

Comments on the article *Technology for alignment of participants in nature conservation: a case study at the Southern African Wildlife College* by I.P. Sonnekus and G.J. Breytenbach—*Koedoe* 43/2 (2000).

The authors were responsible for facilitating students in the 'Team Building' module for the Long Course Diploma in February, and for some training in March and October 2000. The SAWC ran its first Certificate course in 1998 and first Diploma course in 1999. These Long Courses are aimed at training existing agency staff as natural resource managers. In addition the College is responsible for a large number of Short Courses related to conservation, protected area management and community issues.

The SAWC's major goal is one of training students to world best practice. It comes as a great disappointment that Dr Sonnekus and Mr Breytenbach have published a study which does little but justify their 'importance' as facilitators.

Mr Breytenbach was initially contracted by the SAWC in 1999, as a trainer in Project Management, he subsequently returned in 2000 with Dr Sonnekus for the Team Building module. The SAWC was approached by these trainers as to whether a scientific paper could be published relating to the course material taught and class responses. As policy the SAWC invites any research to be carried out that may assist in the provision of better quality training and understanding within and between students, trainers and staff. Approval was granted for the trainers to use their training material and student feedback as the basis for a scientific article. It was assumed that the penultimate draft of such a paper would be sent to the SAWC for comment, and to be checked for factual accuracy. This never happened. Upon reading the article in *Koedoe* the SAWC would like to clarify some factual issues.

1. It is assumed (p. 79) that all of the Diploma students were in their second year at the SAWC when in fact 12 of the 28 students were new. This places a false view of student understanding of the SAWC structure and therefore an incorrect baseline from which to draw conclusions. In fact, for the Team Building module a large number of the class (eight individuals from the class of 28) were yet to arrive at the SAWC.

2. Carrying out the 'alignment process' on the Diplomas in what was for many their second week out of their own country in their lives, undermined natural group interaction phases. Well known is the forming, storming, norming and performing phases. By applying 'alignment technology' to a group of students who are barely forming their work and social relationships was premature, and in fact disorientated the group significantly. Experienced trainers who worked with the Diplomas after the Team Building

exercise noted and commented on the students' disorientation.

3. Real participation by SAWC staff and the students was not encouraged by the authors during their training exercise. In fact the trainers reinforced the 'them and us' division. For a group of students who voluntarily chose to come to the SAWC, and the SAWC totally supported such students financially, implies similar objectives and goals are common to both parties. The year 2000 Team Building class walked away from the exercise 'ready to burn down management if it doesn't do what they want' (Breytenbach pers comm. 2000).

4. In the chapter 'Values and Value Management Technology' (pg 86) the researchers recommend to the SAWC that 'the students select a Student Management Team (SMT)' with students and staff negotiating the process for this selection. The SAWC currently has a Student Representative Council, and it has operated with a similar student committee since 1998 on exactly that basis.

Any educational institution is bound to conflict at some level with student activities. The philosophy of higher education is bound by the process of learning and creating a work discipline to create effective managers. The paper concludes (pg 87) with 'the technology for alignment has... effectively and efficiently provided solutions for an atmosphere of conflict and inadequate thinking between students and staff at the SAWC'. The SAWC concludes that the module and its facilitators 'sowed the seeds' of disorientation and thus an atmosphere of conflict from this process.

5. The authors fail to formally acknowledge the students or the SAWC for allowing them to publish this paper.

The SAWC welcomes unbiased comment and/or criticism regarding its training schedule and operating procedure. No educational institution is perfect in maintaining entirely harmonious student/management relations, and all can benefit from constructive peer review. Through this exercise Dr Sonnekus and Mr Breytenbach managed to create division, distort the facts and present an unrealistic picture of the de facto situation. The alignment process as described in *Koedoe* more realistically created a student body who were left early on in the year with a confused state of identity, and a management team with even greater issues on their hands.

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