

NGOs and participatory management styles: a case study of CONCERN Worldwide, Mozambique

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Summary

The concept of participation has become important in the struggle to improve the effectiveness of both the 'management of organisations' and the 'management of development'. However, NGOs may be confused about these two different though related applications of the term. The first part of the paper seeks to clarify this distinction. The author first disaggregates a range of complex issues surrounding the concept of participatory management and attempts to clarify the term. Secondly, the paper points out that the interest in 'participatory management' in NGOs is related to similar efforts within management more widely in the private sector, and has similar goals of seeking to improve organisational effectiveness. Thirdly, the paper distinguishes the introduction of a set of 'participatory techniques' from full-scale 'participatory management' as a comprehensive empowering strategy designed to involve staff more fully. In formalising the use of 'participatory techniques', it is argued that paradoxically more managerial control may be needed.

The second part of the paper presents a case study of CONCERN's ongoing attempts to introduce a more participatory management style into its programme in Mozambique. As might be expected, motives and methods for such a change remain complex and diverse. Through discussion with key NGO staff it is found that CONCERN's primary aim in introducing a participatory management style is to benefit the people the NGO seeks to serve, rather than the staff of the NGO, whose needs are seen as secondary.

The paper concludes that 'participatory management' for NGOs is perhaps best seen as an aspirational concept which can help to improve organisational impact on beneficiaries through the greater involvement of staff in decision-making. Rather than forming a unitary approach, 'participatory management' is best seen as a bundle of different ideas. It is argued that such a view provides real choices and opportunities for NGOs to improve their effectiveness.

Introduction

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are now increasingly important in international development. Greater attention is being paid to the management of NGOs, which is often claimed to be 'participatory' in character. In addition, the concept of 'participatory management' has become more significant for NGOs, particularly those involved in development. However, considerable debate surrounds this complex and poorly understood concept. An NGO that has become increasingly interested in participatory management is CONCERN Worldwide (hereafter referred to as CONCERN). In particular, its country programme in Mozambique has committed itself to adopting 'a participatory management style' both at project and country management levels. Therefore, a process of institutional change, aimed at facilitating the greater involvement of people in decision-making, is currently in progress.

The importance attached by CONCERN to 'participatory management' is reflected in their invitation to the author¹ to examine this process in their Mozambique programme. Given that 'participatory management' for NGOs is a largely unresearched subject, this represented a valuable opportunity to obtain a greater understanding of both the complexity and importance of participation in the management of NGOs. This is particularly the case given that CONCERN Worldwide is, in many ways, a typical Northern NGO, and is attempting to respond to changing capacities and new ideas.

CONCERN is a non-denominational, international NGO dedicated to the 'relief, assistance and advancement of peoples in need in less developed areas of the world' (Policy and Structure of CONCERN, 1994: 5). Its stated policy is to have a 'range of programmes that are sufficiently broad to address the short-term, medium-term and long-term needs' of its target group, which it defines as 'a range of social groups within the category of the absolute poor' (*ibid*). In addition to emergency and relief work, the organisation is therefore involved in rehabilitation and development, as well as development education in the North. Like many other NGOs in the decade since the Ethiopian famine of 1984, CONCERN Worldwide has seen 'a rapid, continuing and sizeable increase in funding and hence work overseas' (Consolidated Financial Statement of CONCERN, 1995: 9). At the end of 1995, the organisation was working in ten developing countries in Africa and Asia, and in Haiti (all of which are classified by the United Nations as being among the 36 least developed nations in the world), and employed 174 expatriates and just over 5,000 national staff overseas. Its income for the same year was over IR, 18 million, 61% of which represented Government and NGO co-funding.

Mozambique is regularly classified as one of the poorest countries in the world (Hanlon, 1991; World Bank, 1993). It is slowly recovering from one of the most destructive civil wars Africa has seen this century (Bennett, 1995). CONCERN has been working there since 1987 when, at the request of the Government of Mozambique, it commenced a range of relief activities in northern Mozambique, in response to the emergency situation caused by war (Country Director's Annual

Report, 1994). The organisation has since expanded its operations to three provinces. More importantly, it has recently commenced, after a review of community needs and programme activities, Phase Two of five programmes, each of which is committed to laying the foundations for a participatory approach to development. This approach is based on a view of development as 'a gradual process of change which occurs in people, which proceeds at their pace and is achieved, not given' (CONCERN Mozambique Policy Framework, 1995). In particular, it commits CONCERN Mozambique to:

the identification (and/or creation) of 'interest groups' and their subsequent empowerment to allow them to define their problems and realise their own objectives (ibid).

Some brief comments on the methodology adopted for the study are relevant. The case study draws on information gathered during a two-week visit to Mozambique in June - July, 1996. In particular, it is based on a review of the organisation's documents; semi-structured interviews with the Country Director, the Programme Manager of each of the five programmes and the National Administrator; a focus group discussion with the national staff of the Head Office in Maputo and a survey of eleven field workers selected from the five programme areas.

The fact that interviews were conducted only with those who spoke English, and only with those working at a senior level within CONCERN Mozambique, inevitably means that what is explored here is very much the understanding of 'participatory management' held, not by the entire staff of the country programme, and by no means the organisation as a whole, but by management staff within CONCERN Mozambique. This study, however, is not intended to examine the degree to which the understanding of 'participatory management' is shared throughout the organisation, nor is it meant to be an evaluation of the effectiveness of participatory processes. Rather it seeks to offer some clarification on this complex subject, and prepare the way for more extensive research.

NGOs and management

The growing interest of NGOs in management

The concept of 'participatory management' has become important to development organisations. Holcombe (1995), for example, points out that many NGOs now speak of an 'empowering' or 'participatory' style of management, in which staff are seen as a source of skills and capacities, and are encouraged to take the initiative in solving problems. Moreover, Chambers (1995: 197) argues that:

The institutional challenge for all development agencies is... to flatten and soften hierarchy, to develop a culture of participatory management, to recruit a gender and disciplinary mix of staff committed to people, to

adopt and promote procedures, norms and rewards which permit and encourage more participation at all levels.

However, despite growing interest in the concept, 'participatory management' is a term which remains both complex and unclear (Anheier and Cunningham, 1994). A degree of rhetoric surrounds the concept, in the same way that this is a problem for the concept of 'participation' in development (Clark, 1991). Moreover, despite the assumed tradition of participation in the management of NGOs,² and the increasing popularity of 'participatory management' as a management style for NGOs, relatively little has been written on the subject.

The heightened interest in 'participatory management' must be seen, first of all, in the context of increasing importance attached to participatory development paradigms. People's participation, according to the Human Development Report (UNDP, 1993: 1), 'is becoming the central issue of our time'. Smillie (1995: 223) points out that:

... it is the NGO community through which most bilateral and multilateral agencies choose to apply participation, and from which most take their lessons.

NGOs are assumed to be participatory in approach, and this contributes to their perceived comparative advantage (Hudock, 1995).

While NGOs have been examining ways to increase participation of beneficiaries in development initiatives, they have, at the same time, come under increasing pressure to 'professionalise' and, in particular, to address a widespread neglect of management (Korten, 1990; Smillie, 1995).³ In this regard, the growth of NGOs (James, 1994), and their increasing dependence on donors for their income (Edwards and Hulme, 1992), have been important factors.

