably not operate without them [volunteers], they often provide interpretations of local history that give rise to new aspects of our presentation. In that way they’re not simply extra hands, they bring additional expertise to the operation” [SHS2].

Perhaps the most significant observation with respect to the scope and scale of capability, however, was the extent to which the respective case study sites were able to provide much needed interpretation and interactivity both of which are now recognised as key criteria in visitor satisfaction. Since arguably the interpretive process relates to scope of capability in terms of specialised knowledge and degrees of interactivity to the scale or number of employees ‘on the ground’ at any point in time, meeting and exceeding visitor expectations was seen to be directly related to issues of scope and scale.

In summary, a balance of capabilities combined with dimensional considerations of scope and scale were identified as yet another set of critical success factors. Such an observation should, however, be tempered by the recognition that quality may be purely relative given that the smaller of the two attractions apparently manages to deliver a quality experience despite its size. What clearly divides the two sites however is capability in terms of a balance between fiscal and curatorial acumen. The fact that this has previously been identified as amongst the more important hallmarks of success is of particular note.

Impediments to effective management

The final element of the evaluative framework concerns the key impediments to the attainment to achieving consistency of approach and to building the capacity and capability necessary to successfully implement strategies and to support these with appropriate structures and processes. Although some of the previous discussion has alluded to some of the key issues, these are revisited in the interests of bringing the discussion to a focused conclusion. Although the researcher acknowledges that there are a myriad of impediments not mentioned here, the quite particular focus of the research has elicited what respondents viewed as the major operational constraints. For example, it would be easy to conclude that the relative success of the respective case studies could be simply attributed to location, yet the research reveals a set of more complex issues which may simply exacerbate remoteness from source markets. Impediments assume particular importance in the conceptual mix since they represent what emerges as the defining factor in successful operation.

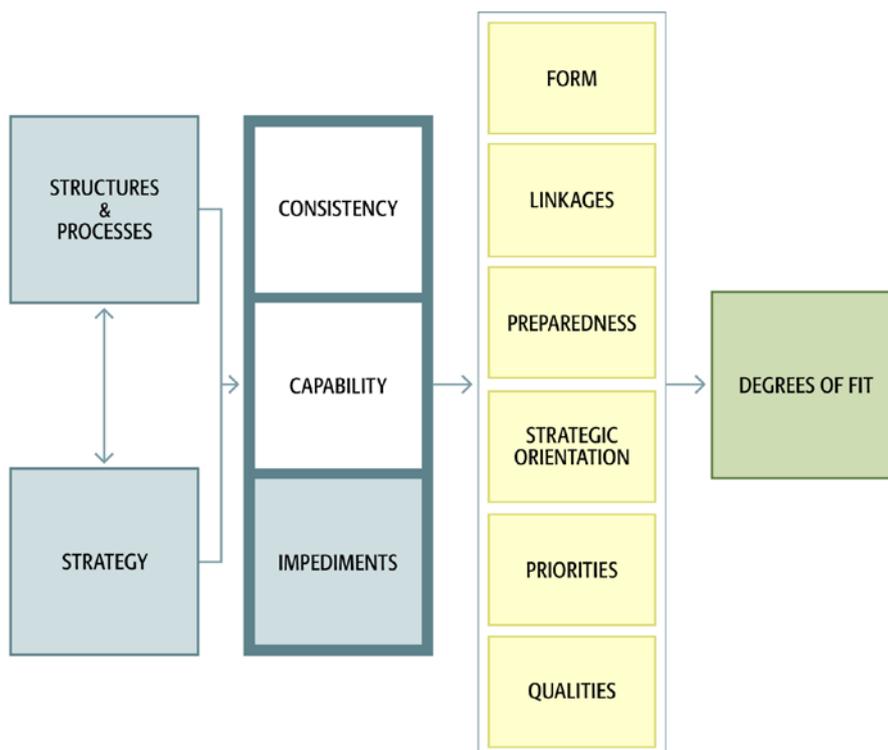


Fig. 6.8 Impediments to effective Management

6.5.13 Impediments to form

Earlier discussion with respect to consistency and capability of form pointed to the importance of a strong and enduring organisational culture, and to the accrued capabilities of the respective case studies born of a constancy of structure. Form, it was suggested is not about structure per se but rather about a set of deep seated values that make the organisation unique.

Since the unique attributes of any organisation are the means by which it differentiates itself from like organisations, and that these attributes frequently inform strategic direction, their consideration in an examination of critical success factors is vital. Moreover, in conducting and analysing the research, it was abundantly obvious that constancy and accrued capability were critical success factors in their own right.

The same process of analysis and contextualisation also soundly established that these attributes were not always an attainable goal and that significant impediments can render such intuitively sensible directions virtually unattainable. These have been discussed in considerable detail in previous sections of this work but their reexamination here is necessary, if only to re-enforce why some attractions appear unable to achieve a form which is conducive to success. Their re examination is also important because it raises, yet again, issues of independence and funding reliance which are, in themselves, significant impediments to a strong and cohesive organisational culture and to knowledge accrual resulting from staff retention as opposed to attrition.

Firstly, it is argued that, by an interpretation, the very essence of a strong and abiding organisational culture is a shared vision and commitment to a common set of values. In a more general sense harmonious working relationships between all stakeholders is a necessary element of a cohesive organisation.

Although there are obviously a number of extraneous impediments to the establishment and maintenance of a strong and enduring organisational culture, the research was able to clearly establish a set of significant barriers to this process which will be discussed here. The researcher noted in particular a resonance with earlier discussion in that they appeared to be almost entirely born of funding reliance and a lack of operational autonomy, discussion of which has been central to earlier discussion of success factors.

Amongst the key barriers identified were a lack of introspection; an absence of trust and collegiality; constant and pervasive change, a general sense of futility in being unable to make binding decisions. In every instance, the counter proposition was seen to be directly instrumental to strong organisational form.

“When you’re simply trying to survive considering how you could improve things isn’t high on your list of priorities. It’s just a day to day battle” [SPS2]. “What’s the point of making decisions when you know in your heart that they’re never going to go anywhere because someone will step in and veto them” [SPS1]. As a result, respondents facing these circumstances appeared to be mistrustful of each other precluding any attempts to articulate a shared vision or mission. As such, the organisational culture appeared to be in a more or less constant state of flux.

It was also the view of some that the situation was constantly exacerbated by change and uncertainty mainly resulting from centralised, and more particularly external, control. Reflecting on the impacts of electoral rotation the point was made that, “Just when you have a majority of councilors on side there’s an election and you’re faced with a whole new set of people with new agendas. The power base just shifts like that and priorities with it. I sometimes wonder what’s the sense of thinking strategically or setting yourself a mission in such a volatile environment” [SPS1].

In the face of these impediments, the incidental or deliberate formation of a cohesive organisational culture was clearly not possible. Having contended that it is the organisational culture that underpins the consistency and capability of organisational form it represents a significant barrier to successful operation.

The research also revealed a second and equally important impediment, namely, the inability of the organisation to retain vital operational expertise. In earlier discussion with respect to capability of form considerable emphasis was placed on skill retention as a means of articulating and operationalising effective strategies.

Having aggregated the data across the two case studies the impact of staff attrition became patently obvious. Aggregation of the data suggested that where expertise was accrued over time the organisation was in a position to draw on past experiences and to articulate a clear strategic vision. Conversely, high levels of attrition logically saw an almost complete absence of entrenched values, and an inability to build on past

experience. A simple contrast between comments such as “One of our greatest strengths, I believe has been our ability to retain key staff over time” [SHS5] and “The comings and goings around here create some real headaches. It’s hard to get people with the knowledge to do things so if you’re constantly losing them it can really impact on your operation” [SPS3] is illustrative of the point.

Further reflections of key respondents across the two sites further illustrates the point. “When I think back, there have been so many good people that have gone through [here]. The sad thing is not just about losing the people but the experience and knowledge they have. You can’t put a value on that” [SPO1]. “There are people around here that have been here almost since the very inception. Being able to call on their knowledge and experience has been invaluable” [SHC3]. As with organisational culture any attrition appeared to be largely due to frustrations arising from an absence of operational autonomy and the fluctuating priorities of those in control particularly when such control was not in the hands of operational staff.

Amongst the more ardent critics of the scale of attrition, one respondent commented “It’s little wonder that people don’t stay here long. It can be very frustrating when decisions are made that your experience tells you are not in the best interests of the attraction. One minute they want one thing then another; you feel completely powerless. If it wasn’t for the knowledge and experience of some of the volunteers there would be virtually no one in a position to balance planning against previous experience” [SPS3].

It was clear from the research that these factors presented quite significant barriers to a consistent and capable organisation. In articulating critical success factors a positive organisational culture and expertise retention will be advanced as the essential elements.

6.5.14 Impediments to linkages

The establishment and maintenance of effective linkages with a range of external stakeholders was previously emphasised as being a vital element of successful operation. Ample evidence was presented to support the value of collaboration and cooperation with government, host community and volunteers. Strong and consistent linkages with government and peak bodies in particular emerged as an invaluable ‘asset’ providing vital information flows and provision of capital grants.

In considering impediments to effective linkages with government the researcher drew an important distinction between various levels of government given the differing specifics of the relationships. Neither of the case studies under examination appeared to have any significant relationship with Federal Government other than maintaining a dialogue with local members as a means of being heard on issues of a national nature. Anecdotally, these appeared to centre on issues relating to Indigenous land rights; taxation; and infrastructure provision amongst other things. Other than the vagaries of political ideology there appeared to be no significant barrier or impediment to the relationship in either case.

In direct contrast, linkages with government at the state level were viewed as being extremely important although there was a distinct difference between the two sites in terms of their apparent ability to establish and maintain such connections. Given that such lines of communication were advanced as a vital conduit for market intelligence and a means of garnering financial support for major capital works their inclusion as a critical success factor is considered appropriate.

As intuitive as such a priority may be, however, the research revealed a number of impediments to the formation of a strong relationship with the state government. These appeared to stem both from the attitudes of government, and from the stance adopted by the attraction in question.

There was a strongly held view that state government support either in a notional or tangible way was strongly tied to the political 'ownership' and perceived 'safety' of the local seat. Although in some instances respondents were reluctant to be specific as to the circumstances, the contention that critical support appeared to be based on political expediency rather than need was of serious concern. As one respondent observed, "They really don't care about whether this place survives or not; it's all about vote catching. If the party in power considers the seat safe they're not going to throw money at it" [SPO1]

Whether such a contention can be supported is open to conjecture, but at very least the support of individual members appeared to be both inconsistent and unreliable in many cases. This appeared to create a culture of mistrust and an attitude of resignation on the part of some case study management of the futility of seeking government support. Over time this appeared to be self-perpetuating and difficult to

eliminate. “We’ve never enjoyed the support of the state so why should they change now? I can’t see it ever being any different” [SPO1].

A more measured view saw this as a challenge rather than an intractable problem. “I never look at things as a closed door. You’ve got to be constantly in their face to get noticed, and you got to convince them that you deserve their support” [SPO1]. There was also some evidence of a flow on effect from degrees of support at a local government level. Reluctance to allocate state funds had occasionally been justified on the grounds that local government was perceived to be unsupportive. The frank opinion of one official reflected the attitude of government. “If regional government isn’t prepared to support them it sends a clear signal that there’s something wrong. We’re certainly not in a position to just dish out money to make people happy. We’ve got responsibilities” [SHO1].

Interestingly previous discussion pointed to the value of connectivity with peak government bodies [such as Tourism Victoria] as opposed to State Government proper since Sovereign Hill, as the more successful of the two attractions, maintained strong linkages at this level and appeared able to maintain support despite the oscillating priorities of successive governments of differing political persuasions. The fact that this was a catalyst for government grants in support of major infrastructure initiatives made this an extremely important area of linkage. Again, the principal impediment in forming these vital alliances appeared to be government perceptions of value and a resignation on the part of some respondents that such initiatives were fruitless.

This represented perhaps the single most important impediment to effective linkages with State Government, namely, an ‘aura of success’. Discussions with both attractions management and with officials of relevant peak bodies highlighted the self perpetuating prophecy that ‘success breeds success’. At best government appeared to be ambivalent about establishing relationships with facilities that they perceived to be unsuccessful or incapable of making a contribution to regional economies. “Even government has to justify its expenditure. If you can see that you’re supporting a successful well run organisation that’s justifying the expenditure and making a contribution to the local economy then the decision is warranted” [SHO2].

Impediments to effective linkages with State Government therefore appear to be largely vested in the attitudes of the respective parties and perceptions which become entrenched over time. Anecdotally these appear to be extremely difficult to overcome.

As one respondent observed, “There’s really no way out of this. We’ve always been considered a basket case and I don’t think it will ever be any different” [SPS2]. And from a government perspective “It’s not as if there’s ever been any cause for optimism. They’ve had some support over time but it just doesn’t seem to make any difference” [SHO2]

Turning the discussion to linkages with local government points to one of the most significant findings of the research, specifically that degrees of separation appeared to have a profound impact on successful operation. Independence from local government control or influence emerged as a pivotal success factor given that it predicates degrees of funding reliance and dictates internal structure and strategy. This issue has received extensive coverage in chapter 5 and in preceding sections of this chapter.

The two case studies under examination introduce another interesting perspective, namely, the impact of discretionary, as opposed to imposed linkages on the establishment of effective relationships. Given that the two sites present examples of both scenarios, the aggregation of the data yielded some valuable lines of comparison. Considered in the context of impediments, the comparison between linkages based on issues of external but mutual concern, and linkages that are more deeply involved with operational issues raises quite distinctly different issues.

At face value, where linkages were discretionary in nature, the principal impediments to effective linkages appeared to be little more than a sense of mistrust as to the motives of local government and, in at least one instance divergence of opinion as to the economic benefit of the particular attraction to the local economy. “Surely it must be obvious that the fact we are here impacts on local accommodation receipts and on the economy in general yet there’s always been this persistent attitude that it’s the city that draws the visitors, not us” [SHC1].

Almost in direct contradiction there appeared to be some persistent, [albeit minor] friction over comparative roles with local government being content to concede responsibility for destination marketing to the attraction rather than assuming this responsibility themselves. “Our job is to promote or to market [the attraction] as a product within the region. Our job is not to promote the region per say. People might assume that they don’t have to do the marketing, the destinational marketing of, for example, because we’re already out there doing it” [SHS1].

The overarching observation on the part of the researcher was that any impediments to discretionary linkages at a local government level were, however superficial and capable of being addressed provided that good will prevailed. To some extent this implies that complete detachment is not desirable and that lines of communication need to remain open. A number of respondents supported such an assertion with one respondent stating succinctly “the value of partnerships with local government in all kinds of areas shouldn’t be underestimated. They need us and we need them” [SHC2]. And another “Let’s face they have power over so many aspects of our operation so it makes sense to have a healthy relationship with them” [SHO3]

A completely dichotomous situation was observed where linkages with local government were imposed and based on formal lines of accountability. In outlining the specifics of the two case studies the negative impacts of such a relationship were ably illustrated. Although this can obviously not be generalised across all attractions of similar type the fact that the situation was characterised by funding reliance and a lack of operational autonomy has some resonance with the findings of this research. Arguably a linkage, even if imposed, based on devolved decision making and adequate funding may not be as debilitating. Even the most strident detractors of government control could see the relationship working with greater operational freedom and at least adequate funding. As one observed, “It’s not being under government control that’s the problem; in some ways it gives you a solid base. It’s the way that the control is exercised that’s the problem” [SPS1].

In the context of the imposed linkage which prevails between local government and one of the case studies in question, however, it was possible to discern a number of specific impediments to an effective alliance. In what was clearly a negative environment maintaining a consistent and workable relationship appeared to be thwarted primarily by conflicting priorities, deeply entrenched parochialism on both sides, and a palpable sense of what was termed ‘professional jealousy’.

Moreover a lack of constancy appeared to negate any possibility of relationship building which may have built much needed trust. Given earlier discussion with respect to the consistency and capacity to establish and maintain positive linkages, the suggestion that positive relationships are built rather than imposed is of interest. “Establishing a good working relationship with council is difficult when the individual directly responsible for the operation of [the attraction] changes so frequently. You find yourself constantly having to deal with new people” [SPS2]

Regardless of individual relationships, however, there was clear evidence that the conflicting priorities of local government and operational staff constituted the largest single impediment to an effective linkage. These appeared to principally lie in opposing visions of the organisational mission, and with it differing degrees of commercial orientation. As one respondent summed it up, " you either view this as a purely commercial operation or you believe that it's a heritage asset for the public good. I don't think you can have a foot in both camps" [SPC2]. Interestingly, the research suggested that much of the discord between parties subscribing to one or other of these seemingly irreconcilable objectives was based on the assumption that they could not be jointly achieved. Given that this research will ultimately contend that such an objective is in fact achievable suggests that this impediment is not totally beyond remediation.

Discussion in chapter 5 pointed to a definitional divide between museums [as traditional recipients of public funding], and theme parks which are logically viewed as commercial enterprises capable of generating recurrent funding. Insofar as the Swan Hill case study is concerned, it appeared to be not so much the respective merits of the opposing views but a lack of consistency on the part of the controlling body in this regard. "One minute they view it as a museum and the next as a theme park. I think we need to decide whether it's a community resource deserving of funding, or a stand alone commercial arm of council. You can't have it both ways" [SPO1].

Notwithstanding conflicting priorities of whatever kind between operational staff and local government were clearly significant impediments to effective linkages particularly when such a relationship was imposed rather than discretionary

As arguably the next most important group of stakeholders, maintaining effective linkages with local community, and as a subset volunteers, was earlier elevated to a key priority. As such the research analysis sought to identify key impediments to these relationships. Although there was some degree of commonality the specifics of a working relationship as opposed to a broader alliance pointed to some separate issues. With respect to effective linkages with local community the principal impediments appeared to be a lack of communication both in terms of promoting the attraction as a community 'asset' but also in fostering positive community perceptions of the standard of operation.

