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Supporting Sustainable Change

Executive Summary

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"For extended periods at the computer screen, Jud recommends:

Zappa, Tequila and Chocolate."

It is not because things are difficult

that we do not dare;

It is because we do not dare

that they are difficult.

Seneca

Summary

A review of modern business literature demonstrates that despite a proliferation of best practice models for managing change, none leads to consistent and sustainable success. In this work, action research within three separate projects leads to a model that facilitates change at a project level. Three main arguments for success are made: individuals and their relationships are more critical to success than technology and structure; an ability to look at problems from a systems point of view provides the key to identify excellent solutions; and making room for individuals to use their uniqueness leads to sustainable change.

The final model developed is an innovative, content free support framework for change that guides the change team in creating options and making choices throughout the change process. Its role is to support the application of existing tools and techniques. The framework can lead to consistent and sustainable success because its use ensures congruence with the needs of the individuals and the business.

Introduction

The Engineering Doctorate (EngD) is an approach to applying innovation in an engineering environment through academic research and project work in organisations. This process is documented in the EngD portfolio which is a collection of project reports and research papers. These chart the development of the research over time. This document, the 'Executive Summary', has three distinct and related roles. It provides both a route map through the submissions to the portfolio and an opportunity to reflect on the portfolio as a whole. It also functions as a stand alone document in the public domain.

The work described is concerned with the management of change in organisations and the achievement of sustainable success. The number of failures in change projects would seem to outnumber the successes. Successful companies do exist however and the portfolio begins by identifying some key success factors for sustainable change (Portfolio Paper 1: 'Success in Change'). Current models for change appear to be failing the practitioner on two different levels. They either appear to miss the opportunity to integrate excellence from different schools of thought or are focused too heavily on a specific environment (Portfolio Paper 2: 'Developing a Model for Supporting Change'). All of these models do have something to offer the practitioner but more work is currently emerging that advocates the need to integrate these various approaches (Portfolio Paper 2).

This work builds on this perspective, using action research to develop an integrative model to support the change process. The model is developed through three action research projects using a process approach to consulting, with the consultant as facilitator, largely in a workshop environment. In each case the project team worked on improving a different aspect of business performance; new product introduction, internal and external communication and strategy formulation (Portfolio Papers 3, 4 and 5). The result of this research is an innovative model that considers the key issues of

change, integrates them and emphasises the importance of the relationships between them. The model is not presented as something that replaces any existing tools for change but as a framework to support effective use of them. It has been developed as an active tool to support decision making by practitioners.

A review of award-winning companies showed that they attribute much of their success to looking at the business at the level of process rather than task (Portfolio Paper 1). At a theoretical level this is understandable since it is likely to give a more integrated view of the organisation. However, under pressure people tend to revert to a task focus (Portfolio Paper 1). The research showed that the integration of new processes is unlikely to happen unless there is understanding, at the individual level, of the nature of the interactions that they will be involved in; how information will be exchanged, how material will move and so on. Process, emphasised in the first models (Portfolio Paper 2), is expanded to interactions, process and systems. The inclusion of 'systems' arose through the recognition that processes themselves interact with other processes and that linear mapping methods do not show these interactions and influences.

From the beginning of the research projects (Portfolio Paper 2) the model has emphasised the importance of learning through change. The model introduces a cycle of notice-model-learn to describe this process as it builds on a natural way of taking in information from the world and makes this explicit and visible (Portfolio Paper 2). The words were chosen specifically because; 'notice' implies looking for what is different as opposed to just looking; 'model' implies reflection and the use of tools and asking questions; and although 'learning' does not guarantee change, the two are closely related and there is an association with progression and development, beyond the static.

At the outset of the research the model was used to emphasise the importance of the relationships between context, people and process (Portfolio Paper 2). As the research progressed the model became increasingly defined by the individuals involved (Portfolio Paper 4: 'Change Support Model in Action'). The consideration of the roles that individuals play in change led to an understanding of

'people' that was based on the interactions at the level of the individual, the group and the wider environment. This was in turn taken as a means of describing the context in which people work and make decisions.

The early consideration of context served to highlight the need to focus on what was meaningful to people, specifically relating to the way in which people adopted and used tools. Observations made throughout the research projects supported this view (Portfolio Papers 3, 4 and 5). In the later version of the model, context is re-expressed in relationship to the tools that are available for change. Much of current research and literature describing unsuccessful or difficult change appears to be focused on describing what was done in order to overcome all the problems arising from the application of a tool without regard for context. Later versions of the model emphasise that there is a dynamic relationship between tools and context, in that as tools are applied, context continues to change and that the selection and use of tools is a continuous process. The final model develops this further to suggest that there is also a strong relationship between tools, context and the level at which they are applied. Similar patterns are found in recent literature on chaos theory and fractals; however, developing this line of investigation was thought to be beyond the scope of this work and more suitable as an area for further research.

As the understanding of the different aspects of the model developed, so did the manner in which these aspects were presented. The first proposal for the model gives a framework for supporting thinking about the relationships. By adding detail to the framework at stages in the project it is possible to generate questions about these relationships (Portfolio Paper 1); the second guise of the model portrays a three dimensional space defined by key aspects of change. This is a space in which it is possible to move around with more specific options about how to integrate these aspects. This makes it possible to reflect on the change and to generate questions from any position. It does not however provide guidance for future options. A further version of the model is developed that represents the relationships as a dynamic systems map (Portfolio Paper 5, Change Support Model in

Organisations). This not only forms a record of how relationships have been considered throughout a project but also, through its simple rules, supports the generation of options for the future.

A number of key issues for organisational change emerge from this work. Context is shown to be highly relevant. Award-winning companies can be seen to start from a recognition of context as 'what is true for us now'. However, 'truth' is not then treated as an absolute, it is a starting point and can be made visible without being limiting. What appears to be of great importance in moving beyond the present is the recognition of the interrelationships between all aspects of change. It is through the understanding of the relationships between the decisions made, the context and tools, and the supporting structures, that change can emerge.

Sustainable change is possible when this understanding becomes meaningful in particular at the level of the individuals, and a mechanism for achieving this is facilitation. Facilitation is about helping people to start with what they have got, create choices and then choose from them. It is not about imposing beliefs or options on others. Facilitation is effective when the approach is to work very closely with the context, as this leads to new understanding which may otherwise have been missed. A facilitator is also in a position to offer new tools and techniques with the support required for them to be tried out with confidence, offering challenge or reassurance as appropriate. Crucially, facilitated work by definition takes time, and time is what is necessary, and often missing, in order to investigate relationships.

A model has been proposed and substantially developed through three action research projects, with the aim of developing a hands-on tool for practitioners that would support existing approaches. The strength of the finished model lies in its dynamic illustration of the key issues and the relationships between them and the expression of the key issues in terms relevant to the individual at a personal level.

1 Structure of the portfolio of work

The portfolio as a whole consists of all the written work associated with the doctorate, including assignments from taught courses, thought pieces and the main body of the research output, as well as the 'personal profile', which provides details of how the candidate for the degree has met the required 'competencies' according to the degree regulations.

The main body of the research output consists of six papers representing key stages in the development of the research, together with this, the 'Executive Summary'. Following the Executive Summary, the papers are to be read in the order in which they are numbered here.

1 Success in Change introduces the question of how to support sustainable change. This is developed through a review of published work from a variety of perspectives.

2 Developing a Model for Supporting Change A framework is developed in this paper that represents the interdependence of process, people and context with respect to change.

3 Exploring the Applicability of a Change Support Model describes the first action research project in which the model was tested for relevance. A new product introduction process is designed and piloted. The project is used to test the model for relevance and the model is subsequently redesigned.

4 Change Support Model in Action describes the second action research project. The redesigned model is applied to support the change project, in which new processes for internal and external communication are designed and implemented. A refinement to the model introduces a version that aims to be more 'hands-on' for the practitioner.

5 Change Support Model in Organisations describes the third action research project, which is concerned more with organisational level change. A strategy formulation process is developed and adopted. The model is again used to support the workshop environment and on this occasion is also

used by the project group to disseminate their findings, indicating that the model may be achieving relevance to practitioners as well as to the author.

As well as the principal papers the portfolio also includes four assignments completed following attendance on taught courses during the EngD programme. The courses attended were on the management of change, innovation strategy, personal development, and communication and coaching skills.

The 'personal profile' details how the EngD 'competencies' were met through professional experience, the taught courses and the research work.

The portfolio also includes a paper developed as a thought piece during the EngD programme. The paper covers a broad spectrum of issues surrounding organisations and as such is felt to fall outside the main body of research. It served the purpose of triggering the research in the portfolio and provides ideas for further research. However, since the papers above cover all aspects of the research topic, this paper need not be read.

2 The research: review of key issues

The research is built on the observation that change projects fail more often than they succeed:

“Recent surveys of change initiatives like total quality management, reengineering, downsizing, and restructuring all point in the same direction. Roughly 70% of these initiatives fail to produce the desired results” (Orgland & von Krogh, 1998).

In ‘Success in Change’ (Portfolio Paper 1) the literature suggested that the problem seemed to be that:

“Despite the large body of literature devoted to the topic of change management, and the many tools and techniques available ... there is considerable disagreement regarding the most appropriate approach” (Burnes, 1996:171).

A growing body of literature does point to the need to provide a more integrative approach between the variety of disciplines as well as tools and techniques concerned with change (see for example Collins, 1998, and Easterby-Smith, 1997).

However, successful companies exist, and from a survey of companies which have received awards for excellence a consistent picture arises; that of creativity and flexibility. In the first of three projects (Portfolio Paper 3) the companies were found to be characterised by their determination to challenge their own preconceptions. Of particular interest is the way in which these characteristics are demonstrated at every level of the business, from the individuals to the organisation as a whole. The structure of the businesses is seen as one that provides support throughout uncertainty and that places emphasis on learning through experimentation. As these organisations are constantly changing there is a suggestion that these approaches have aspects that serve to support not just a single step but also self-sustaining change. Examples of less than successful change also support the view that success comes from recognising the strength of the relationships between these aspects of an organisation.

From these key success factors in award-winning organisations, a number of generic key issues for change emerged during the research. These were; the importance of context, the importance of the relationship between various aspects of change, the role of facilitation and the integration of the various aspects of change for sustainability.

2.1 A process view

“Common examples of processes include new product development, order fulfilment, and customer service; less obvious but equally legitimate candidates are resource allocation and decision making” (Garvin, 1998).

The review of award-winning companies showed that they attribute much of their success to looking at the business at the level of process rather than task.

“Horizontal process redesign provides an important perspective to the change process by emphasising that the organisation is a system consisting of a network of business processes” (Orgland & von Krogh, 1998).

Consequently, ‘process’ was a key factor in the first model. This was subsequently treated in more detail to also include the interactions within processes, and the system as a whole. The inclusion of ‘systems’ arose through the recognition that processes themselves interact with other processes and that linear mapping methods do not show these interactions and influences.

Senge *et al* (1995:92) also remind us that “systems thinking points out interdependencies” and Stacey (1996:1-9) argues strongly that understanding the interdependencies of a business in this way is precisely what is needed in order to step out of the existing mindset in the ways achieved by the award-winning companies described earlier.

The inclusion of ‘systems’ in the first model was by implication only, but it was found in the first action research project (Portfolio Paper 4) that this was easy to forget. McMaster (1997:65) asserts

that this is because systems thinking is currently counter to the socially constructed reality of the West. It was not always so, but this mindset can be traced back many centuries:

“Out of the ferment of the Renaissance and Reformation there arose a new view of science, bringing about the following transformation: the re-education of common sense in favour of abstract reasoning; the substitution of a quantitative for a qualitative view of nature, the view of nature as a machine rather than an organism; the development of an experimental method that sought definitive answers to certain limited questions couched in the framework of specific theories; the acceptance of new criteria for explanation: assessing the ‘how’ rather than the ‘why’ that had characterised the Aristotelian search of final causes.” Encyclopaedia Britannica 1995 cited by James (1998).

Although it has its roots in Aristotle, this phenomenon has become known as the Newtonian paradigm which McMaster (1997:65) describes in turn as a “linear, cause-effect, subject-object understanding of the world.” The irony is that while systems thinking is not linear it is definitely about cause and effect and this is precisely why it is so useful to us.

2.2 Learning through change

From the beginning of the research projects the model has emphasised the importance of learning through change. Change in an organisation really means people having new ways of working. To support this, people need to be making different decisions and choices. We make decisions as a result of our perceptual framework:

“... human beings cannot help attributing meaning to their experienced world; and they can then decide to do some things and not do others ...” (Checkland & Scholes, 1990:2).

There has been much discussion in the literature about the way in which this sort of change takes place. The arguments polarise at their extreme between the behaviourist school (Skinner, 1974), which maintains that all our decisions are learned responses to external stimuli, and the cognitive schools such as expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), where decisions are made with reference to changing personal insights, outlooks, expectations and thought patterns, on a path towards ‘valued goals’. In both cases, however, learning is taking place. Checkland and Scholes call it experience-based knowledge and draw the experience-action cycle in Figure 1.

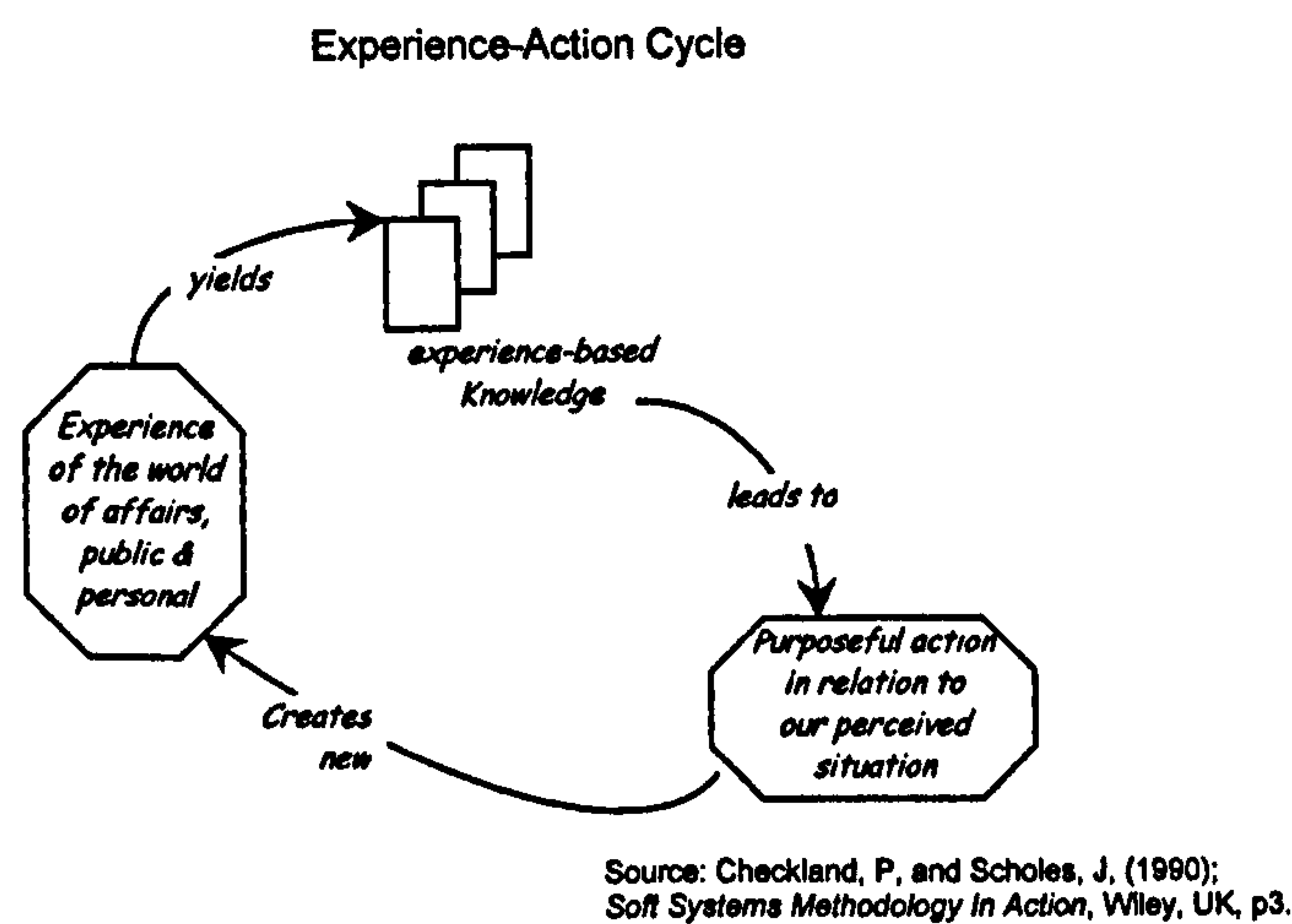


Figure 1

The model that is the subject of this work introduces a cycle of ‘notice-model-learn’ to describe this process, as it builds on a natural way of taking in information from the world and makes it explicit and visible. The words were chosen specifically by the author because; ‘notice’ implies looking for what is different as opposed to just looking; ‘model’ implies reflection and the use of tools and asking questions; and although ‘learning’ does not guarantee change, the two are closely related in ‘learning’ and there is an association with progression and development, beyond the static.

2.3 Context

The literature broadly supports that change takes place only as a result of individuals making different decisions to those that they made previously . At the broadest level:

“... only individuals act. Everything else – society, culture, social structure, power, groups, organisations – is ultimately dependent on the acts of individuals” (Hewitt 1997:4).

Therefore the ‘context’ in which a change project takes place is a term for describing the collection of experiences, expectations and perceptions that are contained in the people involved.

Context in this research came to be defined as the history that people bring with them; their habits and expectations, as a culmination of the experience, beliefs and values in their own individual perceptual framework. McMaster describes this as our:

“... socially constructed reality, created and maintained by stories, metaphors and network of social interaction, all of which create our understanding of the whole” (1997:6).

In the projects, context was specifically identified as being demonstrated in the existing ways of working, the expectations which people had from the project, and the constituent members of the project team (Portfolio Paper 3).

Context is not here a description of an aspect of the environment, as used by Pettigrew (1987). It is a summary of the effect of the environment on the people involved, since the effect will be reflected in their experience. Weick defined the relationship between the individual and the organisation, saying that:

“We participate in the creation of our organisational realities - individuals interpret their own perception of what is real for them and act on the basis of that, and

organisations are social constructs which change with the changes in perception and therefore decision-making of the individuals” (1979).

This viewpoint is in opposition to the reification of organisations, defined by Hyman as:

“treating abstract collective entities which are the creations of human activities, as the active agencies in social relations and in consequence, devaluing the part played by human actors” (1975:13).

Much of the management literature reports in this style, of organisations ‘having’ goals, or ‘making’ decisions, but as Silverman pointed out:

“we can ask an individual about his goals or purposes but it is difficult to approach an organisation in the same way. It seems doubtful whether it is legitimate to conceive of an organisations having a goal except where there is an ongoing consensus between the members of the organisation about the purposes of their interaction” (1970:9).

Context is defined from the perspective of individual perception in this work because of the significance of individuals as the point of action in making change happen. Our perceptual frameworks reflect the sum of our past experiences, which in turn form our current reality and determine the ways in which we make decisions and act.

Continuing on this theme of individual decision-making as the key to change, a significant body of literature supports the view that while we perceive ourselves as rational decision-makers, we in fact rely principally on our emotions. Weick (1969:87) comments that “rationality is best understood in the eye of the beholder,” and this perspective is supported by Pfeffer (1978:12), in that “what is rational from one point of view is irrational from another”.

Luft describes the emotional framework from three perspectives:

“Subjectivism vs objectivism. The key to what is happening in a group or between people is subjective, that is, relate to feelings. It is subjective attitudes and values that tell how individuals see themselves and others and order their world.

Irrationalism vs rationalism. Although some of the events in groups and between persons can be viewed as being orderly and making good sense, behaviour is influenced more by emotional, largely non-rational strivings; logic and reason play relatively minor roles in human interaction.

Qualities vs quantities. The best understanding comes ... with an appreciation of the qualitative differences of the processes of interaction between people and within groups” (1984:58).

In the projects, it became clear that paying attention to the emotional reality of the individual provided access to the reality of the context. Individual perceptions of the existing ways of working included not only process knowledge but were also highly-tuned reflections of the political and structural environment, and of the relationships between people in formal and informal groups at work.. All of these affected the decisions being made by the individuals, which was highly relevant to generating appropriate options for change.