Organisational growth, and the demands of donors, however, are not the only reasons for the pressure on NGOs to professionalise. Whilst NGOs have traditionally not acknowledged the link between 'internal organisational capacities and their programme performance in the field' (Sahley, 1995: 46), there is a growing realisation among them that management is a key determinant of project success (Campbell, 1987). Moreover, the growth in interest in NGO management is due, in part, to increasing organisational problems, in particular problems related to organisational growth, changes in funding, and changes in organisational role (Hodson, 1992; Narayana, 1992; Billis and MacKeith, 1993). At the same time, managers of NGOs increasingly see development as a professional practice (Billis and MacKeith, 1993; Anheier and Cunningham, 1994).

One result of such pressure has been the widespread use of instruments and techniques such as Logical Framework Analysis, Objective-Oriented Project Planning (or ZOPP),⁴ Participatory Rural Assessment and Rapid Rural Assessment. It has also led to attempts to improve the administrative aspects of programme work, such as proposal writing, budgeting and reporting. Moreover, it has also resulted in a growing interest in management approaches, strategies and techniques prevalent in the business world (such as 'management by objectives', 'strategic planning', 'stakeholder-analysis', and 'mission-based management'), and a willingness to import them, often uncritically, to the world of NGOs (Smillie, 1995). The appropriateness of this latter trend, however, is questioned.

The 'NGO management debate'

Several researchers and consultants have applied themselves to the question of which theories and models NGO practitioners can use in the design and management of their agencies (Campbell, 1987; Brown and Covey, 1989; Fowler, 1989; DiBella, 1992). Although it is 'still very much in its infancy' (MacKeith, 1993: 1), the tentative emergence of the study of NGO management has provided the focus for a wide-ranging debate about how NGOs can be more effectively organised.⁵ Indeed, there is, at present, no consensus regarding the nature of NGO management principles and practices, although the importance of management is generally accepted (Campbell, 1987).⁶ Four schools of thought have been outlined by Campbell (1987) and form what I will call the 'NGO management debate'.

Three of the four perspectives presented argue that NGOs require a distinctive management style. The first school of thought insists that the critical issue is that NGOs are voluntary organisations and should draw on voluntary sector principles (Handy, 1988; Billis and MacKeith, 1993). A second view is that NGO contexts are critical in determining the type of management they need, and that the principles of development management should therefore strongly influence NGO management (Korten, 1980; Campbell, 1987; Fowler, 1989; Brown and Covey, 1989). To these schools of thought can be added a cultural perspective which questions the applicability of western management models, discusses the need for 'indigenous' approaches, and argues that the cultural environment in which the NGO operates must determine the nature of NGO management (Bjur and Zomorrodian, 1986; Marsden, 1994; Zadek and Szabo, 1994).

The arguments for a distinctive approach to NGO management, however, are not unanimously accepted. Dichter (1989), for example, argues that the distinction between the management of non-profit and commercial organisations is largely irrelevant as management principles should apply to all organisations whatever their nature and function. The priority need for NGOs, he argues, is straightforward, basic, 'nuts and bolts' management to meet equally straightforward basic weaknesses in organisational management. He points out that 'people-

inventions, and argues that ‘means’ are confused with ‘ends’. In particular, the fact that the participation of people in their own growth is a valued goal does not necessarily imply that the western management models which stress this value will be useful or appropriate in the Third World context. Such a view is echoed by DeGraaf (1987) who, while arguing that the nature of the development task does shape NGO management, insists that to say NGOs should adopt a participatory style of management because participation is important in development is over-simplistic.

‘Participatory management’ and the ‘NGO management debate’

The debate about the nature of NGO management has become polarised. In particular, to argue for a distinctive approach to the management of NGOs does not mean to reject the need for basic organisational systems (Drucker, 1990). Moreover, there are many new theories and concepts in commercial management which are very relevant to NGOs including, for example, ‘strategic management’, ‘In Search of Excellence’ management, and not least, ‘participatory management’ (Campbell, 1987).

Secondly, the view that a participatory approach to the management of NGOs constitutes a distinctive approach is untenable, as there is a long history in the business world of employee involvement in organisational decision-making (Wall and Lischeron, 1977: i). Indeed, since the turn of the century, and particularly since the early 1960s, interest in, and support for, employee participation has been rapidly increasing (Brannen, 1983). Generic management has clearly distinguished between a task-oriented authoritarian approach to management, on the one hand, and an employee-centred, democratic or participative style on the other (Vroom and Jago, 1988). ‘Empowerment’ is now widely used in business and management as well as in development (Wright, 1994), and ‘participative management’,⁷ such as that proposed by Likert’s (1961) ‘System 4’, is a recognised approach to management. In particular, Japanese corporations such Hitachi, Nissan, Honda, Mitsubishi and Toyota are often cited as exemplars of employee-participatory practices (Beardwell and Holden, 1994: 578). At the same time, forms of employee participation have flourished in the 1980s in the guise of managerial policy initiatives inspired by the new ‘excellence’ movement (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Kanter, 1983), and have been expounded as a key instrument in the creation of Human Resource Management (HRM) strategies (Beardwell and Holden, 1994; Storey, 1995). Finally, in recent years, inspired by Japanese management practice, various forms of team-working based around customer care and Total Quality Management (TQM) programmes have witnessed a considerable rise in popularity (Marchington et al., 1992).

The appropriateness of ‘participatory management’ for NGOs

The NGO management debate has attempted to address the question: what style of management is appropriate for NGOs? In so doing, the debate is valuable. However, given that participation in decision-making is a feature of governmental and commercial organisations, the association of a participatory style of management with a distinctive approach to NGO management is unhelpful. It is more useful to examine the advantages of participation to organisations generally, and to NGOs in particular, and then identify those factors in the NGO context which make a participatory approach more appropriate for them.

There are a number of perspectives on the increasing interest in participation in the commercial sector. Guest and Knight (1979) argue that it represents part of the search for

... a new means of overcoming industrial and economic problems, changing market conditions internationally, rising expectations of the workforce, and interest in the concept of industrial democracy.

The emphasis on changing environmental conditions is taken up by Lawler (1986: 19) who insists that ‘the societal, business, product, and work force changes that have occurred argue strongly for a change in management style’, and who believes that ‘in most situations some form of participative management is the best answer’ (Lawler, 1986: 11). At the same time, Wall and Lischeron (1977: 1) point out that in contemporary society ‘participation, in one form or another, is seen as one means of improving the quality of working life’.

However, the increased interest in participation cannot simply be seen as stemming from changed contextual factors and a desire for greater work humanisation. An instrumental view of participation - that greater participation will lead to greater efficiency, and consequently greater profits - is fundamental in the commercial sector (Beardwell and Holden, 1994), and is particularly reflected in the ‘hard’, rather than the ‘soft’ approach to Human Resource Management (Storey, 1987).⁸ That participation is linked to improved performance is evident from Ouchi (1981) who states:

Decision-making by consensus has been the subject of a great deal of research in Europe and the United States over the past twenty years, and the evidence strongly suggests that a consensus approach yields more creative decisions and more effective implementation than does individual decision-making.

Moreover, the participation of staff is inextricably linked with the concept of ‘learning organisations’. Senge (1990: 3), for example, argues that ‘the organisations that will truly excel in the future will be the organisations that discover how to tap people’s

commitment and capacity to learn at all levels of an organisation’.

