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# **Making Sense of Trust and Control in Local Authorities – an Hermeneutic Study**

Carolyn Wilkins

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
of Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

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# Hermeneutic Study

## Abstract

The consequences of senior managers' assumptions about trust and control not only risk undermining their organization's trust-building efforts, they also risk work taking place to strengthen control leading to a growth of distrust in the organization. This not only means the organization failing in its ambitions to build a culture of trust, it makes it harder to deliver the wider programme of change.

This is a reflexive hermeneutic study from a critical perspective exploring how senior managers make sense of the relationship between trust and control in an organizational setting. It also explores the assumptions held by senior managers about trust together with the assumptions held about control. The research covers the period from early 2009 to late 2010 and includes fieldwork carried out in a single local authority. The evidence is taken from interview conversations with ten senior managers from the local authority.

The research reveals senior managers experience a dynamic and interactive relationship between trust and control. Whilst some senior managers understand that trust-building is undermined by strengthening controls it is the unexpected assumptions about control and distrust, common to all the senior managers, that poses the greater risk to trust-building efforts. In making sense of trust it is also necessary for organizations to understand assumptions held about distrust, particularly with regard to the relationship with assumptions about control. This research highlights that organizations face a challenge, often unacknowledged or unrecognized, in the need to continually balance (and re-balance) trust, control and distrust.

The research also identifies that it is insufficient to understand senior managers as architects and implementers of control. Sense-making also needs to incorporate their reality as subjects, and sometimes even victims, of control. In considering such issues as trust and control organizations need to acknowledge that, even when common assumptions are held about the nature and value of such things, this in no way means that common views are held about the current reality in the organization. This research concludes that organizations need to move beyond 'one size fits all' approaches to change, to ones that understand employees as individuals rather than homogenous groupings and engage in dialogue that has cognizance of, and responsiveness to, local circumstances.

This research also identifies several aspects of the role of the critical, reflexive researcher that have practical implications for the role of senior manager.

**Carolyn Wilkins**

**Declaration:** This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration.

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## Why Research Into Trust and Control?

### Introduction

In 2009, the political and managerial leadership of Basset Council<sup>1</sup> had made the decision to develop and implement a council-wide improvement programme. This programme had the stated aims of building a culture of trust in the organization and of putting in place strong and effective corporate governance in order to deliver improved performance across the council whilst at the same time delivering significant efficiencies (£17m in year one) (Basset Council Improvement Programme, 2009). The impetus for the programme came from poor external inspection reports; low satisfaction scores on external satisfaction surveys; low staff trust and satisfaction scores; high levels of overspending in some departments and poor performance in many service areas. The most recent inspection report had stated:

Corporate office leadership of the organization has been weak. The Council's pace of improvement has been slow, it suffers from lack of coordination and it is often slow to get things done and it has been slow to introduce modern systems (Audit Commission, 2009:6).

It was at this point that I joined the organization as part of a new senior management team. I was struck by the scale of the proposed improvement programme, covering as it did areas such as the implementation of new staffing structures, the introduction of a range of new IT systems; changes to democratic leadership; stronger financial management systems; a new performance management framework and changes to the organizational culture to build trust (Basset Council Improvement Programme, March 2009). In my early months I was also struck by comments I heard made regarding the improvement programme – comments that seemed to suggest that for some

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<sup>1</sup> Replacement name for the local authority in which research undertaken



employees there was a tension experienced in a programme that focused on building a culture of trust at the same time as focusing on new and strengthened control systems and measures. For some, this tension was summed up by the challenge to the improvement programme: 'what's trust got to do with it?'

In this chapter, I explore how these initial impressions led to the development and design of my research project exploring the ways in which senior managers make sense of trust and control in organizations. In chapter three I consider how the research topic, together with my review of the academic literature (discussed in chapter two) as well as my own ideas and perspectives, led to my decision that undertaking a hermeneutic exploration from a critical perspective was the most appropriate approach in carrying out my research. Such an approach is focused on: "Facilitating members' own discovery of themselves and an understanding of their own taken-for-granted reality, and through this judicious use of social science theorizing enabling a deeper understanding of their own organizational behaviour" (McAuley 1985:298). My research did not solely facilitate such discovery for senior managers involved as interviewees. As Haynes (2012:87) highlights "The researcher forms part of the research project" and a reflexive approach was crucial in order to enable my own discovery and understanding of my own taken-for-granted. I also consider my decision to focus on the sense-making of senior managers in the organization together with my choice of semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate method for carrying out my research.

### **My Interest in Trust and Control**

I started my DBA soon after completing my MA in Literature in which I explored the narrative construction of masculinity – specifically within the 'Imperialist Romance' genre from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This followed almost immediately from my MPA in which I explored how organizations can be judged as ones that 'learn'. This was triggered by the inspection regime of the time which included 'learning organization' as one of

the characteristics of a good or excellent council. My research included exploration of whose view mattered most in making such a judgment.

Two things in particular were important to me following these studies. The first is subjective nature of understanding – and the extent to which individual contexts and mindsets influences such understanding; the second relates to the importance of voice – which voices are listened to in forming a judgment and whose judgement takes precedence in formal narratives, and within, an organization.

Having spent the last ten years or so in the position of Assistant Chief, Deputy Chief or Chief Executive in a number of councils I was interested in carrying out research which explored understanding from the perspective of senior managers. I focused on trust and control as they were highlighted in the narrative of the organization at the time I joined – but also because my experience working within, and with, numerous other organizations indicated a wider relevance of the topics.

As has already been discussed briefly above, at the time of shaping my research project, Basset Council was facing a number of challenges. Some of these challenges were unique to the local authority. But the work taking place to develop and deliver the improvement programme to address these challenges was also trying to take account of the wider changes facing the local government sector as a whole, including reducing resources and changing focus in policy.

In relation to public policy, the start of my career in local government in the early 1990s broadly coincided with the introduction of an approach to public services in the UK (as well as other countries) that became known as New Public Management (NPM) (Hood and Peters, 2004; Kelly, Mulgan and Muers, 2002). NPM focused on driving through a market approach to public services including initiatives such as contracting out services to the private sector, introduction of quality systems and additional external inspection regimes as well as the

introduction of the idea of the service user as a consumer (Pollitt, 1990; Concannon, 2006). This philosophy of public services has influenced much of the work I have undertaken in local authorities over the past twenty years; work that has often focused on developing strategies framed around statements of aims and objectives together with sets of key actions and interventions to be delivered to achieve them. These strategies have focused on a broad range of issues from reducing teenage pregnancies, increasing take-up of benefits, improving educational attainment and reducing levels of domestic burglary. The majority of these issues were relatively well-defined with established techniques to address them.

Criticisms of NPM have targeted the perceived focus on cost-efficiency over other considerations, as well as the focus on those things seen as easy to measure with those that were more difficult being downplayed or ignored (Kelly, Mulgan and Muers, 2002:9). As a result, performance measures were seen as focusing on outputs and efficiencies rather than more qualitative issues that mattered more to people. For example, critics of NPM viewed patients as being more interested in the level of care received than time taken to get an appointment, but waiting lists became the measure of success. Critics therefore saw performance regimes as resulting in unintended consequences, including resources being directed to the management of the performance regime itself rather than improving outcomes for people. This led to a sense of 'what matters is what can be measured' approach in affected organizations (Kelly, Mulgan and Muers, 2002).

In recent years, writers have begun to consider a second reform wave for local government, and for public services more widely, labelled as post-NPM or Governance (Christensen and Lægreid, 2007; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011; Klijn, 2012). A key difference between NPM and post-NPM is that the latter is mainly inter-organizationally oriented and seeks to enhance coordination between government and other actors (Christensen and Lægreid, 2012). Another difference is the shift to addressing more qualitative issues – focusing on areas such as wellbeing of patients and not just hospital waiting lists. The principles of

NPM have been extended to other areas, requiring public sector agencies to address and measure progress on issues such as public confidence, community cohesion and feelings of safety. For Rose (1999), such issues are characterized by the term 'ethopolitics', where:

The ways in which [particular] features of human individual and collective existence – sentiments, values, beliefs – have come to provide the “medium” within which the self-government of the autonomous individual can be connected up with the imperatives of good government [...] With ethopolitics, it is a host of previously less tangible things – the civility, the level of trust in society, the intensity of community feeling, the extent of voluntary endeavour – that become important (Rose, 1999:477).

But in discussing post-NPM, some writers highlight that these reforms do not represent a break with the past or a fundamental transformation of organizational modes. Rather they are more about rebalancing existing administrative systems (Gregory, 2006). This can be seen in policy changes in areas such as external inspection, where the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) was replaced by the (short-lived) Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). The former was focused solely on local authorities and gave a judgement based on corporate governance systems and service delivery performance. The latter was focused on local authorities working with other public sector partners and looked at delivery of outcomes in areas such as health, worklessness and community safety, as well as public perceptions, levels of confidence and perceptions of community cohesion. In my experience, issues such as these are often not clearly defined and are impacted on by a wide range of factors. This collective inspection reflected the emphasis on collaboration or inter-organizational working in public policy at the time (Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Stoker, 2006) but both types of inspection followed similar formats and resulted in inspection judgements and reports and the requirement for action plans to address key issues identified.

For me, both the CPA and CAA regimes are examples of a central discourse within NPM: “In which it is assumed without much questioning that small groups of powerful executives are able to *choose* the ‘direction’ their organization will move in, realize a ‘vision’ for it [...] select the ‘structures’ and ‘conditions’ which

will enable them to be in control and so ensure success" (Stacey, 2010:1). Indeed, this describes the prevalent approach to the management of all the local authorities in which I have worked. The key difference for the CAA approach was that this discourse was applied to much less tangibles issues than had previously been the case. Rather than strategies to improve the management of assets, local authorities (in partnership with others) were required to produce strategies to improve issues such as community cohesion and public perceptions.

For me, the development of the improvement programme in Basset Council is an example in line with Stacey's (2010) description where a group of executives are understood to choose the future direction of the organization. The improvement programme was agreed by the senior leadership (political and managerial) and set out the vision for the future operating model of the Council, together with a list of changes identified as required to achieve this future state.

In line with the wider changes being seen beyond Basset Council with the shift from NPM to post-NPM, whilst the improvement programme focused on changes to tangible things such as financial and people management systems and procedures, it also focused on changes to more intangible issues. The clearest example of this is the commitment in the improvement programme to change the culture of the organization to one of trust. The introduction of the corporate organizational development programme *Trust Basset* was a central element of the action plan to achieve this culture change. The proposal for the organizational development programme stated: "The *Trust Basset Programme* is a vital strand of the wider transformation Basset Council will deliver over the next five years. It will define and deliver a new 'way we work around here' that connects people, builds trust and energizes staff to boost performance" (*Trust Basset* proposal, 2009:6).

The *Trust Basset Programme* proposal was based on an assessment of the current position of the Council, the vision for the future state, with key actions to be taken to achieve the vision of a new way of working and a culture of trust.

There was no description or definition of trust in any of the *Trust Basset* proposals or related documentation. Instead, the stated aim of the programme was to: “Change the behaviours across all departments and services to ensure there is a One Council approach in place” (Internal Report, June 2009). But a 'one council' approach to trust was not set out.

As part of developing the *Trust Basset Programme* workshops were held for 500 staff, as well as over 120 one-to-one discussions. During a number of these meetings (which I attended) concerns were expressed about the other changes being brought in as part of the wider improvement programme. For example, a freeze panel approach had recently been introduced that meant that no spend over £300 could be made without senior level sign off. Examples of the concerns I noted included:

“I’m not trusted with my budget because we have a freeze panel to make decisions. Why?”

And:

“Everything now has to be signed off four or five times by other people – where’s the trust in that? Why am I not just held to account if things go wrong?”

Changes to trust and to control were clearly set out in the improvement programme as being central to the Council’s overall success in the future. There were strands of activity relating to each – but no discussion in the corporate documentation of any relationship between the two. But the questions being asked, and the comments being made (albeit by a small number of employees), prompted me to consider whether focusing on improving controls at the same time as aiming to build trust could lead to those very trust-building efforts being undermined. I also wondered what this meant for the relationship between trust and control in general, and how this was understood in the organization. I was interested in exploring with a wider group of employees what, if any, kind of understanding was in play in the organization concerning perceived connections

between trust and control. This interest was based on my hunch that the relationship between trust and control was not well understood in the organization and that the focus on trust-building and strengthening control risked controls undermining trust-building efforts.

This hunch led me to question whether the lack of a clear, shared understanding in the organization applied to more than just the relationship between trust and control. As discussed earlier in relation to post-NPM, for me the focus on less tangible issues such as cohesion or perceptions was often based on a weak or underdeveloped understanding of the issues themselves. In considering the understanding of the relationship between trust and control in the organization, I also began to question to what extent 'trust' and 'control' were themselves understood in an organizational setting.

In part this questioning was shaped by my interest in the ways in which people take different understandings from the same conversation, meeting or report. In my experience, people often seem to make sense of things in different ways and, like Humpty Dumpty before them, choose for themselves what words mean: "‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less’" (Carroll, 1872:100). I continue to be fascinated by the ways in which this enormous flexibility of language creates challenges of meaning, often leaving us driven to say: "That is not what I meant at all; That is not it at all" (Eliot, 1920).

My questioning was also influenced by comments being made about the *Trust Baset* programme. The Programme Manager reported he had been asked on several occasions 'What's trust got to do with this?' At an initial briefing for Councillors, one elected member asked why the name had been chose for the programme as it didn't seem to have much to do with trust.

The *Trust Baset Programme* had the stated goal of ensuring a culture of trust was in place in the organization (*Trust Baset Business Case*, January 2009). The approach taken to trust-building was the same as for the other elements of

the improvement programme and was in line with the NPM approach discussed earlier. By this, I mean that a plan had been developed that set out the requirements to develop a number of measures of trust for the Council, and a number of actions to be taken were set out. The stated purpose of these actions was to build trust. Similar plans existed for the management of other elements of the improvement programme such as Council property portfolio, finance and issues such as sickness absence. All this followed the established model for strategy development and implementation in the Council at the time. A programme management infrastructure with senior responsible officer, project manager and programme steering group was also put in place to support delivery of the programme.

I understand building trust as a different type of objective from reducing sickness absence or reducing the cost of the property portfolio. These latter two objectives have relatively clear boundaries, for example sickness absence means absence from work due to ill health. In relation to trust, the matter seems much less clearly defined. Kramer and Cook (2004:5) stated: “We know relatively little about what types of trust an organization should focus its efforts on building”. At the beginning of my research I believed that this view applied to the Council. I was curious about how, in the absence of a clear definition of trust, or understanding of the types of trust needed, the organization could succeed in building or improving levels of trust. As is discussed in chapter four, this idea of focusing on the best ‘type’ of trust is one area in which I travelled furthest from my original sense-making through my research journey.

So for me, in considering the nature and impact of the relationship between approaches to building trust and those to strengthening control, it was important to understand the concept of trust in greater detail. Without this, whilst the *Trust Barset* programme was progressing in terms of delivering against milestones, I wasn’t clear that the organization could know that in doing so it was in any way contributing towards increased and levels of trust. In addition, it was not clear from the corporate documentation that the Council had considered why trust was important to the organization, and there were no measures in place for the



benefits the trust-building programme was supposed to deliver. For me, the programme had taken trust as an inherently 'good thing' and work had progressed from there.

As mentioned earlier, I undertook a hermeneutic exploration, challenging taken for granted assumptions. These assumptions are the lens through which we then see and interpret our world. Oakley (1974:27) cautioned that: "A way of seeing is a way of not seeing". As I explore in later chapters, my interest in how employees make sense of trust and control led me to review the literature on trust and control, and to ask questions of senior managers concerning their sense-making of trust and control. But I approached this through my own lens or understanding and this, at the beginning of my research, didn't include consideration of trust and distrust as separate issues. This meant I didn't review the literature on distrust at the start of my research, or include questions on distrust in my list of areas to be explored with senior managers. As is discussed, my research journey led me to a different sense-making of trust from the one I held at the beginning, and extended the sense-making of the relationship between trust and control, to one between trust, control and distrust.

So, as discussed above, my first hunch related to the understanding of the relationship between trust and control. My second hunch followed from this. To understand the relationship between trust and control, there needs to be an understanding in place concerning trust. My second hunch was that a clear, shared understanding of trust was not in place in the Council at that time. My third hunch then followed from the first two hunches, namely that a shared understanding of control was not in place in the organization, and sense-making of the control frameworks (formal and informal) and their role was confused.

The improvement programme meant additional controls were being introduced, and existing controls were being strengthened or tightened up through further triggers and thresholds, and increased monitoring and reporting. Additional levels of authorization were introduced – for example, no press release could be issued without Assistant *and* Executive Director sign off; and freeze panels

were required for any expenditure above £300. Weekly monitoring of sickness absence, complaints, freedom of information requests and councillor queries, together with other operational processes and performance measures were required by senior management. These individual changes were taken forward as single and separate projects by different departments across the Council. For example, human resources made change to people control systems and asset management to property control systems. There was no evidence in the Council's documentation of a single or integrated control framework.

As stated, Basset Council was experiencing a period in which significant attention and effort was being placed on changes to the way the Council operated. Many of these changes were particular to the specific circumstances of the organization. But they were being actioned within a context of wider shifts in public policy and financing of the public sector. This provided me with a unique opportunity to explore the relationship between trust and control. I chose to focus my research on the sense-making of senior managers within the organization as they were the very people usually held to be the architects and implementers of change programmes and control frameworks in organizations and I was interested in exploring how they understood the two core elements of the improvement programme.

### **The contribution to knowledge and professional practice**

The purpose of my research project is to develop my own understanding and professional practice in relation to trust and control, and how these concepts are described and used in an organizational setting. At the same time I will be making a contribution to knowledge, organizational theory and wider management practice through the unique combination of the subject matter, the context in which the research took place and the approach I am taking in my research to collecting and interpreting the information gathered. The research will be made available to my employing organization and will support the further development of the organizational change programme currently underway, particularly in relation to the culture change agenda.

I believe this research will be of wider value beyond Basset Council. There is a shift from NPM, with the abolition of the Audit Commission and associated inspection regimes, but with no real replacement philosophy – other than approaches focused on financial reductions. And public sector bodies, such as local authorities, and the people within them, are increasingly rated in terms of concepts such as satisfaction, trust, respect and confidence. This is causing concern within the sector because of the perceived subjective nature of such concepts, and the uncertainty about the best way to address them, for individuals, for organizations and also in inter-organization alliances and partnerships. My research considers the views of senior managers regarding trust and control, and the relationship between them. This will be of interest because research usually looks at employees and middle managers, not senior managers.

The opportunity to help inform this debate at such a key time is an exciting one and I consider this research to be both relevant and important.

## **The structure of this thesis**

### *Chapter Two*

In this chapter I set out my consideration of the reading I undertook before I commenced my research and, as such, includes what I saw as the relevant literature at that stage in the research process. It is not a comprehensive review of the literature on trust and control – that would not be possible within the confines of this document. Instead it is a summary of what I considered to be the main issues and themes relevant to my research. It represents my sense-making of the literature – a literature which of course could be interpreted differently by different readers.

### *Chapter Three*

In this chapter I discuss the main elements of my research journey. One important aspect of the journey was my pre-understanding. This has been

considered in part in this first chapter, in terms of my experiences in the organization at the time and my interest in ideas of language. But my sense-making of the literature I read as part of this research was also an important element of my pre-understanding and this is covered separately in chapter two. The second aspect of the journey was the research project itself. By this I mean the purpose of my research as described by the research focus and areas of interest. The third aspect was my research strategy, which included my chosen research method, and the decisions I took in applying this method.

### *Chapters Four to Six*

In the next three chapters I discuss my research information. In doing so I provide a hermeneutic consideration of my three original areas of interest discussed in chapter one, namely how senior managers make sense of trust in an organizational setting; how they make sense of control in an organizational setting; and how senior managers understand the relationship (if any) between trust and control. However, in considering and interpreting my research information, (perhaps not surprisingly) a number of other areas of interest also emerged. In turn, these areas led me to consider new literature which I introduce in the discussion in these chapters.

### *Chapter Seven*

This chapter contains my overall conclusions and reflections on the research I undertook. It also sets out suggestions for further areas of study and consideration.

### Trust and Control - Literature Review

#### Introduction

As I discussed in chapter one, at the beginning of my research I had a number of hunches about the nature of understanding in Basset Council in relation to trust, control and the relationship between the two. My main focus in my research was to explore whether senior managers understood that introducing a culture change programme focused on building trust at the same time as introducing new control systems could lead to trust-building efforts being undermined – and if so, why they considered this to be so. This included developing my own understanding of trust and control and the relationship between the two. In part, this was to be achieved through a number of interview conversations with senior managers in the organization. I discuss these conversations and their contribution to my own sense-making in later chapters. Consideration of the academic literature was also vital in developing my understanding.

In this chapter I highlight the main issues I identified from my reading of the literature before I began my research. As such, the chapter contains those issues I felt to be of interest following my experience in the organization to that point in time, as well as my review of the corporate documentation such as those relating to the Basset Council Improvement Programme (2009) and Trust Basset Programme (2009). As I carried out my research, I identified additional areas of interest that required further reading. Some of these went beyond the scope of this research but indicated potential areas for further study. I note these in my concluding chapter. Where further reading was undertaken in relation to this research it is discussed in the relevant chapters.

An area of particular interest in this regard was distrust. Because my research was focused on *trust* and control, and the relationship between them, I didn't

include distrust in the scope of my review of the academic literature. The interviews I carried out led me to reconsider my view of trust, and to expand my consideration of the relationship between trust and control, to one that also included distrust (Sundaramurthy and Lewis, 2003; Falk and Kosfeld, 2004). I discuss this in more detail in chapters six and seven. In concluding this chapter, I consider the impact of my review of the academic literature on my original hunches and its influence on my decisions to focus on particular areas of interest relating to my hunches in my interview conversations.

As stated, my research was focused on understanding the relationship between trust and control. An important element of this was exploring what senior managers understood by trust and control in an organization. In this chapter, I consider key issues from the literature on trust and control separately first, followed by discussion of how their relationship is considered in the literature.

## **Trust**

In writing about the word 'love' Virginia Woolf (1931:104) said: "That is too small, too particular a name. We cannot attach the width and spread of our feelings to so small a mark". A similar thing seems to be true of the word 'trust'. Like love, trust has had a huge amount written about it. Long gone are the days in the social sciences when it could be said: "The importance of trust is often acknowledged but seldom examined and scholars tend to mention it in passing" (Bhide and Stevenson, 1992:192). There have been times during my reading when it has felt as though the main purpose of each article has been simply to find a different way to describe trust and to add an extra face to an already multi-faceted word.

Trust is now regularly identified as a significant issue in a vast array of different fields including psychology, economics, marketing, organizational sciences and politics. Trust is also considered in relation to a multitude of different issues such as inter-organizational collaboration (Vangen and Huxham, 2003); relationship marketing (Selnes, 1998); dating (Larzelere and Houston, 1980)

and patient-physician relationships (Cook et al, 2004). As well as being considered in relation to different fields and issues, a wide variety of types of trust are described in the literature. Writings on trust include such issues as the antecedents and consequences of trust (Selles, 1998); trustworthiness (McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer, 2003); the benefits of trust (Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone, 1998; Dirks and Ferrin, 2001); how trust is built (Vangen and Huxham 2003); and the downside of trust (Gargiulo and Ertug, 2006).

It is not possible or necessary within the scope of this thesis to cover all the various approaches to trust and connected ideas across the many and varied fields of study. Here I focus my consideration on some of the main ways trust is addressed in the literature that have particular relevance to my research. As my interest is in understanding trust within organizations, this consideration includes the different levels of analysis of trust – particularly at the level of the individual and the level of the institution.

### Types of Trust

There are a number of texts within the academic literature that discuss different types of trust. For example, a distinction is made in the literature between characteristic-based trust where norms of obligation and cooperation are rooted in social similarity, and institutional-based trust where trust is tied to formal societal structures, depending on individual or firm-specific attributes (Creed and Miles, 1996). Another distinction made in the literature is that between interest-based and commitment-based trust. In interest-based trust, service providers are seen as essentially self-interested but can be trusted when there are specific incentives in place for them to act in the consumers' interest. This way of thinking about trust prioritises the importance of institutions and structures in ensuring that the interests of service providers and consumers are aligned (Parker et al. 2008:17). And commitment-based trust is where we are likely to trust people when we believe they are sufficiently motivated by goodwill to help us (Parker et al 2008:17).

Writers also make a distinction between competence trust and intentional trust (Woolthuis, Hillebrand and Nooteboom, 2005). Here competence trust is trust in technical, cognitive, organizational and communicative competence, and intentional trust is trust in the intentions of a partner towards the relationship, particularly in refraining from opportunism. Intentional trust is seen as having two dimensions: trust in dedication and trust in benevolence or goodwill (Woolthuis, Hillebrand and Nooteboom, 2005). A comparison is also made regarding competence trust and goodwill trust, with goodwill trust described as: "The expectation that an other will perform in the interests of the relationship, even if it is not in the other's interest to do so" (Dekker, 2004:32). Other types of trust considered in the literature include deterrence-based trust, knowledge-based trust and identification-based trust (Shapiro, Sheppard and Cheraskin, 1992). Interestingly, Kramer and Cook (2004:5) believe: "We know relatively little about what types of trust an organization should focus its efforts on building". At the very beginning of my reading and research I felt this to be true in Basset Council. It was one of my hunches that without a clear understanding of the types of trust and a clear focus on building the one or two 'best types' it was difficult to see how the Council could succeed in building or improving levels of trust.

To complicate matters further, as well as different facets of trust, some writers also describe what I shall call here different degrees of trust. These include strong and weak forms of trust (Woolthuis, Hillebrand and Nooteboom, 2005) and thick and thin trust (Putnam, 2000). Thick trust is trust embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent and nested in wider networks. In many descriptions, trust is seen as building incrementally and is a history dependent process. Thick trust could also be described as slow trust as it takes time to establish.

Thin trust, on the other hand, is not embedded in the same way but rests implicitly on some background of shared social networks and expectations of reciprocity and encompasses people at a greater social distance from the truster (Putnam 2000). Thin trust is based on what Rotter (1980:2) calls the



'generalized other' - a person or group with whom one has not had a great deal of personal experience. Such trust might be observed in a newly-formed exchange relationship or collaboration (Meyerson, Weick and Kramer, 1996). Also included in the literature, and appearing similar to thin trust, is the notion of swift trust where: "People have to wade in on trust rather than wait while experience gradually shows who can be trusted and with what: trust must be conferred presumptively or *ex ante*" (Meyerson, Weick and Kramer, 1996:170).

The idea that earlier trust is thin, with thicker trust being built up over time, links to ideas in the literature about the ways in which trust develops. For example, Lewicki and Bunker (1996) describe trust developing gradually, growing with mutual experience in relationships over time. Zand (1972:233) presents a 'spiral reinforcement model of the dynamics of trust' which Möllering (2006) describes as follows:

High initial trust will lead the actor A to disclose information, accept influence and reduce control, which the other actor B perceives as positive signs of trustworthiness that increase B's level of trust and induce similarly open behaviour. This reinforces A's initial trust and thus leads to further trusting action, reinforcing B's trust and so forth. In other words, expectations of trust and the resultant action would be a typical example of a self-fulfilling prophecy (Möllering, 2006:366).

But for a number of writers the focus is not on types or degrees of trust, but on the conditions necessary for the development of trust (Butler, 1991; Cummings and Bromiley, 1996; Dirks and Ferrin, 2001). For example, Mishra (1996:265) defines trust as: "One party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the belief that the latter party is (a) competent, (b) open, (c) concerned, and (d) reliable". These components or dimensions of trust could also describe conditions necessary for trust to occur. Butler (1991) identifies 10 conditions of trust, namely openness, receptivity, availability, fairness, loyalty, promise, fulfilment, integrity, competence, discreteness and consistency. Even if these conditions are in place, trust does not automatically occur – there is a decision to be made about whether to trust or not. For Currall and Epstein (2003) this decision is based on three main considerations: expectations about

another's trustworthiness, track record of another's trustworthiness and social influences that do or do not favour trust.

The conditions or dimensions of trust are not always explicit in definitions of trust. For example, trust is seen as the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviours of another (Rousseau et al, 1998). These positive expectations could include any or all of the 10 conditions of trust identified by Butler (1991). Phrased another way: "Trust is the decision to rely on another party under a condition of risk" (Currall and Epstein, 2003:193). Trust is also seen as: "The expectation that a partner will not engage in opportunistic behaviour, even in the face of opportunities and incentives for opportunism, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that party" (Woolthuis, Hillebrand and Nooteboom, 2005:816). This description of trust introduces a connection with control that to be explored further through my research. But as Clark and Payne (2006) highlight, such definitions are interesting for what they *don't* say. They don't include how trust develops or deteriorates – both of which are of interest in this study with regard to the role played by control in building and/or undermining trust. The literature on this relationship is explored later in this chapter.

Given these differing approaches in the literature, in exploring senior managers' sense-making I am interested in whether they understand trust in terms of 'types' or whether they focus on the conditions necessary for trust to develop. This could have implications for professional practice following the research. Should the focus be, as Kramer and Cook (2004) suggest, on deciding which types of trust on which to focus trust-building efforts? Or instead, should the focus be on developing the conditions necessary for trust? Sako and Helper (1998:388) emphasise the latter, stating: "Before an explicit strategy of developing and maintaining trust can be considered feasible, the determinants of trust must be identified".

### Trust at different levels

In this research I am interested in the relationship between trust and organizational control within an organizational setting. This focus has the potential to include trust in and between individuals in an organization, but also the issue of trust in organizations themselves. This relates to another aspect of the literature on trust. As well as consideration of different types, forms and dimensions of trust, the literature also considers trust at different levels of analysis (Banerjee, Bowie and Pavone, 2006). The main levels considered are individual, organization and societal (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Nooteboom, 2002). Indeed, this is the way some books on the subject are structured (for example *Handbook of Trust Research*, Bachmann and Zaheer, 2006). However, before considering the different levels in more detail, I note that a number of writers also point to the confusion that exists in relation to such levels of analysis (Shapiro 1987; Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone, 1998; and Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995). Indeed, Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone (1998) stress the importance of being clear about 'who is trusting whom'. They hold that it is: "*Individuals* as members of organizations, rather than the organizations themselves, who trust" (Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone, 1998:141).

This points to a fundamental split in mainstream academic literature between the individual and the organization, where they are always treated as two distinct phenomenal levels requiring different explanations (Stacey, 2001). The connection between the two levels is usually understood as follows: "Individuals in interaction with each other together create the levels of organization and society, and those collective levels constitute the context within which individuals act" (Stacey, 2001: 14-15).

Stacey (2010) is critical of writers that he sees as treating organizations as though they were somehow separate or split off from the people that constitute them. But I did think, at the beginning of the research, that senior managers would consider organizations as entities in their own right when considering trust in an organizational setting. By this I mean I considered that senior managers would talk about trusting or being trusted by an organization. This

view was based on my experience in organizations where there has been a need to consider issues such as the relationship between citizens and the organization; satisfaction with the organization; and the future direction of the organization. Viewing the organization as an entity by focusing on ‘the Council’ was for me a regular part of the organizational narrative.

The literature on trust at the organizational level considers organizations as well as institutions and systemic trust. I include all three here. At the beginning of the research my own sense-making of trust in organizational settings meant I saw it as possible to consider trust *in* organizations, trust *within* organizations and trust *by* organizations (e.g. do staff feel trusted by the organization) – and for me it seemed likely that they were interrelated. This chimes with the literature where: “Institutions can be seen as bases, carriers and objects of trust: trust between actors can be based on institutions, trust can be institutionalized, and institutions themselves can only be effective if they are trusted” (Bachman and Zaheer, 2006:365).

For Cummings and Bromiley (1996:302) organizational trust refers to: “The degree of trust between units of an organization or between organizations.” It can also refer to the trust placed in institutions or organizations. The academic literature considers all three of these aspects. For example, Galford and Drapeau (2003) identify three different kinds of trust by people in institutions in which they are employees. These are strategic trust (i.e. the trust employees have in the people running the show); personal trust (i.e. the trust employees have in their own managers); and organizational trust (i.e. the trust people have not in any individual but in the organization itself). They see these as distinct, but linked, types of trust. Taken together they describe how: “Every time an individual manager violates the personal trust of her direct reports, for example, their organizational trust will be shaken” (Galford and Drapeau, 2003:93).

