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*Variations of the project sponsor role and benefits realisation: A phenomenographic study*

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**Variations of the Project Sponsor Role and Benefits Realisation:  
A Phenomenographic Study**

DENISE TURNER

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of  
Sheffield Hallam University  
For the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

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## **Acknowledgement**

Undertaking doctoral research has been a huge endeavour that has challenged me intellectually and professionally and changed the way I see the world. As I look back to those early days when my doctoral journey began I want to acknowledge the influence of some important people who have mattered along the way, and take this opportunity to thank them.

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## **Dedication**

As a child, I never fully appreciated the sacrifices my mother, Audrey, made when she gave up on the idea of having a career herself in order to raise me and my sister whilst my father went out to work. She sadly passed away before she had the opportunity to see me graduate with my first degree or witness the changes in my career that have led me to this doctoral journey. The grounding of a happy stable home life that I had the privilege to experience as a child laid the foundations for all that has followed since, and though my mother is no longer around to guide and encourage me her character and commitment is captured on every page I have written.

I dedicate this thesis to her.

### **Candidate's Statement**

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for any other award or credit at this or any institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis is wholly original and all material or writing published or written by others and contained herein has been duly referenced and credited.

Denise Turner

May 2017

## Abstract

The Project Sponsor role and Benefits Realisation have become a focus for organisations and project management practitioners as the need to understand factors that are potentially impacting on the success or failure of projects is gaining momentum. The question of who or what is responsible for the successful delivery and realisation of benefits of publicly funded high profile projects in the NHS has given rise to research that addresses specific aspects of key roles in the project management environment. Addressing a gap in the research this study focusses on the senior role with responsibility for the sponsorship of projects and explores how this role is experienced and understood by those undertaking it, and what is understood of benefit realisation.

The Project Sponsor role has only in recent years received any focus in the research but this focus has failed to address questions of *how* the role is experienced and *what* is understood by the senior managers who undertake the role, and, what if anything do they understand of benefits realisation.

Nine qualitative semi-structured interviews with Project Sponsors from an acute specialised NHS hospital trust were conducted, transcribed and analysed and this research presents the qualitatively different ways in which the Project Sponsor role is experienced, giving an insight into the understanding of the individuals who are undertaking the role, to better comprehend how that role can contribute to Benefit Realisation and achieve successful outcomes for projects.

This phenomenographic study presents three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role and of realising benefits across seven themes of awareness, and suggests that the role of Project Sponsor is experienced in different and inclusively hierarchical ways. This thesis contributes to knowledge on the role of the Project Sponsor, particularly in relation to benefits from projects.

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## **Chapter One – Introduction to the research**

### **1.1 Introduction and overview**

By the early 1990s, the National Health Service (NHS) in England had gained a reputation for the failure of projects that were both high profile and involved significant amounts of public funding (Campion-Awwad, Hayton, Smith, Vuaran, 2014). An example of one such failure was the proposed National Programme for IT in the NHS (NPfIT), the largest public sector IT programme ever attempted in the UK with an original budget of £6 billion over the lifetime of the contracts. Commissioned in 2002 to deliver an integrated electronic patient record system fit for purpose for the twenty first century, this national project was brought to a premature end in 2011, having not achieved the desired outcomes. Subsequent reports, in 2013, by both the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee (Great Britain, Parliament, Department of Health, 2013) aligned the failure of benefits to the role of Project Sponsor, or Senior Responsible Officer (the terms being interchangeable but referring to the senior executive with overall responsibility for the project). Championing the attributes of those who were supposed to be responsible for ensuring continuity of leadership and accountability, the NPfIT had a number of leaders, some of whom lasted for only a matter of months, and eventually the rotation of senior management and leaders impacted on the NPfIT through the loss of corporate knowledge and leadership, and through the dissemination of accountability and responsibility for the programme (Campion-Awwad, Hayton, Smith, & Vuaran, 2014).

Whilst placing a deal of emphasis on the role of Project Sponsor, in neither case did the reports elaborate on whether or not the individual/s within these roles had ‘signed up’ or indeed were even aware of the responsibility that came with the role. This potential disconnect between the perceived role of the Project Sponsor by those outside and within NHS Projects, has continued within public discourse and relevant academic literature. My thesis steps into the disconnect, and brings new knowledge to the subject, by exploring the subjective perceptions of the role of ‘Project Sponsor’ via a series of semi-structured interviews with senior NHS Executive Project Sponsors, analysed in the phenomenographic research style.

There are seven main sections to this chapter, section 1.1 introduces the chapter and gives a brief overview of the issues this research will begin to address. In section 1.2 a brief overview of the history of the NHS from the context of its founding principles and the some of the major structural changes that have occurred since its inception are presented. Project management and the role of the Project Sponsor is discussed in section 1.3 and section 1.4 outlines the role of projects and project benefits in the NHS. In section 1.5 I describe my professional background and motivation as a researcher in carrying out this research. Section 1.6 summarises the overall aim of the research, the research design and method. The chapter closes in section 1.7 with a summary overview of the chapters, thesis structure and summary conclusion of what this research will explore.

## **1.2 A brief history of the NHS – founding principles and structure**

The NHS was founded on three core principles; to be a comprehensive, universal health care service, covering all health needs, and to be free at the point of delivery to all citizens equally on the basis of need. These three core principles remain at the heart of the NHS since its inception in the late 1940's despite the changes in society and advances in health care that have occurred in the intervening years. Now, in the build up to the anniversary of its inception, the challenge to upholding those original principles are evident and well documented, despite successive governments claiming to maintain the three principles on which the NHS was founded, much has changed in the structure and management of the NHS (Talbot-Smith, Pollock, Leys & McNally, 2006).

The change has been significant and ongoing in the NHS since its inception almost 70 years ago, yet at its heart remains the tenet that the services of the NHS should be free at the point of delivery despite the challenges over decades to provide a service to an ever-increasing population with complex and challenging needs. Since Aneurin Bevan launched the NHS, proclaiming that "this is the biggest single experiment in social service that the world has ever seen undertaken" (Timmins, 2008), the NHS has, up to the 1980's, evolved on the basis of redistribution of healthcare resources and services across the country on the basis of need. The structures of the NHS were based on the

kind of service it provided, for example, preventative, primary, secondary and tertiary care. There was however, a step change that occurred in 1979 when the Conservative government came into power and the Thatcher administration introduced two policies of long-term significance – general management and the ‘contracting -out’ of non-clinical services such as hospital catering.

This change in general management saw the introduction of a new layer of hospital managers increasingly trained in business management methods and the introduction of ‘contracting out’ and outsourcing directly brought the private sector into the provision of NHS care for the first time.

Throughout the 1990’s and early 2000’s the change to NHS structures continued, following the governments radical restructure leading to the introduction in 1991 of the ‘internal market’. Following the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act, hospitals and other community health services were turned into semi-independent ‘trusts’ which required them to behave like businesses in a market place. At the same time health authorities became ‘commissioners’ enabling them to ‘purchase’ services from the ‘trusts’ and contracts were introduced between the two parties. This introduction of the ‘internal market’ continued to embrace the original principles of the NHS and as such the provision of services was still meant to be based on the assessment of needs for services in each area, however, there was now an incentive for the newly formed ‘trusts’ to break even by generating income and cutting costs. There was also competition with each other for business as the annual block budget arrangements that had previously existed were no longer there to incentivise the priority of need. The priority became whatever would enable ‘trusts’ to balance the books (Talbot-Smith & Pollock, 2006).

Changes through the ‘internal market’ also meant that there was a change to the way capital was accounted for. The Treasury introduced a ‘capital charge’ in order to make ‘trusts’ more economical with their capital assets and to encourage the sale of assets that were no longer needed. This ‘capital charge’ paved the way for the Private Finance Initiative or PFI which was an alternative way for ‘trusts’ and to raise capital for public investment. Such joint ventures of consortia of bankers and construction companies would build and operate NHS premises in return for an annual charge over

the lifetime of the contract. Such arrangements were envisaged in The NHS Plan of 2000 (Dixon & Dewar, 2000) where 100 new hospital buildings were promised, the majority of which would be funded via PFI, creating a large business sector that was closely tied to the provision of NHS clinical services.

Maintaining that clinical services would not be privatised was heralded until the government published The NHS Plan 2000 in which they made clear that in order to provide additional capacity the NHS would be opened up to the market. Without using NHS doctors and staff, private providers found it difficult to provide significant volumes of services and this signalled a change in policy rationale from the government from one of providing additional capacity to giving patients a wider choice of service providers.

The shift to market forces has led to radical changes in the structure of the NHS, including within the Department of Health, where up to 40 per cent of its functions and staff have since been transferred to the market over time.

This desire for change across all levels of the health economy has continued throughout the decades that followed the launch of The NHS Plan in 2000, and more recently, the Health and Social Care Bill launched in 2011 saw the introduction of a further strategic change that placed the budgets to 'buy' care for local communities into the hands of clinically owned networks of GPs who commission services on behalf of those local communities. The controversy surrounding the introduction of the Bill led to what the government at the time referred to as a 'pause' and following further consultation over 18 months the Health and Social Care Act came into being in 2012, and the 'new' NHS on 1 April 2013. This has seen the shift of responsibilities historically located in the Department of Health move to independent NHS Commissioning Boards. As recently as 2016 in a further move the regulator, Monitor, introduced in the 2011 Bill, was merged with other NHS bodies including Patient Safety, Intensive Support teams and NHS Trust development Authority to create what is now known as NHS Improvement which has a remit "to offer support providers and local health systems to help them improve" ('NHS Improvement', n.d.).

This history of significant change over many decades has been shaped by transition from one restructure to another in an ever-increasing demand led health economy that has also seen significant growth over the last 70 years.

### **1.3 Project Management and the role of Project Sponsor in the NHS**

April 2004 saw the introduction of the first NHS foundation trusts and since their introduction most hospitals in England are now managed in this way. NHS foundation trusts differ from other existing NHS trusts in that they are independent legal entities and have unique governance arrangements. They are accountable to local people, who can become members and governors. It is the duty of each NHS foundation trust to consult and involve a board of governors (including patients, staff, members of the public and partner organisations) in the strategic planning of the organisation.

As self-standing, self-governing organisations, NHS foundation trusts are free from central government control and are able to determine their own future (NHS England, 2016).

Some hospitals in England are managed by acute trusts with foundation trust status and employ a wide range of health care professionals. Acute trusts can be regional or national centres for more specialised care and, in the context of this research, the acute trust in which the research was undertaken is a specialist trust situated in the North of England that serves both the local and regional community and, for some specialised services, takes patient referrals from across the country.

For the purpose of this research the hospital in which this research was undertaken will be referred to as 'The Hospital'.

The Hospital introduced a new structure of governance and operation that was given the title Project Management Office (PMO) at the beginning of 2013 and the remit of the PMO at that time was specifically to support the work associated with service improvement projects that realised financial efficiency across the Trust. At this time, the focus of the PMO was on project development and delivery to achieve the required financial efficiencies identified across the Trust, however following a review at the end of 2013, there was recognition that in order to achieve the broader



outcomes of the strategic objectives the remit of the PMO should widen to include programmes that subsume the identified projects (Kay 2015. Pers.comm).

The PMO did not align itself to any particular professionally recognised standard e.g. PRINCE2®, however certain elements from across the project management community of practice were adopted such as specific role types and governance processes and the principles of setting up temporary work packages as ‘projects’ with a defined initiation process and accountability that reported through senior executives to the executive board were introduced (Kay, 2015; Wardley, 2015; Talbot, 2015. Pers.comm).

#### **1.4 The role of projects and project benefits in the NHS**

The scale and ambition of the NHS, in terms of the healthcare it seeks to provide and the numbers of patients that it serves, means that large scale, strategic projects are commonplace. As a health service that prides itself on delivering the most up to date health care, free at the point of delivery, to the entire population of England, the NHS is constantly changing and evolving. Project management, and the ability to deliver large, strategic initiatives, is therefore a key feature of the NHS, and, since its creation in 1948, the NHS has been delivering a wide range of change programmes.

However, as stated in the opening paragraph of this chapter, the NHS is regularly seen to fail in its delivery of these projects, failure being defined here as an inability to ‘realise the proposed benefits’ of a given project.

The terms ‘benefit management’ and ‘benefit(s) realisation management’ are terms used in both business practice and academic literature and are terms that can be said to be synonymous with ‘benefits management’ (Breese *et al.*, 2015). For the purpose of this study the term ‘benefits realisation’ will be used which of itself extends the scope of benefits management by encompassing both the management of and ultimate realisation of benefits within the business environment. The term, in use for over 25 years, has origins in the project environment in the context of concerns over the failure to achieve the expected benefits linked to major investments and business change (Farbey, Land & Targett, 1999). Despite this long history of use and the introduction into project, programme and portfolio management professional literature and training materials (APM, 2006; PMI, 2008; OGC, 2011), according to

Breese *et al* (2015), where there is evidence within the literature of any significant focus on benefits management it is confined to a limited number of organisations compared to other areas of project management.

If, as is the case for Bradley, the 'ultimate accountability' for the realisation of benefits lies with the Project Sponsor or Senior Responsible Owner (SRO), (2010, p.22) then it would be of interest in terms of academic research to explore what understanding of their role the PS or SRO has in relation to realising the benefits of a project.

The term 'benefit realisation' has a distinct meaning within the disciplines of portfolio, programme and project management and for the purpose of this research the industry standard definition of that term will be used. Jenner (2012), describes a benefit as:

The measurable improvement from change, which is perceived as positive by one or more stakeholders, and which contributes to organizational (including strategic) objectives.

This definition, used as the benchmark for managing benefits within APMG International™, gives clarity to meaning of the term within the project management community of interest, however there are other definitions which describe the reasons of focus for the term 'benefits' within the context of the project and programme management sphere. Bradley (2010), describes very succinctly what benefit realisation is all about:

Benefits need to be the reason for change, the drivers for determining and managing the individual components of change and the prize at the conclusion of the change. (Bradley, 2010).

Attempts to understand the perceived failure to deliver large projects have been made and are documented in the literature (Patel & Robinson, 2010). However, despite the NHS having a formal and well-known role of Project Sponsor, which has the responsibility for leading the direction and outcomes of a project, there is very little research into the impact and/or failings of this role (Crawford *et al.*, 2008).

My thesis brings new knowledge to this area by analysing the subjective perceptions of NHS executives who have, or who were at the time of my study, delivering the role of Project Sponsor.

The role of Senior Responsible Officer, or Project Sponsor, and I shall use the latter term from this point onwards as the more recent and widely applied usage of the term, was introduced to the NHS in early 2000. It was one of several measures that were intended to improve the delivery of public sector projects (Cabinet Office, 2000). Its introduction was aligned to the PRINCE2® methodology, or the 'Projects IN Controlled Environments', a generic project management approach that had been introduced a short time earlier, in 1996. PRINCE2® became mandatory for all large-scale IT projects in the public sector, and quickly became synonymous with the 'Project Sponsor' concept (NHS, 2010).

The two are not, in reality, co-dependent, and projects in the NHS are regularly delivered that have a Project Sponsor but which do not involve large scale IT applications. The delivery of large complex projects is now a common feature of life in most large and/or specialist NHS Hospitals (Edmonstone, 2010). My thesis, being concerned with the role of Project Sponsor specifically, does not differentiate between the type of project, but rather asks what the individuals whom are occupying the role of Project Sponsor perceive it to be, and how, and if, these individual perceptions influence on, and interact with, the delivery of the wider Project.

Given the continued pace of change in the NHS and the challenging fiscal environment within which it operates, this question is both timely and of significance. A greater appreciation of the ways in which individual Project Sponsors perceive their role and more insight into the manner in which this perception impacts upon project delivery will be of interest to all those involved in project delivery within the NHS.

Effective project sponsorship can be said to be an essential discipline for effective project management, and in the context of delivery of a project, it can be the difference between success and a high profile and expensive disaster (West, 2010). By stepping into the role of project management in the NHS specifically, I seek to bring new and important knowledge into this area.

According to the Association for Project Management Book of Knowledge (2012), project sponsorship is a senior management role with responsibility for identifying the business need, problem or opportunity with a focus on ensuring that the project remains a viable proposition and that the 'benefits' of a project are realised.