The literature is divided as to whether politics is a functional or dysfunctional process in organisations. Pfeffer (1981), for example, regarded politics as the normal process of human negotiation and competition for scarce resources that necessarily takes place in organisations, while nevertheless acknowledging that a defining characteristic of political behaviour is the attempt to conceal its true nature.

Other viewpoints in the literature tend to view organisations solely as a collection of homogenous groups of individuals. The unitarist viewpoint assumes that everyone in an organisation shares the same fundamental goals, while the pluralist viewpoint adopts an organisational model whereby different groups in an organisation have different drivers; typically ‘managers’ and ‘workers’.

Collins (1998:153) summarises the implications of these two perspectives for the management of change, saying that the unitarists focus on harmony, and that in this model successful change management therefore comes to be about successfully getting the message across from the top of the organisation downwards. The pluralist viewpoint emphasises maintaining order, again top-down, through the successful management of conflict, although this is regarded as being between 'factions' as opposed to individuals.

These viewpoints ignore the vast variety that is contained in a collection of individuals and which, this research contends, is the key to successful, sustainable change. They also regard political activity as a dysfunctional process, resulting from lack of information and understanding, and thus as something to be 'overcome'. In the projects for this research, working closely with the individual realities provided a process for incorporating the implications of political behaviour without requiring that political manoeuvring be 'surfaced' in discussion.

Context, described as the history that individuals bring, is therefore important because it includes a wealth of resource for change. It is also the unique starting point for each project that can not be ignored or trivialised, because it provides that basis on which individuals can find meaning in the change process; this is McMaster's principle of resonance – that change holds only when it can be meaningfully related to that which went before (1997:31). Similarly, March (1994) tells of trying to get away from 'round theories and flat experiences', when referring to change models that don't resonate with people in a given situation.

2.4 Integration: sustainability through relationships

This research suggests that the key to sustainable change is the integration of the various aspects of change, and the mechanism for achieving this is through focusing on the relationships between them. Illustrating the importance of the relationships between people, McMaster (1997:86) defines the key business process for an organisation as being conversation. Jantsch goes further: "In life, the issue is not control, but dynamic connectedness" (1980:196).

Relationships are important here because they carry more information than tasks, and so give us a vehicle for integrating the multiple aspects of change without getting lost in the complexity. Innovation is more about making new connections between existing ideas than about new ideas in isolation, and similarly improved relationships deliver sustainable change in a way that improving tasks will not.

2.4.1 Relationship to context

We are part of our context and as we change our decision-making approach it changes in its turn. This is complicated by the fact that our history is our perception of it, and we naturally tend to filter information so as to reinforce our existing world view.

“People slant data in the direction of the pre-existing beliefs and discredit information that conflicts with their opinions” (Staw & Ross, 1986).

Our perception thus also governs what is important to us and where it is that we find meaning:

“as human beings we are capable of making sense of our environment and using the meaning we create to guide us. That is our particular mode of survival” (McMaster 1997:13).

As described above, context provides our unique starting point and governs our decisions on how to proceed, in terms of approaches and tools. In the projects, it proved useful to consider people’s perceptions, and therefore their personal reality, in terms of their perspective on themselves as individuals, as part of the formal and informal groups in the workplace (including the project ‘team’ itself), and in terms of how their perceptions were further affected by the wider environment.

Working with the context, ‘building-on-what-you’ve-got’, upholds the principle of resonance, maintains meaning and maximises the opportunity for uncovering and releasing existing, but latent, resource in terms of information and expertise, and making new connections between them.

While the importance of working with context is rarely discussed in this way, the hazards of ignoring it are well documented:

“Too often, senior managers convey that everything is important. They start new initiatives without stopping other activities or they start too many initiatives at the same time. They overwhelm and disorient the very people who need to take responsibility for the work” (Heifeltz & Laurie, 1997).

This is particularly destructive given that change comes from individuals choosing to make different decisions. This research has built on the notice-model-learn cycle of human interpretation. Weick and Westley (1996) specifically state that the likelihood of learning drops when the amount of disorder, or alternatively the amount of ‘newness’, overwhelms the capacity of the individual for retaining what is new and finding their identity within it. Conversely, learning also drops when too much order stifles room for what they refer to very technically as “unjustified variation”, or in other words, experimenting with new ideas and approaches.

The research showed that even when a change seems like a good idea to us we do not necessarily change our decision-making to action its implementation until we have internalised, understood and accepted the implications for us personally (Portfolio Paper 3). Conner expresses the result of finding meaning in the change somewhat effusively, reflecting perhaps the extent to which it represents a utopian ideal:

“When [we] are highly committed to a change because it reflects [our] personal interests, goals or values, the ultimate level of commitment forms – internalization.

This is commitment that comes from the heart” (1992:154).

Leavitt and Bahrani suggest that what is more likely to be going on is that the individual has achieved an internal compromise rather than the ideal of internal congruence:

“human beings try to move toward a kind of internal logical consistency, to seek ways of bringing inconsistent thoughts and feelings together” (1988:61).

Working closely with individual realities in the projects allowed for this process and indeed facilitated it, leading to each individual supporting the change from a point of view that was most meaningful for them. It allowed apparently irreconcilable differences to be discussed openly rather than submerged in the quest for group 'buy-in', ensuring that the direction in which the project proceeded took account of the issues being raised. Knights and McCabe comment that:

“A major weakness of the Human Relations philosophy was the assumption that leadership could eradicate what was seen to be employee irrationality. The possibility that employees might simply subscribe to a different rationality was not considered” (1998).

Many others subscribe to the related view that differences between people are only irreconcilable up to the point where they acquire the skills to generate more different options (for example, Senge's Personal Mastery skills, 1995:193, or tools for Team Learning, 1995:351). However, these approaches start from the basis that the first potential area for disagreement has been overcome – that of the need for change in the first place, or more specifically for change in which the individual is involved. Again, the advantage of the approach taken in this work is that this is not a presupposition during the project.

2.4.2 Relationships between people

The relationships that people have between them is more important than the tasks that people perform when looking for sustainable change.

“the organisation acts when individual members, functioning as agents of the collectivity, carry out their parts of the large task system. ... intelligent action depends on a continuing mutual adjustment of individual behaviours, one to another. Their organizing depends, in turn, on each person's image of the larger system. In this sense, the organization exists in its member's heads. But the

members also access to external maps, memories, and programs, which they must continually complete through mutually adjusted actions” (Schon, 1983).

Initial research into award-winning companies identified close links between people in different parts of the organisation, leading to rapid response through rapid decision making (Portfolio Paper 3). This reflects the quality of the relationships as well as the closeness, since:

“Many formulations of communication depict it as a simple problem of transfer of information from one person to another. But ... the process is anything but simple, and the information transferred is often highly variable and complex. We communicate facts, feelings, perceptions, innuendoes and various other things all in the same ‘simple’ message. We communicate not only through the spoken and written word but through facial expressions, gestures, physical posture, tone of voice, timing of when we speak, what we do not say, and so on” (Schein, 1988:21).

Relationships are the primary means of communication. Project failure is often attributed to lack of communication and also lack of understanding. However:

“power inequality, and identity contests and conflicts, characterise most employment relationships, and ... political tensions are both a condition and consequence of any [change] programme”(Knights and McCabe, 1998).

Our personal perspective is a consequence of our experiences and this includes our relationships and how we experience them. An individual will have a perspective on themselves, their self esteem, values, goals and beliefs, and on how they relate to their colleagues both on a one-to-one basis and also in terms of the formal and informal groups that form in an organisation.

The archetypal human dilemma is the simultaneous need to be an individual and to belong to a community (Leavitt & Bahrami, 1988:14). Individuals develop common interests with others in a number of ways that will influence their perspective and their decision-making, as compared to the hypothetical situation where they might be operating in isolation. These may result in conflicting

priorities for the individual and within the project team which may well appear irreconcilable. This work has found that it is nevertheless possible to proceed successfully in a change project by allowing this to be so. For example, while the conflicting issues may be highly political in nature, they are by definition not necessarily possible or productive to make explicit from the point of view of the facilitator. In 'Exploring the Applicability of a Change Support Model' (Portfolio Paper 3) the need was clearly identified for relationships to get beyond the social level of shared understanding and shared language, to a level that acknowledged these tensions and 'uncomfortable' realities in ways which were relevant for each individual.

2.4.3 Relationships with supporting factors

Structure and infrastructure can support change; too often the attempt is made to use them, in isolation, to drive change.

All "individuals in an organisation need a structure of interpretation which enables them to make sense of things in ways that express their individual intelligence, experience and knowledge, and at the same time forward the action of the whole.

This is something that most organisations lack" (McMaster, 1997:17).

McMaster is describing the interrelation between the expression of the individual and the framework of the business. This framework is a combination of the relationships between people and the supporting mechanisms and processes through which people carry out their work. It is viewed in a political light by Pettigrew:

"structures, cultures and strategies are not just ... neutral, functional constructs connectable to some system need ... [they are] capable of serving to protect the interests of the dominant groups ... the context of strategic change is thus ultimately a product of a legitimisation [sic] process shaped by political/cultural considerations, though often expressed in rational/analytical terms" (1987).

This research departs from Pettigrew's use of the term 'system', as the approach to system thinking and system mapping used in the projects (after Senge, 1995 and Checkland, & Scholes, 1990) includes the political dimension. In the projects, the new ways of working that were developed needed to be supported by new paperwork, new monitoring processes, new roles, new technology, new information flows and the development of new relationships. These were not fully developed until the project team as individuals had a clear understanding of what they themselves required in order to be able to maintain the new approaches as they integrated them in to their work routine.

In 'Change Support Model in Action' (Portfolio Paper 4) the effectiveness of maintaining a strong link between people and supporting processes was evident in that the implementation was virtually complete before it was launched, as so much sharing of information about new process design and current circumstances, and therefore about the nature of the change, had taken place at a meaningful level with all members of the organisation during the project. In 'Change Support Model in Organisations' (Portfolio Paper 5), the strategy formulation process did not become part of the new way of working until it had developed meaning for individuals through extensive challenging of the implications at a very personal level.

2.5 Facilitation

"Perhaps the most important 'change in change thinking' over the last few years has been the gradual diminution in the strength of arguments for formalized, top-down, directive styles of change management. In their place we are seeing highly participative approaches with an emphasis on 'process' " (Mabey & Mayon-White, 1993:55).

The projects were conducted in a heavily facilitated and largely workshop environment. Effective facilitation relies on helping the client team to develop their own options and solutions:

“In process consultation the guiding principle for the consultant is the collaborative working with the client in a manner that enables the client to develop his/her own diagnosis of the situation and the skills to act on it” (Coghlan, 1988).

A successful relationship is in evidence when:

“any advice is sought, not offered, and the facilitator increasingly becomes a ‘sounding board’ for ideas and a source of clarification, not a source of ideas” (Mayon-White, 1990).

However, “change is not a primary task” of the facilitator – rather it is to help to “generate valid information”, since, crucially, “if the interventionist assumes that the client’s biggest problems are related to change, he has already made a choice for the client” (Argyris, 1970:21).

It is interesting to compare this with the role of a manager in an organisation, particularly the command-and-control school. Argyris illustrates his approach with a graphic metaphor; the interventionist facilitator:

“may place the client horse in front of water (it is the interventionist’s job to create all sorts of water holes), but he cannot make the client drink” (*ibid*:129).

The work in this research supports the extension of this metaphor by the author to say that it is in fact the facilitator’s role to create the environment where client horses first identify at least a passing interest in water (which should not be assumed), and then discover how to dig their own range of water holes.

Facilitation is about helping people to start with what they have got, create choices and then choose from them. It is not about imposing beliefs or options on others. Facilitation is effective when the approach is to work very closely with the context, as this leads to new understanding which may otherwise have been missed. A facilitator is also in a position to offer new tools and techniques with the support required for them to be tried out with confidence, offering challenge or reassurance as

appropriate. Crucially, facilitated work by definition takes time, and time is what is necessary, and often missing, in order to investigate relationships.

3 Innovation: review of the model

3.1 The model

The model (Figures 2 and 3) is designed to support existing approaches to change rather than being a new approach in itself. Its key characteristic is that it integrates areas of change that are not usually considered together, and that it is a mechanism for asking questions rather than providing answers.

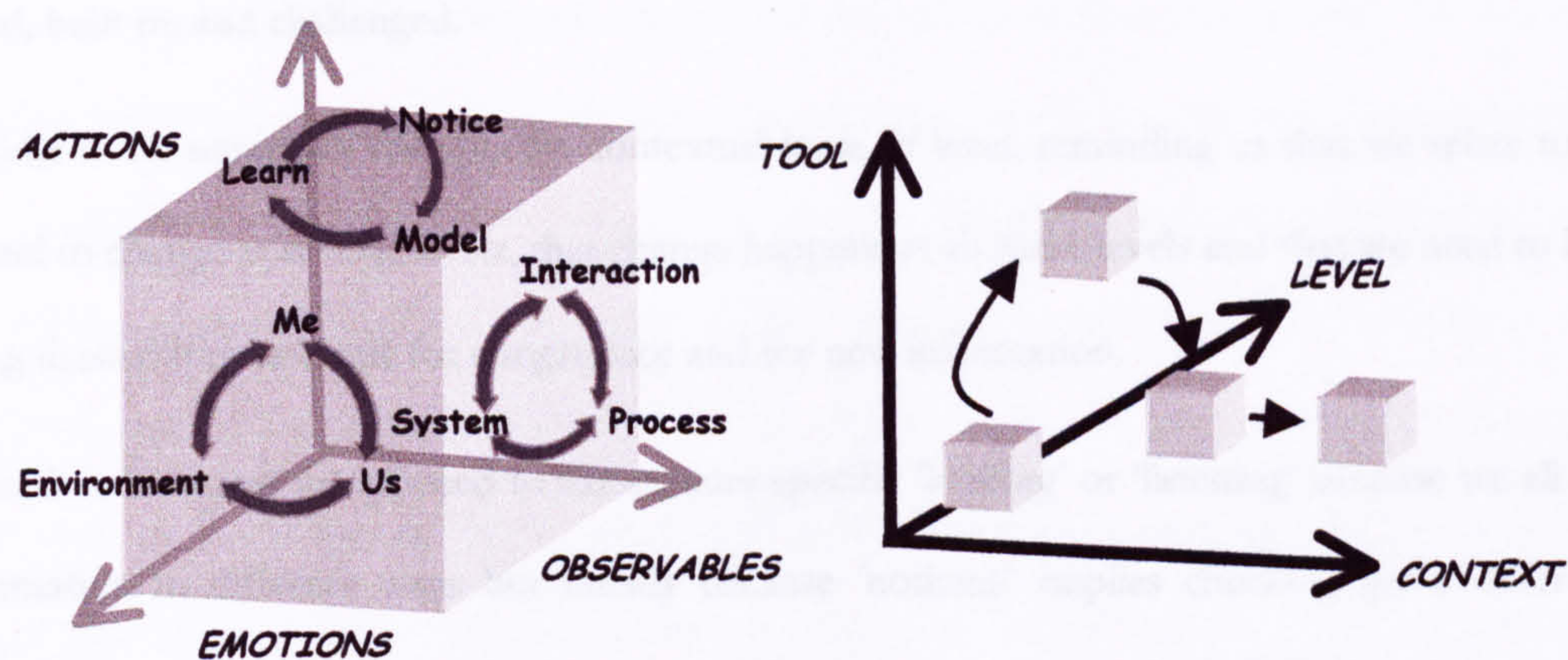


Figure 2

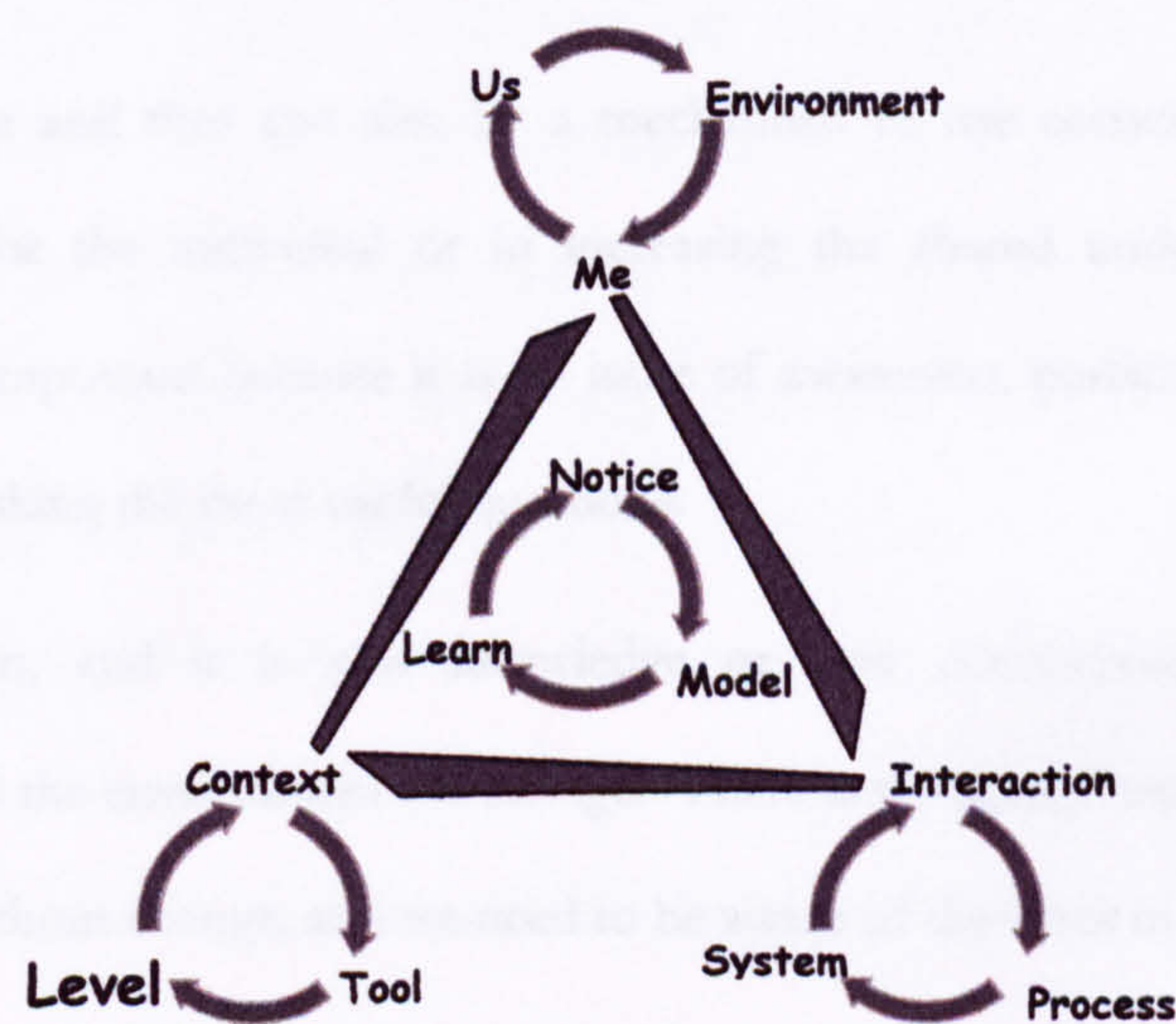


Figure 3

The labels on the model have been chosen specifically to each act as a reminder of the key ingredients for sustainable change and represented in graphical form to highlight the relationships between these issues. Figure 2 illustrates the original model and Figure 3 shows a two-dimensional version which was developed for practitioners to use 'in-the-moment' as a navigational mapping tool for charting progress and generating options.

The model emphasises the importance of 'building-on-what-you've-got' and that this, the context, is only meaningful if it is taken as being the history that people bring. The context is there to be validated, built on and challenged.

The model treats separately the specific contextual issue of level, reminding us that we relate to the world and to change at several levels, that change happens at all these levels and that we need to keep checking these different levels for congruence and for new information.

It emphasises 'noticing' as opposed to the sensory-specific 'looking' or 'listening' because we all take in information in different ways but mostly because 'noticing' implies checking for a difference between what we expected and what we got, and the key to change is for individuals to be making different decisions, which they can not do if they are working from the same preconceptions.

Models can be selective and they can also be a mechanism to use consciously to create greater understanding, either for the individual or in increasing the shared understanding in a group. Modelling is therefore important because it is an issue of awareness, particularly of the self and of technique, in terms of asking the most useful questions.