Research into trust in organizations and institutions is plentiful but has proved problematic for a range of reasons identified in the literature. These include problems with the definition of trust itself; lack of clarity in the relationship

between risk and trust; confusion between trust and its antecedents and outcomes; and a failure to consider both the trusting party and the party to be trusted (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995). And, as already discussed, the literature contains different views on whether it is possible to talk of trust in organizations themselves, or whether it is the people within them who are the trusted parties.

Giddens (1990) describes how people can have trust in institutions or, as he calls them, abstract systems. For him, if trust in systems is 'faceless' and trust in persons involves 'facework', then systems obtain a 'face' at their 'access points' which sustains or transforms 'faceless commitments'. The access points are where the person who decides whether or not to trust experiences the system by interacting with people, typically experts who represent the system. For example, patients, in part, develop trust (or not) in the medical system through their experiences with medical staff such as nurses, doctors and midwives (Bachman and Zaheer, 2006). But since 1990, such systems are increasingly accessed through virtual channels meaning less actual 'facework' takes place. Further, exploring the impact of this change on organizational trust is not directly within the scope of this research as the focus here is on trust within an organizational setting, but it may be such a shift (i.e. reduced personal contact arising from increased virtual contact) is an issue raised in relation to sense-making of trust within organizations.

The description of trust set out by Giddens (1990) suggests that in order to understand trust in organizations, it is also important to understand interpersonal trust. Grey and Garsten (2001) note that the systemic and interpersonal level of trust are interrelated and affect each other. As Shamir and Lapidot (2003) highlight:

A full understanding of systemic (organizational) trust is not possible without reference the individuals who are members of the system, and a full understanding of personal trust is not possible without understanding the systemic context in which such personal trust [...] develops (Shamir and Lapidot, 2003: 465).

A discussion of the literature on relationships between interpersonal trust and systemic or organizational trust comes later in this chapter, but first I consider the literature on trust at the level of the individual.

Many writers have focused on the individual or interpersonal level when considering trust (Sitkin and Roth, 1993; McKnight, Cummings and Chervany, 1998; Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone, 1998; Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Woolthuis, Hillebrand and Nooteboom, 2005). At this level trust can be seen as: “A psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another” (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001:451). Such trust is described by some writers as ‘dispositional’ – namely an individual trait reflecting expectation about the trustworthiness of others in general (Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone, 1998).

Both descriptions include the idea of ‘expectation’ and numerous other writers on trust emphasize trust as a belief, attitude or expectation (Sitkin and Roth, 1993; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994, Woolthuis, Hillebrand and Nooteboom, 2005).

Clark and Payne (2006) highlight that a number of trust studies have focused on trying to identify and establish a set of characteristics that may be identified as influencing an individual’s trusting behaviour. Core to these is the notion: “That the development of trust is directly related to the individual’s perceptions concerning the trustworthiness of others, and that it is appropriate to view trust as resulting from an individual’s perceptions of the characteristics or qualities of specific others, groups or systems to be trusted” (Clark and Payne, 2006:1162). For example, Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) propose that subordinates’ trust in their leader depends on the leader’s perceived levels of ability, benevolence and integrity. In their model ability relates to skills, competencies and characteristics which enable a party to have influence within some specific domain; benevolence is the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to good to the trustor, and integrity means the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable (Mayer, David and Schoorman, 1995). Tomlinson

and Mayer (2009) point out that these three factors of trustworthiness will lead to trust.

Tomlinson and Mayer (2009) also highlight that the model of trust proposed by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) contains a feedback loop from the outcome of risk-taking back to the three trustworthiness factors. "If the outcomes are positive, prior beliefs about trustworthiness are reinforced, and trust will either be maintained or incrementally strengthened. If the outcomes are negative, some combination of ability, benevolence and integrity will be re-evaluated and possibly scaled back, leading to a lowered level of trust" (Tomlinson and Mayer, 2009:86). This feedback loop describes how trust evolves over time, but also shows how there may be sudden changes to trust following negative outcomes. A brief consideration of other descriptions of conditions of trust has been included earlier in this chapter (Butler, 1991; Mishra, 1996 and Currall and Epstein, 2003).

In addition to this, some writers discuss the general willingness of a person to trust others. For example, Shamir and Lapidot (2003:464) indicate that: "Trust building and erosion have been attributed to cognitive and affective processes that occur at the individual level, stemming from the characteristics and behaviours of the trustee". For example, Rotter (1967: 651) defined interpersonal trust as: "An expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon." Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) discuss such expectancy as being akin to a personality trait that is carried from one situation to others. They identify the propensity to trust as a trait that leads to a generalized expectation about the trustworthiness of others. Tomlinson and Mayer (2009) cite blind trust as an extreme example of this where people repeatedly trust in situations where other people would assess trust as unwise. Equally some people are unwilling to trust even in situations where most other people would see trust as appropriate.

Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily (2003) also acknowledge that trust in individuals is understood as being affected by individual characteristics and interpersonal

interactions. But for them trust is also affected by institutional environments. This again highlights the connection made by a number of writers between interpersonal and systemic trust. This is considered further in the following section.

According to Luhmann (1979), trust cannot be fully understood and studied exclusively on either the psychological level or on the institutional level, because it so thoroughly permeates both. For this reason, Lewis and Weigert (1985:974) hold that: “An adequate sociological theory of trust must offer a conceptualization of trust that *bridges* the interpersonal and the systemic levels of analysis, rather than dividing them into separate domains with different definitions and empirical methodologies for different social science disciplines”.

When discussing trust within organizations it would seem at first we can focus simply on interpersonal trust. But the reality within organizations is that structures, processes and culture all shape the behaviour of an organization's members and influence their interactions. This means that it is not easy to be clear about the motives and intentions behind individual behaviour. The effects of organizational context on individual behaviour need to be considered when assessing the trustworthiness of individual organizational members (Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily, 2003). For Shamir and Lapidot (2003) considering trust in formal leaders provides a good opportunity to study the interplay between systemic and interpersonal trust. They argue that this is because: “Systemic trust might affect trust in particular leaders, and trust in particular leaders might influence systemic trust” (Shamir and Lapidot, 2003: 465).

This inter-relationship results from so-called ‘social information processes’. For Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) these are where individual perceptions and attitudes are influenced by information obtained from the person's immediate social environment, which provides cues that individuals use to construct and interpret work related objects and events. Such social influences impact in various ways, including the structuring of people's attention processes so aspects of the environment are more or less salient, as well as affecting attitudes through the



interpretation of environmental cues and providing their constructed meanings of events (Shamir and Lapidot, 2003).

The connection between interpersonal and organizational trust is also understood in the literature as based on institutionalizing processes (Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone, 1998). For example, Parker et al. (2008) states that:

By creating frameworks of rules and values, institutions are often able to bestow some degree of trustworthiness on their staff – we trust someone from the Council because we think their membership of the organization will lead them to behave in a broadly predictable way at a time when we need to delegate a task to them (Parker et al. 2008:17).

They go on to suggest that institutions cannot be trusted *per se*, but that they can create trustworthy rules, values and frameworks that help individuals form trusting relationships with each other within the organizational context (Parker et al, 2008). This connects the idea of trust to ideas of control which will be explored later in this chapter.

An example of organizational context affecting behaviour of individuals in organizations is through roles (Shapiro, 1987). Within an organization Guitot (1977:692) makes the distinction between ‘qua performer’ and ‘qua person’ to illustrate how individuals may perceive each other. For him, ‘qua performer’ is based on observing behaviour as role performance, and ‘qua person’ views behaviours having their origin in the individual’s personality. Therefore how someone acts within a role may be understood as different to how they might act when outside that role. Since roles can therefore be seen to affect behaviour there is reason to believe that roles may influence the degree of trust in agents performing roles. Ring and Van de Ven (1994) highlight:

The ways in which individuals make attributions about other’s intentions and behaviours will vary significantly if the other is viewed as acting within a “role” as opposed to “qua persona”. This means that we may trust people as individuals but may not feel able to trust them when they are acting within their organizational roles and as agents for their organization (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994:96).

For Shamir and Lapidot (2003) there is a third level of trust between the systemic and interpersonal level of trust – this is the group level. They hold that groups may play an important role in the formation of trust in organizations. They illustrate this through consideration of subordinates' trust in a leader where such trust is based on the subordinates' trust in the system that the leader represents as well as on the personal qualities and interpersonal behaviour of the leader. In addition, when subordinates are embedded in teams, their trust in the leader may be based on collective judgements and evaluations. And subordinate teams may also base their trust in the leader on collective considerations relating to the system's values, norms and identity (Shamir and Lapidot, 2003).

This consideration of the literature led me to include whether senior managers' understanding of trust in an organizational context was focused on individuals, groups or organizations – or some combination of the three – as an area to explore within my interview conversations. I was interested to explore whether collective or shared understandings of trust were in place, or whether each individual spoken to had their own unique perspective. The suggested focus on leaders in order to understand the interplay between interpersonal and organizational trust (Shamir and Lapidot, 2003) led me to consider which employees to include in my research study. Whilst I am not specifically looking at trust in leaders here, I considered that exploring sense-making of trust with members of the senior leadership team would be of unique interest. It would be an opportunity to explore ideas and understanding of trust with the very group of employees in the organization who are themselves often the focus of trust decisions, discussions and writings.

There is a third level at which trust is considered within the literature – and that is trust at the level of society. Writers such as Putnam (2000) are clear that social trust is not trust in government or other social institutions - it is trust in other people. Social trust is a: "Standing decision to give most people – even those whom one does not know from direct experience – the benefit of the doubt" (Rahn and Transue 1998:545). As Sheppard and Sherman (1998:422)

point out: “Risk is at the heart of how people do and should think about trust but that risk varies distinctly as the form of a relationship varies.” It is important for social or generalized trust as this is: “Trust towards people on whom the trusting part has no direct information” (Bjørnskov, 2006:2)

Cole, Schaninger and Harris (2002) note Blau’s (1968) discussion on the creation of trust as a major function of social exchange, recognizing it is as a slow type of trust that starts with minor transactions and builds as trustworthiness is demonstrated. Trust at the level of society is also known as *impersonal trust* (Shapiro, 1987). For her, such trust arises when:

Social-control measures derived from social ties and direct contact between principal and agent are unavailable, when faceless and readily interchangeable individual or organizational agents exercise considerable delegated power and privilege on behalf of principals who can neither specify, scrutinize, evaluate or constrain their performance (Shapiro, 1987:634).

As my research is focused on exploring trust within an organizational setting, I have not further considered the literature of societal trust here.

### The Benefits of Trust

As discussed in chapter one, it was not clear from the corporate documentation that the Council had considered why trust was important to the organization, and there were no measures in place for the benefits the trust-building programme was supposed to deliver. In the literature there are a broad range of benefits of trust identified. These include those summarised below, where trust is seen as:

- improving performance (Dirks and Ferrin 2001; Sako and Helper, 1998);
- reducing uncertainty (Lane and Bachmann, 1996);
- reducing the complexity of the event and gain positive expectations (Luhmann, 1979);
- reducing transaction costs by reducing opportunistic behaviour as well as the inclination to guard against such behaviour (Rousseau et al 1998; Bromiley and Cummings 1995; Dore 1983; John 1984);

- allowing people to economize on information processing and safeguarding behaviours (McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer, 2003; McAllister, 1995);
- inducing desirable behaviour (Madhok, 1995);
- increasing satisfaction (Garguilo and Ertug, 2006);
- improving cooperation (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995; Ring and Van de Ven, 1992); and
- reducing the need for formal control systems (Van der Meer-Kooistra and Vosselman, 2000).

Trust is seen as achieving these benefits either through direct (or main) effect on matters such as communication, performance and satisfaction (McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer, 2003) or through moderating effects in which trust provides the conditions under which improved performance and satisfaction are likely to occur (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001).

In considering the benefits of trust, many other concepts are referred to. This can lead to confusion if there is not a clear distinction among factors that contribute to trust, trust itself and outcomes of trust. For example, Parker et al (2008) state that satisfaction (with local government) is a concept closely related to that of trust. But they do not expand on this relationship in any way. The research on trust in this regard seems confusing with writers such as Gargiulo and Ertug (2006:172) stating: “The relationship between trust and satisfaction is perhaps the most robustly established finding in research on the *consequences* of trust”. And writers such as Selnes (1995:308) “We find satisfaction as a strong *antecedent* of trust”. (Note: author’s italics). It may of course be the case that satisfaction is both a consequence and an antecedent of trust. Sako and Helper (1998:388) point to the fact that: “While theoretical work on the link between trust and performance abounds, empirical work on the link between trust and performance has been rare.

As already discussed, the *Trust Barset* Programme is an element of a wider improvement programme aimed at delivering significant improvements across the Council. Therefore, whilst not explicitly stated, it would seem to be

reasonable to conclude that trust-building efforts were viewed by the architects of the programme as (at least in part) having a positive impact on performance. Given this lack of specificity in the organization, and the wide range of benefits of trust identified in the literature, I was interested in exploring senior managers' views of the benefits of trust in the interview conversations.

### The Downside of Trust

But the literature does not just consider benefits of trust. A number of writers highlight that, compared to identifying the benefits, comparatively little is written about the downside of trust (Garguilo and Ertug, 2006; Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone, 1998; and McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer, 2003) – but it is addressed. Nooteboom, Berger, and Noorderhaven (1997) highlight that trust carries the risk of betrayal. This is in part because: “Trust permits action to unfold in situations in which one party must act before they know that the other will play their part” (Stenning, Shearing and Addario, 1986:5). Garguilo and Ertug (2006) highlight a number of consequences from what they see as too much trust including feeling unnecessary obligations that go beyond what is required in the situation; complacency where inertia can trap people into underperformance and blind faith where: “Trust may even provide the occasion for malfeasance and inequity on a scale larger than if trust were absent” (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994:110). Currall and Epstein (2003) identify three evolutionary phases of trust: building trust, maintaining trust and destroying trust. They highlight that: “Once trust is built, we may actively reject evidence suggesting that a party whom we trust is actually untrustworthy” (Currall and Epstein, 2003:197).

It is not necessarily a downside, but something that is not covered in much of the literature is the fact that there is a cost to trust-building. Some writers highlight that the creation of trust is not a cost-free exercise (Long and Sitkin; 2006; McEvily and Zaheer, 2006). In fact, Bachmann (2006) points to the fact that in some situations trust seems too costly to establish in the first place.

Alongside my hunch that there was not a clear, shared understanding of trust in play in the organization, at the beginning of my research I also held the view

that no clear, shared understanding of control existed in the organization, and that the sense-making of the control frameworks (formal and informal) and their role was confused. Without such an understanding I was unclear as to how the impact of control on trust building efforts could be understood and addressed. I first needed to develop my own understanding of control and set out below are the key relevant issues I have identified from the literature on control in organizations.

## **Control**

As organizations grow in size and complexity, the challenge in ensuring all organizational members are contributing to the organizational purpose and objectives also grows. Therefore it is probably not surprising that traditional research describes control as one of the four primary functions of management, with the others being organizing, planning and coordination (Cardinal, Sitkin and Long (2010). Control and control systems are fundamental to most organizations and have been a central element of study with organization and management research (Ouchi, 1980; Scott 1992; Das and Teng, 1998; Thompson and McHugh 2002). Indeed, for some: “Control is at once the essential problem of management and organisation and the implicit focus of much of organisation studies” (Pfeffer 1997:100).

### Formal control

In the literature, control is generally viewed: “As a process of regulation and monitoring for the achievement of organizational goals” (Das and Teng, 2001:258). Descriptions and definitions often also include who or what is being regulated and/or monitored, for example where controls ensures alignment of: “Subunits and individuals with the objectives of the organization” (Inkpen and Currall, 2004:588). The literature considers control in various ways. Examples include the different elements or variables of control (Kirsch, 2004; Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2010); the different types of control mechanisms (Ouchi, 1979; Piccoli and Ives, 2003; Gomez and Sanchez, 2005), as well as approaches to

balancing (and rebalancing) control systems (Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2004) and the costs of control to organizations (Gulati and Singh, 1998; Miller, 2004).

There is also a recognition in the literature that different organizational forms may require different forms of, or strategies for, control, and that changes to an organization's form may also have implications for the control systems utilised (Ogbonna and Harris, 1998; Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2004). But as Das and Teng (1998:493) point out: "Regardless of the focus, firms use control to make the attainment of organizational goals more predictable, which ensures more certain outcomes, and it is in this sense that effective control is believed to help generate a sense of confidence".

Cardinal, Sitkin and Long (2010:56) define organizational control as: "Any process whereby managers direct attention, motivate, and encourage organizational members to act in ways desirable to achieve the organization's objectives". Such a definition is helpful in that it introduces the role of the manager into control. According to Ouchi (1978:173): "It is up to the higher-level managers to determine whether or not the objectives have been met and, if not, to take the appropriate steps. This is the process of control." He goes further in emphasizing the role of senior managers in control, highlighting:

In a hierarchical organization, the top-level managers must not only arrange a mechanisms for controlling their immediate subordinates, they must also arrange a mechanism whereby their subordinates are sure to maintain control over the level below them and so on to successively lower levels (Ouchi, 1978:173).

The hierarchical aspect to control is a significant issue in bureaucratic organizations such as Barset Council. As Hood (1995:207) highlights: "Control over public administration and bureaucracy is still overwhelmingly equated with hierarchical overseers". This continues to be the case even though the last few decades have seen shifts in organizations as restructuring through downsizing and delayering takes place, as well as moves away from collective and joint regulation (Thompson and McHugh 2002). In my experience, the basic control mechanisms in place in the organization have remained relatively stable. The

focus has been on strengthening them and expanding them to additional areas rather than exploring new types or approaches to control.

But, as Johnson and Gill (1993) point out, the processes by which managers try to regulate members' activities always include the potential for conflict.

Because people do not necessarily share the same goals in their involvement with an organization there will inevitably be some degree of conflict, as different groups pursue different objectives and resist others' attempts to modify that behaviour (Johnson and Gill 1993:133).

This introduces the connection between power and control as: "When we talk of 'being in control' this implies the successful end-result of applying power" (Storey, 1983:54). Long (2010:365) highlights that: "Traditional control theory focuses primarily on how managers exercise their power through applications of managerial controls". Such a view suggests that power is only with managers but the idea of conflict or resistance suggests that power exists throughout the organization. For writers such as Delbridge (2010):

Power is seen as relational – and both disciplinary and enabling – rather than as the property of sovereign authority to be wielded over the oppressed [...] all organizational actors as embedded in power/knowledge networks which enable and discipline through discursive practices in mutable ways over time (Delbridge, 2010:84).

I have already discussed how the review of trust literature led me to consider focusing my research on senior managers within the organization. This idea was strengthened by the hierarchical nature of control (and therefore power) addressed in the academic literature. I was interested in exploring the views of those employees in the organization traditionally viewed as being 'in control' or as having power within the hierarchy and therefore the organization.

A frequent distinction is made in the literature between formal control and informal (social) control (Ouchi 1977, 1980; Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2004; Inkpen and Currall, 2004; Sitkin, Sutcliffe and Schroeder 1994; Das and Teng, 2001). Formal controls are described as predictable, regular, involve explicit information transfers, and are codified in rules, procedures and regulations"



(Inkpen and Currall, 2004:590). Such controls are therefore those which are officially sanctioned and can be seen as part of the dominant discourse in the organization. They include elements such as input control to manage resources acquired by the organization; behaviour control to manage task activities that transform inputs to outputs; and output controls that manage product and service outcomes and regulate results or outcomes. Examples of formal control approaches used include techniques such as Management By Objectives (MBO), often used to “Establish the kind of ‘top-down’ control advocated by the classical theorists [...] to impose a mechanistic system of goals and objectives on an organization. These are then used to control the direction in which managers and employees take the organization” (Morgan, 2006:21). This is the theory but I have seen numerous situations where managers and employees continue to take their own direction then retrofit their activities to align with the corporate or departmental objectives.

Other examples of formal controls used in organizations include role or job descriptions, contracts, financial regulations and schemes of delegations. But the reality here is that even formal control processes are not completely objective. Alvesson and Willmott’s (2002) critique writings on control by highlighting that:

Conceptualizations of organizational control have tended to emphasize its impersonal and behavioural features with scant regard for how meaning, culture or ideology are articulated by and implicated in structural configurations of control [...] Yet, the coordinating and controlling of organizational practices is hardly restricted to the design and implementation of impersonal, generally bureaucratic, mechanisms (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002:19).

However, it has been pointed out that: “More controls [control mechanisms] do not necessarily give more control, but the reasons why this occur are not clear” (Merchant, 1984:2). One explanation of this phenomenon is provided by the idea of the ‘control paradox’ (Miller, 2004). This is where the strict enforcement of rules heightens awareness in the workforce of the *minimum* effort they could offer without being fired. But less voluntary compliance then results in a tightening of the rules and increased monitoring by hierarchical superiors, which in turn results in even less willing compliance. I found this point particularly

interesting given the emphasis on controls within the organization as a major element of the Improvement Programme. Existing controls were being strengthened and extra controls introduced in order to drive improvements in performance. I was intrigued to see whether this idea was surfaced in senior managers' sense-making of control and what they saw as the consequences of increased control in relation to performance as well as to trust. The literature also contains another type of control paradox, the paradox of control, where managers are both 'in control' and 'not in control' at the same time (Streatfield, 2001). For Streatfield (2001) being in control is an illusion, generated through a number of tactics that include measuring things, setting targets and goals as well as patterning behaviours that are seen as leading to success.

### Informal Control

The other main form of control described in the literature is informal control, which is defined as being comprised of: "Unwritten, unofficial values, norms, shared values, and beliefs that guide employee actions and behaviors – less objective, un-codified forms of control" (Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2004: 414). This can be extended to include social (or clan) controls. Social control (or clan control) focuses on establishing a common culture and values in order to reduce the differences in goal preferences of organizational members (Ouchi, 1980; Wilkins and Ouchi, 1983 and Das and Teng, 2001). Ghoshal and Moran (1996:25) extend this by highlighting that: "In its broader and more far-reaching form, its users seek to create normative integration by inducing individuals to internalize the values and goals of the organization". The main difference here from formal control is that neither the behaviour nor the outcome is set out in the beginning. This is an evolutionary process rather than a directive one where: "Through a socialization and consensus-making process, members become more committed to the organization, and shared views serve to influence strongly the behaviour of individuals" (Das and Teng 2001:262).

Das and Teng (1998:507) highlight that: "Unlike in formal control, the central element of social control is organizational culture". Culture is, of course, like trust, a term with a huge body of literature around it covering a wide range of

perspectives and a myriad of different aspects. I consider it here in relation to organizations and control. Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily (2003:427) define culture in relation to organizations as: “A set of values, beliefs, assumptions and symbols”. Jones, (1983:454) emphasises that: “The process of learning the organizational culture involves learning the expectations of others and how to act in terms of context-specific assumptions”. This definition of culture aligns with the description of informal control above, particularly the emphasis on values and beliefs. For Das and Teng (1998: 507): “Organizational culture provides a sense of control, for it unifies the way organizational members process information and react to the environment, which facilitates the achievement of a higher level of behavioural predictability”.

I was interested in exploring whether senior managers understood the culture change programme then being delivered in the organization could be, or was being, seen as an informal control mechanism to ensure that organizational culture was part of the wider system of organizational control. This is, effectively, formalizing control over what is seen in the literature as part of the informal control processes.

The culture change programme, *Trust Barset*, was introduced in 2009 and was focused on the notion of values-based leadership and the need for personal and organizational change to take place. The purpose of the *Trust Barset* programme was to clarify and then put in place ‘the way we do things around here.’ It was focused on making: “Deep and lasting changes to the Council’s culture and behaviour so they truly support the [Barset] of the future” (Trust Barset Business Case, 2009).

This programme was part of a wider Improvement Programme that also included delivering efficiencies, service improvements and improving how resources were managed. This included the introduction of a range of ICT systems to support management of finances, people and performance as well as a programme management approach for the Council.

Barset Council is not the only council (indeed, not the only organization) in which senior leadership has introduced a programme aimed at changing the existing culture to a desired future state. A Google search of 'council culture change programme' returned 3,060,000 results (UK pages on 2 February 2010) with seven different local authorities named on the first two pages alone. And a significant theme in organizational change relates to management attempts to direct and control culture (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008). In addition, culture change and the management of culture are often core elements of management courses and qualifications. But the view that culture can be managed or controlled is not without its challenges (Anthony, 1990; Ogbonna and Harris, 1998; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003.).

Writers point to three main positions regarding culture and control. The first is that culture is an organizational variable and as such, like all other variables, is subject to the control of management. The second position, from a more critical perspective, holds that whilst planned cultural change is difficult, cultural processes in organizations may be influenced by certain conditions – but this is reasonably rare. And the final position, also from a critical perspective, is that culture cannot be consciously changed but natural changes in culture happen relatively often (Ogbonna and Harris, 1998; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003).

The other aspect to the consideration of culture and control is the notion of 'cultural control' within organizations. In this sense, in order to accomplish the goals of the organization, cultural control needs to be exerted, i.e. culture is part of the system of control within an organization (Ogbonna and Harris, 1998).

This control role is often exercised by the mechanism of developing a new set of organizational values and behaviours. This flows from the belief that:

"Individuals embedded in strong organizational cultures will be influenced to a greater extent by internalized values and goals than by formal rules and procedures in determining appropriate actions for given situations" (Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily 2003:247). In such situations, socialization is seen as serving as an effective control mechanism because organizational members come to accept the organization's goals as their own. Such social controls are

therefore linked to internal controls – a mode that does not rely on external rewards or sanctions or rule following (Thompson and McHugh, 2002). Here corporate values are principally a mean of legitimate objective social control (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

For Johnson and Gill (1993), the main criticism of cultural control is it is not possible to manage and control cultures closely by their very nature. For them: “The more extreme and mechanistic prescriptions for managing cultures are, then, often the more manipulative, coercive and patronizing and these are likely to be counterproductive in the long term” (Johnson and Gill, 1993: 108).

The Trust Barset programme could be seen as an attempt to achieve a socialization process where:

Socialization serves as an effective control mechanism because organizational members come to accept the organization’s goals as their own. As a result, the inclination of members of a clan organization to act in ways consistent with the goals and values of the organization in the absence of close monitoring (Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily 2003:247).

As Ray (1986:294) points out: “Such a strategy of control implies that the top management team aims to have individuals possess direct ties to the values and goals of the dominant *elites* in order to activate the emotion and sentiment which might lead to devotion, loyalty and commitment to the company”. And Deetz (1995:87) states: “The modern business of management is often managing the “inside” – the hopes, fears and aspirations – of workers, rather than their behaviour directly”. In Barset Council over 400 employees were involved in the process of developing new organizational values and behaviours which then formed the basis of corporate processes such as appraisal and induction, as well as the focus of training and development programmes. The process involved employees identifying what they wanted their workplace to be like, as well as what they did not want.

Through my research with employees from the top management team in the organization, I was interested to explore how they viewed the culture-change

programme and whether they saw it as part of a wider strategy of control or the control framework.

But there is a growing literature that challenges this mechanistic view of managing culture. Four types of response have been documented to attempts to ensure values of employees are aligned with the espoused values of organizations. These are:

- rejection;
- re-invention – recycling of existing values and present them as aligned with the espoused values of the organization;
- re-interpretation – translation which results in intentional or unintentional modification of espoused values; and
- re-orientation – a seemingly unquestioned adoption of espoused values (Ogbonna and Harris, 1998:285)

The ‘seemingly unquestioned’ acceptance is important, because of course it is not really possible to know whether what is being seen is actually a real willingness to change, resigned compliance or ‘instrumental value compliance’ where some people accept the values in order to obtain some perceived return, such as furthering their careers (Ogbonna and Harris, 1998).

Although control has a long history within organizations, it is not without challenges. Cardinal, Sitkin and Long (2010) identify four problems that have made it difficult to operationalize control precisely and consistently. These are lack of conceptual consensus, fragmentation, singularity and lack of attention to control development. They highlight that: “Researchers who study individual control mechanisms typically study only formal control [...] and generally they ignore the overall systems of multiple controls within which those controls are operationalized” (Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2010:55). For them, research to date has not reflected the complexity and multi-faceted nature of control.

In my experience, complex organizations such as local authorities do not rely on a single approach to control, and this also is true in Basset Council. A whole range of formal and informal control processes are in play across the organization. This therefore raises the issue of balance and whether the 'right mix' of formal and informal controls are in place. Cardinal, Sitkin and Long (2004) point to the consensus in the literature about the importance of such a balance of control systems. For them, balance is: "A state where an organization exhibits a harmonious use of multiple forms of control" (Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2004:412). However, they also stress how difficult it is for managers to maintain such a balance – or even to know what such a balance should look like!

There seems to be a great deal of literature on types of control and control systems, mechanisms and strategies, but the literature is much less rich regarding the balance of control – and the implications of not maintaining an appropriate balance across time, and across various changes (internal and external). The consideration of the relationship between trust and control set out in the following section touches on the issue of balance to some extent.

### **Relationship Between Trust and Control**

Hassan and Vosselman (2010) highlight that: "Both control and trust have been seen as instrumental in absorbing uncertainty and behavioural risks" (p.33). Trust alone is not enough to guarantee trustworthy behaviour; indeed trust can expose the trustor to the risk of opportunism and malfeasance (Granovetter, 1985; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). And sometimes trust-building is simply too expensive to undertake (Bachmann, 2006) although control mechanisms also have a cost (Das and Teng, 1998) and it is unlikely that every contingency can be covered or everything required articulated within a contract or specification.

Because of these challenges, there is much in the literature about the relationship between trust and control in organizations, but as Das and Teng (1998) highlight, there is little consensus about the nature of the relationship.

The main perspectives in the literature see the relationship between trust and control as either complementary or substitutive (Dekker, 2004).

In terms of the latter, Knights et al. (2001) highlight the long tradition of management thought that conceptualizes trust and control as opposing alternatives. This substitution perspective is based on an inverse relationship between trust and control which implies that less control leads to more trust and vice versa (Hassan and Vossleman, 2010). One example of this is where control systems are seen as getting in the way and undermining trust (Deutsch, 1962). For Jagd (2010:263): "Trust and control are considered to be alternative strategies for arriving at stable organizational orders".

Costa (2003) showed that trust in work teams was negatively related to monitoring colleagues. A further example of the inverse relationship between trust and control is where trust is on the decline. In such situations: "People are increasingly unwilling to take risks, demand greater protection against the possibility of betrayal, and increasingly insist on costly sanctioning mechanisms to defend their interests" (Kramer and Tyler, 1996:4). Equally, trust and control are substitutable where the presence of trust may negate the need for certain controls.

The explanation provided for this in the literature centres on risk. Risk creates the opportunity for trust, but increased control impacts on levels of risk and in the absence of risk, trust is not needed and cannot grow (Rousseau et al, 1998). Because control systems means people have to operate in certain ways with either limited or no discretion, forming a view on whether they are trustworthy or not is impossible because people cannot assess their motives or intentions outside the role in which they operate (Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily 2003). As Shapiro (1987:651) states: "Restricting discretion simultaneously lessens the extent to which it can be abused and sabotages the very purpose of trust".



The complementary perspective is where trust and control are seen as mutually reinforcing and both may contribute to the level of cooperation in a relationship. Das and Teng (2001:263) state that: "Proper control mechanisms may [...] increase trust, because objective rules and clear measures help to institute a 'track record' for people who do their job well". Parker et al (2008:17) describe such control mechanisms as: "Trustworthy rules, values and frameworks that help individuals form trusting relationships with each other".

The literature also contains a third, more contingent view of the relationship between trust and control. This recognises that the effects of control on trust may not be the same across all situations and may depend on the type of control being considered (Das and Teng, 2001). According to Jagd (2010:263): "Trust and control is either complementary or substitutive depending on the type of control. Formal control is undermining trust, indicating that trust and control are substitutes. Social control, on the other hand, is complementing trust". Das and Teng (1998) identified what they described as a more 'supplementary' relationship where a higher level of trust does not automatically dictate a lowering of the control level and vice versa. "This means that the two can be employed simultaneously in full awareness of the role and efficacy of each other" (Das and Teng, 1998:496).

DeMan and Roijakkers (2009:78) state that we may expect: "Control to be a more valid option in a stable environment with low performance risk, whereas trust is required in a turbulent environment with high performance risk". For Jagd (2010), in the low/low risk quadrant trust and control are substitutes because low relational risk makes it possible to use trust whilst low performance risk makes it possible to use control. In the high/high risk quadrant, trust and control must be combined in a complex governance structure because of the demanding environment of both high relational and high performance risks.

Jagd (2010:267) identifies a process perspective on the relationship between trust and control that implies that: "Balancing trust and control is an ongoing process of balancing and rebalancing. The implication for management is that the problem of balancing trust and control becomes an issue that deserve

ongoing attention”. This is core to my research in trying to understand implications and consequences from making changes to trust and control at the same time in an organization.