‘Participatory management’ and ‘participatory development’

As noted earlier, several authors argue that a participatory approach to management is particularly suitable for NGOs whose work involves the promotion of participation and the empowerment of beneficiaries (Campbell, 1987; Fowler, 1987; Chambers, 1995). Chambers (1983: 210), for example, insists that such a management style is more in keeping with ‘bottom-up development’ or a participatory development approach. NGOs require a ‘new professionalism’ based on fundamental ‘reversals’ in the values, attitudes and behaviour of NGO staff, so that the people whom the NGO aims to support are truly empowered. Carroll’s (1992: 205) study of NGOs in Latin America demonstrates that an open, collegial management style builds confidence and trust among beneficiaries and support organisations, and is, therefore, a key organisational quality for promoting popular participation. Similarly, the British Overseas Development Administration points out that ‘culture, management structure, goals and sources of funding, all influence the manner and extent to which an aid agency can enhance the participation of other stakeholders’ (Eyben, 1994: 4.3). Indeed, Roche (1992: 188) argues:

Experience suggests that a decentralised structure with semi-autonomous, self-managed federated units, coupled with information and cooperative learning, is perhaps the most appropriate organisational design for supporting micro-development.

A second theme that emerges in the literature is that NGOs need to develop decentralised and participatory decision-making structures, and adopt a problem-solving rather than a predictive blue-print approach to management, to ensure flexibility and maintain the ability to adapt to constantly changing realities (Campbell, 1987; Fowler, 1987). In particular, participatory planning processes are important as it is the field staff who normally have closest contact with beneficiaries (Sahley, 1995). This ‘effectiveness’ argument is also taken up, for example, by Brodhead and Herbert-Copley (1988), who suggest that NGOs must adopt a participatory approach in order to have wider impact.

A third theme which emerges is the expectations of NGO staff. Clark (1991: 61), for example, states that:

NGO staff are generally highly committed to their work because of widely shared values and a belief in the social change mission inherent in their work.

This generates a sense of ownership which, when combined with the widespread expectation that organisations promoting democracy and participation should themselves be democratic (Billis and MacKeith: 1993), means that ‘an autocratic style

simply wouldn't work: the staff require participation' (Clark, 1991: 61). Moreover, Hodson (1992: 135) argues that as NGOs grow 'decentralised and consensual forms of decision-making' are of particular importance 'if decisions are to be seen by staff as legitimate'. In addition, there is an assumption that respect for workers leads to improved organisational functioning. Clark, (1991: 62), for example, suggests:

Naturally an organisation of principled and committed workers will function best if staff feel respected, and listened to.

The 'NGO management debate' cannot be easily resolved. In particular, a number of questions about the appropriateness of a participatory style of management for NGOs remain unanswered. Moreover, the debate about the appropriateness of 'participatory management' is constrained by a degree of definitional ambiguity which needs to be addressed.

A case study of CONCERN Mozambique

The aim of the case study is to explore the reasons why CONCERN Mozambique is seeking to adopt a more participatory style of management and to outline the proposals which emerged about the direction such change might take.

The process of change in CONCERN Mozambique is underpinned by a number of assumptions made by management staff about the importance of participation, and its role in the management of an organisation committed to promoting participatory development. These are as follows:

(a) A 'natural' approach for participatory development?

In the first place, the consensus among interviewees is that CONCERN's commitment to participatory development necessitates a participatory style of management. Such a management style is considered, for example, to be 'a natural approach', given that the organisation is committed to promoting participation in its development programmes. As one Programme Manager stated:

You cannot do participatory development without participatory management.

In particular, it was noted that an organisation must practise what it preaches, and that since CONCERN Worldwide is promoting participation of the beneficiaries, the participation of staff is therefore essential. As another Programme Manager remarked:

One can't expect staff to mobilise, animate and facilitate interest groups to analyse their own problems and set their own objectives if the

organisation does not have a similar empowering approach with staff.

(b) Programme responsiveness

Secondly, there is among programme management a widespread belief that greater participation of staff, and particularly field-workers, in the management of the organisation will result in improved programme responsiveness. This view is reflected in the 'CONCERN Mozambique Policy Framework' (1995) which states:

As an agency that targets the poorest we need a management style that is flexible and responsive to the needs of the poor. A participatory management style enables those staff who are closest to the poor, those at project operational level, to guide the organisation in its programme design and implementation to allow the needs of the poor to be identified and met.

Furthermore, the interviews with the Country Director reveal a fundamental belief that staff at project level are in the best position to make decisions for that project. This view is echoed by one interviewee who remarked:

We get reality in decisions... if people further down the line are involved in the decision-making.

(c) Staff empowerment

At the same time, the general view is that 'participatory management' is not just about involving staff, but about 'empowering' them, and creating 'voice'. As the Country Director remarked:

CONCERN is here to deliver a service. The most important people in that service delivery are the field workers (they are the most important people in the organisation in many ways). Space has to be made for those people to have a voice in the organisation.

While most programme management staff spoke about 'participatory management' resulting in improved decision-making and ownership of decisions, a number of Programme Managers also suggested that 'participatory management' is an appropriate management style given that CONCERN Mozambique is committed to building up local staff capacity, and in particular, to creating the conditions necessary for sustainable development.

(d) Better 'downward' accountability

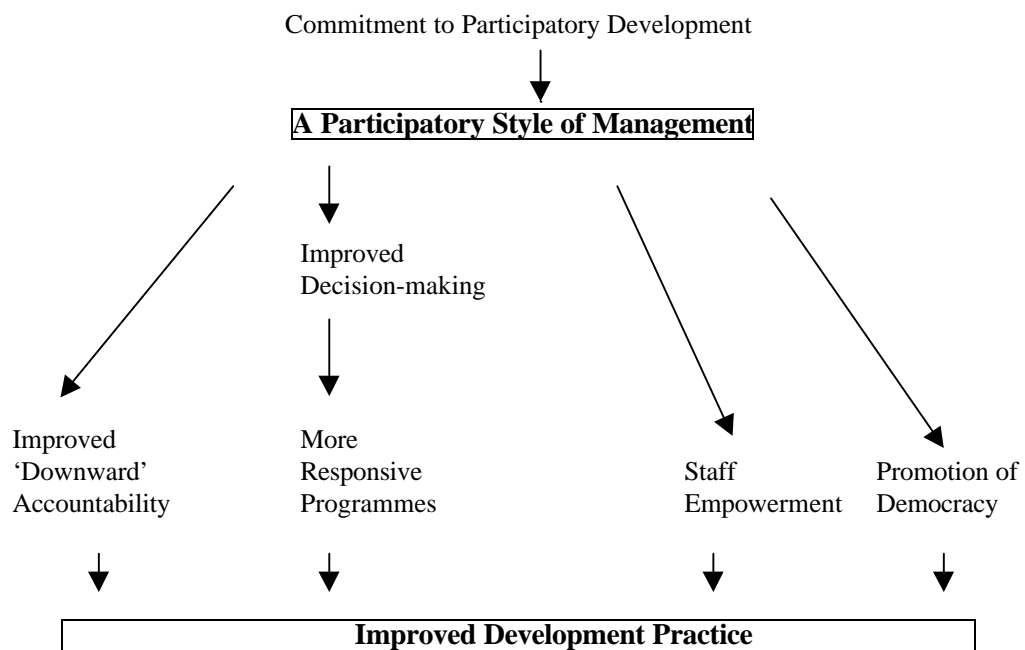
'Participatory management' is also seen as enhancing 'downward accountability'. This is evident from the 'CONCERN Mozambique Policy Framework' (1995) which incorporates the idea, originally suggested by CONCERN Worldwide's Southern Africa Division (correspondence, September 1995), that teams and teamwork at management and project level will 'avoid the emergence of a tall hierarchical structure between the target group and field management' and, more especially, will 'ensure that field resources are not diverted away from the poorest'.