From models we learn, and it is new knowledge or new connections between established perspectives that creates the environment for change. There is no change without learning, although there can be learning without change, and we need to be aware of the latter in particular.

The model takes a process view of the way in which work takes place because it provides new information by linking activities in a meaningful way and providing the opportunity to focus on the outcome instead of the tasks. However, it links process closely to the systems perspective to prevent

the sub-optimisation and/or stagnation which can occur if the bigger picture is not monitored. In considering change, a process does not become robust or meaningful until these individual interactions are considered, and interactions are also part of the new information that is provided by systems mapping. Taken together, the system, processes and interactions provide a framework for observing and modelling the business and change.

The model represents 'people' in terms of the perspective of the individual, as a reflection of the interactions of which they are part. Ultimately, change takes place when individuals make different decisions to those they made before, and the proposition in this work is that in order for this to be sustainable, individuals need to be able to find their own relevance in the change. There is therefore a need to start from that which is 'real' or 'true' for the individual, and this is represented most powerfully by accessing the emotional reality of their experiences and their decision-making. The model divides the total perspective in to "me", "us" and the environment, drawing attention to the different and often conflicting values, beliefs and goals that may be true for the individual with respect to each of these. The convention is to leave emotions out of 'serious' situations such as the workplace, but in fact it is recognised that humans without emotions would be incapable of functioning in the face of the complex decision-making requirements of today's workplace. The emotional environment becomes particularly relevant when we consider "me". Experience has shown that it is vital for all individuals involved to go through the process of finding answers to the question "what does this mean for me?" with respect at all levels of the change process. Without this, there may be learning but no change, because this is the process that allows people to discover what is missing between plan and implementation. Change is often planned in a group, and people at work always belong to some or all types of groups found in the workplace – formal, informal or social, so the implications for the group are also important and different to those for the individual alone.

The importance of people in change is embodied in the concept of context as applied here – the history that people in the business bring to the change project collectively and individually. People

are the most important and the most complex element of change and of the model. The aim of the model is to bring together the complexities of change in a representation which allows those involved in change to move between the vital elements, making new connections as required and, importantly, finding useful suggestions about where to go next when an impasse is perceived.

3.2 Key aspects of innovation

3.2.1 Applicability

In Portfolio Paper 2: 'Developing a Model for Supporting in Change'), it was found that either models fail because they don't provide a mechanism for the practitioner to take in to account the organisational context, or they are so context-sensitive that they are not portable from situation to situation. This model overcomes that difficulty as the group being facilitated brings its own context which the model accommodates, and yet the model remains specific enough to enable real questions to be asked.

3.2.2 Asking questions

The model is a supporting tool that provides a mechanism for asking questions rather than determining answers:

“Generative questions are ones that reveal what we have been unaware of, what has been unquestionable or what has been taken for granted. These kinds of questions are greatly rewarded with new distinctions, and the ability to create and integrate”
(McMaster, 1997:68).

In 'Success in Change' (Portfolio Paper 1), many academic models were criticised for working towards a 'one best way' for change; and:

“we must stop valuing right answers and begin to learn how to behave when confronted by paradoxical and ambiguous situations. Doing so requires a shift

from valuing knowledge acquisition to valuing knowledge production” (Costa & Liebmann, 1995).

By focusing on relationships and providing a ‘map’ of these, the model provides a framework within which to explore the alternatives to ‘right answers’ and to navigate paradoxes in a way that provides some reassuring and guiding structure.

3.2.3 Integrating multiple aspects of change

By focusing on particular aspects of change, previous models for change appear also to have limited the potential for success by missing the opportunity to integrate excellence from different schools of thought (Portfolio Papers 1 & 2). This model brings together the business ‘observables’ and the ‘emotions’ of the individual through the mechanism of ‘notice-model-learn’. Focusing on the relationships between these provides a mechanism for taking an inclusive approach to change that overcomes the fragmentation of existing approaches.

3.2.4 Emphasis on personal meaning

“Organizational psychology’s interest in motivation and its lack of interest in symbolism in the workplace are good indicators of its technocratic orientation. Its research objects consist of narrow and well-defined questions, the answers to which form the basis for small bits of social engineering whose aim is to counteract the ill-effects of the division of labour and the impoverishment of tasks” (Alvesson, 1987:105).

Alvesson’s scathing attack illustrates the significance of the model’s focus on personal meaning. A barrier to considering the individual at this level in the past has been the apparently overwhelming complexity of the implication – that each individual’s needs are to be taken in to account. In ‘Change in Organisations’ (portfolio paper 6) it was found that a number of outstanding organisations, including large industrial manufacturers, have taken precisely this approach without being

overwhelmed. Their approaches could be closely matched by the model’s framework, through its emphasis on relationships and on working closely with the individual and the business processes.

3.2.5 Relevance to the practitioner in the field

A two-dimensional version of the model was developed for use by practitioners ‘in-the-moment’. Given that the language used on the model was already chosen with relevance to the practitioner, as an individual and as a non-expert, the model itself was refined to become easier to draw and interpret (Figure 4).

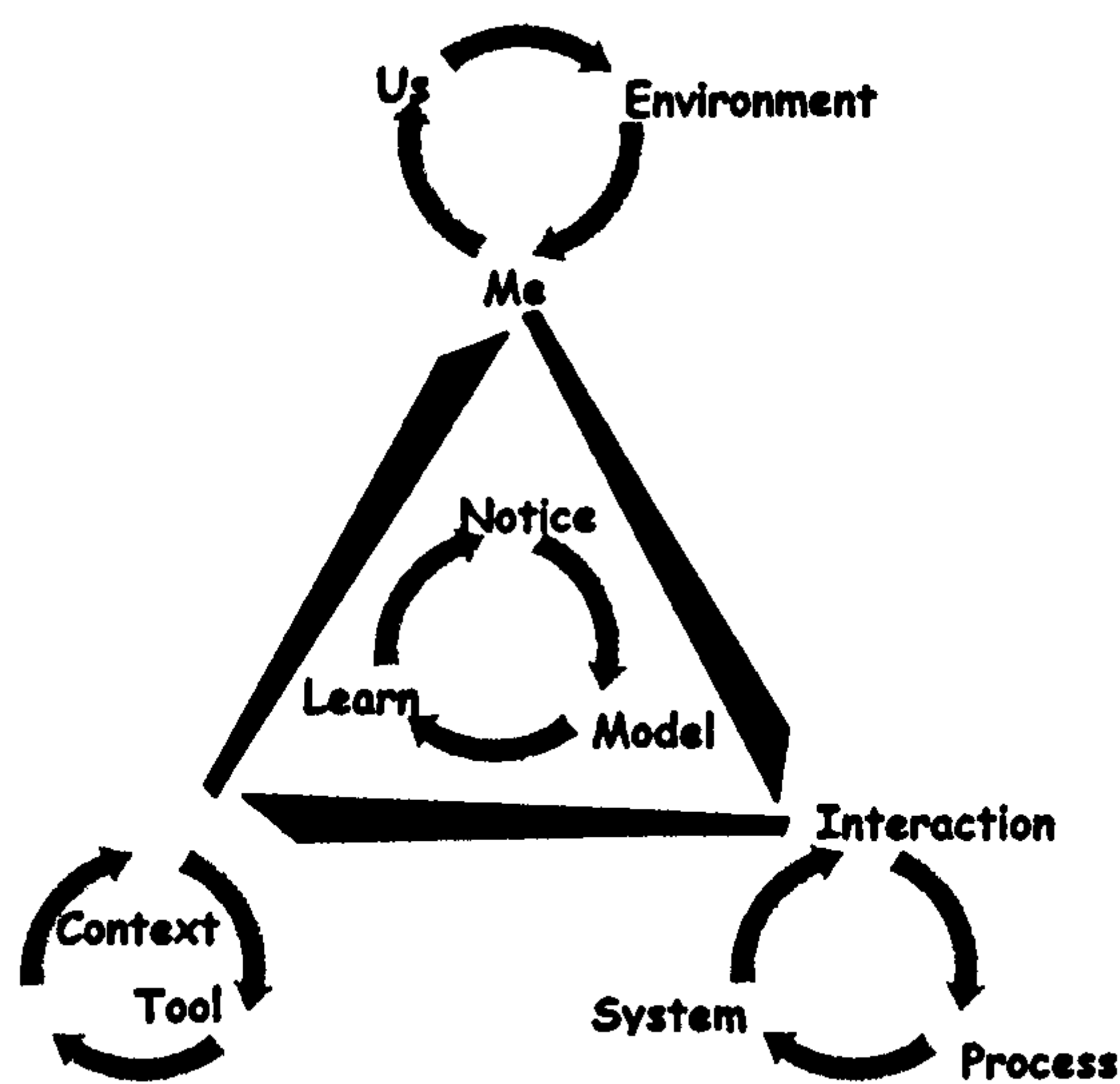


Figure 4

This new design could be used very effectively during the whole project, and during facilitated sessions in particular, to track the progress of the group and generate more options on the basis of this. Figure 5 (overleaf) shows how the basic triangular units can be reorientated and linked to show actual progress in terms of where the discussion and work has taken the group, relative to the different elements of the model. Mapping the journey in this way gives new understanding about, for example, an impasse has been reached (the group may have spent too long in one area of consideration). It also serves as a constant reminder of what other options remain for exploration.

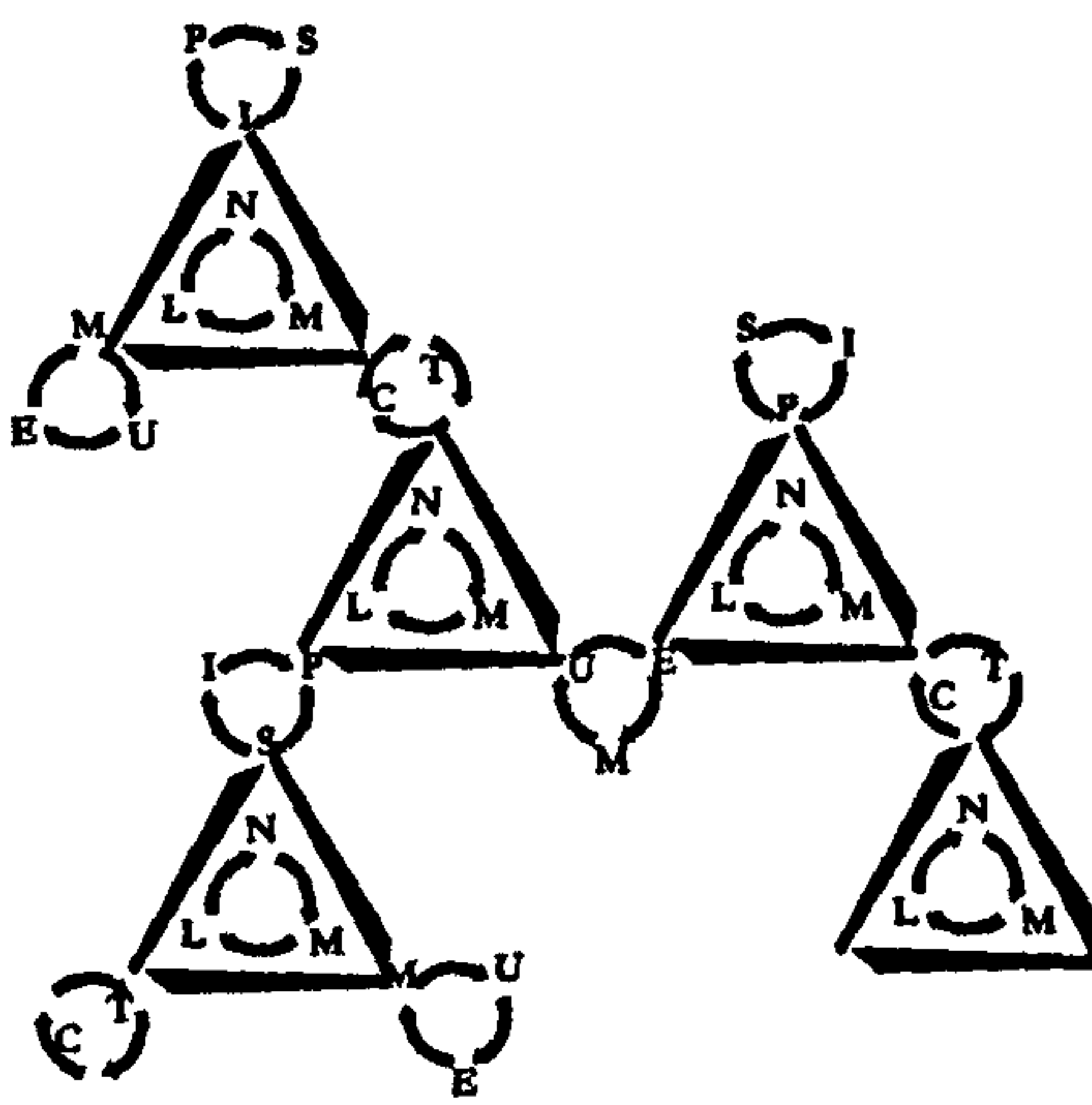


Figure 5

4 The process of research

4.1 Scope

The work was largely driven by an action research approach. Quantitative research was discounted for this work because of the exploratory nature of the research. Practical work was limited to change projects in small organisations, due to the availability of such projects. This was supported by a review of case studies of larger organisations to establish whether a relationship with the practical work existed. Background research was carried out with extensive use of electronic databases. As well as considering processual approaches to the management of change, this included looking at the fields of individual and organisational learning, organisational and social psychology, leadership and management, and good practice in consultation and facilitation.

The aim was to develop a model to support existing approaches to change in organisations, and specifically not to develop a 'one best way' approach.

4.2 Methods

The research builds closely on practical experience throughout and the research projects are action based and observed qualitatively. The projects took place in a workshop environment with a consultant-as-facilitator approach.

Following a review of published work on successful change, a model for change was proposed. This was tested in an action research project for relevance in the field and substantially redesigned as a result. The new model was then used to facilitate change in two further projects, with refinements to the design and refinements to the author's understanding of successful change resulting from both.

4.3 Measurements of success

The success of the projects was determined by whether business objectives were met. Evidence of sustainable change was a particular requirement for the researcher, identified in terms of changes in decision-making by individuals that would survive the pressures to return to old habits.

The success of the model was first determined by whether it described the processes and interactions in the workshops. As the model was developed in to a tool for the practitioner, its success was further measured by the extent to which it helped people generate options and make new choices, and finally by whether people began to use it themselves independently of the facilitator.

5 Results of Applying The Model

5.1 The initial model design

5.1.1 Key concepts from initial research

The critical success factors identified from a review of award-winning companies were:

Context – the importance of matching the approach to the existing resources, not as a constraint but in order to build on the principle of resonance, which is that in order for the new to make sense, and be workable, it must have some continuity with the old.

People – the companies create an environment in which each individual is in a position to contribute to the development of the business.

Processes – people in the companies have excellent processes for sharing information and for maintaining a broader perspective of the business.

The objective of developing the model was to add to the existing 'toolkit' for change by drawing together some key elements for change in such a way as to support the facilitator and group. The aim was to be able to map the relationships between the key success factors as well as providing a framework which to draw things together in an way that is easy to remember, and therefore easy to use.

The approach to the first iteration of the model was to put the key ideas in one graphic and then consider its applicability in a change project, in order to develop it further. The challenge with graphics is that there is limited scope for expressing movement, and that the illustration is restricted to two dimensions. Ultimately, the model must be a tool rather than an illustrations of relationships, so it needs to help people to decide what to do next. It therefore needs to be kept relatively simple.

As shown in Figure 6, the notice-model-learn cycle was put in the middle to emphasise the need to keep examining our own mindsets and creating shared understanding. The axes of process, people

and context are there as reminders of quite complex ideas. On its own the model may not yet act as a powerful support mechanism because it relies on a shared understanding of the underlying issues. The aim of taking this model in to a change project was to discover whether these concepts could be expressed graphically with sufficient detail to be useful.

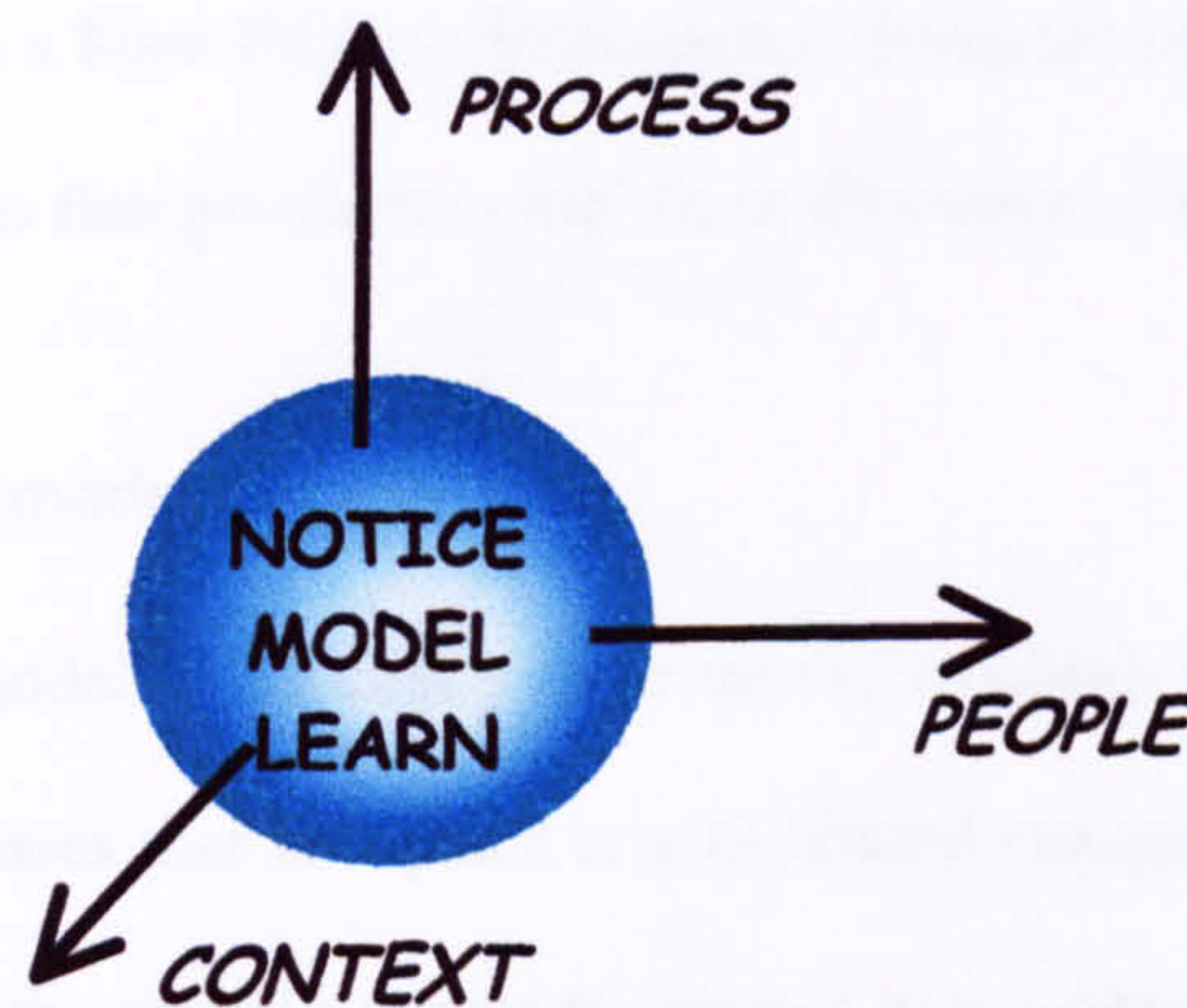


Figure 6

The action research approach to the projects focused on developing multi-functional teams to redesign the process of which they are all part. The facilitator's role was to create an environment where people were able to recognise their own achievements as individuals and as an organisation within the norms of the business (as these had stood prior to the project launch). The output of the projects concerned the business results and the implications for the model and for this research, in terms of achieving greater understanding of the process of change and of the applicability of the model, enabling the model to be refined accordingly.

5.2 Project 1 – Designing a new product introduction process

5.2.1 The company and the project

The company was a producer of knitted garments, with 80% of sales going to a single customer. This customer had traditionally been a retailer of classic designs with few changes from year to year in terms of sales figures and product mix. The customer was now moving in to the fashion market and consequently driving the supplier to increase variety in terms of design and to carry the burden

of risk in terms of the resultant unpredictable demand. The customer also wanted to increase the number of new product launches (“seasons”) per year. There was a clear need to reduce the cycle time of new product development and introduction in order for the business to have the required capability to meet the customer’s new expectations.