## **Conclusion**

The literature has a lot to say about trust and control. The literature also contains an on-going debate concerning the nature of the relationship between trust and control in organizations. The richness of material on these issues provides a fascinating context for my research, particularly when taken with the rapid pace of change within the organization in which the research will take place.

My first hunch was that the relationship between trust and control was not well understood in the organization and that the focus on building trust at the same time as increasing and strengthening control risked trust-building efforts being undermined. This hunch is in line with the on-going debate in the literature about the nature of the relationship between trust and control. But the review of this literature also helped develop alternative views of the relationship – for example where control supports the development of trust. This meant that it was important to be open in enquiring about the relationship in the interviews, not just focus on control undermining trust.

At the beginning of my research I was of the view that there was not a clear or shared understanding of trust in place in the organization. Without this, it was difficult to see how the organization could decide on the best type or types of trust on which to focus its trust building efforts. It was also difficult to see how, without such understanding of trust, any potential impact from strengthening control could be understood and addressed.

From my review of the literature, I understand that trust remains difficult to pin down precisely. There are many forms, types and dimensions of trust discussed in the literature. Following my review, I remained interested in exploring whether

senior managers identify types of trust in their sense-making. But in addition, I now wished to extend this to explore any ideas senior managers may have about conditions or determinants of trust in the organization. Such understandings could have implications for the focus of trust building efforts. For example, focus could be on developing a particular type or types of trust or ensuring certain conditions for trust are in place in the organization.

The debate in the literature concerning the level at which it makes sense to talk of trust led me to extend my areas of interest in sense-making of trust from types or conditions. Following consideration of this debate, I was also interested to explore whether senior managers made sense of trust at the level of individual, group or organization. Building on the consideration of social information processes (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978) I was also interested in exploring whether collective understandings of trust were present or whether each individual spoken to had a unique perspective.

As discussed earlier, the suggested focus on leaders in order to understand the interplay between interpersonal and organizational trust (Shamir and Lapidot, 2003) led me to consider which employees to include in my research study. Exploring the sense-making of trust with members of the senior leadership team would provide a unique opportunity to explore ideas and understanding of trust with the very people in the organization who are themselves often the focus of trust decisions, discussions and writings. This idea was strengthened by the hierarchical nature of control (and therefore power) addressed in the academic literature. I was interested in exploring the views of those employees in the organization traditionally viewed as being 'in control' or as having power within the hierarchy and, therefore, the organization.

My final hunch concerned control. My view before I started the research was that no clear, shared understanding of control existed in the organization, and that the sense-making of the control frameworks (formal and informal) and their role within the organization was confused. Without such an understanding I was

unclear as to how the impact of control on trust building efforts could be understood and addressed

The literature on control also pointed to the need for a more sophisticated understanding of control and its multi-faceted nature. In addition, the literature contained two types of control paradox. The first related to controls highlighting minimum required effort and subsequent withdrawal of voluntary compliance, triggering further controls and monitoring and further withdrawal (Miller, 2004). I was interested in exploring whether senior managers would describe such consequences from the increase in, and strengthening of, controls in the organization. The second control paradox related to managers both being 'in control' and 'not in control' at the same time (Steatfield, 2001). In exploring how senior managers made sense of control in the organization, I was interested in exploring their sense of control of control mechanisms and systems in the way the literature would suggest for those at the top of hierarchies in the organization. Finally, following my review of the literature, I was also interested in exploring whether senior managers understood control in terms of formal and informal controls in the way articulated in the literature, and whether they saw the culture-change programme as part of the wider control framework in the organization.

In the next chapter I consider the approach to be taken to the research strategy and the theoretical perspective that underpins this strategy. This research strategy was informed by my pre-understanding, discussed in this chapter as well as chapter one. It was also shaped by the hunches I held ahead of starting the research. I have reviewed these hunches in light of my consideration of the literature and also identified areas relating to these hunches that I want to explore further through my research.

### Developing My Research Strategy

#### Introduction

This is a reflexive hermeneutic study from a critical perspective that explores how senior managers make sense of the relationship between trust and control in an organizational setting. I approached the research from an objectivist ontology and subjectivist epistemology. The research was carried out in a single local authority during 2010 and 2011 where the research questions were explored with ten senior managers randomly selected from the senior leadership team.

As discussed in chapters one and two, my research was initially prompted by my interest in exploring whether the efforts in the organization to build trust were understood as being undermined by work also taking place to extend and strengthen control systems. This chimes with the literature where some writers emphasise that formal control systems and arrangements undermine trust – particularly if they are poorly designed (Das and Teng, 1998). But this view is not without challenge and there are other views on the nature of the relationship contained in the literature (Das and Teng, 2001; Jagd, 2010; DeMan and Roijakkers, 2009). My original interest was broadened to encompass how senior managers make sense of the relationship between trust and control in general. At the beginning of my research I viewed this relationship as poorly understood within the organization. I believed it was necessary to explore how senior managers made sense of trust and how they made sense of control in order to fully explore their sense-making of the relationship between trust and control.

As I discussed in chapter two, neither trust nor control were clearly articulated in any of the corporate documentation. Without a clear understanding of trust in the Council, I found it difficult to see how the organization could decide on the best type or types of trust on which to focus trust-building efforts. My review of the literature

also emphasised for me the importance of understanding whether senior managers' sense-making focused on types of trust or determinants and conditions of trust. My review also made clear to me the importance of understanding the level at which senior managers made sense of trust – be that at the level of the individual, group or organization.

With regard to control, my view at the beginning of the research was that the sense-making of control frameworks (formal and informal), together with their role, was unclear within the organization. Programmes to change the culture and to strengthen control were set out as separate strands of activity with no identified connections between them. The corporate documentation was silent on the role of culture as a form of control. Without better understanding control systems, I was unclear as to how control could effectively be improved or drive the required improvements in performance. I was also unclear how the impact of control on trust building efforts could be understood and addressed without such clarity of understanding. Following my review of the literature, I was also interested in exploring whether senior managers recognized the need for balance in formal and informal controls across the control framework, and whether they saw the culture change programme underway as part of the wider control framework in the organization.

In this chapter, I set out my journey in deciding how to approach and carry out my research. Part of this process included reflecting on and developing my own understanding of how I view both the world and how knowledge of the world is obtained. Numerous writers highlight the importance of such understanding as our views on the nature of reality and knowledge shape how we access the world (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Johnson and Duberley, 2000; McAuley, Duberley and Johnson, 2007). I also discuss how my philosophical perspective contributed to my decisions regarding the approach I took to my research, including my chosen research method (semi-structured interviews with senior managers). In making my choices I considered a number of different approaches before finally deciding on a reflexive hermeneutic approach, undertaken from a critical perspective. I summarize here some of the considerations relating to other approaches as these

formed an important part of my decision-making in finalizing what would work best in researching my identified areas of interest from my philosophical perspective.

I also consider here decisions taken relating to the application of my chosen research method as well as carrying out the research in the field. The final element considered in this chapter is consideration of my approach to the analysis of the research information generated. Chapters four, five and six then explore this analysis in detail. I acknowledge that, given the huge diversity of research approaches and methods available, other researchers may have made other choices in deciding how to approach my research areas. But this approach works for my research question regarding how senior managers make sense of trust and control in an organizational setting and, for me, there is strong coherence across my theoretical perspective, my research areas, approach and method which I will set out in more detail in the rest of the chapter.

Whilst the narrative of my research journey set out below is structured in a linear way it is important to note that the journey was in no way as smooth as the words suggest. There were times of stalling, times of lots of activity and times when it felt as though it was a journey that was all about going backwards!

## **Theoretical Perspective**

A crucial part of my research journey has been the consideration of various theoretical perspectives in order to develop my understanding and awareness of my own assumptions on how I both view the world and come to my knowledge of the world (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Such assumptions shape my 'way of seeing', influenced the decisions I made in relation to my areas of research interest and, in turn, shaped my whole research strategy and journey. The landscape of theory seems crammed with so many labels and approaches, sometimes seemingly used in contradictory ways, that the process of developing the language of a researcher has been an on-going challenge for me throughout the journey of my research.

In considering my theoretical perspective, and working to develop a coherent research strategy, I have tried to hold on to the need to consider the logics of engagement that link research and researcher rather than being distracted by the labels used to denote the similarities and differences among them (Morgan 1983). Summarised below are the key steps on my journey to find a way to progress my research in a way that is coherent with my view of reality and knowledge.

As I explore in more detail in this chapter, my view is that there is a world that exists independently from me – it is not something I create – but my knowledge and understanding of this independent reality *is* created by me. What we see, what we notice, is always filtered through culturally based, subjective, sense-making processes that we inevitably deploy in making sense of what is going on (McAuley, Duberley and Johnson 2007). In these terms, expressions of personal meaning should be viewed as self-interpretations in which these more general cultural viewpoints are adapted to the unique contexts of one's life (Faulconer and Williams, 1985; Packer, 1985). So, although there is a reality 'out there', we can never know it because we always deploy these sense-making processes and it is through them we create our reality (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). These self-interpretations and sense-making processes are different for different people – so the same reality can be made sense of in different ways.

In discussing theoretical perspectives, many writers emphasise differences between objectivist and subjectivist assumptions (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Cunliffe, 2011). For example, Morgan and Smircich (1980) identify six distinct views about the nature of reality through a continuum that ranges from subjectivist approaches where reality is understood as a projection of human imagination to objectivist approaches where reality is a concrete structure. However, for a number of writers (Deetz, 1996; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000) this construction is problematic, not least because for them the subject-object split is itself a cultural conception.



Whilst I acknowledge that the object-subject dualism is contested, I also recognise it remains a dominant way of considering theoretical perspectives within academic and management research texts. The typology of Morgan and Smircich (1980) was a helpful introduction to these ideas and helped in developing my own understanding of the various different ontological and epistemological perspectives and how they may impact on research undertakings. And, as Cunliffe (2011) points out, I am not alone in using their work in such considerations, although I also recognise there have been many further developments in the thirty-plus years since their ideas were published.

In the following sections I discuss some of the main issues from different theoretical perspectives that I considered in developing my own understanding. This was necessary in order for me to articulate the theoretical perspective underpinning my research study. I start this discussion at the objectivist position on the spectrum by considering positivism. This is not because it most closely reflects my own position but because it continues to be the dominant philosophical stance in a great deal of organizational theory and research (McAuley, Duberley and Johnson, 2007). This perspective holds that there is a real world that both exists and is external to us. It can be known by us as it is possible to separate the subject from the object so the real world can be neutrally or objectively observed without influencing what is observed. McAuley, Duberley and Johnson (2007) highlight that positivist philosophy also maintains there is a neutral observational language and science is only concerned with directly observable phenomena, with any reference to the intangible or subjective being excluded as meaningless.

As Johnson and Duberley (2000) discuss, research from a positivist perspective can be categorised as having a number of preconceptions that include the emphasis on methodological reflexivity including reliability and replication (with focus on reducing potential threats of subject and observer bias and error); the emphasis on the degree of certainty relating to causal link between independent variables and outcomes; the emphasis on generalizability and external validity; and the preoccupation with operationalism, where something we can observe

represents something we cannot, resulting in the reduction of concepts into indicators.

This latter point has very much been the focus of management practice within public sector organisations in recent times and, as a number of writers discuss, is central to New Public Management (NPM) where a plethora of indicators are taken to represent changes in organisations, people and communities (Kelly, et al 2002; Hood and Peters, 2004). It is an example of the significant implications of positivism for management and organizations, which extends to research. The perspective from the objectivist aspect of Morgan and Smircich's (1980) continuum dictates that organisational/management research would be focused on the observable, as: "Reality is objectively given, functionally necessary and politically neutral" (Johnson and Duberley, 2000:40). For example, the study of organizational culture would be interested in observable behaviour, physical structures and symbols with the aim of determining the impact of culture on organizational performance and goals (Cunliffe, 2011). Positivism holds the promise of techniques to control the organization. Managers are seen as using neutral scientific knowledge and their practices are: "Authenticated as merely technical activities grounded in their objective representations of reality" (McAuley, Duberley and Johnson, 2007: 35).

Reflecting on this, I find I hold with the view that there is an external reality and we can engage with this reality in attempts to understand it. However I have much more difficulty with the idea of a theory-neutral language, as well as the idea that it is possible for observation to be completely objective, value free and neutral. Given my pre-understanding, which includes more than twenty years working in local government, I also have difficulty with the notion that the reality of organizations is objectively given and somehow politically neutral. I am much more of the view that organizations are highly political spaces where differential power relationships exist that are impacted by dominant discourses and fluctuating patterns of competition, conflict and control. Such organizational politics can be defined as: "Behaviour that is strategically designed to maximise short-term or long-term self-interest" (Cropanzano et al. 1997:161). Most

modern organizations actually encourage organizational politics because, as Burns (1961:261) points out: “Members of a corporation are at one and the same time co-operators in a common enterprise and rivals for the material and intangible rewards of successful competition with each other. The hierarchic order of rank and power that prevails in them is at the same time a single control system and a career ladder.”

Some writers have begun to acknowledge that organizational politics are not necessarily inherently bad, and those who engage in influence do not always do so exclusively in a self-interested manner, and in direct opposition to organizational objectives” (Ferris et al. 2007:198). But politics continue to be about power relationships in an organization and such relationships, in my experience, are not objective and are not neutral.

Opposite positivism on the ontological spectrum is postmodernism – where the social world and what passes as ‘reality’ are simply a projection of individual consciousness and not ‘there’ in any concrete sense at all (Morgan and Smircich, 1980:493). For postmodernism, both epistemology and ontology are subjective (in positivism, both were objective), and language is the only expression of reality.

The view that we create what we see, in and through the very act of perception itself, is central to postmodernist theory (McAuley, Johnson and Duberley, 2007:39). This gives language a central importance – its role is not to describe, rather it is through language that we both create and make sense of the world. The notion of a theory-neutral observational language is therefore dismissed. “What we take to be knowledge is constructed in and through language. Knowledge has no secure vantage point outside such socio-linguistic processes” (Johnson and Duberley, 2000:96). As Anderson (2008) highlights, writers such as Lyotard recognized that narrative knowledge is significant and, in this case, knowledge is not separated from the knower.

An important concept with regard to language in postmodernism is that of *discourse* which can be defined as: “A particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:1). And because there is no independent reality beyond the discourse, if we change the discourse, we change the reality – the social world is created entirely by us. But for writers such as Burr (2003) it is more than creating and making sense, more than knowing. Whilst: “We can talk of numerous possible social constructions of the world [...] each different construction also brings with it, or invites, a different kind of action from human beings” (Burr, 2003:5). Therefore language drives what we see, what we know and how we act.

The notion of discourse is particularly associated with Foucault who states:

What I am analysing in discourse is not the system of language, nor, in a general sense, its formal rules of construction [...] The question which I ask is not about codes but about events: the law of *existence* of statements, that which rendered them possible – them and none other in their place: the conditions of their singular emergence; their correlation with other previous or simultaneous events, discursive or otherwise (Foucault, 1991:59).

So discourse defines and produces the objects of our knowledge and governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about (Hall, 2001). As writers such as McAuley, Duberley and Johnson (2007) emphasise, discourses are subjective, linguistically formed ways of experiencing and acting and constituting phenomena that we take to be ‘out there’ which differ from person to person and change over time. For example, in *Madness and Civilization* (1964) Foucault looked at the discourse of insanity and society’s responses across different periods in history. He was interested in issues such as the rules which define what is sayable, as well as what utterances are repressed or censored. Study of discourses also includes considering ‘subjects’ who in some way personify the discourse; how the knowledge about the topic acquires authority and the practice within institutions for dealing with the subjects (Hall, 2001). Consideration of discourses also lead to questioning who has access to particular kinds of discourses and the struggle for control of discourses between groups, nations and classes.

As Hall (2001:75) states: “Foucault was concerned with how knowledge was put to work through discursive practices in specific institutional settings to regulate the conduct of others. He focused on the relationship between knowledge and power, and how power operated within what he called an institutional apparatus and its technologies (techniques)”. For Foucault, knowledge was: “Always inextricably enmeshed in relations of power because it was always being applied to the regulation of social conduct in practice” (Hall, 2001:75).

Postmodernists reject the concept of neutral management practices, seeing instead dominant discourses within organizations that privilege the role of managers above other employees and ensure their voices are heard whilst others are suppressed or silenced.

This interest in power relationships points to the fact that there can be dominant discourses that exclude alternative ways of knowing and behaving. Control over discourse is seen as a vital source of power. But there are limits to this control because, as Wetherall (2001) highlights, meanings are fluid and escape their users and can be mobilized and re-worked to resist domination. This assumes it is impossible to separate power from knowledge, and knowledge loses any sense of innocence and neutrality (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000).

My research interest is in how senior managers make sense of ideas within an organizational setting, which means my research requires such physical and social constructs as organizations to exist in a real sense. And whilst I share the postmodernists interest in language, I agree with Parker (1993:208) that whilst: “Language may be the medium for all forms of enquiry [...] but it does not follow from that premise that language is all that there is”. Therefore, as stated, this research is carried out from an objectivist ontology. I do not hold that neutral observation is possible, but rather believe that my knowledge and understanding of this independent reality is created by me. And in deploying my sense-making processes, I recognise that for me, ideas of power are interconnected with ideas of knowledge through, for example, the notion of discourse with its impact on what is valued and what is seen and heard. I also

recognise that in considering discourses in organizations, there will be minority discourses that are harder to hear – or even voices that are silenced completely. These are key ideas in critical theory, which is explored in more detail below.

As has already been discussed, I am interested in how senior managers make sense of the relationship between trust and control in an organizational setting. A critical research perspective emphasizes the need for awareness in carrying out my research that: “Discourse and ideological as well as structural forces may operate ‘behind the back’ of subjects being studied” (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000:70). Critical theorists believe there is an external world ‘out there’ but as Johnson and Duberley (2000) highlight by citing Horkheimer (1972), rather than occupying a neutral position over the object, which seems to conceal the values and interests of the knower, we should see ourselves as embedded within social location and understand reality as the product of an interaction between society and nature.

An important element of this interaction is, therefore, the pre-understandings and perspectives of the ‘knower’. A critical theory approach has implications for the relationship between the researcher and researched. It does not presuppose the primacy of the researcher’s frame of reference or a one-way flow of information that leaves respondents in the same position after sharing knowledge as before. It seems appropriate to me in considering how senior managers make sense of trust and control to recognize that, as a researcher, I also bring my perceptions, understandings and ideas to the research. I have my own views of trust and control. As previously stated, I am not a neutral, detached observer. Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) is a key figure in critical theory. For him: “Even the simplest perception is not only performed pre-categorically by physiological apparatus – it is just as determined by previous experience through what has been learned as by what is anticipated through the horizons of expectations” (Habermas, 1974:199).

In addition, as stated, I do not view management as a neutral activity but one

influenced by power dynamics and political processes. Part of my pre-understanding of organizations is that there are differing power structures and relationships that exist alongside formal hierarchies. It is also my view that phenomena are experienced differently by different individuals. This arises from differences within the organization in terms of role, grade and position; factors such as sexuality, race and faith, as well as different life experiences and world views. For critical theorists, organizations (and wider society) are perceived as places of politics, competition and oppression, but knowledge is seen as offering at least the possibility of emancipation and progress (Johnson and Duberley, 2000; Alvesson and Deetz 2000; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009).

For Habermas (1974), insight is central to emancipatory interest in that it seeks to free people from domination arising from the systematic distortion of interaction and communication. Such distortion arises from underlying consensus of tradition and from repressive authority and power relations (Johnson and Duberley, 2000:119). Giddens (1979) builds on such a view of insight with his idea of 'discursive penetration' described by Putnam et al. (1993) as:

The rationale that social actors provide for why they behave the way they do. It shows how organizational members can gain insights into the systematically distorted meanings that maintain and reproduce reality. Insights into meaning structures provide the basis for generating alternative organizational realities (Putnam et al. 1993:225-6).

Critical theory, therefore, is an approach that: "Works towards an understanding of the ways communications between people become distorted by the processes of power that are part of our everyday, taken-for-granted experience" (McAuley, Duberley and Johnson, 2007:332). As Johnson and Duberley (2000) discuss, for Habermas, the 'ideal speech situation' is one where such distortions are not in place and all participants have an equal chance to initiate and participate in discourse, with all validity claims being open to discursive examination free from all the constraints imposed by disparities in power. Whilst Habermas did not believe such ideal speech was achievable, it provides a way of seeing that surfaces distortions of power, tradition and authority.

These ideas resonate with my research as I was interested in whether there were dominant discourses (in effect, 'taken-for-granted') within the sense-making in the organization regarding trust and control and the relationship between them. I was also interested whether by talking and exploring with colleagues how they made sense of these ideas there was potential to give voice to alternative discourses – ones that in the normal course of events would not be heard within the organization. Part of the practical application of my research was the ambition to develop a stronger understanding of any alternative views and, in turn, develop a richer discourse around ideas about trust and control.

The consideration of potential alternative discourses reminded me of the film *Minority Report* (2002). Here, three people have powers of precognition but do not always agree on their visions of the future. When disagreement happens, the one that deviates the most from the others – the minority report - is the one typically ignored. And the narrative of the film highlights the danger of closing down such alternative views. I found the consideration of motion pictures helpful in developing my understanding of theoretical ideas – literally 'seeing' things differently through visual exploration of concepts and developing my ideas as a result. As a researcher, I had my own discourse that limited the way I viewed colleagues, the organization – and possibly myself. The research journey provided me the potential to open this discourse out, to challenge and to change.

Critical theory has a number of implications for organization and management research and practice. Perriton and Reynolds (2004) identify four underpinning aspects to critical management. These are summarised by Anderson, Thorpe and Holt (2005:3) as: "A commitment to questioning assumptions and taken-for-granted embodied in theory and professional practice; the highlighting of inequalities of power and how these intersect with such factors as race, class, age and gender; a social rather than individual perspective, and emancipation as a fundamental aim".



For some writers (Dawin, Johnson and McAuley, 2002; McAuley, Johnson and Duberley, 2007) this focus on emancipation is interpreted as working towards greater democracy in organizations so that the voices of those individuals and groups whose perspectives are customarily silenced are heard. My research questions focus on a deeper exploration of trust and control in an organizational setting with organizational members, with the intention of exploring perspectives that may otherwise not be considered as well as ultimately highlighting issues for future professional practice. Taking a critical theory approach is coherent, therefore, with my overall research strategy.

Carrying out research from a critical theory perspective requires self-reflection in order that the natural tendency to interpret existing social reality from a taken-for-granted cultural stance is counteracted (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). The role of the researcher is as a 'reflective partner' (Blaikie 2009:52). Critical theory fits well with my commitment to reflexivity in my research that is discussed later in this chapter.

Following these considerations, I approached my research from a critical theory perspective informed by my understanding that there is a world that exists independently from myself and that the researcher is not an independent, objective observer who is separate from the subject of study and there is no such a thing as theory-neutral observational language. Therefore in developing my research strategy I was interested in research approaches in line with these views. I was also interested in approaches that recognise I needed to be constantly reflexive in my approach and take account of the relationship between myself as the researcher within the research process.

### **Carrying Out The Research**

In deciding how to carry out my research it was important that my choice both met the requirements of my areas of research interest and the research questions posed, but that it also made sense to both academic and management practice (Cole et al. 2011). I set out below some of the

approaches I considered on my journey to deciding on a reflexive hermeneutic approach. I include this in this chapter as it was part of developing understanding that took place across the research process.

Given I was interested in experiences within a social setting (an organization) I first considered ethnography as a potential approach for my research with its focus on the ways in which people interact and collaborate in observable and regular ways (Gill and Johnson, 2002). It is an approach usually seen as requiring full immersion in the culture in question over a considerable period of time – points that are often identified as difficulties with the approach (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Other challenges include the risk of the researcher ‘going native’ as well as simply managing the scale of materials generated. As already stated, I am already part of the organization in which I am carrying out my research so initially it appeared such immersion would not be a problem in terms of accessibility and time commitment.

There are elements of participant observation approaches to research that appeal to me in terms of engagement within the culture of the organization, observation and gathering reports from colleagues. Added to that, my pre-understandings were, in part, developed from such observations taking place prior to me deciding to embark on this research. I considered Gold’s (1958) four idealized participant observation roles. The observer as participant requires only brief engagement in the research setting. The complete observer is even more removed as a ‘disinterested spectator’. Neither of these approaches would accommodate my employment by, and role in, the organization where the research took place. Equally, complete participation, where: “The observational objectives are undisclosed to the other research participants [...] demands a degree of duplicity (Brannan and Oultram, 2012: 297). Even if the organization agreed to me carrying out covert observation, for me this would counter the very subject of my research – trust!

The remaining role, participant as observer, was the closest to my roles as employee, peer and researcher but: “A key challenge for the researcher is to

negotiate and establish the specific dimensions of these roles” (Brannan and Oultram, 2012:298). Making such a separation did not fit with my theoretical underpinnings and suggested a need to separate roles, or keep a clear distinction in a way I do not believe is possible. All aspects of my various roles are part of the pre-understandings that I brought to the research. As Tietze (2012: 54) states: “Research questions, research interests, choice of method and research instruments are interlinked with the researcher herself, with her life experience and her development, background and values”.

The role of the ethnographer has been limited to pursuing: “What people actually do, leaving what people say they “think” and “feel” to the skills of the media interviewer” (Sliverman, 2006:69). In addition, Mumby (1993:226) makes the point that ethnographers trying to: “Mirror’ what they observe in the field excludes the people whom they study from the process of reconstructing meaning”. I do not hold that the researcher holds a privileged position that allows them to come to knowledge alone, but very much see the process as one of co-creation between researcher and researched – it is this “we-ness” that is important to me. For these reasons, ethnography as an approach to the research did not seem to fit within my overall research strategy.

Mumby (1993:226) states that the ultimate goal of critical theory is praxis, i.e. “The attainment of insight and the enactment of practical action informed by this insight”. This would seem to link critical theory to action research. Whilst I do not agree practical action is necessarily always the goal, action research was an approach I debated taking to my study when considering whether the research was focused on ensuring change within the organization or on solving a problem – both characteristics of action research (Coghlan, 2007; Harris, 2008). Taking forward an action research approach could have provided the potential to combine my organizational role with my role as a researcher. As an ‘insider researcher’ I am already: “Immersed in the stream of events and activities underway in the organization” (Evered and Louis, 1981:389).

Roth, Sandberg and Svensson (2004:117) highlight the challenges and

complexities for: “An individual acting in the dual role of practitioner and researcher”. These include assuming too much, not probing deeply enough, role conflict, loyalty tugs, behavioural claims and identification dilemmas, the researcher thinking they know the answer and not exposing their current thinking to alternative re-framing, as well as being denied deeper access (Roth, Sandberg and Svensson, 2004; Coghlan 2007). In addition, manager action researchers: “Are likely to find that their associations with various individuals and groups in the setting will influence their relationships with others whom they encounter, affecting the data that can be generated in engaging in second person inquiry and action with them” (Coghlan, 2007:297). I don’t disagree these are all challenges but would argue these are true for all researchers, whether insider or outsider. I am not convinced these challenges are in some way unique to the insider action researcher. It would seem to apply to any research where the researcher is also an employee of the organization where the research is located. It is challenges such as these that call for the need for reflexivity rather than being seen as unique to insider researchers.

In considering my approach to my research, I was clear I was aiming to generate knowledge that is useful to both academic and practitioner communities; knowledge identified by some writers as ‘actionable knowledge’ (Hart et al. 2004; Roth, Berg and Styhre, 2004; Coghlan, 2007). But as Harris (2008) highlights, one of the things that distinguishes action research from other field study methods is the concept of an intervention that involves the researcher in an active role with other organizational participants. This intervention is aimed at bringing about some change, even just a small one, in the organization. At the beginning of my research I was hopeful the conclusions would have implications for professional practice, directly for the organization and more widely, but the research itself was not designed as a direct intervention. Therefore action research was not the most appropriate approach for me for this particular research.

As has been discussed, I hold that discourse is important in relation to sense-making, particularly in relation to the idea of dominant discourses within

organizations. Given this interest, I also considered discourse analysis as an approach to my study. The literature contains a number of forms of discourse analysis, including critical discourse analysis. Discourse analysis includes a close study of accounts already created, such as transcripts from hearings or performance appraisal records. Such close study emphasizes the importance of approaching subjects' accounts in talk and writing: "*In their own right* and not as a secondary route to things "beyond" the text like attitudes, events or cognitive processes" (Potter and Wetherall, 1987:160).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) extends the idea of discourse analysis and is interested in why particular language choices are taken, and why particular meanings made (Dick, 2004; Wetherall, 2001). As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: chapter 5) state, accounts are not simply representations of the world, they are: "Part of the world they describe and as this shaped by the contexts in which they occur". As Cunliffe (2008:82) highlights discourse is not all there is and: "Care has to be taken when asserting the primacy of discourse above those using it, as though language users were mere conduits of socially constructed meanings and interests". This is particularly important because:

Meanings are multiple, shifting, and always embedded in a time, place and relation to others. Researchers work with research participants from within conversations to explore how we ongoingly interpret, understand and relate with others and our surrounding (a reflexive hermeneutic) (Cunliffe 2011:658).

My interest in the role of pre-understandings and the relationship between researcher and researched is wider than simply focusing on discourse alone. I am interested in a more iterative approach to research, one that recognizes the relationship between the text and the wider context and that by developing understanding of one, you develop your understanding of the other.

The primary focus of my research is on how people understand the relationship between trust and control in an organizational setting. Therefore an approach to research is required that facilitates interpretation because, as how we come to understand depends on how we interpret. Therefore I decided to carry out my

research through a hermeneutic exploration because, as writers point out, hermeneutics is the 'science of interpretation' (McAuley, Duberley and Johnson, 2007).

The hermeneutic approach also fits with my theoretical perspective in that it is not about understanding the objects of study as instances of universal laws. Instead, it is about understanding the objects of study as single events and then developing understanding of how the unique relates to the more general (McAuley, Johnson and Duberley, 2007). Gadamer (2004:291) puts this another way by pointing to an: "Hermeneutical rule that we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole". This hermeneutic circle is at the heart of hermeneutics. In hermeneutics therefore: "You start at one point and then delve further and further into the matter by alternating between part and whole, which brings a progressively deeper understanding of both" (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009:92). McAuley (2004:195) highlights how in a research study: "Prior research and prior literature is bringing into the developing scene some loose boundaries, some steer on what is being explored. In this sense both the pre-understanding and the research itself go through iterations of interpretation".

In describing hermeneutics, some writers describe different types or forms. For example, Crotty (1998:110) splits the descriptions into mystic and literary theory and Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) describe objectivist and alethic hermeneutics. In objectivist hermeneutics, the hermeneutic circle described above is extended into a spiral. Therefore, the researcher begins with some part, tries to relate this to the whole and in the process sheds new light on the whole. From this point, the researcher then returns to the part studied, and so on (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). Whereas in alethic hermeneutics, rather than the relationship being between the whole and the part, the focus (or circle) is between pre-understanding and understanding and concerns the revelation of something hidden. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009:104) highlight that the two main hermeneutic currents: "Are different rather than contradictory, so that they may well be joined in the same research process".

Alethic hermeneutics introduces another important idea within hermeneutics, namely the role of pre-understandings. As Gadamer (2004:570) states: “What is understood always develops a certain power of convincing that helps form new conviction”. Therefore the researcher’s perspective and presuppositions are an important part of the research process. The relationship between the researcher and the researched is also crucial in a hermeneutic study. Research from this perspective has been described as: “A dialectical interplay between research participants” (Cunliffe, 2011:654).

But this focus on pre-suppositions or pre-understandings also points to a major criticism of hermeneutics, namely that the subjective position of the researcher impacts on the research to such an extent that any findings are invalid. Neither researcher or reader of the research are free from the taint of their own knowledge. So, in carrying out research, the researcher must acknowledge the nature and impact of their own perceptions, knowledge and pre-understandings throughout the research. This is important because, as McAuley (2004:194) states: “The researcher is not looking at the experience of the subject alone; there is also the position of the interpreter as the scene unfolds, and in the process of interpretation.”

Building on this notion, for McAuley, Duberley and Johnson (2007:341): “The hermeneutic process is designed to uncover the meanings held by members of the organization about themselves and the organization, to develop a new understanding or ‘wisdom’ about organizational life.” McAuley (1985:297) describes how research can deliver this shift, or ‘new horizon’, in practice: “What we would do is get data from [interviewees] [...] and then get them to explore *for themselves* the implications of what they are saying”. McAuley (1985:298) also highlights that what is important for researchers from a hermeneutic perspective is the: “Emphasis on drawing and shaping their [interviewees] data, and being able to confront our own common-sense assumptions as they confront theirs”.