With that in mind the aim of this research is to explore the qualitatively different ways that individuals experience and understand the role of Project Sponsor and to describe how they conceive of that role in realising benefits. This thesis then will explore the research question:

*“What do NHS Project Sponsors understand of their role and of realising project benefits?”*

This introduction will outline the reasons for, and boundaries of, this research project.

### **1.5 Researcher professional background and motivation**

My motivation for selecting the research question was based upon my twenty years of experience of working, at different levels of seniority, in a range of public sector organisations. These included roles within the community sector, the Police, a City Council, and latterly and currently, the NHS. In each of these environments I experienced the delivery of large scale, strategic projects, either as a member of the project delivery team, or as part of the overarching senior executive into which the project team reported.

These different experiences gave me a unique insight into the way in which projects are initiated, developed, delivered, and monitored in a range of contrasting public sector environments. I am conscious that my own perception of project success or failure was influenced by a range of factors, including my level of seniority in the organisation at the time, and my specific role within the different projects. However, a key theme emerged as I moved between these different environments, and this was, the role of the Project Leaders (or in NHS terminology, the Project Sponsor). Moving most recently to a senior role within a specialist hospital trust, and seeing first hand the impact of change projects on the ground, focussed my thinking further and I

elected to delve into the particular dynamics of the NHS Project Sponsor role, to bring new knowledge to this area.

My career to date has been delivered outside of academia. I have been involved in the development and delivery of change projects at a local level, including for example the creation of a Healthy Living Centre for an inner-city area of the north of England, which involved the balancing of multiple stakeholder objectives, the refurbishment of a listed building, and the challenge of a tightly defined project budget. At the other end of the scale, I have managed a portfolio of projects on behalf of a large regional Police Force, working with a large number of internal Project Sponsors, and being responsible for a budget of over £27million. In more recent years I have worked for a Local Authority as Programme Manager for an economic programme of regeneration and activity in a large metropolitan city, working with a range of public and private sector stakeholders on a programme of activity that at time was valued at just under £2billion. During the last 12 years I have worked as both a Project Manager and Project Sponsor in each of the organisations I worked in and laterly, having moved across in the NHS, I have stepped back from the project management and sponsorship roles directly to a role which involves oversight and performance management, including oversight of service improvement and efficiency projects and programmes through contract management. Throughout each of these different experiences, I was struck by the lack of knowledge that appeared to exist around the best way to deliver complex projects in the public sector, and in particular, what specific characteristics are required for a project team to be a successful one. In my experience, the way in which individual project members interact with the project idea and with the environment in which the project operates, is a key factor in the delivery of projects. In selecting my research question, I seek to both explore and better understand my perception, by viewing the role of Project Sponsor through the lens of individual executives, all of which have, or are, delivering the role in the NHS.

Of all the organisations in which I have worked, the NHS is amongst the most political, being in many ways a cornerstone of British society but often at the forefront of public debate by politicians across the political spectrum who claim to support its founding principles unconditionally. Therefore, it is very affected by the evolution of the political

environment at both a national and local level, and this, coupled with the fast technological change of the last two decades has led to the introduction of new working practices in the NHS. These could be described as being reliant upon the transformational change that comes as a result of embracing new technological developments and responding to the need to find efficiency and increased productivity across the public sector.

Teams of people are brought together or given the responsibility of reacting to the change and go on to develop structures, services or systems to implement the change against, usually, a defined time line and then once completed move back to day to day service delivery, and, at a senior level, strategy and policy development within the 'new' context and paradigm.

I have found this constant cycle of change to be at best more 'format through consensus' rather than 'implementation by design' and I have welcomed over the last 10 – 15 years as a practitioner within this environment the introduction of systems and processes that deliberately encourage new ways of professionalising how organisations and leaders think about, plan and execute their responsibilities in terms of implementing change to both tangible and intangible resources.

Managing work packages as distinct 'projects' has gained momentum throughout my professional career in the public sector environments in which I have worked and project management; that is the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements (Project Management Institute, 2008), has evolved throughout this time.

Having experienced this change of emphasis and directly been a part of creating new environments for change management within the organisations I have worked, I have noticed that the application of knowledge and the implementation of systems and procedures does not necessarily guarantee success. As a result of this observation over recent years I have begun to question the roles that individuals play in change processes. Recognizing that integral to the elements of application of knowledge and skills, tools and techniques, systems and procedures, are 'people' I have become increasingly interested in the role that individuals undertake in the project environment and what those individuals understand of their role in relation to the

success or otherwise of projects. From the starting point of understanding the roles and responsibilities of key individuals within the project environment I have gained experience of the different project roles by developing an insight into the value of doing projects well and have recognised the contributions people can make to project outcomes. This has, however, led to more questions regarding the contribution of key individuals within their *specific* project roles and what understanding individuals have of those specific roles (Englund & Bucero, 2006).

Within the confines of my work environment I engage with project stakeholders including project managers and project sponsors amongst others. After working on and alongside many different types of projects in varying environments, both public and private sector, I have built up a long history of practical experience regarding the success and failure of projects and have been a part of and witnessed the shortcomings of ineffective project management. This experience has led me to look closely at the mechanisms of project management and also the characteristics of the individuals involved, regardless of their relationship or role within the project environment.

My training as a PRINCE2® Practitioner highlighted the processes to be followed in order to deliver successful projects according to the PRINCE2® methodology (APM, 2006), but it has also led me question and look closely at the interface between project specific roles and, in particular, what executives understand of their role in delivering projects and delivering project benefits.

Projects succeed and fail in many different organisational environments. Successful outcomes tend to result in the organisation realising the benefits that it recognised it needed to achieve and had initiated the project for in the first place. My own experience has highlighted to me the difference between ‘project success’ and ‘project management success’, a distinction made in the literature also (Dainty *et al*, 2003). This difference between ‘project management success’, measured in terms of time, cost and quality, and that of ‘project success’, measured against the objectives of the project in terms of achieved benefits (Cooke-Davies, 2002; DeWit, 1988), is critical and lies at the heart of my interest in researching the role of the Project Sponsor and what Project Sponsors understand about their role in realising project benefits.

Much has been written about the role of the Project Manager in both industry standards and project management literature in terms of the delivery of projects and the impact on time, cost and quality as success measures (Dainty *et al*, 2003; Bowencamp & Kleiner, 1987; Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Cooke-Davies, 2002). My research interests however lie in looking at the contribution, if any, that the Project Sponsor brings to a project, and in particular, what does the Project Sponsor understand about their role and of realising benefits. Is there a clear understanding of the role and responsibility of the Project Sponsor in the project management process from initiation through delivery and closure, and what, if anything, do Project Sponsors understand of their role in realising benefits?

What the Project Sponsor understands about their role and how they conceive of that role are questions that will be explored through this research and the outcomes of the research will outline the conceptions used by Project Sponsors in understanding the role. There is a very limited amount of research or reference in project management standards that has addressed specifically the understanding of the Project Sponsor role (Cooke-Davies, 2002). The literature that does address the Project Sponsor role specifically looks at the impact of sponsor behaviour on the outcomes of projects, notably Kloppenborg *et al* (2007 and 2009), Perkins (2014), Helm & Remington (2005) all of whom note how little research has been conducted in this area. It is suggested that there is a recognition within the industry standard literature that the project sponsor is seen to be responsible for providing resources for projects but there is little written about the characteristics of the role of sponsor or the specific behaviour and the effect on project outcomes.

A review of the literature in Chapter Two will consider that distinction further through a discussion of the research and literature relating to the project environment; specifically looking the project management process and the behaviours portrayed by the Project Sponsor; project management within the health sector and benefits realisation and benefits management.

In April 2014 I joined an acute specialist hospital and my interest in the role of the Project Sponsor within this type of health setting added to the experiences already encountered in other public sector settings. I found myself in the fortunate position of



having direct access on a day to day basis to senior executives within this organisation who have responsibility for commissioning the delivery of both service improvement and efficiency projects and programmes, all of whom are accountable to the trust board.

This has given me the opportunity to explore through research the understanding of Project Sponsor role in terms of realising project benefits.

Since beginning this research project I have, through the opportunity of moving to different sectors within the public sector, gone through a process of personal reflection on my professional practice and have through this process of reflexivity altered my professional approach to undertaking the roles I have been engaged in. This inevitable change is, I believe, a reflection of the knowledge and understanding I have personally gained through the early stages of being engaged in research that has focussed on a particular aspect of my professional practice – the role of the Project Sponsor.

With that in mind I have used the experience to outline throughout this research that the epistemological foundations, the question of how individuals understand a phenomenon, is for me subjective and as such knowledge claims are characterised through description. This implies an emphasis on description and assumes that the need for description is related to an understanding of knowledge as a matter of meaning. This will be explored further in Chapter Three.

The following section outlines the research aim, design and method of this research study.

## **1.6 Research aim, design and method**

This research project will explore the role of the Project Sponsor, or Senior Responsible Owner (SRO), within health sector projects and programmes. In particular the research will look at what individuals understand of the Project Sponsor role and of 'realising benefits' within the context of the project and programme environment.

The research will explore whether the understanding of the Project Sponsor role, when operating within that role and position, has any reference to 'realising benefits'; in other words are Project Sponsors's making decisions with *delivery of benefits* of the project as

an objective. The research will also explore the concepts used by individuals to understand the phenomenon of the Project Sponsor role and of benefit realisation.

In exploring through this research the concepts through which the understanding of the role of Project Sponsor, and in particular benefits realisation in the context of the project environment takes place the focus will be on *description* rather than *explanation*. The exploration is a search for meaning or variation in meaning and this will be supported by a search for structural relationships between meanings (Åkerlind, 2012).

The research question this research project will address is:

“What do NHS Project Sponsors understand of their role and of realising project benefits?”

There is a lot of potential to ‘drift’ into areas that do not concern this research and for that reason it is recognised that the responsibility of the researcher is key to ensuring that the research is carried out in the image of the chosen methodological approach (Åkerlind, 2012). Chapter Three will introduce the research methodology and method undertaken in this research in detail, however, it is appropriate to give an outline of the research design and method in this introductory chapter.

In exploring ‘meaning’ as understood by the participants of this research a phenomenographic method will be adopted and interviews will be conducted and transcribed. This open explorative form of data collection will then be analysed and interpreted to produce conceptions that will form ‘categories of description’. It is the categories of descriptions that describe the outcome space, or, in other words, the outcome of the research (Svensson, 1997; Sandberg, 2005; Åkerlind, 2012;).

## **1.7 Summary overview of chapters and thesis structure**

Following this introductory chapter, this thesis has six further chapters. Chapter Two will outline and present a review of the academic literature, including project management; the project sponsor role and benefits realisation. This introduction to the areas that concern this research is intentionally brief in the image of the methodology in which the research is undertaken, namely phenomenography. To this

end striving to withhold theories and prejudices about the research object, is a common characteristic of a phenomenographic research study (Sandberg, 2000). The review of the literature will include a review of health sector literature in terms of project management and also a review of the health practitioner government guidance in relation to NHS process and procedures and project management methodologies and also the regulatory standards where they exist and are of relevance. I will conclude by suggesting that despite the presence of reference to the role of Project Sponsor within both the academic literature and health sector guidance materials there is little theoretical knowledge of how the role is understood by individuals.

Chapter Three explores how individuals understand a phenomenon and will outline the ontological and epistemological context in which this research has been conducted and will outline in the detail the research philosophy, characteristics and approach – namely phenomenography. The research design, participant selection criteria and access to participants along with the data collection method and outline of the analysis technique will also be presented. The chapter will also examine why this particular method and approach was chosen for this research study and will conclude with an outline of the data collection methods and reflections on the pilot interview undertaken.

Chapter Four addresses the procedures of the analysis undertaken and explains the processes of the research analysis in detail outlining the stages and steps that were undertaken and exploring the methodological and ethical considerations of the research method as well as addressing the issues of research quality and reliability.

Chapter Five presents the findings or results of the research and outlines the categories of description and outcome space. Following a process of reduction, the conceptions derived from the analysis of the categories of description is described in detail and the structural and referential aspects of the categories are also outlined. I present three different conceptions of the Project Sponsor role and how these were understood by the individuals and reveal the elements of variation in each conception. A discussion of the findings is presented in Chapter Six where the limitations of the research is also addressed. I then review the results in relation to the literature on the Project Sponsor role and of realising benefits.

The final chapter, Chapter Seven, summarises the results and outlines the conclusions of this research study in the form of the contributions to knowledge and professional practice and concludes with a discussion of the areas of possible further research.

### **1.7.1 Conclusion**

The research question addressed in this thesis is one of the understanding of the role of Project Sponsor and of realising benefits. In this research for questions of *how* individuals understand a particular phenomenon – in this case the Project Sponsor role - the aim is to explore the variation in ways of understanding the role amongst a group of people. The research will explore how the participants experience, understand and conceive of the phenomenon that is the Project Sponsor role and also of realising benefits.

## **Chapter Two: A review of the literature.**

This chapter sets the scene and context for the research undertaken by reviewing the literature of the Project Sponsor role and its place within the project environment and project management, focussing on the elements within the environment that contribute to the wider understanding of the role of the Project Sponsor and sponsorship per se. The chapter considers specific areas of interest within this research, namely, the health sector and health sector project management; project management in general and the role of the Project Sponsor and benefits realisation. The relationship of the Project Sponsor role to the project management process and the extent to which the Project Sponsor role impacts on the outcome of projects, and in particular on benefits realisation, is also considered. This review of the literature will look at the major international project management standards, project management practice literature and general management literature. The chapter concludes with a summary highlighting the relevance of the research question as being one worth consideration for research, to which this thesis will begin the address.

### **2.1 Introduction**

The concept of project management has evolved since the early 1950's and grew in America following the removal by the Federal Government of high priority systems developments, which had to be completed in a short time to achieve national goals, from the traditional functional management hierarchy (Morris, 2012). Those first project management organisations reported to the highest levels of general management rather than through the normal bureaucratic chain (Bowenkamp & Kleiner, 1987). The success of those early projects gave them high visibility within the industry because of their strategic importance and so began the evolution of the project management concept.

Over time the concept has spread globally and through the development of the industry standard Bodies of Knowledge and training manuals the processes and terminology has also evolved. An overview of which is presented in detail in the Project Report of Breese et al (Breese *et al*, 2016).

Research in the 1980's and 1990's began to share a common agreement that project success is multi-dimensional and that different people measure project success in different ways at different times (Pinto and Pinto, 1991; Neumann *et al*, 1993; Bryde, 2003). Research considering the Project Sponsor role and the impact, if any, of benefits realisation is still rarely found in the literature, though there are some examples of benefit management in IT projects from the early 1990's (Breese, Jenner, Serra & Thorp, 2015 *et al*, 2015). There are examples in the literature of benefits management and benefits realisation within project management, though not directly related to the Project Sponsor role (Badewi, 2016; Bradley, 2010; Breese, 2012). Research specifically looking at benefit realisation could offer a further insight into the impact of the Project Sponsor role in the project environment.

Understanding of the indicators of project success and failure is covered in the literature and there is reference to the Project Sponsor role with some suggestion of one predictor of project success being an effective executive sponsor (Perkins, 2005a; Cooke-Davies, 2002). The key criteria to determine what being effective means in terms of the role of Project Sponsor is also considered with providing leadership cited as a key criterion. Often the role is undertaken by an individual from the top management level of an organization who champions the project and the senior leadership of an organisation and also mentors the Project Manager. However, there can be differential perceptions of work and work processes amongst such senior managers (Kloppenborg *et al*, 2007). Englund and Bucero (2006), have suggested that a Sponsor's involvement in a project can range from 'alienated passivity' to 'overbearing micromanagement', an indication perhaps that such a broad range of engagement styles portrayed by individual Project Sponsors highlights the relevance of looking at the Project Sponsor role in relation to gaining a better understanding of what individuals undertaking the role perceive the role to be, and what undertaking that role means in terms of the effect on benefits realisation and benefits management. In the sections 2.2 and 2.3 the key terms and phrases that are commonplace in the project management environment will be explored and defined in terms of this research study, their use and meaning. The major international project management

standards will be reviewed first followed by a review of the specific role or reference to the role in the that same standards.

In section 2.4, project management within the academic and general management literature is reviewed, followed by a specific look at project management in the health sector in section 2.5. Section 2.6 explores the Project Sponsor role and sponsorship within the academic literature and is followed by a review of benefits management and benefit realisation across both the industry standards and academic literature in section 2.7.

