Chapter 4

Social learning in community-based environmental management

Case One: The Whaingaroa Catchment Management Project

> *...an exciting but still largely incomplete experiment in resource management and problem solving.*
> (Kenny et al. (2000) speaking of community-based planning in Lane & McDonald 2005, p. 719)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of four case stories that explore the potential role of evaluation in supporting social learning in different environmental management and problem solving contexts. This particular case is first in the sequence not only in this thesis but in the timeline of cases themselves. In essence it marks the baseline of thinking around how evaluation can be configured to support social learning, and the issues that emerge from trying to locate an evaluation with this purpose in mind.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the environmental management context of each case story varies in terms of the perceived problem scope, the system in which it is situated, and the programme of activity aimed at addressing it. This chapter tells the story of the establishment of a community-based environmental management programme in the Whaingaroa catchment, on the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand (see Box 4.1). It therefore represents an opportunity to explore the particular challenges for social learning in what has become a comparatively conventional arena for environmental management – the organising and motivating of communities to undertake environmental improvement initiatives and/or contribute grassroots input into mainstream environmental planning.

Box 4.1 Summary of the Whaingaroa Catchment Management Project

Location: Whaingaroa Catchment, Waikato Region
Duration: 1995–1999
Synopsis: In December 1995 Environment Waikato, Waikato District Council, Landcare Research and the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) put together a joint proposal for an integrated catchment management project based in the Whaingaroa Catchment. The proposal had two parts: (i) to gather biophysical data in order to develop baseline measurements of the environmental processes that impact on the harbor; (i) to undertake a community engagement process based on the approach used in the Canadian Atlantic Coastal Action Programme (ACAP). Funding by the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) Sustainable Management Fund grant covered only the second part of the initial proposal and the project went ahead with a more limited mandate to set up a community group interested in tackling catchment-wide environmental management issues and produce a community environmental management plan.

The community engagement (facilitated by Landcare Research staff with experience in ACAP) involved running community 'kitchen' workshops; gathering background information on the catchment; and holding a public information day. The official engagement process culminated with a public meeting and formation of a community project steering group in March 1997.

Evaluation activity: Two years into the programme I undertook a participatory, goals-free evaluation. This included a facilitated group meeting and interviews with project stakeholders. The evaluation proved a turning point for the programme as it became clear that there was confusion over purpose and direction. A series of meetings followed which galvanised participants into new actions. This illustrated both the value of participants becoming better informed about the programmes in which they take part; and the potential role of the evaluator in increasing access to crucial knowledge about programmes.

Current status: The steering group went on to form Whaingaroa Environment, which has operated for 12 years as a networking group that supports dissemination of information and ideas across environmental groups in the region. It initially received facilitation and resource support from Environment Waikato. By 2002 Whaingaroa Environment had produced a community-based catchment management plan, created an incorporated society, and transformed into the Whaingaroa Environment Centre (WEC). Environment Waikato withdrew from administering funds for the group and WEC entered into a different funding contract (for environment centres) with MfE (Greenaway et al.2003b). WEC currently operates as an information and networking group for the catchment.

Role in project: Process observer, occasional group facilitator, project evaluator

Sources for case story: Formal evaluation report (Kilvington 1998), project notes, subsequent reviews of WCMP (Van Roon & Knight 2000a, b; Greenaway et al. 2003a, b). Discussion with Petra Meijer, PhD student, Auckland University – currently investigating Whaingaroa as an example of community-based environmental management (2008, 2009).
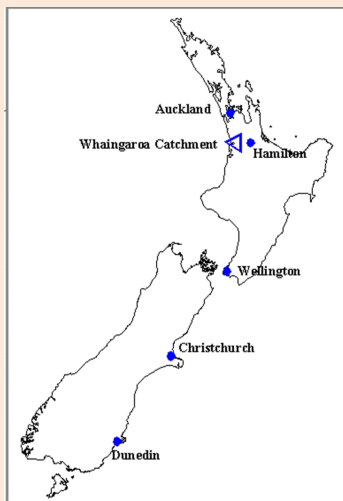
This chapter begins with a basic outline of the Whaingaroa Catchment Management Project, followed by a retrospective analysis of the critical factors that frame the social learning challenge of the situation. It then outlines how evaluation was designed to contribute to social learning, what evaluation approach was used and how it was implemented, and the outcomes from this (intended and unintended). Finally it considers what was learnt from the use of evaluation in this situation and the significance of this for understanding how evaluation can support social learning in environmental management.

4.2   Overview of the Whaingaroa Catchment Management Project

In 1995 a proposal to establish a community-based catchment management initiative in the Whaingaroa (Raglan) catchment was submitted to the New Zealand Ministry for the Environment (MfE) for support under their Sustainable Management Fund. The Whaingaroa Catchment Management Project (WCMP)was foremost conceived as a community planning project that would garner energy around local concerns over harbour degradation (see Box 4.2) and contribute to Environment Waikato's mandated requirement to develop local area management strategies (LAMS). The intention was to run a process that would both engage community interest in local environmental management issues and increase willingness and ability to take action to improve the situation.

While scoping ideas about how to run such an initiatve Environment Waikato met with a recently recruited Landcare Research staff member who had been active in setting up the Canadian Atlantic Coastal Action Programme (ACAP). In addition, the opportunity arose to apply to the Sustainable Management Fund for support for the project. This funding mechanism, and input from Landcare Research staff, directed the project towards a further purpose – to work as a demonstration of community-based integrated environmental management , and in particular to test the transferability of holistic, ecosystem-based environmental management models already trialled in Atlantic Canada (through ACAP).

Box 4.2 The Whaingaroa Catchment (Kilvington 1998, p. 10)

The Whaingaroa catchment covers an area of 525 km^2 on the west coast of the North Island, in the Waikato Region, and is hence under the jurisdiction of the regional council, Environment Waikato. In the mid-1990s the population was around 5,500, around a third of whom lived in the principal town of Raglan. A significant proportion of the community was (and still is) of Māori descent (17% by 1991 census data) representing ten hapu of the Tainui iwi.

Indigenous vegetation was cleared from more than half of the catchment in the 19th century and the land converted for agricultural use (predominantly pastoral farming, but increasingly dairy farming in recent years). Raglan has been an important port and centre for commercial marine fishing enterprises. As it is within commuting distance of Hamilton, it faces pressure to convert agricultural land to residential, or lifestyle blocks. Whale Bay is a popular location for surfing and the site of national competitions.

In the 1990s environmental concerns in the Whaingaroa catchment focused on three principal features: sewage contamination, sedimentation in the harbour resulting from erosion off agricultural land, and perceived declines in harbour fish stocks. Concerns over erosion-associated sedimentation led to the formation in 1995 of Whaingaroa Harbour Care, who run a nursery and promote planting of native trees and shrubs along riparian margins.

The WCMP can be regarded now as a fairly typical early experiment in community-based environmental management (CBM). The late 1980s and early 1990s saw an international trend in resource management policies that favoured greater sharing of power and responsibility between government and local resource users, and increased devolution of management and control (Berkes et al. 1991; Lane & McDonald 2005; Marshall 2008). Although the origins of CBM may have initially stemmed from grassroots frustrations with governmental inabilities to solve local environmental and resource management problems, they have increasingly been sponsored by governments as a way of dealing with problems at spatial scales ranging from small catchments to entire regions (Marshall 2008). The critique that has given rise to this movement is that resource management based on *administrative rationalism*, characterised by decision-making in the public interest undertaken by professionals in distant, centralised and disaggregated agencies, has failed to deliver sustainable outcomes for resources or communities (Dryzek 1997 in Bradshaw 2003, p. 138). The transfer of responsibility to those directly

impacted by resource-management decisions is therefore proffered as an alternative. The idea that 'bottom up' is a more efficient approach to sustainable resource management than regulations imposed by external agencies has had wide currency and CBM has evolved into a major dimension of environmental planning and conservation management in a host of developed and developing nations (Pijnenburg 2002; Bradshaw 2003)[1].

When the WCMP began, ideas about community-based environmental management initiatives as a path to sustainable management in New Zealand were still novel but of growing interest. Furthermore, like other regional councils, Environment Waikato was coming to grips with new functions as a regional planning agency following local government reforms in the late 1980s. They were therefore open to exploring innovative approaches in the development of regional plans, and LAMS, such as that offered by following in the footsteps of ACAP.

4.2.1   The Atlantic Coastal Action Programme

ACAP was launched by Environment Canada in 1991 as an ambitious integrated environmental management programme covering 13 different coastal communities, ranging from urban industrial to rural agricultural (Ellsworth et al. 1997). Initially intended to last 6 years, the programme has continued for over 16 years and is in its third phase of operation (McNeil et al.2006). The main objective of the programme at its inception was to get communities involved with governments in restoration and maintenance plans and actions for harbours and estuaries in Atlantic Canada. While the programme focus began with water-related concerns, this has since broadened to a wide range of sustainability-oriented issues.