The project was defined as a New Product Introduction Programme, with the objective of reducing the lead time for ‘concept to first production run’ from 48 weeks to 12.

5.2.2 Applying the model

The aim of applying the model in the first project was to establish whether the model was a useful representation of the processes that take place in a facilitated change project. Given a useful match, the aim would be to refine the model to provide support in the generation of options and making of decisions for practitioners in change.

The Context

The model (Figure 7) tells us that context is important and much information was gathered for the whole team to make use of through extensive reflexive discussions around the existing ways of working, the expectations that the members of the organisation had from the project, and the personal and professional contributions of the people in the project team as individuals. The existing way of working is a rich source of information in that it carries all the preconceptions from, for example, the sector norms as well as the company and site culture.

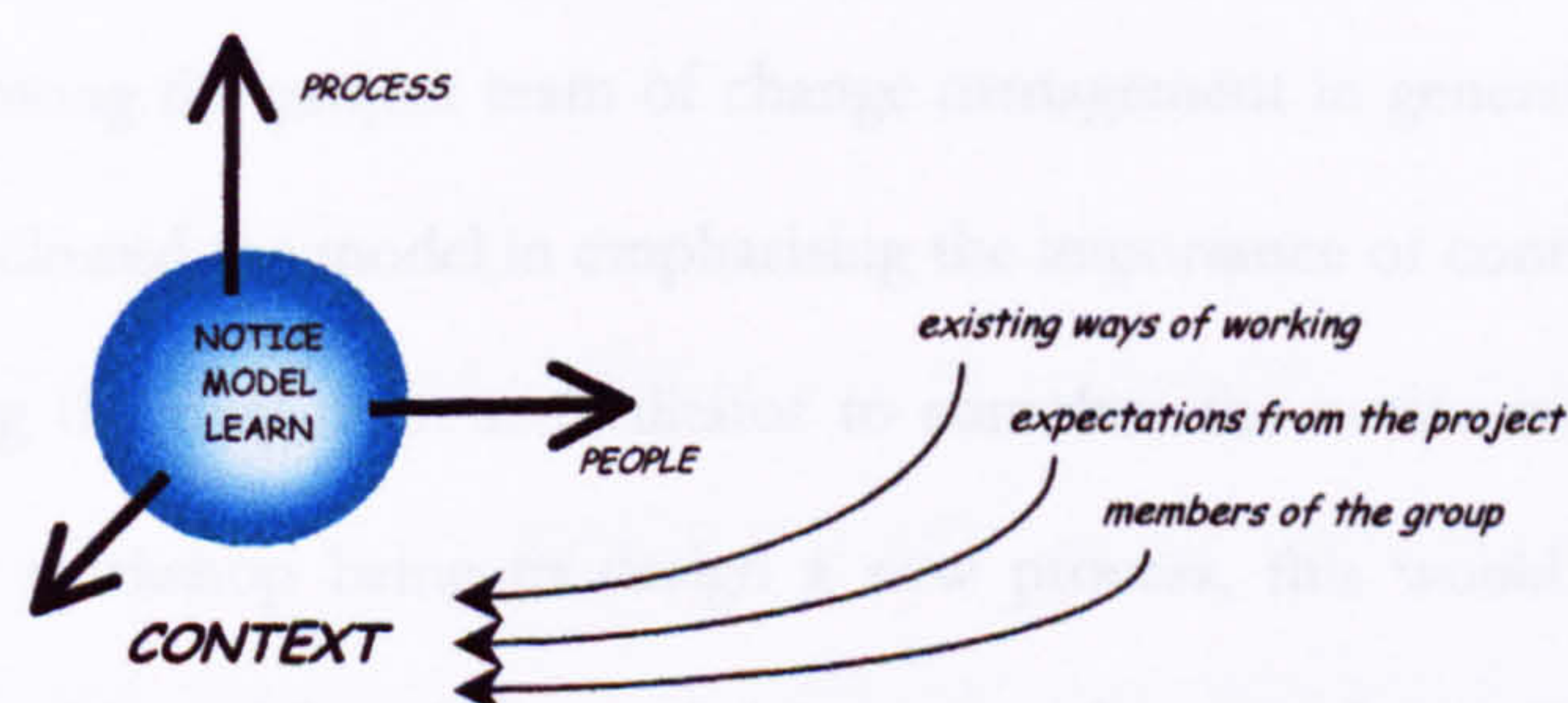


Figure 7

Across the process, relationships were “over the wall”; roles and relationships were based on technical input so day-to-day interactions stayed within a department. The perception was that each department was best left to do its own job. The model could be said to hold this information in that as we notice-model-learn around the issues of context we see how strongly ‘context’ and ‘process’ are related to ‘people’ (Figure 8).

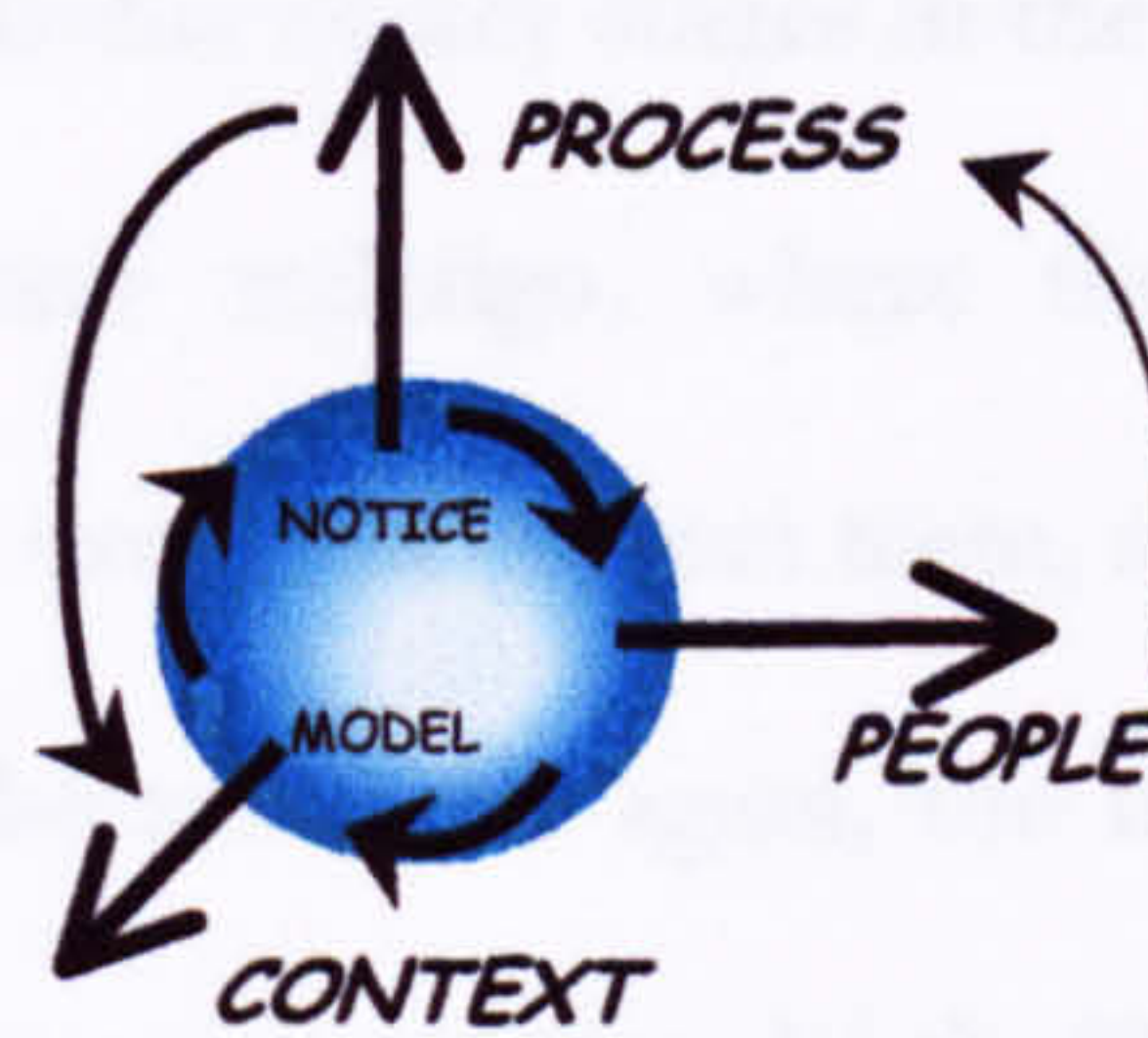


Figure 8

The project team was chosen by the facilitators after fact-finding visits to the factory. All functions in the process were represented. Every level of the organisational hierarchy was also represented in some way. It is also important to include people who are not excited by the project or who oppose it outright. These viewpoints offer the necessary checks and balances for the robustness of the direction the project is taking as it progresses. Senge *et al* (1995:353) go as far as to say that “the moment of disagreement is a cause for celebration”, because it means a greater level of understanding will be achieved as the disagreement is worked through.

The Workshop

Within the facilitated approach described earlier, a workshop was prepared to first develop a shared understanding among the project team of change management in general, and then process design. This approach followed the model in emphasising the importance of context, and ‘building-on-what-you’ve-got’, using the consultant-as-facilitator to stimulate the notice-model-learn cycle. With the objective of the workshop being to design a new process, this would ensure the process focus recommended by the model, and the workshop approach ensured that the people issues were at the centre of the work (Figure 9).

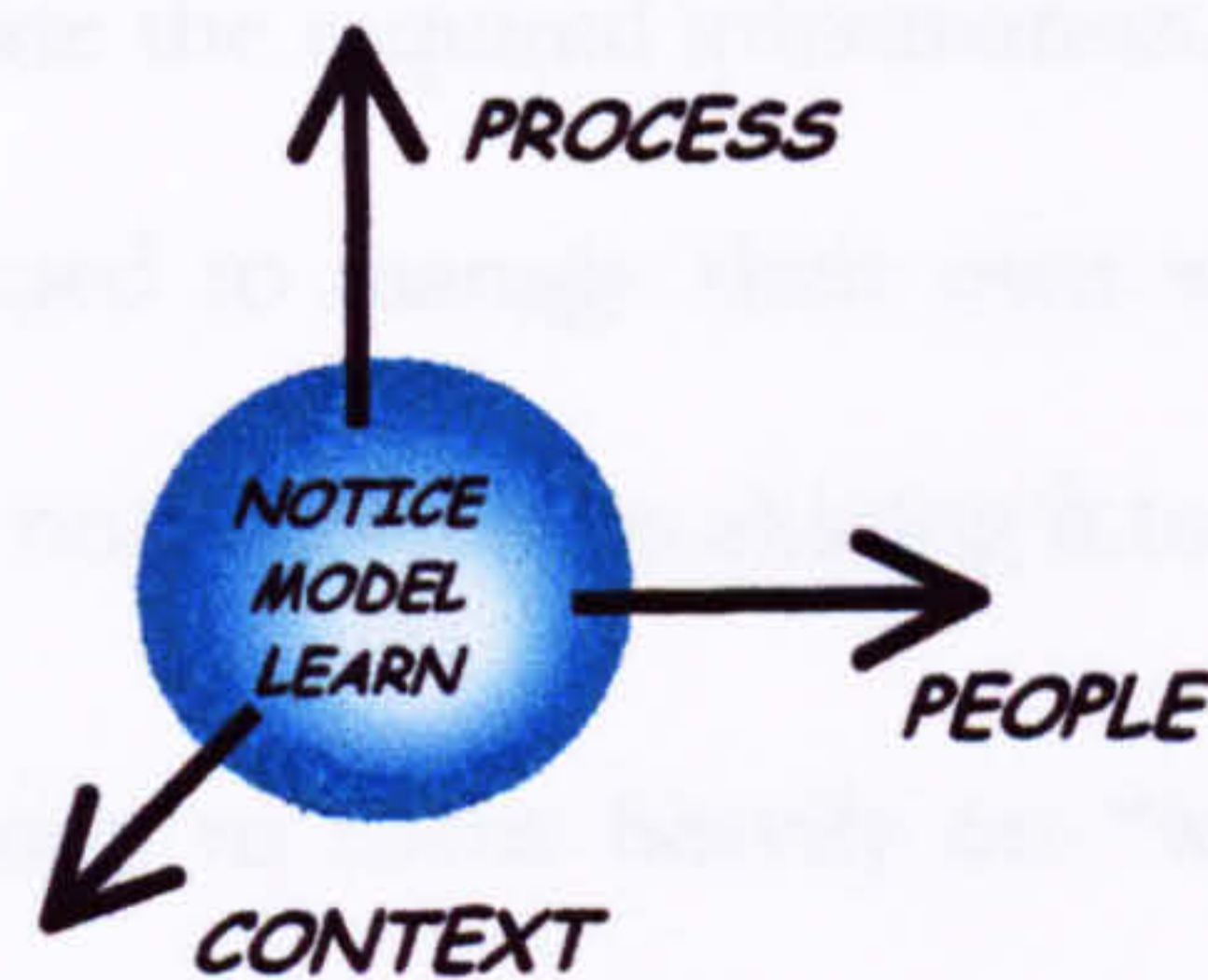


Figure 9

The model effectively reflected a number of key stages in the workshop. The first was the discussion on the choice of tools for process redesign, where the tool initially suggested by the facilitators did not excite the project team, so by taking the discussion round the 'notice-model-learn' cycle again, the facilitators were able to offer a tool that matched the context more closely (Figure 10). The

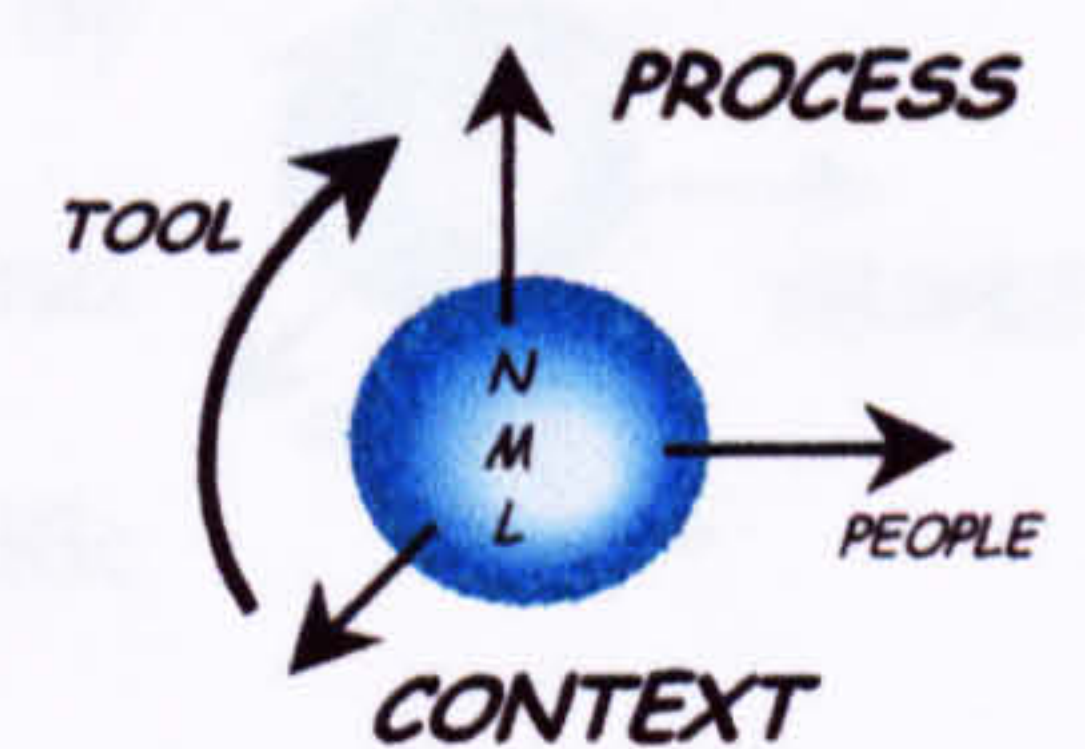


Figure 10

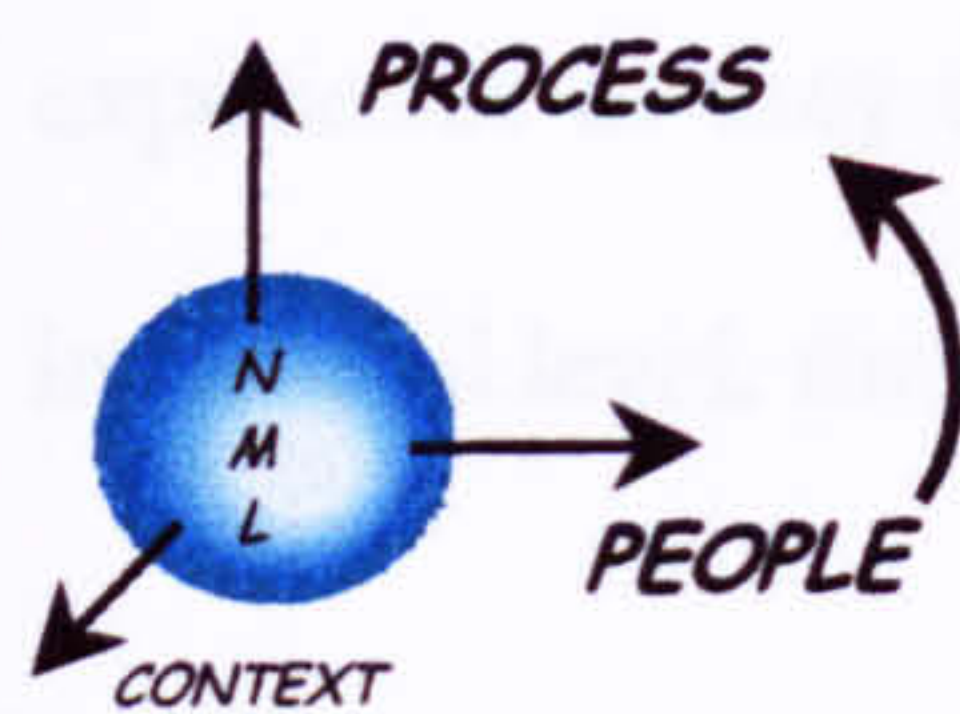


Figure 11

requirement for the team themselves to get a process view of their work before designing the new way of working was supported by the model's emphasis on process. The differences in perception of the members of the project team played a significant part in first highlighting and then resolving issues regarding the new process design (Figure 11), highlighted in the model

by the importance of people and of continuing around the 'notice-model-learn' cycle. The team were encouraged to progress around this cycle during times of conflict, the conflict itself arising from the necessarily different perceptions which individuals had of the context, and the model itself provided the facilitators with reminders of where else to take the discussion when an impasse was reached (Figure 12).

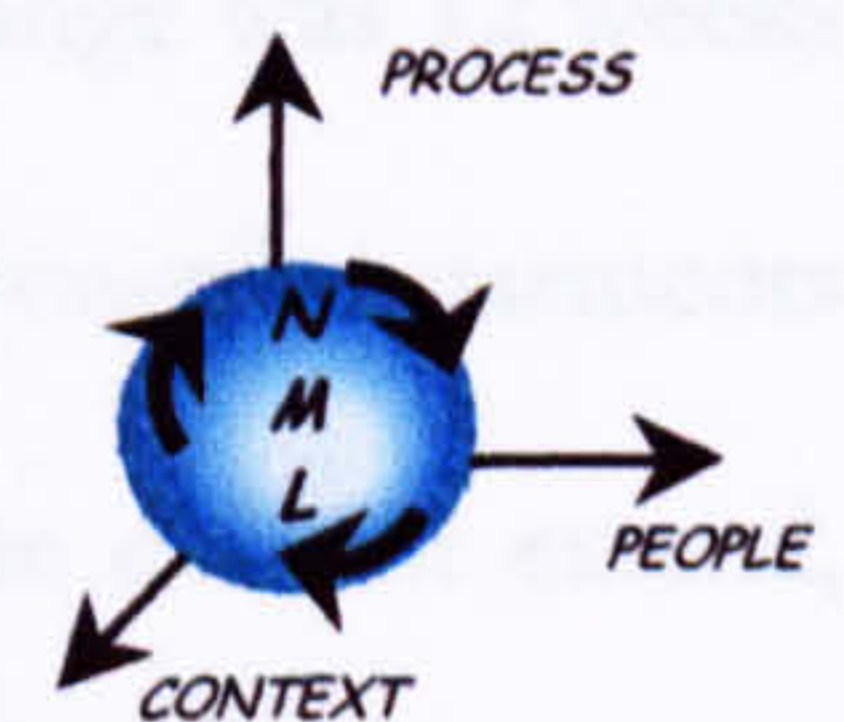


Figure 12

The implementation

Once the new process was designed, the group chose to pilot the approach because the customer had to be involved and so they did not feel that they were entirely in control of the success of the project. The way that people worked during the pilot was that they initially relied heavily on the new paperwork to guide their actions – when something to do with the pilot range arrived on their desks

they were careful to collect and collate the required information. However, the group had designed a new process but individuals continued to manage their own work in the same way as before, and found that collecting information is not the same as sharing it in a meaningful way.