This marries with my research purpose – to explore how people make sense of trust and control in a organizational setting in a way that recognized the importance of the interpretivist role of both researcher and interviewees, as well as accommodating the importance of pre-understanding in this interpretation. As Alvesson and Deetz (2000:113) describe it: “Recognising the interpretive nature of research means that no data, except possibly those on trivial matters, are viewed as unaffected by the construction of the researcher.” This should never be taken for granted, particularly where constructions of researchers may be expected to be similar to those of interviewees as is the case in my research where both researcher and interviewees are within the senior management of a single organization.

The hermeneutic approach involved me in identifying some key aspects of trust and control and their inter-relationship, as suggested to me by both my reading of the literature and my experience in the organization. I then identified some issues to be explored further in interviews. Each interview was a part of the wider research study which included pre-understandings, hunches, literature review, the other interviews, and further consideration of the literature. It also included emerging themes as well as minority voices or issues.

As highlighted, the relationship between researcher and researched is crucial in a hermeneutic study. McAuley (1985:298) sees research as a process of: “Facilitating members’ own discovery of themselves and an understanding of their own taken-for-granted reality and [...] enabling a deeper understanding of their own organizational behaviour.” Such self-discovery and a development of deeper understanding could be interpreted as a form of emancipation by liberating individual’s from their own ‘taken-for-granted’ perceptions. This points to the pairing of hermeneutics and critical theory in this research. This is not an automatic pairing but as McAuley, Duberley and Johnson (2007:342) highlight, for the critical theorist: “The notion that ‘facts’ and ‘reality’ are ‘value free’ would be highly problematic; ‘facts’ and ‘reality’ are interpreted and understood within a social context.”



## A Reflexive Researcher

As has been highlighted above: “In carrying out qualitative research, it is impossible to remain ‘outside’ our subject matter; our presence in whatever form, will have some kind of effect. Reflexive research takes account of this researcher involvement” (Anderson, 2008:184). There are different uses of reflexivity and reflection contained in the literature, but they typically have in common a focus on the involvement of the knowledge producer in knowledge production processes, as well as on the complex relationship between such processes and their various contexts (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009).

This relationship between the researcher and researched needs to be considered throughout the research journey. Epistemic reflexivity seeks to understand the influence of the researcher’s *a priori* knowledge on the research. It means the researcher challenging and questioning taken-for-granted assumptions (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). Or, put another way, such reflexivity is about: “Ways of seeing which act back on and reflect existing ways of seeing” (Clegg and Hardy, 1996:4). But it is important to note such reflexivity is not in any way trying to minimise the impact of researcher on research, for example, by trying to minimise bias. Rather, it: “Reframes the management researcher’s self-knowledge but does not lead to a ‘better’ or ‘more accurate’ account” (Johnson and Duberley, 2003:1291). Indeed as Anderson (2008) highlights the conundrum of epistemological circularity:

Means that we cannot hope to find the ‘best way’ of carrying out research in order to produce new knowledge; we can only produce this knowledge from a stated perspective [...] It is only in being as clear as we can about what our epistemological and ontological convictions are that we can produce truly reflexive research (Anderson, 2008: 184-185).

Challenges to epistemic reflexivity exist – not least that such ‘seeing acting back on existing ways of seeing’ can lead to a never-ending reflexive spiral. And, whilst reflexive researchers open up texts to ‘multiple readings’ to decentre

authors as authority figures and attempt to downplay the privileged position of researcher, this can actually end up drawing more attention to the researcher (Clegg and Hardy, 1996). I recognize this risk, but hold that as neutral observation is not possible, and researchers have an active role in creating meaning, epistemic reflexivity is vital in surfacing the researcher's way of seeing, and the influence of this.

But it is not enough to simply understand what these convictions are – throughout the research process it is vital to question how these convictions both influence and are influenced by, the on-going research process. For Alvesson and Deetz (2000:43) a key question to be posed by researchers throughout the research should be: "What are we able to see or think about if we talk about it in this way rather than that?".

I found the writing about my research an important element of reflexivity. As I set my thoughts and views down and grappled with their relationships with the thoughts and ideas of others, I posed questions to myself regarding the connectivity to my theoretical perspective. These questions sometimes prompted further reading of the literature, or additional consideration the interview transcripts. And they helped me challenge and question my own sense-making, and whether or not it was limited by my pre-understandings, or was really open to the unexpected. This reflexivity continued to the final stage of my research with its focus on closing: "The loop between [...] research and how this informs and further develops professional practice" (Cole et al, 2011: 144). I consider this further in chapter seven.

## **Research Method**

In order to carry out my research I needed to engage with people employed by the selected organization to explore how they made sense of the relationship between trust and control within the organizational setting. To do this I needed to make choices about the method by which I would engage with these people and ensure an overall coherence with my theoretical perspective and overall

research strategy. In making this choice, I first considered and rejected a number of methods that did not fit with the overall purpose of my research. Again, I consider some of this process here as it was important to me in my overall learning and decision-making.

I was not starting my research with a hypothesis or a particular theory to test; I did not have a particular problem or problems to try and 'solve' through the research, nor was I looking to establish any causal relationships. But I *was* interested in how people would choose to describe trust and control, their thoughts and feelings, and their stories and sense-making. My choices therefore seemed to be methods that allowed me to ask or to watch.

Whilst a lot of research involves observation in some form, observational research itself has a number of key aims. These include: "Seeing through the eyes of: viewing [...] from the perspective of people being studied" (Silverman, 2006:68). Writers such as Douglas (1976:7) view: "Direct experience as the most reliable form of knowledge about the social world". This presents a challenge for me arising from my understanding that all reality is subjectively constructed and interpreted. Indeed criticisms have been levelled at observational approaches such as ethnography for: "Trying to understand social phenomena as objects existing independently of the researcher" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:chapter one).

As an employee of the organization in which I am carrying out my research I can be said to be a full participant in the culture. However, I do not believe that my experience of the organization, or my view of the culture, power dynamics, politics, trust and control is necessarily the same as that of other colleagues. I do not hold that I can 'see through' the eyes of another. This point served as a useful caution for me not to assume my perspective was the same as others when carrying out my research. It's true there may be some common experiences, but how they are perceived and interpreted are unique to the individuals concerned.

In terms of 'asking', one possible method choice available to me was the use of a questionnaire or survey (with open and/or closed questions). I ruled out closed questionnaires because my interest was in being able to consider the apparent meanings people attach to issues and situations in contexts that were structured as little as possible in advance by my pre-understandings (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991). Indeed, as Alvesson and Deetz (2000:208) highlight, one of the aims of critical management research is to: "Reduce the pre-structured limitations of thinking, feeling and relating to established values, practices and institutions". A questionnaire or survey would actually mean imposing a structure on the interaction and pre-determining the ground to be covered, leaving little or no scope to be surprised or for new interpretations to be formed. Such a choice would work against the reflexive hermeneutic approach of my research where: "One doesn't know what new insights will be revealed and from this where the research will go" (Cole et al 2011:147).

Another way of 'asking' is to carry out interviews. Broadly speaking, there are three types of interview format: structured interview, semi-structured interview and open-ended interview (Noaks and Wincup, 2004; Silverman, 2006). I decided against the structured interview as it has many similarities with the questionnaire in that it does not allow for any probing, or surprises, and is limited to pre-determined ground. The semi-structured interview allows for some probing and includes the capacity for surprises given there is some flexibility within the interview framework. In open-ended interviews, interviewees are allowed: "The freedom to talk and ascribe meanings while bearing in mind the broader aims of the project" (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:80).

As Cole et al (2011) point out, such a method is suitable for subjectivist research as it enables deliberate engineering of an interactive relationship with the research participants. The physical act of interviewing colleagues provided opportunities to: "To transform the 'familiar' and 'known' into the 'strange' and 'unknown', with a view to generating a different and more informed understanding of the issues under investigation" (Tietze, 2012:60).

In my research, I had some key areas I wanted to explore through the interviews. These areas were informed by my hunches and refined through my consideration of the literature (both corporate and academic). My main focus was to explore how people understood by trust; what they understood by control, and what they understood about the relationship between them. For all three questions the emphasis was placed on sense-making within an organizational setting. I also had other areas identified that I was interested in exploring. These included whether sense-making of trust related to types of, or conditions for, trust; as well as the level at which people made sense of trust, for example at the personal or organizational level. I was also interested in people's views of how trust was built, and if (and how) it could be undermined or broken. As my research was triggered by my interest in whether trust-building efforts could be undermined by control I was interested in whether people understood it in terms of formal or informal control and whether people saw culture-change as part of the wider organizational control framework.

I did not encapsulate all these areas into a list of interview questions as I did not want to try and direct the interview conversations in this way. But I did have notes on a number of potential prompts for the interviews that related to these issues. In addition, some issues emerged from the early interviews that I then incorporated into successive interviews. For example, the first interviewee raised the fragility of trust as an issue, and I was interested whether this was something others recognized in their sense-making so this became a prompt if people did not raise it themselves in the conversations. I also considered these other issues when carrying out my analysis of the interview conversations. This is discussed in chapters four, five and six. I had the three initial questions discussed above, with these other areas of interest as potential probes.

I was also prepared (indeed hoping) for the discussions to raise issues that I had not previously considered. I did not want my pre-understanding to constrain or dictate the conversations that took place. I was open to the fact that the interview could be taken in a direction not foreseen by me, but steered by issues important to the interviewees. I did, however, have an overall framework

to the discussion in relation to trust and control. Therefore, the interviews were not completely open, but partially structured as befitted my theoretical perspective and purpose of the research (Gill and Johnson 1991, Noaks and Wincup 2004).

It is possible to carry out interviews electronically. Such a process begins with a small number of questions or a topic of interest being shared by email.

Participants then reply with their thoughts and ideas. The researcher then responds to those ideas, and can then ask further questions, seek clarification and raise other connected points in order to widen the discussion (Morgan and Symon, 2004). I considered using electronic interviews as all my potential interviewees had access to email. There would be no need to transcribe the interview as it would already be written down, and there is no need to arrange interview times.

However, for me, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is an important part of the research process. The interviewee is a 'participant' in the research, actively shaping the course of the interview rather than passively responding to the interviewer's pre-set questions (King, 2004:11). Schmitz and Fulk (1991) point to the absence or reduction of social cues in electronic communication making it unsuitable for certain forms of communication.

However, since this publication in 1991 there has been an enormous and rapid growth in the use of email and other forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC). The debate about the circumstances under which people use these media for communication – particularly in situations of high ambiguity – has also grown (Byron, 2008; Palvia et al. 2011). The use of email interviews seemed unsuited to the research situation which for me can be described as one of high ambiguity. I decided to carry out my interviews face-to-face.

A point made by Alvesson and Deetz (2000:56) struck me in my consideration of my chosen method and its application. They state that:

Less significant than the particular techniques or procedures are the ways in which the researcher *approaches* [my italics] the subject matter, the questions asked and the answers sought, the lines of interpretations followed and the kinds of descriptions and insights produced.

Taking this point, I reflected on the nature of the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee and how I approached it in my research.

For writers such as King (2004:11) “The goal of any qualitative research interview is [...] to see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee, and to understand how and why they have come to that particular perspective.” As previously discussed in relation to observation, I do not hold that things actually can be seen from the perspective of others. Moreover, given my theoretical perspective, it is probably no surprise that I didn’t approach interviews as simply a data collection exercise. Nor did I hold that the interviewee held some kind of ‘truth’ about the matters I was researching, and if I could just ask the right questions this ‘truth’ would be revealed. Rather, my view of interviews is in line with writers for whom the interviewee and interviewer collaboratively produce or together actively construct meaning (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Silverman, 2006). As Potter and Wetherall (1987:165) state: “Interviewees are regarded as active participants in a conversation, rather than as ‘speaking questionnaires.’”

Prior to the interviews I was conscious that I wanted both parties to approach the interview as a genuine opportunity to explore the issues and engage in collaborative sense-making – a chance to explore views, beliefs and experiences. Part of my reflexivity in this research is recognizing the numerous ways issues such as my role in the organization, and my prior relationship with the interviewees all form part of the research. As I bring my pre-understandings and hunches to the research, so too do others. They are all involved in the

development of meaning in the interview conversation. As Tietze (2012: 55) highlights, it is central to the research process to: “Reflect on one’s own position, purpose and sources of power as pre-knowledge and presuppositions are activated in establishing relationships with the researched”. As well as bringing my pre-understanding and preconceptions of organizational and theoretical issues to the research scene (as discussed in chapter one) I also have an established relationship with my respondents because, as Tietze (2012) highlights, we all carry particular organizational roles and positions in the organizational hierarchy. There are a number of ethical issues that arise from such relationships such as voluntary participation and confidentiality – particularly given the more senior nature of my position in the organizational hierarchy to all my interviewees.

I incorporated a number of elements into my approach in order to try and make explicit that the nature of the relationship between researcher and researched is an important part of my research approach and sense-making, not a source of bias to be mitigated or overcome. I explained to interviewees that this was a confidential process and was not an interview in an organizational sense (such as relating to securing a post) but was part of developing learning and understanding. Although I was clear the findings would be shared in the organization, I was clear that no-one would be identifiable, and that whilst quotes would be included in my write-up but that they would not be attributable to individuals – different names would be substituted.

Given the continuing relationship between myself and research participants in the organization outside of my research, it was important I had a clearly communicated stance about modes of engagement with the researched. Using interviews enabled both me and those involved as research participants to be able to: “Differentiate between information provided in a research interview that can be used for research purposes, and informal exchanges over a cup of tea or coffee that they assume are ‘personal’ and not meant to be reproduced as ‘quotes’ in papers and texts” (Tietze, 2012:60). I also spoke to all potential research participants before writing to them inviting them to be part of the



research. In these conversations I stressed the voluntary nature of any engagement, and made clear it would be possible for them to withdraw at any stage. I explained the purpose of my research and that their involvement would be focused on a single interview.

Everyone I spoke to agreed to take part in the research, and no-one withdrew once the research was underway. During the interviews, I was clear that I was looking to develop my understanding but it was a discussion not simply a process of asking and answering a set of pre-defined questions. This meant interviewees could direct the nature of the conversation as much as I could – albeit within the scope of the research. This meant I needed to be patient throughout the discussion and not close points down because they didn't sit with my pre-understandings. It also meant sitting through silences while people thought through their responses.

It is not possible for me to know what impact my position in the organization had on what senior managers discussed in the interview but I did (and still do) reflect on what was discussed – did people hold back? Did they trust me, or not? Did they make things sound worse in the hope I would try and change things? Were people looking for sympathy? Were they genuinely ok with the way the organization was progressing? Or did they just tell me what they thought I wanted to hear? I can never know the answer to these questions – but the research process highlighted for me that this is true of every conversation I have, particularly in my organization but also outside it.

Throughout my research, but particularly during the interviews and again when carrying out the analysis of what was said, it was important I took time to the positions from which we speak and the social and political context in which the conversations took place. On the one hand, having well established relationships with my interviewees before the research can be seen as a positive, and something that meant it was more likely a more open conversation could take place than with people with whom there was no such relationship. However, as Tietze (2012:58) this can actually result in a potentially more

exploitative process: “As such relationships are more open to manipulation and betrayal – by the researcher as well as the researched”. I needed to ensure I didn’t discuss my research as it was underway – particularly in casual discussions taking place with those involved.

Of course, a more critical view may be that I was using my position as a researcher to lull senior managers into being open with me in order that I could take advantage in the other aspect of my role – as a senior manager in the organization! And it is not possible for me to know to what extent people believed the process to be voluntary, or whether they would have taken the time to be involved if I held a different role in the organization. Therefore, my role and position within the organization was, to me, an inescapable part of the context of the research.

I was also aware, at least in the first couple of interviews, of an anxiety that in holding more of a conversation I was somehow exerting inappropriate influence on the process as I was contributing some thoughts not simply asking questions. In chapter one I considered the impact of previous academic study on my pre-understanding, in particular research undertaken as part of my previous management qualifications. In studying for both my Postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies (DMS) and Masters in Public Administration (MPA) I used interview techniques and spent considerable time on issues such as piloting the questions and minimizing bias. This was even more of an issue for my undergraduate degree in Psychology where standardization and replicability were central concerns.

These reflections led me to expand my reading on the subject of interviews and to explore more fully the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. My consideration began with my reflection on the words ‘interviewer’ and ‘interviewee’. These terms may be neutral in relation to constructs such as gender, age and ethnicity but that does not mean the terms are value-free. One way of seeing the interviewee is as ‘epistemologically passive’, therefore not engaged in the production of meaning” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:8). The

active role is left the interviewer. And the interviewer role can be seen as the more active role in other ways. For example, as interviewer I set the initial territory to be considered, selected the people to talk to, as well as the location for the conversation (although people were provided with some choice on this).

Therefore the power of the interviewer can be seen to extend at least as far as setting the framework for the conversation and may well then extend in to the interview itself. But, as Habermas (1974) pointed out, a range of things, including authority and power relations, systematically distorts both interaction and communication. The openness of the interview process, including choice for the research participants where possible (such as whether or not to take part, interview location and whether or not to record the discussion) was an attempt to minimise such distortions whilst recognising they could not be removed. As stated, the fact of my role within the organization was, to me, an inescapable part of the context of the research.

I understand the interview as a social interaction as much as a way of exploring sense-making where meaning is not: “Merely elicited by apt questioning nor simply transported through respondent replies; it [is] actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:4). This fits with my understanding of *conversation* as a: “Self-organizing phenomenon in which meaning emerges” (Streatfield, 2001:4). Clearly, as I had areas to explore, it was not completely self-organizing, but discussions flowed differently across all ten conversations.

All the interviewees (as well as myself as the interviewer) were employed by the same organization at the time of the research. According to Kramer and Tyler (1996:20): “Managers’ overall attitudes and behaviours determine the initial levels of trust expectations within the organization, in effect enacting the context within which organizational processes will be embedded.” In addition, as discussed in chapter two, I was interested in exploring the views of those employees in the organization hierarchy traditionally viewed as being ‘in control’ or as having power within the hierarchy and therefore within the organization. It

seemed appropriate to me to draw my interviewees from those employees who are grouped within the senior leadership team of the organization, of which I was part. This was partly pragmatic – this was a group of individuals with whom I had regular contact and could easily arrange to spend time with. But also it seemed to be a group who would be more comfortable talking to another senior manager than perhaps might be the case for employees in other roles in the organization. These employees were also involved in the Improvement Programme and were therefore experiencing the changes to control systems, were part of the culture change programme, and, as such, were connected with my areas of interest in my research. In addition, from the perspective of critical theory, most organization members are only too often reduced to the objects of organizational change (Darwin, Johnson and McAuley, 2002). I was interested in exploring with senior managers the extent to which this was the case with the changes taking place in the organization through the Improvement Programme.

I drew names at random from a distribution list used to call senior leadership team meetings. No further selection criteria were applied – I did not select for characteristics such as gender, age or length of service. In acting this way I was: “Selecting people, as opposed to representatives of populations [...] individuals [...] are equally worthy despite individual differences and therefore have worthwhile stories to tell” (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995:26). In writing up my study I randomly assigned names to interviewees from the first two volumes of the *Barchester Chronicles* by Anthony Trollope (*The Warden*, 1855 and *Barchester Towers*, 1857). This means in the write-up, women interviewees may have been assigned names typically associated with men, and vice versa.

Of course, in selecting interviewees: “The key question [...] is whose voices will be heard and whose voices silenced if we conceive of people in particular ways?” (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995:27). In selecting the senior leadership team as the pool to draw interviewees from meant the voices of majority of Council employees were excluded. But, as discussed earlier, in a hermeneutic study, a general ‘truth’ is not being sought so a study with a small number of

interviews is appropriate as it is the extent to which they shed light on wider issues that is considered.

I spoke to the senior managers selected first, asking if they were prepared to be involved in my research. Everyone expressed their willingness to be involved. I then followed up the initial contact with a letter inviting them to interview.

Interviewees were offered the choice of meeting location. One person chose the local coffee shop, others chose to meet in their offices but most (six) chose to meet in my office.

Alvesson and Deetz (2000:7) state that:

Studying management means studying asymmetrical relations of power, including dependencies. A study typically concentrates on or at least involves actors having formal and symbolic resources for the exercise of non-domestic, systematic forms of control over organizational participants and indirectly over other groups and non-human objects.

Whilst for me this is the case, a critical theory approach also has implications for the relationship between the researcher and researched. It does not presuppose the primacy of the researcher's frame of reference; the interview is not a one-way flow of information. Engagement in dialogue needs to take place where information is required or perspectives need to be discussed as: "The involvement of the researcher in this real dialogue involves them in the critical process [...] digging down to reveal the respondent's frame of reference is not meant to be an oppressive hierarchical process but a liberating dialogical one" (Harvey 1990:12-13). For me, a strength of critical approaches is that they acknowledge the importance of the relationship between interviewee and interviewer. As Dick (2004:207) points out: "The participant makes a social reading of the interview and the interviewer and this has a fundamental effect on the nature of the data produced, which needs to be accounted for in the analysis."

When I began my research I did not have a fixed number of interviews in mind but expected the resource constraints of the process would require me to limit it

to about a dozen. Also, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009:233) point to an important principle of discourse analysis, namely: "It is not the size of the sample that is interesting, but the close study of nuances in possibly quite a small number of accounts." I also hold that to be the case in this hermeneutic study. I was not carrying out a comparative analysis across the organization, such as one which explores whether senior managers view trust and control differently to other employees, or whether men approach the concepts differently to women. My aim was to provide an in-depth analysis that is focused on explanation, rather than generalization (Dick 2004). As Saunders (2012:49) states, there are no clear 'rules' for selecting the sample size but information should be collected until: "No new themes or information are observed, that it is until saturation is reached". This was a useful guiding principle, in making my decision to stop interviewing after carrying out 10 discussions. But in doing so I recognized in speaking to any senior manager, new themes or perspectives could have been raised.

I began each interview by asking the interviewee what they understood by trust in an organizational setting. For some interviewees I needed to follow up on the organizational setting element of the question as this was not addressed in their initial response. I followed up points made with further questions which differed across the interviews but covered some similar ground. Such areas included how interviewees made the decision to trust, as well as views on breaking and building of trust. The differences and relationship between trust in individuals and trust in organizations was also explored as part of discussions concerning the level at which it made sense to senior managers to talk about trust.

I followed this discussion on trust by asking interviewees to describe how they made sense of control in an organizational setting. I asked them about their views on how control and control systems were positioned in the organization, as well as views about types and approaches to control. Senior managers were also asked about whether they understood culture change and culture to be part of the organizational control framework. I then asked them whether they saw a relationship between trust and control, and if so how they would describe it. A

particular area that emerged across the discussions was the relationship between control and distrust. This was not identified in the original areas of interest for the interviews, and I didn't ask specific questions, but discussions on this relationship in many of the interview conversations.

In the research, a total of ten discussions took place, each with a single individual. One interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, and the others lasted between 40 minutes and one hour. Each interview conversation began with me providing a description of the purpose of my research, including highlighting the fact that I had written approval to carry out the research. I also asked if interviewees were comfortable with me recording the conversation and confirmed that all information would be treated in confidence and the organization and individuals within it would not be named. I also confirmed that the recordings would be deleted once the programme of study had been completed. However, I did stress that direct quotes would be used in the final write-up.

### **Approach to Analysis**

As has been discussed throughout this chapter, the way we view the nature of reality and knowledge shape how we access the world (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Johnson and Duberley 2000; McAuley, Duberely and Johnson, 2007). As a subjective researcher I hold that researchers have an active role in the creating meaning – they are not neutral observers. This calls reflexivity into importance as a focus on the involvement of the knowledge producer in the knowledge production processes. Epistemic reflexivity means the researcher challenging and questioning taken-for-granted assumptions (Johnson and Duberley, 2000) Such reflexivity is vital throughout the research process – but perhaps never more so than when carrying out the research analysis. But it's important to re-state that the focus of such reflexivity is not an attempt to minimise bias – the researcher doesn't impact on research in this way as they themselves are part of the research – it is about developing a deeper understanding of the researcher's way of seeing and the influence of this.

Whilst the hunches identified at the beginning of the research, and refined through consideration of the literature (corporate and academic) are important, their role is to describe the territory under consideration – not to constrain the discussion. Being open to new and surprising is a vital element of the process/approach. The interviews were carried out in order to provide an opportunity to generate a different and more informed understanding of the issues described through my hunches – not to look for evidence to ‘prove’ or ‘disprove’ them - hunches are not hypotheses. In the interviews I wanted to explore understandings and sense-makings, not limit myself to a fixed number of areas – therefore I selected an open-ended interview approach which allowed for this more emergent approach.

This flexibility was also important in my approach to analysis. As discussed, my hunches, developed a priori, described the territory to explore in the research; a starting point. As McPherson (2008:188) states: “Analysis is [...] an interpretative process where new themes are identified, sub-themes are generated, new connections acknowledged”. This process of interpretation is central to my research. The iterative process adopted for my analysis was central to developing *my* interpretation; *my* understanding. As Johnson and Duberley (2000:179) acknowledge: “There will always be more than one valid account of any research”. What is important is that my analysis is consistent with my epistemological assumptions and usefully addresses the research questions posed. Carrying out my analysis was central to the generation of a deeper, more informed understanding by senior managers of the relationship between trust and control in the organization.

In carrying out the analysis, I transcribed all the interviews personally. I decided to do this, partly to maintain the confidentiality of the material – something that would have been broken if I’d given the recordings to my PA to type up. But also this time consuming process provided me with a deep familiarity with the conversations as they were being translated into written texts. I listened repeatedly to the dialogue and then read through the texts. At points in my



analysis I also went back to the recordings, so my analysis relates to both spoken and written words.

For Gummesson (2000:70), research is: “An iterative process whereby each stage of our research provides us with knowledge.” This process is known as the hermeneutic cycle or circle. The researcher can start the hermeneutic circle at any point. For example, the researcher can begin:

In some part, try tentatively to relate it to the whole, upon which new light is shed, and from here you return to the part studied, and so on [...] you start at one point and then delve further and further into the matter by alternating between part and whole, which brings a progressively deeper understanding of both (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009:92).

At one level at least, for this research ‘the whole’ is the totality of the research information from all ten of the research transcripts. Each of the ten interview transcripts could then be seen as a single part. In order to start the hermeneutic cycle I chose one transcript on which to begin the analysis. I considered it against my three research areas and how it met (or not) my hunches and preconceptions. At this stage it could be said the individual research transcript had become the whole, and each of the three areas a part to be examined in order to develop understanding. I constructed my analysis in this way and my initial reading of the first transcript focused on considering how the senior manager had made sense of trust – what words they had used, and the ways they had used them. I noted this down, including direct quotes from the transcripts.

I then did the same with the other transcripts. I went through each one a number of times and noted down all the points relating to trust. I typed each set of notes up in a table, with paragraph and page references, extracts of text together with any noted comments. At the end of this process I had ten tables with information relating to senior managers’ sense-making of trust. This provided a new ‘whole’ to be considered. I then reviewed this analysis, looking for ideas common to all or a majority of the discussions. I also considered points that only a minority of interviewees, or even a single individual, had made. I

considered how the accounts chimed with the literature, went against what I had read – and also considered where they pointed to any gaps in the literature.

I then repeated this exercise for control – starting with a single interview and noting what was said. Then moving to a second interview, then a third and so on until all ten had been considered and quotes and notes taken down. These were added to the table already created for each interview, and a summary of all the information on control from all ten interviews prepared. As I went through the interviews I also noted points made either by myself or by the person being interviewed that were of potential interest but outside the three main areas of research interest. These included points relating to the research process, such as me noticing that I introduced the discussions as conversations rather than interviews. This process enabled the research areas to provide a focus for the analysis, but not a constraint. The analysis also enabled me to identify ‘minority sense-making’ and not simply be limited to common themes, or ‘majority voices’.

Finally, I took a single transcript and considered how the sense-making of the relationship between trust and control was discussed. Again I added notes to the table created for each interview. Across all three waves of analysis, where common themes were supportive of the hunches I set out at the beginning of the research, I tested them further against the literature. I also undertook this process where common themes *did not* fully support my hunches – as well as where the analysis had flagged up new ideas. This prompted me to revisit the literature I had already reviewed and also to consider additional academic literature. In this way I tried to ensure my hunches didn’t limit my own sense-making and that I used the analysis process to challenge my own pre-conceptions.

In some ways, this process had the potential to be never ending – each reading had the potential for a different sense-making to emerge as more literature was considered, and as I myself changed over time. I stopped when no significantly new ideas were presenting themselves to me.

## Conclusion

My purpose was to develop a coherent research strategy for my study. I am not claiming that the approach I undertook is the only approach that could be taken – the plethora of writings of ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies and methods mean there are a vast range of possible permutations! I needed to develop an approach that was coherent for me, and for my areas of interest; and I also needed a strategy which I could be confident would enable genuine learning for myself and my organization as well as wider organizational theory.

In this chapter I explored various potential approaches (albeit a limited number) and the reasons for discounting some of them. I also set out my rationale for deciding to progress a hermeneutic study from a critical perspective using partially structured interviews. For me, this approach made it possible to carry out my research in a way which fitted with my way of viewing the world and knowledge within the world. It was coherent with my understanding of my research – it wasn't intended to find some 'truth' about trust and control across the whole Council; rather it was about exploring ways in which individuals make sense of such ideas in ways in which it would be useful for the organization to understand and consider the potential consequences. This research approach also enabled me to develop my own learning and sense-making and to draw valid conclusions within the framework of the approach set out here. These findings and conclusions are explored in the following chapter.

### Making Sense of Trust

#### Introduction

In this and the next two chapters I discuss my research information. In doing so I provide a hermeneutic consideration of my three original areas of interest discussed in chapter one, namely how senior managers make sense of trust in an organizational setting; how they make sense of control in an organizational setting; and how they understand the relationship (if any) between trust and control. However, not surprisingly, in considering and interpreting my research information, a number of other areas of interest also emerged. In turn, these areas led me to consider new literature which I introduce in the discussion in these chapters (for example, Meyerson, Weick and Kramer, 1996; Sheppard and Sherman 1998; Ferrin, Kim, Cooper and Dirks, 2007; Dirks, Lewicki and Zaheer, 2009; Kramer and Lewicki, 2010). This is a typical hermeneutic exploration (as discussed in chapter three) where the emergence of fresh ideas results in further reading and consideration, which in turn contributes to further development of ideas and understanding.

In this chapter I explore the research information relating to the ways in which senior managers understand or make sense of trust in an organizational setting. As discussed in chapter three, I had some key areas I wanted to explore through the interviews. These areas were informed by my hunches and refined through my consideration of the literature (both corporate and academic). These included whether sense-making of trust related to types of, or conditions for, trust; as well as the level at which senior managers made sense of trust, for example at the personal or organizational level. I was also interested in their views of how trust was built, and if (and how) it could be undermined or broken. As has already been highlighted, there is a rapidly growing literature on trust and my brief discussion of this in chapter two considered the literature on areas

such as different types of trust; decisions on trustworthiness and the benefits of trust. Key points from the literature review are considered here along with my sense-making of the interview conversations and new areas of literature.

### **Senior Managers Making Sense of Trust in an Organizational Setting**

As I was interested in how senior managers understood trust within an organizational setting, I first asked each senior manager to explain what the word trust meant to them. I emphasized I was interested in this in relation to trust within an organizational context, not simply in general terms.

A number of interviewees discussed trust in terms of faith or belief in others:

Susan: about people having faith in, or belief in...in others and...that they will...they will do...the best for that individual or whatever it may be. So it's about...ummm...having, yes, having faith and having belief that people will do the right thing.

John extended the idea of trust as 'doing the right thing':

John: So [pause] for me it's about belief in the ...integrity of...either the organization or the individual to do the right thing [...] the other words that came to mind when I was thinking about this were around faith, honesty and sort of trusting in the discretion of others. So those are some of the associated concepts.

This idea of trust being about honesty and integrity was also raised by a number of the other interviewees:

Lucy: So it's kind of...it's honesty, it's integrity erm...it is...it is that that kind of strength? Erm...or that ability to er...to support people but also to be honest and challenge as well.

And:

Frank: Erm I think it means a kind of...several things. One is er...a trust in people and a belief in them in that erm...that they have integrity.

And:

William: Or if there's a problem you're open and honest about it. It's not something which is dealt with by kind of...back door or underhand methods.