Although each ACAP community is associated with an ecosystem, the community itself is not determined by usual geographic or political boundaries but rather made up of environmental, economic and social stakeholders who are able to *distil their aspirations and values to create common unity* (Ellsworth et al. 1997, p. 126). Hence the boundaries of each initiative are pragmatically based upon the interests and issues to hand. The initial object of ACAP was to

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[1] Although CBM has been widely taken up in New Zealand, the argument that it is required to counter centralised decision-making is less applicable. Other possible reasons for embracing CBM approaches include a desire to facilitate local action, and a hope to reduce the burden of local government. (see Appendix 2 background to CBM in New Zealand).

facilitate the establishment of community-based organisations that would take a leadership role in the planning and management of the local environment. The intended difference from other participatory government initiatives is that this group would go on to form an independent incorporated society that itself employees a community coordinator (albeit with funds and technical support generally being provided by the lead environmental management agency).

Within the first phase of ACAP the core group would produce a comprehensive environmental management plan (CEMP). This would take the form of a long-term strategy for the local ecosystem that would be based on consensus on long-term vision, goals and objectives; establish working partnerships; and include financial plans, timetables and commitments for implementing actions (Ellsworth et al. 1997). In addition to contributing to planning, in Phase I each ACAP project plays a role in education and awareness raising and on-the-ground action (termed the 'trinity' of activities) (ibid.). In Phases II and III the emphasis shifts from gathering of baseline data and the development of the CEMP, to implementation. This includes: capacity building, direct action, and the advancement of science with a view to preparing communities to tackle complex local environmental issues (McNeil et al. 2006).

Although ACAP has not advocated any specific methodology for Phase I initiatives, they generally have five main steps:
1. Formation and incorporation of a representative multi-stakeholder organisation
2. Consensus on a holistic vision for the area
3. Conducting environmental quality assessment
4. Identification of remedial options to close the gap between existing and desired levels of environmental quality
5. Consensus on an implementation schedule and agreement on actions and responsibilities.

In 1997 Environment Canada undertook a review of ACAP to identify lessons learned, and factors that assisted, or caused difficulties, for the ACAP groups. This report noted that overall the watershed boundaries and multi-stakeholder approach were effective, although obtaining full representation of interests was often problematic. They found that ACAP participants perceived many mutual benefits in cooperating with other organisations that share ACAP

interests, though the extent of cooperation varied, and it was widely recognised that time and effort are required to establish and maintain working relationships. The review also concluded that ACAP board composition at each site needed to be guided by local issues; and that skills and training for board members, in areas such as facilitation of decision-making or public relations, was both needed and valued by participants (S.B. Moir Consulting 1997).

Finally, the review revealed that the CEMP was useful in providing a long-term focus for activities, but CEMPs varied in the degree to which they specified implementation, and groups had to contend with reluctance of some people to take part in lengthy planning exercises. There was also the risk that the CEMP would be treated as a blueprint for change rather than as a dynamic document flexible to new knowledge and altered circumstances. Further reflections observed that a number of the ACAP communities did not develop holistic responses but rather focused on single issues and remained essentially environmental NGOs (ibid.).
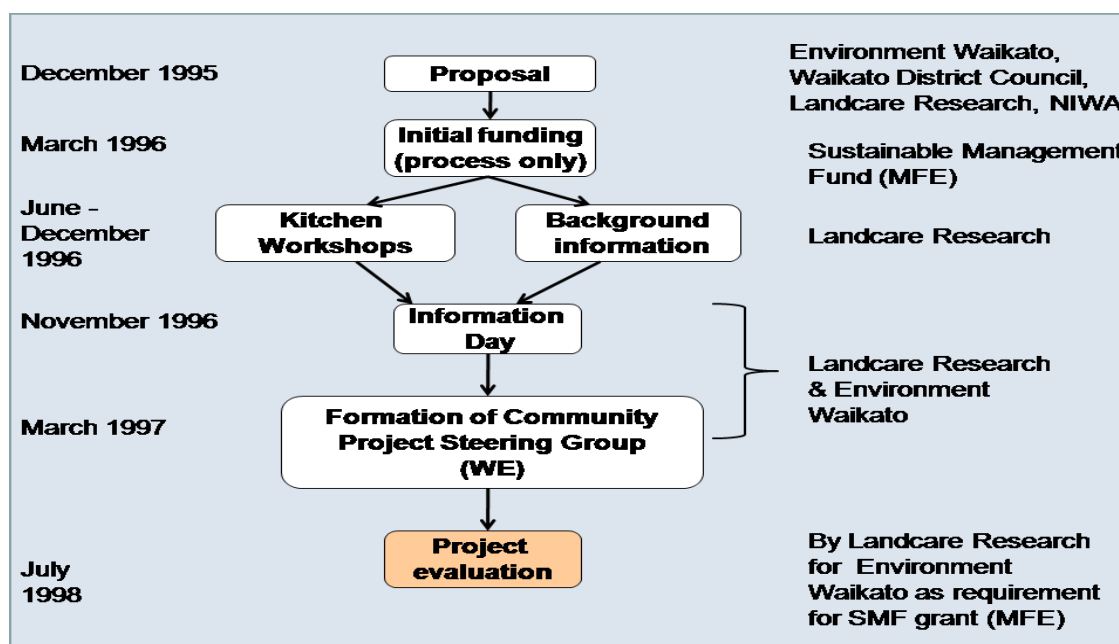
4.2.2   WCMP process and major events

In line with Phase I of the ACAP process, the initial proposal for funding of the WCMP had two parts: (i) to gather biophysical data in order to develop baseline measurements of the environmental processes that impact on the harbour; (ii) to undertake a community engagement process based on the approach used in ACAP. However, funding granted by MfE covered only the second part of the initial proposal and the project went ahead with a more limited mandate to coordinate community involvement in catchment-wide environmental management issues. The project's initial aims were to run a process that would cross traditional boundaries between formal (regulatory) and informal groups concerned with the management of the Whaingaroa catchment; and develop new relationships between unfamiliar collaborators such as farming and fishing interests, and those concerned primarily with issues of environmental health. As with ACAP, the intended outcome of this initial process was the formation of a representative stakeholder group that would subsequently guide development of a local area management plan.

Phase I – engagement

The steps of the engagement process are shown in Figure 4.1. It was intended to be a combined 'top down' and 'bottom up' process, initiated and led by Environment Waikato and facilitated by the Landcare Research staff member who had worked with ACAP. The project facilitators began by identifying stakeholders in the community, publicising the project's intentions, generating interest, and initiating the formation of a stakeholder group. The principal method for this was 'kitchen workshops' (denoting their informality) where identified key stakeholders invited neighbours or associates to meet and discuss issues that concerned them. The workshops took place in such diverse locations as shearing sheds, community halls, fire stations and the homes of local residents. Participants in each workshop came from similar backgrounds (e.g. fishers, farmers, bach owners) to minimise potential conflict at an early stage and enable participants to freely express their views.

Figure 4.1 First 2.5 years of WCMP (Phase I).

Negotiations also took place to facilitate tangata whenua involvement with the project. These were initially with the Huakina Development Trust and later with the locally based Whaingaroa Kite Whenua Trust. Significantly, these were not productive in engaging either iwi group. The workshops were followed by an information day in November 1996, where information about the catchment was shared, attended by local residents, interest groups, tangata whenua and local

government representatives. Subsequently an open meeting was held at Te Uku with the intention of forming a community project steering group.

Phase I – formation of a community action group

More than 50 people crowded into the community meeting centre at Te Uku in March 1997. This was to be a pivotal meeting in the WCMP, as it was to result in the formation of a community steering group made up of volunteers representing a range of stakeholders in the community. This group would take on the task of developing a grassroots strategy for the catchment that would garner the multiple interests and concerns of constituents. It also marked the end of the formal involvement of Landcare Research staff as it was expected the newly formed community group, in conjunction with Environment Waikato, would be responsible for direction of the project. Many of the participants at Te Uku had taken part in one of the kitchen workshops, or the information day, or had been consulted in the first stages of applying for funding for the project. However, a number of those at the Te Uku meeting had not previously had direct contact with the project and the good attendance at this meeting reflected not only a high degree of interest in the environmental management of the catchment but some outright curiosity about what was going on.

The meeting did not run smoothly, and comments received later indicated that its purpose had been unclear. For some, particularly those who had not taken part in earlier workshops, the idea that the project would now hand over responsibility to the community (with the withdrawal of the Landcare Research facilitators) was confusing, and even suspicious. As one participant later commented *it felt like we were being handed a hospital pass* (i.e. something was being passed on to them that was destined for failure) (Kilvington 1998). Despite these concerns a project steering group was formed, although its membership was far from the wide sectoral representation initially envisaged. Over the next 18 months this group developed a role in coordinating, networking and providing information on catchment environmental issues. Called Whaingaroa Environment (WE) the group met regularly, convened general public meetings to determine the future of the project, generated newsletters and engaged in a number of activities to promote environmental concerns in the catchment. Environment Waikato continued to support WE by providing resources for newsletter production, and small projects, and through

further facilitation. Waikato District Council continued to send a representative to group meetings (either a staff member or local politician). In July 1998, at the official end of the MfE funding for the project, a participatory evaluation was undertaken that proved to be a turning point in the direction of the project.