(e) Promoting democracy

Finally, while Programme Managers, in general, see 'participatory management' in terms of its having a crucial role in improving organisational effectiveness, the wider implications of adopting a participatory style of management were noted by one Programme Manager who commented on the importance, in a fledgling democracy, as Mozambique is, of promoting democracy within the workplace.

In summary, the case study suggests that while a number of different reasons may be identified, they are all related to the ultimate aim of improved development practice, and in particular, are inspired by a fundamental commitment to participatory development. The reasons for adopting a more participatory style of management in CONCERN Mozambique, and the relationship between them, are presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1 'Participatory Management' and Improved Development Practice



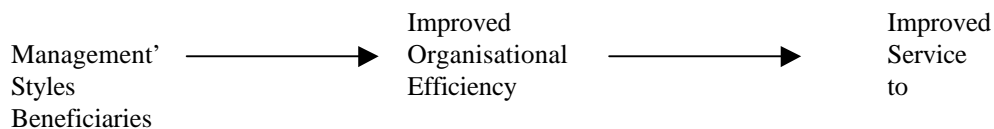
‘A means not an end’

Participatory management is seen therefore not as an end in itself, but as means of reaching organisational goals more effectively. As one senior staff member commented:

The only reason we have participatory management is to facilitate our development approach. It is not for its own sake.

Indeed, as Figure 2 below illustrates, the ultimate benefits of a participatory approach to management accrue, not to the organisation, but to the community the organisation aims to support.

Figure 2 The Task Orientation of ‘Participatory Management’



The study revealed the crucial role of leadership. It is clear that, on a practical level, CONCERN Mozambique has initiated this process of institutional change because the Country Director strongly believes in the importance of such an approach, and more significantly, has acted on that belief by taking advantage of a number of opportunities which have enabled the process to take place. The most important of these has been the support for the initiative from CONCERN Southern Africa Division, including its willingness to allow the budget flexibility necessary for the development of the new systems. At the same time, according to the Country Director, that this belief is *shared* by the Programme Managers and key national staff has also been crucial, as has their willingness to accept the new responsibilities that a participatory style of management involves. The case study indicates, in the first place, that management staff in CONCERN Mozambique clearly see ‘participatory management’ not as a collection of tools and techniques, but as a fundamental approach to management. At the same time, it is understood as something which must be created, or allowed to evolve, over time: as one Programme Manager pointed out, it is essentially a process of ‘introducing things bit by bit’.

Secondly, though the possibility of including other stakeholders had been briefly discussed, the general understanding among CONCERN programme management staff is that ‘participatory management’ is, for the time being at least, only about the greater involvement of staff members, and in particular field staff, in decision-making. It is therefore perceived as overlapping with, but distinct from, CONCERN Mozambique’s commitment to ‘participatory development’, which pledges it to securing ‘the

participation of interested parties in all stages of the programming process - government, team, target groups, informal structures etc.’ (Policy Framework for CONCERN Mozambique, 1995).

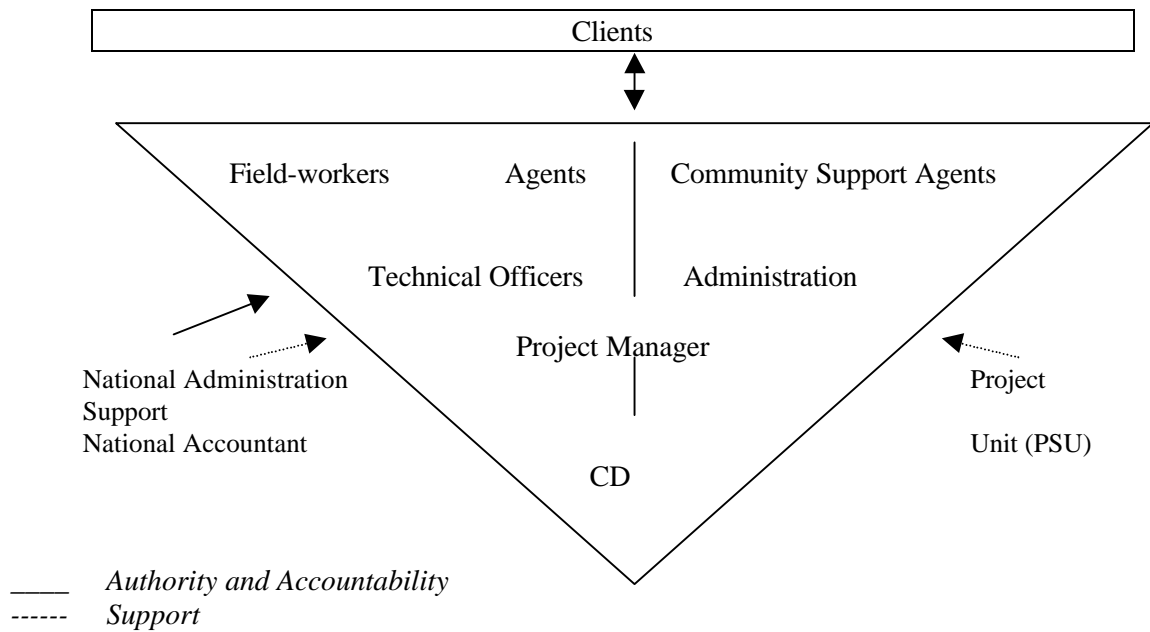
At the same time, ‘participatory management’ is not seen as representing in any way a rejection, or diminution, of standards of professionalism and accountability. There have been no changes to the financial or administrative systems, nor are any intended, and auditing and input control remain crucial. Indeed, at a meeting of senior programme staff with the Southern Africa Regional Director in March 1995 it was agreed that ‘by ensuring that tasks are better defined, such control mechanisms can be enhanced by participatory objective-led planning’.

These changes also require a firm hand. ‘Participatory management’ is not about the adoption of an unstructured, ‘laissez-faire’ style of management. On the contrary, it is seen (though not always positively) as quite procedural, and very structured. As the Country Director remarked:

Participatory management is not less structured; it is more structured if anything. It’s quite prescribed, but people are involved in the prescription.

Finally, ‘participatory management’ is linked to a ‘reversal’ in the way in which the organisation is conceptualised and represented. In the first place, it is informed by an understanding of the organisation as directly related to, and in service of, the beneficiaries (who are conceived of as ‘clients’). In addition, it is underpinned by a view of the NGO as a ‘bottom-up’ organisation in which the most important members are those closest to the clients. The present CONCERN Mozambique organogram (see Figure 3), which is based on the concept of an ‘inverted triangle’, reflects these views.

Figure 3 CONCERN Mozambique Organogram⁹



The study also reveals that there is a crucial link between the adoption of a more participatory style of management and institutional change. Indeed, as one Programme Manager remarked:

A participatory approach to development requires changes at all levels of the organisation.

The resulting programme proposals

CONCERN Mozambique’s commitment to such change is evident in the five programme proposals, each of which states:

CONCERN Mozambique is going through a process of institutional change aimed at creating a management style that is conducive to the type of community development programme being proposed here.

These changes commenced in 1994 and are still ongoing, are structural and cultural in nature, and have taken several forms.