Whilst promoting the attraction to prospective visitors was viewed as being largely intuitive by most respondents, the merits of 'selling' the attraction to community at large appeared to have been largely overlooked. Given that community attitudes appeared to be directly instrumental in shaping local government policy, a number of respondents acknowledged that this impediment needed to be addressed. There was evidence of some attempts at forging links with community through participation in community and service organisations but more direct communication appeared not to be the order of the day. Interestingly, to a greater or lesser degree this appeared to prevail in both case study sites. Conceding that little had been done in this area an interviewee observed "I'm not sure how you go about it but I agree we need to get our message out there. Kind of give them a sense of ownership" [SPS2].

"I think we tend to think of promotion as being necessarily directed at prospective visitors. When you consider that the local community are not only prospective visitors themselves, but can be a significant voice in shaping council policy getting the message to them seems pretty important" [SHS4]. The importance of addressing this impediment was even more pronounced where, as previously discussed, the relationship with a governing body was imposed rather than discretionary.

In analysing the data, an interesting distinction was observed between community attitudes manifested as outright opposition and general indifference. A number of interviewees felt that overcoming indifference was perhaps more challenging than winning the support of a small group of antagonists. "There's really only a small number of people that are actively opposed to our existence. It's the larger number who really doesn't care that present us with a challenge" [SHC1].

Overcoming indifference as an impediment also emerged as a significant factor in attracting a volunteer workforce. A general willingness to devote discretionary time and effort to the running of the attraction combined with the existence or otherwise of a knowledge base were generally agreed to be the greatest challenges. There was also a view that a rapidly ageing population would increasingly present a significant impediment to the generation of a volunteer force." It's so difficult to interest young people in volunteering. I'm not sure what the future holds. When the current generation of volunteers is dead and gone, I'm not sure what will happen" [SPS3].

This also raised the issue of trans-generational transfer of heritage values as an impediment to effective volunteer linkages. The challenges associated with interesting

a whole new generation in heritage and conservation values were viewed as being significant.

In summary, there appeared to be a number of imperatives to forging and maintaining effective linkages. A divide was conceptualised between imposed linkages and discretionary linkages given implications of control and autonomy. Considered in the process of identifying critical success factors fostering effective linkages regardless of their context appeared to be a central element.

6.5.15 Impediments to preparedness for change

In earlier discussion with respect to a capability or capacity to be prepared for change, three principal areas were identified from analysis of the data. The capacity to anticipate and detect market shifts which present either opportunity or threat; the conscious accumulation of resources necessary to facilitate change; and the value of incremental change as a means of impact reduction, were all held to be intrinsic elements of readiness.

A significant part of earlier discussion has focused on the importance of market 'intelligence' in particular given what was viewed as a characteristically volatile marketplace. Issues of linkages, also discussed earlier were generally seen as the most effective means of achieving such vital data.

It would be over simplistic, however, to suggest that knowledge of existing and potential markets is entirely dependant on external alliances. There was sufficient evidence to suggest that preparedness by way of an understanding of the nature and composition of visitors was not purely a matter of possessing the necessary sphere of influence to draw on externally generated data. This points to what the researcher viewed as a recognisable impediment to preparedness, namely, the inability or disinclination to collect even the simplest data in situ. This was particularly evident when requests for even the most basic data were met with an admission that "we haven't really got round to doing any research ourselves. We've got a pretty good idea of where our visitors come from just by looking at them; but we just haven't got the resources of the time to do anything in that area" [SPC2].

In attempting to form even the most basic understanding of the respective performance of the two sites, the researcher was confronted with a surprising paucity

of data in one instance. Collection and analysis of even the simplest visitor profiles over time appeared to have been sporadic and unsystematic rendering any understanding of trends impossible. "Every so often we launch into some research on who our visitors are and where they come from but we either don't carry on or we collect it and then don't analyse it" [SPS2]. Although this appeared to be principally attributed to a lack of resources in the view of the researcher such an admission also raises issues of a lack of resolve on the part of site management. This may in part be due to a negative organisational culture which enshrines indifference.

Either way the absence of even the most basic understanding of visitation trends was seen as a major impediment to preparatory capability. "I mean it follows doesn't it? If you're trying to make marketing decisions it's impossible without at least some knowledge of where they're coming from. If there's a major shift it can come and go and we'll never see it" [SPC1].

Although seemingly obscure in the context of this discussion, there was also an isolated view that relationships with intermediaries, particularly tour operators had the potential to draw on a more commercial understanding of the market. Provided that this did not develop into over reliance, it was argued that such organisations were an effective barometer of consumer preference as well as a cost effective conduit for marketing and promotion. "These people put an enormous amount of money and energy into making sure that their products are what the market wants. If you don't work with them you not only miss out on a slice of the market but you won't have the benefit of their foresight" [SHS4]. As such, the absence of a strong and effective distribution network was also viewed as being an impediment to market readiness.

Any capability to respond to change is, however, entirely dependant on having the necessary resources to take the appropriate responsive action. It is perhaps here that the two sites differ most markedly in that operational independence on the one hand has clearly fostered an 'arsenal' of resources which can be used to facilitate change; and external control on the other which has resulted in a clearly evident paucity of the requisite means.

In considering the two case studies distinguishing between various types of resources pointed to how these translated into impediments. Typically, responding to change involves strategic action [as might be characterised by increasing marketing activity or infrastructure development] or structural responses which may involve the acquisition

of expertise or increases in manpower. Either way the provision of capital is central to these responses. As such, the absence of adequate recurrent or capital funding was viewed as the major impediment to the accumulation of resources and thereby preparedness for change.

Given the clear dichotomy between the two sites in this respect and their perceived levels of readiness for change the correlation between these two factors became clear to the researcher. Reiterating an earlier reported response yet again re-enforces the view . “When you’re virtually living from hand to mouth any thought of capacity building just isn’t on the horizon. Surviving in the short term becomes your priority. Sadly if an opportunity arises no matter how good, the money and resources just aren’t there” [SPC1].

The third and final factor which emerged from the interviews and subsequent analysis was the value of incremental change. More particularly the suggestion appeared to be that small but progressive responses to subtle shifts in the external environment had a cumulative value and the power to cushion the impact of ultimate change even if it were large. It was recognised that incremental change is arguably not as resource intensive allowing stepped dedication of resources and capacity building. I agree entirely said one participant “Changing a little at a time instead of waiting to have major change forced on you is a lot easier and creates a lot less pressure on your resources. Sure you have to take major initiatives from time to time but I think step by step is the way to go” [SHO3].

The ability to exercise such a process, although partly tied to market intelligence also appeared to be dependant on focus and vigilance. The obvious distractions created by a more or less continuous process of ‘forced’ tactical responses in one case clearly depleted focus and a sense of environmental awareness. “When you’re handling pressing issues you tend to lose sight of what’s happening around you. Your focus is by necessity directed towards getting things done rather than what you might like to do” [SPS1].

It was thus clear to the researcher that apart from resource constraints effective incremental change was impeded by a lack of focus and an absence of vigilance. That these in turn appeared to depend on such things as operational autonomy and organisational culture the difference between the two sites again became apparent.

6.5.16 Impediments to strategic orientation

In considering issues of focus in particular, the research sought to elicit views on those factors impeding strategic thinking and direction. Although, as alluded to earlier the majority view was that these were almost entirely connected to the availability of resources the researcher discerned a number of more subtle barriers to the formation of a strategic mind set.

Earlier discussions with respect to the consistency and capability for strategic orientation pointed to a number of factors that had impacted negatively or positively on the respective organisation's ability and propensity to develop and pursue a forward vision. Broadly these were conceptualised as falling into four main groups, namely, identity, structural considerations, commercial orientation, and degrees of control.

Firstly, there was a widely held view that the very foundation of strategic vision was a clear and unequivocal view of the purpose and mission of the organisation. The assumption that this should be intuitive, however, was not born out by the research with considerable confusion in one case study as to these fundamental cornerstones. It was suggested earlier this may in part be due to conflicting sets of priorities between key stakeholders. It was clear to the researcher that this lack of consensus clearly served as a significant impediment to strategic vision. "How you set and agree on strategic direction when there's not even agreement on what we are I'm not sure. It seems to me that that's a fundamental decision. After all the way forward for a museum and the vision for a commercially operated theme park are clearly different" [SPO1].

Although the researcher remains firmly of the view that clarity of purpose underpins strategic capability, the earlier contention that these seemingly disparate visions can in fact be reconciled seems strangely contradictory. "I don't think the two things are mutually exclusive. If you're commercially successful then you can devote energy and resources to making sure that what you're presenting is of the highest quality" [SHS3].

Careful analysis of the responses offered perhaps greater subtlety suggesting that it was not only a lack of consensus as to purpose and mission that served as an impediment to strategic vision, but a lack of constancy or consistency of view born of the fluctuating dominance of opposing coalitions. "One minute you feel you are in

control and can make strategic decisions, and before you can implement them the power swings the other way” [SPS1].

A noticeable barrier to consensus also appeared to lie in parochial views as to the ability of opposing parties to who was in the best position to make strategic decisions. “They [council] are just not in a position to make decisions as to what we should do with the collection. They simply don’t have the experience” [SPS1]. And from the other perspective “They simply don’t understand that above everything else it’s all about spending public money. That’s our number one consideration” [SPC1].

It was important to observe, therefore, that such fluctuation was not merely a result of the vagaries of various perspectives. It was abundantly clear that they had their foundations in more tangible considerations most notably the ‘bottom line’. To that extent an absence of viability also emerged as an impediment to strategic vision

Considerations of consensus also lead the researcher to explore the allied issues of internal cohesion and structural stability both of which have figured prominently in earlier discussion. Respondent views pointed to a direct link between a cohesive and stable internal environment and the ability or propensity to adopt a strategic orientation. Conversely internal ferment and an absence of stable structure could be seen to largely negate any attempts at visionary thinking.

Given that across the two case studies under examination there were examples of both scenarios, it was possible to elicit some quite specific views as to the impact of either situation. From the negative perspective one interviewee observed. “If we could just settle down into some sort of stability and begin to focus on our specific strengths and weaknesses we at least see some logical directions. As it is we work at cross purposes without any collective vision. Unfortunately that tends to encourage internal competition rather than internal cooperation” [SPS3]. Yet another commented “How can you have an agreed idea of where to head if everyone is forced to take such a defensive stance. We have people here who have a clear idea of the best direction for their own [department]. It’s really a question of getting that all together” [SPS1].

It was abundantly clear that this lack of cohesion and persistent insularity were not only significant impediments to strategic orientation, they virtually rendered it impossible. The relevance of such a distinction is important in that strategic vision will later be advanced as a critical success factor.

Either as a result of this lack of cohesion, or as its cause, the situation described above appeared to be characterised by ineffective structures or processes which did little more than exacerbate the lack of direction. Discussion in chapter 3 with respect to the theoretical nexus between structure, strategy, and environmental alignment of fit suggested that although strategy was the 'principal alignment mechanism' it was strongly dependant on effective structures.

Questioned on the dimensions of what could be defined as effective structure individual respondent views included "open communication", "devolved control", and "integrated working relationships" between operative units. On these criteria alone there was a marked difference between the two sites with degrees of strategic disposition clearly tied to these dimensions. "Thinking strategically is not simply a question of deciding to do so; the right conditions have to exist. The whole structure of the place has to be right. People need to work together and talk to each other" [SHC3].

In the context of this discussion, structure also assumes connotations of functional multi skilling. As distinct from resources generally possessing the necessary skill set to operationalise strategies suggested that any shortcomings in this area could represent an impediment to strategic orientation.

It was also evident that strategic thinking was directly correlated to commercial orientation in an overall sense. Viewed from the perspectives of both inclination and ability a highly developed sense of the profit imperative appeared to translate directly into strategic drive. Axiomatic as this observation may seem the fact that both inclination and capacity appeared, in turn, to be tied to operational autonomy and funding reliance is supportive of earlier observations.

A comparison of the two case studies highlighted a distinct difference between the two sites in this regard. An absence of operational autonomy and dependence on external sources for recurrent funding, as exists in one case, clearly dissipated strategic orientation.

6.5.17 Impediments to framing priorities

A repetitive theme throughout earlier sections of this work has been the nexus between the maintenance of curatorial integrity [as principal driver of the quality of the

experience] and the ability to generate recurrent funding and/or profit. Reconciling these two objectives was identified as a preeminent success factor.

What was abundantly obvious from both anecdotal discussions, and analysis of the interviews was that subscription to one or other of these priorities was not necessarily mutually exclusive. Whilst it appeared quite possible to recognise the importance of meeting both objectives there were a number of identifiable impediments to the process. These were identified in earlier sections of this chapter as being a lack of clarity, conflicting perspectives as to the relative importance of either objective, and the absence of universal subscription to the dominant organisational 'mission'.

An absence of clarity appeared to be a defining factor with evidence of a clear and cohesive set of priorities on the one hand, and significant ambiguities on the other. Across this situational divide it was possible to observe the positive outcomes deriving from a clear and cohesive set of priorities. It was equally apparent that the absence of clear priorities served as a major impediment to organisational success.

A number of respondents felt that it was important to make a distinction between strategic priorities, as are being discussed here, and operational priorities which it was argued are the 'building blocks' of strategic capability. "Prioritisation is not just about deciding on where you want to be in say ten years; it extends right down to your day to day operations. If the two things don't match you're never going to achieve your objectives" [SHC2]. It was felt that a distinction also needed to be made between a simple lack of consensus and outright disagreement over priorities. In terms of impediments it was agreed that a lack of consensus was not beyond remediation, whilst the existence of direct conflict over priorities was somewhat more difficult to overcome.

Since there was evidence to suggest that where conflict prevailed it was primarily based on considerations of profit orientation suggested that the conflict was more deeply entrenched. "Getting parties to agree on a sense of direction is one thing. When it boils down to dollars the divide becomes more difficult to overcome" [SHO3].

In order to fully understand the significance of conflict as an impediment to the framing of clear and cohesive priorities it became necessary to also explore the catalysts rather than the merely the causes of such conflict. Supporting earlier findings there was clear evidence that conflict over priorities was exacerbated in situations where

control did not reside with operational staff, and where the attraction in question relied on external sources for recurrent funding. “It’s kind of a them and us mentality. Not only do we have different priorities but we neither can see the other’s view” [SPS1].

Again, aggregation of the data pointed to a significant distinction between the two case studies in this respect which was discussed in chapter 5. That it was also possible to witness the negative impacts of such impediments reinforced the researcher’s view that independence both in an operational and financial sense was a preeminent success factor.

6.5.18 Impediments to quality

In earlier discussion, it was suggested that, in the context of this research, quality was vested in the standard of the visitor experience given that it appeared to translate directly in visitation levels and thereby attempts at profitability. Attempts to frame an inventory of key capabilities adopted a largely dimensional perspective with suggestions that the scope and scale of capabilities combined with a balance of expertise were the main factors influencing quality outcomes.

There was some polarity of views as to whether this could be explained simply by adequacy of resources, but given that quality delivery appeared to underpin success at a fundamental level, a more detailed examination of perceived barriers to quality delivery became necessary.

Discussions focused on achieving a balance between quality of presentation through curatorial focus, and the realisation of profitability resulting from a focus on sound management. The suggestion was made that the existence of separate and dedicated expertise in both areas was central to success. Although by the simplest interpretation the defining factor appeared to be size of operation with the larger of the two case studies achieving such a division of functions, there appeared to be more significant impediments to achieving this end.

What appeared to significantly impede achievement of balance was not the procurement or accumulation of expertise per se but rather the tendency for one priority to successively subsume the other. As has been discussed at length previously this was particularly evident in one case study site where changing fortunes were the catalyst for fluctuating emphasis on one or other of these objectives. “Every time the

issue of operating costs comes up, the spotlight seems to move from thinking about the site as a community resource to getting it on a more commercial footing. One minute the director is someone with expertise in museums and then they put someone in whose focus is on cost control. Even when we've had both they can't agree on basic issues" [SPS2].

In earlier discussion with respect to capability it was suggested that quality delivery was strongly underpinned by scholarship, attention to detail, and recognition of the expectations of visitors. In the process of comparing the two case studies it became evident that an ability to achieve this end was predicated on the scope and scale of expertise at an operational level. Although this appeared to be largely resource based in that it was dictated by manpower limitations, difficulties associated with recruiting specialised expertise in quite particular areas of operation appeared to be a major impediment to quality delivery. Moreover, development of a skill base appeared to be not only important to the standard of delivery but was also a key factor in fuelling innovation and creativity.

There was evidence that this impediment could be partly overcome by recruitment and training of a volunteer workforce, but that success in this endeavour was almost entirely dependant on this being a long term strategic objective rather than a tactical response. Failure to recognise the importance of this objective was thus held to be another impediment.

"You don't build a body of volunteers in ten minutes; it takes time and focus, and thinking about what kind of expertise you're looking for. I mean we are looking at skills and crafts that are virtually extinct so it's not an easy process; you've got to think strategically" [SPS3]. This also raised issues of scale since it was observed that the size of the volunteer workforce was directly instrumental in levels of interactivity with visitors and strength and depth of interpretation. Since these have been identified as critical success factors any shortcomings in historical expertise represent a significant impediment to quality delivery.

Although not directly related to issues of balance, scope, or scale the suggestion was also made that any diversion from the dominant theme may also constitute an impediment to quality of delivery. "You've got to focus on telling the story as faithfully as you can; you got to stick to your theme and not confuse the visitor with a mixture of themes" [SHC2]. Given earlier observations with respect to the quite singular focus of

one case study and the diverse presentation of the other it was possible to consider how the latter serves as an impediment.