4.3 Social learning challenges for WCMP: scoping the problem situation

In many ways programmes like the WCMP typify the social learning challenge, as it is the very struggles around trying to progress collective understanding and action across communities and agencies with diverse goals but common interests that have provided both impetus and knowledge leading to the development of social learning as a normative concept in environmental management.

In terms consistent with interpretations of social learning presented in Chapter 2, the problem situation presented in the WCMP can be scoped using a SWOT analysis (see Figure 3.4) based on four interlinked foci of concern: (i) stimulating and managing group participation and interaction; (ii) locating the initiative within significant social and institutional structures; (iii) supporting the generation of new knowledge and capacity for learning at multiple levels; and (iv) introducing new approaches to the integration of ideas and information for problem solving. In addition it is useful to review the overall theoretical basis to the WCMP and how the overt and tacit expectations and theories of action held by proponents, facilitators and participants influenced the programme.

4.3.1 Group participation and interaction in the WCMP

The concept of wide and equitable public engagement and participation (and all it entails) is a fundamental operational element of CBM. In CBM initiatives participation must go well beyond supplementing existing decision-making arrangements. Making progress through an oftentimes complex, multi-faceted resource allocation or environmental problem solving situation is dependent on intra- and inter-organisational interaction, collaboration and learning. It is the development and support of collective communication and learning capacity that has proven to be one of most testing components of CBM (Lane & McDonald 2005).

As a programme whose primary goal in its first phase was to establish a cross sector steering group that would include community members and representatives of major environmental and resource management agencies, the creation of a platform for collaboration and exchange was clearly pivotal for the WCMP. As outlined in Chapter 2 (Table 2.4) there are substantial procedural difficulties in running a multi-party deliberation. However, contextual issues can also influence the effectiveness of such platforms in any given situation. These include existing connections between stakeholders (particulary the distribution of power inherent in these), and overall capacity and preparedness for engagement. It is not uncommon for CBM initiatives to proceed without investigating the background of the community that is to take up challenge, or with insufficient consideration of how the programme should respond to local conditions (Bradshaw 2003). In the WCMP several contextual factors that had not been sufficiently considered emerged as problematic for group participation and interaction in the programme. These included: (i) contentious relationships between an existing local environmental group – Harbour Care and Environment Waikato, and others; (ii) burgeoning assertion of tangata whenua authority over resource management issues in the catchment, and (iii) existing appetite for the initiative.

Contentious relationships

During the project design phase for WCMP, locations other than Whaingaroa were considered for a trial of the ACAP process. These included Kawhia and Tairua harbours, where there were already plentiful data available on the ecology of the area[2]. However, the prospect of running the project in Whaingaroa, and gaining funding through the Sustainable Management Fund, was raised during a meeting in April 1995 with the then Minister for the Environment, and local MP for Raglan, Simon Upton. This meeting followed on the heels of appeals to the MP to take action on local concerns over pollution, siltation, and over-fishing affecting the health of the harbour, and in particular following a campaign of form letters directed to Environment Waikato. These petitions had been stimulated by the local environmental group – Harbour Care, which had been in existence sometime before the WCMP project was conceived and was spearheaded by an outspoken and somewhat confrontational local resident. While the group had made substantive contributions to restoration planting in the catchment (including setting up a

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[2] A strong evidence base was a prerequisite of the ACAP model (Dech 2003).

local nursery) they were also vocal in concerns over silt and pollutant runoff into the harbour and made many representations to Environment Waikato.

Eventually, despite suggestions from within the council itself that other locations would be better suited to the project, Whaingaroa was selected as the site. The inescapable conclusion is that the idea of using the WCMP to mollify local agitation, and to satisfy a government minister's ambitions for 'wins' in his own consituency, was an undercurrent in the initial thinking about the project. Further, as in practice the community members empowered through WCMP were not those agitating for greater influence, it could be said that an intention of the project was even to destabilise existing community dynamics.

Site selection based on political reasons, and influenced by the temptation of readily available funding, is a familiar story in CBM projects However, this stands in contrast to acknowledged criteria for success of CBM initiatives, such as a clearly identifiable and unifying challenge, or strong social cohesion (Chamala & Mortiss 1990; Selin & Chavez 1995; Margerum 1996). It was also contrary to ACAP's principles of locating projects within communities which already had a recognised need to work collaboratively to resolve shared issues of concern. Furthermore, using participatory processes as a tactic to pacify or divert the public's energy away from criticism and into activities considered safe by an agency can create expectations and demands that may lead to backlash if people are engaged with no visible returns (Larner & Craig 2002 in Scott & Park 2008). In the end, the outspoken member of Harbour Care was far from appeased by the WCMP process. He continued to agitate for 'real action' from Environment Waikato and frequently confronted both the council and the WCMP facilitators on the worth of the project.

Tangata whenua involvement in the WCMP

A second challenge to the format of multi-stakeholder engagement prescribed by ACAP emerged around the role of tangata whenua in local resource management. The ACAP process identifies engagement with indigenous people as important, but signficantly accords them no different status than that of other community and sector stakeholders. However, in New Zealand resource ownership and management rights accorded Māori through the Treaty of Waitangi, and the associated negotiations with national, and regional government agencies over

this, represents a signficant contextual factor for not only the specific situation of the WCMP but for CBM initiatives across New Zealand[3].

Relationships between regional and territorial agencies and tangata whenua vary widely. The capacity and organising potential of iwi[4], and their success or otherwise in achieving levels of autonomy and resource independence through Waitangi Tribunal settlements clearly have profound impact on this. Most importantly for CBM, the Treaty of Waitangi provides tangata whenua with the standing of a direct treaty partner with the Crown. A CBM process like ACAP, which assumes equal status will be accorded the multiple stakeholders participating in the project, in the New Zealand context reduces tangata whenua to an interest group. Thus arguably the ACAP process could be seen as circumventing the obligations of local government under the Treaty of Waitangi. However relationships between tangata whenua and local government play out in practice, it is not surprising that iwi and hapu[5] do not regard themselves in the same light as a community interest group and have thus been understandably reluctant to take part in multi-stakeholder community initiatives where their unique status might be subsumed.

In the Whaingaroa catchment in the mid-1990s, a significant proportion of the community was (and still is) of Māori descent. The Whaingaroa catchment is not only an area of great significance to tangata whenua but the site of some momentous conflicts. Te Kōpua (Raglan) was home to Eva Rickard, a well-known Māori activist who was vocal and influential in ascerting tangata whenua rights. Controversy over appropriation of land during World War II that was subsequently not returned to local Māori, and concerns over the location of landfill sites and sewage treatment schemes, meant the relationship between the local hapu and regional council was strained.

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[3] Claims by Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi cover a wide range of property and resource management matters. Across New Zealand independent resource management agencies representing the interests of iwi and hapu of a region have been established. The RMA (1991), and the Conservation Act (1987) – major pieces of legislation governing the management of natural resources – both require regional and territorial authorities, and DOC, to give recognition to the Treaty of Waitangi and the Kaitiaki (guardianship) status of Māori.
[4] Tribe
[5] Subtribe

As involvement of local Māori with the WCMP was considered important for the success of the project, support for the project during application to the SMF was sought and secured from the mana whenua[6] via the Whaingaroa Kite Whenua Trust. However, this was offered with some reservations. They considered that the project preparation stage had been rushed and there was little opportunity to discuss the details of their involvement. Subsequent discussions were held with the Huakina Development Trust – the environmental management arm of the Tainui Trust Board - who also raised concerns over the lack of Māori input into the development of the process itself, and questioned the benefit to furthering fundamental issues of iwi resource ownership and management. Tensions between the Tainui Trust Board and the local hapu contributed to the uncertainty of the project facilitators about the correct procedure for ensuring tangata whenua involvement in the project. The concerns of the Huakina Development Trust remained unresolved and in November 1996 a decision was made to contact the Whaingaroa Kite Whenua Trust again, inviting them to the project information day. Subsequently a meeting was held on Te Kōpua Marae[7], attended by kaumatua[8] from three other marae in the catchment. This went some way to reconnect Tainui hapu to the WCMP, but the proffered original ideal of having tangata whenua representation within the WCMP steering group was not realised.