The purpose of this literature review is to identify whether or not there is a research gap and to guide the primary research focus. The focus therefore, has not only been on the role of Project Sponsor and sponsorship, benefits management and benefit realisation but also on the context in which the role and associated project activity are grounded – project management and general management literature. To this end section 2.2 will begin by defining the terms ‘project’ and ‘project management’ as they are described in the major international project management standards.

## **2.2 Projects and project management within the major international project management standards.**

Across the major international project management standards there are varying definitions of ‘project’, ‘project management’, ‘project manager’ and ‘project sponsor’, however for the purpose of this research the definitions used to describe the terms will be taken from The Praxis Framework (2017) comparative glossary of project, programme and portfolio management terms (Association of Project Management, 2017). This glossary brings together terms used across a number of industry standard practice guides and provides comparative descriptions and definitions for equivalent terms. Different guides have different structures and the equivalent terms are approximate or near equivalents, however the Praxis Framework is a useful tool for defining many of the common or similar terms used in project management practice and for that reason I have chosen it as the appropriate glossary for this research. Where any specific reference is made to terminology or phrases that are directly taken from the industry standard guides then this is referenced accordingly.

Taken from a widely used industry standard, the Association of Project Management (APM), a 'project' is defined as 'A unique, transient endeavour undertaken to achieve planned objectives' (APM, 2017) . Projects, by their very nature, are temporary structures created to achieve a specified business benefit and once completed are disbanded. A project has very specific characteristics which include a finite and defined life cycle, defined and measurable business products and corresponding set of activities to achieve those business products. Projects need to have a defined amount of resources and, most significantly, an organisation structure with defined responsibilities to manage the project (Office of Government Commerce , 2005). This and other definitions of what a project is sits alongside the definition of 'project management' within the industry standards and the APM describe project management as 'The application of processes, methods, knowledge, skills and experience to achieve the project objectives' (APM, 2017)

Within the project management standard PMBOK®, a project is defined as 'a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product, service or result', and project management is defined as 'The application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements' (Project Management Institute, 2013). There is then similarity between the definitions across both these industry standards and this is also evident in the definitions of specific roles within the project environment.

In Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2® (Office of Government Commerce , 2005) it is the Project Manager role that is described in terms of responsibility of tasks. Interestingly the industry standards for project management outline a process of project management by exception in terms of reporting issues and escalating them to the next level in the project management environment.

'Project Management' can be defined as the appropriate application and integration of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements through project management processes which include initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling and closing a project (Project Management Institute, 2008). In Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2® (Office of Government Commerce, 2005) a project management method is described as being



essential and states that a good project management will guide a project through to the desired results. The guide states that “Projects always need to be managed in order to be successful” (Office of Government Commerce, 2005, p.2). The guide describes a direct correlation between having a project management methodology and projects been completed on time and within acceptable costs, going on to state that the individuals involved in a project will not be clear about how much responsibility, authority and accountability they have without the execution of a project management methodology. This focus on process and procedure is reiterated in the literature with much of the emphasis on the execution of activity, an alternative way of defining project management is that it is the discipline of managing projects successfully, the focus here been on following a methodology for success rather than successful execution through processes (Morris, 2005). PRINCE2® methodology states quite clearly that the methodology excludes certain aspects of project management including people management techniques such as motivation, delegation and team leadership and is specifically a methodology that covers the management of the project itself and the management of the resources involved in carrying out the activities of the project (Office of Government Commerce , 2005).

### **2.3 The Project Sponsor role and sponsorship within the major international project management standards.**

Sponsorship is defined in The Praxis Framework as the ability to ‘provide ownership of and accountability for the business case and ensure that the work is governed effectively.’ (APM, 2017). The framework recognises that there are different names given to the role of sponsorship across the industry standards and goes on to describe some of the names used, i.e. executive, senior responsible owner or client, and goes on to describe that in Praxis the role is referred to as the ‘sponsor’.

In looking at the internationally recognized project management standards it is possible to glean some understanding of the definition of the role of a Project Sponsor as a key stakeholder within the project management environment. In the Project Management Institute standard ‘*A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge*’ (PMBOK®), the Project Sponsor is not defined as a role, sponsorship is

described in sections that refer to project stakeholders and governance rather than a specific sponsor role being a focus in the guide. PMBOK® does, however, reference the sponsor's responsibilities in terms of the charter, change control and formal acceptance of deliverables, all process variables, but the focus here is on the responsibilities of the sponsor within the project management process. The guide is written from the perspective of the project manager and the project team within the context of managing a single project, with the focus clearly on process and procedure. There is a distinction in the industry standard literature of the focus on attributes of a particular role and of sponsorship as a function.

Interestingly the Office for Government Commerce standards, PRINCE2® (OGC, 2005), *Managing Successful Programmes* (OGC, 2007a), and *Portfolio, Programme and Project Management Maturity Model (P3M3®)* (OGC, 2007b) do address the role of the sponsor more directly and prescribe specific functions within the project hierarchy. As mentioned previously the sponsor role in PRINCE2® is not recognised as a specific role within the methodology, however within both *Managing Successful Programmes* (Office of Government Commerce, 2007a) and *Portfolio, Programme and Project Management Maturity Model (P3M3®)* (Office of Government Commerce, 2007b) there is some direct reference to sponsor *behaviour*, with recommendations that sponsors lead by example and demonstrate commitment and direct involvement (OGC, 2007a).

Within the literature there is a distinction made between project success per se and key stakeholder roles and their importance within the project environment which has gained momentum in both academic and industry standard literature over recent years (Cooke-Davies, 2002; Bryde, 2008). However, what is of particular interest to me is the criticality of the sponsor role and the focus within more recent literature of the importance of that role in relation to its place within the project environment, and the relationship between the role and benefits realisation (Crawford *et al*, 2008).

The terms or titles used in this research focus on the whole on the terminology commonplace within the community of practice that is 'project management'. However, within this community there are variations in the use of terminology dependent upon the sector and preference of individual organisations and

communities of practice. For the purpose of the remainder of this thesis the use of the term 'Project Sponsor' will cover all definitions and variations including the following – Senior Responsible Officer, Senior Responsible Owner, Executive Sponsor, Client and the acronym SRO.

The industry standard definitions are quoted frequently within the literature along with research literature that has used the same definitions as a focus for exploring research questions on the subject of project management (Lundin & Soderholm, 1995; Sahlin-Andersson & Soderholm, 2002; Müller & Turner , 2005 in Crawford *et al*, 2008). However, there is no clear consensus on the effectiveness or otherwise of specific project management methodologies and tools or that by utilising such methodologies will result in a controlled management of change in terms of investment and return on investment. How sponsorship and the role of Project sponsor are defined in industry standards is of relevance to this research study as the participants of the study may or may not express their understanding of the role, in terms of addressing the research question, by referencing their experiences through knowledge of or training in the industry standard nationally and internationally recognised project management methodologies.

#### **2.4 Project Management within academic literature and general management literature.**

In noting the poor track record of major government IT projects referenced in The Financial Times in January 2000, Cicmil & Hodgson (2006) outline that blame was attributed to a “ lack of specialist project management knowledge among some civil servants and ministers ..” (p 114). Drawing attention to what can be described as conventional and mainstream approaches to studying projects and project management they call for the need to introduce alternative theoretical approaches and a move away from project management literature that relies upon the 'regularity and control' (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). They argue for 'new trajectories' (p.119) within the research agenda in fields relevant to projects and project management, and to encourage a more critical approach in these areas. Moving beyond the dominant approach to examining project success; namely indicators of time, cost and quality,

research that engages with practitioners other than project managers, with a focus on the lived experiences of project key players is seen as a welcome transition (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). The Project Manager has traditionally been the key role in project management and is described by Bowenkamp & Kleiner (1987) as the direct representative of the organization's top level general managers who is responsible for performing all functions necessary to make the project successful. There are many examples in the literature of research addressing the Project Manager role (Morris, 2005; Muller & Turner, 2010; Too & Weaver). The focus being on the role specific responsibilities and the impact on the outcome of the project; the desired outcome being success. This process within the methodology of 'management by exception' is in line with what Bass (1990) describes as a transactional leadership style whereby action is taken when tasks are not going as planned. Müller & Turner (2007) note that the literature on project success factors has largely ignored the impact of the Project Manager and their leadership style and competence on project success and go on to state that leadership style and competence are seldom identified as critical success factors on projects regardless of the specific role been carried out within the project management environment. There is though no reference to the role of Project Sponsor and so the outcome of any focus on this particular role cannot be assumed from looking at the outcome of another and different role. This raises questions of whether or not leadership style and competence can be understood in terms of 'behaviour' and if so would applying a leadership methodology to the specific roles of 'Project Manager' and 'Project Sponsor' give an insight into increasing the knowledge and understanding of the effect of behaviour on project outcomes? A rhetorical question and one that is not addressed in the literature.

## **2.5 Project Management within the Health Sector.**

Project Management based on the PRINCE2® methodology is perceived to be the method of choice for managing organisational change in the National Health Service (NHS) (Edmonstone, 2010). Following the criticism levelled at the NHS due to the failure of a number of IT related infrastructure projects in the early 1990's, along with similar failures in other public sector major schemes, PRINCE2® has increasingly come

to be seen as an appropriate means of managing significant change in the NHS. However, PRINCE2® is not the universal standard across the NHS for managing projects and there have been challenges to the idea that this methodology is fit for purpose across all projects. Some have suggested that there is a denial of complexity, a centralisation of relationships and a dependence on local circumstances which could signal a what Ham (2007) describes as a 'cookbook approach' and asserts that the NHS needs to think beyond projects and look towards more systematic shifts in processes and behavioural change (Ham *et al*, 2007). The suggestion being that a new approach to project managing change is required within the NHS, an approach that ensures that project management is less rigid and more open-ended, collaborative and emergent (Edmonstone, 2010).

The health sector, and specifically the NHS, has been subject to constant change since its inception in 1948 (BMJ 1998;317:69; Zairi & Jarrar, 2001; Talbot-Smith & Pollock, 2006; Jervis, 2013). As a consequence of this ever-constant cycle of change the processes for managing change have also evolved and this has been particularly evident in terms of the introduction of information technology (IT) systems and major IT infrastructure projects across the NHS both nationally and locally.

To document the long history of change projects, in their 1979 paper Boldy & Clayden cited the number and type of projects that had been undertaken from 1972 to 1979 across the health and welfare sectors in the UK and Ireland, noting the prevalence of health & welfare services projects and hospital services projects and the growth of these two areas across the previous ten years (Boldy & Clayden, 1979).

This long history of documented research has centered on the development of service change and service management change and, more recently, private finance initiatives (PFI) or public private partnerships (PPP) and information technology and information systems development and change.

The history of PFI schemes within the NHS began with the launch of the first wave of schemes in 1995 and in the ten years after the launch of the first wave there was a considerable number of schemes completed (6 schemes) or under construction (17 schemes) and more in the pipeline (45 projects) according to the Department of Health (DoH, 2009). PFI within the NHS has been subject to scrutiny by the press and

government bodies and there is literature looking at the effectiveness and value for money of such schemes (Hellowell & Vecchi, 2012; NAO, 2013). Yet even with such high profile investment in capital NHS schemes the role of the sponsor in NHS bodies has received very little coverage in the literature and the impact of the sponsor role on large infrastructure projects has only been subject to criticism and debate through press coverage and government scrutiny.

Though there is a growing body of research addressing the issue of effectiveness of project management processes, particularly in the sector of construction and IT project management, there is little research looking at the role of the Project Sponsor or of benefit realisation (Patel & Robinson, 2010).

## **2.6 The Project Sponsor role in academic project management literature**

Though there is now a growing interest in the role played by the Project Sponsor and research projects have to some extent begun to explore the nature of the role, there still appears to be very little research that has examined the role in any depth and even less that has examined specifically the Project Sponsor role and benefit realisation (Kloppenborg *et al*, 2007; Crawford *et al*, 2008).

The definitions, and understanding of those definitions, with regard to specific roles is an important element of recognising the scope of the research undertaken in identifying the impact of the role of the Project Sponsor and of benefit realisation. Englund & Bucero (2006) talk about the need to learn lessons following the success or failure of projects, but they do not specifically address the understanding of the individuals who carry out the role of Project Sponsor in terms of what the role involves. In other words there is no reference to the 'professionalization' of the role or the qualification and ability of the practitioner in wearing the 'badge' of Project Sponsor. Helm & Remington (2005) talk about the significance of project managers exercising a complex range of behaviour patterns to compensate for inadequate sponsor support in some projects and the potential affect of masking inadequate sponsor performance. This however falls somewhat short of addressing the issue of the sponsor role directly. If a sponsor believes that they fully understand the role requirements and are acting within the scope of those requirements do they perceive

their experiential maturity to be such that it will affect project outcomes or impact on benefit realisation.

This issue is not addressed within the literature which may be significant enough to warrant researching further, however for the purpose of this literature review I will refer to the industry standards in seeking accepted definitions of key stakeholder roles and responsibilities. I will highlight where the literature uses these definitions and assumes universal understanding and maturity in executing these roles for the purpose of researching the subject of project management. In other words the role 'assumed' by the title 'Project Manager' or 'Project Sponsor' can be open to interpretation and the skill and ability to execute the role successfully should not be taken for granted. Within the project management literature several writers have emphasized the necessity for high-level sponsor involvement and commitment to the project but this reference has tended to relate to ensuring the availability of resources and the appropriate level of attention from senior management (Cooke-Davies, 2002), echoing the reference in PMBOK® that defines the sponsor as the person providing the financial resources rather than exploring the role of the sponsor and the effect on benefit realisation. Consistent leadership is identified as one of the key success factors identified for project delivery, along with having an informed board and a CEO with a robust framework for decision making (Patel & Robinson, 2010). In the case of capital projects, Patel and Robinson (2010) conclude that having clear accountability arrangements with a single Project Sponsor will help to ensure good governance and ownership of projects.

Martin Smith (2003) argues that project success is directly related to the seniority of the sponsor within the organisation, stating that project success was more likely when the sponsor was mid-level rather than a senior executive. Smith's research looked at data from across 59 organisations to identify the correlations between success and failure of change projects. In speculating about why this could be Smith suggests that senior managers as sponsors are more removed from the working environment of front line employees and don't have as much control over the 'levers of change; work standards, rewards and feedback processes etc., and so are not as well positioned as mid-level managers to manage change efforts.

There is clearly some ambiguity in the literature about sponsorship of a project as a critical role within the context of the project management environment, and the effect of having the most appropriate management level acting as sponsor, on the successful outcomes of projects.

This ambiguity could be attributed to the lack of research that has looked at the role of the sponsor rather than the seniority of the manager acting as sponsor or role responsibilities of a sponsor within the context of the project environment. Traditional management theory suggests that managers at different levels set different goals appropriate for their level and responsibilities whether that is strategic, tactical or operational and in doing so managers tend to act in a manner consistent with achieving those goals (Kloppenborg *et al*, 2007). However, there appears to be little if any reference in the project management literature of research that has looked at the actions of sponsors.

In reviewing the literature there is little reference to the maturity level of individuals in terms of the knowledge, skills and abilities they possess when carrying out the particular roles identified and also little reference to the maturity of the organisation in which the project management processes are being carried out. The perceived assumption appears to be that where an organization has a project management methodology in place and individuals use the title of Project Sponsor the individual will have the requisite and appropriate skills to carry out that role (Helm & Remington, 2005; Crawford *et al*, 2008; Kloppenborg *et al*, 2007; Müller & Turner, 2010 ). There is little evidence within the literature that individuals in the role of Project Sponsor would be operating within a Project Management environment without the appropriate skill and understanding as to what being a Project Sponsor actually means to the organisation in which they are operating. This issue will be addressed later in this research along with considering the level of project management maturity and role appropriate understanding which in turn raises questions regarding the findings and in particular highlights the need for further research to be carried out specifically in organisations where the maturity of project management methodology may be less well developed and therefore could identify additional areas of learning.