6.5.19 Summation

In the latter sections of this chapter consistency, capability and impediments were considered on the basis of six specific dimensions [see figs 6.6/6.7/6.8] emerging from the research, each of which constitutes a key area of competency. These were seen to emerge from a combination of structural and strategic characteristics shaped by the particular origins and operational environments of the respective case studies.

Having completed this process it became possible to reflect on the issues raised in chapter 5 [see table 5.1] and to consider the extent to which these were instrumental in successful operation. In so doing the conceptual link between what respondents viewed as key issues and success factors was formed.

Moreover it became possible to conceptualise the relative importance of certain factors as fundamental instruments of successful operation. The initial objective of identifying critical success factors was thus met. The selection of heritage attractions as the focus of this research is also vindicated in that their complexity of operation offers significant insights into elements of successful operation in complex operational environments. Although it will be conceded that the findings can not be generalised across a broader spectrum of attractions they are nonetheless valuable insights.

Fulfilling the declared intent of the work, chapter 7 will juxtapose these findings with broader theories of strategic fit, as a means of addressing the research questions outlined in chapter 3. By so doing two formerly discrete bodies of knowledge are brought together, offering both a means of conceptualising theories of fit in hitherto unexplored organisational contexts, and offering much needed extension to the attraction centric literature. The contemporary nature of the study also gives rise to a number of potential research directions which are outlined in chapter 8.

7.0 The Research Questions in Context

7.1 Introduction

The closing sections of Chapter 2 conducted a comparative analysis of various theories as they relate to what was termed the 'ideal organisation'. Despite a theoretical divide between those who hold that structure dictates strategy, as opposed to the antithetical proposition, a common objective implicit in the search for high levels of performance is the ability to successfully adapt to environmental change. In chapter 2 it was emphasised that attractions in general, and heritage attractions in particular, operate in volatile environments, such that attempts at environmental alignment or fit are a constant and pervasive challenge.

Ascribing the term 'organisational fit' to this dynamic process, Miles and Snow (1984) contend that "successful organisations achieve strategic fit with their market environment and support their strategies with appropriately designed structures and processes" (p.125). Perhaps more importantly their observation that "Organisations of different types can be successful provided that their particular configuration of strategy structure and process is internally and externally consistent" (p.125), suggests representative measures which, hypothetically at least, constitute a prescriptive approach to the successful management of organisations. Given that, as earlier contended, much of the attraction centric research has adopted a largely issue specific approach, examining the nexus between these three elements in the context of visitor attractions provides an opportunity to expand the existing understanding of the dynamics of their operation

More specifically, the contribution of this research has been to identify what specific structural forms or strategic approaches and/or responses contribute to organisational fit and performance in the context of the two case studies under examination. Although it may not be possible to generalise the findings across a broader spectrum of attraction types, or to tourism enterprises in general, the conceptual framework may point to research opportunities in other areas.

By focusing on the structure and strategic orientations of what was termed the 'ideal' organisation, the early literature appears largely to have failed to recognise the role played by the particularities and peculiarities of specific operational environments in shaping management decision making. Such a consideration was, in part justification

for selecting heritage based attractions, offering as they did, quite particular operational challenges. Such challenges are further emphasised by the two case studies which formed the basis of the research, given the starkly different operational circumstances and an equally disparate set of outcomes.

Further, the literature with respect to fit appears to assume that the requisite resources or capabilities are in place; that a consistent approach is maintained; and that the organisation is capable of overcoming both internal and external impediments. Chapter 2 pointed to a number of recurring themes emerging from the literature, which suggest that without due consideration of these factors any attempt at articulating a robust inventory of 'ideal' management approaches is problematic if not flawed. A more pragmatic approach for example would see the elimination or avoidance of impediments as a strategic action in itself or the accrual of skill as a cornerstone of structural capability.

Ongoing discussion in this chapter is thus directed at juxtaposing Miles and Snow's thesis against the findings outlined in figure 4.2 as a means of addressing a number of research propositions and ultimately the overarching research problem.

7.2 Problem Definition

Although Miles and Snow's thesis appears to enjoy significant support in the literature based on a set of empirical studies in US manufacturing industries, its applicability to a wider range of industries is obscure. As a theoretical paradigm, the notion of 'fit' appears largely to have been adopted, not in the field of strategic management specifically, but in the field of human resource management. More particularly, in the context of this research, the absence of any broad based examination of how heritage visitor attractions attempt to align with changes in their operating environment represents a void in the literature.

Miles and Snow's own admission that "some types of organisations require specific styles of management whereas other types permit a broader range of managerial philosophies and practices" (1978 p.9), provides strong justification for this examination. Moreover, their exhortations for examination of their theoretical platform in other organisational domains points to an opportunity to broaden both the literature of organisational adaption and that of attraction management.

Given these actualities, an overarching research problem and a number of supporting research questions were articulated. In the first instance, the research sought to address the following research problem:

To what extent does organisational fit contribute to successful operation in heritage visitor attractions?

In pursuit of some understanding of this problem, four specific research questions were then framed. Both individually and collectively, these address a range of specific issues which, it is held, are central to enhanced knowledge of the problem. To some degree these have their basis in the literature reviewed in section 2.5 which pointed to a number of specific determinants of, and impediments to, organisational fit. They are also influenced by the structural and strategic dimensions of the findings outlined in table 4.2. which offers some attraction centric perspectives. Finally, they contextualise the extensive discussion conducted in sections [insert section numbers from consistency of form to impediments to quality currently listed as ch.4 but actually second part of chapter 4] built around a broad conceptual framework.

The on-going discussion in this chapter brings together these three elements of the research in an attempt to provide vital insights into the similarities between heritage visitor attractions and organisations generally. More importantly it contributes to our understanding of the specifics of attraction management in a sector characterised by significant complexity. This fulfils the research objectives outlined in section 3.5.

Specifically, the research questions are articulated as follows:

RQ1:

What are the key performance variables that determine degrees of organisational fit in heritage visitor attractions?

RQ2:

What are the main impediments to the achievement of organisational fit in heritage visitor attractions?

RQ3:

In the context of heritage visitor attractions what respective roles do strategy, structure, and process play in higher levels of organisational fit and organisational performance?

RQ4:

In the context of heritage visitor attractions does strategy appear to dictate structure, or is the reverse proposition evident?

7.3 Addressing the research questions

Mirroring the process by which the four research questions were framed [section 3.3] on-going discussion similarly adopts a tripartite approach directed at identifying synergies and dichotomies between theories of organisational fit and the findings of the research. More particularly the identification of performance factors not evident in the extant literature may point to elements of an attraction centric model of organisational fit. Specifically the three components of the discussion are as follows:

1. The establishment of a specific inventory of performance variables [determinants of fit] as imbedded in Miles and Snow's (1984) theoretical framework and later work [see for example Olson Slater and Hult 2005] both of which were discussed in sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2.
2. A synthesis of the research findings outlined in chapter 4 with respect to stakeholder views of factors which assist or impede the successful operation of attractions and by so doing;
3. Point to key similarities and differences between broader theory and actuality or reality in the attraction sector.

With respect to the theory the discussion is broadened to include not only factors related to strategy structure and process as outlined in Miles and Snow's framework (1984), but what Olson Slater and Hult (2005) term 'control variables' or key externalities that impact on and shape strategic behaviour. Given the considerable emphasis placed on the wide range of externalities confronting the attraction sector in chapter 2, this is seen as an essential element of articulating a comprehensive set of final conclusions.

In seeking to identify key differences between broader theories of organisational fit and the findings of this research, the empirical validity of the extant literature enjoys obvious supremacy. Further, since it is impossible to generalise the findings across a broader spectrum of attractions or even heritage based attractions specifically, the particular value of highlighting these differences lies principally in offering a range of future research directions. This both addresses the paucity of attraction based

research and provides an extension of Miles and Snow's framework into hitherto unexplored contexts.

RQ1:

What are the key performance variables that determine degrees of organisational fit in heritage visitor attractions?

Introduction

Before considering the key determinants of fit as they relate to attractions specifically, it behoves the researcher to briefly reiterate earlier discussion as to literature perspectives of the determinants of organisational fit in a general sense. Fundamentally, Miles and Snow (1984) suggest that this is about achieving a particular configuration of strategy, structure and process that is internally and externally consistent. This has two implicit components, "The alternative ways that organizations [sic] define and approach their product-market domains [the entrepreneurial problem] and construct structures and processes [the administrative and technical problems] to achieve competitive advantage in those domains" (Olson et al (2005, p.51).

If not explicitly stated, the inference drawn from Miles and Snow's (ibid) contentions is that strategies directed at achieving fit are mainly vested in product development or marketing. This is in contrast to the findings of this research where the process of achieving fit is more broadly construed. Similarly, from structural or process perspectives the operational particularities of this type of attraction have highlighted a particular set of internal challenges, calling for structural or procedural changes which are not simply related to the product market domain.

Further, the fact that the research which underpins Miles and Snow's framework, and much of the research that followed was conducted in organisations with complete discretion over the decision making process is to ignore organisational forms that do not have complete autonomy. Interestingly, they observe (p.12) that highly regulated industries, for example, do not fit the mould in terms of their framework. As such, it will later be suggested that the heritage visitor attractions are sufficiently differentiated from organisations generally, to require quite particular approaches to attempting organisational fit.

As detailed in Table 5.1, there were a number of recurring issues which the research indicated are central to the organisations attempts at achieving fit. . An individual examination of these issues facilitates a comparison of extant theory with the findings of the research which was the last objective of this section.

Conclusions with respect to issue 1:

Independence from Local Government/Dependence on External Funding.

Although the general literature with respect to organisational fit pays little attention to issues of fiscal or operational autonomy as a determinant of organisational fit, the research provided clear evidence of a link between degrees of independence and high levels of performance. In particular, degrees of reliance on external sources for recurrent funding appeared to be a significant factor in shaping strategic action either by way of imposing limitations or enabling a process of unfettered decision making. Discussion with respect to initial and final findings conducted in chapters 5 and 6, placed considerable emphasis on this point.

Given discussion in section 2.3.2.1 with respect to a growing reluctance on the part of government to fund tourism enterprise or infrastructure, the ability to achieve and maintain independence emerges as a significant performance indicator or determinant of fit. Fit in this context could be defined as achieving a balance between total dependence and strategic linkages which were emphasised as being important to successful operation.

Although there is little explicit reference to governmental relationships in the broader literature of fit, a number of authors discuss fit in specific contexts such as strategic alliances (Douma; Bilderbeek, Idenburg, and Looise 2000), and stakeholder theory (Donaldson and Preston 1995) both of which broadly emphasise the importance of effective communication with bodies or persons who, to a greater or lesser degree exercise some influence over strategic orientation.

Despite attempts at independence and self sufficiency being a natural part of on-going strategic action, the researcher noted in particular that, at least in the context of the two case studies, the origins and original charter of the respective organisations played a very significant role in how well they performed in this respect. A contrast was observed between independence as a cornerstone of the founding charter and a culture of dependence born of a lack of original clarity

A distinct nexus was evident between independence and funding reliance although it remains largely unclear as to the directional nature of the relationship.

Of even greater importance was the perceived link between original charter, funding reliance and commercial orientation given that all three in turn appeared to substantially predicate enduring and cohesive management structures; shape strategic vision and impact on degrees of community engagement. In summary independence and financial self sufficiency emerged at the cornerstone of attempts to adapt to changing circumstances. With respect to independence, however, the defining factor appears to be balance.

With respect to research issue #1, therefore, the research concludes that operational autonomy is a pre-eminent variable in determining the organisation's ability to adapt to change and achieve environmental fit. In an attraction sector characterised by public sector funding and ownership this may not, however, always be achievable. To some extent the ability to generate recurrent funding and attain self-sufficiency appears to be a more realistic way of achieving that end.

This is seen as being broadly congruent with the literature of organisational fit which suggests that a clear, shared and unequivocal sense strategic direction is central to the process. As Harvey (1972, p.26) observed, "Organizations tend to be more adaptive when parts are in good communication with one another, are committed, and can be creative, flexible and innovative".

Conclusions with respect to issue 2:

Continuity of Management Structure/Purpose

An essential element of the literature (Miles and Snow 1978, 1984) with respect to organisational adaption [as outlined in chapter 2] is the suggestion that the identification and establishment of structures that are supportive of strategic direction is a key determinant of organisational fit.

Although stability was advanced as a key structural element [table 4.2], there is, to some extent, an inherent contradiction in that overly rigid structures may constrain rather than facilitate change. Preparedness for change implies at least some degree of inconstancy. Here the concept of continuity has more particular connotations of

retention of key expertise, succession planning, and, from a strategic perspective, an enduring vision of the purpose and mission of the organisation.

Constancy and clarity of 'mission', in particular, emerged from the research as a key factor in the extent to which the respective organisations were able to frame and realise strategic objectives [section 5.4.1]. A clear dichotomy could be observed between conflict and ambiguity as to identity and mission on the one hand; and a clear sense of purpose and direction on the other. That the latter proposition could be seen to translate directly into successful operation was of note. Such a proposition was seen as being inextricably linked to the origins, ethos, and commercial orientations of the respective case studies discussed in research issue 1.

Given the quite specialised nature of the attraction type under examination, the accrual and retention of specialised expertise [section 5.2.2] was seen as being directly instrumental in the process of adapting to changes. Later discussion will point to market knowledge and innovation as being supportive of this process. Perhaps more importantly, considerations of 'purpose', although more abstract, were seen as being directly instrumental in the respective organisations' ability to adapt to change and achieve 'fit'. Chapter 4 highlighted the difficulties associated with framing effective strategies in environments where conflicts over operational ideology dominated.

Early and formative literature in the area of strategy (Litschert and Bonham 1978, Zahra 1987) points to a clear link between ideological values and belief systems and effective strategy. Of direct relevance to this study, Litschert et al (1978, p.215) quoting Child (1972) observe that "strategy formulation is primarily a result of an essentially political process in which constraints and opportunities are functions of the power exercised by decision makers [dominant coalition] in the light of ideological values". This has particular resonance in the findings given the observation that the extent to which the respective attractions were able to maintain a consistent sense of direction was a key performance variable.

From a structural perspective, there was clear evidence of a link between operational capacity and continuity of structure [5.2.2]. As suggested earlier, this did not imply rigidity but rather building structures with the expertise, capacity and flexibility to adapt quickly to external changes. A clear dichotomy could be observed between the two sites in this respect.

Conclusions with respect to issue 3:

Ability to reconcile operational objectives

Discussion with respect to research issue 2 emphasised the role played by values and ideologies in shaping strategic direction. Given the declared *raison d'être* for the choice of heritage visitor attractions as a research context, was the perceived conflict of priorities between the maintenance of curatorial integrity and the pursuit of profit, the fact that these two distinctly different operational stances emerged as an inherent challenge in both case studies illustrates the thesis of the study. Rather than being irreconcilable objectives however there was ample evidence [4.3.1/4.3.2/5.0] to suggest that, in fact, achieving both objectives was possible and that this was, as anticipated, a key indicator in the comparative performance of the respective case studies. Whilst it will later be conceded that attainment of this balance is not easy to achieve, it constitutes what the researcher holds to be central to both internal and external fit.

Given that, as previously observed, much of the early empirical research in organisational adaption (Miles and Snow, 1978:1984; Mintzberg 1979:1983, Porter 1980 et al) had its foundations in organisations with a purely commercial orientation, this challenge would appear to be unique to this particular type of enterprise. Although the researcher is aware of a body of literature with regard to specific areas of strategy in not for profit organisations [NFPs], there is perhaps a subtle distinction which can be made between the case studies which, either by outright necessity or orientation, are driven by at least some quest for cost recovery or profit; and facilities which serve alternative purposes yet attract tourists.

Such an observation has quite distinct grounding in the findings which suggests that even issues of simple nomenclature can have a significant impact on the perceptions of both internal and external stakeholders. That this in turn impacts on funding and other forms of support reinforces the contention that an ability to maintain a balance between the two objectives directly impacts on viability.

Of perhaps greater significance is the link between this important performance indicator and the very foundations of the organisations in focus discussed in issue 1. As has been suggested throughout previous sections [4.3.1/4.3.2] a distinct causal link appears to exist between origins, independence, and degrees of commercial orientation. This appears to some extent to entrench one or other of the objectives

making attempts at reconciliation problematic. Later discussion will focus on specific impediments to the process, but it remains a key objective in the quest for environmental fit.

Conclusions with respect to issue 4:

Internal cohesion

In discussing the strategic and structural dimensions of fit [5.2.1/5.2.2], some emphasis was placed on the importance of a strong and prevailing organisation culture in shaping both consistency and capability. In discussing organisational culture as an element of internal fit, Arogyaswamy and Byles (1987, p.649) make an analogy between strength and cohesion suggesting that that “strength denotes the extent of agreement among members of an organisation about the importance of specific values or ideologies”. This, they go on to observe, (p.647) “[is because] of its possible importance in the environment-strategy-structure-performance link”. Culture is increasingly being treated as a major if not the only predictor of performance” (p, 648).

Although the data have been aggregated to permit a comprehensive view of performance factors, the contrast between the two sites with regard to their respective organisational cultures, and the comparative impacts was prominent. Since as Schein (1997, p.12) observes that the culture of a group “can be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that fashion an organisation’s view of itself and its environment” the absence of consensus which was apparent in one of the case studies [4.3.2] was seen as a significant barrier to effective performance.

Cohesion, however, has broader connotations of direct relevance to the findings of this study. Amongst the more important conclusions drawn from the research was the apparent impact of decentralised structures and effective communication on organisational competency and preparedness. Both from researcher observation and the analysis and interpretation of the data, it was possible to discern significant advocacy for the view that decentralised management structures with particular functions devolved to an operational level permitted greater levels of flexibility and adaptability provided that effective channels of communication were in place.