Despite the inference that the facilitators involved in ACAP in Canada had some practical knowledge of engaging with the indigenous people of an area, the fundamental process as advocated through WCMP was inadequate to address the complex power relation aspects of Māori participation in a multi-stakeholder environmental management process. Indeed, as it later emerged, the experience of the facilitators in securing the participation of indigenous people through ACAP at that time had been largely symbolic (at all ACAP meetings a chair was held vacant for an indigenous representative to indicate the importance of their presence but they did not in fact attend!). To date two parallel planning processes have evolved for the CBM of the Whaingaroa Habour and catchment – one by tangata whenua and the other by the balance of the community. Individuals within both sectors have made efforts to involve and keep the other group informed, and despite the lack of integration the overall impression is that

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[6] Those with customary authority over the area.
[7] Most Māori tribes and subtribes have marae – places where significant meetings are held and ceremonies conducted.
[8] Tribal elders or leaders.

all parties have similar objectives for the sustainability of valued local resources(Van Roon & Knight 2000a).

Capacity for community-based environmental management

The two previous challenges to the establishment of a platform for collaboration and learning in the WCMP have been examples of what Bradshaw (2003) terms *community credibility*. This refers to both the knowledge held by communities and their long-term commitment and shared desire for collective community and environmental benefit as a fundamental basis to resource management decision-making. It cannot be assumed that because a CBM initiative might be desirable in a particular context that there is sufficient community credibility to make it viable. What is often at the heart of mistaken assumptions of credibility is the degree of idealisation of the notion of community, where insufficient attention is paid to the likely influence of dominant power factions and competing communities of interest as a counter force to collaboration (Lane & McDonald 2005).

CBM initiatives like WCMP also make large demands on *community capacity*, i.e. the social and physical resource base which will be drawn on to complete CBM goals (Bradshaw 2003). Even where there are good networks, leadership, commitment and local environmental knowledge, communities 'empowered' under CBM face difficulties associated with the varying wealth and resources in a region, and the public-good nature of acts of environmental management which consequently rely on volunteers who are prone to burnout (ibid.). Community capacity needs to be regarded as a dynamic commodity as CBM initiatives often span many years during which they face widely varying external pressures (ibid.).

This question of community capacity came to a head in the WCMP at the meeting held at the Te Uku community centre. At this stage in the project (Figure 4.1), participants at the kitchen workshops and the information day, along with staff from the Waikato District Council and Environment Waikato, were to convene to discuss the establishment of a steering group. This group would become an incorporated society administering its own funds from the project, would employ its own convenor, and direct the development of a local environmental management plan. This suggested trajectory was clearly confusing to many at the meeting and

even regarded as outrageous by some. Not only was there apprehension as to who would be on this steering group, how they would be chosen, and who they would represent, but also it appeared to some participants at the meeting that the very nature of an independent community group that would generate plans for the catchment undermined the democracy of an elected regional council – who furthermore appeared to be reneging on their responsibilities. Far from regarding this as an opportunity, they considered it '*a cop-out!'*(Kilvington 1998).

Clearly the engagement process employed to that point in the project had insufficiently prepared the community for this proposal. There had been no real assessment of community capability or willingness. Rather there was an assumption that the ACAP-mirror process would be sufficient to engender the necessary support, and there was no contingency plan should this not be the case. In the end a preliminary steering group was established through the self-nomination of participants at the meeting. These people for the most part were those who were already actively involved in some form of community work (e.g. members of Harbour Care or the local residents association), and was far removed from the wide-sector representation anticipated in the original project design. Consequently, although the inclusion of participants of groups such as Harbour Care created useful connections for the WCMP, to some extent the project was an overlay on existing community-based structures.

4.3.2   Social and institutional settings for the WCMP

As outlined in Chapter 2 capacity for social learning is dependent on social and institutional arrangements, norms, and practices that frame the context of the environmental management situation, particularly in terms of the formal and informal arrangements around planning and decision-making. For participants in the WCMP this included access to resources and personnel involved in environmental governance, which itself is dependent on how well existing decision-making structures could accommodate community input, and enable the cross-sectoral, and interagency agency holistic thinking around catchment issues, that was at the heart of the project.

Clarity on the type of CBM initiative the sponsoring agency has committed to is fundamental to understanding how existing institutional arrangements must shift and resources be assembled to

accommodate it. It is also essential to appreciating how significant a challenge the proposed initiative is to existing norms and practices. Different types of CBM can be classified by where they sit on three principal continuums: (i) complexity, (ii) purpose, and (iii) extent of power sharing and devolution of responsibility (Figure 4.2).
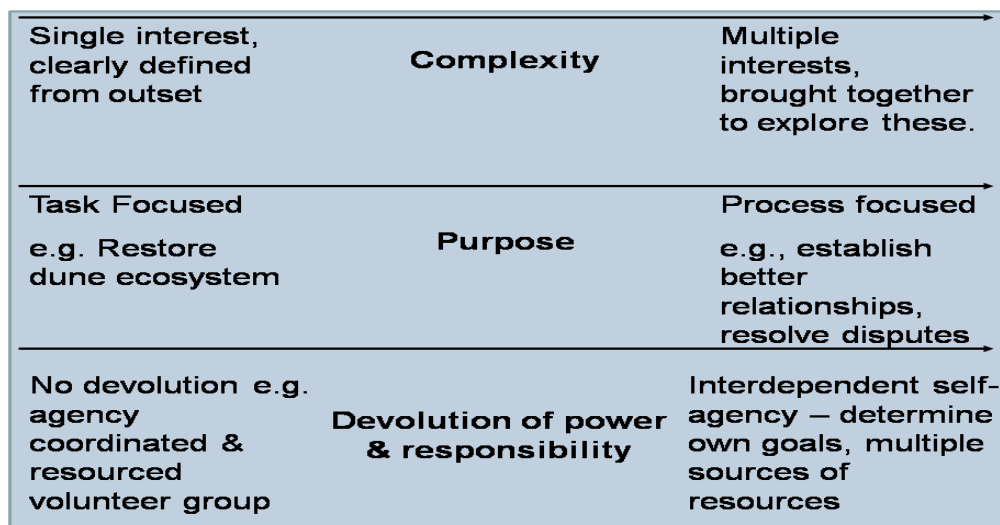

Figure 4.2   Three continuums of CBM initiatives.

Complexity refers to the nature of the environmental management issue that is the focus of the CBM initiative, as well as the number of parties involved and the time and geographic boundaries of the initiative. Hence on the complexity scale CBM initiatives extend from situations of comparatively low complexity, such as the establishment of care programmes where relatively homogenous groups participate in local activities for environmental benefit, such as dune replanting for erosion control, to high-complexity situations, e.g. large-scale, catchment-wide projects integrating the knowledge and perspectives of diverse stakeholders and requiring sophisticated mechanisms to support collaboration. Similarly the continuum of power-sharing and devolution refers to the basis for national and local government and community relationships. This can range from situations of high dependency (and thus low devolution of power and responsibility) such as groups initiated and supported to perform specific tasks by government agencies; to joint partnerships; and in some circumstances transfer of specific roles and entitlements to local organisations which are self-directed and form new interdependencies with diverse partners (Pretty & Frank 2000).

The nature of CBM is also influenced by the principal purpose the initiative is intended to address and the extent to which this is about delivering on particular pragmatic tasks or setting up new processes and relationships. For example a highly task focused CBM initiative may be to coordinate volunteer effort to address a local problem (such as pest or weed control). Alternatively CBM initiatives may be a means to build relationships or address conflicts between sectors, governance agencies and/or communities[9].

The WCMP suffered from a lack of clarity on what kind of CBM initiative it was intended to be. In the first instance Environment Waikato, as the primary sponsor of the WCMP, had acknowledged ambitions for the project. Principal amongst these was that it would provide input into its LAMS for the catchment, but more optimistically that it would deliver an entire community-based plan that would include aspirations for the catchment held by various stakeholders in the community (and beyond the jursidiction of the council) and have developed a strategy for delivering these. This semi-formal planning role for the WCMP – that it would assist with managing a catchment across system boundaries, and sector interests – places it to the far right of the complexity scale. However, the novelty of the situation for all involved led to confusion over the anticipated extent of independence and responsibility of the WCMP steering group, and Environment Waikato. While the ACAP programme on which WCMP was based represented something comparatively radical in Canadian regional environmental planning, it is was not intended to be about devolution —regarded as a step too far for the readiness of most regional authorities (Ellsworth et al. 1997) . By following the ACAP process, the WCMP somewhat unconciously located itself between being about the creation of an independent body with entrusted responsibilities and mandate, and a volunteer group coordinated and managed by Environment Waikato.

One of the most obvious consequences of confusion was that, through a desire not to be too directive on behalf of Environment Waikato, the WE group were not informed about the

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[9] Wherever CBM initiatives start may not be where they end up. Their eventual history depends on numerous factors, including leadership and opportunity. It will also depend on how they go about addressing issues such as the dynamics of relationships between agencies and different public constituencies; processes of group behaviour, conflict management and collaboration; mechanisms for sourcing new ideas, and learning, and adapting to new information; and the life-cycle of long-term projects, where goals shift and circumstances change.

expectation that they would produce a community-based environmental management plan – and in fact did not become aware of this until after the first-phase evaluation. After the Te Uku meeting, in the void of clearer directives, and the withdrawal of facilitation by Landcare Research staff, the community steering group slipped into the role of a networking agency. This was needed in Whaingaroa where there were multiple agencies with overlapping and not always complementary jurisdictions, and some real community concerns about harbour degradation. However, it was not the purpose originally intended for the group, and did not deliver on Environment Waikato's needs for input into local area planning. Furthermore there was some sense from various stakeholders (notably the protagonist from Harbour Care) that the 'hype' of the WCMP had led to little outcome.