Project Management literature refers to the key role that the Project Manager plays in leading the project and in being the link between the project team and the Project Sponsor throughout the life cycle of the project (Bowenkamp & Kleiner, 1987; Dainty *et al*, 2003). This critical link tends to be viewed in the context of the role of the Project Manager rather than that of the Project Sponsor and where reference is made to the role of the sponsor the focus is on highlighting the activities and functions that a sponsor carries out at the start-up phase of a project and the key decision making role with regard to allocating resources (Englund & Bucero, 2006; Sutterfield *et al*, 2006). This phase of start up is seen as critical to the success of projects and if the role of sponsor is critical at the start up phase then this would suggest that the sponsor role has a part to play in the success of projects (Müller & Turner, 2005).

There is clearly a need to distinguish between *activities and procedure* and *behaviour* in terms of separating out and gaining an understanding of the distinct roles and responsibilities within the project management environment. In their research Morris & Hough (1987) identified project success factors from a study of seven major projects in the UK from the previous three decades. This research culminated in Morris (1997) further developing the findings to produce a project strategy model which Turner (1999) re-presented as the Seven Forces Model. Sponsorship is presented as a key factor along with 'people' and also 'attitude'. This research is based on looking at the key role of the Project Sponsor which has not to date featured as a research area in terms of the literature, for Müller & Turner (2005) there has been a more recent interest by researchers into the Project Manager's leadership style and though their study focuses on the role of Project Manager rather than Project Sponsor it would be interesting to see if the findings are as relevant to both roles or specific to the Project Manager role alone.

A key obligation of the Project Sponsor is to create the right environment for project success. An effective Project Sponsor will deal with resource availability minimize functional barriers and ensure that the right tools are used. However Project Sponsors are more effective when they understand their role as a sponsor and do not delegate this responsibility to lower levels. In describing the qualities required to carry out this

role Englund & Bucero (2006) refer to leadership, behavioural, skills and attitude characteristics and claim that successful sponsors are also successful leaders.

There is clearly some research that suggests there is value in looking at 'leadership' as a behaviour and characteristic within the project management environment but the focus for this particular research was with regard to project success and the role of the Project Manager (Müller & Turner, 2005). In their research Helm & Remington (2005) cite the nine attributes associated with the ability of the Project Sponsor to provide effective support and achieve project success. Behavioural attributes are amongst the nine cited including willingness to make connections, courage, ability to motivate the team and ability to provide objectivity and challenge.

Project Sponsor, Executive Sponsor and Project Sponsorship are all terms that are closely associated with project management (Kloppenborg *et al*, 2007). The industry standards comment little on the role of 'Project Sponsor' and the role can be said to be unclear in some organizations, which can generate conflict and lead to problems (Englund & Bucero, 2006). However where reference is made in PMBOK®(2008) the context of the role is set very much at the initial stages of a project lifecycle and the main responsibility of the role is stated as being to provide the financial resources for the project. For issues beyond the role of the Project Manager the sponsor is described as serving as the escalation path as well as authorizing changes in scope, end of phase reviews and decisions where risks are high (Project Management Institute, 2008). In Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2® the 'sponsor' is not a specific role or term used within that particular methodology, the most similar role described is that of 'Senior Supplier', but again the context of the role is explained in terms of task and responsibilities rather than behaviour (Office of Government Commerce, 2005).

In reviewing the literature there appears to be some evidence to suggest that effective Project Sponsorship is a contributing factor to project success but clearly the limited amount of literature that specifically focuses on the Project Sponsor behaviour is a barrier to gaining a more thorough understanding of the effect of Project Sponsor behaviour on project success.

The literature is beginning to reflect a general recognition of the vital role played by the Project Sponsor within the project management environment. The role of the

Project Sponsor is emerging as a complex and difficult one. An involved and committed sponsor with the requisite experience who fully understands the responsibilities of the role is becoming as critical to project success then as Crawford *et al* (2008) state, identifying the characteristics of effective performance of the sponsor role is vital and can only be achieved through further research into the effect of the Project Sponsor role on the outcomes of projects.

## **2.7 Benefits Realisation within the project environment**

The traditional measure of success in projects, particularly capital projects, is the so called iron triangle of cost, quality and time, and benefits or the impact they have had on projects are seldom considered (Sapountzis, Yates, Kagioglou & Aouad, 2009). Reiss *et al* (2006) point out that benefits do not just happen by delivering projects and that mechanisms to measure benefits are needed. As projects succeed and fail in many different organisational environments, successful outcomes tend to result in the organisation 'realising the benefits' that it recognised it needed to achieve, and initiated the project for, in the first place. In their study on Benefits Realisation Management conducted in Brazil, the United States and the United Kingdom, Serra and Kunc (2015) conducted a survey evaluating the impact of Benefits Realisation Management (BRM) practices on project success. The results of the study show that BRM practices can be a positive predictor on the creation of strategic value for the business and suggest that a benefits management strategy integrated with corporate governance processes helps organisations to increase their ability to define and manage their success. Despite this there is little evidence that benefits management impacts on project management or general management practices, even though benefits management emerged over 25 years ago at a time when there was concern about investment in major ICT projects (Breese *et al*, 2015). There is evidence from the National Audit Office (NAO, 2013; NAO, 2011, in Jenner 2012) that many public sector projects are completed late, often over budget and do not necessarily deliver the outcomes expected. The question of the understanding of Project Sponsors of their role in realising benefits seems an appropriate area for research at this time. Equally focussing on the understanding of

individuals in the role of Project Sponsor when operating in the project or programme environment is a complementary question to be explored.

Project and programme management processes and methodologies are often used by organisations in the hope of achieving the best possible outcome through delivering against a prescribed and tested method. The industry standard methodologies were developed with the intention of improving project and programme outcomes by following a framework. Research in the 1980's and 1990's began to share a common agreement that project success is multi-dimensional and that different people measure project success in different ways at different times (Pinto and Pinto, 1991; Neumann *et al*, 1993; Bryde, 2003). That distinction is further highlighted when considering the impact of specific role on the outcome and success of projects. A balanced benefits management environment requires two critical elements according to Payne (2007), leadership and organisation.

## **2.8 Conclusion and consideration of the research question**

This research study will address the question of what Project Sponsors understand of their role and of realising benefits. The research and analysis will be carried out following the phenomenographic approach where focus will be on understanding the qualitatively different ways that the Project Sponsor role is understood through consideration of 'what' is experienced and 'how' it is experienced. It is the variation in ways that people experience a phenomenon that is of prime interest for this and other phenomenographic study (Marton, 1997).

The review of the literature has revealed a gap in terms of knowledge of the awareness and understanding of individuals undertaking the role of Project Sponsor. Though there is considerable research addressing the subject of project management, the success and failure of projects and the role, attributes and skills of the Project Manager, there is little evidence of a focus on the Project Sponsor role itself in anything other than addressing the impact on project success.

## **Chapter Three – Methodology**

The purpose of this chapter is to set out my thinking around the decision to adopt a research method that will enable an exploration of the question “What do NHS Project Sponsors understand about their role and of realising project benefits?” and questions of knowledge and understanding of the concept of ‘benefit realisation’ within the role of Project Sponsor.

This research will explore the role of the Project Sponsor, with a focus on the health sector in particular, and the research will look at what individual Project Sponsors understand of their role and of realising project benefits.

### **3.1 Introduction**

The chapter outlines the research approach used and has nine sections. Following the introduction, section 3.2 describes the reasons why the phenomenographic approach is suitable for the research question and why this approach was chosen for this study. Section 3.3 discusses the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this interpretive approach. This is followed in section 3.4 with an outline of phenomenography and details of the development and characteristics of this approach. Section 3.5 details the data collection method and give an outline of the specifics of the participant selection process and design of the research questions. This is followed in section 3.6 with a discussion on the phenomenographic approach to address issues of generalisability. The chapter will then present a brief reflection on the pilot interview undertaken in section 3.8 and will close with conclusions in section 3.9.

### **3.2 Selecting phenomenography as the research approach.**

Phenomenography has been selected as the research approach for a number of reasons described more fully throughout this chapter. Phenomenography is neither a method nor a theory, although there are both methodological and theoretical elements to be derived from it (Marton & Booth, 1997). It can be described as a research specialisation with the aim of mapping “the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive and understand various aspects of,

and various phenomena in, the world around them” (Marton, 1986, p. 31). It is a way or approach to identify and tackle certain sorts of research questions that are particularly aimed at questions of relevance to understanding and learning (Yates, Partridge & Bruce, 2012). Phenomenographic research focusses on ‘ways of experiencing something’, and the object of phenomenographic research is the ‘variation’ in ways of experiencing - in the case of this research that is the Project Sponsor role and benefits realisation.

From my scrutiny of the literature I have found few examples of this approach being used within project and programme management research (Partington, Pellegrinelli & Young, 2005; Chen, Partington & Wang, 2008; Lupson & Partington, 2011) and through this research there is an opportunity to generate new understandings and ways of knowing about questions in the field of project management and the Project Sponsor role. This approach is a useful way of exploring experiences and perceptions regarding how the world appears to different people or of how they understand a phenomenon or experience. Focussing on the central theme of variation in the ways in which people experience phenomenon, the phenomenographic approach has commonly been used to explore issues of variation and understanding (Bowden & Walsh, 1994).

More recently the use of phenomenography in healthcare research has developed though this has focussed on the clinical side of health care management (Jangland, Larsson, & Gunningberg, 2011; Rahmner et al., 2009; Steffenak *et al*, 2014; Carlsson *et al*, 2016).

As a practitioner researcher with a professional interest in project management I have explored my epistemological and ontological beliefs in the context of undertaking this research and consider that with a grounding in an interpretivist paradigm, understanding that meaning is created through the interaction of people with the world around them, there is a requirement for me to outline why the traditional positivist scientific method is to not, in my view, an appropriate approach in which to answer the research question of this study and set out my reasons for the choice of approach I have made.

In thinking about how I view the world I have reflected on my own construction of knowledge and social reality in considering how as a researcher I gain knowledge and

construct meaning about the world. My view of reality, or ontology and my view of how a person acquires knowledge, or epistemology, have guided my thinking on the theoretical framework I will use in undertaking this research study. The overall research framework, or paradigm, that I have adopted has guided the methodology and methods I have selected and supports my understanding of the philosophical underpinnings that have informed my choice of research question. My research question is based on exploring how individuals construct meaning, in this case meaning about the role of Project Sponsor and of realising benefits. An interpretivist paradigm, outlined further in section 3.3, with ontological assumptions of social reality viewed as multiple people interpreting events differently and thereby having multiple perspectives supports my view that my role as researcher in in this study is to seek to “understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.19). To this end, my quest in this research study is not to change or challenge social phenomena but to seek to understand social phenomena. This in itself can be said to be in contrast to the positivist, or scientific paradigm, in that the positivist researcher seeks to explain social phenomena rather than seeking to understand.

To this end there is an opportunity as a practitioner in project management to improve practice through better understanding of the relationship between how Project Sponsors perceive their role in realising benefits within the project environment. The exploration of ‘variation’ in ways people experience phenomena in their world is a prime interest to phenomenographic research and it is the aim of phenomenographers generally, and this researcher in particular, to describe that variation. The type of research question selected along with my own epistemological position, as outlined above, has led to phenomenography as the chosen research approach for this research study.

### **3.3 An interpretative approach**

The interpretive approach to understanding the issues in question represent a belief that the reality we know is socially constructed (Willis, Jost & Nilakanta 2007) and though not directly accessible through research, external reality does exist. In contrast

to positivist or constructivist research paradigms, the interpretive paradigm is drawn from hermeneutical philosophical experiences and assumes that actors and their worlds are inseparable. Phenomenography assumes a non-dualist ontology in that reality is seen as neither purely subjective nor purely objective, but derived from the interaction between a person who experiences and an experience itself (Marton, 1981). This can be described as the belief that an objective reality exists, and we have a limited capacity to get to know that reality, being constrained by the limits of perception and understanding. Reality then is neither singular nor fixed but realities are constructed from interpretations made as a consequence of interactions within the world (Green, 2005). There is a great importance placed on how the world is perceived and experienced by individuals in the interpretive research paradigm as this directly influences their behaviour within it. According to Willis,

Humans behave the way they do in part because of their environment... [they are] also influenced by their subjective perception of their environment—their subjective realities...if we are to fully understand the behaviour .... we must understand her view of the world around her. We must also understand the subjective perceptions of her by others in her social and cultural context. Thus, for interpretivists, what the world means to the person or group being studied is critically important to good research in the social sciences (2007, p. 6).

In this research, the professional backgrounds and social contexts that the participants, when operating in the role of Project Sponsor, experience and understand are influenced by this and other social experiences, underpinned by the notion that people collectively experience and understand phenomena in a limited number of qualitatively different but interrelated ways (Marton, 1986; Åkerlind, 2012). The phenomenographic approach is therefore concerned with describing things as they appear to and are experienced by people (Yates, Partridge & Bruce, 2012). Phenomenographic research focuses on exploring the relations formed between the research subjects and aspects of the world, so is considered to be a relational approach with the phenomenon under enquiry and the people experiencing the phenomenon being treated or viewed separately (Bowden, 2000a).



### **3.4 An outline of Phenomenography**

Section 3.4 presents a short introduction to the phenomenographic approach its origins, procedures and the theoretical and practical benefits. Section 3.4.3 provides an overview of the main criticisms of phenomenography and explores its use and application for the investigation of questions about the role of Project Sponsor. The section concludes by addressing phenomenography's suitability for examining the key research question this thesis is attempting to address.

#### **3.4.1 Introduction to phenomenography.**

Phenomenography is an interpretive research approach that is defined by Marton as 'the empirical study of the qualitatively different ways in which various phenomena in, and aspects of the world around us are conceptualised, understood, perceived and apprehended' (Marton, 1994) in other words it is an approach concerned with identifying the qualitatively different ways in which people experience a given phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997). The focus for the phenomenographic method is not on specific aspects or subjects of the world in isolation but on the relationships between them (Marton and Booth, 1997) and therefore the object of study within phenomenography is the variations in the ways in which an aspect of the world has been experienced, with the variation of that description that exists being revealed through the methodology applied.

The approach emerged from Sweden in the 1970's and was originally an approach to educational research. Phenomenography represented "a reaction against, and an alternative to, the dominant tradition positivistic, behaviouristic and quantitative research" (Svensson, 1997, p. 171). It is an empirical rather than theoretical or philosophical approach with ontological assumptions that are non-dualist (Åkerlind, 2005).

In the traditional positivist model, research approaches are commonly based upon a dualist ontology, where person and world are viewed as two distinct entities. This is in contrast to phenomenography which is grounded by a non-dualist ontology, where by

the person and world are viewed in relation to each other. In describing this non-dualistic ontological perspective Marton (2000) states that:

There are not two worlds: a real, objective world, on the one hand, and a subjective world of mental representations, on the other. There is only one world, a really existing world, which is experienced and understood in different ways by human beings. It is simultaneously objective and subjective. (Marton, 2000, p.105)

This non-dualistic position assumes that the relationship between people and aspects of their world are inseparable in terms of the relationship between the two, and it is exploring this relationship that is the focus of phenomenographic research (Svensson,1997).

The epistemological stance of phenomenography, that is the assumptions related to the nature of knowledge, is based on intentionality and it is this principle that embodies a non-dualist view of human consciousness. Experience is described as an internal relationship between human beings and the world and, according to phenomenography, knowledge is thereby constituted through internal relations between people and world (Marton & Pang, 2008). In phenomenography, knowledge is understood in terms of the various meanings, and the similarities and differences in those meanings, that are associated with the phenomenon of interest.

Phenomenography emphasizes discovering the second-order perspective of phenomena, in other words the underlying ways of experiencing the world, the ways that people themselves experience and perceive phenomena, this means that the researcher is oriented towards describing people's ways of seeing, understanding and experiencing the world around them. In this second-order perspective, phenomena are explored through the experience of the participants rather than the experience of the researcher, and this is essentially linked to how experience is as being an internal and inseparable relationship between people and the world (Marton and Booth, 1997, Trigwell, 2000). The second-order perspective allows researchers to "describe particular aspects of the world from the participant's point of view, that is, to reveal human experience and awareness as an object of research" (Yates, Partridge & Brice, 2012, p.100).

As a practitioner in the field I must conduct this research with a level of experience of the subject to be researched, a useful basis upon which to interpret the statements made, however it is equally important to ensure that any preconceptions or theories about the aspect of the world under consideration that may come from my own experience is held at bay during the research (Sandberg, 1997). This will allow a presentation of 'other' experiences as genuinely as possible.