The facilitators then helped the group to focus heavily on “what does this mean for me?” as the mechanism for helping them to each identify how they were going to be effective in changing their

work habits. Working at a very personal level, individuals identified the key changes they could make in their work that would support the new process. By going through they cycle of ‘notice-model-learn’ for themselves as individuals (Figure 13), each person was invited to make a small number of specific



Figure 13

commitments about what they were going to do differently from now on, having thought the implications through at a detailed level, particularly in terms of the pressures that they would experience as they made the changes. As the new process acquired significance and meaning at an individual level, the pilot was now able to run successfully.

5.2.3 Project results

The result of the pilot was that the customer asked for significantly fewer product changes on the pilot garments and chose every garment in the range. The lead time for the pilot range was 12 weeks from initial concept to first production, compared with the normal 48 weeks. Non-pilot garments from the same season were not adversely affected in that the lead time for these did not extend, although neither was it reduced. The company was therefore in a position to increase their new product launches from 2 to 8 per year. As measured against the rest of the sector, this would be regarded as world class.

A number of factors which had been considered external to the project resulted in the new ways of working being undermined in the following design season. This exposes a lack of systems view in the project and in the business.

5.2.4 Implications for the research

The model as it stood could be used to follow the interactions that were taking place during the project, and in some cases served as a useful reminder, for example to make greater use of the 'notice-model-learn' cycle. It specifically enabled a new approach to choosing change tools, which was to let the group members choose them once they had been round the notice-model-learn loop and got a good view of what they were trying to do. However, in not drawing enough attention to the need to maintain a systems view, it allowed the project to become exposed by not taking in to account the changing external environment or recognising the need to form relationships at this level as well as within the project.

In the facilitated environment there had been a greater focus on the individual than the model currently provided. The additional information from the project is summarised in Figure 14.

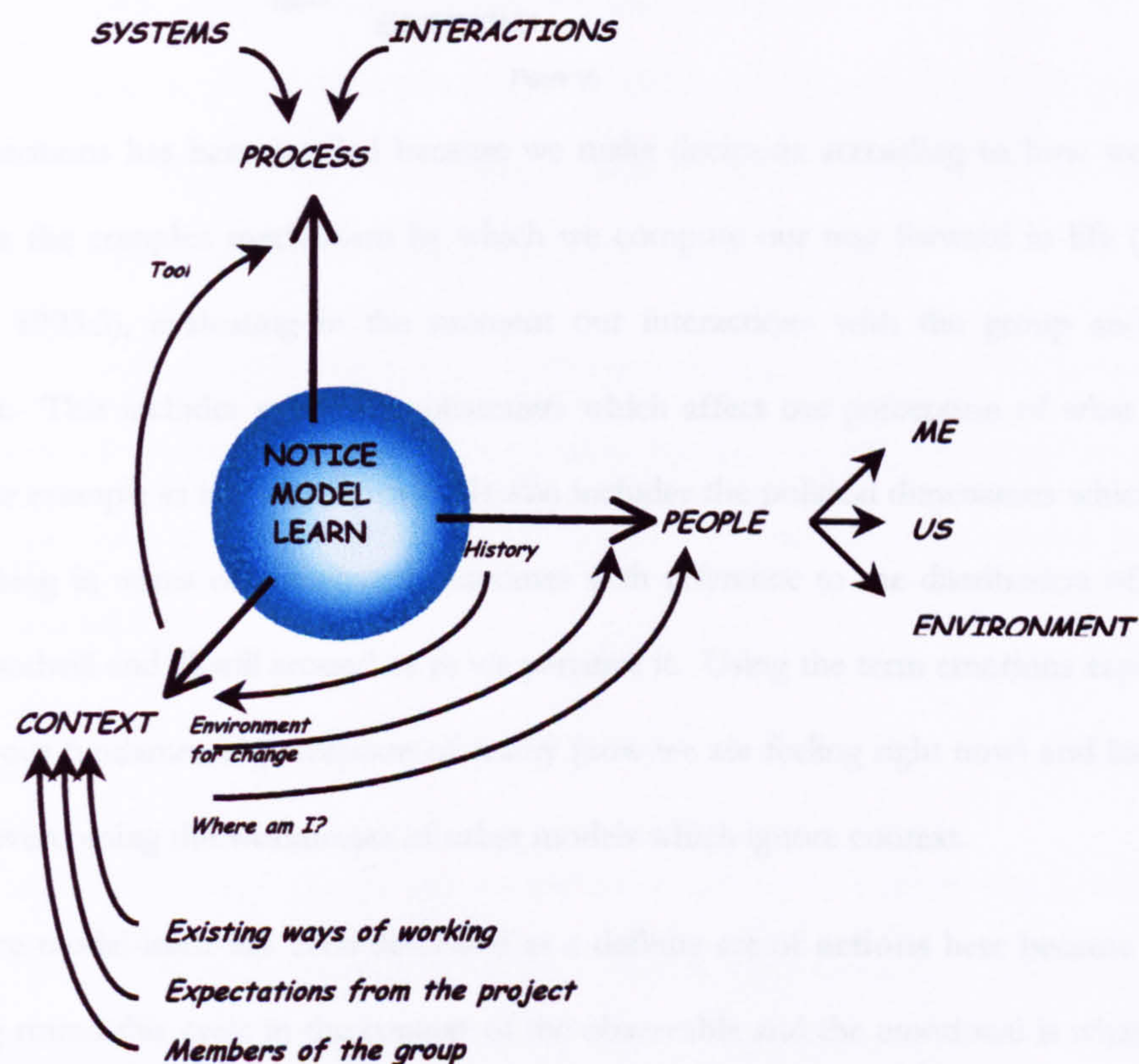


Figure 14

The model was redesigned in a series of iterations to take these issues in to account (Figure 15). In this new form, the core concepts have been identified as actions, emotions and observables. The **observables** are the interactions that take place, the process itself, and the system. These can be made visible as has been shown in the project, and the changes followed. One aspect of interactions, however, relates more closely to the ideas which have been grouped as **emotions**. These are the 'people issue' ideas.

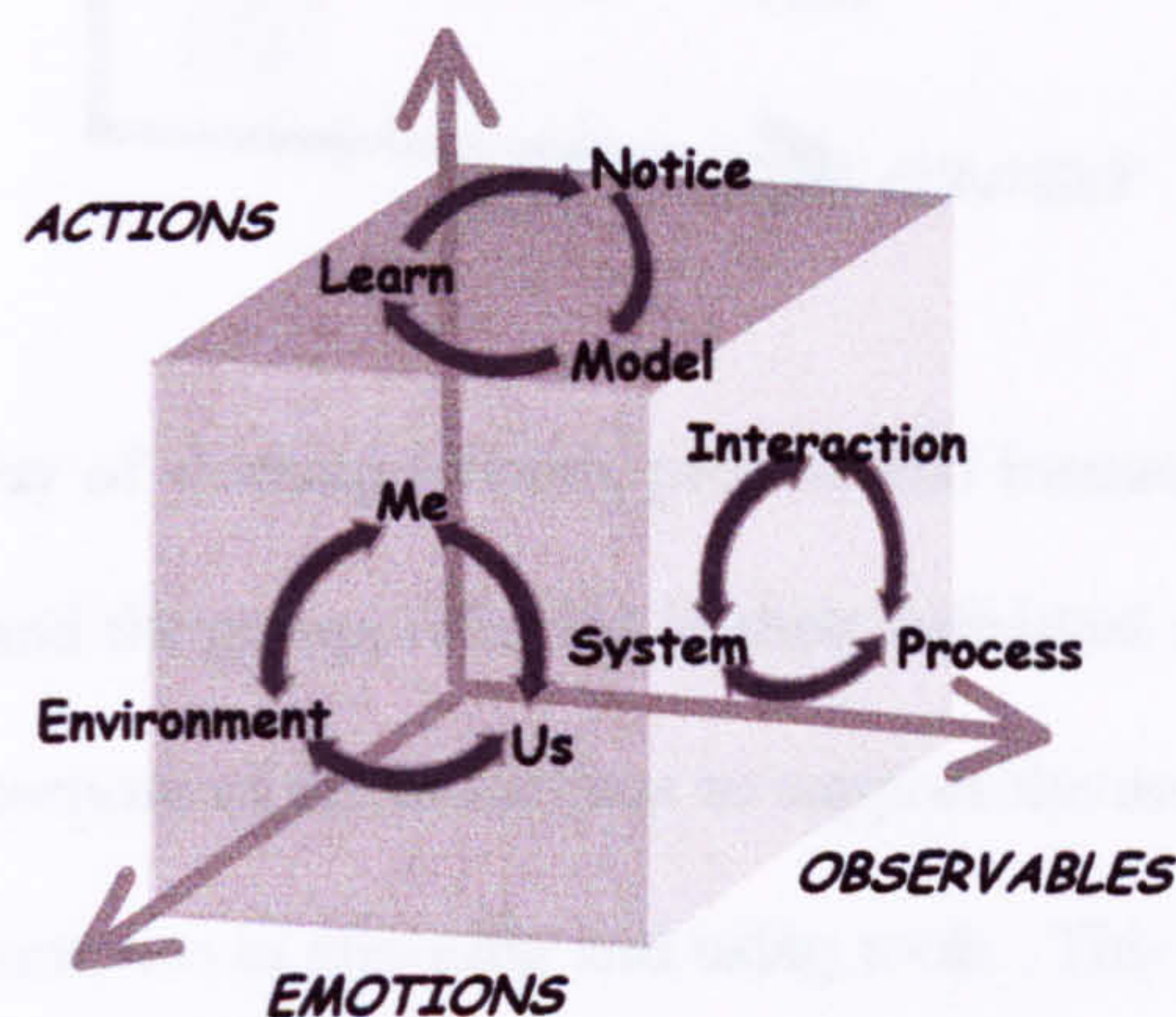


Figure 15

The term emotions has been applied because we make decisions according to how we feel – our emotions are the complex mechanism by which we compute our way forward in life (Fineman & Hochschild, 1993:3), evaluating in the moment our interactions with the group and the wider environment. This includes structural constraints which affect our perception of what is possible, expressed for example as industry 'norms'. It also includes the political dimensions which affect our decision-making in terms of anticipated outcomes with reference to the distribution of power and influence, goodwill and ill-will around us as we perceive it. Using the term emotions explicitly draws attention to our fundamental perception of reality (how we are feeling right now) and has proved to be a key to overcoming the weaknesses of other models which ignore context.

Finally, notice-model-learn has been described as a definite set of **actions** here because as we have seen, driving round this cycle in the context of the observable and the emotional is what creates the steps forward in change.

Context is noticeably absent from this new model and in many ways this does not mean that we have lost information because with the explicit inclusion of system and environment we have specified the

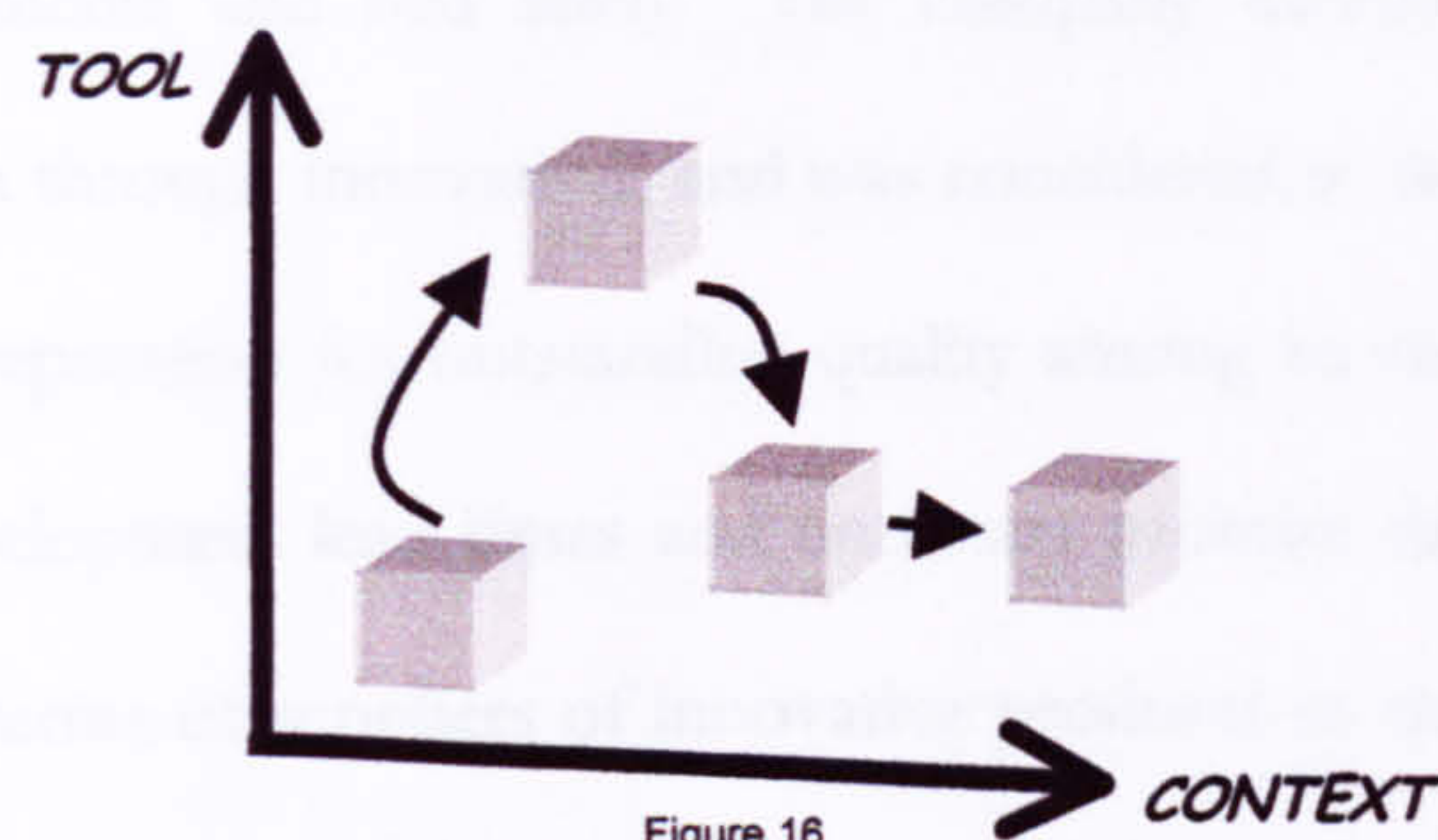


Figure 16

contextual aspects of the way of working (system, process and interactions) and the perceptions, or 'history' of the individuals and the group, reflected in their individual realities and expressed as their 'emotions'. However, the purpose of the model was to support the use of existing change tools, and we saw how important context was in choosing and using tools. This implies that it is still useful to define this relationship explicitly. It would also be helpful to be able to express the change in context that results from a change project, for example, as an iteration which impacts on the choice of tool for subsequent initiatives. Figure 16 attempts to illustrate this relationship.

In conclusion, the new design brings the key concepts more into the realm of the personal, moving from process-people-context to actions-observables-emotions. Bringing the model in to a personal context brings it closer to the domain of the individual decision maker and therefore is more likely to be meaningful to the user.

5.3 Project 2

In this project the redesigned model was applied more actively to support the facilitation of the project. The aim was to refine the model further so that it could be used to guide decision making and option generating 'in-the-moment' by other practitioners, not just the author.

5.3.1 The company and the project

The company is a producer of knitted fabric in the UK. The majority of its production is supplied to manufacturers of garments and bed linen. The company maintained its competitive edge and product differentiation through innovation, and was considered to be the benchmark for innovation in the UK. It had a reputation for outstanding quality among its customers who were nevertheless experiencing long development lead times and uncertain promise dates. However, the market was far from saturated in terms of suppliers of innovative products so the company maintained a steady order book.

The company had nevertheless identified that its return on capital employed could be higher, and had recognised the need to shift the balance of sales further from low cost mature products to even more high margin, innovative, products – the difference in margin being a factor of three. The project described here is one of three initiatives that were launched to support this requirement, and is a project to improve the company's interface with the customer. Originally conceived as an exercise to improve customer service, the project became a driver for an organisation-wide overhaul of the information flows in the business.

5.3.2 Applying the model

Understanding the context in all its dimensions at the outset of the project allows the facilitator to support the change process more effectively, using the principle of 'building-on-what-you've-got'.