Most importantly, the experimental nature of the WCMP also meant that the programme was effectively positioned outside other planning, policy and management initiatives within the council. The programme champion was himself located within the council's policy division. He managed the funding for the programme and ensured resources were available, and consistently participated in all aspects of the project. However, despite the intended holistic nature of the WCMP, the programme came to be perceived within Environment Waikato as a separate initiative not relevant to other branches of council activity. It was even referred to as 'X's *project*' by one biosecurity officer within the council who had chosen not to use the WCMP as an avenue for setting up community based pest control work in the catchment, as he was unclear of how the WCMP connected with this work. Without deliberate strategies to use CBM initiatives like WCMP to contribute to ongoing formal approaches to management in the region, and even to challenge the limitations of existing silos of responsibility within organisations, the risk is that such programmes become powerless appendages to ongoing traditional management practices.

In the years following the initial set-up of WE (and after the programme evaluation), the group took on the responsibility of coordinating the development of a community-based environmental management plan. In 1999 two contractors were employed using funds provided by Environment Waikato and by 2002 a draft plan was widely circulated. However, the group

subsequently expressed regret that the plan had no real status or resourcing associated with it (Greenaway et al. 2003a, b).

4.3.3   Promoting holistic thinking and enabling learning through the WCMP

Of the different CBM approaches that exist, the WCMP was most closely affiliated to integrated environmental management[10]. This is an approach to holistic or system management which principally relies on drawing together a diverse group of stakeholders who share information and perspectives in a way which fosters mutual understanding, and develops a collaborative approach to managing an environmental system (Margerum 1999). The principles of integrated environmental management are that it goes beyond enhanced communication or consultation and is rather a planned process of change that results in a different way of 'doing business' and may include a new strategy or new institutional arrangements. Core to it is the use of scientifically recognised techniques for understanding environmental systems, albeit with a wider use of lay practitioners in collating, and interpreting information than in more traditional environmental management regimes (Margerum 1996).

Basing the WCMP on an integrated environmental management model of CBM presented the programme with two significant challenges: firstly, to provide participants in the project with access to current biophsysical research information about the catchment; and secondly, to create a process by which this information could be debated, interpreted, and scrutinsed by the various community and sector interests in the catchment. However, a significant divergence from the ACAP process was the failure at the outset of the WCMP to secure funds for preliminary research on the catchment. The expectation was that the project would subsequently source additional funding to meet the data needs of the ACAP process for the Whaingaroa Catchment. This did not eventuate and without this, now independent research institutes such as Landcare Research and NIWA could not contribute time and resources to the project.

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[10] CBM approaches with characteristics that fall to the right of the continuums (i.e., high complexity, mixture of task and process, and responding to devolution of power and responsibility) include those under the name **co-management** (largely but not exclusively focused on relationships between regulatory agencies and first nations) and **integrated environmental management** (a holistic approach to management that relies on collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders). Examples of these approaches to CBM have emerged across Canada, North America, and Australasia (Berkes et al. 1991; Margerum 1996).

Being able to hold critical public debate on important catchment issues, supported by access to up-to-date technical information, is a central pillar of the ACAP platforms for public engagement in environmental management. Already in the Whaingaroa catchment issues of sedimentation, and sewage treatment and their impact on the health of the habour (in particular fish stocks) were topics that were contentious, subject to divergent views and clouded by conflicting interpretations of such data as were already available. Alongside this had developed suspicion and mistrust of agencies such as Environment Waikato, and tensions between sectors such as fishing and farming. It is unlikely that scientific data alone, coming into this arena, would have been met with widespread acceptance (though unquestionably this was the anticipated outcome by professional managers and researchers involved in the initial WCMP proposal). Although it may have provided some clarirty over what was currently known about the catchment and what would remain, for practical purposes in the short term, unknown. However, without this information those involved with the debate were left with the sense that resolution was outside their grasp.

In practice, even if there had been a strong science component to the WCMP, the project had not made sufficient provision for how this information would be used, understood and integrated with other sources of knowledge. The WCMP's main method for collective thinking was the generation of a 'shared vision' for the catchment. However, without faciliation skills in conflict resolution, constructive debate, systems thinking and adaptive learning the visioning exercises that took place resulted in weak, overarching concepts upon which it was easy to reach agreement, and which were consequently irrelevant to the real challenge of reconciling divergent viewpoints and knowledge about local environmental issues. This may not have been a fault of the project itself but rather an inherent methodology failure. Early work on integrated environmental management reveals no explicit recognition of the challenge that different knowledge basis or premises for problem construction might present to holistic management. This contrasts with its close relative co-management which more overtly acknowledges the inherent power relations in the ownership of legitimate knowledge[11].

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[11] For instance in Margerum's (1999)list of 20 foundational factors for successful integrated environmental management practice (written after an extensive review of projects across Australia and the USA), the only reference specifically made to knowledge is factor 10 which highlights the need for integrated environmental

4.3.4 Theoretical basis and programme logic of the WCMP

The previous sections already hint at a number of under analysed aspects to the premise, theory and implementation of the WCMP. These include: lack of consideration of the impact of choosing a site based on meeting political needs rather than on community credibility and capacity; the assumption that the ACAP process would be adequate to manage tangata whenua involvement in the project; lack of resources for incorporating research and technical information gathering; and the absence of a platform for reconciling stakeholder interpretation of existing information of the catchment, and development of collective understanding.

From the project evaluation, it was apparent that there was not a strong conceptual understanding of the programme among participants or proponents – at least not one that would have been equally recognisable to all parties. Instead, the evaluation revealed a wide range of assumptions and expectations regarding the WCMP, held by the MfE, the regional council and community members. Some of these were assumptions on what the programme would deliver and others were believes about how things would come about (theories of action). They included:

- People want to have greater control over management of the catchment
- Adequate scientific data can resolve contention over what and who are responsible for the decline in fish stocks in the harbour
- The project will force Environment Waikato to act more in accordance with particular groups' wishes
- The community will generate a plan of action and carry it out
- Bringing people together in a facilitated group will result in them recognising common goals and being better able to work together
- There is sufficient motivation and skill for a group to form that will be self-directing after 18 months of the project
- There will be recognisable improvement to environmental quality at the end of the project (3 years).

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management projects to be equipped with sufficient scientific data to understand environmental systems and their interrelationships.

In addition there were some high-level value judgements associated with the project. Significant among these was the idea (inherent to CBM) that local residents are better at managing their own resources; and local knowledge is undervalued in current formal management regimes. Much of the theory and practice around CBM has come from North America, where such assumptions may be valid given highly centralised environmental management bureaucracies. However, it is questionable whether this holds true for the Whaingaroa catchment. Arguably, with the privatisation of research institutes and the devolution of management responsibilities to regions, it could be claimed that it was as challenging for scientific information to be incorporated in regional environmental planning as local knowledge.

In addition to competing ambitions and theories about the project, the evaluation also revealed a lack of connection between espoused goals and strategies to achieve them. In the original proposal for the WCMP the expected project output was *a catchment environmental strategy supported by community and local government* (Kilvington 1998). In contrast, the even more ambitious intended outcomes of the project were (i) *increased community involvement in natural resources management*; (ii) *improved management of natural resources in the Whaingaroa Catchment*; and (iii) *improved health of the Whaingaroa Harbour* (ibid.). However, these outcomes were implementation strategies, baseline measures or indicators of success. In the end, with no clear, shared sense of either a theory of action for the project or way of achieving its own predetermined outcomes, the WCMP was based on a somewhat formulaic adherence to the processes used in ACAP, even when divergence in circumstances suggested a need for process readjustment.

