

## Reply to the comments from the Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC)

The SAWC as an organisation has a laudable and major role to play on the African continent. The students that come to the SAWC are all employed and experienced staff from conservation agencies in Africa. The SAWC's objective is to empower their students to make a practical difference in their countries (Moll 1999, 2000 *pers comm.*)

Prof. Moll and Mr. Breytenbach agreed that the extensive conservation research and development programmes they were involved in contributed substantially to the development of science, scientists and conservation theory. They also, however, agreed that the programmes did not have the required impact on the status of the environment, conservation and conservation management processes. (Between 1977 and 1986 they were members of several of the Scientific Steering Committees financing the South African Terrestrial Ecosystems Programmes.) They therefore agreed that the SAWC provided the perfect opportunity to focus on the management processes, rather than the natural science issues. This gave the SAWC the opportunity to empower their students to make a real difference.

Prof. Moll then wanted to know whether the facilitation processes Breytenbach used to align groups (previously used with great success in communities and businesses), could be used as part of a team building activity that would allow the SAWC to align the students with the College Management Team in a basic process to achieve this objective. The major outcome of the process should be a group that shares a vision, has jointly come to understand what their expectations are and how they can achieve the identified outcomes. Mr. Breytenbach then explained the alignment process to Prof. Moll. He stressed that full participation by staff and students is required in order to achieve alignment. This is the process described in the published article.

In response to Prof. Moll's specific comments:

His point 1 and 2 refers. The process is specifically designed to achieve consensus and alignment in groups irrespective of age, qualifications, background and prior knowledge. The fact that some students were late in arriving and did not participate in the process is not relevant in relation to the outcomes achieved. In addition, the process is geared to empower participants to become critical and therefore it is a normal reaction for trainers that are used to dominant input systems as opposed to collaborative output systems to find the aligned groups challenging to work with.

His point 3 refers. In discussions with Prof. Moll and his management group, it was stressed that the suc-

cess of the process depends on the full participation of the students and the staff. Before, and during the course the staff was continuously invited to attend. Eventually they managed some 2 hours participation in a process that encompassed 24 hours over a period of three days. Prof. Moll's statement that the 'them and us' concept was reinforced is his personal perception. The students' list of outcomes to achieve, highlights unity and shared responsibility. Similarly, in the list of outcomes to avoid 'a split between management and students' was identified as something that must be avoided at all costs. 'Moreover, the students came to realise that they could not abdicate responsibility to contribute to the successful management of the SAWC.' (P. 8 Sonnekus & Breytenbach 2000).

Points 3 and 4 refer. The personal comment on 'ready to burn down management' is taken completely out of context. At the debriefing session after the team building programme was completed, it was stressed that the students had identified purple, i.e. participatory processes, as a critical component of the management process to be adopted. We explained to Prof. Moll that there were SAWC students who operate in the red system. These students could easily resort to measures such as 'burn down management' of which the SAWC had a taste the previous year. A truly participatory management process prevents anger. In essence, it was clear that the students were more than willing to take on accountability and responsibility, but that the staff would have to involve them constructively in management. The speech by the head student at the closing ceremony clearly indicated that true participatory processes did not take place. In the words of Gostelli (1995, sorry we could not get a more recent reference), 'We all firmly believe we are doing things which we don't', i.e. SAWC management believe that they definitely use purple participatory processes, but in reality they do not. However, the authors believe that the insight they generated for the students into the SAWC's management style prevented any disruptive behaviour.

Point 5 refers. The objective of the team building exercise was to align students and staff into a mutually agreed upon joint management process and system. The functions that were identified included shared responsibility. Depending on how you read the sentence quoted by Prof. Moll, in effect, the authors claim that the process provided a solution 'for an atmosphere of conflict and inadequate understanding' that was already present at the college from unresolved issues from 1999. The alignment process did not create an atmosphere of conflict and inadequate understanding.

Point 6 refers. The authors acknowledge that they formally failed to acknowledge the contributions of the students and staff at the College and hereby apologise for this oversight.

Finally, we would like to point out that the article was presented to *Koedoe* rather than to a Social Sciences Journal that would normally publish such articles. Therefore, the article refers people to original, rather than current reference materials and is more verbose than would normally be the case in order to clarify relatively unfamiliar humanities concepts to natural scientists. We would also like to apologize to Prof. Moll for listing him as one of the possible referees to the Editor of the *Koedoe*, instead of submitting the article directly to him.

The final paragraph of Prof Moll's letter perplexes the authors somewhat. From our perception, we provided the *Koedoe* reader with a perspective on the SAWC that shows that the organisation is committed

to make a difference and contribute constructively to the development of a new conservation ethic in Africa. In fact, Sonnekus & Breytenbach (this *Koedoe*), clearly illustrate just how the processes used, contributed towards achieving this in another module. We therefore apologise to Prof. Moll if he believes that our objective was to put his organisation in disrepute. None of the referees interpreted the article in this fashion and in fact commented that the article clearly pointed out how student and management issues could be handled more effectively at tertiary education institutions in this country and the SAWC was pointing the way forward in the current chaotic situation prevailing elsewhere.

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