(a) A ‘flatter’ Organisation

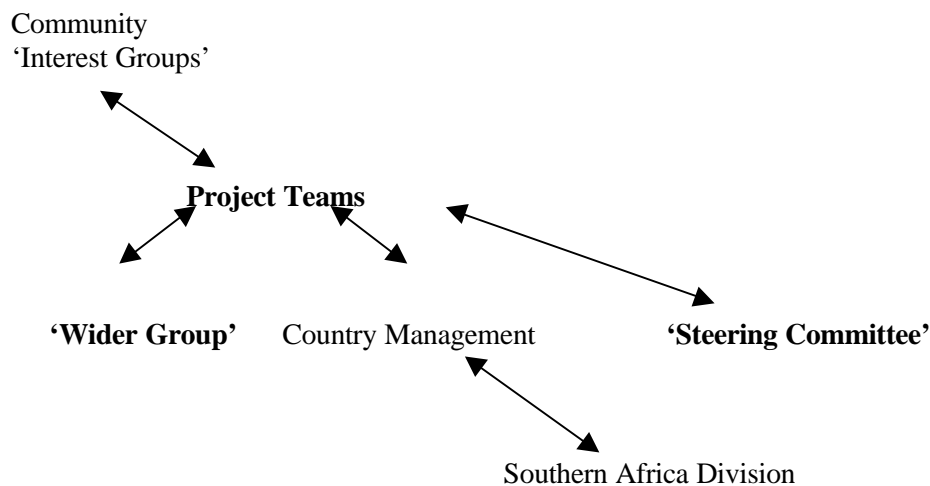
‘Participatory management’ is clearly identified with the creation of a ‘flatter’ or more

‘horizontal’ form of management, and the reduction in the layers of authority between senior management and field-workers. This facilitates speedier and more participatory decision-making, and is assumed to increase programme responsiveness. Additionally, it narrows the gap between the organisation’s target group and senior management.

(b) Team structures

Secondly, the study reveals that the adoption of a team approach, both at project and country levels, is central to the style of management adopted by CONCERN Mozambique. A project team (referred to as a ‘General Assembly’) has been formed in each of the five programme areas, and is the most important aspect of the new structure at project level. Comprising all staff directly involved in project activities, it meets every three months. Its responsibilities include the design of work plans using the ZOPP methodology, the evaluation and re-design of existing methodologies, and the evaluation of the management team.¹⁰ Furthermore, two new fora have been established at country level, and meet annually: a ‘Wider Group’, which is concerned with national policy and strategy, and a ‘Steering Committee’, which is responsible for ensuring that policy is implemented. The importance of team structures in the management of CONCERN Mozambique¹¹ is evident from Figure 4.

Figure 4: Team structures in CONCERN Mozambique



(c) Other changes

The study also reveals that adoption of a more participatory style of management is not just about changing organisational structures. It is also clearly seen to involve the creation of an environment in which dialogue, communication, and particularly organisational learning, are facilitated and encouraged. The establishment of the staff

magazine, in June 1995, is an important development in this regard. Furthermore, the conducting of an evaluation, by the staff in early 1996, of CONCERN Mozambique's strengths and weaknesses during the previous year, and the publication of the results in the staff magazine, reflect the link between 'participatory management' and a commitment to the development of a culture of openness.

Levels of participation

The study confirms that, in CONCERN Mozambique, staff are now more involved in both project and country management (see Table 1). This parallels 'participative management' practices at 'shop-floor' and 'plant' levels (Guest and Knight, 1979). Moreover, the involvement of employees at country management level, in decisions that relate to the entire country programme rather than just projects, illustrates that the participation of staff in CONCERN Mozambique is, to use Strauss and Rosenstein's (1970) framework, both 'immediate' and 'distant'. At the same time, however, the adoption of a participatory style of management does not, for the time being at least, imply the participation of non-management staff in decision-making at levels higher than the Mozambique country programme.

Table 1: Levels of participation - examples from CONCERN Mozambique

	<i>Guest and Knight (1979)</i>	Participatory Mechanisms	Responsibilities Involved	Form of Participation
CONCERN Worldwide	'Company Level'	N/A	N/A	N/A
CONCERN Mozambique Country Management	'Plant Level'	'Wider Group'	Review CONCERN Mozambique Policy & Strategy	Representative
		'Steering Committee'	eg Approval of Annual Budget	Representative
			Staff Benefits & Conditions	
		HRD Planning & Monitoring		
		Staff Salaries and Benefits Committee	Staff Salaries and Benefits	Representative
		Staff Magazine	Forum for Discussion	Direct

<i>CONCERN Mozambique Project Management</i>	<i>'Shop-floor level'</i>	'Project Team'	eg Design of Work-Plans	Direct
			Evaluation & Re-design of Methodology	
			Evaluation of Management Team	
		'Project Committee'	Ensure decisions agreed by Project Team are implemented.	Representative
	Staff Selection Committee		Selection of Staff	Representative

Secondly, the study reveals that the participation of staff in the design of work is perceived by senior staff as central to 'participatory management'. In this regard, the ZOPP methodology, introduced in 1995, is crucial. As the Country Director remarked:

ZOPP is at the core of participatory management: it gives staff a language, puts people on an equal footing, and gives people the confidence and the skills to sit with their boss and argue.

At the same time, 'participatory management' is understood to involve more than just the design of work. Four of the eleven field-workers surveyed, for instance, mentioned their involvement in deciding the responsibilities, tasks and procedures of the project team as an example of the way in which they are now more involved in decision-making. Indeed, staff are increasingly invited to participate in decisions about work conditions (for example, staff salaries and benefits) as well as in decisions about administrative issues (such as staff appraisal, staff selection, and transport policy).

The study also reveals that there are different degrees or 'intensities' of participation within CONCERN Mozambique, and suggests that 'participatory management' is more than just improved information-sharing and greater consultation of staff. More authority has been delegated than previously, and indeed, there has been, and continues to be, a transfer of power. However, the degree to which this takes place varies according to situational factors, and more particularly, occurs within carefully defined parameters. The study also suggests that the intensity of participation depends not only on the level of the decision-making, but on the nature of the decision. The decision-making power of the Steering Committee is a good example (see Table 2):

Table 2 ‘Steering Committee’ Responsibilities

Programme Opening and Closing	Decision-making
Emergencies	Decision-making (re. procedures)
Approval of Benefits/Conditions	Recommendations
Human Resource Development (HRD):	
- Planning and Monitoring	Decision-making
Effectiveness, Efficiency, Economy	Recommendations

Moreover, when looking at areas of decision-making not related to the design of work, there has, to date, been more in terms of consultation than delegation. This is indicated by the results of the focus group discussion with the national staff of the Maputo office, during which staff were asked to identify recent decisions made and staff participation in them (Table 3).

Table 3 Staff Perceptions of Degrees of Participation

Design of National Strategy	consultation/negotiation
Salaries and Benefits	consultation
Staff Appraisal:	
System	delegated
Questionnaire	information
Function of the Maputo Office	consultation (on-going)
Staff Recruitment	information
Staff Promotion	information
Design of Decision-making Structures	(manipulation)

In summary, the case study has shown that CONCERN Mozambique has commenced a process of institutional change aimed at facilitating its development approach. This process is still emerging, and is inspired by a fundamental commitment to providing a better service to organisational beneficiaries. Important lessons can be learned from this experience, and these will be the subject of the next and final chapter.