Though phenomenography allows the researcher to use their own experiences as data for phenomenographic analysis (Richardson, 1999), which fits with the view taken that in seeking knowledge there is an acceptance that the researchers own experiences will have an impact on the research itself in terms of subjectivity, an important aim for phenomenography is to achieve a 'collective analysis of individual experiences' (Åkerlind, 2005).

Within phenomenographic research with the object of study not being the phenomenon per se, but the relationship between the actors and the phenomenon, analysis seeks a 'description, analysis and understanding of experiences.' (Marton, 1981).

The use of phenomenography to understand and explore questions of project management has been limited to date. The research that has utilized this approach within the project management and management fields has been related to questions of accountability, leadership and construction project management (Lupson, 2007; Chen, Partington & Wang, 2008).

Phenomenography as a research approach has more commonly been applied to teaching and learning questions. This thesis, however, represents an application of phenomenographic inquiry into an area of project management that focuses on a specific role by exploring the qualitatively different ways in which the Project Sponsor understands their role and realising project benefits.

### **3.4.2 Outcomes of the research**

Within the phenomenographic research approach conceptions are the central unit of description about people's experiences and they can be defined as "different ways of understanding" (Marton & Pong, 2005, p. 335), and there is a distinct difference

between the term 'conception' and the term 'category of description'. Subject to some confusion within the phenomenographic literature and subject to a certain level of criticism (Bowden, 2000a), it is suggested that the primary distinction between conceptions and categories of description is the focus on either individual or collective ways of experiencing (Sandberg, 1997). In this research, the meaning of the term 'conception' is 'people's ways of experiencing or making sense of their world' (Sandberg, 2000). Marton and Booth (1997) explained this further stating:

When we talk about 'a way of experiencing something' we usually do so in terms of individual awareness ... When we talk about 'categories of description' we usually do so in terms of qualitatively different ways a phenomenon may appear to people of one kind or another. Thus, categories of description refer to the collective level. (Marton and Booth, 1997, p.128)

Categories of description are the main products of phenomenographic research and they represent the qualitatively different ways of experiencing the phenomenon being explored. The structural relationships between these conceptions are also of importance in phenomenographic enquiry and together both of these elements represent what is known as "outcome space" (Marton, 1981; Åkerlind, 2005). The purpose of the categories of description are to capture the variations in experience across a collective group rather than focussing on particular individuals. It is, however, possible for a single individual to hold more than one conception of a phenomenon (Boon, Johnston & Webber, 2007). Categories of description refer to the collective level, the description is never the whole of what it describes, just as a way of experiencing is never more than part of the phenomenon experienced and as a consequence the described – ways of experiencing something – and the description – the categories of description – are inextricably intertwined (Marton & Booth, 1997). There is an assumed logically related relationship between the different ways of experiencing phenomena and this assumption comes from the ontological position that ways of experiencing something are neither purely subjective and internal nor objective and external, but can be said to arise out of the relationship between the person who experiences a phenomenon and the phenomenon itself (Åkerlind, 2005).

The different experiences exposed are assumed to be related in one way or another through the common phenomenon, and are presented through the outcome space as the logical structure which includes and relates these experiences. Some aspects are focussed on and other aspects are not, or, are seen in succession rather than simultaneously. Any such relationships across ways of experiencing are often found to be hierarchical in the phenomenographic tradition, however, this is not always the case nor should this be sought out if it is not evident in the data (Åkerlind, 2005; Tight, 2015).

Each category can be described as including both a referential aspect and a structural aspect and suggest how ways of experiencing a phenomenon can be described and analysed in terms of a structure of awareness (Marton & Booth, 1997). Such a framework has been suggested as contributing 'thoroughness' to phenomenographic analysis (Cope, 2004). The referential aspect can be described as capturing the overall meaning of the experience or conception, whilst the structural aspect is comprised of both an internal and an external horizon. The phenomenon and its parts are features of the internal horizon and the way in which the phenomenon experienced is discerned from and related to its context is outlined in the external horizon. The aspects of a phenomenon which are part of the internal horizon, and which can vary, are referred to the themes of awareness and can carry different values which contribute to different overall experiences of the phenomenon.

In order to identify critical differences in the aspects of the role of role of Project Sponsor, and in particular the understanding of that role in realising project benefits, focussed on by participants in this study this research has utilised the structure of awareness framework in the data analysis and as such the outcomes are also reported using this framework.

### **3.4.3 Criticisms and debates of phenomenography**

As an approach phenomenography has been subject to debate and criticism, some of which is entrenched in misunderstandings of both methodology and requirements. There are limited published discussions of the phenomenographic research method and this, for Åkerlind (2005), is fundamental reason for misunderstanding the

methodology and approach. Phenomenographic enquiries are often the focus of the same criticisms encountered by qualitative research more generally, namely that the results often lack a justifiable level of rigour (Cope, 2004).

This research will contribute to the development of phenomenography, in part, by thoroughly explaining and detailing its procedures of method and analysis.

Further there is acknowledgment of the researcher's background, approach to participant selection, the design of the interview questions, analysis and interpretation (Cope, 2004) in order to specifically address issues of validity and reliability. Examples of debate around whether or not the data should be analysed in the context of its full transcript, or in smaller chunks of separate discrete statements (Åkerlind, 2005) are discussed. Analysis of the full transcript would allow the incorporation of context into meaning, however, there is a risk of too much of a focus on individual experience being represented rather than the collective experience, whilst analysis of smaller chunks from the transcript supports a focus on the collective experience but, in the absence of context, there is a risk of the misidentification of meaning. A specific criticism of phenomenography is that meaning could be imposed through the structure of a rigid outcome space and that structure to the data could be implied that is not really evident (Åkerlind, 2005). However, acknowledging the likelihood of different structures and non-critical variations reported alongside more significant or critical outcomes is a potential solution to this (Åkerlind, 2005).

A further criticism is that phenomenographers tend to identify hierarchical arrangements of conceptions, with the most highly developed carrying some level of more significance (Webb, 1997). For the purpose of this research I see the hierarchical arrangement of conceptions as adding to the depth of interpretation of the data rather than alluding to any significance of importance.

#### **3.4.4 Process and procedures of the phenomenographic approach**

The most common way for phenomenographic researchers to gather data is through semi-structured interviews which are then transcribed. Though there are other possible data sources, for example participant observation, interviews appear to be the most commonly used strategy (Tight, 2015). The research interview is an

acceptable and, more importantly for this research, an appropriate approach to gathering data as within the theoretical research perspective of phenomenography no assumptions are made about the nature of reality, there are, however, assumptions made about the nature of conceptions. Conceptions are assumed to be the product of an interaction between people and their experiences with the external world and that different forms of actions, particularly language, are the means by which a person's conceptions are accessed (Svensson, 1997).

Within this research framework the aim of the interview is to have the participants reflect on their experiences and then relate those experiences through the data in such a way that a mutual understanding about the meanings of the experiences of the Project Sponsor role, and of benefit realisation are reached and differences identified. Transcriptions are, later in the process, pooled and analysed collectively.

Phenomenographic analysis relies on processes of reading and re-reading. Bowden (2005), argues that analysis should not begin until all of the interview transcripts are ready for reading as a whole, there are however different views within the phenomenographic community about the importance and necessity of this as a directive to be followed. Åkerlind (in Bowden & Green, 2005) on the other hand argues for what she calls the 'practical value of analysing a preliminary subset of interview transcripts' before analysing the whole. An alternative approach would be to combine the two approaches outlined above and conduct all of the interviews before the analysis began but then do a preliminary analysis on a subset of the transcripts, followed by analysis of all of the transcripts (Bowden & Green 2005).

For the purpose of this research I chose to adopt an approach that involved conducting all of the interviews, transcribing all of the transcripts and then beginning the analysis process by reading all of the transcripts as a whole. Individual researchers have also made differing choices about how much of an interview transcript to consider as 'data', whether or not the data analysis is conducted individually or in collaboration with other researchers and also how to make sense out of the volume of data that can be amassed in phenomenographic enquiry. There is also variation in the extent to which relational structures can be said to be driven by the data itself, versus the judgement of the researcher (Åkerlind, 2005). A selection of smaller excerpts which

are seen as representing particular meanings can be considered in the context of the larger interview (Svennson & Theman, 1983) and large chunks of each transcript related to a particular issue (Prosser, 1994; 2000) are just two of the variations in approach adopted by phenomenographic researchers, but for the purpose of this research I chose to disregard the utterances and quotes that were not relevant to the main and follow up questions asked and were not illuminating to the context of the interview, for example specific references to individuals or organisations with more of a general nature – the status of specific projects known to both parties based on mutual knowledge the participant and I as researcher share. Once disregarded I was able to focus on the data within the transcripts that was relevant to the questions and or context and this approach gave a depth of meaning to the analysis that had been ‘hidden’ from the first rounds of reading and re-reading that had taken place in the initial stages of the analysis.

During this process of analysis, the qualitatively distinct categories that describe the ways in which the interviewees experience a different concept have been identified. The categories are discovered by immersion in the data, in this case the interview transcripts, and by looking for the similarities and differences, or variation between them and between the interviewees (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Trigwell, 2000). The following section of this chapter details the data gathering procedures undertaken in this research study informed by phenomenographic traditions along with a brief reflection on the pilot interview undertaken.

### **3.5 Gathering the data**

The data for this research has been generated through qualitative interviews with participants using an interviewing technique aligned to a position that Alvesson & Ashcroft (2012) describe as ‘romanticism’, whereby the interview is seen as an authentic dialogue that can draw out inter-subjective knowledge advocating a more ‘genuine’ interaction through interpersonal relations founded on a rapport. This type or orientation of interview is of particular interest to this research as the research participants are all known professionally to the researcher and both the researcher and the participants work side by side on a day to day basis.



Miller & Dingwall (1997), describes a position that through closeness to the respondent the more likely the authenticity of expression in the talk. It is through this rapport and trust that participants can be said to feel free to express themselves openly. By conducting my research in the organisation that I work in and selecting participants who with whom I have day to day professional contact I am aware of the need to ensure that I do not allow the knowledge and experience I have of the organisation and the participants to influence the research in any way. Ensuring this distance is maintained through the interviews and analysis of the data is an important factor in conducting phenomenographic research and, to this end, the researcher:

‘..... has a responsibility to contemplate the phenomenon, to discern its structure against the backgrounds of situations in which it might be experienced, to distinguish its salient features, to look at it with other’s eyes, and still be open to further development.’ (Marton & Booth, 1997, p.129)

Through the lens of romanticism, I am aware that the interviewees may be guided by social desirability through anticipating what I as interviewer ‘want to hear’ or what can be described as an expression of the ‘cultural norms for preferred expressions’ (Alvesson & Ashcroft, 2012, p.242). For me as researcher this particular approach to the interviewing process is highly relevant to this research as it accords with what Alvesson and Ashcraft describe as being ‘dependent on the dynamics of a particular research relationship and interaction’. As this research is based in an organisation with which I am very familiar and the interview participants are all know to me this type of approach is relevant to the context in which this research is based. There is, however, is balance to be struck between the presuming an ‘authentic’ exchange and ensuring a counterbalance of analytical distance in the process undertaken.

### **3.5.1 Participant Selection**

The participants for this study were selected from a pool of senior Executive Directors and Associate Directors within a single organisation structure but operating across different sites. The pool of potential participants was selected based on certain inclusion criteria, namely direct experience of undertaking the Project Sponsor role and/or being directly accountable to a Project Sponsor undertaking the role in the last

two years. As a practitioner researcher, for both practical reasons and ease of contact to undertake the semi-structured interviews I sought participants who were available during a specified period of time, namely within a three-month period at the end of the fiscal year, between January and the end of March .

Conducting research within the organisation in which one works has been subject to comment both by researchers who have direct experience of carrying out research in their own organisation (Tietze, Cohen & Musson, 2003), and those who make reference to the fact that there is not much literature or guidance available for those undertaking research in their own organisation (Costley, Elliott & Gibbs, 2010). The nature and dynamics of what can be said to be the 'researcher-researched relationship', when research is based within the employing organisation, is different to conducting research in an organisation and with participants who are unknown to the researcher. Having an understanding of the relationships between researcher and the boundaries of those relationships become more ambiguous and open-ended but are also part of the 'meaning' researchers' make of their findings (Tietze, in Symon & Cassell, 2012). In cases where the researcher investigates their own organisation, as is the case with this research, the research process can be said to be about making the 'familiar' 'strange' and by doing that the researcher should also acknowledge that the questions, issues and objectives can become entangled in blended identities and relationships within what Tietze refers to as "social, emotional and gendered contexts of hierarchy and power" (Tietze, in Symon & Cassell, 2012), to this end being reflective and aware of this will enable me to adopt a reflexive approach and to have at the forefront of my mind my own presuppositions and pre-knowledge and how my position as a result of this influences my research and relationship with the participants in this context (Cohen, Duberley, & Musson 2009).

The participants of this study were selected on the basis of their work history and experience. The final list of potential participants was drawn up on the basis that a participant had to have had direct experience of the role of Project Sponsor or of being directly accountable to a Project Sponsor at some point in their career in order to explore the research questions of the qualitatively different ways in which the role of Project Sponsor is understood and in particular the understanding around *that* role in

realising project benefits. The participants selected represented as much variation as possible in terms of being from varied disciplines, cultural backgrounds and gender and with varying levels of experience in terms of their chosen career path. The point of selecting as much demographic variance as possible was to increase the chances of there being as much variation in experience of the role of Project Sponsor within the participant group. As is common in phenomenographic practice variation within the participant selection should reflect the variation within desired population of, in this case, the role of Project Sponsor within the health sector community of an acute setting. It is anticipated that this would lead to the range of meanings within the sample being representative of the range of meanings within the same population (Åkerlind, in Bowden & Green, 2005).

The nature of the role within the organisation in which the study was conducted leads to a direct correlation of the specific group of individuals who are or have direct experience of the role of Project Sponsor and as such this narrowed the pool of potential participants to approximately 30 or so individuals. Some individuals when approached were unable to participate due to the timeframe in which the research was to be conducted being a conflict to other commitments. Others felt that their experience of the role of Project Sponsor was so limited that they ruled themselves out of participating. The number of participants selected for the study that were able to be interviewed within the timeframe outlined to them was 10 with one other participant from a different organisation being involved in a pilot study to test the questions to be used in the main study. One participant withdrew from the study shortly after the interview process began due to work commitments, however this participant had not been interviewed at the point at which they withdrew from the study.

Following the first six interviews, 'new comments' and 'utterances' were starting to become far less frequent, and by end of the final interview, the interview was not revealing any new or significantly different information in the answers to the questions put to the participants. To this end I felt that the data was becoming redundant and saturated (Baker & Edwards, 2012); there were no new elements and variations in the narrative of the collective data set were much less apparent from the final interviews conducted. There was a lessening of information that was new and fewer utterances of

variation on data-gathering effort at this point. On reflection, I am unclear whether or not this was because I was consciously getting to the end of the planned interviews or whether it was a true reflection of reaching 'saturation', however at that point in the process I identified a natural stopping point for data gathering. There is a wide range of variation across participant counts in phenomenographic studies, from as few as 5 (Wakimoto & Bruce, 2014) to as many as 80 (Boon, Johnston & Webber, 2007) and given the constraints on access to further participants at that point in my research journey it seemed an appropriate time to stop.

The participation criteria around having direct experience of the role of Project Sponsor, or of being directly accountable to a Project Sponsor, and to be available and willing to be interviewed within a set timeframe resulted in participant group that had only one interviewee with recent and limited Project Sponsor experience of the role itself. All other participants had direct experience of the role over varying time spans. Other than the primary participation criteria around experience of or in the role of Project Sponsor, diversity in participant gender, executive responsibilities, administration and clinical management experience was also sought in order to generate a wider range of potential views and experiences.

The nine participants who eventually directly contributed to the study included two female and seven male participants, representing both senior managers and senior clinical roles within the organisation.

Six participants held leadership positions at executive board level at the time of interview, while the other three held associate director level positions with direct experience of the role of Project Sponsor or of being directly accountable to a Project Sponsor. Participant ages ranged from 35-60. The number of years' experience of undertaking or being directly accountable to the role of Project Sponsor averaged 15 years.