And:

Samuel: I don't think it's about having again a neat solution to that because of the nature of relationships and competition is that you can never have that kind of fully safe environment. It's life but it's to do it with some kind of integrity and some dignity in the process and I think that underpins trust.

These views closely echo definitions provided by numerous writers on trust (Sitkin and Roth, 1993; Zaheer, McEvily, and Peronne, 1998; Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Woolthuis, Hillebrand and Nooteboom, 2005) that emphasize trust as a belief, attitude or expectation.

But in the literature, trust is not seen simply as a general expectation or belief. It is a belief or expectation that relates to actions and to an outcome or outcomes. As Sitkin and Roth (1993:264) emphasize, the concern is that: "The likelihood that the actions or outcomes of another individual, group or organization will be acceptable or will serve the interests of the actor". This notion of positive or acceptable actions and outcomes was illustrated across a number of the replies in terms of the sense that trust was about people doing what they said they would and not letting others down:

William: I suppose there are other elements to trust about people who actually do what they say they're going to do. So it's you know they don't...they don't promise the earth and then not...not deliver on it so you have a conversation and you agree that you'll do things and then you both go away and do...do what you said [...] do what you said you'd do.

For me, there is a sense in William's description that trust is about keeping promises where people 'do what they say they're going to.' This could also be seen as reliability – where people are trusted because they are reliable, they do what they say they will. There is widespread coverage in trust literature about reliability as a dimension of trust (Das and Teng, 1998; McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer, 2003). This reliability seems to me to concern at least two levels. The first of these is at the operational or 'doing' level, where people do what they said they would. So reliability here is consistency between words and actions – which is something I will come back to in later chapters when considering the implications for professional practice.

Reliability is also described as consistency of behaviour (Shapiro, Sheppard and Cheraskin, 1992). For them, behavioural consistency is sustained by the threat of punishment (e.g. loss of relationship) that will occur if consistency is not maintained. This is known as 'deterrence-based trust.' I found this

interesting because there are also examples in the literature that state trust (unlike control): “Is not based on the explicit threat of enforcement of an agreement” (Jagd, 2010: 262). This idea of deterrence-based trust did not come up for senior managers at all, they were much more positive in their views of trust. And for me, deterrence-based trust seems somewhat oxymoronic.

For Frank and Samuel trust was also about compliance, but in a slightly looser way.

Frank: that erm...you can...give them some outline frameworks and let them get on with things. That erm...they respect your....they they respect the value systems of the organization but they respect the confidence that you give them. Erm...And so they won't do things like erm...letting you down I suppose or going against the principles of what of what they've been asked to do...So it's about in a way as an individual it is about letting go, letting people go. Giving them some outline parameters....letting them go. And then trusting them that they will erm behave accordingly.

And:

Samuel: It's responsibility and accountability...erm...it is giving people erm...the space and the heads...to use their heads as opposed to being very prescriptive and very specific about everything we do.

Here trust was about acting within a framework, or inside 'outline parameters' which implies some scope for interpretation or flexibility – but ultimately still acting in line with expectations. This proposes that there is a framework within which people are trusted to act. This point will be considered further when looking at trust and control.

Tom also takes trust beyond the notion of 'trust as compliance,' opening it further still:

Tom: I suppose trust it goes back to freedom really and responsibility. I trust you to get on with it. There are levels of trust that you have to...it's about confidence and somebody to be able to deliver erm what they said they would do. It's not just about confidence that actually I trust you to do it, I trust you to make a judgement. I trust your interpretation of what needs to be done.

Trust here is still about people doing what they said they would, but also allows for interpretation rather than strict compliance. Tom also introduces an idea that I will come back to later in this section, in terms of 'levels' or degrees of trust.

Again this chimes with some of the literature on trust where trust is not simply seen as compliance or predictability, but rather as confidence in the face of risk (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). So the notion of freedom or autonomy of action introduces the idea of risk as there is no certainty about how people will behave – it has to be ‘taken on trust.’

There is an interesting challenge to trust as positive expectations posed by the description in the literature of ‘trust dilemmas.’ Dirks and Skarlicki (2004:34) describe these in the following way: “For the many trade-offs involved in maintaining trust in multiple relationships [...] the dilemma leaders encounter is that they may have to simultaneously *meet* the expectations of one party and *violate* the expectations of another.” This ongoing challenge needs to be acknowledged within the complex reality of organizational life.

Whilst some senior managers described trust as a positive expectation (i.e. doing the right thing), others expressed trust as a belief that people *would not* do the wrong thing (i.e. would not do something detrimental or likely to harm the trustor). William addresses this in the following:

William: If you're out then they're not going to be talking ...talking unpleasantly about you or...or so people aren't playing playing organizational games where it's like you know, well I'll say this but actually I'm doing that but I'll say this to you in order to keep you...So, so it's a sense that what [...] you get when you meet someone talk to someone face to face is the same as they're treating you when you're not there. So it's it's people that I trust are people who I feel erm, I have that sort of relationship with. Basically they're not stitching you up.

And:

William: Trust is a really big thing for me around how I work and...you know the sort of relationships I have and do something around about having you know around the organization there's people that I...it's almost like a kind of hierarchy of people that I really trust and I [...] I know they wouldn't stitch me up.

Mary shared this view of trust:

Mary: But it's all based around the same thing I wouldn't...you trust that someone wouldn't...trust in somebody means that they wouldn't do something that you think that on purpose to deliberately hurt or upset you.



Again, such views chime with those expressed in the literature, where trust is described as the: “Expectation that a partner will not engage in opportunistic behaviour, even in the face of opportunities and incentives for opportunism, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that party” (Woolthuis, Hillebrand and Nooteboom, 2005:816). Interestingly, Cummings and Bromiley (1996:303) add the caveat: “Does not take *excessive* advantage of another even when the opportunity is available” (my italics). This made me wonder whose definition of ‘excessive’ would be brought into play when deciding this.

Cummings and Bromiley (1996) include two other elements to this expectation in their definition of trust, namely that individuals make good faith efforts to behave in accordance with both implicit and explicit commitments and are honest in any negotiations that precede such commitments. For them, much of organizational interaction rests strongly on these three characteristics which makes trust so centrally important in organizations.

Eleanor also saw trust as including the expectation that someone will not let you down (i.e. do something detrimental) but needed more than that:

Eleanor: So trust is just a presuming that somebody will operate at a similar level of values as you [...] and won't let you down and would give you a fighting chance if you got something wrong.

In some ways this might seem a bit of a one-way street – expecting people not to let you down, but if you get something wrong and let *them* down, they will be reasonable in their response. However, Eleanor introduces the idea of similar values, suggesting she would also give the benefit of the doubt to people.

For Lucy the response to having been let down is influenced by the reasons for the letdown:

Lucy: Sometimes, you know, we all make mistakes and sometimes kind of reason why that trust's broken might help...erm [...] So again I am probably quite extreme sort of character in that sense so honesty is really really really important [...] but I'm also one of those people who recognize that we all make

mistakes and so, can you rebuild it it's tough because its always there erm... and once somebody's been dishonest they've shown they can be.

So judgements about trust can be influenced by the previous experience of individuals and the track record of the relationship. For Sitkin and Roth (1993) individual instances of task unreliability are seen as context specific rather than generalizable *unless* core values of the organization are violated. Lucy extends this to violation of personal values, which then makes rebuilding of trust much more difficult.

Like most senior managers interviewed, John and Eleanor also viewed trust as a belief in others, but noted possible variations:

John I was thinking it probably means quite different things in different contexts.

And:

Eleanor: And...different levels of interaction enable you to trust at different levels because [...] what I trust you with isn't the same as I'd need to trust my husband with [...] so it's different isn't it in different situations.

Both quotes indicate that trust is context dependent. Susan extended this to include personal context:

Susan: It's also about your own life experiences in terms of that...what that..erm...how that then enables you to openly trust, be trusting of others.

Interestingly, only one respondent talked about trust in themselves in replying to the question about what trust meant to them:

Henry: I suppose it's er...people having confidence in er...your ability, what you're doing er that you'll do things when you say you'll do them erm...that you'll be at times...er...not actually pass on things that perhaps confidential...erm..reliable...I think it's also that you trust that person as well.

In the literature on trustworthiness, ability is one of the three factors identified as important by Mayer, David and Schoorman (1995) in relation to people's perceptions concerning the trustworthiness of others. It was only raised directly as an issue in one interview. But, as already discussed, a number of senior

managers identified trust as 'people doing what they said they would', which could be taken to encompass having the ability to do so.

A number of senior managers also highlighted the reciprocal nature of trust:

Eleanor: So it's just occasionally that trust needs to be reminded it's a two way thing.

And:

William: But the big one for me is that thing about erm...er...in the relationship where you have a relationship a relationship of trust where erm...you can...you can rely on each other, each other's support when you're not there.

And:

Henry: So it's a mutual thing is the trust...erm...loyalty.

And:

Lucy: "And the trust stuff...you get it right works both ways.

And:

Samuel: But trust is two way.

Frank takes this point of the trust relationship to include the notion of dependency. So, trust is about knowing the other person is in it with you all the way:

Frank: So so the captain of an aeroplane won't fly into a storm cloud. He just won't do it because he knows the aeroplane falls to the ground. And anyway he's also part of the trust because he falls...you know, if his aeroplane goes down, the passengers go down, but he goes with them. In the banking industry that's not the case. Because when those erm... investment bankers have taken risks, they're flying straight towards the clouds...because it encourages them to do that and when that fails it's not them that fails. The captain fails... fail the passengers crash you know and all pick up the cost of that. Investment banker doesn't crash...just their passengers. There's no in this together.

This interesting point sent me back to the literature to review how authors have considered the impact on trust of the nature of the relationship between trustor and trustee. Sheppard and Sherman (1998) identify four distinct forms of trust that vary as a function of the nature and depth of interdependence in a given relationship. The four forms are shallow dependence, shallow interdependence, deep dependence and deep interdependence. For them: "Both the risks that trusting parties assume and the mechanisms for mitigating those risks emerge

as a function of the form of interdependence in the relationship” (Sheppard and Sherman, 1998:422). In a situation of high or deep interdependence, everyone is comparably vulnerable and controls each other’s fate, and so imposes the same threat (Meyerson, Weick and Kramer, 1996). But in the quote above, Frank seems to be describing ‘deep dependence’ where the trustee has what is described as ‘fate control’ – i.e. where one party can unilaterally determine the fate of another, such as a boss determining an employee’s salary or promotion or, as in Frank’s example, where a pilot can determine the fate of the passengers. This idea of dependency is discussed again later in this chapter when considering trust in organizations.

Part of my initial hunches going into the research related to trust-building, and my view that there was not a clear or shared understanding of trust in place in the organization. Without this, it was difficult to see how the organization could decide on the best type or types of trust on which to focus its trust-building efforts. In order to explore what senior managers understood by trust, I asked interviewees how they make the decision to trust in the first place. This was because I considered exploring influences of decisions to trust as important in developing my understanding of trust and the factors that could be seen as influencing trust-building.

Henry: No I don’t think so... It’s a personal thing isn’t it...but I think it’s like anything I er...you...give them little tests I suppose... That’s life isn’t it? You test people out and then you start to build trust will stop so it goes back to this business that trust is earned as opposed to the expected isn’t it all demanded er... and I think also as you get er...older, I’m in my mid-30s now [both laugh] and er as you get older you realise don’t you what mistakes you can make by being perhaps a little too trusting of individuals.

Susan had a slightly different view:

Susan: You can be unconditionally trusting can’t you? Of other people. But you can also be conditionally trusting of people until *until* they’ve demonstrated to you that actually there is something [on which] you do feel you can trust them.

Some people described trust as instinctive – something you didn’t need to think about:

Eleanor: I can probably go through the whole senior leadership team now and just off instinct say who I trusted and who I didn't, and then I would have to think about why I didn't the ones I didn't. It's not that the thought processes comes first and you work it out.

And:

Frank: I think sometimes trust is an instinctive thing.

And:

Mary: I think I trust everybody. Until something happens and then they lose the trust.

Such views relate to consideration in the literature of propensity to trust as a trait. For Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) the expectancy of trust is akin to a personality trait that is carried from one situation to others and leads to a generalized expectation about the trustworthiness of others. Eleanor and William also both describe this propensity to trust as central in deciding to trust (or not):

Eleanor: A lot of it comes from the person you are and probably I start from a position of 'I'll trust you 'til I feel something different.' But a lot of people come from 'I won't trust anybody 'til I've had it proven to me' so it depends if you're a half glass empty half glass full person don't it? So I trust you until I'm let down I suppose and then psh! You're off my agenda whereas a lot of people won't open themselves up to that will they?

And:

William: Erm...I...I think, I think I'm a kind of glass half-full person. So I think I start with a...erm...an assumption of trust. But I suppose you...you build a relationship up with someone over time so kind of you...so I think I, I like to start with being open and honest and it's almost on the basis that if I...if I...model myself the way in which I'd like to be treated that then you know you kind of get off on the right footing and you're showing this is what I...this is...this is how I'll treat you and it's almost like this is how I expected to be treated by you and so...what you then find is well how does the...how does the interaction go and you get that sort of response back. And then gradually as you work together over time with somebody...you kind of...you learn more about well actually is that what happens? Is that what happens in practice?

William's description also echoes those in the literature where trust is seen as developing over time as one accumulates trust-relevant knowledge through experience with the other person (Boon and Holmes, 1991; Lewicki and Bunker, 1995). This is known as thick trust which is embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent and nested in wider networks (Putnam, 2000). Henry also expressed trust as something that builds over time:

Henry: I think that helps to build trust if you think well look...just just empathizing with people as well really and saying...it's difficult for me this isn't it and er...I...I but that that builds up over period of time as well doesn't it...where that relationship has to develop to such an extent that when...it doesn't have to be somebody that you manage does it really it could be somebody else in the organization that thinks well I know this person does have people's best interest in at heart and they are a genuine person and they're not just a person that's seeking to climb the greasy pole.

Thin trust, on the other hand, is not embedded in the same way but rests implicitly on some background of shared social networks and expectations of reciprocity and encompasses people at a greater social distance from the trustor (Putnam 2000:136). William described uses children to illustrate how people's approach to initial trust can be different:

William: If you think back...not think back but if you look at kids...kids are like that...If you see kids standing at the side of the for example...a ride and one will jump on and one will think I'll just see how it goes so that's er that's them as a couple of individuals isn't it? Thinking nah...I am more of a risk averse this this one is more of a risk taker. And I think that probably continues into your life doesn't it?

Frank sees such an assumption of trust as something managers also need to make:

Frank: But for a senior manager, the first piece of trust has to be a gamble [...] you have to start from first trust these people until I find a reason not to trust them. So if you start from the other end, I'll just give them a bit of trust and then a bit more trust.... there's chance you'll never get there, so... so I tend to start from the other end, I'll trust people until there's a reason not to.

Although for some writers the leap of faith required in trusting early and quickly is not viewed as trust because: "When faced by the totally unknown, we can gamble but we cannot trust" (Lewis and Weigert, 1985:970), the senior managers interviewed did see this as trust. Other writers highlight the temporal dynamic where trust takes on a different character in the early, developing and 'mature' stages of a relationship (Lewicki and Bunker, 1996). However their view suggests a fairly linear process. The sense I took from interviewees' contributions was much more fluid phenomenon that could ebb and flow over time.

Another aspect of trust shared across the sense-making by senior managers was the connection to values and behaviours:

Samuel: Erm... I think trust to me is .... It's about values and behaviours but its organisationally for me where a group of stakeholders.. have a sense have a sense of... you know belonging, values and behaviours which they all sign up to and that's how they operate from...erm... and working within those kind of expectations it's as kind of loose as that in a way....erm... it's more about behavioural approaches erm.... Its more about how you behave and what you demonstrate as a leader.

And:

Lucy: So there's there's just something about...erm... the the whole thing about the values and behaviours. You may have heard me say before er... it's just the way my mum brought me up, you treat people how you want to be treated yourself and erm...and so as hard as things are, er...and as as sensitive or as difficult as messages can be, er... you owe it to the people who your responsible for all you work alongside or whatever to erm...to front that up erm...in the way that you would hope that it would be sort of dealt with for you.

And:

Frank: Give them some outline frameworks and let them get on with things. That erm.. they respect your... they they respect the value systems of the organisation but they respect the confidence that you give them.

Again, these views could be seen to reflect the three factors of trustworthiness that lead to trust (Tomlinson and Mayer, 2009), in particular integrity which is identified as the trustee adhering to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable (Mayer, David and Schoorman, 1995).

Senior managers' sense-making of trust related to its positive nature and they all appeared to see trust as important. I did not ask interviewees directly whether there were any negatives associated with trust and I find it interesting that only one person mentioned there may be a downside to trust:

Tom: So again yes it's difficult but there's a downside to trust with the risk of it being abused.

There is much in the literature about the risks and downside associated with trust that was not reflected in the discussions (Granovetter, 1985; Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Mishra, 1996). I would be interested in exploring further whether there were certain conditions or situations within an organization where

employees may more readily identify trust as having a downside. It would be helpful to understand these as, if present, they may influence the way that employees understand and engage with trust-building efforts.

## **Trust – Breaking and Rebuilding**

As already discussed, my research was informed by my interest in whether trust-building efforts could be undermined by control, and therefore I was interested in discussing with senior managers their views on whether trust could be undermined. In discussing trust, most interviewees talked about its fragility and also identified that trust could be broken completely:

Susan: He talked about trust being like glass. And once it's shattered it's broken and you can never ever put it together again.

And:

Tom: And you know that people do that another reason that there are some things that you want to believe them on and there are some things that are really important. The important things are going back to trust that really matter. If you let down on the biggies...then that takes the carpet away on the rest of it.

And:

John: You get your trust broken sometimes that can be catastrophic. Because it's almost like erm you know I'll never forget what people have done to me. And I will always have that. Yeah? And I'll try not to... but.

And:

Lucy: I think this is human instinct er....you know negatives are far more powerful than positives so it only takes one thing to have occurred and then you've broken that trust bond er...and that...that...that can dispense with 20 years of you know er...sort of doing the right thing or behaving the right way.

Given the suggestion that trust is thinner at the beginning of relationships (Lewicki and Bunker, 1996) this would point to trust being more fragile at this stage. Kramer and Lewicki (2010:251) concur: "Trust violations that occur early in a relationship, when trust is building, are far more harmful to the future of the relationship than when trust is violated later in a relationship's development. But in the interview conversations interviewees did not distinguish between stages of relationship development and the fragility of trust. Mary summed up what others also expressed when she said: "They'll put their trust in them...and that



continues for as long as something breaks that trust or makes them...the behaviour makes them not trust them.”

And as the literature indicates, there are plenty of ‘somethings’ that can happen to break trust. Kramer and Lewicki (2010) summarize the eight factors identified by Fraser (2010) that were most commonly mentioned by organizational work groups as contributing to breakdowns in trust. These are: disrespectful behaviours; communication issues; unmet expectations (including broken promises); ineffective leadership; unwillingness to acknowledge or take responsibility; performance issues; incongruence (between actions and words and values); and structural issues, including changes in systems and procedures, lack of structure, too much structure and misalignment of job duties and authority.

If trust within an organizational setting can be eroded or broken, there then comes the challenge of seeing whether or not it can be rebuilt. There were mixed views across the interview conversations as to whether or not this was possible:

Mary: It can but it takes a long time [...] and then sometimes and then... it's funny really isn't it because things happen in your life and at that point in time you think that trust is broken now it can't be rebuilt. It can but it takes a long time and then sometimes it can't ...

And:

Susan: Oh I am and I'm really really hard on that. I...I find that really difficult. [...] Really difficult.

And:

Lucy: It's very difficult... erm...it's quite, it's quite...Me, I find that hard erm...

No-one said they thought trust was something that could be easily rebuilt. Even where senior managers felt it could be rebuilt, there was a shared assumption it would be a lengthy process. This has implications for trust-building within Basset Council as the programme in place is not aimed at employees in the organization starting from a single position or view point. There will already be some employees in the organization who feel their trust has been broken in some way, and still others perhaps where trust is being rebuilt. Acknowledging this means trust-building programmes may also need to include elements of

repair and rebuilding.

There is a growing interest in the literature about rebuilding and repairing trust (Lewicki and Bunker, 2006; Ferrin, Kim, Cooper and Dirks, 2007; Dirks, Lewicki and Zaheer, 2009). In considering this issue, Kramer and Lewicki (2010) highlight the fragmented nature of the literature on trust repair but identify that:

The dominant focus of this work has been in four major areas: factors affecting the ways that trust is broken; the role of explanations, apologies and verbal accounts in ameliorating trust violations; the impact of reparations or compensation in healing a trust violation; and the creation of structural solutions which minimized the probability of future trust-destroying events and allows trust to be restored by minimizing future vulnerability (Kramer, Lewicki and Zaheer, 2010: 250-251).

This latter point relates to how people make decisions about trustworthiness discussed in chapter two. Knez and Camerer (1994:101) use the label 'expectational assets' to describe those things that people draw on when trying to make decisions about the trustworthiness of others.

### **Trust (or not) in an Organization**

In my research I was interested in how people understood trust in an organizational setting. My initial question to people asked them to consider what trust meant to them within this context, but only John raised the issue without being prompted:

John: You can have trust [...] in individual services or the organization so at a range of different levels. It can be sort of [...] person to person or on [...] um in an organization or not in an organization.

And:

John: It's quite a human concept but it can be between people and...something a bit more abstract like the organization rather than between me and my line manager or whoever.

Other interviewees described trust in relations to personal relationships and were then prompted by me in order to consider it at this level. William acknowledged this:

William: I knew the interview was about trust but I think I'd been thinking more

about the sort of personal relationships and trust whereas probably we spend longer talking in work about organizations and trust and how you make a trusting organization which is an interesting challenge.

Given that senior managers began by describing trust at the personal level, I asked them whether, having described trust in this way, they felt trust at the level of the individual was different to trust in organizations – or indeed whether they felt trust in organizations was possible. There was a range of responses to this question:

Susan: No I don't think you can. Well erm...no. Well that's interesting actually. I shouldn't automatically jump to that [pause] I can't think of any I would totally trust I think. But people do put trust in organizations so people may trust Marks and Spencer because they provide good quality clothing or it's very dependable".

And:

John: I think it's probably more abstract to the organization and I think (pause) probably more nuanced to an organization in that perhaps you trust parts of it or you trust it to do certain things [...] I think there are probably things that I would trust this organization to do well and there are others that I wouldn't.

And:

John: I guess partly it's that organizations are complex so you might trust different parts of it [...] I think you see it reflected within our employee survey stuff. I get a strong sense of 'I trust my manager', 'I trust my service', 'I trust my directorate' a bit less and it kind of dissipates as it gets more remote.

And:

William: But we're also talking about something different about organizational trust and ...interpersonal trust cos org...org...organizational trust is maybe about just erm you getting anything which contradicts the things that you're saying about yourself so you know we deliver the bins we...do the bins well or you know if you're a erm...website or something you know you're consistent you don't get viruses off it or something. But at an interpersonal level actually you're asking a lot more so it's actually about how...how people relate to you...how they, how they behave.

For some interviewees the trust they had in individuals meant, on balance, for them it may be possible to trust the organization as a whole. For others they felt it was possible to trust in an organization:

Susan: It's I trust that we've both got enough of a shared interest to make it work but in terms of individuals and I'm not saying all of them but some of them and I suppose that's where the influence lies as well. I trust I trust you as an individual because I generally do trust them and put my faith in them to get the work done. And faith in them because they will have the influence that I need

them to have helped me get what I need to do. There are other individuals who I wouldn't trust at all [...] And therefore it's sort of the sum of the parts really that overall provides that the overall level of trust feeling that we've got to get on with this.

And:

Tom: You trust certain brands so it's...that's trust. And there are certain organizations that you do trust.

And:

Eleanor: I suppose erm the public's trust in me as dealing with the bin service is a lot less level of trust than they need from somebody working in adult care if they need a care home isn't it? So that level of trust will vary from where you are in the community and your relationship with the Council and your relationship with Barset as an employee is quite a big one because such you're here such a huge chunk of the time you need to be safe, you need to get paid so you need a ... really good level of trust in there.

And:

Henry: Well I heard somebody say last week that you know I've been a member of First Direct for years they've given me fantastic service so I do trust them. But then, if they started to have some bad experience based on one or two individuals would their trust in that organization start to waver, would they start to change their opinions?

And:

Samuel: My personal view I think people erm...may be ready to trust organizations for different reasons with the most er...personal influence on response to that organization is the behaviours and the mindset and the values you know which people kind of exhibit really demonstrate.

In responding to the question about trust in organizations, seven of the ten senior managers spoken to made the point that organizations are collections of individuals which makes it difficult to talk about trusting organizations as a whole in any meaningful way.

Susan: I think because...given the nature of work and the size of this organization and the complexities of this organization you could never ever say you trust the organization because there are so many different facets to it and unknowns you never ever say you totally trust it.

And:

Eleanor: Not that you trust an organization but that's the sum of the people in it isn't it so erm just that.

And:

Mary: No I don't think you can because there's too many individuals that make up an organization so you can have so you can trust an organization in that you can say its got values and it is what it what it believes in is this. So you could on one level you can say you can trust the organization would support you or wouldn't let you down but at the end of the day there are probably hundreds of

in fact if not thousands of people who work in that organization...and every single one of them you can't have that contract with them around trust. So I don't think you can actually trust in an organization.

And:

Henry: Well I think the organization and its culture is determined by the individuals isn't it? So if they start to change, then your erm...views on trust within that organization will change accordingly so I so well it's down to personal experiences isn't it? So now I don't think the er...I think it's more down to the people than the organization.

And:

Samuel: Erm..I think the organisation is defined and characterized by the people who are within [...] erm... So I think I think it's about how you behave erm...you know that I my personal view I think people erm...may be ready to trust organisations for different reasons.

And:

Lucy: Hmmm...What's an organization? Erm...[pause] I suppose...it's an interesting [...] who, who is an organization? Er...Who are the influences within the organization erm...but it's very difficult because of course the organization is huge, it is complicated erm...It's made up of lots of different people erm...who operate in very different ways. Trust in an organization...it's interesting how people assess that and because...do people trust me? Do I represent the organization. I know within the organization er individuals within the organization will sort of personify the organization you think that word a lot but through individuals erm...so erm...there will be views amongst people that you can't trust the organization because of such a body and then you can't, you can't trust the way that they're going to operate. Not fair but you know that's the kind of reality and that some of the stuff that we have to contend with.

And:

William: I mean an organization is...the people who are in it when it comes down to to it. So...erm...and obviously you'll have a whole range of individuals within the organization and there'll be some who...who can be trusted and some who can't be trusted.

As discussed in chapters one and two, I was interested in trust-building efforts in the organization, and it was part of my pre-understanding that consideration of what trust meant for the organization and how 'best' to approach trust-building was underdeveloped in the organization at the time. In part this related to the focus of trust-building efforts – should these be focused at an organizational level, or at the level of individual? The discussions across the interviews indicate a need to consider both in order to reflect senior managers' sense-making. Another element to be taken into account was the distinction interviewees made between trust in an organization they were part of compared to one they were external to.

## Trust in Organizations – Impact of Internal and External Relationships

Unprompted, Susan and Mary both highlighted the difference between an organization such as one where you shop and your own work organization:

Susan: Which is quite different [...] You can pick and choose with where you shop can't you? [...] So for example with your work organization that would probably be very different in terms of what you say you trust your work environment, your organization at work [...] And in terms of your employing organization...you are reliant on that organization for your pay and therefore this influences lots and lots of other things in terms of your life and so I think there's a dependency element to that as well isn't there?

And:

Mary: Where you work it is much more about the individual relationships and there's a longer term commitment that you're going to be part of the organization and you actually can't choose as readily if that trust breaks down to be somewhere else whereas I can easily choose to not shop at Marks and Spencer and go and shop somewhere else. And sometimes my trust does actually move around shops [...] When you're working it out in a place it's probably more important that you trust the people in it. And sometimes you can work somewhere and the...as long as the people you work with you trust, the reputation of the organization could be that you wouldn't trust it as far as you can throw it. But actually the people that you work with...I think that happens sometimes that people working in groups and they really trust each other erm...but they fill in a staff questionnaire whatever and they'd say the organization wouldn't trust it.

This was followed up in other interviews where it was not stated spontaneously by asking the senior managers whether there was any difference in how they made the judgment to trust or not if they were inside an organization or external to it.

Eleanor: Yes it is different that higher level of trust needed if you work there because they got a huge control of your life. If you're choosing to take your services from someone that is a choice thing largely isn't it.

And:

Lucy: I suppose being within an organization you see far more [...] yeah I suppose it is that kind of greater exposure. Erm...mmm the other we've got I think again, for us particularly as an organization is erm..we have people who have at least a couple of kind of positions really in the sense that as employees of the organization and residents of the borough they're kind of users of our services as well as deliverers.

This led to a discussion in the interviews about whether the difference arising from how people were positioned in relation to the organization – i.e. internal or external, was also linked to the impact of distance in relationships. Some writers point to the fact that increases in physical and social distance lead to a decline in personal control, transaction history and familiarity - all of which reduce the potential experience to serve as a basis for trust (Zucker, 1986; Shapiro, 1987; Sitkin and Roth 1993). Although this does not make it clear if this is true just for new relationships, or at the beginning of relationships, or is also seen as the distance widens. For example, is it true within a hierarchy, over time, or as a result of physical distance such as being based at different sites? This would be an interesting area of further study.

As stated in chapter two, for Sheppard and Sherman (1998:422) such difference relates to risk as: “Risk is at the heart of how people do and should think about trust but that risk varies distinctly as the form of a relationship varies [...] Relationships of different form entail distinctly different risks”. I asked people whether they felt distance in a relationship was an issue in relation to trust, and the split in views is reflected by the two quotations below:

Susan: Just thinking about some of the feedback we’ve had in the staff survey and about people being comfortable within their own part of the organization and not necessarily being as positive about the broader organization [...] they will probably have trust within their own immediate environment and with their manager and that’s where the dilemma comes with the manager who’s then got to be the conduit and the linkage, the the connector with the broader part of the organization and that’s where the dilemmas of trust because they will...have to probably deal with some of the issues about breaking some of the trust with the individuals who sit there so why is it you’re picking on my job? Why is it that we’ve got to do this? Why have we got to do that?

And:

Eleanor: I don’t think that makes any difference [...] I’m not close to you but I trust you just as much as I trust [name of direct line manager].

### **What Leads Senior Managers to Trust Organizations?**

Following the question as to whether interviewees felt there was such a thing (for them) as trust in organizations I asked what it was that led them to trust in

an organization. The answers provided by senior managers to some extent mirrored what they said about trusting individuals by focusing on positive expectations or having confidence that the organization will do what it says. The importance of consistency between what the organization says is important and what it does in practice was also highlighted.

Susan: There's something about continuity and consistency and there's something about...hm that's interesting, about um whether they um whether they enact or evidence the values they espouse [...] So there's something about all of that which enables you to feel confident about what to expect...confident in terms of the...standards that you expect and the behaviours you can expect. How you feel you will...you have confidence in terms of how you will be treated and how you will...be made to feel...important in terms of your value as an individual.

And:

Tom: I think it's the quality of what is delivered and it's believing what they say [...] Why do you trust an organization and I think that's because...what they put out is what they do [...] But they're someone who's got a history of delivering it and a track record of getting it about right. Nothing fancy but about right. [...] And in certain places it's for instance in (name of place) what they say and what they do big difference but I kind of like (name) because you can like them for their boldness. There's something about them. But when it comes to trust it's...no, I wouldn't trust them.

And:

Eleanor: I think that degree of honesty at the beginning generates a situation where you can gain trust because then you can't say you didn't know because actually they've been very fair and upfront.

## **Conclusions**

Counter to my own starting perceptions, the research information revealed that senior managers did hold shared assumptions about trust. There was a shared 'taken-for-granted' that trust was a personal construct, discussed by all in essentially ego-centric ways. There was some limited contextualization of comments through reference to the organization but the majority of discussions on trust focused on senior managers themselves and their own personal relationships and beliefs. I had to prompt almost all interviewees to consider trust in relation to organizations – even though the letter inviting them to interview stated that the focus of my research was sense-making of trust (and control) in an organizational setting. All senior managers were comfortable discussing trust and the language they used reflected the personalized nature



of their sense-making.

There was also a clear shared assumption by senior managers of trust as positive expectations that others would do the right thing; or would do what they said they would. There was also a shared sense of trust as an understanding that people would not let you down. This chimed very strongly with the literature where: "Most scholars agree that trust involves positive expectations regarding the actions of others" (Jagd, 2010:260). In the literature, trust is also understood as a: "Willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of others" (Jagd, 2010:260). This vulnerability was not discussed explicitly by senior managers in their descriptions of trust, but was illustrated through the discussions of trust being broken which I consider in chapter six.