Emerging issues

Issues for managers

Important practical issues are raised by the case study of ‘participatory management’ in CONCERN Mozambique.

In the first place, the case reveals that the initiative in CONCERN Mozambique is primarily an attempt to arrange internal structures and procedures in such a way as to

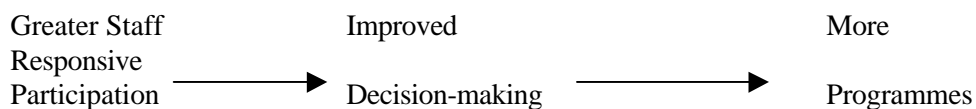
most effectively and efficiently undertake the organisation's tasks and purposes. In this regard its objectives may be no different from the objectives of 'participative management' in the commercial sector. However, the aim of organisational efficiency in NGOs is not the making of profits, as it is in the commercial sector, but improved service to the NGOs' beneficiaries or clients.

At the same time, the case study also reveals the importance of a 'process orientation' in NGO management, and suggests that the nature of the task has an important, if not a crucial role, in determining organisational processes. It suggests that attention to 'process', or what Paton (1991) calls the 'expressive aspect of management', may be of greater significance for NGOs, particularly those involved in the promotion of participation. 'Participatory management' may therefore represent a conscious effort to exercise management authority and responsibility in ways which are consistent with the broader social values and purposes of the NGO. In particular, it may be seen as an attempt to address the management challenges that the task of promoting participation imposes on an organisation. As Batsleer (1995) points out, however, none of this is new among voluntary organisations.

The study also suggests that at the heart of the task dimension of 'participatory management' is the assumption that the participation of staff leads to improved decision-making and, therefore, greater effectiveness. This is not new, however, either in NGO management or management generally. In the NGO context, it has been explored by Carroll (1992) whose study of NGOs in Latin America concluded that effective NGOs use a participatory style which relies on local knowledge and dialogue with beneficiary groups, and have a less hierarchical and more collegial internal organisation than public or private organisations.

However, that greater staff participation will lead to improved decision-making, and that this in turn will result in more responsive programmes, are both assumptions which need to be tested (see Figure 5). As a consequence, an important aspect of the relationship between 'participatory management' and improved development practice remains unproven. At the same time, the study highlights the close connection between 'participatory management' and organisational learning, which is increasingly promoted as crucial to organisational effectiveness (Senge, 1990; Dartington, 1992; Korten, 1980).

Figure 5 Assumptions About Greater Staff Participation



The case study also suggests that 'participatory management' is not necessarily concerned with increasing staff motivation. However, the study also suggests that

'participatory management' may be a strategy which effectively capitalises on expectations among staff throughout the organisation who, according to Sahley (1995: 52), 'need to feel that they can contribute to the development of policy and strategy'. At the same time, a participatory style of management may be bolstered by a 'view of staff relations - which assumes that management and employees are working to the same goal of the organisation's success (Fincham and Rhodes, 1992).

Secondly, it is clear that management staff in CONCERN Mozambique see 'participatory management' largely, though not exclusively, in terms of its benefits to the organisation, rather than to staff. While such an instrumental view is dominant in the generic management literature, the participation of staff may, nonetheless, be seen as an end in itself. As noted earlier, 'participative management' may have as its objective the improvement of the 'quality of working life', or the promotion of industrial democracy. That these are not explicit concerns of the management in CONCERN Mozambique suggests, however, that 'participatory management' may be seen in the context of the 'hard' rather than the 'soft' side of Human Resource Management (Storey, 1987).

The study also indicates that different objectives may be attributed to 'participatory management' even within the same organisation. In addition, different aspects of the process of adopting a participatory style of management may be associated with different objectives. One of the implications is that the perceived 'success' or 'failure' of 'participatory management' will depend on the aims attributed to the greater involvement of staff in decision-making. Consequently, the question: '*Is Participatory Management effective?*' has no simple answer.

At the same time, the study suggests that there is a danger that a participatory approach to management may be perceived by NGO staff as appropriate only to those NGOs involved in 'participatory development'. However, the generic management literature clearly suggests the advantages to organisations, generally, of increased employee participation.¹²

Issues for researchers

While the case study suggests that 'participatory management' may represent a distinctive approach for NGOs, it also reveals that such an approach to management is not fundamentally different from management approaches adopted by some organisations in other sectors. Indeed, the adoption of participatory styles of management among NGOs may be seen as part of the tradition of importing management concepts, prevalent in the business world, to the NGO sector. At the same time, the study demonstrates that NGOs may learn a great deal from for-profit organisations about the importance and nature of participation in management.

The case study also confirms the view that 'participatory management' is more than a collection of participatory techniques and involves institutional change that is both structural and cultural in nature. It implies a pro-active 'formalisation', or

'institutionalisation' of participation, so that existing *patterns* of participation are transformed into *structures* of participation. Such structures are necessarily expressions of the organisation's fundamental and long-term commitment to a participatory process. 'Participatory management' can be seen, therefore, in the context of the challenge facing NGOs to lose their 'shyness' of management and take on a strategic management orientation rather than focusing on logistics or project management (Korten, 1987: 155). At the same time, the study shows that translating a policy commitment to participation on the part of the organisation into a meaningful set of strategic and operational choices may be problematic. In particular, there is an inherent irony in promoting participation from the top down.

The case study demonstrates that the concepts and categories used to describe participation in the generic literature are of considerable use in understanding the nature of participation in NGO management. In particular, it reveals that 'participatory management' in NGOs is a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted concept, and is no less complex than participation in commercial organisations. Participatory schemes may pervade many or all levels of the organisation, and may take different forms. Moreover, the study endorses the view, expressed by the British Overseas Development Administration, that 'from any stakeholder's perspective participation may be seen as a spectrum model with a range of possibilities from being manipulated to being in control' (Eyben, 1994: 2.1). The participation of staff will, therefore, vary in intensity according, for example, to the nature of the work, the experience and capability of staff, and the stage of development of the organisation. In this respect, White's (1995) conceptual framework, which argues that participation may be 'nominal', 'instrumental', 'representative' or 'transformative' (with only the final category truly empowering), may usefully be applied to, and inform, our understanding of 'participatory management'.

While interest in participation in the management of commercial organisations is generally confined to the involvement of employees, the study reveals that participation in the management of development NGOs may refer to the involvement, not just of staff, but of other stakeholders, even the beneficiaries. 'Participatory management' may thus be seen in the context of an NGO's attempt to structurally and systematically engage its multiple stakeholders (Fowler, 1995). However, the study also suggests that, in practice, participation in the management of NGOs may be confined to the greater involvement of NGO staff. This is in accordance with the view that the involvement of beneficiaries in the management of the organisation may not be feasible (Clark, 1991). In this regard, 'participatory management' may differ little from employee participation in the commercial sector.

There is no trade-off between greater participation of staff in decision-making and maintaining high standards of professionalism. It demonstrates that 'participatory management' does not mean being non-directive, and, somewhat paradoxically, requires strong leadership. Indeed, it suggests the accuracy of Clark's (1991: 66) view that

achieving the right balance between strong leadership, which ensures resolute pursuit of strong ideas, and openness of style, which ensures that all staff feel properly valued, is the greatest management challenge for NGOs, particularly as they grow in size.