Again it was possible to contrast the differences between one case study with a highly centralised management structure, and an organisational design characterised by decentralised functional and departmentalised operation [4.3.1/4.3.2]. Although this was

obviously contingent to some extent on the size of the organisation, there appeared to be some consensus across the two sites that the latter was decidedly more conducive to preparedness for change. It appears that this was due in large part to the specialised nature of operations in attractions of this type with quality of presentation being strongly underpinned by curatorial integrity.

It was apparent too, that high levels of performance were vested in capacity building through the retention of key individuals as discussed in issue 1. Although to some extent stating the obvious, a number of respondents were of the view that stability and consistency of key skill bases was conducive to developing a cohesive organisational culture, and a commitment to core values.

These conclusions are generally supportive of the key literature (Miles and Snow 1984) which suggests that the adaptive process is as much about internal fit as aligning with the external environment. If it could be satisfactorily contended that internal cohesion is even broadly analogous to effective structures and processes the chances of effective alignment with the operating environment are clearly enhanced.

Conclusions with respect to issue 5:

Market Knowledge/Focus

Earlier discussion pointed to an implicit element of Miles and Snow's framework of business strategy (1978) which views strategic action directed at fit as being principally confined to considerations of the alignment of product and market. Although it was contended that strategic action has much broader connotations in the context of heritage visitor attractions, the findings of the study emphasise the importance of aligning product offerings with the changing needs and preferences of the market. This is discussed in more detail under issue 7.

Almost intuitively, the ability to successfully achieve this alignment is contingent on being able to effectively read these market shifts. Perhaps more importantly, it implies a propensity on the part of management to identify, evaluate, and pursue market opportunities. As such market knowledge and focus seem integral to achieving fit.

Such observations are born out by the findings of the research. Discussion with respect to government linkages [5.4.2] emphasised the success enjoyed by one case study in forging alliances with government organisations as a means of gathering

market intelligence. Although the two case studies differed markedly in the extent to which they were successful in this respect [4.3.1/4.3.2], there was consensus across the two sites that this was a key indicator of organisational maturity and capability.

Given the volatile social and economic environments discussed in chapter 2, the importance of proactivity was ably demonstrated in one of the cases under examination being able to read market shifts in advance and engage in product innovation directed at capitalising on these trends. This appears directly consistent with Miles and Snow's original vision of the key elements of organisational adaptation or fit (1978) which included scanning or "surveillance of those environmental elements deemed most critical to the organization [sic]" (p.21).

It also has some resonance in earlier observations as to the value of decentralised structures. In earlier discussion with respect to ideal strategic types (Miles and Snow 1978) it was suggested that a key behavioural characteristic of organisations deemed 'prospectors' is the inclination and propensity to identify, and exploit new product and market opportunities. This process, they suggest, may be enhanced by "develop[ing] an elaborate surveillance capability by decentralising scanning activities to appropriate sub-units within the organisation" (p.56). To have discovered that such a process is present in one case study with distinctly positive outcomes, suggests to the researcher that this a crucial element of attempts to achieve fit.

Despite there being consensus on the importance of market intelligence however, ability and propensity to engage in such a process was not as evident largely because of resource constraints and a general sense of pointlessness born of what appeared to be a deeply entrenched culture of resignation to poor performance. Later discussion will expand on these impediments in more detail, but it is worthy of note that despite these constraints respondents generally recognised that merely 'defending' the existing product was not conducive to high levels of performance. High performance therefore seems vested not only in ability to cope with change in terms of the requisite structures and processes, but in preparedness in all of its manifestations. For this reason preparedness for change was a particular element of the discussion in chapter 5.

Conclusions with respect to issue 6:

Reading & meeting consumer expectations

At a more particular level, the process of scanning extends to understanding not merely the dynamics of demand for various product types [in this case heritage attractions] but the more specific attributes of the product as they relate to consumer perceptions of quality and utility. Given earlier discussion with respect to product market matches as a central element of strategic fit, projecting particular product attributes and, more importantly delivering a product that meets if not exceeds accrued expectations is an area of performance which is integral to visitor attractions. The breadth of attention devoted to this aspect of attraction visitation in the tourism literature is evidence of the importance of this facet of operations.

The motivations and associated expectations of visitors to heritage attractions is a complex field of enquiry which, although not within the direct scope of this study, is worthy of brief examination if only to gain a deeper understanding of the research outcomes. Much of the literature (Beeho and Jenkins,1997; Swarbrooke 2002) views attraction visitation as a process of experiential consumption, with the “attraction manager in effect becoming engineers of the experience through the provision of context” (Beeho et al 1997, p.76).

Added complexity flows from the fact that customers aid in the provision of their own individualised ‘products’, with each visitor’s personal agenda unique. If anything this highlights the essential difference between the attraction product and more tangible consumer products and highlights the complexity of product provision and evaluation. Since the focus here is on gauging levels of strategic performance it suggests to the researcher that attraction managers are typically confronted with diverse visitor preferences and expectations rendering the process of market fit problematic.

Since the entire thrust of Miles and Snow’s seminal framework (1978) was the articulation of ‘strategic types’, it seems more logical to gauge performance on the basis of perceived orientation rather than performance benchmarks per se. Olson, Slater, and Hult (2005) outline a number of strategic orientations which they contend “have the potential to create superior performance” (p.52) but point to the merits of a customer oriented approach. “Because of the constantly refined market sensing and customer relating capabilities of the customer oriented firm it should be well positioned to anticipate customer need evolution and to respond though the development of new

value focused capabilities” (p.52). In the context of this study high performance seems vested in degrees of dedication to customer orientation and a propensity to constantly scan for preferential changes.

The research outcomes are supportive of this perspective in that there was an evident link between degrees of customer orientation and performance [5.3.3]. The process of scanning, in particular, appeared to translate directly into successful anticipation of future trends in terms of visitor expectations. In particular, respondents highlighted the growing expectation amongst visitors for interactive experiences rather than purely static displays of heritage material [5.3.6]. The contribution made by a highly organised volunteer force in one case demonstrates how this visitor expectation can be met.

With respect to this research issue, the main conclusion that can be drawn from the research is that although ‘tight’ product market matches appear difficult to achieve, they are nonetheless critical in maintaining alignment with the market. Further, such a process seems entirely dependant on effective scanning both of the potential market and of visitors in situ. There was a view that, in fact, the latter cohort presented the greater potential in that it was possible to gauge expectation fulfilment and gain insights into how the experience might be improved. As suggested earlier, high performance in this context, may therefore be best conceptualised as a commitment to customer orientatation and proactive product development.

Conclusions with respect to issue 7:

Ability/propensity to engage in innovation and or re-invention

As concluded in issue 6, an essential element of meeting changing consumer expectations is the capacity and propensity to develop new products, and to modify existing product features in response to perceived trends. This is both an integral element of Miles and Snow’s (1978:1984) vision of the process of fit, and emerges as a key issue in the research discovery. In outlining the characteristics of prospector organisations, these authors do, however, issue a warning in pointing to the risks associated with an overextension of products and markets. There are risks too in high degrees of innovation when it moves an organisation away from its traditional or distinctive competencies (Zajac, Kraatz, and Bresser 2000). All of these issues have relevance to heritage attractions but the subtle differences that exist between tangible consumer goods [which is the primary focus of the literature related to fit], and attractions as an intangible bundle of products and services which are experienced

rather than consumed per se, suggest that there are particular considerations that apply to attractions in general, and heritage attractions in particular.

Perhaps the most significant of these is the role played by product innovation in fostering repeat visitation. Although it was generally felt that adherence to the dominant theme was essential, it was recognised that a constant process of refreshment was an inescapable priority. As such' it was seen to be directly instrumental in quality of delivery and as an element of strategic capability.

For many respondents, innovation was viewed as being an incremental process of improvement although the value of what were termed periodic 'wow factor' initiatives by adding substantial new features was widely recognised. Despite the level of consensus on this issue, however, the limitations imposed by funding were seen as a significant issue. Previous observations with respect to the value of forging relationships with government as a means of attracting supportive grants are again emphasised.

Above all there was a view that innovation and re-invention needed to be a decidedly proactive process, creatively driven and faithful to the central theme. Although not explicitly referred to in the findings, there was evidence of highly successful innovation driven by little more than small themed events depicting a particular aspect of the overall historical montage. Proactivity in particular appeared to be a cornerstone of successful operation and, in keeping with Miles and Snow's contention that rather than being a question of simply responding to changes in the market environment, organisations have the some ability to create their environments and "to define the organisations relationship with the broader environment" (Miles and Snow 1978, p.5)

From observation and analysis it was therefore possible to conclude that a proactively driven process of continuous improvement had demonstrated potential in aligning the organisation with its market environment. Although the scope and scale of innovation appeared not to be a defining issue as such, major initiatives at strategic stages of the organisational life cycle were seen to have demonstrably positive outcomes.

Conclusions with respect to issue 8:

Clarity of/adherence to dominant theme

In drawing conclusions with respect to issue 7, the importance of innovation which remains essentially faithful to the dominant theme was emphasised. Major divergence, it was suggested is inherently risky. Given the quite particular thematic focus of the attractions which were investigated, issues of thematic clarity also appeared to be a significant issue both in terms of visitor perceptions, and in relation to curatorial integrity. That the latter was seen to translate directly into visitor appeal was of particular note.

Although, at face value, the notion of considering certain attributes of a product as being inviolate seems inconsistent with the entrepreneurial ideology of Miles and Snow's 'ideal types' (1978), it is held that an effective analogy can be drawn between issues of branding in consumer products and the maintenance of a central theme in attractions. One can conceptualise, for example, the similarities between flavour variations in branded food products which do not detract from an overarching branding identity and feature modifications or additions in attractions that build or capitalise on the dominant theme.

Although adherence or faithfulness to theme seems an intuitive objective in this particular type of attraction there was evidence of both major departures from the central theme characterised by Sovereign Hill's diversification into depictions of early rural life and of a diverse, and to an extent disparate, set of sub themes in the case of Swan Hill which may have dissipated attempts at establishing a particular identity or consumer profile. In the latter case, the problem appeared to have been exacerbated by shifts in the dominant coalition.

Notwithstanding, there appeared to be some degree of consensus that a dominant, clear, and unambiguous theme was an element of consistent quality, and an element of organisational capacity. This can be ably demonstrated by considering the deliberately narrow depictive window [1851-1861] that is the essence of Sovereign Hill. Not only does this facilitate a curatorial focus of considerable depth, but presents the visitor with historical re-creation free of uncertainties or contradictions. Put simply, attention to detail appeared directly instrumental in the quality of delivery. Suggestions in the tourism literature (see for example Prentice Witt and Hamer 1998) that heritage attractions have an intrinsic value in their ability to provide meaning and cultural

connection suggests that clarity and adherence to particular theme is representative of a product market match and thereby an indicator of environmental fit.

Conclusions with respect to issue 9:

Engagement with community

Throughout early discussion relationships with the immediate community were accorded particular importance both because of their sphere of influence in shaping government support and because they represent an important resource in terms of volunteers. Traditional views of the relationship between the organisation and its 'market' seem not to apply here. In essence, theories of organisational fit suggest a largely exploitative process characterised by a purely commercial relationship based on the equation of supply and demand. This seems at direct contrast with the much more complex relationship observed during the research born of a notional if not actual sense of community 'ownership'.

At face value, therefore, any connection between this particular aspect of heritage attraction operation and the attainment of fit seems obscure. Notwithstanding, positive engagement with community emerged as a significant determinant of fit. To the researcher, this re-enforces earlier assertions that this particular type of attraction involves significantly greater degrees of complexity of operation.

Discussion with respect to issue 1 pointed to the importance of effective, albeit arms length, relationships with government. Being able to draw a direct comparison between one case study, which enjoys independence and financial self sufficiency, and the other which comes under direct government control and relies on the largesse of this administration for recurrent funding, points to the first and arguably most important aspect of positive community relationships. It was clear from the research that community, as voting constituents of local government were able to bring considerable pressure to bear in shaping attitudes towards the attraction. Regardless of whether this translated into funding pressure as was the case with Swan Hill, or impacted on the effectiveness of linkages in a general sense, many respondents felt that engaging with community and fostering positive relationships was a key determinant of successful operation.

This relationship was seen to take a number of different forms foremost amongst which was engagement at the level of direct involvement through volunteer

participation Apart from nurturing a sense of community 'ownership', there appeared to be many more tangible benefits flowing from this relationship. Quite apart from the savings made possible by non paid staff, volunteer participation was seen to significantly enhance interactivity. Given that this has been identified as a key element of visitor expectations, there was a view that this may ultimately be a key determinant of success.

Although not following established canons of organisational fit, the main conclusion drawn from the findings is that the extent to which attractions of this type can establish and maintain positive relationships with community is a key indicator of performance given its potential impact on funding and visitor appeal.

Overall conclusions with respect to research question 1

The principal conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing discussion is that each of the research issues identified in table 5.1 can largely be validated as key performance indicators in the quest for organisational fit. The analysis does, however, re-affirm the contention that attractions of this type typically display organisational characteristics that require some re-conceptualisation of the notion of fit. In particular, the challenges arising from various degrees of reliance on government set these enterprises apart from their purely commercial counterparts, with strategy and structure potentially constrained by external influence or control. A direct relationship can thus be drawn between degrees of operational autonomy and fit given that the entire process of aligning strategy structure and process [which is central to the notion of fit] assumes freedom on the part of management to exercise control over key decisions in this respect.

Further, since control appeared to have direct connotations of funding reliance and thereby commercial focus it appeared to be a key determinant in shaping organisational culture and strategic orientation. Cohesion, innovation and market orientation, all of which were suggested as key performance indicators, were also seen to be directly impacted by the extent to which the respective organisations were free to establish effective structures and processes [towards internal fit] and set strategic direction [attempts at external fit].

Fit also assumed different dimensions by virtue of the community based origins of the two case studies under examination. This, it was observed, rendered them distinctly

different from consumer products generally and suggested that a key element of fit was not simply a matter of aligning with the market, but aligning with key stakeholders.

Finally the very nature of the heritage attraction as a product appeared to have distinct implications in terms of attempting to establish product market matches.

Although Miles & Snow (1978) warn of the risks of overextension, an implicit element of their framework is the ability to innovate in a total sense by bringing completely new products to both new and existing markets. Although innovation and re-invention was endorsed as a key determinant of fit, the extent to which attractions of this type can or should divert from the central theme suggests that attempts at fit may be partially constrained. Notwithstanding, the research reports on small scale, but effective, innovation which does not detract from essential elements of the attraction.

Although seemingly problematic, the attainment of internal and external fit in this particular theatre of attraction operation seems possible provided that various impediments could be overcome, even if only partially. Just as it is possible to conceptualise actions or strategies which would contribute to fit, the research revealed significant obstacles in some cases which would need to be addressed if any degree of fit were to be achieved. As such, the next research question examines what respondents suggested are the main barriers to aligning strategy structure and process and thereby achieving fit.

RQ2:

What are the main impediments to the achievement of organisational fit in heritage visitor attractions?

Introduction

The opening sections of this chapter pointed to what appears to be a fundamental flaw in seminal theories of fit in that there appears to be little if any discussion as to the specific barriers or impediments to the process of strategic fit. Although Zajac et al (2000) point to macro environmental factors affecting the desirability of strategic change, and Miles and Snow (1984) allude to a lack of flexibility impacting on the efficiencies necessary to realise strategies, neither appears to explicitly recognise the vast range of constraints to unfettered strategic action. Miles and Snow (1984, pp.22-23) do, however, acknowledge that in the face of significant external change “some organisations may be unwilling or unable to adjust”.

To the researcher this suggests that a lack of resolve, for whatever reason, or absence of the necessary resources, of whatever type, 'headline' two areas in which the research suggests most of the barriers to fit reside. Molinsky (1999) adds another dimension by suggesting that issues of power and conflicting individual or group agenda can 'sand down' the sharpest edges of even the most promising change initiatives. Interestingly, the same author observes that a change project regardless of its merits can often be undermined by antagonism towards the project's sponsor. This has particular resonance in the findings of the research in that there was evidence of significant disagreement in one case study over strategy and direction which clearly impacted on organisational performance.

The fact that the operational circumstances of the two case studies were seen to be significantly polarised in terms of the absence or existence of impediments made it possible to draw some valuable conclusions as to the relative impacts of various barriers to strategic and structural cohesion. Rather than simply articulate these impediments as the antithetical proposition to what were designated as indicators of high performance, further in-depth interpretation made it possible to synthesise these into seven focused areas which will form the basis of ongoing discussion. The reader is also directed to extensive discussion in section 5.4 which provides more expansive discourse. As with the performance indicators, it will be suggested that many if not all of these are interdependent which might suggest that systemic, rather than individual solutions, may be required.

Specifically, impediments were seen to fall into the following categories:

1. Absence of operational autonomy
2. Resource constraints
3. Structural and Strategic mismatches
4. Conflicting Priorities
5. Lack of consensus and resolve as to strategic direction
6. Underdeveloped market focus
7. Negative perceptions of key stakeholders

Research Issue 1 – Absence of operational autonomy

The systemic nature of the impediments may, perhaps, be best demonstrated by highlighting what the research reveals is a defining factor in achieving both internal and external fit. There was both significant evidence [5.3.2/6.4], and strongly held views amongst a majority of the respondents that an ability to articulate and operationalise effective strategies was seriously impeded by a lack of operational autonomy. This situation appeared to be exacerbated where strategic direction was in the hands of a dominant coalition not directly involved in the day to day operations of the attraction.

There was strong support for the contention that attractions of this genre required specialised management and that critical decisions with respect to curatorial matters in particular could not, and should not be made by individuals without the requisite expertise. At the same time it was recognised that there were certain financial realities upon which such decisions should be based pointing to often conflicting priorities which are discussed later in this section. If anything this appeared to have connotations of the reactive rather than proactive management styles which are characteristic of the less successful strategic 'types' as outlined by Miles and Snow (1978).