### **3.5.2 Capturing the qualitative interviews**

The interviews were conducted over a nine-month period and were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data relating to the length of time the participant had operated as a practitioner within the health sector in various organisational

settings was collected during the interview in order to provide context to the participants' reports and perceptions of the role of Project Sponsor. A semi-structured approach to the interview questions was adopted in order to allow participants more control during the interviews to allow them to direct the conversation based on the question being asked. This is an effective way to draw out the understandings and perceptions of the participants within the phenomenographic tradition (Partington, Pellegrinelli & Young, 2005), and also allows the participants and the researcher to construct the meaning of their experiences together during the interview process itself (Cassell *et al*, 2009).

The semi-structured interview approach also allows the interviewer to draw out an account of what the individual experienced in the various settings in which they had experience of the role of Project Sponsor without placing any expectation or pre-determined context that is specific to the current organisation in which both the participant and researcher are operating. This allowed the participants the opportunity to focus on the experiences of the role rather than the role in the context of the organisation in which both they and the researcher were currently operating. A sense of how the role of Project Sponsor is perceived and defined by the participants can come from both what participants choose to address in their responses, and also what they choose not to address. This is a benefit to a semi-structured interview approach that could be lost or impeded in a more structured interview format.

Different approaches to data collection have been adopted in other phenomenographic research studies, including a data collection plan that involved conducting interviews and carrying out observations with not only participants of the study but with their immediate superior also, as well as interviewing a sample of participant peers; as was the case with the phenomenographic study into programme management competence conducted by Partington, Pelligrinelli and Young (2005). For this research study the data generated through carrying out the interviews with participants was the only source of data utilised and analysed. This was for both practical time constraint reasons and also to demonstrate, within the principles of phenomenography, the need, as researcher with day to day contact with the individuals who were the participants of the study, to reduce bias and focus on the

interview data without allowing any prior or present knowledge of the participants undertaking the role of Project Sponsor to influence my interpretation of the data (Tight, 2015). In answering the core research question “What do NHS Project Sponsors understand about their role in realising project benefits?” Emphasis was placed on encouraging participants to articulate their views of two aspects of the phenomenon: how they understood the role of Project Sponsor and of realising benefits. Probing questions were used to encourage participants to focus on their *understanding* of the phenomenon and to describe situations or scenarios that illustrated their understanding for instance; “Can you give me an example?”

Additional supporting questions asked included follow –up questions to glean further and deeper understanding, however the primary questions were asked in each of the ten interviews conducted, including the pilot interview in which the complete range of questions were utilised and then refined and reduced in line with the feedback from the pilot interviewee. To that end, four broad questions or conversation starters were presented to participants and were structured as follows:

Q1) Can you tell me what has been your experience of being a Project Sponsor?

Q2) Can you tell me what decisions you made about your approach to the role of Project Sponsor?

Q3) Can you tell me what the term ‘benefits realisation’ means to you?

Q4) Can you tell me what is your experience of ‘benefit realisation’ as a Project Sponsor in the project environment?

The questions were reworded to reflect whether the participant had undertaken the role of Project Sponsor or had been directly accountable to that role. For example, question one was reworded thus for the directly accountable participant “Can you tell me about your experience of the Project Sponsor role undertaken by the person that you were accountable to? At the end of the interview I repeated the core question to give the participant the opportunity to reflect on and further expand their description.

### **3.5.3 Design of the interview questions**

There are different approaches to question design have been employed in phenomenographic studies and in considering how to formulate the questions to be

used in this research I have reflected on the phenomenographic approach and what is described as being at the core of phenomenographic inquiry – the conceptions that people have regarding the phenomena of interest (Marton & Pong, 2005). To this end, the design of the interview questions for this research are outlined below, in order to contribute to debates around useful ways of structuring and designing the phenomenographic interview and to contribute to practice.

In what Marton (1986) described as “a research method for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them (p.31)”, phenomenographic research has developed further over a number of years and though now described by Marton & Booth (1997) as “an approach to identifying, formulating and tackling certain sorts of research questions” (p.111) it is based on what Svensson (1997) describes as a number of assumptions, in particular that knowledge has a relational and holistic nature and conceptions are the central form of knowledge. In this context, a further assumption is that descriptions are fundamental to scientific knowledge about conceptions.

The questions used in this thesis centred on the experiences of individuals and the meaning and understanding they glean from those experiences of a specific role within the project management environment – the project Sponsor. Additionally, the follow up questions give opportunity for depth and richness for example by asking for examples and for more detail regarding the specific experiences alluded to in the initial response. This type of questioning also allows for description of difference – an important aspect of the phenomenographic framework that has significance in interpreting the data by focussing on different as well as similar utterances that explain a way of experiencing the phenomena in question (Tight, 2015). The value of this type of question is twofold, firstly is intended to assist in describing or explaining what something is by comparing it with that which it is not. Secondly it will help participants to call to mind their recent interactions and experiences in terms of the role of Project Sponsor. The intention of adopting this style of approach is to give participants opportunity to clarify in their own minds what they think of as important

or significant about the role of Project Sponsor by drawing on their prior experiences within the health sector in terms of the role's main characteristics and foci. Establishing the qualitatively different ways in which the role of Project Sponsor might be perceived and utilized, particularly in the context of realising benefits, is the main concern of this inquiry rather than determining an objective reality. So, whilst this research uses a similar approach to other phenomenographers in order to produce qualitative data for analysis there are other aspects of this methodology, such as data analysis, that are somewhat distinct. As a first-time researcher, I felt it was important for me to approach the research interviews with some level of assurance that the questions I had identified would work in the interview scenario. As I also had a professional relationship with the participants I wanted to test my own ability at being able to step back from the usual conversations I undertook in my day to day engagement with the participants and at the same time test the questions in a formal setting with an individual who would not form part of the participant cohort but was someone with whom I had a professional working relationship. A brief summary by way of a reflection on the pilot interview that I undertook as part of this research study follows in section 3.8 below.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

In this section the procedures around data analysis are outlined with a more detail description of the processes and procedures undertaken described in detail in the following chapter. The techniques used are outlined to give transparency and an explanation of where they are consistent or depart from common practice within the methodological approach. The detail outlined in Chapter Four that follows gives a level of what Cope (2004) refers to as "informed scrutiny" thereby giving readers the ability to make judgements about how these procedures may or may not have affected the research outcomes.

In what Maitlis (2005), describes as thematic analysis the content of the text is explored and focus is on *what* is said rather than the *way* it is said, the aim being to identify key themes within the text or in the case of multiple texts to identify themes that are common to all the texts within the set. This is not the case in a



phenomenographic enquiry where the focus is on the qualitatively different ways in which a phenomenon is experienced thereby giving equal focus to variation in the ways in which a phenomenon is experienced or as Marton & Booth (1997) describe “It is through variation that aspects are differentiated within the experience of a phenomenon.” (p145) This focus on variation is a central tenet of phenomenographic research and phenomenographers aim to describe that variation.

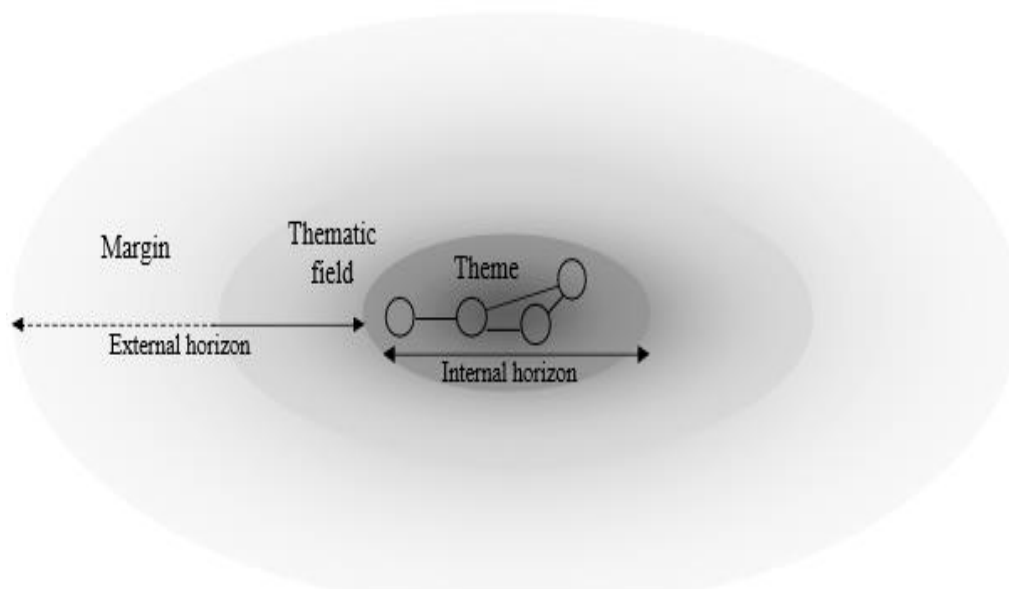
In order to address this in the analysis of the data phenomenographers commonly use ‘frameworks’ in order to break down the conceptions into smaller parts for the purpose of analysis (Marton, Dall’Alba & Beaty, 1997; Marton & Booth, 1997; Cope, 2004). These what/how and referential/structural frameworks can be challenging to understand and as the primary tool of analysis for this research inquiry I as researcher found that once I applied the frameworks to the data produced through this research inquiry I fully recognised their strengths and weaknesses and can now see the value of utilising such a framework in order to both present and explain the outcomes of the research undertaken. I also acknowledge the limitations of such frameworks within the context of exploring conceptions in the phenomenographic approach.

### **3.6.1 Structures of awareness in the phenomenographic approach**

As described in section 3.4.1, in a first order perspective the researcher makes statements about the world, however, phenomenographic studies take a second order perspective in which the researcher makes statements about other people’s experiences of the world (Marton, 1981).

In an attempt to give the phenomenographic research approach a stronger theoretical basis phenomenographers have used the analytical framework of a structure of awareness to describe and compare different levels of understanding of the same phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997; Cope, 2000a). Developed from the field of consciousness described by Gurtwisch (1964), awareness is suggested as being made up of three overlapping areas: the margin, the thematic field and the theme.

The figure below, taken from Cope (2000a), outlines a structure of awareness:



**Figure 1:** A structure of awareness (Cope, 2000a)

Figure 1 above brings together the field of consciousness described by Gurwitsch (1964) and the internal and external horizon referred to by Marton & Booth (1997). Experiences can be said to be comprised of both meaning, described as the referential aspects, and structural aspects which represent the structure of experience. These two aspects of experience occur simultaneously and are dialectically intertwined (Marton & Booth, 1997). The structural aspect of experience is comprised of two elements which are referred to as the external horizon and the internal horizon and are described as the “combination of features discerned and focussed on by the subject” (Marton & Pong, 2005, p.336). The external horizon refers to what is in the background of the experience, and the internal horizon refers to what is in focus or the theme. The referential aspect refers to the particular meaning or label assigned to the experience (Marton & Booth, 1997). Gurwitsch (1964) describes the structure and dynamics of consciousness as a field of consciousness which has a variable size focus or theme of attention surrounded by a structured periphery of unattended contents, a “totality of co-present data” (Gurwitsch, 1964; p.2), multiple parts of co-presence unified in a single conscious state which encompasses a focus and periphery. A field of consciousness is structured into three domains that can be described as the theme, the thematic field and marginal consciousness. The theme represents the data at the

focus of attention with the thematic field covering the data that is not at the focus of attention, the so called unattended data, but is still relevant to the theme. At the margin of consciousness is the unattended data and not relevant to the theme. These three co-present data are based on two principles which are a distinction between what is at the focus of attention (the theme), and what is at the boundary of inattention (the thematic field and margin). The second principle is the distinction within the boundary between what is relevant to theme (the thematic field) and what is not relevant to the theme (the margin). Occupying the centre of the field of consciousness is the theme and the rest of the field forms a background to the theme. The field of consciousness encompasses a range of experiential constituents which enable the phenomenon to be understood – in this case the role of Project Sponsor. The data in the thematic field influences the way the theme is experienced but the data in the margin does not and thus the only relation the marginal data bring to the theme is of coexistence in consciousness (Yoshimi & Vinson, 2013). As the three classes of data are always present somewhere in the field of consciousness, when analysing data, a framework encompassing the elements of the field provides a useful context in which to analyse the data and present the findings or outcome space from this phenomenographic study. In the case of this research the use of a structure of awareness, based on the field of consciousness, to analyse and describe the different ways of experiencing a phenomenon has been used. In describing the theme, thematic field and margin the terms internal and external horizon have been adopted and those aspects of the internal horizon are described as the themes of awareness (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton, 1998)

Describing and analysing different levels of understanding in this way can provide new insights into the nature of critical differences between levels of understanding and how a deeper understanding can be achieved. The concept of 'understanding' is central to phenomenography and can be described as: "a relation between subject and the phenomenon and is a result of a meaning-creating process. A phenomenon can in theory be perceived in an infinite number of ways. However, in the process of constituting meaning only a limited number of ways of understanding will result. The ways of understanding have both 'what' and 'how' aspects." (Larsson, 2004, p.20).

According to Marton & Booth (1997), an individual's level of understanding of a phenomenon sits within the individual's structure of awareness when they contemplate a phenomenon and this is how they give meaning to the phenomenon. This descriptive analytical framework consists of a structural aspect – the *how* - and a referential aspect – the *what* – and describes the internal and external horizons of awareness and the meaning inherent in the structure respectively.

Marton, drawing on qualitative research about how people understand and learn, has used the terms referential and structural aspects to explain qualitative differences in the outcome of learning (Svensson, 1984 and Wenestam, 1978, cited in Marton, 1988).

Marton explained:

Qualitative differences in the outcome of learning have logically and dialectically related structural and referential aspects. Structure refers to how the outcome is arranged, and referential refers to what the outcome is about. (p.64)

This structure of awareness concept provides the framework for understanding how participants view and experience the phenomenon in question and comprises the referential and structural aspects outlined above. (Marton, 1988; Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton 2000).

According to Marton and Booth;

...[t]o experience a particular situation...we have to experience the general aspects. These aspects correspond to themes of awareness. That which we observe in a specific situation we tacitly experience as values in those dimensions (1997, p. 108).

The themes of awareness reflect aspects of focus within each category and help to expose and define the experiences of participants as a collective.

The referential aspect conveys the overall meaning of the category and the structural aspect breaks down awareness of the phenomenon into constituent parts. These are arranged in an internal and external horizon and can be described as the first and second level respectively. The first level of the internal horizon, or themes of awareness as described above, reveals how participants perceive the phenomenon, its constituent parts and their internal relations; whilst the second level external horizon

reveals how participants distinguish the phenomenon in contrast to its background or surroundings. The external horizon includes the margin and thematic field as described in a structure of awareness (Cope, 2000a, Figure 1) which captures coexisting experiences and perceptions which are linked and experienced at the same time as the phenomenon in question but are discrete and separate entities (Marton & Booth, 1997). The experiences of the participants are also described in terms of the themes of awareness across the categories. This is because, according to Marton, in order to discern the component parts, internal relationships and external contrasts of phenomenon, we must discern the aspects which define them. A way of experiencing something “is an internal relationship between the experiencer and the experienced, it reflects the latter as much the former ...”, (Marton & Booth, p.115). Arguably the internal and external aspects of the framework are described at first and second level respectively when phenomenography researchers employ the framework as the basis of analysis and to present the ‘outcome space’ as the results of the research, which as a novice phenomenography researcher I have chosen to do with this research inquiry. With that in mind the following section outlines the internal and external horizons in more detail and references how for this particular research the first and second level dimensions of the framework applied and were understood.

### **3.6.2 Understanding the internal and external horizons**

The first level of the referential/structural framework describes the parts of the conception and their relationships, the second level can be described as the context of the phenomenon containing the thematic field and the margin as outlined in Figure 1 above. The first level of awareness outlines the main focus of awareness within the conception or category and these aspects can be said to be part of the conception and its relationships, the second level – or external horizon- is the context and margin and identifies those aspects related to but not a main focus of the conception (Cope, 2004). The external horizon can be said to be unfocussed and unclear and this in turn delimits the experience to partial or incomplete or what can be described as ad-hoc, however this is still a relevant dimension within the conception and therefore for the purpose of

this research the external horizon depicts the context and margin of the outcome space and is described more fully in the key findings chapter that follows.