'Participatory management' inevitably raises questions about the nature of the relationship between those who manage and those who are managed. Such debate has been vigorous in the commercial sector throughout this century (Beardwell and Holden, 1994: 6). In particular, 'participatory management' implies a conception of the organisation as an environment in which managerial discretion is permitted freer rein, and staff are given greater 'voice' (Hirschmann, 1970). As such, it is essentially no different from 'participative management' in the commercial sector in which employees are enabled, to varying degrees, to have a greater say in decision-making (Beardwell and Holden, 1994).

The case also demonstrates that 'participatory management' may represent a management style in which 'worker empowerment' in practice takes place very much within the boundaries set by management. In this regard, too, it is no different from employee involvement practice in the commercial sector (Beardwell and Holden, 1994: 584). At the same time, there is likely to be a dilemma, within management, in terms of how much power to extend to the workforce. Management will want to harness the workers' creative energies, but at the same time not undermine managerial prerogatives, particularly accountability. 'Participatory management' may be seen, therefore, as an attempt to reconcile the tension between participatory ideology and the hierarchical requirements of institutional action (Martinez Nogueira, 1987).¹³

The research also highlights the important link between a more participatory style of management and democracy within the organisation. It suggests the accuracy of Pateman's (1970) argument that it is possible for 'partial' participation at both immediate and distant levels to take place without a democratisation of authority structures, and that 'full' participation may be introduced at the lower level within the context of a non-democratic structure overall. However, while it may be possible for a more participatory approach to be introduced within an organisation which is not participatory in management style, the case suggests that official endorsement (at the organisational or 'company' level) is essential if such practices are to be legitimised, and therefore truly 'formalised' and 'institutionalised'.

The importance of a gender focus in 'participatory management' needs to be made explicit. In the first place, 'participatory management' requires an examination of popular assumptions about the position of women in organisations. Secondly, as Goetz (1995) points out, unless women and men are represented equally at all levels of an organisation, management can never be truly 'participatory'. Moreover, an organisation whose management is not gender equitable will ultimately fail to address the priorities of women, who, as Kabeer (1994) points out, have been and continue to be marginalised by deeply entrenched, and hence barely visible, biases in development theory and practice.

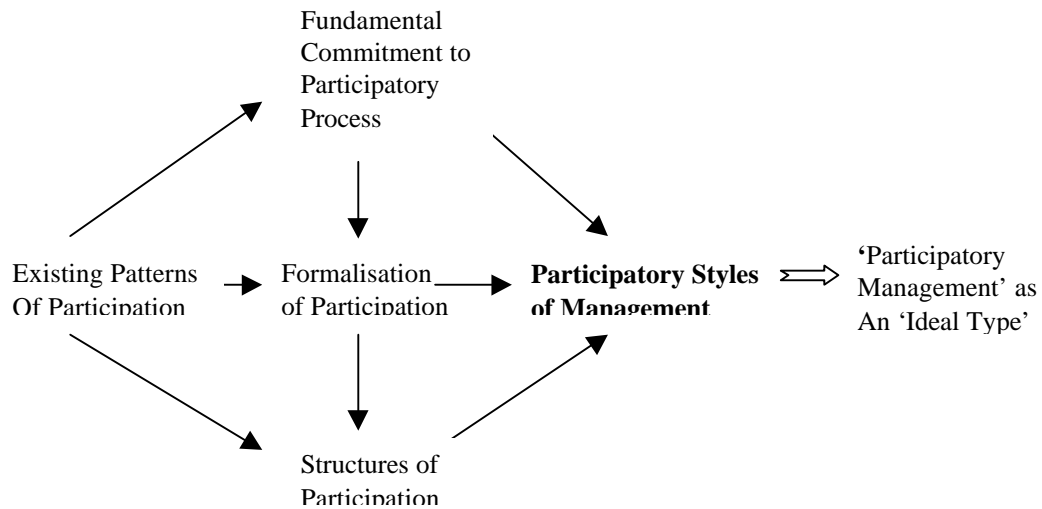
‘Participatory management’ must be informed by culture and, like any management approach, must ‘spring from the cultural values which govern social interactions and dominate intra- and inter- organisational relations’ (Bjur and Zomorrodian, 1986: 415). However, culture is an extremely complex phenomenon (Wright, 1994), and although writers such as Hofstede (1980) and Laurent (1983) have attempted to examine the influence of cultural factors on management generally, our understanding of such factors remains unclear. The treatment of the relationship between participatory styles of management and culture, therefore, needs careful investigation. In particular, the idea that ‘participatory management’, as a people-centred approach, is a western construct (Dichter, 1989), and therefore foreign to Third World contexts, needs to be seriously challenged.

While ‘participatory management’ and ‘participatory development’ are sometimes used interchangeably, the study suggests that this is a terminological rather than a conceptual problem. For senior management staff in CONCERN Mozambique the distinction is clearly unproblematic. ‘Participatory development’ is clearly about the involvement of beneficiaries in the planning, implementation and evaluation of external interventions. ‘Participatory management’, on the other hand, is about the participation of staff (and possibly other stakeholders) not only in the design of organisational activities, but in decisions about organisational policy, strategy and operations. It is essential, therefore, to avoid confusing the terms, and in particular, to link the two more precisely.

What emerges from the study, but is not discussed in the literature, is the degree to which ‘participatory management’ may be highly formal and procedural. In particular, it requires the transformation of existing patterns of participation into formalised structures. Ironically, this may result in stronger managerial control. At the same time, the study suggests that the structured and controlled nature of ‘participatory management’ may strengthen rather than weaken accountability. In particular, it may support programming, monitoring and evaluation systems which are important ‘downward’ accountability instruments (Wils, 1995).

The case also suggests that ‘participatory management’ is an aspirational concept, (see Figure 6), and thus may be best described, in the Weberian sense, as an ‘ideal type’ (Fincham and Rhodes, 1992: 190). It indicates that the degree to which any organisation may facilitate the greater involvement of non-managerial staff in decision-making is inevitably limited, and will be contingent on the complex interplay of a number of organisational variables. Moreover, like other management approaches such as Total Quality Management, ‘participatory management’ will remain open to a variety of definitions and interpretations. As a result, NGOs will need to create their own model of ‘participatory management’. This, however, is not necessarily a constraint.

Figure 6: The Process of ‘Participatory Management’



Finally, the case study also suggests that ‘participatory management’ must be seen in the context of Campbell’s (1987: 3) assertion that ‘there is not, nor can there be, only one correct way of managing an organisation’. This ‘contingency approach’, which is the dominant approach to the management of organisations generally (Child, 1988), must be the context within which ‘participatory management’ is discussed. In this way, ‘participatory management’ can be completely consistent with Dichter’s (1989) view that what is needed is not a search for universal principles but a clearer focus on the actual field conditions, as it is these which must determine which management style is appropriate.

Conclusion

‘Participatory management’ is a complex subject, surrounded by a degree of rhetoric and considerable debate. However, the increasing importance of NGOs in international development, and the pressure on them to practice professional but appropriate management, have added to the urgency of gaining a better understanding of this multi-faceted, and slippery, construct. This paper has drawn on a case study of ‘participatory management’ in CONCERN Mozambique in order to disaggregate and investigate a number of the key issues, particularly those related to the nature of ‘participatory management’ and its appropriateness as a management style for NGOs. Whilst many questions remain unanswered, and a comprehensive analysis of this important subject is needed, this study provides a number of clarifications which are of theoretical and practical importance.