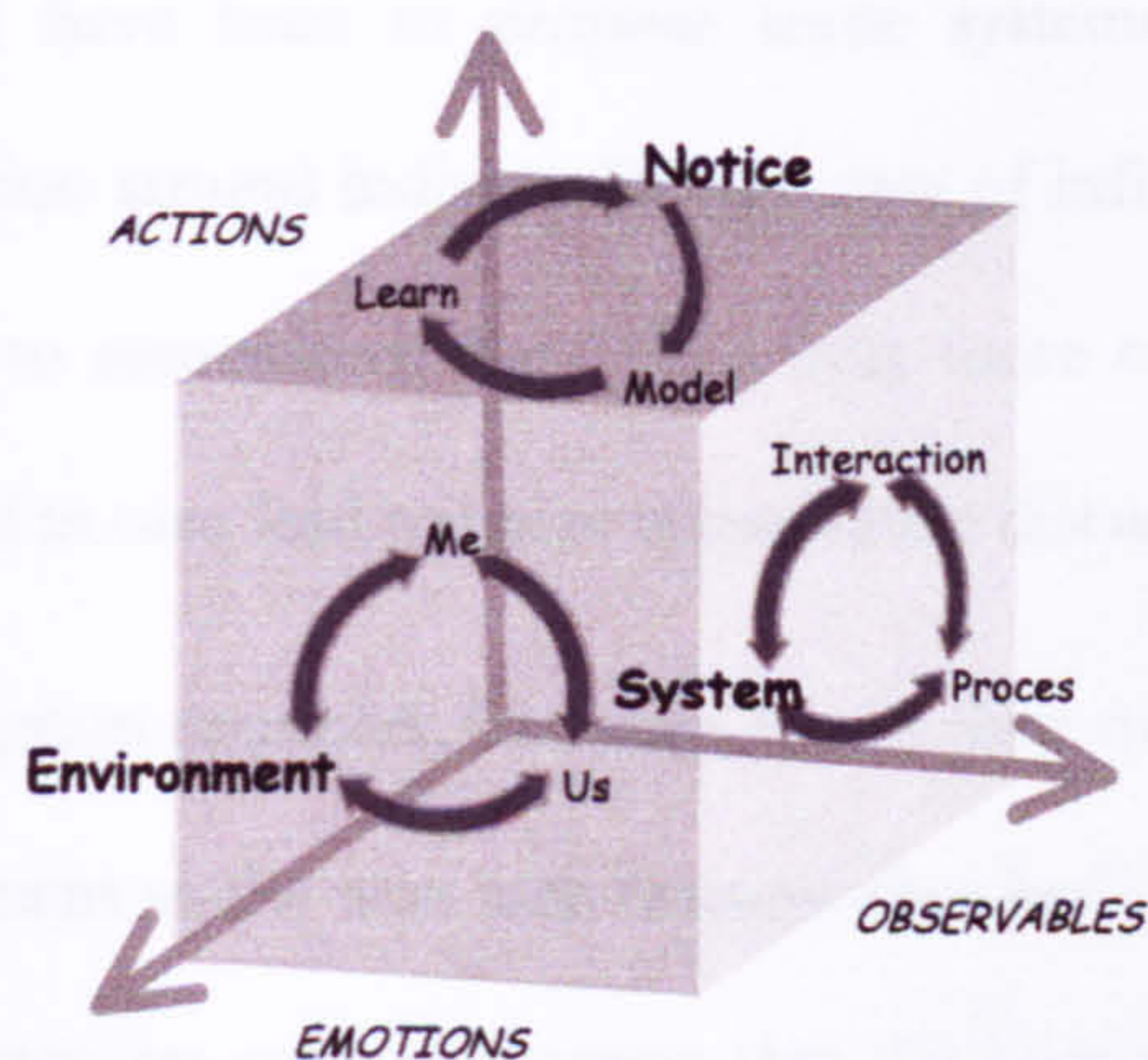


Figure 17a

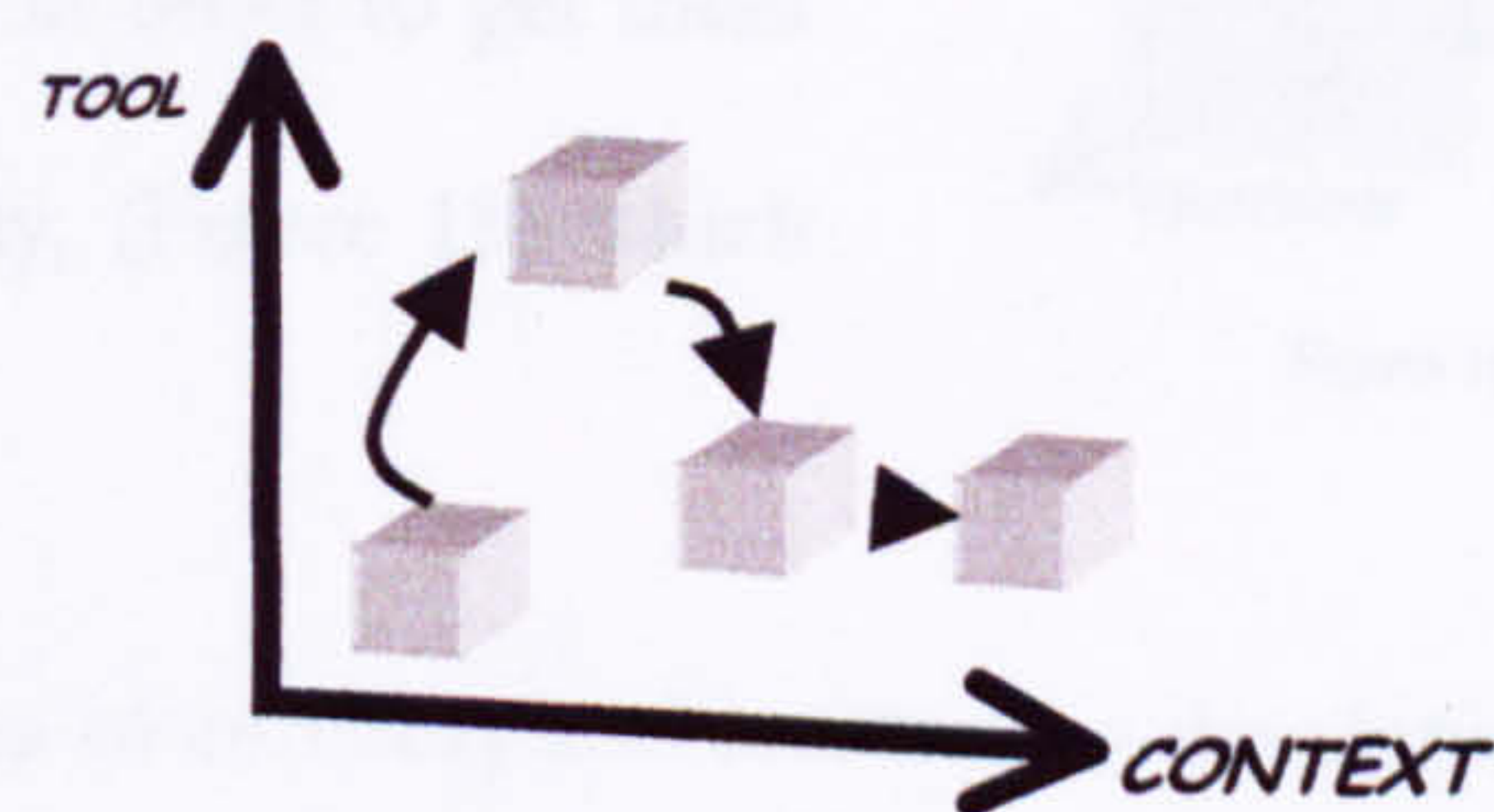


Figure 17b

Figure 17 shows how the actions, emotions and observables which together describe our interactions with the organisation operate in a context which determines the tool or approach to be used.

The current way of working was characterised by the quality focus which exclusively drove the decision-making process, and the reluctance to make such decisions without total confidence in the outcome. This is an example of the important relationship between the environment, as perceived by the individual and the process, as illustrated in the model.

Part of finding the way forward is to get a clear understanding of where individuals are starting from. because that is what is 'real' for them, and in this project there was a distinct and overriding need to let people have their say at the outset. However, the enormous amount of information that came out of this exercise was overwhelming to the group. Apparent contradictions arose out of the differences in the way that each department worked, in the way that each department perceived the customer, and in the way that departments perceived each other. Different time horizons were involved and variations in the nature of the exchange – involving definitive information or speculative information or a negotiating process.

Reaching the point where an impasse threatened, the model offered a number of options for a new direction in which to proceed. The objective was to give people a rest from the highly-charged environment that they were experiencing. From the model, it is possible to choose an area in which to work that may not have been addressed for some time. One option could have been to propose some systems mapping of the current situation around individual's own area of influence in order to get them back to somewhere that held a little more certainty, (Figure 18) which would in turn lead to more constructive discussion.

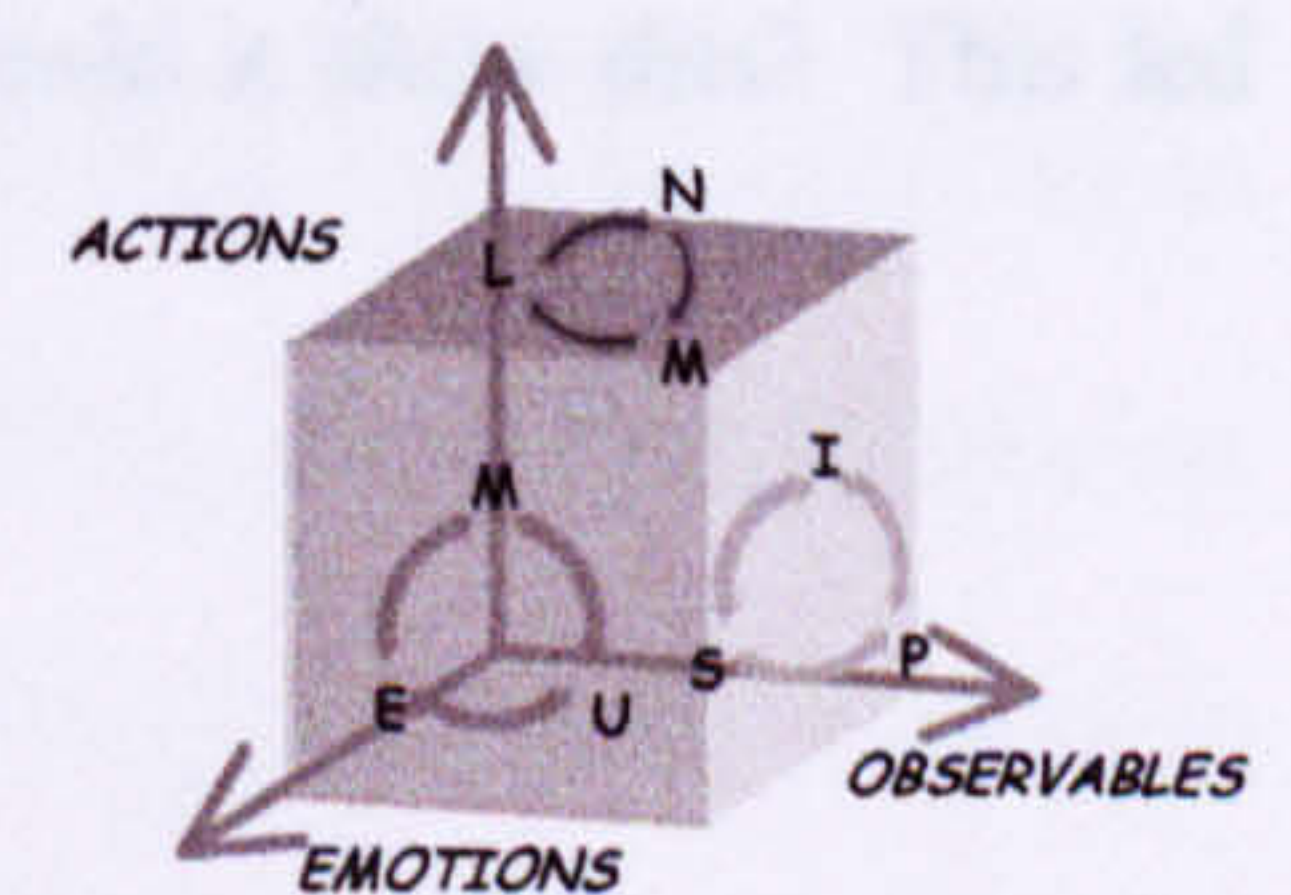


Figure 18

The group members, however, found their own area of certainty and insisted on developing a vision statement as the next step because they had previous positive experience of doing so. The model's emphasis on context suggests that the best results come from 'working-with-what-you've-got', and

this builds on the principles of effective facilitation discussed earlier, so this direction was duly followed.

In the event, the vision was a catalyst for a leap forward in understanding. This is an example of the value of not looking for endpoints in the learning cycle – the vision statement was a journey round the learning cycle, not a means to an “end” of having a vision or setting objectives (Figure 19). Making the step from

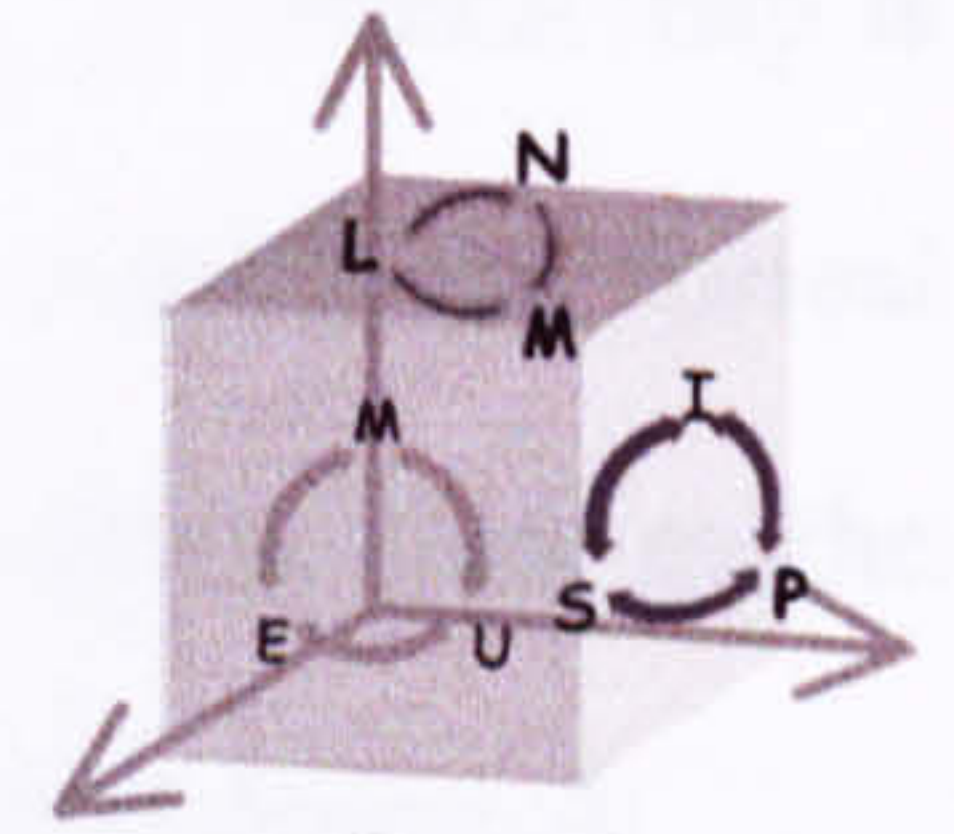


Figure 19

task to information flow as the focus for development was the change in emphasis that allowed the group to begin to work together on a common problem instead of argue about a variety of different ones. They were quickly aware that they needed to represent the business in a way that would be useful to them and therefore that they needed to map the information flows.

They needed to talk to many people, and were looking for a wide variety of different inputs. As a multi-functional team they could draw on the team itself as a resource and organise themselves to interview, validate the results and map the processes. Their new multifunctional understanding would allow them to see bigger picture and ensure that links between functions were accurate (Figure 20).

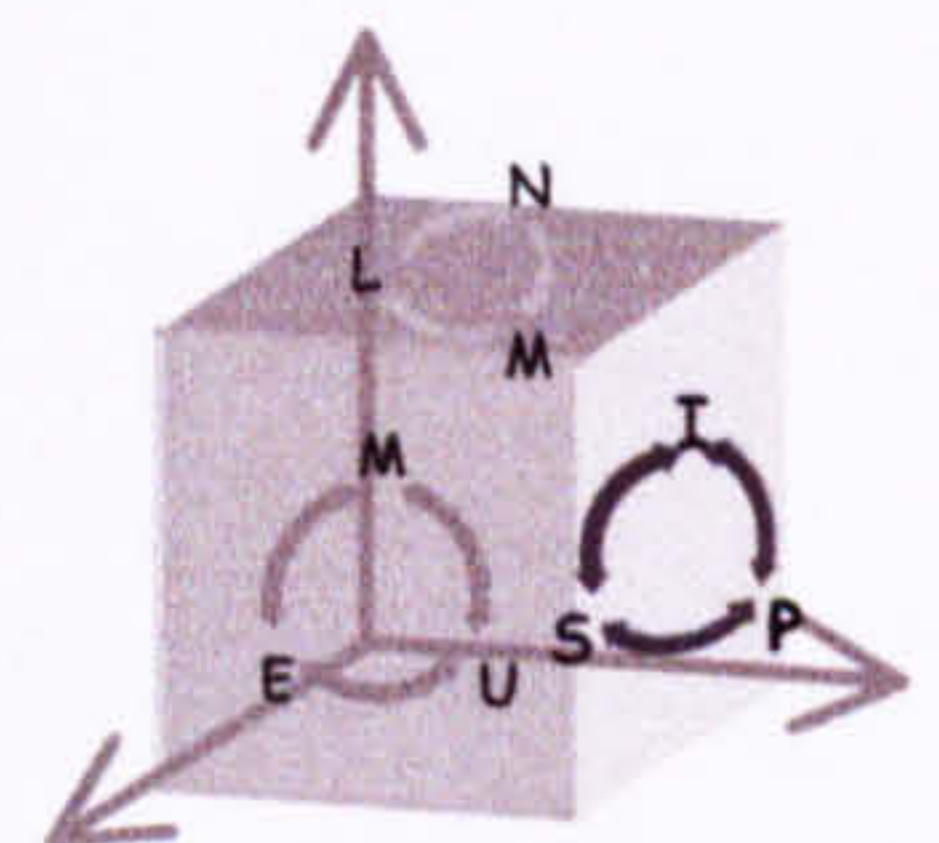


Figure 20

They started with the customer interface and worked back into the organisation. With the facilitators, they thought the mapping process through – in each case, what would they need, what would the results look like, what would it tell them and how effectively would it show this? This led

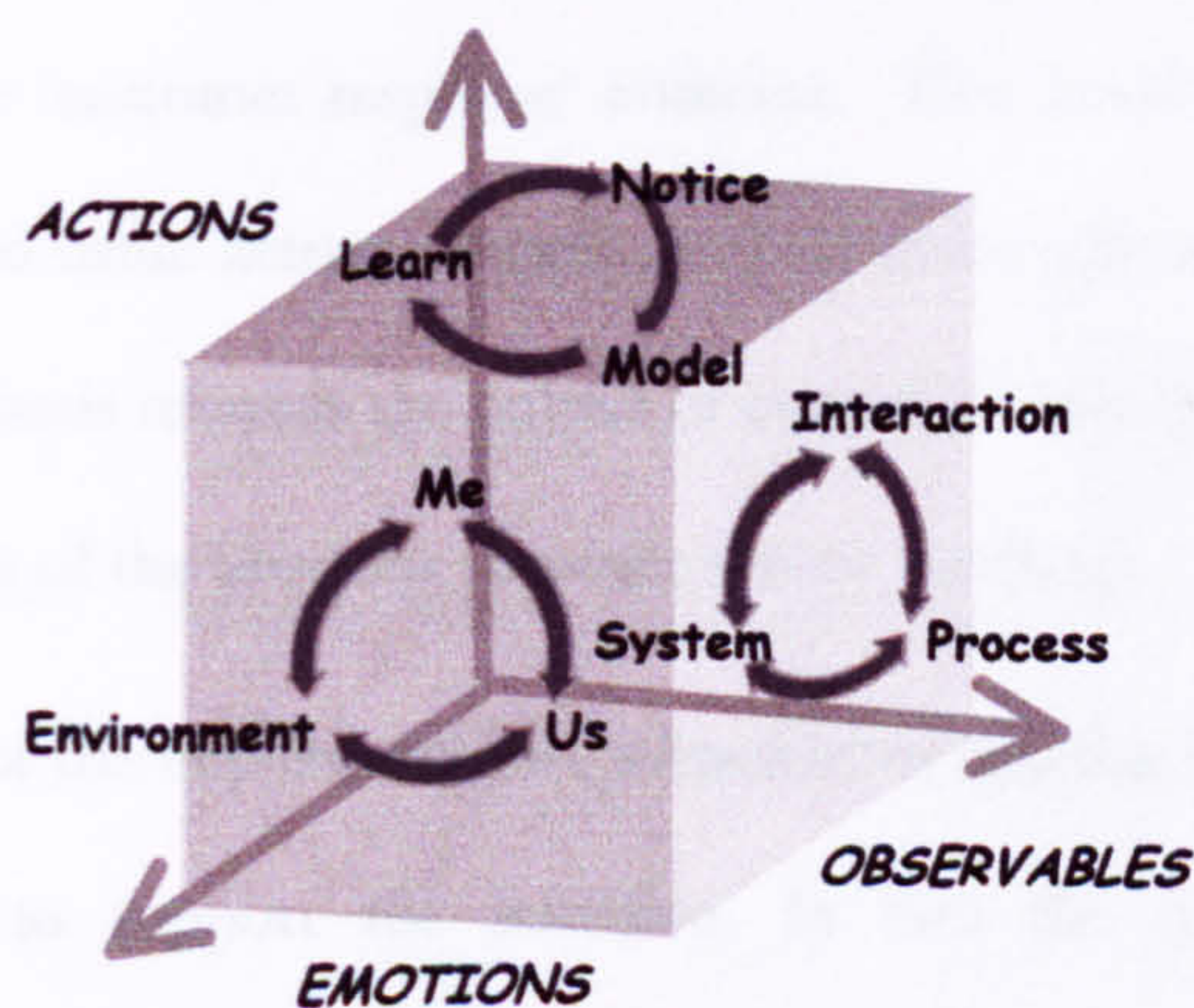


Figure 21

to the creation of a systems map that showed the dynamic flow of information throughout the business, giving the links between the processes and, because it can show the effect of individual decisions, it also provides the link with the emotional environment (Figure 21). A systems map is able to include places where information is created and transferred that are outside the formal process. In this organisation there was no formal process, but there was a perceived logic to the transactions that was in fact full of exceptions and idiosyncrasies that needed to be understood.