As stated, interviewees used their own personal relationships to illustrate their sense-making of trust. But these examples tended to focus on one-to-one relationships. From my experience, within an organization, each senior manager is part of a web of relationships with peers as well as other employees at different places within the organizational hierarchy. Senior managers are both managers and managed. This complexity, and the challenges it can pose for trust such as those illustrated by Dirks and Skarlicki's (2004) 'trust dilemmas' was not included in the interview discussions. This indicates that, although in the research study senior managers were beginning to challenge their own 'take-for-granted' in terms of trust, there was further to go in terms of seeing trust in organizations differently.

From the research evidence I find that there were a number of shared assumptions about trust expressed by senior managers, but I was surprised these did not include different types or kinds of trust. This differed from the literature where, as discussed in chapter two, there are a range of different types and forms described. But it also differed from my original expectation that, through my research, I would develop a clearer idea of the best type (or types) of trust for the organization to focus on in its trust-building efforts. And,

connected to this, whilst there was a shared understanding of trust in place, there was less uniformity between senior managers on how trust was built. Some senior managers saw trust-building as an incremental process but others highlighted the propensity to trust as an important aspect to trust-building. These are not mutually exclusive and in the literature the two aspects together form the 'spiral reinforcement model' (Zand, 1972:233) where initial trust leads to trusting action that reinforces trust. The organizational approach to trust-building did not include any acknowledgement of trust being continually influenced by behaviours and perceptions. Nor did it take account of different individuals having differing perceptions of the current state of trust within the organization. Both these factors are capable of influencing trust-building efforts and need to be considered further within the organization.

In making sense of trust in relation to organizations, a central issue for senior managers concerned what an organization actually was – and whether you could trust an organization or whether you trusted the people that made up the organization. Some interviewees felt it was possible to trust organizations as entities in their own rights, whereas others pointed to both the complexity of organizations such as councils and the fact they are made up from thousands of individuals as reasons for not being able to trust organizations as a whole. Senior managers also highlighted the nature of relationship with an organization as an influencing factor on the trust dynamic (i.e. external or internal to the organization) which links to deep and shallow dependence and/or interdependence (Sheppard and Sherman, 1998) which would have implications for trust within an organizational setting.

The ideas of trust will be considered again in chapter six, when senior managers' ideas of the relationship with control will be discussed.

### Making Sense of Control

#### Introduction

In this chapter I explore the research information that relates to the ways in which senior managers understand or make sense of control in an organizational setting. As I described in chapter three, before I began my interviews I had identified a number of areas in relation to control that I wanted to explore. These areas were informed by my hunches and refined through my consideration of the relevant academic and corporate literature. These areas included senior managers' sense-making of control in the organization, and whether formal and informal (or social) control was included in this as indicated in the literature (Ouchi, 1977, 1980; Sitkin, Sutcliffe and Schroeder, 1994; Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2004; Inkpen and Currall, 2004). I was also interested in the view of senior managers regarding the consequences and impact of strengthening and increasing control in the organization – particularly with regard to any perceived effects on performance and trust. In addition I was also interested in any perceived downsides to control.

As Hood (1995:207) highlights: "Control over public administration and bureaucracy is still overwhelmingly equated with hierarchical overseers". Therefore, I was also interested in exploring with service managers their own sense of control of control frameworks in the organization – did they feel 'in control of control' or 'controlled by control'? Given the focus in the organization at the time of the research on the culture change programme aimed at building trust, I was also interested in whether senior managers understood culture as a form of informal or social control that therefore formed part of the overall control framework. Such a view would be in line with the literature where: "The central element of social control is organizational culture" (Das and Teng, 1998: 507).

As has been discussed in chapter two, there is a significant amount in the literature on organizations and management regarding control. This is not surprising given the fact that: “Management in a modernist discourse works on the basis of control” (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000:11). My brief discussion of this literature in chapter two considers definitions of control in organizations as well as describing the two main types of control – formal and informal. In relation to informal (or social) control, I consider the literature on culture as a control mechanism. I also consider the idea of balance in relation to control systems. In chapter two I also discussed my review of the corporate literature and how it related to control. Key messages of the Improvement Programme related to improved controls supporting improved performance and efficiency (Barset Council, Internal Reports March 2009 and June 2009).

Given the hermeneutic approach to my research, I began my analysis with the expectation that, as well as the areas of interest I identified before beginning my interviews, other areas of interest in relation to control would emerge during the interviews themselves. This expectation was met and the new areas led me to consider additional literature which I introduce in the discussion in this chapter and the next (for example Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Mumby 2005; Sitkin, Cardinal and Bijlsma-Frankema 2010).

### **Senior Managers Making Sense of Control in Organizations**

In the interviews, I followed the discussion on trust in organizational settings with a discussion of control. As I was interested in how senior managers understood control within an organizational setting, I first asked each interviewee to describe what they understood control to mean in this context.

Interviewees articulated a range of views about control within the organization which are discussed in more detail in the following sections. It struck me that across all the conversations senior managers discussed their sense-making in relation to the specific organization, with an occasional reference to previous

places of employment. The views of control were considered in relation to the organizational space, which was in direct contrast to the discussions on trust which primarily focused on personal spaces and relationships. Reflecting on this suggests that control is primarily associated with work relationships and contexts – no one used an example of control from their personal lives outside the organization; whereas trust was discussed by senior managers in more personal terms, with examples provided from family and other personal relationships until prompted to consider trust in the organizational context.

In their initial responses to the question about what control means to them in an organizational context, a number of senior managers first stressed the importance of control to organizations. They also highlighted what they saw as the benefits on control. Such views chime with the literature that highlights control as a fundamental aspect of all organizations (Scott, 1992; Thompson and McHugh 2000) and sees management as: “Theoretically and practically intertwined with control” (Pfeffer, 1997:100).

Samuel was particularly clear about the importance of control, emphasizing the fact a number of times across the conversation.

Samuel: You know control isn't a negative word. Erm...a set of controls about how people work er...and expectations and values no, I think that's commendable.

And:

Samuel: I'm very clear that at different points within an organization you need controls, you need internal controls, you need firm management processes.

The use of the phrase “at different points” connects to idea that the control systems, mechanisms and frameworks are not required to be uniform across the organization. This point was made by a number of interviewees. Frank highlighted the importance and benefits of control but tied this to more specific functions or circumstances within the organization:

Frank: So there will be bits that are regularized, like finance here, you have to have a certain level of competency and control before you can do any more.

You don't want them [finance] to press a button and put everything on the 3.30 at Kempton.

Lucy extended this point to consider controls relating to the management of performance which was a key outcome of control set out in both corporate and academic literature:

Lucy: Our accountability is not just to ourselves again...but control...it's it's about that you know the evidence and information and the awareness of how we are performing erm...and actually, you can call me old fashioned if you like, but erm...it's about that's that's our responsibility to demonstrate those things. So that isn't about kind of senior management checking up on...it's actually about is being able to demonstrate and the other side to that it is also about it gives us the opportunity to celebrate those successes as well and the evidence that sits behind them...and do something about it where it isn't.

Here Lucy is describing a positive purpose to control systems in the organization. And Lucy's description is in line with discussions of formal control in the literature. For McAuley, Johnson and Duberley (2007:152): "Formal control refers to everyday hierarchical processes and practices whereby attempts are made to ensure that members' *potential* labour power is realized in relation to their organizational tasks."

As well as identifying the importance of control in the organization, and examples of types of control used, some of the interviewees also expressed the view that there was something unique and important about the political context of local authorities which impacted on the nature and types of control in place. In part this related to the point raised above by Lucy regarding accountability being wider than the organization but it also relates to the interest I had before beginning the interviews about how 'in control' of control senior managers felt. Samuel highlighted the impact of external bodies on control in the organization:

Samuel: But in the last 12 years and the previous administration what we had was a culture of increasing centralization, the kind of micro-management from the state [...] For the last number of years I've been subject to a regime which says if those controls aren't in place we'll name and shame you and when things go wrong, it went wrong because of these controls not being in place.

And Eleanor highlighted how the democratic nature of the organization added to the complexity of the organizational context:

Eleanor: Controls vary don't they from public sector to private sector. We've had that discussion today. This whole issue is how politics puts a different dimension on it and how in some ways it is quite a lot easier to work in an autocratic organization because you just take your lead, you follow it. If it fits with your ethos you stay there, if it doesn't, you move. Erm...whereas it's a lot more complex when you're working in a democratic organization because there's so many more players and strands in there isn't there...it's a lot more complex.

## **Variations in Control**

In discussing their sense-making of control in organizations, senior managers described types of control as well as their application across the organization. But, as Samuel has already indicated above, there was a recognition that there wasn't a single type of, or approach to, control in place across the organization. Other senior managers acknowledged this and emphasized that it probably would not be appropriate or effective if there were a single approach.

Mary: I think there's different types of control...erm...I think there's er...like a managerial control so you can control and be controlled erm...which means to say that there is a contract between you and I that says you must do this like your job description. There are systems and processes about erm..about control as well.

John also acknowledged the differential nature of control across the organization, but for him this related to risks which were different in different parts of the organization:

John: So if you think about a complex organization like a local authority...you expect the control mechanisms to look quite different in children's social care because your risks are different...erm...and at different levels of seniority they look different.

This notion of different approaches to control for different employees or professions was also expressed by Henry:

Henry: And so I suppose that's a different that's a different environment in which they're working so, I suppose from a control perspective you sort of have to recognize that people might need er...handling in different ways to get where they are now in terms of their level of efficiency or outputs.

But revisiting the organizational documentation on controls shows the same controls set out in relation to finance, human resources, assets, and performance for the whole organization. These include the Medium Term Financial Strategy (2010-13), financial rules and regulations, Council Constitution, People Framework with associated policies and procedures, Asset Management Plan and the Corporate Performance Framework. There are then additional systems in place for specific functions – such as criminal records bureau checks for employees working with children and young people. The base controls are not different for different employees or different services – but this does not necessarily mean they are interpreted and applied in the same way across the organization.

Susan raised the idea that the extent or degree of control varied across the organization:

Susan: Some staff have very little control...Some staff work in a very controlled environment. So they they have a uniform they're very clearly managed, tightly managed and they have very you know strict rotas in terms of how they work. And therefore, you would think there might be some kickbacks around some of that, but, so...but there wasn't.

Given the critical approach to my research, I was extremely interested in the idea that the extent control was applied to employees varied across the organization, and given the hierarchical nature of the organization, also varied across the hierarchies. I was also interested that Susan had raised the idea of 'kickback' from employees in terms of them reacting to controls in a negative way. This suggests the potential for resistance to control. McAuley, Duberley and Johnson (2007:153) emphasize that: "Control over employee behaviour is always problematic, especially because people always retain at least the potential to resist control strategies." Such resistance can take a number of forms – with controls being ignored, subverted or actively resisted. As Ackroyd



and Thompson (1999:47) state: "Control can never be absolute and in the space provided by the indeterminacy of labour, employees will constantly find ways of evading and subverting managerial organization and direction at work. This tendency is a major source of the dynamism within the workplace". As McAuley, Duberley and Johnson (2007:152-3) point out: "People are not passive recipients of external stimuli [...] human beings possess agency: their behavior is guided by their active sense-making, and this can lead to unintended and often unpredictable consequences". Frank also highlighted the potential for resistance when describing control in the organization:

Frank: What eventually happens [...] that that kind of people go around another way because you just get frustrated you can't get the job done.

Mumby (2005:29) highlights that: "Much of the research on employee resistance focuses on the routine practices of workers as they engage with the everyday control mechanisms and disciplinary practices of organizational life". Such resistance is rarely about open hostility, it is usually more covert in nature. Given this, Susan's view that 'kickbacks' were not happening does not necessary hold – they may well be going on below the radar.

For Mumby (2005) much of the literature treats the control-resistance relationship as a dualistic one that privileges either organizational processes of control and domination, or the possibilities for employee resistance. He argues that the relationship should be seen as dialectic where the focus is on the dynamic interplay between control and resistance and the intention is not to resolve this dialectic but instead to: "Explore how the tensions and contradictions that inhere in the dialectic can create possibilities for organizational change and transformation" (Mumby, 2005:38). This idea of a dynamic tension that creates opportunities for change and emancipation was not something that was expressed by senior managers. A much more static sense-making of control emerged from the discussions. Henry alone introduced a more democratic idea of agreeing or negotiating the extent of control to be exerted.

Henry: While I also think there has to be varying levels of control again depending on there's some...some people that expect a lot of control and others that just expect a little bit of guidance in terms of to get from A to B...what's expected of them...and I think you have to with any organization there has to be more, there has to be more of a ... people have to agree in terms of how much control to exert on the individuals within the organization.

I found this idea of people coming to agreement about how much control to be exerted interesting. It chimes with the critical theory perspective discussed in chapter three, where a key challenge lies in identifying ways in which organizations could become more democratic in order to listen to the voices that usually went unheard. This enables organizational members to self-determine the values and direction of their organization (Darwin, Johnson and McAuley, 2002). Sitkin, Cardinal and Bijlsma-Frankema (2010) describe the idea of worker-designed peer controls, where workers choose the approaches to be used to control their peers, and include both formal and informal peer controls. They are used where the organization explicitly delegates authority to workers to self-govern, for example in self-managed teams, but also in more informal arrangements within teams. It would be interesting to explore this idea further in the organization, and I will come back to this point in chapter seven when discussing the implications for professional practice.

### **Positioning Control in the Organization**

Given the perceived influence of the external environment on control in the organization, and the complexity of both the organization and its operating context, I was interested in exploring with senior managers how they understood control to be positioned in the organization – for example, was it imposed from outside, was it presented as important, and if so why was it seen as important? Therefore I asked interviewees what they understood the organizational messages to be regarding control and control systems. I was also interested in the extent to which any 'corporate line' on control chimed with their experience.

The majority of senior managers understood the main corporate position on control to be focused on a shift from a previous 'command and control' culture to an approach based on staff empowerment. But at the same time, there was a shared 'taken-for-granted' from all interviewees that there were now more controls in place than had previously been the case. There was a shared understanding of a disconnect between the corporate position on control and the day-to-day reality experienced by senior managers.

As Eleanor stated:

Eleanor: It always seems to be as well...as well as, not instead of. Or if it is meant to replace nobody makes it clear so we carry on doing what we did and then add new ones as well. No wonder it's a bit of a mess.

A number of senior managers interviewed expressed concern about the negative connotations for control in the organization in a way that did not fit with the corporate messaging:

Samuel: I actually think it's about subliminal messages as well. Because I've heard this before, we're going to move towards...from erm....command and control to a culture of accountability. But I think that to the way that it is used here, accountability would have a very negative connotation. And it would be about erm...potential blame [...] And I think that the way it's said here...shifting from that command and control culture to accountability still feels like a shifting essentially of responsibility or blame or control because we don't trust you, to it's clearly your responsibility now and you'll be at fault if it goes wrong. I really think something's missing here.

And:

Lucy: So its not, so I guess it's shifting in the mindset from this is punitive, it's negative, it's trying to catch us out or to demonstrate what we're not doing...to a more positive 'actually this is demonstrating what we are doing er... and we have to have the evidence base to...to show that so...There's something about erm...it is kind of negative catching out and not trusting et cetera.

## **How Control should work**

In discussing their sense-making of control, a number of senior managers discussed how they felt control should operate in organizations. Common to these descriptions was the idea of controls acting as guides rather than in a prescriptive way:

Frank: The rules are there to give you a guide. They're not there necessarily to be so prescriptive.

And:

Samuel: Its responsibility and accountability erm... is it giving people erm.. the space and the heads to use their heads as opposed to being very prescriptive and very specific about everything we do.

Samuel extended this point using football as an illustration:

Samuel: You need to be able to engender that kind of...that creativity, that innovation and let people to to to feel they can take a few risks within a controlling framework. I just use a footballing metaphor [...] I can watch that game within three or four minutes where there is a system in place where the people know what's expected of them and what they have to do. And that's functional and that will deliver. But where they actually move and I think take a step up [...] this is where they can start to give some freedoms within the pattern of play and they can have some creativity and creative play. But you know that certain things...so people will know what they're doing and you can actually bring somebody to that position who can adapt and play to that position....erm...because he's part of a bigger system.

I find it interesting that Samuel described a 'controlling framework' rather than a 'control framework' and I discuss this distinction in more detail later in this chapter.

## **Downside of Control**

Without being prompted, a number of senior managers expressed the view that there was a downside to control, and control could have negative consequences in an organization.

Frank: If you control more and more and more, you have more people running around after the same small thing to get it done and more people checking it and checking it and checking it. I think there was a quote that I remember from erm...my university days. I can't remember who it was from but he said in the...in the private sector they say erm...no...in the Army they say 'ready, aim, fire' but in the private sector they say 'ready, fire, aim' but in the public sector they say 'ready, ready, ready'. And I think there's more than a shade of this here as we go 'ready, ready, ready' and then we check it and then we check it again, then we check it again and just in case, and then with another check just in case. And then the thing doesn't happen so then somebody gets told off because it didn't happen so then we run and put another check in place to make sure that it does happen [...] But you've had so many checks in place that erm...you can't actually achieve what you need to achieve.

So Frank expressed real frustration in what he/she saw as the barrier to action in organizations caused by excessive use of control. This view is in direct contrast with the corporate messages relating to control where improved corporate control was articulated as contributing to improved performance and efficiency. I also found it interesting that Frank saw the consequences of things not then happening as a 'telling off', followed by a further escalation of controls. This accords with the idea in the literature of the 'control paradox' where more control leads to decreased performance. The example provided by Miller (2004) is one where:

The strict enforcement of rules heightened the awareness of the workforce on the *minimum* effort they could offer without being fired. Less voluntary compliance resulted in a tightening of the rules and increased monitoring by hierarchical supervisors, which in turn resulted in even less willing compliance. The net result [...] was decreased performance (Miller, 2004:112).

Frank's description is somewhat different because for him effort continues, and even increases, but the extra effort goes on managing the controls rather than on work that adds value or improves performance. This highlights the point made by McAllister (1995:32) that monitoring and safeguarding generally: "Represent non-productive use of finite managerial resources [...] Managers engaging in excessive monitoring and defensive behaviour will have fewer resources remaining with which to achieve fundamental work objectives". Controls have a cost to the organization – they require resources to develop and to operate.

Frank highlighted this cost, which could be experienced in a number of ways. The effect could be actual costs due to additional resource requirements for operating growing control systems. Or the cost could be experienced in terms of reduced outputs/outcomes from the finite resource as it becomes focused on control rather than working towards outcomes or outputs.

Frank: If you think about the baby P stuff...so, baby P happened, it was a terrible to have happen. The Government brought in more regulation and, in fact more regulation didn't necessarily take the risk away, it just meant more people beavering around being more risk averse and the perverse of that was fewer social workers came into the sector [...] quite often institutions will knee jerk

intervene...with we'll have to regulate it more. So you end up spending more time measuring the measures than you do working to the outcomes. You get into that kind of world.

Sitkin, Cardinal and Bijlsma-Frankema (2010) pose an interesting question when they ask to what extent controllers consider the costs when deciding on a portfolio of controls. This was not a specific question posed to senior managers but I think it is an issue that the organization should explore in future when considering the design and operation of its control framework(s).

Mary expressed her concern that applying controls could create unintended consequences in the organization. A control may be effective directly where applied but could then divert activity and/or behaviour elsewhere where controls were not in place or not as effective:

Mary: It's a bit like when they say they will control the media, you know, so we'll put all these press releases out into the [name of local paper] so we'll control the message that goes out. We'll do it internally. We'll control the message. We'll give managers a speech as this is what you're going to say to your own employees, erm...and you're going to say it this way erm...and in fact, at its very extreme what you do is drive people into the water cooler conversation because they're being told they're being told what to say and they're being told what to think. So you drive them into a water cooler conversation which is...if you look at them erm...Facebook and others, they go into the alternative conversations because they're not allowed to have the conversation through official channels because you're trying to control it...yes? So it becomes perverse at its extreme end.

Considered critically, this connects to the idea of employee resistance already discussed. It also links to the literature that describes the connection between control and conflict that Mary's example illustrates. Argyris (1999) notes March's (1981) views on control and conflict in stating:

Control systems drive conflict systems because once measures are developed to evaluate performance and compliance they invite manipulation. Once the rules of evaluation are set, conflict of interest between the rule setters and the rule followers assures that there will be some incentives for the latter to maximize the difference between their score and their effort (Argyris, 1999:328).

This distinction between 'rule setters' and 'rule followers' illustrates the idea of differing power relationships within organizations and hierarchies. It also connects to the 'rule setters' being 'in control' of control.

Instead of illustrating senior managers having this sense of control, the interview discussions demonstrated an increased frustration of the senior managers arising from the recent strengthening of controls. This is illustrated by William's comments with the change in the approach to control he had recently experienced:

William: There's something about the organization at the moment about control about the extent to which erm...decisions are being sucked up [...] there's no real delegated decision making so its being sucked up to a very tight group at the top and so I think there's like a...almost like a control through the use of resources at the moment [...] but what I think where that leaves me and others feeling is actually I haven't got sufficient control over...over resources so you want to make things happen but how do you actually how do you actually do it?

As discussed above, this frustration was a common aspect of senior manager's sense-making:

William: But I felt like I had more control over resources...both people and finance, and I've lost that so I've got kind of less influence over what...how much change how much change I can make.

And:

Frank: The more you let go, the more comes back. You know the less you let go, the less you let go, the more you micro-manage the less you're likely to get done for you.

For a number of senior managers, their sense-making concerned situations where it could be said: "Formalization had already passed the point of constructive clarification and usefulness" (Cardinal, Sitkin and Long 2004:422). But there was no discussion by senior managers about what they had done, or intended to do to address such a situation.

At the beginning of my research I was interested in exploring whether senior managers recognised formal and informal controls in their sense-making of control in an organizational setting but this did not appear to be the way that senior managers understood control frameworks. No interviewees seemed to

make the distinction between formal and informal control in the way that the literature describes (Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2004; Inkpen and Currall, 2004). The literature did not just describe controls as informal and informal – there also appeared to be a consensus in the literature about the importance of a balance of control systems, where balance is described as: “A state where an organization exhibits a harmonious use of multiple forms of control” (Cardinal, Sitkin and Long 2004:214). For authors such as Sitkin, Cardinal and Bijlsma-Frankema (2010:326): “Control systems that include a balance and integrated mix of formal and informal control mechanisms are thought to work better than those that rely too heavily on one or the other”.

As senior managers did not describe balance in the organization between types of control (i.e. formal and informal) it is not surprising that they also did not refer to the importance of balance of control systems in the way discussed in the literature. However, whilst senior managers did not describe this type of balance, a number of them did talk in ways that illustrated ideas of balance between autonomy and control in the organization:

William: Erm...I suppose there's something about how much autonomy do you have over...taking decisions so if the organization...if an organization's very controlling erm...the decisions are taken higher up...or have to be referred...referred back up so as an individual further down the structure you're much more erm...you've got...you've got far more limits around what you can do or what decisions you can take. So rather than feeling free to you know, just get on with it and within broad parameters deliver what it is you're meant to do and it's continually going back up...on...er...you know on of often quite small things rather than just reporting back when there's problems.

There were a number of examples given in which senior managers appeared to have experienced the ‘paradox of control’ described in the literature (Streatfield, 2001) where managers are both ‘in control’ and ‘not in control’ at the same time. This paradox was experience by interviewees in a number of ways:

John: Lots of conversations where you know staff are saying well, erm..you know...you pay me 100 grand a year to manage social care but you won't let me decide to spend 150 quid on a new fridge for a day centre or whatever. I've got to take it and get it signed off.



A number of senior managers provided examples of where they understood they had less autonomy in the current organization than in previous roles in different organizations. This suggests the approach to control may be specific to the organization rather than generic to the local authority sector, but it would be interesting to explore whether this 'paradox of control' was experienced by senior managers in other organizations. Tom described the issue of autonomy as follows:

Tom: [name of senior manager] and I had a conversation, you know she's come from [name of previous local authority], I've come from you know erm from [name of previous authority] and whatever. But it's the level of er... autonomy that you had...so I was making decisions that now I have to consult [name of senior manager] on...you know and I was making them daily. It was like because that was sort of there was broader controls obviously because you were you know in an authority and you've got processes in place whatever. But the level of autonomy and authority that I had was, and it wasn't just me, it wasn't just about...peculiar to my position but anyone who was a chief officer making much high-level decisions and had a broader erm...commitment to the organization. I didn't need to be told to do it, I did it because corporately what we're all about isn't it. I'm a senior manager in this organization...it goes back to well I don't take TOIL<sup>1</sup> because you paid me this, it's kind of like a contract between me that I will give you my utmost if you will pay me this money.

Kramer and Cook (2004) emphasize that getting the work done needs more from employees than simply complying with the rules and directives of the organization. It also needs discretionary or voluntary efforts that often mean going beyond any formal role or job descriptions. This is why 'working to rule' where such discretionary effort is withdrawn: "Is one of the most fascinating and revealing forms of organizational sabotage" (Miller, 2004:99).

Both William and Tom described the frustration felt in the organization at the constraint to such voluntary or discretionary effort experienced as a result of applying controls. What was not clear from the interview conversations was whether this frustration could then escalate so that voluntary effort and compliance was withdrawn in general – for example including in those situations where controls were not a block; and whether this frustration would then be part

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<sup>1</sup> TOIL – time off in lieu of hours worked.

of an escalation of control leading to decreased performance; in turn leading to further control - and so on.

William: if you...if you completely control everything you take away people's autonomy [...] ...and you lose the opportunities for them to be creative or you know to take opportunities as they come along, you know it's like well you can only do what you're told to do and you can't stray outside those boundaries. So you have a set of frustrated individuals cos they feel they could give more but but they can't. So you might have an organization which doesn't...which doesn't make many mistakes but equally you won't take many of the risks which might sometimes go wrong but on other occasions...might lead to you know massive improvements. ...Or massive gains. And the individuals who aren't being trusted...kind, or are being controlled actually will resent that being controlled and feel frustrated. So they're not going to be... It's not an organization that they'll be happy to work in.

And:

Tom: You control it you're not giving people the freedom to think and therefore you don't get that extra amount it becomes transactional so [...] Yes so I gave them the extra mile and I got so much more out of them because I didn't control them because he came from a controlled environment.

But this was not everyone's experience. One senior manager described how they were allowed the space to carry out their work – but this was a minority view:

Eleanor: And it was that being told what to do that stresses me and [name of senior manager] is brilliant – she just lets you get on with it unless you've got a problem and then she's there for you. And that's...that's a manager for me [...] So perhaps I'm not suffering too much of that control with things.

For Mary, the imbalance was almost a 'work to rule' imposed by the organization itself on its employees:

Mary: I mean it's control in that sense is that somebody doesn't let you use your own initiative whatsoever.

A number of interviewees also highlighted the importance of balance in the amount or degree of control. John agreed with others that control was needed in organizations, but qualified this agreement:

John: For me it's about is the control appropriate and proportional erm and I think you do that you do need some control [...] making sure that the framework is sort of proportional and risk-based I think.

To me, this is an extension of the discussion of balance between control and autonomy, and raises a key question regarding who it is in organizations that makes the decisions on what level of control is appropriate and proportionate. In a risk averse organization, a high degree of control may seem appropriate to those 'in charge'. But if the organization is operating in a low risk environment, such high degrees of control might be experienced by others in the organization as inappropriate and excessive. In the interviews, most senior managers described experiencing 'too much' control, and a number of them used the term 'controlling' to describe the organization in such instances. Considering this reflexively, where control and autonomy were experienced as in balance, control was seen as neutral – it was a tool or system experienced as part of 'business as usual'. Where control was experienced as excessive, it was no longer neutral – it was controlling. But from a critical perspective, control is never neutral – it may sometimes simply be less obvious: "Sometimes these processes are very subtle and barely noticeable because they are so much a part of our everyday lives and experiences" (McAuley, Duberley and Johnson, 2007:152). It may be that, at times of change when control systems become more visible the opportunities for challenge and the potential for change may be the greatest.

From a critical perspective, a crucial question concerns from whose perspective something is judged to be controlling? William posed this very question:

William: It's almost like how much control gets put in before you're controlling? And who decides? I can see, say, having [name of on-line performance system] and some sort of performance management system...you need to have a sense of are we making progress, are we delivering what we said we'd do? But it's almost like well how much, at what level of detail is it going in? So...from my point of view the...reporting quarterly on every little detail in the service plan is incredibly frustrating [...] So you end up it's ... overtly controlling because its too hung up in the detail and actually there may be perfectly good reasons to change ... things around but ... it's too rigid a structure. And then the other thing is just the frustration with the amount of time that you spend in completing things like that as opposed to getting on and delivering what it is you want to do.

Mary made the distinction between the control systems and how people then chose to apply them.

Mary: I have never ever thought [name HR system] or any of those being controlling, I've just thought of them as control systems that help you do your job better...and and I think probably.. I think contracts and things like that can be controlling when people choose to use them like that.

As explored earlier, control, like trust, is talked about in a number of ways. A lot of the literature focuses on the approaches to control in organizations, making the distinction between formal and informal controls (Ouchi 1977, 1980; Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2004; Inkpen and Currall, 2004; Sitkin, Sutcliffe and Schroeder 1994; Das and Teng, 2001). Also addressed in the literature is the idea of control as an activity, with people being 'in control' (Streatfield, 2001). The third element relates to 'who' it is then, that is 'in control'. Stacey (2010:78) highlights the: "Assumption made in the dominant management discourse where control means simply that someone is 'in control' and so ensures survival". This 'someone' is usually: "Those in positions of authority" (Streatfield, 2001:7). Hood (1995:207-208) shares this view and states: "Control over public administration and bureaucracy is still overwhelmingly equated with hierarchical overseers".

But the interview discussions appear to highlight that the expectations senior managers have about control, and how it should be applied in the organization, are not being met, and in some cases are being breached. As the literature points out:

In all organizations, expectations are handed up and down, consciously and unconsciously through relations between individuals, and between sub-systems, as well as through political processes of action and avoidance. Expectations have a powerful impact on the ways in which members of organizations feel about and do their jobs (Vince, 2004:50).

Here, as for the literature, it would seem that the expectations of senior managers that they would have a degree of autonomy in their work, and some degree of influence (or control) over control were not being met. The implications for this in relation to trust are explored in chapter six.

## Controlling Culture and Culture as Control

I asked senior managers about the view in the literature of culture as a soft control, where culture change programmes are part of the organization's control mechanisms (Das and Teng 1998). Mixed responses were given. For example, Eleanor strongly disagreed with this position:

Eleanor: I think that smacks of paranoia [laughs] cos there's nothing in there that anybody semi-decent wouldn't sign up to.

Lucy also disagreed that this was how the culture change programme was perceived:

Lucy: But actually has Trust Barset been a way of kind of manipulating control in people? I don't know that it has, but others might have a different view, but I think we've introduced it in such a way that as I say we've provided a framework...erm...and a language and a way of doing things and and actually, maybe an identity that people can buy...buy into erm...and there are the sceptics as there are with any kind of development programme.

I find these responses interesting because they suggest to me that by agreeing with or 'buying-in' to the culture, or holding the same values, this somehow negates any control element of culture. Considering this reflexively caused me to wonder whether control is only really tangible when it somehow comes into conflict with an individual's own expectations and beliefs. Otherwise, is it just seen as part of 'how the organization works'? It would be interesting to explore this idea further in future research.

Others acknowledged that culture could be used as control in an organization, as this longer extract shows:

John: I think you can use the trust and the culture to [...] control people and we were talking about a member of my staff that I've got difficulty with and their timekeeping. That's not come to my attention because I was using formal control mechanisms. I've never seen a timesheet from anyone in my service [...] but actually on the culture side in a way I didn't need to because I've built a culture of trust in the team where a couple of other people came in and said we think there's an issue there. So in that sense I guess you could say that the culture of my team operated as a control mechanism on that individual.

Interviewer: Because it's got some standards that the culture sort of framed around it?

John: Yes and those were quite explicitly built in with the Trust Barset values around we deliver our best at all times and that was kind of the basis on which people were coming to me...we don't think this individual can be because they're not physically here [...] So for us in terms of the way that we then manage that situation, then you invoke formal controls. So that person's timesheets will now be checked and signed off.

This links back to the idea of peer controls discussed earlier in this chapter where informal controls are in place – here described as the culture in the team (Sitkin, Cardinal and Bijlsma-Frankema, 2010). Of course this extract is also interesting in terms of what it says about trust and this relationship between trust and control is explored further in chapter six.