A body of literature (Lioukas, Bourantas, and Papadakis 1993; Verhoest, Peters, Bouckaert, and Verschuere, 2004) has examined autonomy in public organisations or what are variously termed State Owned Enterprises [SOE], and observes that variations in autonomy between such enterprises varies according to resource dependence, political visibility [defined by its contribution to social objectives] and a number of other factors including size, performance, competition, and demand volatility. Interestingly, the former authors derive two central hypotheses which resonate with the findings of this study. Observing that intensity of control increases with the degree of resource dependence, and that a positive relationship exists between intensity of control and political visibility is illustrative of the situation which exists with the case study under government control.

There was strong evidence that issues of political visibility were a defining factor in shaping the relationship between community as constituents, local government, and the attraction and in fluctuating degrees over control. There was evidence, too, of a

direct correlation between resource dependence, mostly in terms of recurrent funding, and the levels of control imposed by local government.

From a structural perspective, a lack of autonomy appeared to give rise to an insular and negative organisational culture although there was some evidence in individual respondents maintaining some degree of optimism despite a sense of futility [5.4.1]. In these circumstances, processes were built largely around defensive mechanisms with poor collaboration and communication. The alignment of processes and structures which the literature suggests is integral to achieving internal fit seemed unattainable when such conditions prevailed.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to draw from the research in this respect is that most if not all of the other impediments to a greater or lesser degree stem from an absence of control over decision making. Although some respondents felt that autonomy should be absolute, the general consensus was that some degree of reliance on outside stakeholders was inevitable and that such support was often contingent on making some concessions in terms of policy and direction. The suggestion was made that an ability to attract capital grants from government involved some loss of control but that this was an acceptable cost given the need to periodically engage in major innovation.

Although the intuitive prescription would be to maintain as high a level of autonomy as possible, the degree to which this could be achieved seemed largely pre-ordained by origins and foundation ethos as discussed in chapter 5. Despite the fact that there are clearly a vast number of exogenous factors that dictate whether the attraction is successful, and thereby self sufficient, this may suggest that a determination to maintain independence is a decision which needs to be made at inception. The experience of one case study in this respect is illustrative of the point.

Research issue 2 - Resource constraints

Discussion in the previous section pointed to theoretical perspectives of the positive relationship between reliance on outside sources for recurrent funding and degrees of autonomy. Here, however, the focus shifts to perspectives of how resource dependence, and by inference inadequacy of resources appeared to impact on the process of fit. As has already been suggested, the broader literature relating to organisation environment fit appears to be based on the fundamental assumption that

the resources necessary to modify organisational structure and process as a means of aligning with strategic direction are in place. As Sanz-Mendez and Cruz-Castro (2003, p.1295) suggest, “the concept of organisational strategy implies the ability of organisations to respond actively”.

Although Zajac, Kraatz and Bresser (2000) allude to a set of organisational contingencies, including the input resources and various extant competencies that impact on the desirability of change, there is no explicit reference to the way in which input resources in particular constrain structural and strategic action [see Figure 3.2]. The research concludes, however, that as with most organisations, attractions of this type were typically constrained in their internal and external decision making where the requisite resources were absent. In short the process of attempting internal and external fit appeared to be almost entirely dependent on structural depth and capability, on processes conducive to a positive organisational culture; and on the generation or provision of adequate resources particularly those of a financial nature. The dichotomous scenarios which confronted the researcher highlighted the impacts of any shortcomings in this regard.

Many felt, however, that resources were not entirely confined to issues of funding. Perhaps the most obvious example was the importance placed on volunteers as a critical resource. Their impact on presentation, interpretation, and visitor interaction was seen as being central to the organisational culture. An inability to attract an adequate and enthusiastic force of volunteers was thereby seen as a significant barrier to successful operation. That, in some instances, this was seen to result from negative community perceptions of the attraction suggested to the researcher that community could itself be considered a resource.

Resources were seen too, to encompass the accumulation of critical expertise as a means of building operational capacity. Although this was, to some extent tied to financial resources in that structural depth and breadth was considered by some to be a question of manpower numbers, a more complete perspective suggested that continuity of structure did much to build this resource. Again, the researcher was able to compare two sharply contrasting sets of circumstances and to reflect on the negative impacts flowing from a constant process of managerial transitions.

Quite apart from aligning structure with strategy an inability to establish any enduring structure or to entrench processes constituted a major impediment to fit. Respondents directly involved in this process were able to provide valuable insights into the

problems associated with a lack of constancy, particularly as it related to a sense of strategic direction. Further, many felt that a lack of stability was counter to internal cohesion upon which effective processes relied.

With respect to resource constraints, therefore, the principal conclusion to be drawn from the research was that the resources extend beyond simple considerations of funding to include accrued expertise and community support. The suggestion was made that, to some extent these three resource bases were interdependent and that failure to achieve a balance between the three made environmental alignment problematic.

Research issue 3 – Structural & strategic mismatches

Central to the concept of organisational fit is the alignment or matching of internal structures and processes with the strategy of the organisation. As Miles and Snow (1984, p.10) observe, “Maintaining at least minimal fit between these elements is essential to all organisations operating in competitive environments”. Further, they submit that “if misfit occurs for a prolonged period usually the result is failure” (p.10). Of perhaps greatest relevance to the study at hand are the structural forms needed to facilitate innovation which, according to some of the earliest literature (Burns and Stalker 1961) need to be flexible and organic.

Considered in the light of the findings of this study, two aspects of Miles & Snow's framework (1982) need to be re-considered. First and possibly most important, their contention that the principal alignment mechanism is strategic response to changes in the external environment is to ignore the antithetical proposition, namely, that structural change, particularly when imposed for internal reasons, may be the defining factor. From the analysis of the data, it was clear to the researcher that internal change, particularly when this was frequent, significantly diminished strategic capacity. In one case study a more or less constant process of structural mutation made any alignment of structure with strategy impossible. This appeared to foster many of the characteristics of Miles and Snow's 'reactor type' [2.5.2] which, it was suggested earlier are not conducive to tight fit. Respondents viewed this as a serious impediment.

Secondly, the suggestion that management has the capacity to shape the environment in which it operates has connotations of proactivity which were decidedly absent in some cases. This appeared to be largely due to a lack of resources, but also to an

organisational culture of resignation. There was a strongly held view in some quarters that strategic vision was futile.

The main conclusion to be drawn from the study with respect to the strategy structure nexus was that a lack of capacity or inclination to align the two components for whatever reason represented a key impediment to the adaptation process. There was ample evidence to suggest that this was, in fact, a self fulfilling prophecy in that structural uncertainty and inadequacy significantly impaired strategic capacity which in turn further entrenched ineffective structures and processes. This appeared to initiate and perpetuate a cycle of poor performance which permeated all aspects of operation.

The research also concludes that mismatches between strategy and structure negatively impacted on the organisation's ability to foster a positive organisational culture, impeded the establishment of effective linkages, and generally depleted quality of presentation [5.4], all of which it was contended, are instrumental in achieving organisational fit. In the context of this particular type of attraction, the researcher contends that in all possibility, organisational structure, culture, and process are precursors of strategic capacity rather than the reverse proposition. This may suggest that overcoming mismatches is more about building structural capacity as a means of underpinning strategic action. This is borne out by the research which clearly illustrated how original culture and structural determination were directly instrumental in realising strategic objectives over time. This is discussed in more detail under research questions 3 and 4.

Research issue 4 – Conflicting priorities

Discussion with respect to key performance indicators suggested that the ability to reconcile commercial orientation with conservation and curatorial priorities appeared to be a key determinant of success. To simply adopt the antithetical proposition and suggest that an inability to achieve both objectives represents the sole impediment to fit is to ignore the wider dynamic of these seemingly irreconcilable objectives. The research findings point to a range of other issues which both underpin the main problem and represent conflicting priorities in their own right.

The dominant goals of various stakeholders were found to differ markedly which in part may explain the discord that prevailed in some cases. This was particularly obvious where the locus of control was not vested in operative staff but rather with a coalition

not directly involved in the day-to-day operations of the site. In terms of organisational fit, the implications of external control in terms of strategy formulation seem clear. Perhaps more importantly, strategies based on purely remedial objectives seem directly counter to the sort of proactive strategic orientation inherent in Miles and Snow's 'ideal types' (1978).

This appeared to be particularly so where outside control was vested in local government as was the case with one of the attractions under examination. Here attempts at achieving a delicate balance between responsibilities vested in the dispensation of public funding, and social responsibilities involved with the conservation of community heritage as a 'public good', appeared to be the order of the day. Although the research concludes that considerations of public funding appeared to subsume the less tangible objective, probably because of constituent pressure, local government stewardship over elements of local culture remained an inescapable responsibility.

To some extent, the problem appeared to be exacerbated by the transitory nature of elected officials resulting in fluctuating consensus as to the relative importance of one or other of these priorities. As such, many respondents considered that, at least in this instance the reconciliation of these priorities was problematic, if not impossible. Some felt that the problem could, in part, be overcome by simple consensus as to the fundamental mission of the attraction, although this too seemed to be the basis of ongoing disagreement. This also has broader implications in terms of strategic direction which will be discussed in more detail under research issue 5.

Although basically born of the same basic considerations, the priorities of operative staff appeared to be more personal and direct in nature with successive site management clearly subscribing to either a sort of fiscal conservatism or curatorial priorities. This appeared to mirror the shifting agenda of local government. As such, there appeared to be little chance of reconciling these priorities. The research suggests that this was a major impediment to the attainment of fit if only because the advent of tight financial control seemed to reflect a transition from a potentially proactive orientation to a purely reactive stance. In discussing the literature of fit, much has been made of the inherently proactive nature of effective strategies.

Although the research did not seek the views of local communities in other than an anecdotal sense, there was some indication that an 'ideological divide' existed

between residents who viewed the attraction as a community asset, and those who considered it a potential burden on finite public resources. The research suggests that these two cohorts were reasonably fixed in their view suggesting that overcoming such attitudes was problematic. If anything, this reinforces the suggestion that developing positive community relationships should be a priority.

The principal conclusions to be drawn from considering conflicting priorities as an impediment to achieving fit are firstly that such priorities appear to differ between various groups of stakeholders, suggesting they are multi-dimensional and somewhat more complex than first thought. Secondly, both individually and collectively they constitute a significant impediment to establishing enduring structures and processes, and to framing realistic and appropriate strategies. As such, any attempt at aligning strategy, structure, and process seems fraught with difficulty.

That said, the researcher concludes that such barriers did not appear to be insurmountable. The interdependent nature of the various impediments discussed here suggest that given adequate resources and a reasonable degree of operational autonomy reconciling priorities at an operational level may be achievable. That this may in turn eliminate the dilemma facing government and enhance community attitudes was worthy of note.

Research Issue 5 – Lack of consensus and resolve as to strategic action.

Perhaps the most significant manifestation of the divergent priorities of key groups of stakeholders was the inevitable lack of consensus as to the future directions of the attraction. Although this represents a significant impediment in its own right the problem appeared to be exacerbated by the fact that even the priorities of individual groups lacked constancy being mainly driven by expediency rather than strategic thinking. Again the problem appeared to have its origins in a lack of operational autonomy with effective control held by a dominant coalition with a wider agenda.

Miles and Snow (1978, p.20) place considerable emphasis on top decision makers who, they observe “serve as the primary link between the organisation and its environment”, yet cite evidence from their research which suggests that, in the case of the company under examination, attempts to modify its products and markets were constrained by the fact that the general manager and his staff did not possess the needed market orientation” (p.21).

The issue was therefore viewed as being two fold. Attempting to achieve consensus over even reasonably static strategic orientatations appeared difficult enough because of a fundamental ideological divide; yet where the respective orientations of opposing groups was transient at best the chances of any alignment appeared problematic. The researcher concludes, however, that even the devolution of 'control' to an operative level would not necessarily solve the issue. The defining factor appeared to be one of funding. Even if strategic decision making were notionally, in the hands of operative staff, any chance of realising even the most optimistic strategies would ultimately be constrained by the absence of resources.

Since it was earlier suggested that, in the case of attractions of this type, structure appeared to dictate strategy, even the most fundamental resources, as might be represented by staffing levels, would impact on the effectiveness of both structure and process rendering the realisation of proactive strategies unlikely. Given that the fundamental premise of organisational fit is that strategy must be underpinned by supportive structures and processes, achieving the necessary alignment seemed an impossible objective.

The fundamental conclusion to be drawn from these interpretations of the data is that strategic control needs to be accompanied by either financial self-sufficiency, or adequate funding. Although there was no suggestion that such control necessarily needed to be absolute, there appeared to be a fundamental expectation of meaningful rather than token devolution of power. The research also concludes that regardless of where control is seated, long term commitment to chosen strategies is imperative. Interestingly this again is logically finance dependant. Although it may seem simplistic, given the financial realities of operations in this sector the researcher concludes that much could be achieved by collaboration underpinned by effective communication.

Research issue 6 – Underdeveloped Market Focus

Although focus on existing and potential markets may seem an intuitive direction for any consumer oriented product, somewhat surprisingly there was evidence of not only an inability but a palpable lack of inclination to engage in market research in some instances. The impact of poor market intelligence or even the most basic understanding of the characteristics of existing visitors appeared to serve as a significant impediment to the formation of strategy.

Although largely dismissed as being due to resource constraints or situational characteristics, there appeared to be little knowledge or realisation of the resources available without significant cost. Earlier discussion with respect to the forging of alliances with government as a means of accessing vital tourism data is illustrative of the point. Research across the two case study sites provided a valuable contrast between high levels of market orientation on the one hand and a passive approach on the other. The researcher concludes that such an orientation is fundamental to successful operation.

Not only did a lack of market focus appear to significantly constrain the conceptualisation and formation of realistic strategies, the research further concludes that it renders proactive product development unlikely. Since it was earlier suggested that attractions of this type rely on product innovation for maintenance of appeal and repeat visitation, failure to keep abreast of changing consumer preferences and develop new or modified products in response seems a recipe for failure.

Given that the most fundamental aspect of theories of fit is the achievement of a product market matches, any lag in product development can have serious consequences. To the researcher operating on this basis is characteristic of Miles and Snow's reactor type which they declare to be unstable and likely to be an ineffective performer (1978, p.14).

The principal conclusion to be drawn from these observations is that, regardless of resource constraints, attractions of this type should strive to achieve as high a level of understanding of market characteristics as possible. This is not to suggest that responses should be universal in that the attraction in question should follow any and every trend. Much can be achieved by careful mindful selection of niche market segments and the development of products and experiences tailored to their needs.

Even within an attraction sub-sector characterised by a common, overarching theme of cultural heritage, in the view of the researcher there remains considerable scope for product differentiation based on the particular nuances of the heritage being presented.

Considering the data as a whole the research concludes that even were it possible to overcome all other impediments, failure to exercise a proactive approach to product development based on sound market intelligence would inevitably erode market share. Nor would it be possible to articulate effective strategies without a clear understanding of market composition, consumer preferences, and buying behaviour. This represents a key conclusion in that maintaining market appeal may underpin viability, decrease funding dependency, and ultimately foster effective structures and processes. As Miles and Snow (1984) observe, once this process of internal fit is achieved it creates a functionality that becomes “so obvious and compelling that complex organisational and managerial demands appear to be simple” (p.15).

Research issue 7 – Negative Perceptions of Key Stakeholders

Earlier discussion with respect to the impediments to successful operation imposed by the conflicting priorities of various groups of stakeholders, pointed to the role played by perceptions in shaping attitudes towards the attraction. In particular, the perceptions of resident communities were seen to be of some importance given their ability to exert considerable pressure on elected officials depending on how they viewed the attraction in question. Although the research points to one case study where such pressure had potentially more serious implications in influencing funding support, there was evidence across both cases of negative community perceptions having at least some impact on operations.

Perhaps the most obvious of these was a lack of support by way of volunteer participation. Previous discussion emphasised the importance of interactivity in enhancing the visitor experience, integral to which is live interpretation of the heritage theme. Since there was quite compelling evidence to suggest that this was a key determinant of success, any lack of resolve on the part of community to support the attraction in this way is seen as a significant barrier to successful operation. What appeared obvious to the researcher was that attempts to engage with community as a means of garnering support in this way was a key component of quality presentation and thereby visitor appeal. Where the level of this engagement was low there was

evidence that, over time, little attempt had been made to 'sell' the value of the attraction to residents. More importantly, no attempt had been made to convey the notion of the attraction as a community asset. The problem was exacerbated by local media who appeared to be extremely influential in shaping community attitudes. The fact that, according to respondents, this frequently had negative overtones seemed to counter any attempts to generate a positive profile by further entrenching negativity.

Although slightly more obscure, negative community perceptions were also seen to impact on the extent to which residents were inclined to increase visitation by encouraging visiting friends or relatives to include the attraction in their itinerary.

Although the research sample did not, by intent, include individuals drawn from local community, anecdotally there was evidence of the dissemination of negative word of mouth to potential visitors. It is held that such attitudes and inclinations represent a significant impediment particularly given their compound effect. The research concludes that opposition or indifference on the part of the host community presents a significant challenge to management.

Previous sections have also focused on the complexities of the relationship between one case study and local government with particular emphasis on control and conflicting priorities. Although the attitudes of these external stakeholders appear to be largely shaped by financial realities in terms of levels of performance, the research also reveals that persistent negativity as to the attraction's community worth may in part be due to a lack of comprehension of the importance of heritage conservation to community cohesion. The adversarial nature of the relationship between site management and local government officials appeared to do little to foster effective lines of communication. The researcher views this as a significant impediment in that a lack of consultation on key strategic issues may have resulted in ill conceived strategies and further exacerbated conflict.