Using the systems map in this way actually makes it possible get a very good approximation of the new approach because people in a process do get the information that they need by whatever means. The systems map of “as is” makes it easy to see the most direct way for existing requirements to be met and how to best support them. It also makes it easy to integrate any new requirements

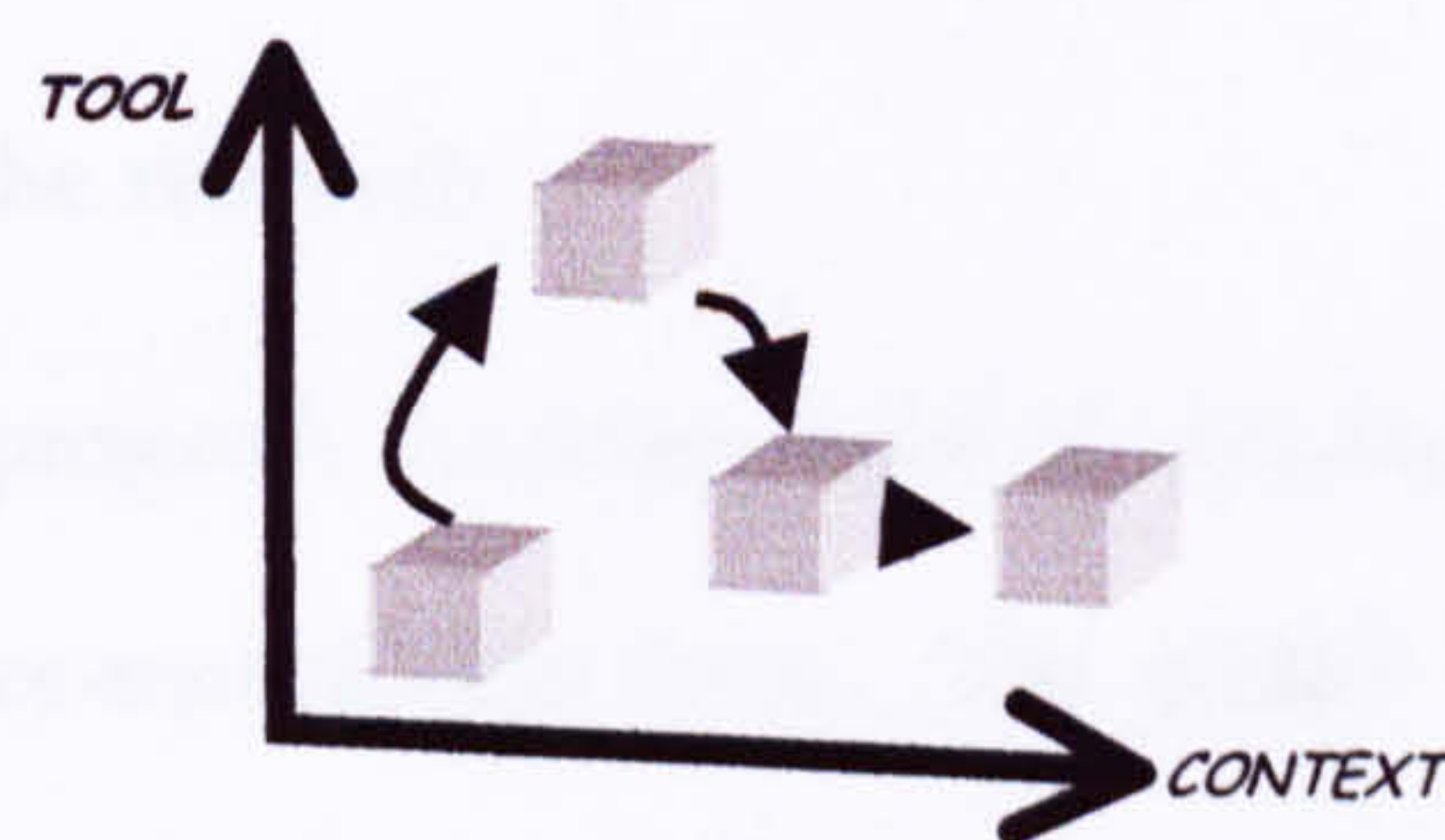


Figure 22

effectively, again working on the principle of ‘building-on-what-you’ve-got’ (Figure 22).

In discussion, the group members realised that in mapping the existing information flows they had already established the criteria for the new way of working, and they identified the opportunity for an integrated company-wide ‘customer response’ initiative. This could build on the existing focus on quality, which they found came across strongly in their investigations. The opportunity existed to build on the quality emphasis towards the output of customer satisfaction, continuing the trend away from the ‘input’ emphasis of the previous constant review meetings.

As part of the support for the implementation, a booklet of ‘guiding principles’ for working with the customer was devised to support the initiative. In fact the group had underestimated the effectiveness of involving everyone in the systems mapping because by the time the booklet was

issued, it was perceived as being superfluous because people had such a clear idea of what the change meant for them as individuals. This is an indication of the success of the approach, and of the way in which changes in context affect the use of tools (Figure 22).

5.3.3 Project results

The key result was that a complex problem about communication had become a simple message about the customer, making change much more straightforward.

A customer perception survey commissioned three months after the end of this phase of the project showed that perception among customers and suppliers had changed significantly. The perception of the company had moved from it being seen as a company difficult to get information from, to now being perceived as the most favoured company to deal with in terms of communication..

5.3.4 Implications for the research

A key learning point from this project is the importance of repeatedly being able to access new ways to keep going round the notice-model-learn loop. The model was useful in helping to trigger thoughts on where else to take the thinking of the group when they felt 'stuck'.

The model supported the use of other tools, such as systems mapping. Having expanded the 'people' issues in the model into 'me-us-environment' provided a much more dynamic representation of the need to consider what is happening for the individual and group. The representation provided a vehicle for allowing 'both-and' instead of 'either-or' when there were heated debates at the beginning of the project about different ways of working.

In support of this was also the emphasis on considering the interactions within a process as well as the information flows, and mapping this as a systems map was the breakthrough because the interactions and influences, the 'unofficial' information flows, could also be represented.

One of the objectives of designing a new model was to make it a tool for generating options in the moment, and although the current graphic representation is a useful way of representing the complex

relationships involved, it sometimes seemed as if there was too much information there through which to navigate.

An addition to the 'toolkit', therefore, was to consider the model in one dimension at a time as a problem-solving tool. The idea was to be able to make use of the quality of being able to start from anywhere and go anywhere in a more hands-on way. Figure 23 shows how the relationship between the various faces of the cube in the change support model can be represented in two dimensions rather than three.

Expanding on this idea produced an extended representation of the group's journey by mapping their 'visits' to each part of the model, Figure 24. Each triangular element can be placed in any orientation and linked so as to reflect the steps taken. This almost gives a systems map of where the group's thinking went throughout the project.

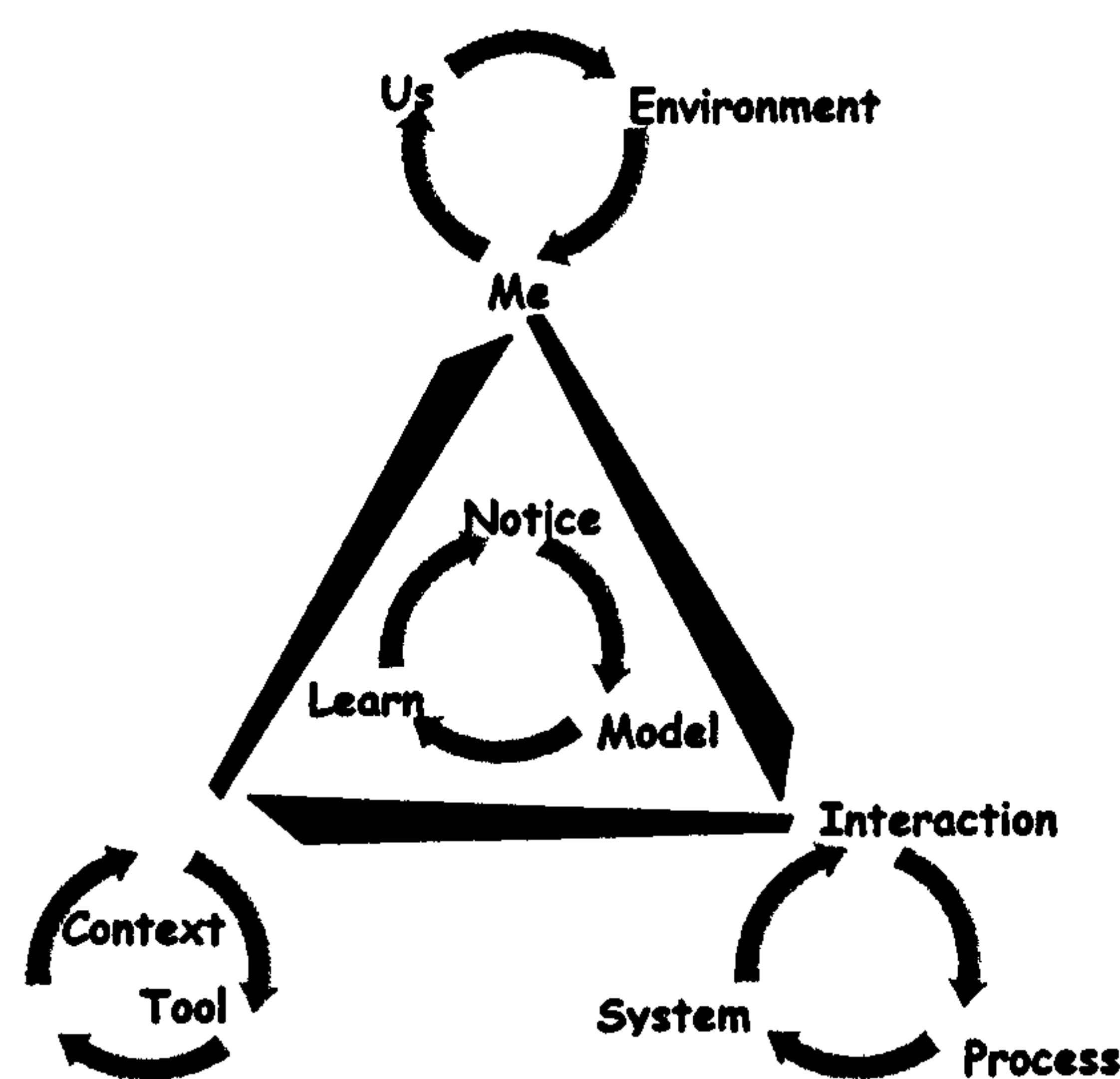


Figure 23

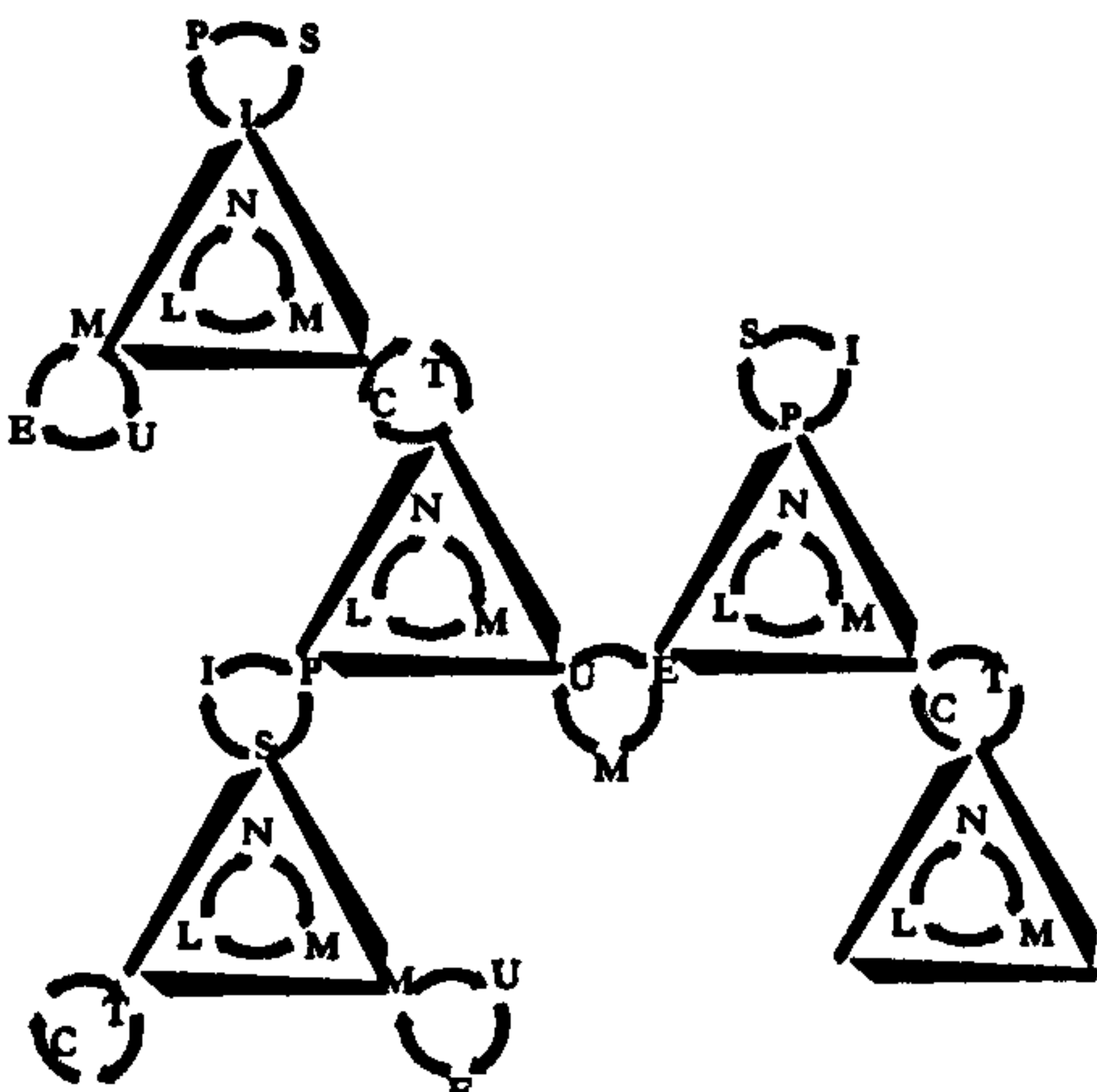


Figure 24

If used during, rather than after, the project, this approach could be used in two ways. As a map, it would allow a check on progress and emphasis, allowing us to notice if more consideration has been given to one aspect rather than another, and to check whether this is appropriate or whether corrective action needs to be taken. As a decision-making tool, this can also be used literally on the back of the proverbial envelope or cigarette packet to work out where to go next. In this way the

model could become more of a 'practitioner-friendly' device for option generating and decision making.

5.4 Project 3

In this project the group members did make some use of the model themselves, showing that the two-dimensional representation could be more accessible in the moment compared to the three dimensional representation. The project is of particular interest because, with the formulation of a new strategy as its objective, the project team did not comprise those who would be normally be responsible for making decisions at this level.

5.4.1 The company and the project

This project is with the same company as described in Project 2 above, and took place towards the end of three initiatives of which the above project was one.

The company had seen new product introduction lead times reduced from seven weeks to two weeks, and the number of new products introduced per year had risen from five to ten.

People across the business were concerned that they were vulnerable to losing their way again, as they had with their previous misinterpretation of the quality focus. They realised that they had been operating in what was effectively a strategic vacuum, and the project was launched to develop a new strategy.

5.4.2 Applying the model

People were aware that they had very little concept of what strategy meant for them at a personal level, in terms of how it would influence their work. They were aware that a good strategy should be helping them to make decisions, but they couldn't identify this in any more detail, such as how this would happen. There was only a definite nervousness about not having an indicator of direction on which they could rely.

However, people probably had more of an understanding than they realised because as individuals they would each have their own concept of what good decision-making was, and therefore how to get the information that they needed. They all had their own personal strategy even if it was not being applied consistently or beyond the limited sphere of their day-to-day work. By sharing their experiences they would be able to build up a picture of what strategy meant, and in doing so they would

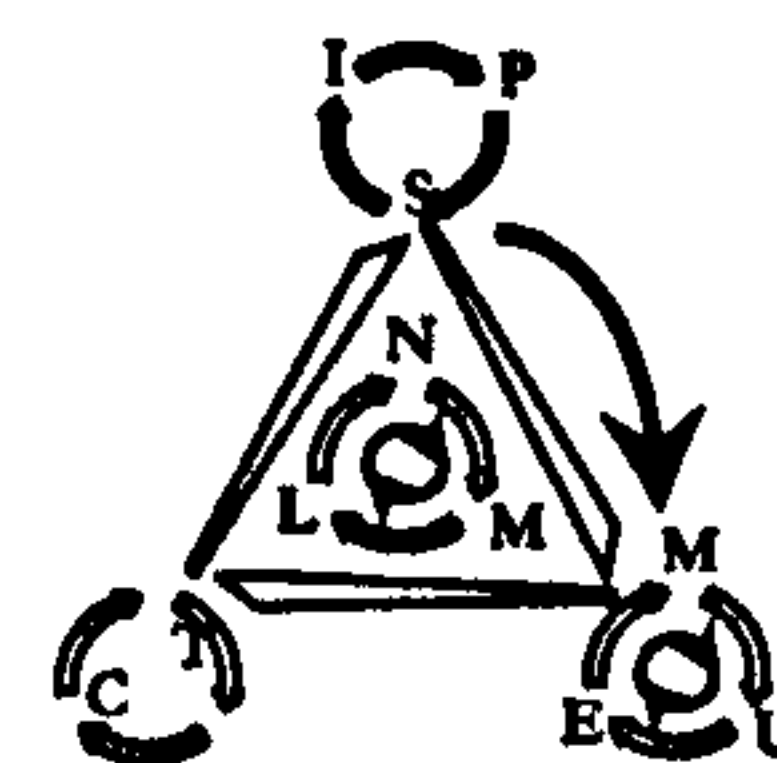


Figure 25

be doing this through making their own 'context' visible. As a first principle of the change support model, this would then allow them to build on that context in a way that was meaningful to them and therefore they could move forward with the appropriate tool or approach (Figure 25).

As the discussion progressed, their concerns went beyond the strategy itself to the question of strategy renewal, and monitoring their strategy for continued relevance. They realised that they did not want a strategy as a picture of how to do things; they wanted something dynamic that would give them an ongoing way of taking account of what was happening in the external environment, understanding what that meant to them and helping them to identify tools that were going to help them to respond. This would be much more like an iterative process that would help them to keep going round the notice-model-learn loop as a business (Figure 26).

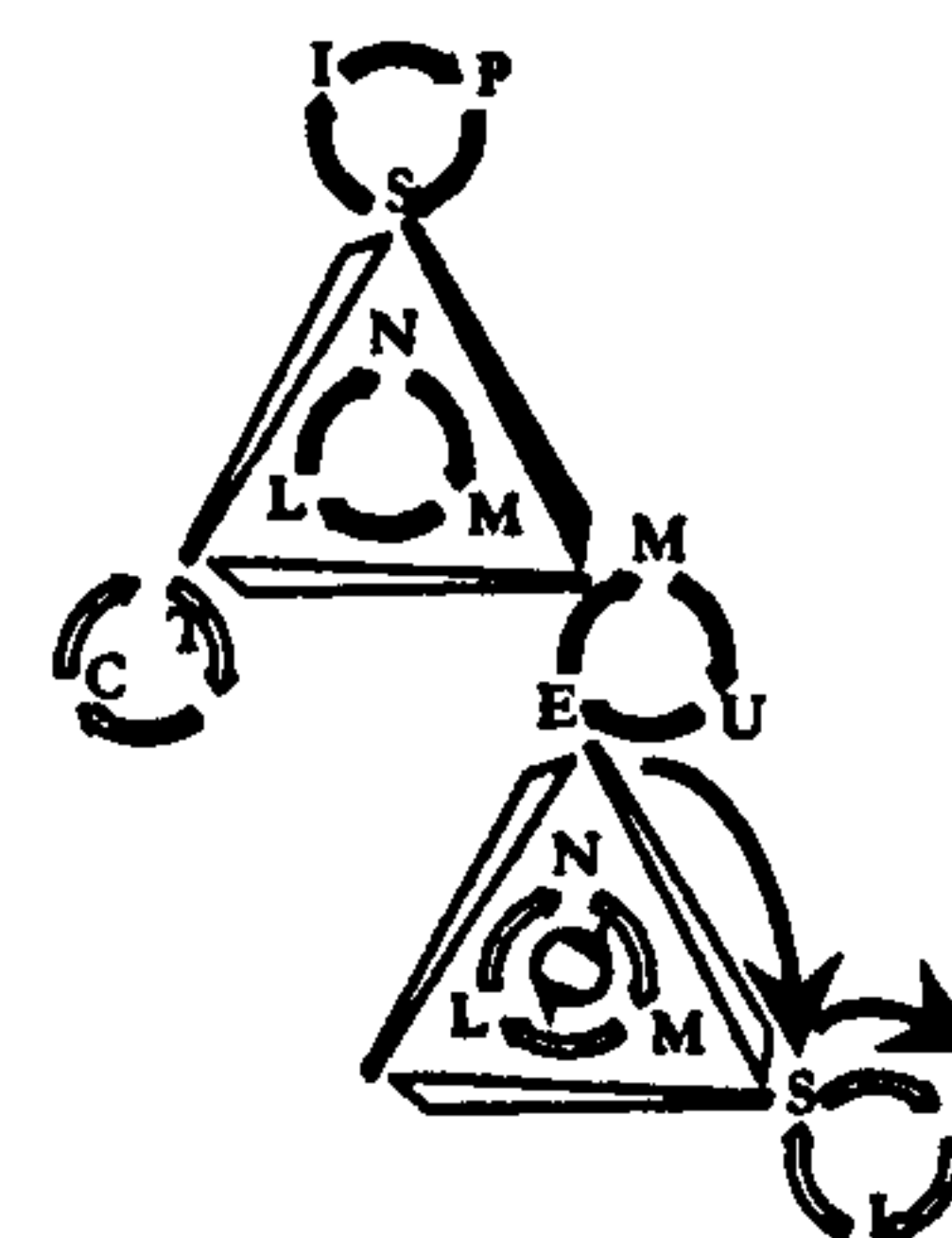


Figure 26

On reviewing the available strategy formulation models, they found very little material to support strategy reformulation beyond the initial strategy formulation. At this point the group lost its momentum because their expectation was of being able to identify a tool at this stage, according to the next step in the change model. Using the two-dimensional mapping technique from the change support model, the facilitators built up a picture that suggested that the group had spent a long time in the area of 'process' and of 'me', and perhaps they could find a way of understanding more about how to get the dynamic element in to a strategy formulation process by considering the elements of 'system' and 'environment'.