Rigidity of process is problematic in CBM. Prominent authors and practitioners in the field of CBM (Berkes 2006; Cash et al. 2006; Guijt 2008) note a tendency to establish CBM initiatives based on predetermined and static institutional and power-sharing arrangements. This process inflexibility even extends to the evaluation and monitoring– which Guijt (2008) describes as typically designed once, at the outset of the initiative, and from then on assumed to be adequate for all future eventualities. Such systemic intransigence is anathema to good conditions for social learning. Large-scale, long-term projects are likely to evolve through different cycles of
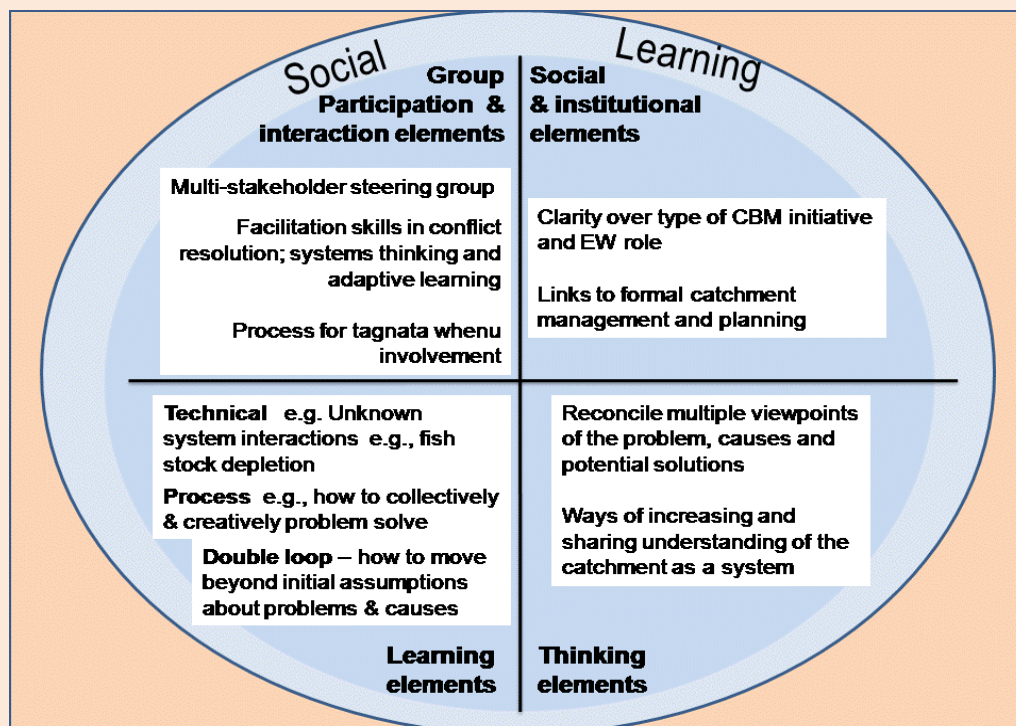
goal setting, and key political relationships. Uncertainty of what substantive knowledge is needed to address issues (let alone emergence of new issues as projects progress), coupled with unpredictable and changing social elements and political conditions, requires that the CBM initiatives be adaptive, and flexible. Arguably, in such a form as this, CBM projects, and their counterparts in participatory planning processes, are not equipped to be responsive vehicles for collective learning and development.

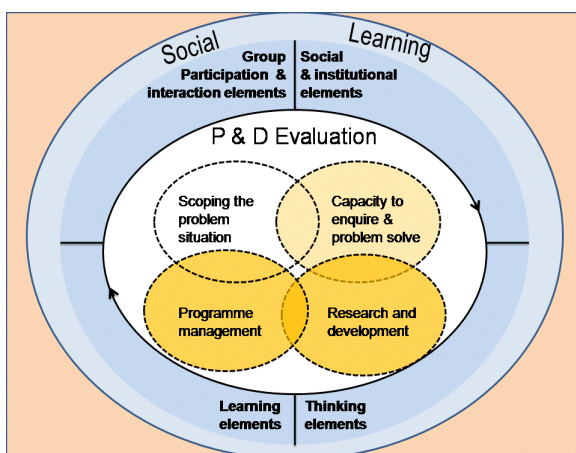**Summary of the social learning challenges for the WCMP** (Figure 4.3)

Establishing a platform for multi-stakeholder collaboration was a core ambition of the WCMP. Also important was providing an entry for community-based management and locating this within existing institutional arrangements for the catchment. Underpinning these ambitions was the need for capacity in reconciling and integrating multiple viewpoints over causes and solutions to local environmental problems, which itself was reliant on the ability for multiple stakeholders to share interpretations of technical information about the catchment and to integrate this with contextual knowledge about local management practices. Ultimately, the success of the WCMP as a CBM initiative also rested on its ability to increase both community and agency skills, and awareness of collaborative processes.

The WCMP was hampered by a number of factors, including insufficient assessment of important social dynamics, which affected community credibility and capacity as a base for a CBM initiative, and lack of access to scientific and technical information on problem issues in the catchment. Important to the programme's success, but also lacking, was a clear and shared sense of programme purpose and logic, and a way to manage the multiple assumptions and aspirations for what the programme would deliver. Most of all with such a challenging venture ahead of it, and much uncertainty about how a novel process would fit within its new context, the WCMP needed some way of monitoring its progress and responding to signals that all was not going according to plan.

Figure 4.3   Components of the social learning challenge for the WCMP

4.4   The WCMP evaluation

Chapter 3 concluded with four possible connection points between evaluation and social learning. In environmental management programmes evaluation is most commonly linked to accountability to programme funders and/or programme management. However, evaluation methods and approaches can also be used to build the collaborative enquiry capacity of programme participants; as well as provide important information about the success factors and limitations of the overall programme approach for both the programme proponents and those that might follow in their footsteps (see Figure 3.3 repeated here).

The evaluation of the WCMP took place in June 2008, 2.5 years into the project. It was commissioned by Environment Waikato to fulfil conditions of funding received from MfE. While it was ostensibly driven by an accountability function it was also shaped by the need to provide information on the WCMP as a national demonstration programme for the practical use of other similar initiatives in the future (i.e. **a research function**). Neither Environment Waikato nor MfE outlined more than general expectations for the evaluation, There were no explicit 'learning' intentions for the evaluation and certainly no capacity-building intentions. However, as the evaluator of the programme I had substantial freedom to design the evaluation process (within resource limits and fulfilling the requirement of completing a report). A number of factors influenced my choice, including: client expectations for the evaluation, what had happened in the project to date, evaluation history of these types of project, tools and techniques available to me, and my own values around evaluation.

Firstly, since the WCMP was an ongoing initiative it seemed appropriate to undertake an evaluation that would provide information for the future development of the project. Importantly this information would be most useful to the regional and district councils and the community participants in the project rather than MfE. Thus the evaluation addressed two client needs (i) to be formative, i.e. providing information for ongoing programme improvement; and (ii) to assess impact, i.e. determine the results and effects of the programme to date (**programme management**). This was essentially a double task with distinct but overlapping audiences, and the possibility that there would be some information that might benefit project participants but which it would be preferable not to share with the funding agency.

Secondly, the WCMP was conceived without clear, measurable objectives or established baselines. Its two stated goals were (i) the establishment of a multi-stakeholder group and (ii) the production of a community-based catchment environmental management strategy. To restrict the evaluation to an assessment of the achievement or non-achievement of these goals would not provide a very rich picture of the WCMP. In such circumstances a goal-free[12] (or

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[12] Goal-free evaluation attempts to document the actual effects of the project on the target participants or addresses the extent to which actual participant needs are being met by the project.

needs-based) evaluation is more appropriate. This requires substantial input from the participants since the focus is on their experience rather than what should have happened.

Thirdly, one of the strongest drivers of the evaluation approach was my own concern that there had been no appreciable opportunity for the programme participants and proponents to learn and respond to what was going on in the programme. At this stage in my work I was not yet part of CLEM and I had little background in social learning. However, as a new member of the Landcare Research team that was carrying out facilitation of the WCMP I had observed most of the project's major events. I was therefore aware that neither the programme protagonists nor the facilitators had expressed much interest in improving the learning potential of the programme[13]. Like many, if not most CBM initiatives, the foremost emphasis was on action. Furthermore, my observation was that the project participants (particularly the members of WE) were uncertain of their aims and purpose now the facilitation by Landcare Research had been withdrawn, and were in need of an opportunity to explore the project's strengths, and weaknesses, and to develop clarity over future directions, and needs. I therefore saw the evaluation as a chance to contribute to WE's capacity to **enquire and problem solve**.

A possible methodology to support this learning orientation to the evaluation was offered in a recent workshop I had attended, run by Robert Chambers, the UK-based specialist in participatory rural appraisal. The essence of participatory rural appraisal is the use of approaches to community development that enable communities to examine their own problems (Chambers 1997). Although the techniques explored in the workshop were designed around rural, primarily non-literate societies, it was possible to extend the essence of the approaches to the context presented in WCMP. In particular I made use of a timeline technique where groups are facilitated to explore the history of their collective experiences (e.g. what had been achieved, what had been problematic).

Ultimately, because of its mixed aims and client needs, the evaluation methodology involved two processes: Part 1 was a facilitated group reflection by members of WE on the group's goals, criteria for success, achievements and difficulties, as well as proposals for how the group

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[13] My task as an observer was largely anticipated to be to witness and record the success!

might operate in the future. This would provide both public information (to be made known via the evaluation report) but also give the group an opportunity to discuss more sensitive issues to be kept confidential. Part 2 involved interviews with staff of the main environmental management agencies operating in the catchment (the district and regional councils, Department of Conservation and the Ministry of Fisheries) who could be considered participants of the project; alongside the Chairperson of WE, an active environmental organiser for mana whenua, the chief advocate for Harbour Care, and other community members associated with the project. This participant-told story of the project represented the bulk of the results presented in the evaluation report, but in addition records of the project were reviewed and an evaluation of the kitchen workshops done by students at Waikato University (Gallardo & Hewson 1996) was also included. Most importantly the final evaluation report (Kilvington 1998) was circulated to all the stakeholders who took part in the evaluation.