The research also reported on the attitudes of state government as being shaped by a perceived lack of support at a regional level. There was evidence of some reluctance on the part of state government and its instrumentalities to support the attraction by way of capital grants because of the perception that it did not enjoy local support. Again, this is seen to present a significant barrier to the process of constant intervention which was earlier emphasised as being an absolute imperative.

Although such negative perceptions are inextricably tied to performance, the research suggests that strong external communication has the potential to counter, even if only partially, any perceptions of the attraction being a drain on public resources. Even critics of the attraction appeared willing to concede that much could be achieved by fostering a better understanding of the operational ethos and mission of the organisation.

Negative perceptions are not, however, confined to issues of financial dependence on public money. Although admittedly to a much lesser degree the contrasting case study which enjoys independence and financial self sufficiency appears not to be totally immune from negative perceptions of community and local government. Analysis and interpretation of the data conducted in chapter 5 alluded to a small but persistent pocket of negativity with respect to the perceived market dominance of the attraction. Although a number of respondents dismissed this as merely a product of 'tall poppy syndrome', unchecked it was considered that this could become a significant problem. Here too, the research concludes that transparency and good communication presents a way of countering such perceptions.

Although connection with theories of organisational fit seem obscure, the commitment of both internal and external 'stakeholders', effective communication, and a positive organisational culture are all essential ingredients in the process of aligning strategy structure and process. What appears clear from the research is that attractions of this type appear to enjoy mixed success in this regard.

Overall conclusions with respect to research question 2

In considering impediments in a collective sense, the research concludes that most if not all impediments have their root cause in a lack of operational autonomy and with it reliance on external sources for recurrent funding. Where these conditions prevailed this almost inevitably gave rise to a clash of priorities and disagreement over mission and strategic direction. As outlined in section 6.4, this appeared to have more far reaching consequences impacting dramatically on the organisations ability to achieve alignment with its operating environment. From an internal perspective this appeared to encourage and entrench a negative organisational culture, to perpetuate structural and procedural inadequacy and ultimately to hamper the delivery of a quality product. Also in these circumstances, attempts at market alignment appeared to be reactive at best with little in the way of any obvious attempts at understanding consumer trends

and preferences. Strategies, if they existed appeared to be either ill conceived lacking in long term commitment, or rendered ineffective by delays in bringing them to reality.

Several of the impediments are, however, deserving of individual emphasis given what the research suggests are their impacts on organisational fit. Of particular note is the issue of conflicting priorities which at face value would seem to be completely intractable. Although the researcher assiduously avoided any preconceptions influencing the data collection and interpretation there was at least some initial perception that profitability and curatorial integrity were irreconcilable objectives. Were this to be universally true, it would indeed represent a significant impediment to successful operation given that the singular pursuit of either objective infers the achievement of one at the sacrifice of the other. In fact, the research concludes that these objectives are interdependent and achievable, which may question traditional thinking.

With respect to market focus, the findings point to a necessary distinction between lack of market focus and resource constraints. Although absence of the necessary resources could obviously deprive the attraction of the breadth of expertise necessary to read and interpret market intelligence, lack of market focus is not resource dependant per se. Its significance as an impediment therefore needs to be questioned since there are effective means by which small attractions can accrue useful data without substantial cost. Some clarity may be afforded by considering lack of propensity rather than ability to adopt a market focus as an impediment.

The final issue is that relating to structural and strategic mismatches which it was suggested represent a primary barrier to the attainment of fit. Although this is a central plank of Miles and Snow's (1979; 1984) theoretical framework, the research reveals that, at least in the context of the case studies under examination, some degree of mismatch is inevitable. This may be due to the volatility of the market as outlined in chapter 2, or may simply be characteristic of the truly organic structure which this sort of operation seems to demand.

In summary, the research concludes that attractions of this type are confronted with a number of impediments which they must attempt to overcome if they are to successfully achieve alignment of process, structure and strategy. Some, the research suggests, are somewhat more difficult to overcome, but their identification highlights the challenges of management in this attraction sector.

RQ3:

In the context of heritage visitor attractions what respective roles do strategy, structure, and process play in higher levels of organisational fit and organisational performance?

Strategic Perspectives

Having considered both key performance indicators, and the range of impediments which need to be overcome to achieve high levels of performance, research question 3 aligns the findings of the research with fundamental theory as it relates to organisational fit. Earlier discussion emphasised the centrality of the three elements of strategy, structure and process to the notion of fit, and pointed to various perspectives as to the relationship between them. Miles and Snow's (1984) assertion that strategy is the defining factor will be examined in greater detail under research question 4, however, any adjudication, by necessity, should be made on the basis of what the research suggests is the relative importance of each of the three factors. In so doing the research also provides insights into the research problem outlined in earlier sections of this chapter.

In first considering the strategic orientation of attractions in a volatile operating environment, a critical distinction needs to be made between Miles and Snow's view of alignment as being solely concerned with the market environment and an attraction centric view which both the literature and the research findings suggest needs to consider adaption to a wider range of environmental forces. Although clearly important, strategic action as simply a means of attempting product market matches is merely one element of how small attractions of this type need respond to environmental pressures. Strategic fit thereby needs to be conceptualised as a multi faceted process of reading broader environmental forces and adapting accordingly.

As such, market acceptance needs to be measured by more than product uptake or adoption to include social acceptance in a broader sense. For example, strategies directed at garnering community approval and support in the face of opposition appear to be every bit as important as increasing visitation levels.

Such observations have strong foundation in the research which suggests that management are confronted with multiple challenges requiring an eclectic view of strategy. This was supported by a review of the literature conducted in chapter 2 which highlighted the complexity of the operating environment. Interestingly, the research

suggests that neither of the case studies appear to take a completely eclectic view of strategy. This may be because certain strategic inclinations are implicit in their style of operation but there were clearly examples of strategic approaches directed at little more than defending the existing product.

As such, the research calls for a broader view of strategy, which encompasses response mechanisms to a variety of environmental forces. Where possible these should be proactive rather than reactive in nature given the obvious value of offset over remediation. This echoes yet again Child's (1972) suggestion that management has the capacity to shape the environment in which it operates. It is acknowledged, however, that strategy and by inference, proactivity can be constrained by structure and process (Miles and Snow 1978). There was significant evidence to suggest that ineffective structures were both a cause of unworkable strategy and a major obstacle to their formation. Notwithstanding, strategy assumes particular importance in attempts at environmental alignment.

Structural Perspectives

Although the interdependence of strategy, structure, and process is germane to Miles and Snow's theory of fit (1984), earlier discussion alluded to differing theoretical perspectives as to the relative importance of each in the mix. More particularly, there is fundamental dispute on the nexus between strategy and structure. Whilst the research broadly supports the contention that effective strategy is indeed underpinned by structural capacity and process efficiency, there was evidence that structure in this context assumes unique connotations and dimensions which may render it the defining factor in strategic fit rather than the reverse proposition.

An integral part of the theoretical framework which formed the basis of discussion in chapter 6 was the researcher's contention that considerations of 'form' provide a more comprehensive view of structural capacity rather than structure in a literal sense. Much of the literature with respect to fit (Miles and Snow 1979; 1984, Olson Stanley and Hult 2002) is confined to the efficacy of various structural configurations which, the research suggests, do not adequately explain the way in which the organisational form of small heritage attractions dictates their strategic effectiveness. This points to some distinct differences between the organisations which were the empirical basis of Miles and Snow's framework, and the case studies in focus.

In short, the quite particular nature of small heritage based attractions as organisations, demands a view of structure or form that extends beyond simple considerations of organisational dimensions. Such a view is supported by the research which strongly suggests that the underpinnings of effective strategy in this context are also about structural capacity and ideology. Examined in this light, the importance of structure comes into greater focus.

Perhaps the most significant difference between considerations of structure as viewed by early theorists in the area of fit, and the current study, is the part played by volunteers in contributing to the dynamics of the organisation. The research concludes that there is an inherent difference between organisations that rely on the largesse of unpaid 'employees', and those where commitment on the part of staff is for the most part assumed. Further, any degree of reliance on a volunteer workforce in terms of tenure and continuity appeared unwise if not impossible. The impact of a strong and enduring volunteer network was quite evident in one case which supported the researcher's view.

Commitment too, appeared to have connotations in terms of the value laden nature of the product. Unlike mainstream consumer products to which management and staff generally have no emotional connection; those with a decidedly curatorial focus appeared to view the collection as holding intrinsic, rather than purely material value. In a structural sense, this appeared to entrench the divide between supporters of the financial imperative and those who viewed curatorial integrity as the pre-eminent objective. Such an observation is particularly important given earlier discussion with respect to difficulties associated with the reconciliation of objectives, and the observation that strategy could be constrained by ineffective structure.

Although the findings appear to be congruent with the broader literature of fit which posits the effectiveness of decentralised functional structures in achieving tight fit, the case studies also displayed some additional complexity in terms of the highly specialised nature of various functions within the structural mix. Unlike manufacturing industries which were the principal focus of Miles and Snow's seminal research (1979), the study pointed to significant diversity in the functions of various devolved units suggesting that attempts at structural cohesion were more difficult. This is seen to have particular implications in terms of the role played by structure in dictating strategy given that meshing disparate agenda could present a problem. Conversely it might be argued that structural depth equates to strength. The challenge would appear to be

successfully managing these units by encouraging effective communication and fostering a binding organisational culture.

This points to the final dimension of structure which appears to differentiate small heritage based attractions from organisations in a general sense. Although there are obvious implications in terms of size, the research suggests that organisational culture is an inalienable part of structure in attractions of this type. The research clearly demonstrates what can be achieved by including a diversity of views into the overall culture. The ability to accommodate a wide range of individual agenda into one cohesive vision would appear to result in significant structural depth.

In summary, the research pointed to a number of structural particularities without which the articulation and implementation of effective strategies seemed problematic. As such, the structure of the respective organisations is viewed as playing a pivotal role in the attainment of external fit.

Process Perspectives

The research revealed even greater levels of complexity in the accompanying processes which characterised the operational 'behaviour' of the respective case studies. As a result, the researcher was drawn to consider how the particular demands of operation shaped process and whether such processes could be rationalised given prevailing structures. The degree to which process and structure are in alignment is the principal determinant of internal fit and, thereby a key part of the adaptive process.

The research supports fundamental theories with respect to attractions in general (Swarbrooke 200 et al) which suggest that the attraction product has some unique characteristics. In particular, they point to the simultaneous production and consumption of the attraction experience; and the fact that the visitor is partly instrumental in the 'production' process. To the researcher, this implies a set of processes which are significantly different than might be applied to the production of products generally.

This was, in fact, strongly born out by the research which pointed to a number of procedural issues that appear to be unique to attractions of this type. In particular, a contrast was observed between a flexible organic approach to processes, and rigid approaches born of a defensive stance. That the former resulted in a proactive,

innovative approach to strategy and the latter to largely re-active styles of management was of note. The principal conclusion to be drawn from these interpretations is that processes and structures appeared to be strongly interdependent with neither able to be effective in isolation. Moreover, flexible processes appeared to be the means by which the benefits of effective structures were maximised. The reverse proposition also appeared to be the case. Such findings are supportive of broader theories of fit which suggest that internal fit can only be achieved when these elements are aligned.

Overall conclusions with respect to research question 3

Having pointed to the particular set of strategic, structural and process dimensions of the case studies under examination, it becomes possible to consider the precise roles of each in achieving performance and fit. Since it has earlier been contended that tight internal and external fit, as envisaged by Miles and Snow (1984), is predicated upon degrees of alignment between strategy, structure and process, the roles played by each in the adaptive process are logically interdependent. That said, the research reveals that each plays quite particular roles in fostering high levels of performance.

In a general sense, organisational strategy is primarily a proactive process of adjustment to changing market conditions. More specifically it provides a concrete sense of direction, enables planning, provides performance measures, and perhaps serendipitously points to internal strengths and weaknesses which might not otherwise be obvious. More importantly, it provides an overall sense of cohesion which permeates all other facets of the operation. In collecting and analysing the data, the researcher was able to critically evaluate the extent to which the respective case studies under examination were able to achieve these objectives and thereby to consider the effectiveness of whatever strategies were in place. Moreover, it was possible to identify the specific roles of strategy in enhancing performance.

Possibly the most obvious role played by strategy in this specific research context was the ability or otherwise to adapt to a volatile, but more importantly diverse environment. Earlier discussion offered a view of strategy which suggested that for these case studies, change and adaption extends beyond consideration of merely attempting product market matches to include wider environmental forces. As such, the research concludes that the roles of strategy in this research context are broader in application and wider in implication.

Although market directed strategies remained a key part of successful operation, strategic orientation extended to calculated and purposeful engagement with community, to general levels of innovation; and to curatorial strategies directed at maintaining the integrity of heritage items and presentations. At perhaps a more obscure level strategy directed at promoting good corporate citizenry and community worth appeared to be included in the mix. Although the two case studies clearly placed varying emphasis on these objectives and enjoyed differing levels of success, they were an evident element of respondent views on strategy in both cases.

Having been able to observe both the positive and negative impacts of strategy in terms of breadth and focus, the research concludes that this more eclectic view holds some prescriptive value in framing an approach to achieving environmental fit. In particular, the research suggests that proactivity is the key. The inherent power of strategy appeared to be significantly diminished when applied in a reactive way.

Earlier sections also pointed to the somewhat unique structural demands of this particular type of organisation, which, it is suggested, place the roles of structure into diverse domains. Although the research concludes that the fundamental role of structure in providing basic functionality applies equally to these attractions as to other types of organisations, structure in this context was first seen to bring together diverse expertise into a working 'whole'. In this respect, these attractions were seen to be distinctive in the sense that the mechanistic structures that appear to be characteristic of Miles and Snow's studies of manufacturing organisations were contradictory to what was observed. As such, the role of structure in building organisational competence particularly in such diverse and specialised operational contexts was considered vital.

In addition, the role of structure in integrating a volunteer workforce with paid employees presented quite particular structural challenges. Where such an objective was achieved the evidence that this translated into high levels of performance was compelling. Even if only indirectly, therefore, the role of structure in fostering positive links with community is worthy of recognition. It also plays a significant part in quality presentation given earlier assertions that an effective volunteer workforce has the potential to raise and enhance interactivity.

Another important role played by structure in achieving high levels of performance was that related to the conflicting objectives. There was evidence of structure as a

mediating force between financial and curatorial objectives in that structures designed to give equal focus and importance to both objectives clearly had a positive outcome. In that regard the importance of structural capacity was again reinforced.

The final sets of conclusions were those related to process which is closely aligned with issues of structure. Processes were seen to have an important role in that as earlier observed they appeared to be a defining factor in structural effectiveness. More specifically, it was emphasised that in this particular operational context, procedure assumed quite unique connotations in that management were only partially in control of the 'production' process. There was discussion too with respect to a simultaneous production and consumption process suggesting that the establishment of rigid process was not always possible. Rather than diminish the importance of procedural focus, however, it elevates the role of process to another plane.

In summary, strategy, structure, and process were all seen to play a vital role in enhancing organisational performance. Although the findings are generally supportive of broader theory with respect to fit, mainly as it relates to the interdependent nature of these elements, the case studies under examination offer significant insights into the particularities and peculiarities of attractions of this type. They support the general contention that small heritage based attractions display quite distinctive forms and structures; require often unique strategic approaches; and employ processes that are largely dictated by the nature of the attraction product.

Perhaps the most significant observation that can be made with respect to the respective roles of strategy, structure, and process, however, lies in the degree of discretion that the respective case studies had over key decisions in these areas. Previous discussion has placed considerable emphasis on the fundamental role of operational autonomy in empowering management to make critical judgments in this regard. It needs to be emphasised, however, that complete absence of any constraints in this regard is not, in itself, a panacea, or necessarily a recipe for high levels of performance. It is the researcher's observation that much of what constrains successful operation is not only an absence of freedom over decision making but also a lack of internal cohesion and with it a negative organisational culture. As such the results call for a more holistic view of strategy structure and process, to incorporate elements beyond traditional views of these elements of fit.

RQ4:

In the context of heritage visitor attractions does strategy appear to dictate structure, or is the reverse proposition evident?

Previous discussion has alluded to an ongoing debate as to the relationship between organisational strategy and structure. In short, the question is posed as to whether strategy dictates structure or whether the antithetical proposition applies. Although Miles and Snow (1984) are resolute in their contention that “in practical terms the basic alignment mechanism is strategy” (p.11), and that fit is achieved when strategies are supported by appropriately designed structures and processes, a number of other organisational theorists (see for example Engdahl Keating and Aupperle, 2000) suggest that structure is partly instrumental in shaping strategy. As they observe, “the strategy structure elements imply a one-way relationship when it is becoming increasingly clear that structure has a significant impact on strategy” (p.22). Just as Miles and Snow (1984) suggest that effective structures and processes foster and support effective strategies, the reverse proposition seems intuitively logical. Of even greater note was the observation that a lack of constancy in structural form simply compounded any lack of strategic direction.

Such contentions have particular resonance with the findings of this research which point to a distinct causal relationship between structure and the ability or propensity to engage in proactive strategy formulation and implementation. That said, the research is also generally supportive of the view that, to some extent a two way relationship exists between strategy and structure. In examining the data derived from the two case studies, it was possible to identify clear examples of key structural adjustments being made in support of strategic initiatives supporting Miles and Snow’s thesis (1984) that strategy is the driving force behind structural re-alignment. Conversely, there was evidence, of strategies being framed on the basis of perceived structural capacity, suggesting the opposite may also be true. Offering any definitive answer to the research question therefore appears problematic. Some clarity may be afforded by considering structure, not as a determinant of strategic behaviour per se, but rather a moderating or influencing force.