Viewing things from the systems perspective would allow them to model the organisation as a more fluid and thus more dynamic series of interactions than when considering processes only. 'Environment', meanwhile, was a cue to look beyond the shared understanding that existed in the group and to revisit some of the complex pressures that impact on strategic decision-making.

The group members became more determined to design their own solution rather than expect an off-the-shelf answer, and identified an iterative change model which they felt they could adapt to make an iterative strategy formulation model. In order to consider the implications of adopting this model, it was important to ask as many questions in the 'emotions' area of the change support model, of the "what does this mean for me?" variety.

The group chose to take this literally and explored the use of the change model through taking different aspects of their role and working through it for each individual in the group, identifying what decisions they needed to make and what information they needed to support this and who else needed to be involved. They were taking their own content as they currently understood it and applying it to the model's process. In this way they began to build up a shared understanding of how the model could help the business (Figure 27).

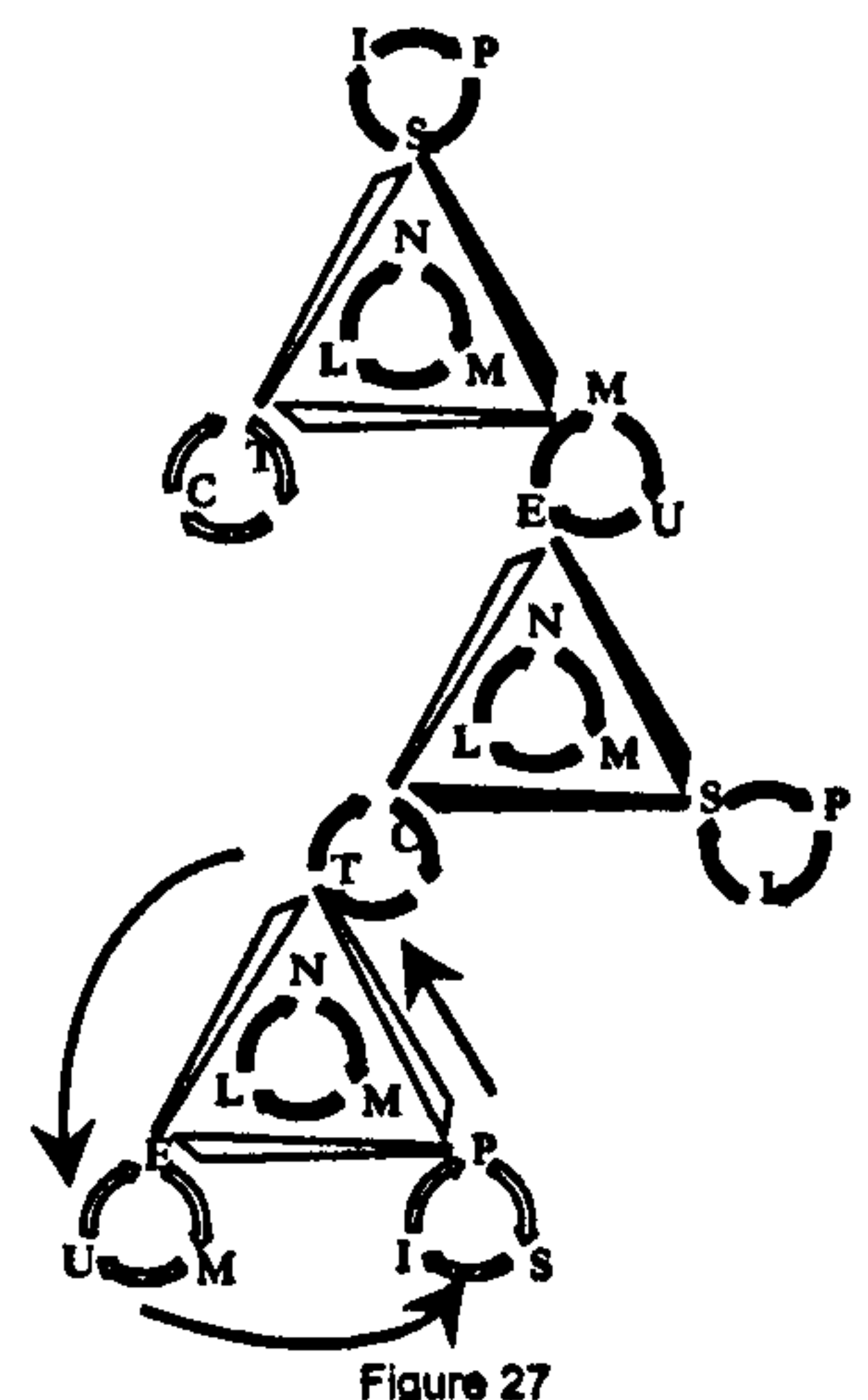


Figure 27

In order to share this with the rest of the management team and the directors, the group members needed to consider how the managers and directors could be helped to achieved the same level of understanding as the group members had. In terms of the change support model they were now having to consider how to share the meaning in the broader 'environment', beyond the 'us' of the group.

The group went to the board with an exercise that took the board members and managers through the same learning process of going through the model as individuals, and then as a group, with their own scenarios. The group made use of the two-dimensional change support model after the exercise

to explain to the board the nature of the learning that they had just gone through, highlighting the importance of the relationship between 'emotions' and 'observables'. This was a powerful message coming as it did immediately after a discussion which had clearly tackled personal decision-making as well as business processes, and it resulted in a meaningful level of shared understanding with respect to both the approach and the application.

5.4.3 Project results

This integration of the approach at the board level lead to reconsideration of roles, responsibilities, individual and group targets and performance measures, providing the leverage to prevent the organisation from reverting to having an internal focus, with reactive and tactical decision making.

The development of this new framework for the organisation was supported with the further use of systems mapping to analyse the impact of the new approach and identify the key measures and drivers that needed to be put in place.

Following the introduction of this approach the number of new product launches over the next year doubled again from ten to twenty. This built on the new capabilities that resulted from the three previous projects on communications, R&D and prototyping, through the new level of co-ordinated and dynamic opportunism that followed from adopting this approach to strategy.

5.4.4 Implications for the research

The importance of context was once again demonstrated by the effectiveness of staying very close to the pace of the group as they went about discovering their own insights in to strategy. The relationship between observables and emotions was built on repeatedly and the model was of quite specific help in generating options for moving the group forward when an impasse was reached.

The two dimensional modelling approach proved to be a powerful way to share this process with the group, where before it had mostly taken place in the minds of the facilitators. The model in this format provided a framework for quite complicated dialogue that provided more clarity than the

cube alone, where the risk can be that one is reduced to waving one's arms around in explanation. The cube has the advantage of capturing all the concepts in one place and as such provides an invaluable framework for operating. The two-dimensional approach provides a more 'hands-on' way of problem-solving in the moment, beyond the usefulness of the cube as framework.

In all the projects, much emphasis has been placed on the need to choose the tool according to the context rather than insist on the use of any particular tool. The converse of this is that any tool has the potential to be appropriate for a given change project. The choice of tools and approaches is determined more by the people involved than by the nature of the project, and we have seen this also from the literature. In this project we saw a special case of this which is that the same tool can be used at a number of different levels. In this example we saw a change model, that was designed with project-level change in mind, successfully applied to an organisational-level strategic change project.

If this is more generally the case, then this provides us with a powerful lever for successful change at an organisational level. The proposition is that if a given tool is chosen for change at a certain level in the organisation, then considering the level could be an effective mechanism for increasing the scope of the change, by developing an organisation-wide change initiative that takes the organisation in a coherent direction. The principle would be to seek to apply the same tool at different levels but by being conscious of the change in level the tool could be adapted to take account of the new context. Conversely, if different tools were adopted at different levels, this provides a framework for making meaningful links between them to keep the organisation coherent.

At a project level, having the extra dimension of 'level' explicitly stated in the change support model (Figure 28) may also allow more information to be acquired by offering the possibility of looking at the same situation from the perspective of various different levels. Figure 29 shows how this adds extra options to the two-dimensional approach.

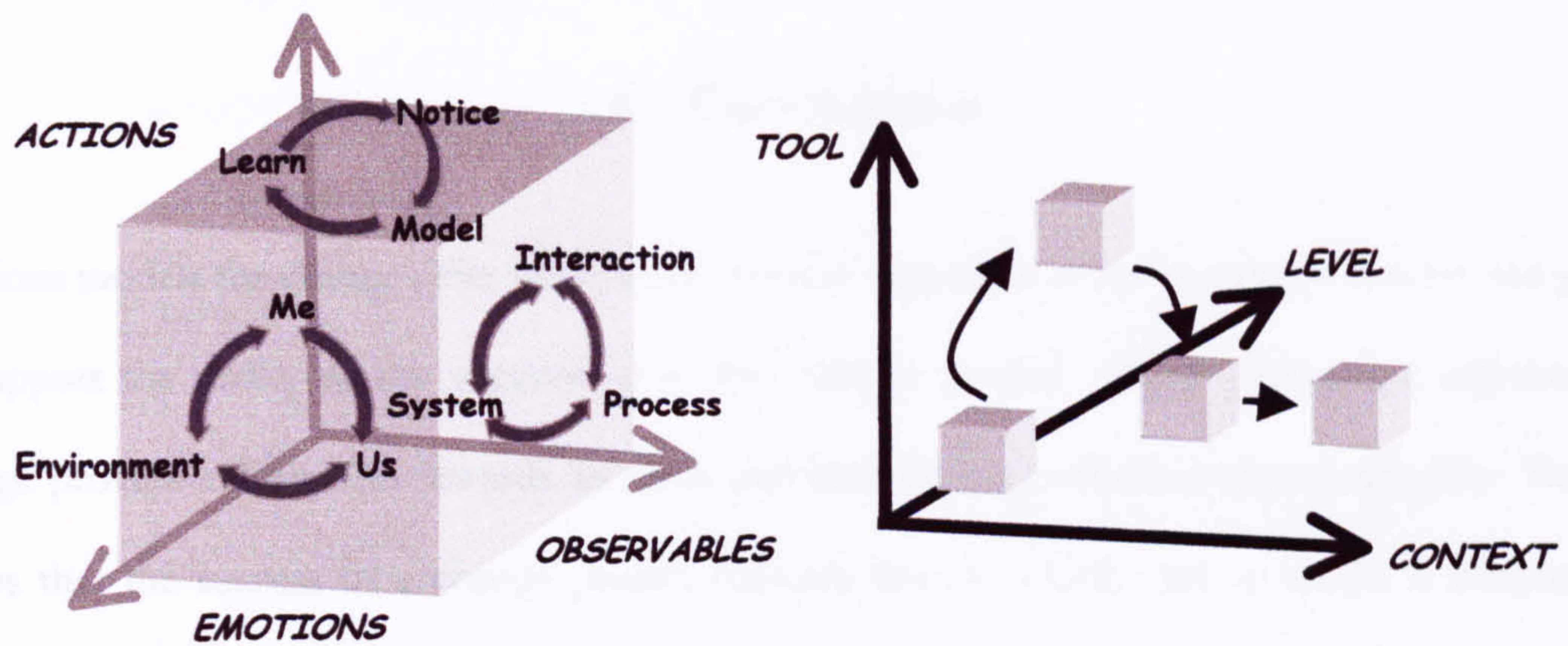


Figure 28

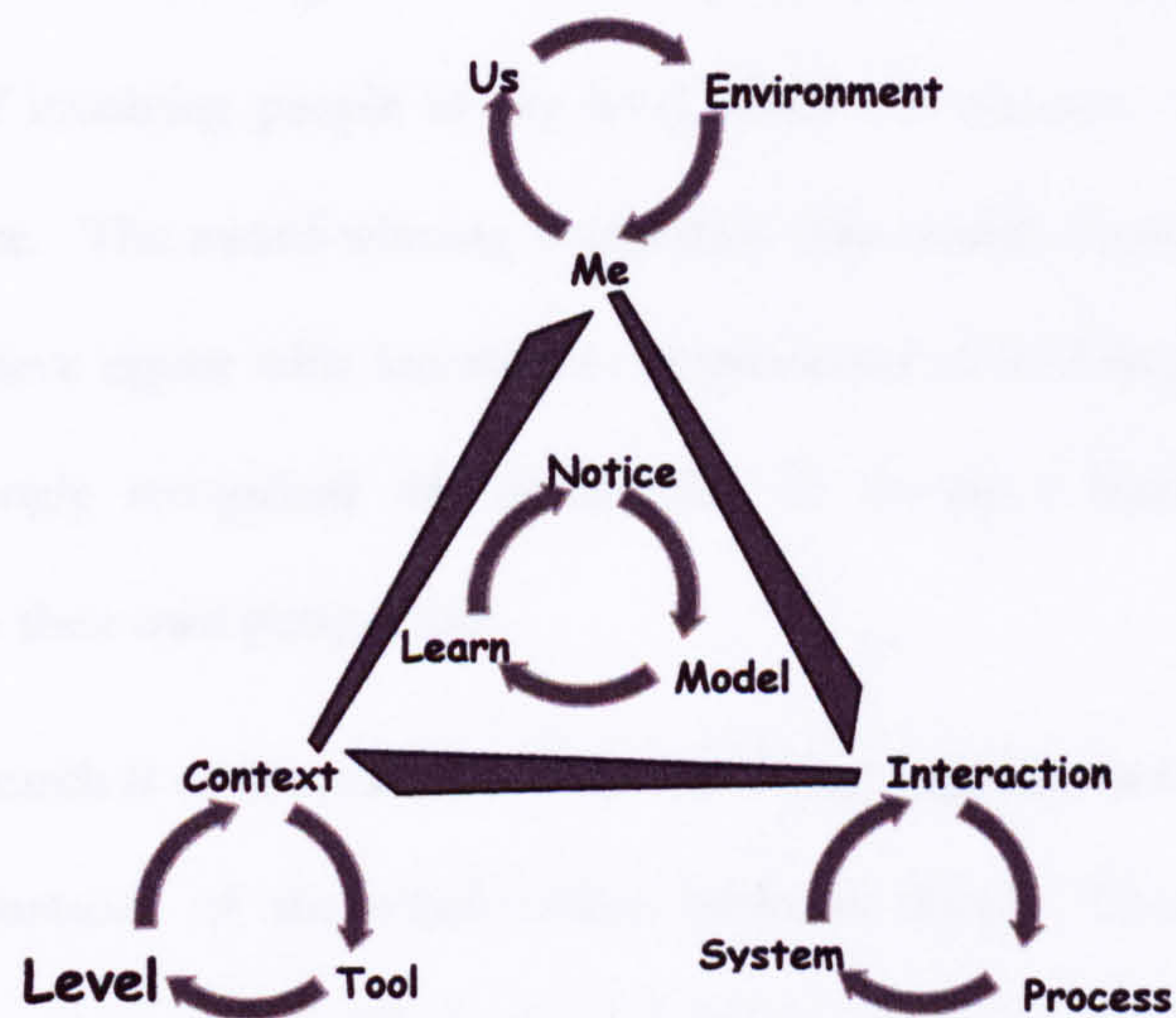


Figure 29

6 Conclusions

Previous models for change offer prescriptive step-by-step approaches to change that are too generic to support the reality of the vagaries of a 'live' change project. More conceptual approaches to change provide exhortation towards an ideal, and lead those involved to expect answers. Research shows that the success of a change project depends less on which tool or model is adopted, and more on the way in which it is used.

From award-winning companies it was found that the key was to have a 'bigger picture' that was used to ask questions and innovate, and for this to be true at all levels of the organisation. Achieving this is generally regarded as a challenge because of the infinite variety of individuals and the time-consuming nature of involving people at any level, when the pressure is on to deliver a specific performance objective. The award-winning companies maintained a broader 'systems' view which enabled them to achieve rigour with innovation, in processes as well as products. Award-winning companies also strongly recognised the significance of having a business which consisted of individuals, each with their own perspective.

The result of this research is an innovative model that brings together these key issues of change and emphasises the importance of the relationships between them. These issues are not usually considered simultaneously – organisations are vulnerable to considering 'people' issues and 'business' issues separately. Considering relationships changes the focus from the 'task' of change to the 'process' of change. Representing relationships graphically is a way of holding information about the plurality and dynamism of these relationships.

The model is not presented as something that replaces any existing tools for change but as a framework to support effective use of them; it has been developed as an active tool to support decision making by practitioners. Being developed out of action research in a highly facilitated workshop environment, which led to successful change, the model also represents an effective

approach to facilitation. What can not be inferred from this research is whether this approach to facilitation produces consistently good results. However, a number of questions arise for further research, given that the larger organisations studied all had leaders who placed great emphasis on facilitation as a leadership tool.

7 Further Research

7.1 Change in large organisations

Change at an organisational level rather than at project level is considered to be more complex because of the increased size of the undertaking. If the basic principles that apply at a project level for change also apply at an organisational level, then we may see how the change support model can support sustainable change in organisations larger than those covered in the previous work. However, the implication is that in order to achieve sustainable change, a large organisation will have the most success by working with the unique combination of needs and perspectives that is every individual in the business. From a conventional perspective this would seem to introduce an intolerable level of complexity.

The model and the approach maintain that this is resolved by focusing on relationships between actions, observables and emotions, through the interactions between individuals. This changes the perspective that is held by conventional task focused approaches - by focusing on relationships the tasks take care of themselves. This work has focused exclusively on designing and implementing change through the mechanism of small heavily facilitated groups. Given the encouraging results, the opportunity now exists for exploring the applicability of this approach in the larger organisational context.

7.2 Complexity theory in meaningful application

Leading on from this, we begin to touch on some issues currently being discussed under the banner of 'complexity theory' and organisations as 'self-adapting' systems:

“The more freedom in self-organization, the more order” (Jantsch, 1980:40).

This would suggest that a facilitative approach that reinforces a single paradigm will ultimately be less successful than a facilitated environment where no such limitations exist. However, as Wheatley observed:

“To many managers, autonomy is just one small step away from anarchy”
(1994:145).

The model could provide a mechanism for providing the required freedom in self-organisation without threatening to produce anarchy, by virtue of presenting a framework within which to operate. The emphasis on relationships has already been shown to simplify the complexity that arises when maintaining a task focus in an organisation.

7.3 International models

During the research, it became apparent that much of the work studied on individuals in organisations came exclusively from what Chanlat (1994) described as the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ perspective. Working in Quebec, Chanlat has benefited from research in two languages and four cultures, and considers that much of the ‘human condition’ crosses otherwise divisive cultural norms. Further investigation of a more international nature may prove useful in refining what is at present essentially an Anglo-Saxon model for supporting change.

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