Therefore, there was limited acknowledgement across the interviews that culture could be used as part of control. So the 'taken-for-granted's' surfaced in the interviews seemed to be contradictory – on the one hand, culture was not part of control; on the other, controlling behaviours existed in the organization.

Across the interview conversations, most senior managers expressed a perception of a controlling culture in the organization, as well as expressing frustration with this approach:

Samuel: And these are these are big people. These are people that set the tone of the whole organization...And they're...they have an obsession with structures and micro-management.

And:

Tom: Culture...it's the corporate culture that controls and then within the directorates becomes more controlling and impose more controls [...] we get churned up in this minutiae of responsibilities and who is leading and so that we all just lead each other round in a dark confusion.

And:

Samuel: You need clear controls to improve but I sometimes think you're now in Barset we have...we demonstrate too many controlling behaviours.

And:

Tom: I think it goes back to leadership really and the leadership is quite controlling here [...] It is controlling behaviour because everyone accepts there's control in there but it it ...it it's deeper than that. And it and it's about

erm...I think it's about when I talk about the corporate discipline...controlling how people are".

In addition, the existing formal control systems were also seen as a block to culture change and control:

Susan: But what we have got is a very traditional set of HR policies and procedures which in some ways are so constrained by the legislative requirements and you know trying to be as risk averse as possible...about what that tends to do is sort of almost wrap you in some kind of straitjacket and you that then you are then reactive as opposed to proactive and and actually then almost works against what what you're trying to erm promote in terms of the the trust Barset values and behaviours isn't it. So it works it can work against it.

Surfacing these seemingly contradictory views provides the opportunity for senior managers to explore and work to a new understanding regarding control and culture.

### **Culture and the Control of Identity**

As discussed in chapter two, critical perspectives on organizations question the ethical and intellectual foundations for viewing culture as an organizational variable that can be controlled (Anthony, 1990; Ogbonna and Harris, 1998; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003). A particular aspect of this relates to individual identity and the notion that organizational culture requires employees to adopt management-derived values regardless of whether or not these are consistent with their own (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003). Alvesson and Willmott (2002:620) view: "Identity as an important yet still insufficiently explored dimension of organizational control". As well as being considered in the literature, identity was an issue that came up in several of the interview discussions, particularly in relation to changes to physical expressions of identity and whether or not this then linked to changes in culture.

Henry: I don't [...] agree that sticking a badge on somebody or a new er...label on the front door, acquiring uniforms changes people's attitudes though...erm...or to say dress down Friday relaxes people. I think it is all about up here isn't it? [taps head] Because I've seen organizations put a new ... [laughs] ... nameplate on the front door and it's the same crap services when I

walk through the door...so it is about erm...getting people to change individually and collectively to come towards a different way of er...thinking really.

And:

Lucy: Organizations need an identity [...] So, a uniform, call it that, for the organization isn't that a response to some of the issues that we've identified and is not necessarily a bad thing? And that's about erm...you know, I suppose a kind of...creating robots or what have you, but it's actually about what are we about and do we all buy into that. And you're right, people have to ask themselves the question can I buy into it? then I need to consider what that means for me.

William was more positive about the approach:

William: But in a way if Trust Barset is about behaviours and it's [...] saying you know let's... erm...encourage behaviours which are positive for the organization and the people we serve and discourage things which are...negative, I mean in a way that's a...that's almost like a...It seems to me it's a justifiable basis on which you'd want to or as part of the framework around which you'd want to keep or lose people.

The idea of identity in organizational control, and implications for organizations in terms of designing, implementing and managing control frameworks would be an interesting area for further study.

## **Conclusions**

From the research information I find there to be no shared articulation by senior managers of the organization's overall control framework. The sense that emerged was of something in a state of flux. Given the focus on changing the control framework at the time of the interviews this is perhaps not surprising. However, counter to my expectations at the beginning of the research, there were a number of common themes articulated by senior managers in relation to control in the organization. Firstly, senior managers all used the organization as their frame of reference for sense-making of control. Unlike for trust, interviewees' sense-making did not extend to their wider lived experience but was bounded by the organization and focused on relationships and experiences within it. But senior managers described their sense-making through 'everyday speak', rather than using corporate or academic language. Interviewees made



sense of control through their personal experience rather than articulating a 'corporate line' or describing types or forms of control.

Secondly, there was a shared acceptance that control was required in the organization and it was a 'taken-for-granted' that there would be differences in the extent and nature of controls in different parts of the organization: for example, between regulated and non-regulated services. The research information also indicates that senior managers understood core controls were needed across the Council, such as financial controls, and these needed to apply to everyone. However, this did not necessarily mean these controls were interpreted and applied in the same way across the organization. Indeed, for the majority of interviewees, inconsistency in control application was a core aspect of their sense-making.

For a few interviewees inconsistencies included insufficient control, but for most senior managers inconsistency was experienced through perceptions of excessive control. The inconsistency related to application of controls, but also between the corporate messages on control (which emphasized a shift from 'command and control' to greater empowerment) and how control was experienced in the organization (through significant increases in controls). Interviewees expressed frustration with this inconsistency and sense-making then shifted from ideas of control to ideas of controlling behaviour or culture.

Whilst the possibility of balance in control systems was accepted, this did not relate to formal and informal controls as in the literature (Cardinal, Sitkin and Long 2004; Sitkin, Cardinal and Bijlsma-Frankema, 2010). It related more to the balance of control and autonomy, with the present understanding that there was an imbalance in place. And the addition new controls, with no reduction in existing, was perceived to be exacerbating this imbalance.

In addition, whilst the corporate literature focused on the role of strengthened controls in improving performance and efficiency, senior managers actually

identified controls as getting in the way of performance. As discussed earlier, excessive or inappropriate control connects to the idea of control paradox (Miller, 2004) where rules are seen as setting the minimum effort required and resulting in withdrawal of voluntary effort. But I got a different sense from the research information, with *greater* voluntary effort being required in order to try and keep up with increasing demands by non-productive control systems whilst continuing to deliver against outputs and outcomes. Because of this, I propose adapting of Millers' description<sup>2</sup> to more accurately reflect what seemed to be happening here where: Stricter attempts to control subordinates result in less *achieved* by subordinates – *despite their continued efforts* [my changes in italics].

Before I began my research I was interested in how senior managers, usually seen as the architects and implementers of control, made sense of control in the organization because, as Stacey (2010:78) points out, control means simply someone is 'in control'. But, although the senior managers interviewed were near the very top of the organizational hierarchy, the research information indicated no shared sense of being 'in control' of control. But of course, as Kramer (1996:226) wrote: "Although individuals who sit atop the hierarchical relationship enjoy considerable advantages over those on the bottom in terms of relative power and control, they are far from being free of either vulnerability or uncertainty".

There was no discussion in the interviews about ideas or proposals to change the current experience. In discussing this, whilst it may have been cathartic, I sensed no idea of liberation – no understanding of senior managers seeing their role in control differently and believing they either could or should do something to change the current reality. Henry probably came closest in saying: "People have to agree in terms of how much control to exert on individuals within the organization." From the research evidence I find that further developing understanding about individual's roles and responsibilities in relation to control

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<sup>2</sup> Original text: "Stricter attempts to control subordinates result in less effort by subordinates" Miller (2004:112)

will be an important aspect in improving approaches to control in the organization.

In the literature on control, culture is identified as the central element in social (or informal) control (Das and Teng, 1998). But the research information indicates there were mixed views on understanding culture as part of the control framework. Some of the disagreement seemed to stem from the view that the desired culture being articulated should be universally accepted and somehow this widespread agreement meant it could not be part of the control system. This was a minority view, but it prompted me to question whether something is only acknowledged as being about control when it rubs up against, or even comes into direct conflict, with personal beliefs and expectations. I would be interested in exploring further the idea of employees needing to feel overtly controlled in order to recognize control in operation.

And whilst the majority of senior managers did not see culture as part of the control framework, a number of them described their experience of a controlling organization. From the research information I find that control and culture are seen as different entities, with senior managers' sense-making of control focusing more on the formal control systems. This would indicate difficulty in ensuring a control system in balance if a significant element of the informal system were not even considered and the need for further challenge to senior managers' 'taken-for-granted' on control.

The ideas of control will be considered again in chapter six, when senior manager's ideas of the relationship with trust will be discussed.

### Making Sense of the Relationship between Trust and Control

#### Introduction

As has been discussed in previous chapters, my interest in developing my understanding of the relationship between trust and control in an organizational setting provided the impetus for this research. My hunch before beginning the research interviews was that this relationship was not well understood in the organization, and that focusing on trust-building at the same time as strengthening controls risked trust-building efforts being undermined. In this chapter I reflect on the interview conversations and the ways in which senior managers made sense of the relationships between trust and control in an organization.

Although my initial hunch related to control undermining trust, this was refined and broadened following my review of the literature. As has been discussed in chapter two, whilst there is a significant amount written about the relationship between trust and control, the literature contains disagreement about the nature of the relationship (Woolthuis, Hillebrand, and Nooteboom 2005). The main perspectives in the literature articulate the relationship between trust and control as either complementary or substitutive (Dekker, 2004) although more recent articles argue for a process perspective of the relationship (Jagd, 2010). Therefore, whilst I was interested in exploring whether senior managers saw trust as being undermined by control, in the interviews I was also interested in exploring how senior managers made sense of the relationship in more general terms. Therefore I didn't limit my questioning to just one aspect of the relationship. In this chapter I discuss the development of my understanding of a more dynamic and interactive relationship between trust and control than the substitutive or complementary ones described in much of the academic literature (Hassan and Vosselman, 2010; Jagd, 2010).

As discussed in previous chapters, in considering and interpreting my research information a number of other areas of interest emerged which led me to consider additional literature which I introduce in this chapter. This is particularly the case here in relation to the consideration of distrust. At the beginning of my research I was interested in the relationship between trust and control, and my sense-making at that stage did not incorporate a role for distrust in the relationship. This meant I didn't review the growing literature on distrust at the start of my research; nor did I include distrust as an initial area of interest to explore with senior managers in the interviews. But, as I discuss in this chapter, my research led me to a different sense-making of trust from the one I held initially. My understanding developed to make sense of trust and distrust as separate but related constructs (Hardin, 2004; Lewicki, McAllister and Bies, 1998; Sitkin and Roth, 1993). I also developed my sense-making of the relationship between trust and control to a dynamic, interactive relationship that also includes distrust.

### **Senior Managers Making Sense of the Relationship between Trust and Control**

Following the discussions on trust and control individually in the interviews, I asked senior managers whether they saw a relationship between the two, and if so how they understood this relationship. As for the discussions on control, senior managers located their responses in the organization. By this I mean that their discussion on the relationship was based on the experience in Barset, and whilst it sometimes related to work-based relationships, it did not include personal relationships outside the organization in the way considered in the discussions on trust alone.

Some senior managers were not initially clear there was a relationship:

Eleanor: I don't...I don't know whether control and trust...are that related.

The majority of interviewees did understand there to be a relationship between trust and control in an organizational setting, but they made sense of this relationship in different ways.

For John, while both trust and control had a role in the organization, trust was seen as coming first:

John: So for us in terms of the way we then manage that situation we then invoke formal controls [...] so for me the trust has come first, perhaps been abused and then you invoke the control mechanism and I guess that's about it.

This description is in line with the substitutive perspective of the trust-control relationship described in the literature. In this perspective: "Trust and control are inversely related; more trust results in less use of formal control mechanisms and vice versa" (Dekker, 2004:33). John seems to be describing the 'vice versa' here where trust has been abused, with the result that formal controls were then 'invoked' and act both as a response to low trust and as a substitute for trust. Trust can substitute for control in this way: "Because trust reduces goal conflict, the need for formal control mechanisms reduces as parties are inclined to act in each other's interests" (Dekker, 2004:34). In this sense-making of the relationship, trust and control are considered to be alternative strategies for arriving at stable organizational orders (Costa and Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007).

As has been discussed in chapters two and five, the literature on control considers culture as informal or social control (Das and Teng, 1998). A central message of the Improvement Programme within Barset has been about changing the culture in order to change the 'way we do things around here'. I asked people about their views on the culture change programme being introduced in the Council and whether they saw it as part of the Council's control strategy or framework:

John: I think the programme is about building trust as opposed to about building control and I've not come across that particular cynicism in my travels around the organization.

I find it interesting that John feels people would view the notion of a cultural change programme being part of the control framework in a cynical way as the messages in the Council have been about the programme changing the values of the organization, and also about changing behaviours and the way things are done. However, John did then go on to describe an instance of culture as part of the control strategy:

John: I think you can use the trust and the culture to...to control people and we were talking about a member of my staff that I've got a difficulty with and their timekeeping. That's not come to my attention because I was using my formal control mechanisms. I've never seen a timesheet from anyone in my service but actually on the culture side in a way I didn't need to because I've built a culture of trust in the team where a couple of other people came in and said we think there's an issue there [...] the culture of my team operated as a control mechanism on that individual.

This shows a situation where control is exercised in an informal way through the culture and relationships in the team. Bradach and Eccles (1989) argue that personal relationships can prevent opportunism and can thus be seen as control mechanisms. But where the team culture and relationships are seen to be insufficient to prevent opportunism for a particular individual, more formal controls are then brought in to play. Again, this reflects the position in the literature where control acts as a substitute for trust. This quotation is also interesting in terms of what it suggests about trust. John says he trusts the team to identify breaches of rules or controls, but it is questionable whether the team member in difficulty with time keeping would describe a culture of trust in the team. It would be interesting to explore the expectations that arise from trust in teams in further detail.

Mary articulated a different understanding of the relationship; for her trust *and* control were needed in organizations:

Mary: It doesn't matter whether you trust them or not you're still going to have to have somebody watching what they're doing. You're still going to have all these controls [...] And I...but I...and I do think that it would be great if we had this real you know the world we lived in was everybody trusted everybody...then you wouldn't need contracts. But people would therefore take advantage of it so you've got to have some sort of...something in place so that if something goes wrong.

And interestingly Mary did not see introducing new controls as having anything to do with trust:

Mary: But introducing systems that isn't that that's not...to me that's not about trust. That's about saving money on...on having lots of people all inputting data into things.

Samuel also held that trust and control were both needed:

Samuel: You need some controls and mechanisms by which you get information and see there with you on right track...so I trust you but I'm also can check every now and again.

This more protectionist view of the role of control echoes the view of writers such as Granovetter (1985) and Ring and Van de Ven (1994) that trust alone is not enough to guarantee trustworthy behaviour. Indeed, as Granovetter (1985:491) states trust, by its very existence presents: "Enhanced opportunity for malfeasance". Mary's sense-making, where organizations are using control to guard against opportunistic behaviour chimes with the literature where *opportunity control* is: "The limitation of opportunities for opportunism by restricting the range of a partner's actions" (Woolthuis, Hillebrand, and Nooteboom 2005:815). So trust exists but controls are still required to make sure that the trust is not taken advantage of. This accords with the complementary view of the relationship in the literature. Here, formal controls form the basis for trust by limiting the opportunities and incentives for opportunism so people have no choice but to act in a trustworthy way (Knights et al, 2001; Woolthuis, Hillebrand, and Nooteboom 2005). Control is seen as supporting trust by establishing formal institutional frameworks that: "Act as impartial third parties with enforcement capacity [...] essential to reduce



uncertainty about the behaviour of others” (Oskarrasson, Svensson and Oberg, 2009:181).

Not everyone interviewed shared Samuel and Mary’s view of the relationship between trust and control. In line with my original hunch, a number of senior managers saw trust as being undermined rather than supported by controls.

Henry: Very early on [...] the Trust Barset programme some of the [senior manager team label] and were saying I don’t feel trusted by the organization and what they were describing which was undermining that trust was the control mechanisms [...] And they were seeing even more...even more controls and were saying I’m not sure, I just don’t know how this feels.

John also expressed this view of the relationship between trust and control:

John: Perhaps we’ve gone too much on the command and control and it’s stifled trust...it signals people are not trusted [...] We tend to see each other in more formal settings which also probably tends to be where there are more of the hierarchy and with the controls [...] In formal settings control becomes a barrier to trust.

And Frank made a similar point:

Frank: And then there is that tension between the micro-management which I think sometimes implies there isn’t the trust there...it doesn’t feel like we’re trusted to do our jobs.

Here I interpret ‘micro-management’ as equating to excessive or inappropriate control – but recognize this is from the point of view of those being managed. It is managing to a level of detail or constraint that Samuel does not believe is required. This picks up the interpretation people make on the existence of control systems. The term ‘micro-management’ is often used in a negative or derogatory way to describe a process of managing beyond the required level of detail, namely ‘over managing’.

This perspective on the relationship links to the literature where control is conceived as something that can also negatively impact on trust by limiting its development and undermining it where it already exists (McEvily, Perrone and

Zaheer 1998; Bradach and Eccles, 1989; Lyons and Mehta, 1997; Kramer and Tyler, 1996; Costa, 2003).

Eleanor and Susan had a very different take on the relationship between trust and control, seeing them as very separate ideas. Eleanor did not have any sympathy with the idea controls were brought in because of low trust, seeing controls as separate from trust:

Eleanor: I think that's rubbish. I don't understand where they're coming from because to me, you've had all those systems before they've just been very poor paper-based systems. So what's the difference? I would expect any large organization to know who it had working for it, what they're paid. And actually that makes my job an awful lot easier if I can get ready access to the information [...] It would only be wrong if you said huh...hey...the only executive directors and above can have access to it. That's when it would be wrong. The way it set up is I can see all my area so why is that taking control away? It's actually quite enabling isn't it?

When asked about control systems and trust Susan was also of the view that they were separate:

Susan: I wouldn't see it as you don't trust me; I personally wouldn't see it as that. I would see it as um trying to move to move to a more modern functioning organization [...] So it's not actually changing the fundamentals of what you've got to do, whether it's filling in your car mileage or whatever, it's just that you can't write it down on a piece of paper any more. You've got this blinking system...got to go into the system, if you've forgotten your password and whatever... it's just another, ...its just an irritant designed to make your life more difficult [laughs] speaking from experience. But it wouldn't be about trust.

Dekker (2004) provides an explanation of the trust-control relationship that connects Mary's more positive understanding of the relationship between trust and control with the more negative perception of John, Samuel and Henry. Dekker (2004) stresses that the use of formal controls may be complementary and enhancing to trust up to a certain threshold, but when the use of formal control exceeds this threshold trust is damaged. William articulated exactly this perspective:

Here 'appropriate' could be seen to link to idea of threshold put forward by Dekker (2004). Anything below or at the threshold would be seen as appropriate, anything above the threshold would be seen as inappropriate. This suggests a more complex relationship between trust and control than one that is simply complementary or substitutive.

Across the interviews, senior managers articulated a relationship between trust and control but there was not a single view of the nature of this relationship. Some interviewees described it as complementary and for others it was substitutive. However, a number of senior managers also understood the relationship as a flexible one that could change and adapt as a result of circumstances and conditions. Considering this range of views reflexively resulted in my understanding of a more dynamic and interactive relationship between trust and control than the substitutive or complementary ones described in much of the academic literature (Hassan and Vosselman, 2010).

### **Trust, No Trust and Distrust**

As discussed above, in discussing their sense-making of control, a number of senior managers described it as impacting on trust in a negative way – both by stifling trust, and being a barrier to trust-building. Reflecting on this I was struck by some interviewees' descriptions of the introduction and/or application of control as resulting in 'less trust' or 'no trust'. Such sense-making of trust appears to acknowledge trust as something that can exist in full (trust); in part (less trust) or not at all (no trust) as though there was a continuum of trust from no trust to full trust - although, as Wright and Ehnert (2010:116) point out: "We never quite 'trust' in any final sense but are always in the process of 'trusting'". For some writers, such a continuum can be seen as extending beyond 'no trust' to distrust, where trust and distrust are viewed as the two ends (Welsch-Larsen, 2004).

For other writers, trust and distrust are understood as separate but related constructs (Vlaar, Van den Bosch and Volberda, 2007; Hardin, 2004; Lewicki, McAllister and Bies, 1998; Sitkin and Roth, 1993). Here distrust is defined as: “Confident negative expectations regarding another’s conduct” (Vlaar, Van den Bosch and Volberda, 2007: 410). These negative expectations then manifest themselves in fear, vigilance or suspicion (Sitkin and Roth, 1993). This idea of trust and distrust as separate was not something I had actively considered before the research. Through carrying out the interviews and considering the literature I understand distrust as not merely the absence of trust, but as an active construct about which I share the view of Bachmann (2006:399) namely: “Betrayed trust, in other words, does not just leave social actors without trust. Rather, it produces distrust between them which often makes it difficult merely to re-establish a neutral basis for future social exchanges.” Some writers also view the antecedents and effects of distrust as distinct from those of trust (Cook et al 2004).

Reflecting on the interview conversations, senior managers did not actually use the words distrust and mistrust in describing their sense-making but they did use phrases such as “he doesn’t trust you”, “they don’t feel trusted” and “I don’t trust them.” In the literature ‘distrust’ and ‘not trusting’ are the same: “If I distrust you, this surely means I do not trust you” (Ullmann-Margalit (2004:60). Following the literature (Kramer, 1999; Hardin, 2002; Ullmann-Margalit, 2004), in the research interviews I interpret ‘not trusting’ and ‘not trusted’ as distrust.

One such example came from Lucy:

Lucy: I mean the classic example was we introduced Trust Barset at the time we introduced for example freeze panels. That was the you know, perfect for everyone. Trust?! Erm.. I can’t even spend 10 bob without the er...chief executive signing it off. They don’t trust me to do my job, and it’s getting worse.

The literature considers the ways in which control goes beyond undermining trust, actively leading to distrust (McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer, 2003; Sundaramurthy and Lewis, 2003; Falk and Kosfeld, 2004; Berg, 2005). The fact that the need for reassurance by managers results in them introducing controls can be perceived as an expression of mistrust (Berg 2005). This is because monitoring and surveillance systems communicate to employees that they are not trusted, they are signals of distrust and can limit choice autonomy, potentially breeding mistrust and resentment in return (Sundaramurthy and Lewis, 2003; Falk and Kosfeld, 2004). Distrust escalates through controls undermining a sense of value congruence, signalling suspicion, conveying disrespect and threatening a sense of professional autonomy and competence (McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer 2003; Berg, 2005). This is particularly the case if the controls are ill-suited to the tasks at hand (Sitkin and Roth, 1993; Sitkin and Stickel, 1996) which again links to the idea of 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' control.

The idea of the escalation of distrust was described by Tom:

Tom: And it's also a trust thing. If you start from the wrong end of trust so okay I don't trust you but I'm going to manage you and I go to ask you to do this and ask you to do that and I'd ask you to check this, that and the other. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in the sense of I then don't deliver it because there's all these checks and balances all over the place. So I don't get it done and then it'll be 'told you, told you so, I knew I couldn't trust you, I knew you wouldn't get it done.' You know... so it becomes a prophecy.

In such a scenario it can be seen that: "Increased formalization, which they were now pursuing as a response to every problem, simply added fuel to the fires of resentment and distrust" (Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2004:422). Sitkin and Stickel (1996:207) identify that: "Once the seeds of distrust were sown they were self-generating". Cardinal, Sitkin and Long (2004:422) consider the relationship between distrust and control discussed by Sitkin and Stickel (1996) as illustrating: "A double helix of escalating distrust and control". This chimes with the view of Luhmann (1979) that distrust is a positive feedback system in which experience is self-reinforcing rather than equilibrating. Some writers point

the self-fulfilling prophecy of distrust that can then emerge (Ghoshal and Moran, 1996; Sundaramurthy and Lewis, 2003 and McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer 2003).

The experience of control undermining trust, and leading to distrust was expressed in a very personal way by Frank:

Frank: If people keep pointing to what you got wrong...You can brush it off a couple of times, and think 'oh well, dropped a clanger that's okay I got that sentence wrong' or whatever it might be. But when it...when it goes on and on and on...then what it does is it undermines your confidence...really undermines your confidence because then you think my instincts must be wrong. So you kind of unlearn kind of years of experience that you know and then that becomes a [self] fulfilling prophecy because anything you do is no good then you think I can't do this you know [...] So what are you being judged on really? Are you being judged on those two sentences in that report or are you being judged on something wider? Er...But if you've just been judged on those two sentences in that report then, and that's not part of your values and you think...well I think that's.... it's a minor thing but it's a bigger thing for somebody else...it just erodes your confidence and your trust. You don't trust them and they don't trust you. But worst of all if they...is they...is that you don't trust yourself.

This raises an interesting point which has had limited consideration in management and organization literature, namely where distrust develops in oneself: "Individuals can begin to distrust their own judgments" (Sitkin and Roth, 1993:381). Exploring the relationship between control and trust and distrust in oneself would be an interesting area for future study.

Frank takes this point further, and illustrates some potential consequences from this distrust in oneself:

Frank: And it was like they'd been caged in...that's the way we're going to control you. You can't access this, or you can't do that. And when we opened the door and there was this field, they were still in the cage, you know, the door was open but they weren't sure...they were like, 'will I get eaten by something?' It took the best part of 18 months to get them to come out of the cage and then they began to believe. It takes, it takes a couple of years for that belief to grow. But the actions have to follow the words.

This illustrates the view that after being controlled it can take a long time to rebuild confidence and trust. If this is the case, there may well be implications for the organization – especially at a time when the messages are that more is needed from employees, particularly for them to act with greater autonomy. As illustrated by the self-fulfilling prophecy of distrust, if distrust already exists it will be more difficult for employees to respond positively to such messages of empowerment.

If controls can undermine and break trust, the literature also points to the role control can play in rebuilding or building it (Das and Teng, 1998). Trust building and re-building has been considered in chapter four but, in addition to that discussion, the literature also emphasizes that the nature or type of breach in trust has implications for the success of any rebuilding efforts. Controls (or legalistic responses) can restore trust expectations when violations are specific to a particular context or task; i.e. they respond to violated trust (Sitkin and Roth, 1993). When fundamental values are violated and perceived trustworthiness is undermined across contexts then legalistic remedies are ill-suited to restoring lost trust or addressing distrust. Indeed, controls here are likely to exacerbate the problem of distrust as they are impersonal, distance enhancing and context specific (Sitkin and Roth, 1993).

Although this role of control in building/rebuilding trust is discussed in the literature, it was not identified by any of the interviewees in terms of their sense-making of the relationship between trust and control. No-one described using controls to help rebuild trust once it had been broken. What was introduced by a majority of interviewees was the idea of controlling approaches rather than control when describing their understanding of the relationship between trust and control. For example, Mary described the relationship between controlling and trust:

Mary: And I say things to...to my peers and to [name Chief Executive]...erm... because I trust them. And I like to think that they trust me and that I don't want

them to think that I'm controlling because I don't think I am. So that in terms of who you trust...you trust...somebody more when they're not controlling.

Lucy had a similar view:

Lucy: So that in terms of who you trust somebody more when they're not controlling...I don't know...I [...] just like the idea of this thing around trust in control and can you have...can you have trust without control and can you have...if you've got, if you're controlling it therefore means there's no trust.

This again links back to the point William made about whether the level, type and application of control is seen as either appropriate or inappropriate and who makes the judgement about this. This is a relevant consideration as the perception of whether someone is trustworthy, as well as whether control is appropriate, or excessive and controlling, may depend upon where the power rests in a relationship. As was discussed in chapter two: "When we talk of 'being in control' this implies the successful end-result of applying power" (Storey, 1983:54). Long (2010:365) highlights that: "Traditional control theory focuses primarily on how managers exercise their power through applications of managerial controls." The sense-making of the application of controls indicated senior managers were experiencing this application in a negative way.

As discussed in chapter five, it appears from the interviews that the expectations of senior managers that they would have a degree of autonomy in their work, and some degree of influence (or control) over control, were not being met. In chapter four, the factors most commonly mentioned as undermining trust in organizations were discussed (Fraser, 2010). Unmet expectations is one of these. In addition, controls threatening a sense of professional autonomy and competence contribute to escalating distrust (McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer 2003; Berg, 2005). From the sense-making discussed, senior manager's expectations regarding autonomy and levels of control are not being met, resulting in trust being undermined, interviewees experiencing the organizational culture as controlling and leading to distrust. This suggests it is not the controls themselves that impact on trust and distrust,



but how they are applied in relation to the interviewee's values and expectations. There are a number implications for organizational practice arising from this and they are discussed in more detail in chapter seven.

## **Positioning of Trust and Control**

Another factor highlighted by Fraser (2010) as something that undermines trust in organizations was incongruence between actions and words, and values. For me, an important element of the culture of any organization is the extent to which corporate messages and commitments are seen to translate through into people's experiences within the organization. This is discussed in relation to the positioning of control in chapter five. I also asked people how the messages in the organization about trust and control relate to how it actually feels on the ground.

For Samuel, there was not always a clear match between what was said and what was done.

Samuel: It's also about who is walking the walk and erm...doing what you say is on the badge and I do think there is still...even though I think there's been some movement on that erm...some kind of erm...tension between what what the culture aspires to, and what is said about trust...about trust, control both of those.. and sometimes they way people...the way leaders act.

Others also noted this tension and for both John, Tom and Samuel there was a much stronger difference:

John: I think they're definitely very different things. I think there's a clear gap erm I think in fact in terms of the fact that we've called the change programme trust Barset, we are talking a good game in terms of trust and I think erm...if you look at our values and the behaviours that that are set out underneath them...erm...we probably are saying all the right things. But I still...think that our culture poses a number of serious challenges to that.

And:

Tom: There's no (and I hear this phrase used a lot here) corporate discipline that brings people around trust.

And:

Samuel: It's not always about messaging you know...It is also what we do and how that matches or not what we message.

As Mishra (1996:628) states: "Nothing is noticed more quickly – and considered more significant – than a discrepancy between what executives preach and what they expect their associates to practice". Indeed as McAuley, Duberley and Johnson (2007) highlight:

Employees may be alert to any disparity between management's cultural rhetoric and its apparent everyday behaviour to the extent that employees may use the espoused values underpinning prescribed cultural change to challenge and rectify inauthenticity signified by such lapses in managers' performance of their corporate script (McAuley, Duberley and Johnson, 2007:167).

This provides a positive interpretation of the gap between corporate messages and senior managers' actions – in line with critical theory it provides the opportunity for challenge and change. A much less positive result connects to trust in the organization where: "The divergence between words and deeds has profound costs as it renders managers untrustworthy" (Simons, 1999:89). Therefore, the importance for senior managers in ensuring coherence between rhetoric and reality should be considered in the efforts to build trust in the organization.

## **Conclusions**

As has been discussed, the literature contains various views on the relationship between trust and control. Based on my pre-conceptions and review of the literature, I began this research with a hunch that formal control systems in organizations, rather than supporting the development of trust, ran the risk of constraining or undermining trust. This had a number of possible consequences for the organization, as work to develop a culture of trust was underway at the same time as work introducing and strengthening control systems.

The view that controls can constrain and/or undermine trust was reflected in some of the interview conversations. But this view was not expressed uniformly across the discussions. A number of people made sense of the relationship by saying both trust and control were needed in organizations whilst for others, controls were seen as potential substitutes for trust. For a small number of interviewees, control had no relationship with trust – controls were simply the processes and systems that would be expected in any large and complex organization.

Whilst views about the relationship between trust and control varied, from the research evidence I find that there was a shared ‘taken-for-granted’ concerning the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate control. All senior managers gave examples of inappropriate control and for most this was where perceptions of what was appropriate and the day-to-day reality of extent or types of control differed.

Furthermore, the views of senior managers about the consequences arising from the balance between expectations and perceptions of control led to something unexpected at the beginning of the research – namely the relationship between distrust and control. Before beginning my research I had not considered trust and distrust to be separate constructs. But what became clear through the interviews and the subsequent revisiting of the literature is that passive ‘no trust’ is not the same as active distrust.

Both the literature and a number of the interview conversations described the self-fulfilling prophecy of distrust (Falk and Kosfeld, 2004) and described the so-called double helix of escalating distrust and control. As discussed in chapter six, Frank provided a compelling narrative on this escalation of distrust and control on a personal level, where the impact of increasing controls was a growing distrust of one’s own judgment and competence.

I was interested to compare the helix of distrust with the control paradox (Miller 2004) described in chapter five. The control paradox refers to the fact that rules can be seen by the workforce as signalling the minimum effort required and withdrawal of effort – the paradox being that more control leads to less effort. This in turn leads to further tightening of the rules and increased monitoring and control which results in even less voluntary compliance. The overall result is decreased performance. But rather than narrowly reading this as a relationship between control and performance, I believe the paradox can also be read as a more complex relationship between control, trust, distrust and performance.