Viewed from that perspective the researcher concludes that, on balance the structure, and more particularly the structural capacity of the respective case studies, was the defining factor in strategic behaviour. Structural modification as a means of underpinning strategy appeared to be more a case of proactive capacity building rather than direct responses to specific strategies. As such, the case studies under

examination challenge early perspectives of the adaptive process as envisaged by Miles and Snow (1984).

In summary the research concludes that, at least in the context of the case studies under examination, structure, more broadly conceptualised as capacity, appears to shape if not dictate strategic behaviour. This appears to be largely due to resource constraints which both impede the structural breadth and depth of the organisation and, in the long term contribute to diminished strategic resolve. Closing sections of this chapter will highlight the specific implications of such a scenario in terms of its impact on both internal and external fit.

7.4 Overall conclusions with respect to the research problem

Having examined the four research questions in detail, it becomes possible to consider how the research and its analysis contribute to an understanding of the research problem which was articulated as follows:

To what extent does organisational fit contribute to successful operation in heritage visitor attractions?

The research points, however, to a number of critical definitional and conceptual issues, which need to be addressed before any comprehensive understanding of the problem can be achieved. Firstly, although success could be conceptualised as having multiple dimensions including such factors as operational life span, size, and market penetration, the research concludes that the most appropriate measure appears to be financial self sufficiency, given that this appears to be a defining factor in the relative performance levels of both case studies.

Secondly, any comprehensive attempt to address the question must first make a critical distinction between internal and external fit. Miles and Snow (1984) suggest internal fit is “a process of efficiently managing internal interdependencies” (p.3) whereas external fit is the process of strategic alignment with the market or, as was contended here, the broader operating environment. In a total sense the process of alignment or fit is hypothetically attainable when these two constituencies are achieved both independently and jointly. As such, any adjudication needs to be made on both levels.

Finally it needs to be recognised that the concept of fit is, in itself, dimensional rendering any judgment as to attainment problematic. In observing that “perfect fit is most often a condition to be strived for rather than accomplished,” (Miles and Snow 1984, p.11) make a clear distinction between minimal fit as a base requirement for survival, and tight fit which “[produces] excellent performance and a strong organisational culture” (p.10). They also refer to a state of what is termed ‘fragile fit’, which has particular resonance in some of the findings.

Although at face value these would seem to complicate the process of making any judgment with respect to the problem, considered in the light of the research outcomes a set of quite definitive observations is possible. Table 6.1 points to the structural and strategic dimensions of the themes which emerged from analysis of the data. Since, by the simplest interpretation, internal fit is vested in considerations of effective structure and process, and external fit in strategic orientation these dimensions offer a means by which at least minimal fit might be evaluated.

7.4.1 Internal fit and successful operation

Conceptually, internal fit is commensurate with structural forms that are organic, flexible and responsive. This enables the organisation to not only respond effectively to sudden unexpected change, but also to shift operational emphasis without major disruption to otherwise rigid structures. Both from an observational and interpretive perspective, the research provided clear evidence of a link between these configurational characteristics and an ability to respond effectively to change. This can be seen to ultimately contribute to self sufficiency in that the potentially negative impact of unanticipated change may be ameliorated by preparedness and capacity.

Further, such structures were seen to be directly conducive to a positive organisational culture with a majority of stakeholders subscribing to a common set of values and priorities. Potentially this had a significant impact on successful operation in that it clearly fostered cohesive and efficient processes which were, in themselves conducive to high levels of performance. They were also the catalyst for strong lines of communication and information sharing which again was seen to enhance preparedness and capacity.

Alignment between physical structure and processes, which is central to internal fit, also appeared to perpetuate a sense of introspectivity in that in a climate of structural

stability, there was an obvious tendency to constantly re-evaluate and improve internal processes in a quest for improvement. Not only did this appear to enhance financial performance through increased efficiencies, but it also had the potential to eliminate outdated or inefficient practices. In addition, it frequently pointed to strategic opportunities by identifying particular strengths on which the organisation might capitalise. As such these characteristics of internal fit appeared to have a significant impact on the operation overall. The fundamental suggestion that an on-going process of innovation is central to market appeal and thereby profitability is illustrative of the point.

Finally, the attainment of internal fit, to whatever degree was seen to contribute over time to capacity building, in terms of the accrual, scope and scale of internal expertise. The research provided compelling evidence that this translated into higher quality presentation and thereby increased visitation. Although it may be overly simplistic to equate visitation levels with financial self sufficiency, the contrast between the two sites suggested at least some causal link between visitor numbers and revenue generation.

Internal fit is thus seen to contribute to successful operation by enhancing preparedness and capacity to respond to change; by increasing internal efficiencies; and by encouraging proactivity in searching for new opportunities and engaging in innovation. As such, the attainment of alignment between structure and process appears to have significant impact on performance.

7.4.2 External fit and successful operation

Earlier discussion pointed to an implicit element of theories of organisational adaption which view strategy as being principally vested in achieving product market matches. Based on the research findings, the suggestion was made that in this particular organisational context achieving external fit appears to be somewhat more complex in that there are multiple environments with which alignment must be achieved. Notwithstanding, in a rudimentary sense the attainment of external fit is predicated on successful market alignment which at least hypothetically translates into increased market share and thereby higher levels of revenue generation.

In this respect the research evidence was clear and unequivocal. The contrast between the two case studies highlighted the extent to which market alignment

appeared to impact on successful operation. Such a finding is, of course, directly congruent with Miles and Snow's framework (1984) which postulates such alignment as a fundamental requirement for the attainment of external fit. Although a direct causal link was hard to establish in quantifiable terms, a more obvious link was seen to exist between a demonstrated grasp of market conditions; effective responses; and the maintenance of visitor appeal. Given the absolute importance of repeat visitation achieving and maintaining market alignment was viewed as being central to success.

An understanding of market conditions also has obvious implications in terms of product development. Achieving the product matches required for fit supposes not only knowledge of effective demand but more particular preferences in terms of product attributes. Earlier discussion pointed to the importance of deeper market intelligence in achieving an understanding of consumer preferences. Product development directed at product market matches is both an integral element of fit, and a key determinant of success. Achieving external fit in this way may not only sustain demand, but also contribute to the viability of product initiatives, and result in quality of delivery. All, it could be argued, ultimately underpin financial self sufficiency.

As was suggested earlier external fit, however, assumes wider connotations when viewed in the context of this study. It is held that fit in this particular context involves not only market alignment but 'alignment' with a set of stakeholders whose individual and collective agenda impact on the operation of the organisation. Such a contention is central to the findings of the study in that the attitudes of external stakeholders, regardless of their sphere of influence, were identified as a key factor in economic viability. The role played by host communities in particular in exerting constituent pressure on local government was seen to have a profound effect on the dispensation of funding for recurrent costs. Just as market alignment involves achieving fit with the desires and expectations of consumers, alignment with the broader community necessitates recognition of the wishes and aspirations of these key stakeholders. Even more directly at least some concession to host community concerns has the potential to enhance relationships and encourage direct involvement by way of volunteer participation. This has the potential to both reduce operating costs and more importantly to improve levels of visitor interactivity further enhancing appeal.

Finally, a more eclectic view of external fit is completed by considering the importance of alignment with government both at a regional and state level. Although the research presented examples of considerable discord at a regional level, the entire gamut of

government relations is viewed as being a key element of external fit. Regardless of the nature of the relationship between regional government and attractions of this type, regional governments exert considerable influence over the operation of small tourism enterprises of all types. Although, in some instances fostering positive relationships was particularly problematic, mainly because of a relationship based on dependency, it remains a key element of external fit.

Although different in nature, government relationships at a state level also have a significant impact on the success of regional attractions. As such, aligning with government and constituent instrumentalities emerged as a vital component of successful operation. A capacity to innovate appeared to be almost totally dependant on the dispensation of capital grants in particular. The funding of large projects was undeniably instrumental in the maintenance of revenue generation. In a less direct but nonetheless important way, alignment with state government policy, particularly as it relates to regional development enhanced performance by enabling attractions to tap into wider regional initiatives, and to obtain vital information as a basis for marketing decisions.

In summary congruence or fit with the broader external environment was a key factor influencing successful operations given its implications in terms of host community acceptance and participation, various levels of government support, and market effectiveness. Both individually and collectively these factors underpin self sufficiency in that they have the potential to enhance the visitor interface through volunteer participation; to engender positive attitudes as a means of overcoming opposition; to elicit vital funding support; and to achieve more effective product market matches.

Having examined the research questions in the context of the findings, and offered a set of definitive conclusions, chapter 8 points to the perceived implications of the research for both theories of organisational fit, and for theory and research in the attraction sector specifically. Further, since the particular focus of the research is on small heritage based attractions, the implications for this sub sector are explored in greater detail.

Continuing sections of chapter 8 reflect on the suitability of the selected research paradigm, and of the method which underpinned the research. It is contended that the approach adopted was appropriate, both in the context of this particular study, and as a potential basis for future research in the area. Finally the chapter articulates a

number of research directions which, it is suggested, address critical shortcomings in the literature.

8.0 Conclusions, Implications, and Opportunities for Future Research

8.1 Introduction

Having addressed the research problem and associated questions in the context of the findings, it becomes necessary to consider:

- The perceived implications of the research as they relate to wider management theories of organisational 'fit' or adaptation.
- What the research suggests are the more specific implications for attractions in general and small heritage based attractions in particular.
- The implications for on-going research in terms of the methodology adopted
- The perceived opportunities for future research.

Such a process of elucidation not only brings the work to a conclusion, but fulfils the pre-eminent objective of the research in juxtaposing two essentially discrete bodies of literature and research. In so doing it becomes possible to consider the explanatory value of broader management theory to the attraction sub-sector, and, as a consequence of emerging contrasts, the particularities of attraction management. In turn this points to perceived inadequacies in extant attraction research, particularly as they relate to change and organisational adaptation. Finally, in the light of what the research reveals to be key success factors, it also offers some research directions deserving of attention.

8.2 Implications for theories of organisational fit

Previous discussion alluded to the view that theories of organisational fit may not adequately reflect the diversity of organisational types, or the environmental particularities characteristic to specific types of forms of organisations. Moreover, it was suggested that the framework which forms the principal focus of this study (Miles and Snow 1978:1984) conceptualises the alignment process as being principally directed at the market environment through the achievement of product market matches. Given the outcomes of this study which suggest that the operating environment is, in fact multi-faceted requiring alignment on a number of fronts, the adequacy of their framework may be at question.

Conceding that they have no final proof of the validity of the framework they do, however, question whether “particular type[s] or forms of organisations require a specific style of management”, or whether “existing models of organisational strategy, structure and process [are] able to meet all environmental conditions” (Miles and Snow 1978, p.4). The study provides compelling evidence that, at least in the context of the two case studies under examination, a unique set of environmental challenges demand an equally unique management style. Although the findings can obviously not be generalised, even to attractions of the same genre, there appears to be sufficient evidence to suggest that, in the context of small to medium sized attractions, fit needs to be more broadly construed.

The findings also appear to question whether the strategic or structural adjustments which are central to the process of adaption, are merely a matter of exercising options, or whether, as the research suggests this can present greater complexity in that it may demand the reconciliation of conflicting priorities which may both need to be achieved. Although Miles and Snow (1978) acknowledge that it may be necessary to frame multiple strategies in the face of non homogenous environments, there appears to be no explicit reference to the difficulties associated with achieving clearly disparate objectives. A clear analogy can be drawn between the dilemma facing the case studies in focus [with respect to the profit/curatorial divide], and organisations in general that may be confronted with the need to balance a sense of environmental responsibility, with returns for shareholders. As such, consideration of the factors that potentially constrain strategy may need to be broadened beyond structural and process impediments to include the complexities imposed by prioritisation.

Reference to issues of environmental responsibility also points to an essential difference between the case studies in focus and the organisations which were the basis of Miles and Snow's thesis adding yet another dimension to the concept of fit. Unlike consumer products to which the potential or actual user has no emotional attachment per se, the value laden nature of the heritage attraction product suggests that strategy, in all of it's manifestations, assumes an elevated ethical dimension. If anything, this may reinforce the call for a shift of emphasis from strategy as a market orientation, to strategy as a vehicle for relationship building. Earlier discussion with respect to the influence of host communities and government on successful operation is illustrative of the point.

The distinctive nature of the heritage attraction product also raises issues of product development in response to perceived demand variables. Although the process of developing or modifying product offerings which reflect the changing needs and wants of various market segments is integral to the process of adaptation, there may be certain elements of the heritage product which are beyond modification or re-interpretation. As such, total freedom for product innovation which is an implicit element of broader theories of fit may not be possible in this context. Strategy may be constrained by the very nature of the product rather than structure and process alone.

Further, since tourism products in general, and heritage based attractions in particular, are an amalgam of tangible and intangible elements, product development involves not only the creation or modification of physical aspects but also the utilisation of structural capacity in terms of service delivery. To some extent this blurs the distinction between strategy and structure in that structural capacity is itself an integral part of the end product. Although in a broad sense this supports Miles and Snow's contention that product strategy must be supported by appropriate structures and processes, it points to critical distinctions between tourism products and consumer products in general which may require a re conceptualisation of theories of fit not only in the context of tourism, but in service related products in general. Since Miles and Snow's original study (1979) was principally focused on manufacturing industries this provides a worthwhile direction.

Finally, the notion of products having tangible qualities assumes that they can be tailored specifically to meet the needs of consumers. This assumes total discretion or control over the production process on the part of management, given the absence of any major constraints. Swarbrooke (2002 p.42) suggests, however, that the attraction visitors are themselves involved in the production process with "the product reflecting their own attitudes expectations and experiences". This is seen to have particular implications in terms of the quest for fit since, hypothetically, no two 'products' or experiences will be the identical. To that extent the attainment of tight fit in attractions appears problematic.

In summary, the research suggests that theories of organisational adaptation or fit may not adequately reflect the particular challenges facing small heritage based attractions in attempting to adapt to change. Fit, at least in the context of the two case studies that were the focus of this study demonstrated considerably more complexity by virtue of a set of unique challenges and operational requirements. In particular, it is contended

that external fit conceptualised as market alignment is too narrow in focus, given the multiple environments with which the attraction must align if it is to be successful in a general sense. Further, the nature of the attraction product as a concocted experience involving tangible and intangible elements, in which the consumer is part of the production process, questions the degree of control management has over strategic direction in terms of product market matches. There are issues too of strategic direction being complicated by the competing demands of directly conflicting priorities rather than simply strategic options.

Although the fundamental tenets of Miles and Snow's framework (1978; 1984) can be applied to attractions insofar as the alignment of strategy, structure, and process seems a logical requirement for efficient operation; any attraction centric model of fit needs to recognise the particular nature of the product and the environments in which it operates. With respect to theories of fit in a general sense, the research contributes to a broader perspective of strategy; raises valuable issues with respect to the nature of products; and demonstrates the difficulties associated with the process of alignment in certain organisational contexts.

8.3 Implications for tourism /attraction theory

In chapter 2, it was suggested that the literature of attractions, and more specifically that relating to attractions, appears to pay scant regard to issues of strategic management, preferring instead to concentrate on a range of specific operational issues. As valuable as such research is, the absence of any overarching view of how such attractions adapt to changes in their operating environments represents a shortcoming in the literature. In essence, the implications of this study for attractions centric theory are more related to the need for a broadened perspective rather than necessarily identifying theoretical dichotomies.

The study at hand provides insights into the strategic behaviour of small heritage based attractions and the structures and processes which either foster or impede strategic vision. Perhaps more importantly it identifies a number of performance variables emerging from the data which may hold some prescriptive value in framing canons of best practice.

To some extent, the outcomes appear to question conventional wisdom with respect to strategic orientation in attractions of this type in that they challenge the notion that

heritage attractions are demand driven and that strategy is purely directed at product market matches. As was suggested earlier, strategy in this context appears to have much broader connotations suggesting that theories of strategic management if only in this particular attraction sector require a more inclusive conceptualisation. Further, from a structural standpoint, a broadened theoretical perspective might view structure as also being vested in capacity and organisational culture rather than considerations of simple configuration. Since it was earlier suggested that these two elements are central to internal fit, their incorporation into the conceptual mix is important.

Although perhaps somewhat obscure some parallels are also observed between theories of fit which imply a more or less constant process of product market re-alignment and the notion of rejuvenation which Butler (1980) advances as a post decline option. The fact that the latter example is implicitly reactive in nature and the former arguably proactive, invites some thought as to the value of proactivity in avoiding decline. From a theoretical perspective, validation of the notion of alignment or fit implies at least some control over product life.

8.4 Implications for the operation of heritage based attractions

On-going discussion will point to the limitations imposed by an inability to generalise the findings either to attractions generally, or to heritage based attractions in particular. Notwithstanding, the research points to some key areas of focus which may hold prescriptive value in the successful management of small heritage based attractions, if only by creating an awareness of the potential impact of various approaches. In a practical sense, their selective implementation, depending on the requirements of particular circumstances, may provide greater support for their utility. In addition, expanded research may yield greater insights into the value of various approaches.

The prescriptive value of the findings is, however, not simply confined to operational issues in existing attractions. In outlining the findings of the research in chapters 5 and 6, considerable emphasis was placed on the enduring impacts of origins and foundation ethos in terms of operational independence suggesting that they may also hold some value in guiding the creation of new attractions. Although clearly dictated by funding reliance, the establishment and maintenance of operational autonomy should be a paramount objective given that it impacts directly on strategic orientation; structural configuration and capacity; and organisational culture. Although it may be difficult to garner financial support from sources which do not compromise operational

independence this may present at least a partial solution to the problem. Issues of sponsorship or private benefaction are illustrative of the point. There was also some discussion with respect to the impact of nomenclature on funding given that facilities framed as galleries or living museums are considered a community resource and thereby deserving of both public and private support. Although there appears to be no absolute panacea, consideration of these issues, either at inception, or as a strategic objective are worthy of consideration.