### **3.7 Generalisability**

Evaluating the quality of qualitative research is subject to debate in the literature in terms of whether generalisability is a relevant criterion (Sin, 2010). The extent to which the findings from a specific group from the target population is representative is, for some researchers, not a useful measure of quality as complex phenomena are context specific and meanings cannot be context free (Larsson, 2009). The main focus of phenomenographic research is the examination of the variations of the experiences of an aspect of the world for a specific group of people and as such the conventional notion of generalisability is not applicable (Åkerlind, 2002). A different participant group in a different context may provide different categories of description and it is also possible for a different researcher to develop different categories from the same data. As such the outcomes from this research are not generalisable from the participant group to the population represented by the group because, in the usual sense of the word, the population is not representative.

There is however an expectation that the range of variation in the sample reflects the variation in the population (Marton & Booth, 1997). The generalisability of this phenomenographic research is to a group with similar characteristics and experiences to the sample group. Whilst this range of variation may be generalisable it is important to note that the distribution of people amongst the different categories may not be (Åkerlind, 2002).

In order to address this in the research I have specified the characteristics of the participants in this study in section 3.5.1 above, in order for the readers to make up their own minds about the generalisability to the group (Cope, 2004).

### **3.8 Pilot Interview – a brief reflection**

A pilot interview was undertaken in order to test the questions and format of the interview process before the interviews were undertaken with participants. Pilot interviews are recommended for novice researchers to provide an opportunity to

develop skills, check questions and process and be better prepared for the research process of phenomenography which on the whole uses semi structured interviews as the main means by which data is collected (Åkerlind, in Bowden & Green, 2005)

The pilot interview was conducted in another organisation and the participant was known to the researcher as a colleague from a previous work setting.

The interview lasted around one hour and ten primary questions with a further six follow on questions. The final three questions asked were specifically about the process and procedures of the interview format in order to gain feedback on the interview itself.

At the end of the interview I asked the interviewee to reflect on the experience in general. The feedback included comments on the questions and the style and flow of the interview. The interviewee suggested that the number of questions asked was quite high and did not reflect fully their understanding of what the interview was going to be about as the questions were more focussed on the general project management process rather than 'purely' the role of the Project Sponsor. The interviewee commented that the follow up questions were useful in allowing the process of reflection for a follow-on answer giving more depth to the original response. The more probing questions were considered to be well structured in order to reflect on issues that might otherwise not be at the forefront of the interviewees mind. The length of interview was suggested to be about right and the interviewee felt that towards to end of the interview the process was more like a professional conversation rather than an interview which was reflected on as being something that put the interviewee more at ease and encouraged deeper reflection of their experience. The pilot interviewee noted that during the conversation when I, as researcher, was making notes this was somewhat of a distraction given that I had already explained that I would be recording the interview and transcribing verbatim. This was noted as point for consideration before I undertook the participant interviews with a view to removing note taking as part of the interview process if on reflection I felt this was not adding anything specifically to the interaction with the participant.

Following the pilot interview the research questions were reduced in number in order to ensure coverage of the main area of research – that of the experience and

understanding of the role of Project Sponsor and of realising benefits. The style of asking more probing follow up questions was considered in advance of the participant interviews and prompts of such follow-on questions were noted before the interviews took place. The idea of the interview being a 'professional conversation' and reflection on experience and understanding was discussed with the participants by way of an introduction the process just before the interviews began.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the methodology choices made in undertaking this research study, the method used and selection of the participants and also reflected on the choice of interview questions and influence of the pilot interview in selecting the final questions that were put to the participants. The analytical framework against which the data will be analysed was outlined and the use of a structure of awareness theory as the basis against which the analysis will be undertaken was also explained. The appropriateness of a theory of consciousness as the basis against which the data in a phenomenographic study can be explored was also outlined.

The following chapter, Chapter Four, addresses in more detail the procedures of analysis and presents the iterative versions of the development of the categories of description and research outcome space which constitutes the results of this research study.



## **Chapter Four: Procedures of Analysis**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe in detail the process of analysis undertaken in this this phenomenographic research study. The chapter will detail the approach to the stages of analysis undertaken in the phenomenographic method in section 4.1 followed by an outline of the stages undertaken in sections 4.2 – 4.5. Section 4.6 describes how, through this process, the ‘categories of description’ and ‘outcome space’ was derived. The tables representing the iterative process in reaching the final version of the categories of description of the “understanding” of the Project Sponsor role are presented and the differences between each version outlined. Section 4.7 gives a brief introduction to the findings chapter which follows, and the final version of the categories of description – the outcome space – is presented.

### **4.1 The approach and stages of analysis**

The analysis broadly followed a seven step approach through four stages using the phenomenographic method proposed by Larsson & Holmström (2007); Jangland and colleagues (Jangland, Larsson & Gunningberg., 2011; Larsson, Holmström & Rosenqvist, 2003). However, consideration was given to other described elements of method as outlined by Åkerlind; Bowden & Green and Marton & Booth amongst others (Åkerlind, 2005; Bowden & Green, 2005; Marton & Booth, 1997).

As described in the previous methodology chapter, the structural and referential aspects of the phenomenon being studied are critical elements of the phenomenographic method (Larsson & Holmström, 2007) and therefore the “what aspects” and the “how aspects” are the focus of the analysis undertaken and as such at the forefront of the researchers’ mind is identifying “what” participants talk about and “how” they talk about it.

The process of analysis for this study did follow, overall, the process outlined by Larsson & Holmström (2007), although I added a further step to the initial stage of the process, which was to listen to the recorded interviews at least twice. The inclusion of an initial step at the beginning of the process was, considered a useful addition as it allowed me as researcher the opportunity to contemplate the transcripts *as a whole* before the detailed reading of the individual transcripts began. In order to

acknowledge that there may be several factors that could potentially hinder this; for example, a participant's reluctance to reflect on their experience during the interview, and in order to ensure that the analysis was carried out with the maximum of empathic understanding, undertaking the first step of listening and re-listening to the recorded interviews maximised my understanding of the metaphoric 'enunciation' of the participant voices.

Consideration of, and working with, the collective data set as a whole is a fundamental principle of phenomenography and enables meanings to be interpreted in conjunction with other data in the overall set (Sin, 2010; Åkerlind, 2005). A key criterion for assessing an interview is whether or not it gives access to the participants' life world (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).

The interviews recorded for this study were transcribed verbatim. In order to further increase my familiarity with the data I transcribed all of the interviews myself and though this process was very time consuming it added to the level of familiarity and awareness with the data and this enabled a deeper and more thorough subsequent analysis of the data. I was also able to find appropriately referenced sections of the transcripts much quicker when I moved on to the next stage of analysis. Once the transcribing process was completed for all of the interviews, I checked the transcriptions against the recordings and noted any significant pauses or emotional tone that I judged to be relevant, corrected any errors, and anonymised any references to people or places. Any errors corrected were not pertaining to impact on the meaning of the sentences but rather correcting any typographical errors or misheard sentences and words (Åkerlind, 2005).

In line with the recommendation of other phenomenographic researchers that the ideal to maximum number of interview transcripts that can be analysed at any one time is between 10 -15 (Trigwell, 2000; Richardson, 1999), the participant interviews were pooled and analysed as a collective, as per typical phenomenographic procedure. The number of interviews conducted was determined by the participant selection process outlined in section 3.4.1 of Chapter Three and the decision to not begin the analysis process until all the interviews were concluded and then transcribed is in line with the recommendation of avoiding any potential 'distortion' of the data at the

analysis stage, by not inadvertently introducing any new unplanned content half way through the interviews, or by making any judgmental observations in an interview that could then be carried through into the next. This was particularly important for my study given my status as a practitioner researcher with a day to day professional working relationship with the participants of this study. Thereby intentionally utilising strategies of avoidance outlined above this ensured that any such 'distortion' had been avoided as far as possible in this research study (Bowden & Green, 2005). Accepting, however, that an individual researcher will always bring an element of their own world view to any research project (Radnor, 2001) and I have provided a summary of my own background in Chapter One to contextualise my research in this respect. This strategy of collective analysis at the end of the interview process also supports the principle of identifying variations in ways of experiencing a phenomenon within a collective group of people, rather than to identify or describe the qualities of individuals or to compare individuals. This 'collective' process constitutes the overall data set where meanings are interpreted in relation with the others. To that end, the analysis began after all the interviews were completed. Also, being acutely aware of my role as a practitioner researcher and having a need to ensure good quality data collection I elected to carry out a pilot interview as described in Chapter Three section 3.5. This allowed me to observe instances in which I may have inadvertently influenced the interviewee by the use of certain phrases and I was able to refine my interview technique before the actual interviews with participants of this study took place.

There were certain elements of the transcripts that I chose to discount from analysis, including sentences where I considered that the participant may have been unduly influenced by my questioning. During the review and read through of the transcripts, I found instances where I had suggested specific 'labels' to describe distinction between certain roles when probing participants to extend discussion. These avenues of questioning were an example of where during the interview itself I had found it difficult to "bracket out" my prior knowledge and experience of the subject matter, and I considered that these utterances should be less of a focus since they were not brought up by the participants themselves. Therefore, any instances were removed from the data analysis.

This review and reflection caused me to consider more carefully the language used in the questions, and the follow-up technique in further iterations of the analysis process and to confirm that I had not indirectly suggested a direction or idea to participants. Any such occasions were highlighted and are acknowledged in the analysis in order to ensure that as much objective understanding of the Project Sponsor phenomenon from the perspective of the participants rather than my own perspective was at the forefront of my engagement with the data. Other considerations included exclusions from analysis where statements in the transcripts which I considered to be completely unrelated to the conversation or unrelated to the research questions such as discussions of that day's events more generally, which usually took place at the beginning or end of the interview, or deviating into topics of general interest to the participants, were also excluded in the final data set.

In general terms, I found it a difficult challenge for me as an experienced project management practitioner to put to one side areas of professional discussion that engaged with theorizing around the knowledge of the Project Sponsor role and in particular discussion of realising project benefits specifically. With this in mind I have taken care throughout the analysis to reflectively "bracket out" the potential influence of any professional, as well as personal beliefs and assumptions, and also my own understanding of academic and professional practice literature in order to give the most complete consideration to the conceptions expressed by participants; a fundamental phenomenographic procedure (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Richardson, 1999).

<b>Larsson &amp; Holmström (2007) – Seven Step Approach</b>	<b>This research study: Stages Steps</b>	
Read the whole text		1. Listen to recorded interviews at least twice. Note themes.
Read again and mark where interviewees gave answers to the main interview questions	<b>First Stage</b> Familiarisation and awareness	2. Read and re-read all the transcripts looking for common themes in relation to the main interview questions. Note themes
In these passages look for what the focus of attention is and they describe their way of working. Make a preliminary description of each interviewee's predominant way of understanding the work.	<b>Second Stage</b> Coding of textual meanings or conceptions	3. Code textual meanings from themes found in initial rounds of analysis. Write preliminary description of each interviewee's way of experiencing the role.
Group the descriptions into categories, based on similarities and differences. Formulate categories of description.	<b>Third Stage</b> Group descriptions into categories of similarities and differences	4. Group individual descriptions into descriptive categories of similarity and difference. Repeat iteratively.
Look for non-dominant ways of understanding.		5. Immersion in the pooled data to look for non-dominant ways of understanding the role.
Find a structure in the outcome space	<b>Fourth Stage</b> Formulate categories and find structure in the outcome space	6. Formulate the categories of description into the conceptions
Assign a metaphor to each category of description		7. Develop the outcome space and find the structure 8. Assign a metaphor to each conception

**Table 1** – Overview of Larsson & Holmström 7 step approach and this research study approach to analysis using the phenomenographic method.

#### **4.2 First stage of analysis – Familiarisation and awareness**

The first step of data analysis involved listening to the interviews individually twice. I included this step, as described above, as I saw the benefit of being immersed in the all of the data for the purpose of 'listening', to become more familiar and aware rather than for the purpose of 'listening' in order to transcribe. This step meant that I could experience the interviews again without the interruption of stopping in order to transcribe. In Larsson & Holmström (2007) the first step of analysis is to read the whole text and this is a common first step in the phenomenographic analysis process (Sin,

2010; Jangland, Larsson & Gunningberg, 2011; Marton & Booth, 1997). However, in order to achieve what Ashworth & Lucas (2000) describe as 'sensitisation' and "the development of an attitude of 'dwelling with' the train of thought of the research participant" (p.304), this initial first step of listening and listening again to the interviews became for me an important process that led to me being immersed in the research data as a collective holistic whole.

As noted at the end of the previous chapter – Chapter Three - after considering the literature on the phenomenographic approach I have found little evidence that the approach is carried out by lone researchers outside of conducting research for doctoral purposes. Often post-doctoral research and research conducted via academic institutions at later post-doctoral stages is carried out by teams of phenomenographers of at least two or more researchers (Green, 2005). The team approach to analysis in these circumstances tends to involve the stages of analysis being carried out by all members of the team in a collaborative basis, with discussion and agreement taking place around the final categorisation of the 'categories of description', a process that Bowden (2000a) describes as 'democratic participation' espousing the role of 'devil's advocacy' in which each team member plays a key role in the early stages of developing the initial categories of description and the other members then take on the devil's advocate role. Such an approach would go some way to acknowledging that the need to listen and re listen to the interview transcripts as a collective whole data set is a somewhat redundant step in the process given that the collaborative voices of the research team will discuss and agree the relevant content of the final categories of description that define the final outcome space of any phenomenographic research. This collaborative approach, in that it is present in a team analysis, is not an option for a sole researcher.

To this end the inclusion of my initial step of listening and re-listening to the interview transcripts may be a beneficial step for sole and novice researchers undertaking a phenomenographic approach without the benefit of a team of collaborators to debate the collective depth of meaning of the collective research data. In adding in my own additional step to the phenomenographic approach to data analysis, I make a new contribution to this research method and approach that I suggest may be of future

usage to other doctoral students who may be considering phenomenography as a research methodology.

The next step was to read and re read the whole text of the transcripts to look for common themes and key words, some of which I may have already noted in the listening step I had already undertaken, others of which may have been new, to find all the passages where the participant gave answers that were related to the main interview questions and purpose of the study as well as making myself aware of potential areas of difference and variation. During this process the focus was on *what* was in the participants' awareness and *how* the participant described their experience in relation to understanding of the Project Sponsor role and/or of benefits realisation. This search for excerpts from the data that might be relevant to the purpose was focussed at a collective transcript level even though the transcripts were considered individually at this stage of the process (Marton & Booth, 1997). The focus of analysis was always to work with the data as presented and to ensure that even in the early stages of analysis there was no attempt to bring in any other influences to colour the understanding and content of the transcripts themselves. This is a common approach in phenomenographic research in that the emphasis is always on the data and data alone – in the case of this research that means the transcripts as they are the only source of data in this study. Highlighting this issue Bowden (2005) outlines “Anchoring all analysis to the transcripts alone, reading forward and backwards around key statements ..... all assist in maintaining focus during the analysis.” (p. 28). With that in mind I followed a data-driven inductive approach to the analysis and categorization process, moving from specific observation to detecting themes and patterns in the data resulting in the likelihood of more general conclusion later (Cresswell, 2009). Intentionally being aware of how my knowledge of existing literature and theory, as well as my own professional position, assumptions and biases may affect my reading of the data was also reflected on throughout the analysis stages. Tight (2015), outlines concerns that he and others have expressed regarding whether the researcher undertaking phenomenographic analysis is, through ‘choosing and disregarding’ the data, consciously interpreting the data and by doing so may be constructing the

relationship, rather than 'looking into the transcripts to discover the particular ways in which people understand the phenomenon' (Walsh, 2000, p.20).

In order to address this as researcher I identified some of my own assumptions about the Project Sponsor role and then consciously employed a process of reading the data through an alternative lens. For example, I identified a personal view and assumption that the Project Sponsor role is pivotal in identifying and driving through the realisation of project benefits in the project environment, and consequently then read the data set as if the Project Sponsor role had no part to play in benefit realisation, and then as though I had no prior knowledge or understanding of the term 'benefit realisation'. I found this process difficult to employ but it allowed me to step outside of my own perceptions such that I viewed the data in a different way. This conscious stepping into a new lens of 'knowing' meant that I was able to provide a further robust layer of authenticity to my research, that I felt necessary given the backdrop of debate around the considerable variations in practice amongst phenomenographers (Tight, 2015; Åkerlind, 2005; Bowden, 2000). This approach, on reflection, adds to the understanding of the contested elements of the phenomenographic method in practice.