4.4.1   Outcomes of the WCMP evaluation

Around eight members of WE took part in a facilitated group meeting where they created a timeline of activities from the 14 months of working together. The aim of the session was to not only gather information for the evaluation on what the group had done but to support the group's own learning about who they were, what they had already achieved and what they could do in the future (see Figure 4.3). The group not only identified events but ranked them as positive or negative experiences, based on their own criteria. Discussion on whether they regarded events as successful, challenging, galvanising or confusing was revealing for the group. As one member expressed *'we've really done a lot – I hadn't realised how much'* From this initial exercise discussion expanded into assessing the group's capacity in terms of members, resources, networks and goals. They also discussed their current relationship with Environment Waikato and other key relationships revealing that such networks were the most tangible outcome of the programme to date.

This reflective self-evaluation exercise was useful for WE's development. However, it was the wide circulation of the final evaluation report that had the greatest impact. The report documented the history of the project, including its basis in ACAP and provided an assessment of the community project steering group (WE) based on points raised in the group meeting and

interviews. This included representativeness, key relationships, achievements, success factors, weaknesses, and challenges for the future of WE. The report also looked at implementation issues, i.e. how the project was initiated, community facilitation, iwi participation, and agency involvement. Beyond the detail of what had worked and what had not, the evaluation raised the issue of a significant gap in communication and understanding across the range of stakeholders involved in the WCMP. It highlighted discordance between the objectives for the project outlined in the funding agreement between Environment Waikato and the Sustainable Management Fund, and the objectives WE had established for their work. It revealed that WE were not fully (if at all) cognizant of the broader project process and the contractual obligation of its work – namely to produce a community catchment management plan, in accordance with the ACAP process (Greenaway et al. 2003b).

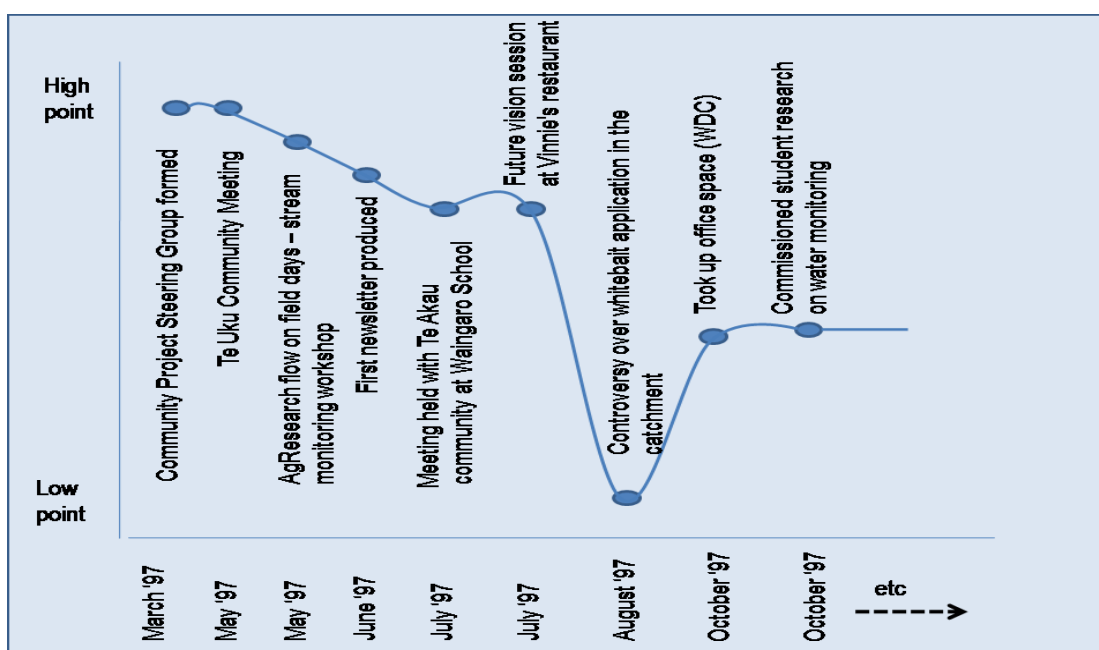**Figure 4.3 The first few months of the WE timeline** (derived from Kilvington 1998).

The wide circulation of the evaluation brought critical attention to the WCMP and to WE. Among other things the report had revealed that the project to date had not undertaken work on a community catchment management plan. This was picked up by representatives of various groups who challenged the project and WE. As one WE member commented:

That report was picked up by some people in the community who hadn't been involved up until then, who came along to the meeting…and said 'you failed you didn't make a plan'. Everybody was going 'we didn't know we were meant to have a plan!'
(Greenaway et al. 2003b, p. 31)

Subsequently, the group underwent an arduous process of developing a mission statement as well as clear protocols for the work they undertook. This involved extensive discussion and resulted in the development of a stronger group identity and clarity of purpose (ibid., p. 31). As one interviewee, in a subsequent review of the WCMP commented:

They [the challengers] *had a major impact on the mission statement…we debated hard, hard, hard, meeting after meeting, communities and what that word meant…what we thought we could offer, we were being prescriptive…it was hard work…that was maybe a second phase in the life of the organization.* (Greenaway et al. p. 31)

Ultimately WE responded to this challenge by reassessing their goals and priorities and securing funding to contract researchers to develop a draft set of environmental guidelines as the basis to a catchment management plan for Whaingaroa (Stanway & Thorpe 2002). In the same year the draft plan was released (2002), WE transformed into an incorporated society – the Whaingaroa Environment Centre (WEC), and Environment Waikato withdrew from administering funding for the group. As a centre WEC received grant funding for establishment and overheads from MfE but is still largely staffed through voluntary labour.

Overall the evaluation could be regarded as a potent intervention in the WCMP. Coming more than 2.5 years into the initiative it was the only structured learning opportunity for the programme stakeholders, that furthermore became the impetus for further reflection. The intention of the evaluation had been to provide an overview of the programme for all stakeholders and an opportunity for a formative assessment that could be used to develop the programme further. In practice the evaluation became a turning point for the programme, it identified not only points of strength and weakness, it highlighted critical gaps in communication, and failures in relationships that were essential to address for the future of the initiative. That such information emerged through what could almost be described as a crisis for the programme is a consequence of the evaluation coming as a single intervention. Building

ongoing, organized reflective practices into programme design has not been mainstream practice in CBM design or in community action initiatives in general (Pijnenburg 2002; Greenaway, et al. 2003a). Furthermore, Pijnenburg (2002, p. 298) goes as far as to say that it is this lack of critical reflection in CBM practice that places it most at risk of failure:

> *Lack of critical reflection has likewise been observed in connection to other participatory approaches. Such approaches are often presented as the only way forward with the consequent risk of imposed cookbook type interventions. Implementation was too eagerly put on a single track before practitioners had enough information….*

According to Duignan's (2003) terminology for evaluation (Table 3.1) the evaluation design for the WCMP is not easy to classify. Overall the evaluation had some of the characteristics of evaluation approaches that in Table 3.2 have been classified as having a change and development orientation, i.e. a focus on stakeholder and participants needs, and a fundamentally constructivist epistemology. However, it was intended to meet purposes of outcome and impact assessment, as well as create opportunities for formative thinking. Also, formally, it largely cast the evaluator in the conventional role of external, technical expert, while informally, my own orientation was to use the opportunity to facilitate learning. Furthermore, despite the participatory group reflection exercise, there are limits to the extent the WCMP evaluation could be regarded as participatory . Participatory evaluations involve project participants, and intended beneficiaries of the project determining the shape of the evaluation. In the WCMP this would have required the staff of Environment Waikato, members of WE and the wider Whaingaroa community to collectively agree on the goals, boundaries, measures and assessment procedures for the evaluation. At the stage the evaluation was conducted, the project participants shared an insufficiently collective vision of the project for this to be easily achieved. What this suggests is that the participatory nature of the evaluation may be limited by the extent of the participatory processes inherent in the project.

What the WCMP evaluation did do was to clarify across the range of project stakeholders what the project had been about. Evaluations can play a useful role in building understanding across stakeholders, and subsequently contribute greatly to the achievements of the programme (Greenaway et al. 2003a). This is a particularly significant role for evaluation where communication among those within an interest in the programme has been poor and where the

evaluator, in effect, can end up being the only person with an overview of the project. That the WCMP stakeholders could have developed divergent viewpoints on the intentions of the project in a comparatively short space of time is again symptomatic of lack of opportunities for the project sponsors (Environment Waikato), facilitators (Landcare Research) and core group participants (WE) to collectively assess their individual goals and expectations. It is also associated with incorrect assumptions that participants shared common ideas on core concepts such as catchment health, the critical issues in the catchment or the notion of 'sustainability'.