Distrust is a positive feedback system where experience is self-reinforcing. For example, in a situation where I am not sure I trust you to deliver I might put controls in place. These controls may both signal to you that I do not really trust you, whilst at the same time taking some of your capacity in non-productive work and making it harder for you to deliver what I have asked. You may then: put in the original pre-control effort required but fail the task; work harder to meet the task; or decide the controls set the minimum standard and just work to that. You are likely to be unhappy in all three scenarios, and I am likely to be happy with the outcome in only one of these, and may well feel I have had my distrust in you justified in the other two. I may then decide to put further controls in place – signalling greater distrust and likely leading to further decreases in your performance – either because of the difficulty in meeting the task, or withdrawal of the effort required to do so because of your growing distrust of me.

Once trust has been broken, or distrust is evident, the literature describes the potential role of control in overcoming the distrust or rebuilding trust. Whilst most interviewees believed trust could be rebuilt, they saw this as more a result of time and people proving they could now be trusted – no interviewee described a role for control mechanisms in the process.

Therefore, my original hunch, that trust building could be undermined by controls was evidenced in a number of the interview conversations but, more than this, control was also seen as generating distrust. What emerged from the research was a much more dynamic relationship between trust, control and distrust. This related to the process perspective of the relationship between trust and control described by Jagd (2010:267) where: "Balancing trust and control is an ongoing process of balancing and rebalancing." I would extend this to say that the issue of balancing trust, control and distrust is one that deserves ongoing attention in organizations.

### Introduction

In 2009 I was appointed as a senior manager (reporting directly to the Chief Executive) to organization that had recognized it needed to address a number of areas where it was performing well below other local authorities.

Performance in a range of service areas was weak and inadequate financial management had resulted in significant overspends in key service areas.

Recent resident and employee surveys all indicated low levels of trust in the organization and low satisfaction. The organization was in the process of implementing an ambitious improvement programme designed to build a culture of trust in the organization whilst at the same time putting in place strong controls targeted at improved management of resources and performance. The programme was also required to deliver significant financial savings.

This programme, with its dual focus on trust and on controls, provided me with a unique opportunity to explore the relationship between the two in a local authority at a time of significant change. In particular I explored how the relationship was understood by senior managers of the organization – the very people usually held to be the architects and implementers of such change programmes. Senior managers are also viewed in much of the literature as the employees who are ‘in control’ of control.

In my research I was interested in exploring whether the trust-building efforts in the organization could be undermined by the work also underway to develop and strengthen controls. My concern that this could be the case was informed by my sense that the relationship between trust and control in the organization was not well understood. In part this assumption was based on my view that trust itself was not well understood in the organization and I was uncertain that, without a focus on the best type or types of trust to be building, the organization could succeed in building or improving levels of trust. I wished to explore this with senior managers together with their sense-making of control in the

organization. This latter interest was shaped by my assumption that a coherent understanding of control was also absent from the organization.

In chapters four, five and six I consider the research information from the interview conversations with senior managers. In these chapters I explore with them their sense-making of trust and control, and their understanding of the relationship between the two. And whilst, as discussed in chapter three, my own experiences and sense-making shaped my approach to the study, it is the information from the research interviews that determined the direction taken.

### **My Conclusions - Summary**

My research supports my hunch that the relationship between trust and control in the organization was poorly understood, with the consequence that assumptions about control were a potential risk to the trust-building efforts by the organization. But more than this, the assumptions held by senior managers risk the growth of distrust in the organization, with wide-ranging consequences both in terms of the organization failing in its ambitions to build a culture of trust and making it much harder for the local authority to deliver its broader programme of improvement.

From my research I conclude that whilst there are shared assumptions in senior managers' sense-making of control, they tend to focus on negative aspects of control and there is a lack of ownership or sense of control by them of the organization's control frameworks. This contributes to controls being perceived as signals of distrust. Senior managers understood excessive controls as an unnecessary drain on resources, leading to frustration and contributing to the growth of distrust.

Contrary to my original view, I also conclude from my research that senior managers in the organization hold common assumptions about trust. They understand it as based on positive expectations that people will deliver on their commitments and do what they say they will. But a shared view of what trust is

does not mean all senior managers hold common assumptions about existing levels of trust. It is possible for some to trust, some to have no trust and for some to actively distrust. Such differences are not recognized by current 'one size fits all' approaches to trust-building in the organization.

My research demonstrates a much more dynamic interplay between trust and control in senior managers' everyday reality than that described in much of the literature – and this interplay includes distrust. And common assumptions are not the same as common experiences or starting points – a finding that has significant implications for organizations in addressing these issues.

In the following sections I explore my conclusions in more detail, together with their implications for professional practice.

## **Trust and Control**

As discussed in chapter one and referred to above, I began my research with the assumption that the relationship between trust and control was poorly understood in the organization. This was emphasised by the fact that whilst trust-building and strengthening control were both strands of the same corporate improvement programme, there was no indication in the corporate literature that the two strands of the work had the potential to impact on each other. This view differed from the academic literature, where considerable attention is given to the nature of the relationship between trust and control (Woolthuis, Hillebrand, and Nooteboom, 2005; Dekker, 2004; Jagd, 2010).

The review of the academic literature also highlighted that the nature of the relationship between trust and control could impact significantly on the improvement programme then underway. For example, if assumptions in the organization are in line with the literature that posits trust and control as substitutes for each other (Dekker, 2004; Costa and Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007), it could be argued that the organization is undertaking unnecessary activity by working on both. If assumptions support trust and control as complementary



(Knights et al, 2001; Woolthuis, Hillebrand, and Nootboom 2005), then the organization needs to take this interdependency into account in designing a programme that focuses on both.

The research information supports my original hunch that the relationship between trust and control was not well understood by senior managers in the organization. Whilst a consensus emerged through the discussions that there *is* a relationship, views about the nature of the relationship were mixed. Most senior managers held that controls *could* undermine trust – but this was not seen to be *automatically* the case. Controls were only seen as undermining trust in particular circumstances. The way in which senior managers made sense of control was a key factor in the relationship between trust and control.

### **Sense-making of Control**

From the research information I identify that the way senior managers view control in the organization is a significant influencing factor on their sense-making of the relationship between trust and control in organizational settings. As discussed in chapter two, at the beginning of the research it was my assumption that the sense-making of control in the organization by senior managers was confused. But from my research information I find a number of common aspects to the assumptions held by senior managers about control in an organization. The first of these relates to the uniform acceptance that controls are required in organizations and that these need to differ in different parts of the organization in order to take account of different functions, risk levels and legislative requirements. There was also acceptance that core controls such as financial controls were needed across the board.

But whilst these things were acknowledged, there was no common description of the control framework provided by senior managers and there was no distinction made between formal and informal controls in the way set out in much of the literature (Ouchi, 1977, 1980; Sitkin, Sutcliffe and Schroeder, 1994; Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2004). Furthermore, control was not understood as

central to driving up performance in the way described in the corporate literature.

There was common acknowledgement, however, across the research interviews that the corporate narrative on control positioned the organization as committed to a move from a culture of 'command and control' to one of trust and empowerment but there were very clear differences in the views of senior managers about the extent to which this narrative was being translated into organizational reality. For most senior managers the transition was not taking place. Strikingly the day-to-day experience for senior managers was of an organization where controls were increasing and were seemingly arbitrarily (rather than differentially) applied. From the research information I find that controls were experienced as inappropriate and excessive. Senior managers could not track the relationship between levels of controls and factors such as function, risk levels or legislative requirements. Senior managers described experiencing controlling behaviour and a controlling culture as part of their day-to-day reality, leading to significant frustration with the organization.

From the research information I find that senior managers understood excessive controls as taking up valuable capacity in non-productive work, making it harder, not easier, to deliver improvements in performance. In the research information I find no sense that controls were leading to a withdrawal of voluntary effort in the way described in the literature (Miller, 2004). The literature did not adequately address what seemed to be happening in practice where senior managers described having to work even harder, sometimes with less achieved, because of the demands made by the control systems themselves.

As discussed in chapter five, the literature describes the importance of balance in control systems (Cardinal, Sitkin and Long, 2004; Sitkin, Cardinal and Bijlsma-Frankema, 2010) with the focus on balance between formal and informal control but the research evidence did not indicate this was part of the sense-making of senior managers: they made no distinction between informal

and formal controls. Even when prompted to consider culture as informal control, senior managers were not clear about the role of culture in control frameworks and had not previously understood it in this way. This seemed to stem from the view that the proposed future culture was desirable and therefore was not really part of control. The challenge to their 'taken-for-granted' provided by the research had the potential to open up new ways of seeing control within the organization. This is important for the organization as it is difficult to see how balance in a control system can be achieved if part of the system is not acknowledged or recognised. The research also highlighted a tension in the assumptions made by senior managers – they did not recognize culture as part of control, yet they described a controlling organization which suggests a controlling culture – at least in some parts of the organization. Such tensions provide a useful entry point to further discussions on control.

The literature on control positions those with most power in a hierarchy (usually those at the top) as the architects and implementers of control. But whilst the senior managers interviewed all expressed frustration with the current control frameworks and applications of control, none made any suggestions about how to improve control. In no way did interviewees present a sense of being 'in control' of control (Stacey, 2010). Indeed, in one case, excessive control was understood as leading to a loss of trust in one's own abilities. Senior managers understood themselves as the subjects of control – possibly even sometimes the victims. This also raises the question of who is controlling control in the organization.

Arising from the research information I find a significant challenge for the organization that results from the perceptions of control held by senior managers. Not only do they see controls as excessive and as getting in the way of improvements in performance, excessive controls are seen by senior managers as signals of *distrust*. This poses a threat not only to trust-building efforts but also to the wider improvement programme.

At the beginning of my research it was my assumption that the organization should focus its trust-building efforts on building a particular type (or types) of trust. It was also my view that the lack of discussion of trust itself in the corporate literature on trust-building indicated a lack of shared understanding of trust. At that stage I did not consider the role that distrust could play in the organization – either in relation to trust-building efforts or in the relationship between trust and control.

From the research information I find that sense-making of trust by senior managers is not based around particular types or forms of trust in the way discussed in the academic literature but I also find that there are many commonalities to senior managers' assumptions about trust. Across the interview conversations senior managers understood trust as a positive expectation that people (and organizations) will do what they say they will. I also find that senior managers make sense of trust through reference to personal relationships, expectations and beliefs. This has implications for trust-building in an organization as trust lies in relationships and not in the systems or structures, which are often the main focus of change programmes.

In the literature, trust is also understood as a: "Willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of others" (Jagd, 2010:260). And whilst this vulnerability wasn't discussed explicitly by senior managers in their descriptions of trust, it was illustrated through the descriptions of when trust was broken. A number of senior managers here all described how trusting had left them open to hurt or harm in some way. But unlike in the literature (Kramer and Lewicki, 2010; Lewicki and Bunker, 1996) the research information showed that senior managers made no distinction between fragility of trust and the stage of relationship development – trust was understood as something that could be broken at any time. Interestingly, the research information showed that senior managers differed in their views on whether or not trust could be rebuilt. Even

those who believed this could happen held the view that doing so would be a lengthy and difficult process.

Whilst there was a shared understanding of trust in place there was less uniformity regarding views on how trust was built. The research information shows that some senior managers saw the propensity to trust as an aspect to trust-building. But a number of other senior managers described trust-building as an incremental process where trust develops over time through positive interactions between trustor and trustee (Boon and Holmes, 1991; Lewicki and Bunker, 1996). These are not mutually exclusive and in the literature the two aspects together form the 'spiral reinforcement model' (Zand, 1972:233) where initial trust leads to trusting action that reinforces trust.

From the research information I find there is also a need for greater clarity in trust-building approaches regarding who is trusting whom. There were mixed views expressed by senior managers with regard to the possibility of trusting organizations, or whether it was the people who made up the organization that were trusted. The existing corporate literature was silent on this but the differences in views from the interviewees points to the need for clarity on the focus of trust-building efforts. Related to this issue was the idea raised by a number of senior managers that the size and complexity of the organization were challenges for trust. If trust is about people doing what they say they will, the larger and more complex the organization, the harder it will be to match the two. The greater the scale, the greater the opportunities for distortion in communication to take place as described by Habermas (1974) and the greater the opportunities for trust-building efforts to be compromised. Taken together these two issues raise questions about the spatial level at which it makes sense to talk of trust-building in an organization.

The research information highlights another important issue for trust-building efforts in an organization. Whilst senior managers shared common assumptions about the nature of trust, this in no way means they held common positions on the degree to which they currently trust. From a critical perspective, senior

managers are acknowledged as individuals not a homogenous group. Each senior manager has their own beliefs, values and experiences – they each have their own way of seeing. Of the senior managers interviewed some trusted the organization, some have no trust in it, and others actively distrust the organization or feel distrusted by it. This means it should not be assumed there is a common starting point for senior managers in relation to trust-building in an organization. An approach that works with a senior manager who has a propensity to trust will not necessarily work in the same way with a senior manager who has no trust, feels their trust has been broken or actively distrusts.

### **A Dynamic Relationship between Trust, Control and Distrust**

Through my research I developed my own sense-making of trust, together with my understanding of the separate but related construct – distrust. This development was essential given the sense-making by senior managers of the connection between control and distrust and its impact on the relationship between trust and control. I was surprised by the number of references in the research interviews to the relationship between control and distrust. Distrust was not referred to in any corporate documentation on control and there was no mention in the trust-building programme that distrust was an issue that needed to be addressed. But from the research information I find that when controls were seen to be excessive, and therefore inappropriate, they were understood as both controlling and a threat to personal autonomy. As discussed in chapter six, controls in such a scenario engender distrust through a number of mechanisms including undermining a sense of value congruence and signalling suspicion (Berg, 2005; McEvily, Perrone, and Zaheer, 2003). And this growth of distrust was seen by senior managers as particularly likely when controls are perceived as ill-suited to the task at hand (Sitkin and Stickel, 1996).

Taken together I find that it is not the actual controls that impact on trust and distrust. The evidence shows that it is the manner in which controls are introduced and applied, and the degree to which this is congruent with senior

managers' values and expectations, that has the impact on trust and distrust. It also depends on the degree of trust (or distrust) that senior managers have to start with as existing distrust makes interpreting controls as signals of suspicion much more likely. The implications of this for the organization are discussed later in this chapter in the section on implications for professional practice.

At one level, the dynamic nature of both trust and control in organizations that emerged from the research evidence points to the process perspective of the relationship more recently described by Jagd (2010:267) where: "Balancing trust and control is an on-going process of balancing and rebalancing." This certainly fits with the sense-making of trust that emerges from the evidence. Here, trust is something that continually evolves and is continually at risk of being broken. This also fits with the sense-making of control that emerged through the research where it is understood as something experienced in different ways in different circumstances. The process perspective is more limited in relation to the impact of the individual making judgements about the balance between trust and control. Balance is not an absolute – there can be shared assumptions in place that trust and control are in balance, but it is also possible for there to be differences in views. Such judgements are based on individual, subjective interpretations of balance influenced by numerous factors including expectations about extent of professional autonomy and values held.

But more than this, the unexpected emphasis in the research evidence on the relationship between control and distrust highlights the limitations of the existing theoretical perspectives in fully explaining the day-to-day reality for senior managers about the relationship between trust and control. Perceptions of inappropriate control, or controlling behaviour, do more than undermine trust in an organization. From the evidence I am clear that such perceptions can lead to controls being understood as signals of distrust and therefore, through the self-fulfilling prophecy of distrust, ultimately lead to the growth of distrust within an organization. Therefore I conclude that the risks of not fully understanding the sense-making of trust and control, and the relationship between them go beyond the risk of trust-building efforts being undermined. The organization

risks missing its stated aims of building trust and strengthening control to boost performance being overturned by the growth of distrust. There are a number of implications for professional practice that arise from my conclusions that can assist in avoiding such unintended consequences.

The hermeneutic approach I used for this research provided a helpful and appropriate framework for a critically reflexive research study. As Cole et al (2011:141) emphasize: “The rewards [...] of reflexive exploration, offer the opportunity of a privileged insight into workforce behaviours and motivations that are not often articulated and recognized in the business world”. Through the hermeneutic process I explored and provided challenge to the taken-for-granted assumptions held by employees of the Council, both about themselves and about the organization they worked in. The research generated a great deal of rich information and senior managers were generous with their time and, as far as I can know, open with their views and opinions. I focused on senior managers as their views on trust and control are underexplored in the academic literature where they are traditionally viewed as the architects rather than the subjects of control. Throughout this research I have also explored and challenged my own sense-making and as a result have developed a new understanding of both the theoretical perspective and the everyday reality of the relationship between trust, control and distrust.

I received feedback from one interviewee during the process that before her interview she had spoken to a colleague who had already gone through the process. The colleague had described the process as interesting and actually quite cathartic as they had found an opportunity to discuss how they were both experiencing and feeling about the organization at the time. This was pleasing feedback, although I was interested in my research going beyond such catharsis to liberation by creating the opportunities for change (Duberley, Johnson and Cassell, 2012). Therefore I now discuss the implications for professional practice that stem from my conclusions and my experience of carrying out my research.



## Implications Arising From My Research

Influencing my decision to pursue this research was the desire to improve my own practice as a senior manager. I saw the research process as a way of challenging my own ways of seeing, and my own taken-for-granted in my role in a large complex organization. I was also committed to making a contribution to professional practice in my own organization – but also to professional practice more widely.

In part, this development in professional practice relates to the subject areas of my research – trust, control and distrust. In this research I set out to develop my understanding of the relationship between trust and control in an organizational context. And, within this, I wanted to further develop my own sense-making of trust and control themselves – both in terms of the academic literature, but also in regard to the way they were both constructed by, and understood in the organization. This has been successfully achieved, and I will explore the implications of this – both for myself in relation to my practices as a senior manager, and for organizations more widely in the following sections.

But first I want to discuss another key insight for me as a senior manager from my research – and one that I had not expected at the beginning of my study, namely how my experience of viewing the organization through the lens of a researcher has contributed to the development of my role as a senior manager. I also explore here how this learning is being taken forward into my role in the organization and discuss the implications and possibilities for managers.

Brannick and Coghlan (2007:69) state: “When insider researchers augment their normal organizational membership role with the research enterprise, it can be difficult and awkward and can become confusing for them”. As discussed in chapter three, insider researchers are seen as facing such challenges as role conflict, loyalty tugs and identification dilemmas (Roth, Sandberg and Svensson, 2004; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). I agree that trying to sustain a

full organizational membership role and researcher role simultaneously can be challenging. For example, I discuss the ethical issues arising from this role duality in chapter three. But for me, there are also significant benefits which extend beyond the period of the research itself.

My argument is that the approach taken as a reflexive researcher provides extremely useful approaches for the role of senior manager. Reflexivity is about recognizing: “How the researcher forms part of the research project and is actively constructed through the process of research” (Haynes, 2012:87). Applying this to the role of manager then leads to exploration of how the manager is part of what is managed and how the manager is actively constructed through the process of management. This includes taking time to consider the position from which managers speak and the political and social context in which the conversations take place (Haynes, 2012). Rather than there simply being a conflict between roles of researcher and manager, I understand there to be a synergy in the roles, resulting in a managerial approach better equipped to deal with the challenges currently faced and described in chapter one.

There are two particular aspects to this that I explore here. The first is the importance of understanding one’s own existing interpretations or ‘taken-for-grantedness’ in any given situation. As has already been highlighted: “A way of seeing is a way of not seeing” (Oakley, 1974). As McAuley, Johnson and Duberley (2007) discuss, power dynamics and distorted communications in organizations are not simply means by which employees are ‘oppressed’ by managers – “They are also ways that ‘managers and leaders’ oppress themselves because they also impose controls on managers themselves” (McAuley, Johnson and Duberley, 2007:374). By extending a critical, reflexive approach beyond my role as researcher and striving to incorporate it in to my management approach and practice I can attempt to challenge my own ‘taken-for-grantedness’ and work to overcome the restrictions they place on creativity.

One aspect of my translation of such an approach to management practice in the organization has focused on the importance of challenging what is being 'seen' by challenging the framing of the issue or question being explored. As Tietze (2012:56) highlights, in part the role of researchers is: "To find the means to render strange what is established as 'normal', that will find mechanisms that will distance themselves from what they already know". I argue that in the challenging context that public sector managers find themselves, this is also a key skill that is needed in order to be able to achieve the degree and pace of change required.

A particular illustration of this is provided by the work that has taken place over the last 12 months on the Council's approach to commissioning. The original approach was based on the widely used framework of 'Analyse, Plan, Do and Review' which focused on assessing needs, planning the service intervention required, ensuring its delivery and monitoring its effectiveness. Considering this process reflexively highlighted the importance of the 'analyse' stage to the overall commissioning process. It was at this stage that decisions were taken about the nature and scope of the service to be commissioned and who should be involved in the process. As McAuley, Duberley and Johnson (2007:340) highlight: "The aim of reflexive thought is that members [of an organization] can develop a living and therefore constantly changing understanding of their actions and processes". Here, such consideration revealed how the commissioning process was typically driven by 'taken-for-granted' which primarily resulted in a re-commissioning of what was already in place, albeit with a focus on reducing cost and/or improving performance. There was little debate about the nature of the outcomes to be achieved, or how to involve different voices in both the framing of the discussion and the subsequent stages of the commissioning process.

Applying the learning from this research study to this scenario meant that the 'taken-for-granted' of those involved in the commissioning process needed to be surfaced and explored at the very start of the process. There also needed to be a challenge to the range and nature of voices to be involved in the process and

questioning of their origin, for example whether providers, commissioner or service user/recipient were included, and if all three, whether any dominated.

In Basset this challenge resulted in a re-framing of the Commissioning process. The commissioning cycle was developed, starting with a stage originally titled 'what question are we asking' but ultimately labelled 'framing the challenge'. This stage focused on challenging the 'taken-for-granted' that led to the commissioning process focusing on a supply side approach. For example, local authorities have focused on how to improve the effectiveness and reduce the cost of cleaning streets. A traditional commissioning process starts with the challenge of commissioning the most efficient street cleaning service, and whether this is in-house provision or outsourced to a different provider. Reframing the commissioning challenge to the commissioning of clean streets widens the conversation to include the demand side, and therefore incorporates issues such as citizen behaviour and social norms in relation to cleanliness. As a recent Basset Council Cabinet report states:

The new framework will move us away from the traditional Analyse, Plan, Do, Review cycle that often leads to a service rather than an outcomes focused solution and towards a new system of commissioning. The new framework will support us to ask the right questions to address our key challenges and help us to identify and test a number of options based on the needs and aspirations of citizens" (Basset Council Cabinet Report, 2013).

As indicated, this reframing of the discussion also includes the second key point from the research process that has practical implications for me in my role as senior manager, namely whose voices are heard – both in day to day organizational life, but, perhaps more importantly, in times and processes of change. My research also led me to challenge not just whether minority or silenced voices were heard – but also *when* they were heard. As Alvesson and Deetz (1996:193) point out, in critical theory: "All knowledge claims primarily reference social communities filled with specific power relations". One manifestation of these power relations is that some voices are privileged in organizations, whilst others are marginalized or silenced. Reflecting on this in

relation to my own experience in organizations, I would add that even when attempts are made to encourage different voices in discussions, processes and decisions, this is often toward the later stages when solutions have been identified rather than in the early stages when discussions about the nature of the problem or challenge itself are underway. As Alvesson and Deetz (1996:195) point out, critical theory highlights the importance of more groups in social determination where: "The hope is to provide forums so that different segments of the society and different human interests can be part of a better [...] dialogue so that each may equally contribute to the choices in producing a future for all". In my view it is not enough to emancipate through increased democratization of dialogue and involvement – the timing of the democratization is equally important.

Again the Commissioning process in Basset Council can be used to illustrate this point. There is a need to diversify the voices involved in the framing of the challenge, as much, if not more so, than those involved in deciding the solution. A further example is provided by the approach taken to the national ambition to reduce the number of 'Troubled Families' across England and Wales announced by Government in December 2011. The Government identified four criteria against which councils needed to assess the number of 'troubled families' living in their area. These were:

- get children back into school
- reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour
- put adults on a path back to work
- reduce the high costs these families place on the public sector each year

In Basset, the views of professionals working with these families was sought in order to develop a wider range of criteria against which the programme could be developed. Key issues for families were identified and included domestic violence and housing conditions. In itself, seeking the wider front-line perspective was a shift from the traditional approach. However, from a critical perspective, the most marginalized voices were still missing from the conversation were still missing from the framing conversation – the voices of the families themselves. A system perspective had been developed, driven by the

challenges those families posed the system. In-depth interviews were then carried out with a number of those families- and the key issue consistently identified by them was that of debt. This issue was missing completely from the system-side framing of the challenge.

Seeing the organization both as a researcher and a manager has the potential to significantly strengthen professional practice within organizations by developing abilities around challenging 'taken-for-granted's' and leading to deeper, richer understanding of issues and challenges. Different perspectives open up different possibilities and different solutions and approaches and processes for involving different voices, and listening to these voices becomes a key management challenge.

As I stated at the beginning of this section, there are also a number of implications for professional practice arising from the areas of my research themselves. My research concludes that anyone looking to improve trust and control within an organization needs to recognize there is a relationship between the two, and to understand that this is a more complex and dynamic relationship than the one described in much of the literature. My conclusions show it is also essential to recognize the role distrust plays in this relationship. The day-to-day reality of a continually shifting balance between trust, control and distrust is not currently recognized in the organization.

Understanding trust as a positive expectation that others will do what they say they will has important implications for the ways in which trust is affected by choices made in organizations on how to communicate key issues. As highlighted in chapter four, inconsistencies between words and actions have implications for perceptions of trustworthiness. My research demonstrated that inconsistencies were experienced by senior managers between corporate messages on control and their day-to day reality and tensions arose as a result, that in some cases led to increasing distrust. For me, the introduction of greater dialogue and time to consider the extent to which approaches and narratives

are congruent with senior managers' day-to-day reality is an important aspect of attempting to reduce such tensions in organizations.

Within the understanding of the relationship between trust and control I also identified the need for a fuller understanding of control. From my research I find that it is important for there to be balance in control frameworks in an organization but this balance isn't limited to the description in the literature between formal and informal control. A critical perspective takes the idea of balance beyond this. There is an assumption in much of the literature that those further up the hierarchy are those who are 'in control', both of the organization and of its control frameworks. My research challenges this way of seeing the organization and instead chimes with Kramer's (1996:226) view that: "Although individuals who sit atop the hierarchical relationship enjoy considerable advantages over those on the bottom in terms of relative power and control, they are far from being either free of either vulnerability or uncertainty". There is then a need for organizations to develop the understanding of the day-to-day reality of senior managers with regard to control – to explore views, experiences, roles and responsibilities as part of a deeper understanding of the nature and operation of control.

My argument here is that when control is understood by individuals to be at an acceptable level, its role in the organization is acknowledged as positive. When, however, control is seen to exceed such a level, potentially catastrophic consequences result. Not only are trust and trust-building efforts undermined but a self-reinforcing escalation between control and distrust can result.

Taking these findings together as a whole, from a critical perspective I find that professional practice, both in this organization and more widely, needs to move beyond the typical New Public Management approach that was my focus at the beginning of my research. In such an approach activity would be focused on developing a strategy and associated actions to be delivered in order to implement the strategy and achieve a set of pre-determined measurable outcomes. For example, a typical response to building trust or strengthening

control from such a perspective would be to set out an overarching vision and ambition and identify a number of actions which, if all were successfully delivered, would result in greater trust and/or improved control.

The critical perspective highlights the importance of a richer understanding of the personal and situational aspects of the organizational context as part of balancing trust, control and distrust. My argument here is that senior managers, and other employees, are not a homogenous group simply because they share the same hierarchical or organizational label. For example, instead of a control framework being designed in isolation and then being imposed in a way that conflicts with personal or situational expectations, a dialogue should take place. This dialogue would need to include discussion of the organizational requirement of control (for example, set by legislation or internal regulations) together with senior managers' experiences and expectations. This would lead to a richer discussion and ultimately a fuller understanding of both the requirements for, and the impact of, controls. In turn, this would lead to a wider ownership of control than I found through the research to be present. It would also result in less distance between theoretical frameworks of control and organizational reality. It is important that senior managers perceive control as relevant and appropriate, thus avoiding the catastrophic consequences of an escalating spiral of control and distrust.

It would not be sufficient to limit this discursive practice to senior managers. Democratization of the control processes would require wider engagement of other employees across organizational hierarchies. This is not a one-off process for organizations. From my research I find the need for a continuous dialogue at the core of a different way of working not solely limited to approaches to control in organizations. Such a process enables on-going discussions about what the organization is saying and doing, and the day-to-day reality for employees. This helps raising awareness of discrepancies between the two and reasons behind them. This therefore helps to minimize distortions in communications such as inconsistencies between statement and deed, and helps to maximise the positive expectations at the core of trust.



My research contributes to the literature on control, in particular the literature considering the idea of balance of different control systems. My research also makes a contribution to the literature on the role of senior managers in control. Traditionally the literature views those highest in the organizational hierarchy as responsible for control. My research challenges this view by providing a picture of senior managers as the subjects, and even the victims, of control.

My research contributes to the growing literature on distrust, in particular the relationship between control and distrust. In doing so my research particularly highlights the role that sense-making of controls as inappropriate or excessive plays in relation to controls being understood as signals of distrust.

This research also makes a contribution to critical management theory as it highlights the importance of understanding senior managers as individuals rather than a homogenous group. This means 'one-size fits all' approaches to issues such as trust-building or control-building risk failure as they do not acknowledge that common assumptions or sense-makings do not mean common starting positions are held. I also identify several aspects of the role of the critical, reflexive researcher that have practical implications for the role of senior manager.

With regard to the relationship between trust and control, my research highlights the inadequacy of the literature that limits the relationship to either a complementary or a substitutive one. My research proposes a much more dynamic and interactive relationship where trust and control are continually balancing and re-balancing. My research also proposes that the relationship between trust and control should be understood as a relationship between trust, control and distrust.

## Limitations and future research

This research was based on a small number of interviews within a single organization. This could be seen as a limitation from some theoretical perspectives but I was not interested in the creation and application of natural laws – I was interested in uncovering: “Meanings held by members of the organization about themselves and the organization, to develop a new understanding” (McAuley, Duberley and Johnson, 2007:341).

This small sample provided a lot of very rich material. Indeed, given the wealth of material the ten interviews generated, I experienced a real challenge in limiting my consideration to the issues of trust and control. In reaching my conclusions I also identified a number of areas it would be interesting to research further.

Given that the sense-making of senior managers in the organization is at odds with the view that senior managers are in control of control, I would be interested in exploring the views of other employees in the organization from different positions in the hierarchy to understand how they see the role of senior managers and whether there is a difference in the views.

A minority discourse illustrated the impact controls can have on trust and distrust in oneself, and one's own abilities. I am interested in exploring whether this is a minority discourse about the impact of control, or whether it is a wider alternative discourse that was not surfaced by this study. And, I am interested in considering the implications such a minority or alternative discourse for professional practice. This point also connects to another area I would be interested in exploring further. In discussing their frustration with control in the organization, and the impact on trust and distrust, senior managers, at times, expressed considerable emotion. Not feeling trusted or beginning to doubt one's own abilities were not comfortable positions for the people being interviewed. Exploring these emotional responses in relation to trust, control and distrust would be a rich and interesting area of further study.

## **Personal reflections**

The study provided me with a fabulous opportunity to explore more deeply some of my areas of interest in relation to organizations. Fortunately for me, these were also areas of interest for the leadership of the organization and I was lucky that I was supported in my research. And the areas continue to be of interest – in fact probably more than ever in a context of budget cuts and service reductions not really dreamt of when I started my research.

I was grateful for the interest taken by my colleagues in the research and their willingness to share personal experiences and thoughts. Something began in those interview conversations that I am fortunate has continued. The interviews introduced us to a way of taking time to consider, challenge and explore that has grown across the wider membership of the senior leadership team.

I expected research in my own organization to be problematic. I decided against observation as I didn't want colleagues to be wondering whether I was relating to them as a colleague, manager or researcher. Even limiting this to interviews caused me some anxiety before I started the research, both for the research discussion and for future work relationships. Once I had considered my ontological and epistemological commitments and worked through the implications for my research, I recognized and was comfortable that I had a role in developing a shared understanding and meaning from the process.

Although I was supported in carrying out my research, I also had some concerns about how the findings of the research would be received in the organization, particularly as they can be seen to challenge the dominant discourse and do not propose a traditional management response to the issues in question. I am fortunate that the organization is prepared to consider a different way of seeing things as part of exploring new ways of working.

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