In the first place, it is clear that a number of objectives may be attributed to adopting more participatory styles of management. However, the desire to improve organisational effectiveness, or in the NGO sense, to increase impact, appears to be particularly important. In this regard ‘participatory management’ differs little from its

commercial sector sibling: 'participative management'. However, that NGOs are non-profit-making suggests that 'participatory management' may, even in this instrumental way, be more altruistic than 'participative management' as its ultimate benefits are intended to accrue not to the staff, or even the organisation, but to the people the NGO seeks to serve. At the same time, 'participatory management' may not be concerned with improving staff motivation, the quality of working life, or the promotion of industrial democracy, all of which are given at least lip service in commercial management practice.

Secondly, 'participatory management' may represent a conscious effort to exercise management authority in ways that are consistent with the broader social values of the NGO. In particular, it may be seen as an attempt to address the management challenges that the task of promoting community participation imposes on an organisation. However, whilst there is a strong link between 'participatory management' and 'participatory development' (and a need to articulate the relationship more precisely), the benefits of participation are not confined to organisations directly involved in promoting participation. Indeed, as has been noted, the benefits of greater employee involvement have long been recognised in the commercial sector, where more importance than ever is attached to staff participation. Thus 'participatory management' is not fundamentally different from management approaches adopted by many other organisations, and indeed, may be seen as part of the trend to import management concepts from the commercial world to the NGO sector.

At the same time, the use of participatory techniques, and the existence of informal patterns of participation, must be distinguished from 'participatory management', which is a strategic approach to NGO management and is inspired by a fundamental commitment to giving managerial discretion freer rein. In particular, it involves the 'formalisation' of participatory processes so that the conditions necessary for the greater involvement and empowerment of staff are created. This may be entirely consistent with the pursuit of professional standards. 'Participatory management', therefore, does not mean being non-directive, and, somewhat paradoxically, requires strong leadership. In addition, its structured nature may ironically lead to greater managerial control. Moreover, the potential for the formalisation of participation to undermine, rather than enhance, participation remains unexplored.

Furthermore, the degree to which an organisation facilitates greater involvement of non-management staff will inevitably be limited and must be considered in relation to other features of the organisation and its environment. Ultimately, 'participatory management' is best perceived as an aspirational concept, or as an 'ideal type', providing the inspiration for many models, all manifesting to various degrees, and in different forms, a commitment to improving organisational impact through the greater involvement of staff in decision-making.

Finally, that there is no one model of 'participatory management' is not necessarily a constraint. Indeed, one of the strengths of 'participatory management' is that there is no one way of doing it, and therefore no 'right' way of facilitating greater staff

involvement. 'Participatory management', therefore, presents real choices for NGOs, and real opportunities for improved effectiveness. At the same time, it is appropriate to note that participation in management has been, and continues to be, important in many NGOs, even though they may not be explicitly committed to 'participatory management'. However, as NGOs respond to the challenges now before them, the degree to which they are willing to develop existing, informal patterns of participation may be a crucial factor in determining whether or not NGOs, in the words of Edwards and Hulme (1992), can really 'make a difference'.

NOTES

1 The author is an employee of CONCERN Worldwide (with over two years' experience in East Africa) and was sponsored by the organisation to study for the Masters degree in NGO Management.

2 Dichter (1989), for instance, argues that the traditional ideology of NGOs stresses group processes and popular participation, using, for example, team building, facilitation skills, coalition building and conflict resolution.

3 Numerous explanations for the tendency of NGOs to neglect management are suggested by the literature. NGOs have generally not understood the benefits to the organisation of effective management and have traditionally regarded it with 'considerable suspicion' (Campbell, 1987: 2). Some NGOs have rejected management ideas as linked to undesirable mainstream ideologies (Landry et al., 1992; Dichter, 1989). NGOs, for example, often negatively associate modern management with productivity, efficiency, and profit-making, and often regard it as a means of justifying hierarchical authority. Management is therefore seen as alien to NGOs, who regularly pride themselves on being value-driven, people-centred and non-profit-making, and who have traditionally emphasised mission rather than objectives, values rather than systems, roles rather than job descriptions (Dartington, 1992). Moreover, a lack of time, resources, and expertise on the part of NGO managers has contributed to the failure of many NGOs to develop sound management practice (Campbell, 1987).

4 ZOPP is the acronym for the German term 'Zielorientierte Projekt-planung' - objectives oriented project planning.

5 Reports examining the management needs of NGOs have been commissioned (for example, Stark Biddle, 1984), and journals devoted to the Management of NGOs have been established (MacKeith, 1993). The International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) was founded in 1991 (Smillie, 1995: 148). A Masters Degree Programme in the Management of NGOs was established at the London School of Economics in 1995. These developments suggest the increasing importance of, and interest in, NGO Management.

6 The lack of consensus about 'NGO management' is reflected in the debate about management training and development in the non-profit sector. O'Neill and Young (1988: 20), for example, argue that there is 'no one best way' to do non-profit management education: several important models have already emerged, but it is too early, they claim, to narrow the field down to one model.

7 'Participative Management' is the term generally used in the generic management literature to refer to participation in management. 'Participatory Management', on the other hand, is the term more regularly used in the development management and NGO literatures. The difference is largely semantic, and the terms may be used interchangeably. During this discussion, however, the term 'participative management' will only be used when specifically referring to the treatment of participation in the generic management literature.

8 The distinction between 'Hard' and 'Soft' normative models of Human Resource Management (HRM) is made by Storey (1987: 6). The 'hard' model emphasises the 'quantitative, calculative and business strategic aspects of managing the headcount resource in as "rational" a way as for any other economic source'. On the other hand, the 'soft' model stresses employees as valued assets, and a source of competitive advantage through their adaptability and high quality. The focus is therefore on generating commitment via 'communication, motivation and leadership'. These rather different emphases, however, are not incompatible.

9 A feature of the present structure of CONCERN Mozambique is the 'projectising' of technical support through the creation of a 'Programme Support Unit' (PSU). The rationale is that technical support is provided to the programmes by a team of 'advisors' (in education, health, and natural resources) who are not part of line management. Such a system, according to the PSU's Terms of Reference (March, 1995) allows for the provision of sound technical advice, while at the same time empowering programme teams by encouraging responsibility for, and ownership of, technical inputs to the programmes. This system, which simplifies the lines of authority, represents a movement away from the system traditional within CONCERN, of having 'Field Officers' with line responsibility for the various sectoral activities.

10 The project teams may also create a 'project committee' (comprising the Programme Manager and three staff representatives), to meet on a more frequent basis, and to ensure that the decisions made by the project team are carried out.

11 The 'Wider Group', consists of the Country Director, the Programme Managers, the members of the Programme Support Unit (PSU), and most significantly, two representatives from each of the projects. The 'Steering Committee' includes the Country Director, the Assistant Country Director (as Head of PSU), the National Administrator, the five Programme Managers, the assistant/trainee Programme Managers (national staff), and a representative of the Southern Africa Division.

12 The recent debate about the need to link relief and development (Adams and Hawksley, 1989; Duffield, 1994; Walker, 1994) adds weight to the view that participatory approaches to management may also be appropriate for NGOs not directly working in 'participatory development'.

13 Again, this dilemma is not unique to NGOs, as it is central to the whole debate concerning Human Resource Management, and modern organisational practices such as the de-layering of middle management structures, the creation of flatter organisations, and the introduction of Total Quality Management (Beardwell and Holden, 1994).

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