4.5   Summary – evaluation and social learning in the WCMP

The early experience of establishing the WCMP is illustrative of how the potential for CBM initiatives to foster the capacity for social learning among institutional and community stakeholders is let down by a 'cook book' type methodology that has insufficient awareness of its own fundamental theories of action. The WCMP began with inadequate understanding of the political sensitivities behind bringing various groups in the catchment together. Furthermore, adherence to the pre-designed approach to the programme, (based on the ACAP methodology), coupled with implementation that had no built-in monitoring, or evaluation, meant the WCMP was unable to respond to important events that challenged and shifted it from its planned trajectory.

The evaluation that was undertaken after the programme had completed its first 2.5 years of activity was based on a goals-free and participatory framework. It was a one-off event and the opportunity to undertake it was prescribed by the compliance needs of the programme funding (i.e. it had no learning intention from the point of view of the programme proponents). Nevertheless programme participants, and the wider community affected by the programme, were able to make use of the evaluation findings to cause a reassessment of the programmes directions. In a programme lacking a thought-through framework that connected theories of action to observable outcomes, and without opportunity for reflection, an 'end of the pipe' evaluation can have a dramatic effect as the only learning opportunity available to participants. However, this is only true if the evaluation information is made available to participants through either participatory events or the wide dissemination of the findings. Otherwise there is

a real risk that the evaluator becomes the most informed about the programme with no ability or mandate to take action from this.

Ultimately this kind of catastrophe-based realignment of programmes is hardly ideal. Indeed, while the WCMP evaluation helped programme participants reconfigure the programme in this instance, there is no system for programme learning further down the track. What is needed is an imbedded inquiry that is able to empower CBM initiatives with the capacity to be reflective and consequently responsive in three contiguous spaces: (i) understanding the social dynamics of the interacting stakeholders at the heart of the programme, (ii) understanding the programme's goals, and the logic of its actions; and (iii) how the programme fits alongside core concepts that underpin CBM (see Figure 4.4).
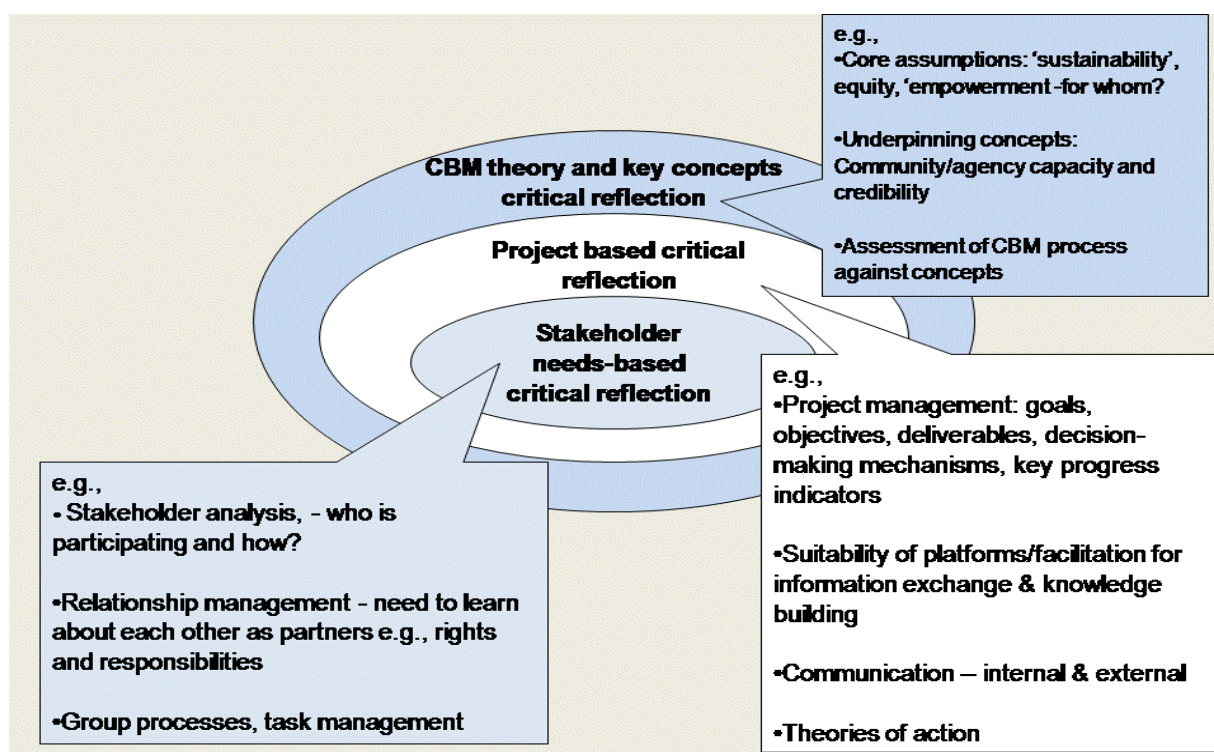

e.g.,
•Core assumptions: 'sustainability', equity, 'empowerment-for whom?

•Underpinning concepts: Community/agency capacity and credibility

•Assessment of CBM process against concepts

CBM theory and key concepts critical reflection

Project based critical reflection

Stakeholder needs-based critical reflection

e.g.,
• Stakeholder analysis, - who is participating and how?

•Relationship management - need to learn about each other as partners e.g., rights and responsibilities

•Group processes, task management

e.g.,
•Project management: goals, objectives, deliverables, decision-making mechanisms, key progress indicators

•Suitability of platforms/facilitation for information exchange & knowledge building

•Communication – internal & external

•Theories of action

Figure 4.4 Critical reflection spaces for CBM.

Firstly, stakeholders need to have some awareness of the essential relationship dynamics of the CBM initiative. This can include examining who is participating and under what circumstances, being able to understand each others' roles, rights and responsibilities, and being able to keep track of group and individual tasks and processes. Secondly, critical reflection is required at the

project level, examining aspects of project management such as goals, objectives, deliverables, decision-making mechanisms, key progress indicators; as well as the essential mechanisms of the CBM initiative, such as the suitability of platforms for information exchange and knowledge building; and communication strategies for exchange between stakeholders internal and external to the project.

Also important at the project level is a collective understanding of the theories-of-action underpinning the programme approach. These can vary between stakeholders, who may even hold contradictory views on what actions are essential and what outcomes they will contribute to. Although the common themes of CBM are well established (e.g. a belief in the need for enhanced public participation in environmental decision-making; the notion of community as a meaningful organising concept for resource management; and the importance of strengthening networks between institutions, sectors and communities), less apparent in CBM initiatives is their explicit theory-of-action. ACAP, for instance, places great emphasis on the connection between 'education, awareness raising and action-on-the-ground' (Ellsworth et al. 1997).

However, the cause-and-effect relationship between actions central to the ACAP process (such as forming a multi-stakeholder group representative of the interests of the catchment) and the anticipated outcomes (shared knowledge about the catchment) is not clearly articulated nor, as a consequence, exposed to tests on its veracity. Similarly the ACAP process, as a widespread movement, appeared to anticipate little interference from the diversity of social and physical environments in which it has been utilised, i.e. their theory-of-action assumed context was largely insignificant. What this can amount to is an unchallenged superimposition of process over context. This was the case in the WCMP where use of the ACAP approach placed an odd (but not untypical) confidence in the ability of process to override existing institutional relationships and power dynamics, which later proved problematic to the success of the WCMP.

Thirdly, it is important for programme stakeholders to have the opportunity to examine underpinning theory and ideas integral to CBM practice. This includes an examination of the variance in interpretation of core concepts such as 'sustainability', equity, or 'empowerment –

(for whom?); and assessment of the impact that critical components of CBM (revealed through the growing body of CBM theory) such as community or agency capacity and credibility may have on the programme.

The evaluation of the WCMP crossed all three critical reflection spaces. It queried stakeholder roles, articulated divergent goals and intentions for the project, enabled stakeholders to asses their group process strengths and weaknesses, and questioned fundamental theories-of-action inherent in the ACAP process. It also examined the WCMP against some fundamental principles of CBM through critiquing the processes of site selection and iwi participation. However, the limitations of the evaluation are obvious. It represented a slice in time, and the principal 'reflector' was not an ongoing member of the project. While efforts to pass on the observations were made, it could not substitute for critical reflection built in to programmes as part of ongoing monitoring and assessment which enables stakeholders to build awareness of key content and process matters. Thus the WCMP as a case story is illustrative of the need for ongoing and embedded evaluation, to build the social learning potential of the CBM initiatives.

The following three chapters explore further cases in which attempts have been made to directly apply evaluation to the task of supporting social learning in environmental management.