Issues of funding reliance also give rise to an almost inevitable conflict between the drive for cost recovery or profit and curatorial priorities directed at maintaining the integrity of what is being presented. The contention of the research is that quite apart from being discrete objectives they are largely interdependent with each ultimately contributing to the other. Although potentially constrained by an absence of adequate resources, structures and processes directed at achieving both objectives represent a key priority. Given that the research pointed to structures which gave appropriate and equal recognition to both directions, and that this resulted in high levels of performance in both areas, suggests that building structural capacity in this way may be central to success.

Just as the establishment of complementary expertise was instrumental in successful operation, the accumulation and retention of key personnel represents a key priority for managers of heritage attractions. There was clear evidence to suggest that high levels of staff and management attrition had a decidedly negative impact on organisational culture and structural capacity. Although this seemed to be largely due to outside interference in the processes and priorities of the organisation, there were indications that insufficient focus was given to fostering a collective vision. Although difficult to maintain in such adverse circumstances this should represent a key management priority.

Considerations of expertise also appeared to support the efficacy of decentralised management structures. Given the somewhat specialised nature of the product, structures based on devolved responsibility to functional levels appeared most effective. Such structures fostered an attention to detail which could be seen to translate directly into standards of presentation and thereby visitor appeal.

Within the confines of available resources, attractions of this type should endeavour to ensure that the development of specialised expertise and attention to detail are cornerstones of operational ideology. Perhaps more importantly, focusing on particular

aspects of presentation had demonstrated potential in clarifying and strengthening the central theme. The conscious decision to focus on a particular time frame also aided in this process. Given earlier argument that curatorial focus and financial self-sufficiency may be interdependent, addressing this aspect of operation at least provides a basis on which consumer profile may be enhanced. Logically, this would have revenue implications in terms of increased visitation.

Although it has been stressed that introspection has particular value in the pursuit of continuous improvement, the research strongly suggests that the ability and/or propensity to adopt a strong market focus was a key factor in successful operation. This was viewed as being important both in terms of reading overall market trends but also in identifying and responding to consumer trends in leisure and activity choice. Although there was some evidence that achieving a sophisticated grasp of the dynamics of markets was beyond the reach of attractions of this size, there was equally compelling evidence that this could be achieved by fostering alliances with government instrumentalities from whom vital secondary data could be sourced.

There also appeared to be a lack of recognition in some quarters of the potential for collection of valuable primary data from visitors in situ at very little cost and to great effect. Despite the fact that knowledge of existing and potential markets would seem an intuitive focus there was even open reluctance in some instances. Without such vital information, finite marketing funds may be rendered ineffective, and product development out of synch with market preferences. In addition, market intelligence permits proactive rather than reactive decision making which, it has already been contended, has the potential to enhance attempts at market fit. An effective blend of introspection and external focus provides a valuable prescription

Knowledge of existing and potential demand trends not only contributes to effective marketing and product development but appears to underpin the whole process of innovation which, it was stressed, is vital to the maintenance of visitor appeal. Engaging in major initiatives without the benefit of such knowledge may seriously impact the feasibility of highly capital intensive projects. Logical as such an observation may be, however, there was evidence of decisions in this respect being taken without an adequate grasp of the implications or a full understanding of the chances of success. Given the sometimes tenuous nature of viability in this sub sector engaging in innovation based on intuition rather than demonstrated feasibility seems an unacceptable risk. The fact that innovation is an inherently proactive process,

points to the absolute importance of decisions made on the basis of sound demand data. Effective innovation is also underpinned by accrued expertise and specialised focus which were discussed earlier.

Finally, but certainly not of diminished importance, was the clear indication that the breadth and effectiveness of community linkages had both direct and indirect implications. In discussing the implications of the research findings to broader theories of organisational fit it was suggested that alignment with host communities was an integral part of the overall process of external fit. In particular, it was suggested that a link could be perceived between community perceptions and attitudes and funding pressures, in that as constituents of local government they were in a position to influence decision making.

Given earlier observations with respect to the nexus between operational autonomy and funding reliance, their influence was clearly more pronounced where control was vested in local government but they appear to constitute a force even in situations of greater autonomy. The suggestion was also made that positive attitudes towards the attraction, and the projection of community 'worth' had more direct benefits in terms of encouraging volunteer participation. This had very practical benefits in terms of enhancing the visitor interface through greater levels of interactivity and interpretation. Cultivating ties with host community thus has far reaching implications. A broadened view of marketing might encompass not only consumers but the prospect of 'selling' the attraction to local residents.

In summary, the research points to some key orientations which, it is suggested constitute a more holistic approach to successful operation and, in turn adaptive capacity and capability. In particular, the research suggests that either as a founding principle, or as an on-going objective, maintaining operational independence is central to successful operation, although it is conceded that this is clearly dependant on financial self-sufficiency. Considerable thought needs to be given to alternative sources of funding which do not compromise such independence. From this fundamental tenet of operation flow, strategic orientation, structural and process capacity, and prevailing organisational culture, all of which dictate capacity for internal and external fit.

8.5 Implications for Research

In justifying the selection of a constructivist paradigm to guide the research, chapter 3 pointed to the complementarity between a research approach that acknowledged the existence of multiple realities and a characteristically narrow research agenda in the field of attractions which delivers little understanding of how attractions attempt to align themselves with a changing environment. Further, the recognition that a range of individual perspectives would provide a truly subjective view underpinned the methodological design of the study.

The veracity of such an approach was born out by both the research and the analysis. Despite a relatively small sample of respondents, their diversity in terms in the nature and tenure of their involvement provided the researcher with considerable subtlety of interpretation. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.194) observe “The constructivist paradigm provides more sophisticated reconstructions of reality”

As such, this particular methodology was well suited to the objectives of the research. Further, based on an aggregation of the data there appeared to be significant consensus on critical issues across two completely disparate sets of circumstances suggesting that the validity of the findings was potentially enhanced.

Although the researcher found a snowballing approach to the selection of potential respondents successful, there were some persistent concerns with respect to the potential for outcomes to be influenced by the existence of what Jennings (2001, p.139) terms ‘informal networks’. Although the use of purposive sampling may have avoided collusive, groups the absence of priori knowledge of the politics involved in the operation of these attractions suggests that chain referral sampling provided the best and most convenient approach. The fact that even respondents sharing similar affiliations did not necessarily agree on critical issues, to some extent dispels any concerns in this regard. Notwithstanding, in this particular operational context the process by which potential respondents are identified deserves particular attention.

Although the researcher was cognisant of the existence of a number of computer assisted qualitative analysis tools [NVivo], the conscious decision to undertake an elaborate process of manual coding and re-coding provided what the researcher viewed as greater depth of analysis. Although there appears to some disagreement as to the relative values of a manual versus electronic approach, mostly in terms of outcome validities, there is some research evidence (Anderson and Shaw, 1999, p.99-

106) to suggest that there is substantial convergence between the two approaches in terms of outcomes. The decision to employ electronic forms of analysis may thus be more a question of the study size rather than perceived validity of either approach.

Finally, although researchers are generally reminded of the need for objectivity in interpreting qualitative data, knowledge of the operational domain made a positive contribution to the process of analysis in that the researcher was able to reflect on both observation and personal experience and elicit greater nuances from the transcripts of respondent views. Any compromise may be avoided by ensuring that the interview structure is as organic as possible.

In summary, the selected research paradigm, design, and method are, in hindsight, all entirely appropriate to the research objectives and provided the researcher with workable and meaningful outcomes. As such, the approach adopted presents attraction researchers with what is considered to be a workable framework.

8.6 Future Research Directions

Chapter 2 pointed to a perceived paucity of literature into the management of attractions particularly as it related to strategic management. Much of the research with respect to attractions generally appears to have been confined to management issues in theme parks due, it was suggested, to their quite particular commercial focus, and their ease of identification. Paradoxically, research in the field of heritage attractions continues to demonstrate growth although it was contended that this has focused on specific operational issues rather than adopting a bigger picture view. A number of papers (Lennon and Graham 2001; Leask Fyall and Garrod, 2002) with respect to issues of funding are illustrative of the point. Although the extant research makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of some of the more vexing issues confronting heritage attractions there is a need to broaden the research.

In particular this study points to a need for greater research into the strategic management of attractions in an overall sense, with particular emphasis on change management. Regardless of whether this is confined to heritage attractions in particular, adopts an alternative focus, or forms part of a comparative study across various types of attractions, the area presents significant scope. At a more specific level the research points to a number of areas that are likewise deserving of particular attention. Since these have emerged from the research, which was directed at

identifying key challenges confronting attraction managers, they contribute to a complete view of strategic management.

Achieving a higher level of understanding as to the dynamics of the relationship between host communities and small regional attractions should be viewed as a priority given their potential to influence government attitudes particularly with respect to funding, and their contribution to the operation through volunteer participation. A worthwhile basis for on-going examination can be found in McKercher (2001) which addresses some of the key issues that shape community attitudes, but questions the efficacy of community involvement in decision making because of "emotional attachment to the attraction rather than a rational assessment of its future" (p.29).

Given the somewhat contrary indications of this study which point to either indifference or even direct opposition, future studies directed at examining perceptions of local heritage as a community asset may yield some interesting dichotomies. Further, and perhaps more importantly, the articulation of frameworks for community involvement in attractions of this type would provide practitioners with worthwhile prescriptive tools

Again, born of the persistent issue of funding reliance on-going research should also address the potential or actual role of sponsorship and private benefaction in heritage based attractions. Given that both of the case studies which were the focus of the research had their origins as community based projects suggests that there may be potential to elicit more tangible forms of support. Sponsorship in particular is worthy of focus although this may present difficulties given the nature of the product.

Further research also needs to be devoted to the complex nexus between curatorial integrity and financial self sufficiency. In particular, degrees of interdependency between these two priorities and processes for their reconciliation are worthy of attention given that this study provides evidence of this being achieved. This is seen as being central to strategic management in that an ability to balance these priorities underpins financial self-sufficiency and thereby capacity on all levels.

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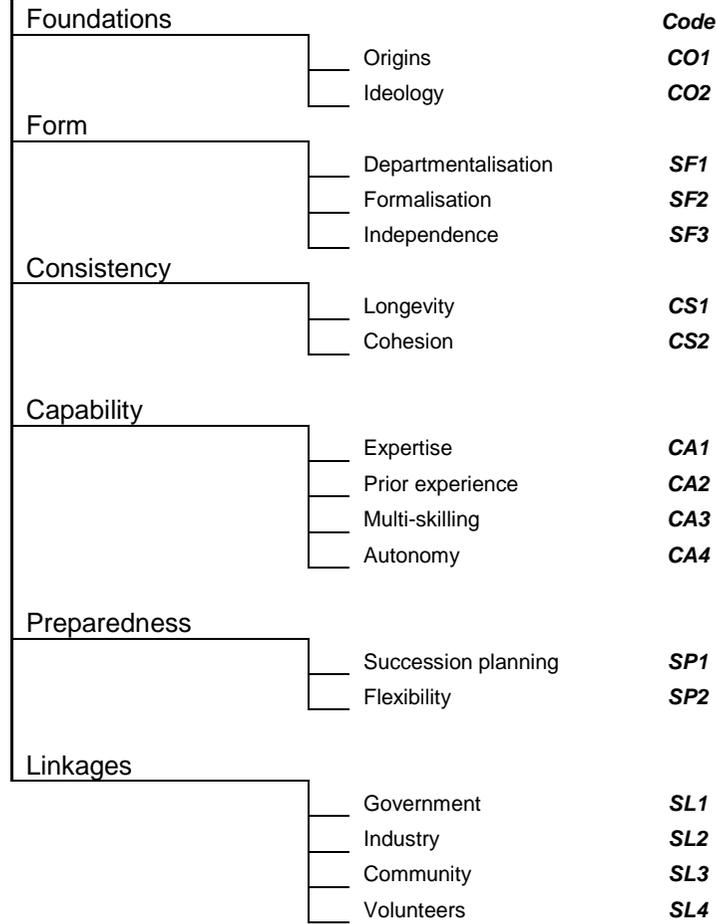
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Appendix [A] Interview Format

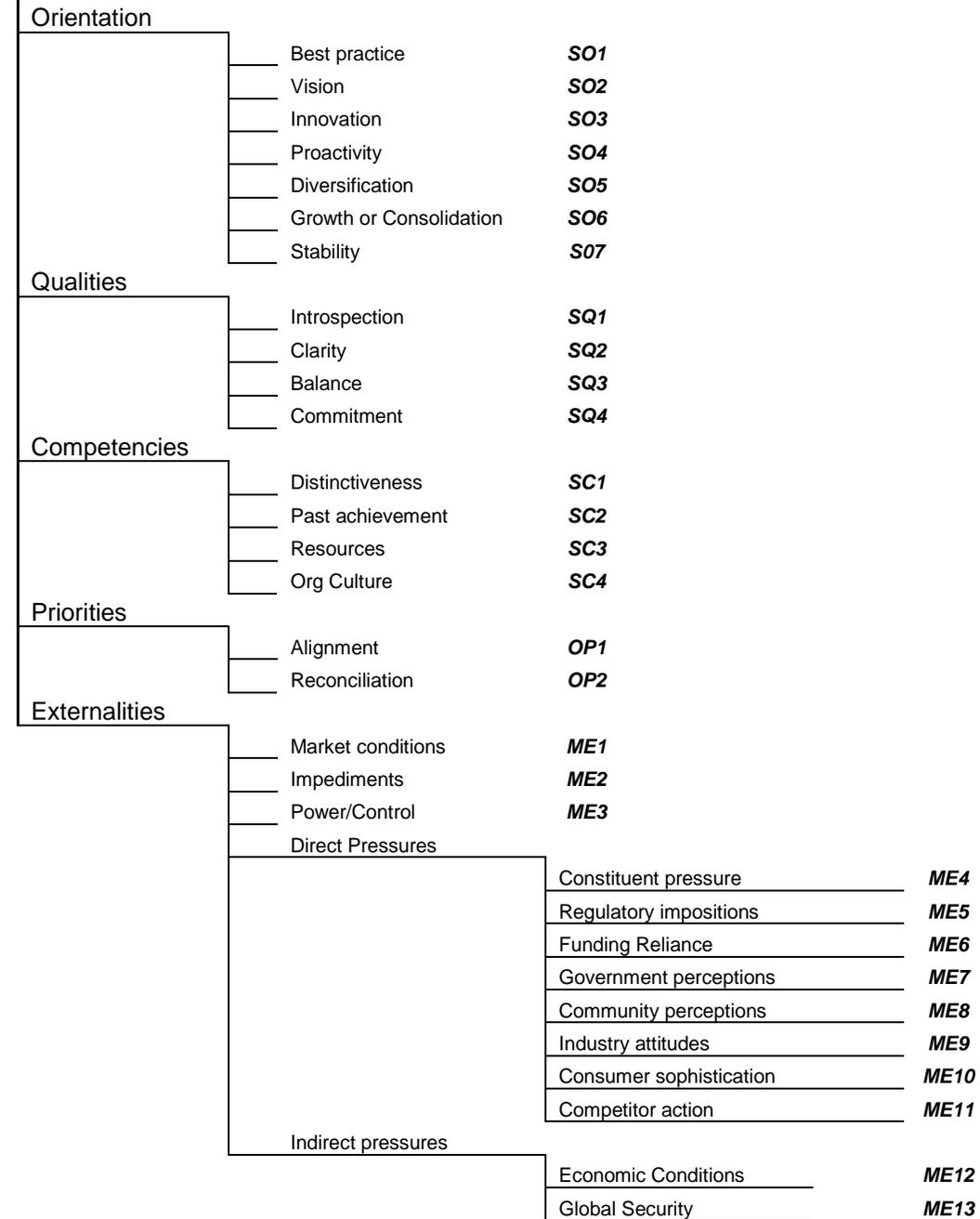
Respondent Background/relevance	Direct/Indirect
Milestones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What significant milestones or significant developments can you recall during your tenure? • Were there any events that stand out in particular? • How does the scope & scale of the attraction compare now to the way it was when you arrived?
External Influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What external pressures impacted on the operation during your involvement? • Actions of local government? Degrees of dependence, interference in particular. • Actions of State/Federal governments? • World events at large?
Internal influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think the attraction is profit driven or driven by the need to preserve heritage? • Do you think it's possible to reconcile the two? • How would you describe the organisational culture of the attraction? • Have there been any major shifts in organisational culture or is it more or less intact from inception? • Changes in marketing direction or emphasis
Leader/Follower?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent do you think the attraction has tried to be proactive? • Has the attraction always been conscious of the need to refresh?
Success Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think the attraction has reached its full potential? • What reasons would you attribute to its success [or lack of success]?
Impediments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factors do you think have impeded the growth of the attraction? • What impediments do you see to its ongoing growth & development?
Key Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you see as the main challenges facing the attraction?
Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the future hold?

Appendix B

Structure



Strategy



Competencies

Applications

- Responsiveness **AC1**
- Proactivity **AC2**
- Internal processes **AC3**

Knowledge

- Knowledge as a resource **KC1**
- Building on experience **KC2**
- Retention/Accrual **KC3**

Commitment

- Reading market forces **OC1**
- Adherence to core business **OC2**
- Regional contribution **OC3**

External Focus

- Reading potential markets **EF1**
- Reading competitive forces **EF2**
- Maintaining alliances **EF3**
- Fostering business links **EF4**
- Reading consumer expectations **EF5**

Values/Orientations

- Faithfulness to theme **VO1**
- Conservation commitment **VO2**
- Adherence to charter **VO3**
- Commitment to community **VO4**
- Visitor engagement **VO5**

Outcomes

- Interpretive Strength **CM1**
- Cohesion **CM2**
- Clarity of mission **CM3**