#### **4.3 Second stage of analysis – coding of textual meanings or conceptions**

The second stage of analysis in the phenomenographic approach involved the step of coding every piece of textual meaning from the initial rounds of analysis. This involved writing a preliminary description of each participant's way of understanding the role of Project Sponsor and of realising benefits. This was an important step even when the meaning initially did not appear to me to be of relevance to the research questions as it acknowledged that my personal sense of what is relevant or illuminating should not be allowed to colour my selection or prioritization of the data and highlights the effort applied to reduce this tendency. As the analytic procedure for this research is primarily focused on generating categories of description directly from the data gathered, the use of any pre-existing theory for guiding the data analysis that may be suitable for other types of qualitative questions are not appropriate for a phenomenographic approach. Through analysing the participants' understanding of the role of Project



Sponsor and of realising benefits, as a novice phenomenographer, I was attempting to derive conceptions of the phenomenon from the data itself. This process involves looking for certain aspects in the data – the referential and structural aspects. Both aspects are intertwined, with the referential aspect denoting the global meaning of the object conceptualized, and the structural aspect, showing the specific combination of features that have been discerned and focused on (Marton & Pong, 2005). These aspects are what constitute the conceptions in phenomenographic research.

This process of coding, revision and further recoding was an iterative process during which I was careful not to form any opinions about the conceptions at that stage of the process (Bowden, 2005).

The purpose of this stage of the analysis was to code every piece of contextual meaning. The size or extent of a unit of meaning or theme in the case of this research can be described as the size of sentences or paragraphs, as opposed to individual keywords or full discussions. There were sentences or paragraphs of varying lengths which for this study constituted a unit of meaning.

It should be noted that without a specific rule within phenomenography on how frequent the meaning needs to be evident across the data set in order to be viewed as significant to the development of categories, an expression of meaning that may have appeared only once, may still be significant if it is directly related, or in focus, to the research question and reveals a qualitatively unique way of experiencing the role of Project Sponsor. This was the case in terms of 'organisational culture' and 'organisational maturity' in this early stage of analysis.

#### **4.4 Third stage of analysis – grouping of descriptions into categories of similarities and differences**

The third stage of analysis undertaken was to group the individual descriptions into descriptive categories based on similarities and differences and to review them against the context of all the transcripts that touch upon the same and related themes in the context of both the individual transcripts and collective categories. The categories were therefore based on both variation and commonality. This stage of the analysis was the most iterative of the stages and the process involved moving from the

individual transcripts to the condensed, preliminary descriptions and back again to make sure that the participant's statements were correctly captured and to ensure that all the ways of understanding the phenomenon were observed and not just the dominant ones. The final step in this stage of the analysis was then to look for the non-dominant ways of understanding the phenomenon. This stage of the analytical process involved considered analysis of a large amount of data at any given time and as a practitioner researcher this was the most challenging phase of the analysis as the methodological approach expects that the researcher will undertake the iterative process repeatedly until satisfied that the process has been completed fully, as according to Green (2005) the iterations "hold the key to meaning" (p.41) and play a key role in the development of understanding of the meanings derived from the data pool. However, despite these challenges, by the end of the process I was satisfied that I had attained a complete objective immersion in the pooled data and was confident with my choice of phenomenography as my methodology. The descriptions that emerge reflect the essence of the data analysed. I was also very aware of the need to not conclude the analysis too early or for the categories to emerge too soon. The iterative versions of the categories of description are presented in section 4.6 below.

#### **4.5 Fourth Stage of analysis – formulating the categories of description and finding a structure in the outcome space.**

In stage four, the final stage of analysis, the descriptive categories were formulated following several iterations of a process of revisiting and re-reading the data and transcripts, confirming the meanings with both the immediate context and of surrounding statements and the transcript as a whole. This process was repeated several times. For each global meaning of the category the associated structural aspects supporting the global meaning were identified. This step can be said to be the critical stage of the analysis in which the final global meaning of the categories of description are formulated.

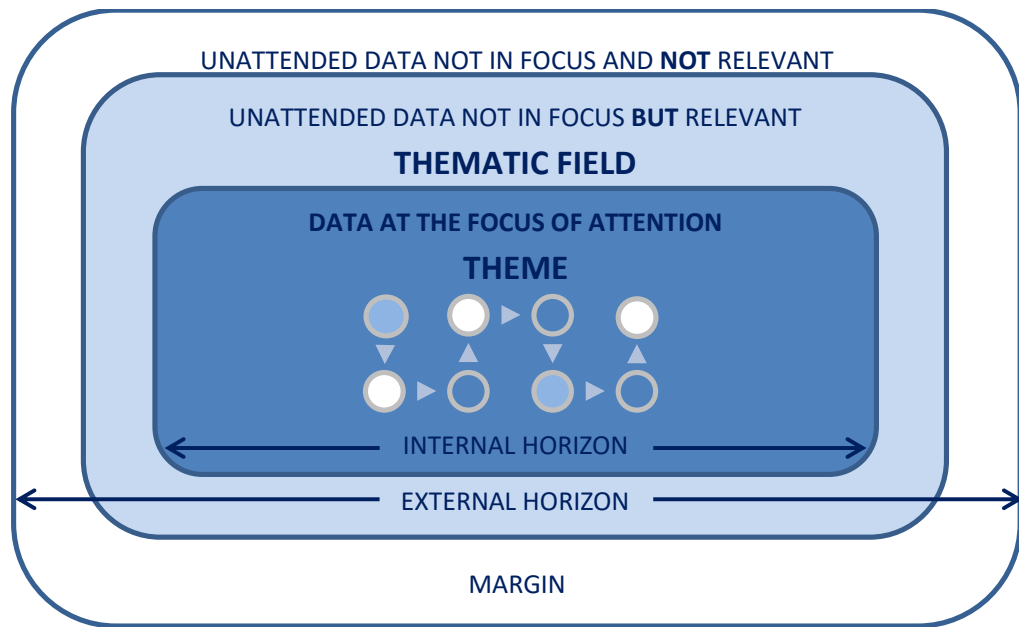
The final steps in the analysis process were two-fold, firstly to develop the outcome space from the categories of description which, based on the comprehensiveness in each category, described the completeness of the findings and the internal and

external horizons and secondly, suggest the hierarchical relationship between the categories. This step was therefore about finding the structure to the outcome space. The outcome space of phenomenographic research constitutes the findings of the research itself in so much as the phenomenographic findings are reported in an outcome space that describes the categories of qualitatively different conceptions or understandings of the phenomenon – the Project Sponsor role (Sin, 2010). To this end the quality of an outcome space can be defined as encompassing three criteria; a distinctive element to the Category in each category; categories are ‘optimal and parsimonious’ and the relation between the categories is clearly stated (Marton & Booth, 1997).

The final step in this stage of analysis was to assign a metaphor to each category. The metaphor acts as a brief descriptor encompassing the whole explanation of the context of the category – a short hand to the description of the concept (Larsson & Holmström, 2007). The value of ‘labelling’ the categories with a metaphor, or other such short hand descriptor, at the end of the analytical process is that not only does the descriptor give a label for the category but it also avoids any psychological tendency to look for evidence in the data to fit the descriptor whilst at the same time allowing the maximisation of the development of the category description and facilitates adjustment of the description in the latter stages of analysis than otherwise might have been (Bowden, 2005). with reference to the structure of awareness framework outlined in Marton & Pong (2005), the detail of the findings for this research study are presented in Chapter Five. The ‘outcome space’ of this research is presented in Table 9 at the end of this chapter.

Figure 2 below, presents a structure of awareness over-laid with the analytical process undertaken in this research – the data that is in focus and the data that is not in focus - which influences the development of the categories of description and outcome space. Figure 2 draws on, but extends, Cope (Cope, 2000a) ‘Structure of awareness’ diagram. Cope himself was influenced by Gurwitsch (1964), Booth (1992, 1997), Bowden and Marton (1999), Marton, (1998) and Marton and Booth (1997) in producing his diagrammatic interpretation of a structure of awareness, Figure 1 on page 54.

I have further developed Cope's structure of awareness diagram by adding the 'attended' and 'unattended' data and data 'in focus' descriptors as outlined in Figure 2. The use of the word 'unattended' is deliberate as it describes whether or not the information and data in the field of consciousness of an individual are relevant when utilising experiential knowledge.



**Figure 2:** A diagrammatic representation of the structure of awareness used to analyse the research data.

#### 4.6 Developing the categories of description – versions 1 – 6

The following section outlines the development of the categories of description beginning with version 1, the initial attempt at representing the variation in the overall meaning across the transcripts in Table 2.

<b>Categories of description – initial version</b>
Project Sponsor role and realising benefits is understood as:
No different to Executive Director role.
Utilising existing skills in a different management role.
Utilising seniority of position and authority to deliver major change objectives.
Delivering projects through managing and controlling to deliver over and above day to day management objectives.
Clearly defined role separate from day to day activity.
Delivering change through a formal structure.
Managing others to deliver successful outcomes within a time limited environment.

**Table 2:** Initial categories of description - first attempt to represent variation

The seven areas outlined in version 1 constitute the initial attempt to formulate the global meaning of the transcripts and are, in effect, seven initial understandings or ways of experiencing the Project Sponsor role. This version is still through the lens of the individual view rather than the collective view and as such version 1 represents, to a certain extent, as many ways of experiencing the Project Sponsor role as individuals interviewed.

Subsequent iterations of presenting the categories of description and potential themes of expanding awareness through to the presentation of the final categories which make up the outcome space and findings of this research study are presented below as versions 2 - 6. Each version and iteration of the categories is a further revision of the data and the main analytical development in each of the versions is to address the questions of “what” participants experienced and “how” they experienced it in relation to their understanding and to refine the depth of description within each category.

Table 3 below represents the second version of the categories of description, the second iteration of presenting the global meaning of the categories alongside the potential themes of expanding awareness – the themes of expanding awareness. The internal structural description is captured in the thematic field and this relates to the meaning expressed in the transcripts, highlighted by the transcript code. The early themes of expanding awareness and are suggested and the external margin and context from the analysis is proposed at the end of the table.

This format of presentation of the iterations is consistent across version 2 and 3. In version 4 the presentation style changes to accommodate the Category heading in the category of description itself, rather than maintaining a Category heading. This change of format was introduced to avoid the main headings of the conceptions becoming the ‘labels’ of the categories of description and to ensure that the development of the structural relationships is undertaken simultaneously with the development of the categories of description (Bowden, 2005). There is a temptation that the early ‘labels’ become the route by which to look for evidence in the data to support or refute the label descriptor. At this stage of the analysis such an approach would potentially influence the outcome of the research and distort the phenomenographic principles of this research study.

#### Categories of description - Version 2

<b>Category A</b>	<b>No different to the Executive Director role</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Executive Sponsor role and Executive Director role are the same (PS007) (PS004)	
Nothing distinct and unique about the role of Sponsor (PS004)(PS002)(PS008)	
Seniority of position leads to Project Sponsor role (PS006)(PS005)(PS004)(PS002)	
There is a blurring of roles (PS006)	
Position within organisation defines who can carry out the role (PS004)(PS002)	
Skills for both roles are the same (PS004)(PS005)(PS002)	
Authority and seniority but don't define the role (PS004)	
Seen by others as acting in substantive Executive role (PS004)	
Executive Director is synonymous with Executive Sponsor (PS008)(PS002)(PS003)	
<b>Category B</b>	<b>Utilising existing skills in a different management role</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
It's all about doing the day job (PS005)(PS004)(PS002)	
Experience replaces formal training (PS007)(PS005)(PS008)	
Using judgement and experience (PS002)(PS010)	
Experience comes from failure (PS005)	

Ensure management grip (PS007)	
Can't separate experience gained from responsibility and position (PS005)(PS004)	
<b>Category C</b>	<b>Utilising seniority of position and authority to deliver major change objectives</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Substantive Executive position equals Project Sponsor position (PS007)(PS002)(PS008)	
Figurehead role (PS009)(PS004)	
Executive Sponsors influence situations (PS008)(PS010)	
Leading and making it happen (PS004)(PS005)	
Executive Project Sponsor clear about delivering objectives (PS009)	
<b>Category D</b>	<b>Delivering projects through managing and controlling to deliver over and above day to day management objectives</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Executive responsibility to focus on transformational activity (PS007)(PS004)(PS002)	
Co-opt normal management arrangements (PS005)(PS004)	
Executive behaviour is that of taking control and directing (PS009)(PS008)	
Taking too much control and lose focus (PS009)(PS005)(PS008)	
Projects neatly packaged and stand alone from day to day (PS007)(PS009)(PS010)	
<b>Category E</b>	<b>Clearly defined role separate from day to day activity</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Project Sponsor fully aware of role within a project (PS010)	
Understand the role and be consistent, unblock when stuck (PS009)(PS007)(PS008)	
Leading transformational change (PS002)(PS003)	
Lack of clarity of who is accountable and responsible (PS002)	
<b>Category F</b>	<b>Delivering change through a formal structure</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Large projects need a formal structure (PS006)(PS009)(PS004)	
Executive collective responsibility for change programmes through a structure (PS007)(PS005)(PS009)	
Governance arrangements are clearly defined (PS010)(PS009)	
PRINCE2® too rigorous but structure focusses people's attention (PS005)	
PRINCE2® and other methodologies bring structure to delivery (PS009)	
Methodologies are tools (PS008)(PS009)(PS003)	
Clarity of governance arrangements sought (PS004)(PS008)	
<b>Category G</b>	<b>Managing others to deliver successful outcomes within a time limited environment</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Methodology and structure to deliver projects successfully (PS010)	
Transforming others to deliver outputs (PS005)	
Taking people with you, solving problems (PS002)	
Define benefits to be delivered early in process (PS002)	
Reviewing the work other people do (PS005)	
Culture linked to transformational change – do it with people not to people	
Need to have a Project Manager and Project Team (PS005)	

Transformation from evidencing the benefits and involving people (PS005)(PS002)(PS009) (PS006) (PS008)
<b>Themes of expanding awareness – version 2</b>
<b>Managing</b> - managing people, managing projects, management processes <b>Vs</b> <b>Leading</b> – leadership role, leading change, leading governance
<b>Substantive role</b> – responsible and accountable in Exec role, experience and skills <b>Vs</b> <b>Sponsorship role</b> – specific role profile, training, knowledge of role
<b>Being responsible</b> – responsible with others, taking responsibility, being accountable <b>Vs taking control</b> – management control, control through structures, control others
<b>Transformational change</b> – ‘big’ projects, not day to day, major projects <b>Vs</b> <b>day-to-day activity</b> – business as usual, normal business, transactional day to day
<b>Margin and Context – version 2</b>
Hierarchical position, personal authority, doing the right things vs doing things right

**Table 3:** Categories of description and the themes of expanding awareness – Version 2

Version 2 extends the seven conceptions of global meaning presented in version 1 and expands the meaning by highlighting the high level structural elements of the category with reference to the transcripts that include similar experiences and understanding. At this stage of the analysis the collective view is in the early stages of development. The four areas of themes of expanding awareness are the ways of experiencing and show the early themes of expanding awareness. The margin and context are the peripheral data or the unattended data that is not relevant as outlined in section 4.5, Figure 2.

#### **4.6.1 Categories of Description - Version 3**

In version 3 below the conceptions of version 2 are refined further representing more developed categories. The developing categories of description are reduced to six in this version as Category D and Category B have been combined. This is a result of the two conceptions of ‘experience’ and ‘managing and controlling’ coming together in the further analysis of the transcripts. This represents the development of the collective view in this iteration of the analytical process. Combining Category D and Category B results in a change to the main category descriptor that represents further analysis by questioning ‘why’ and ‘how’. Analysis questions such as “what themes of awareness is differentiated?” helped me to delve deeper into the data and gave me a level of



confidence about the themes of expanding awareness that were being uncovered. This meant that I was able to combine the categories in the knowledge that I had explored more fully the statements in the transcript that were suggesting a different understanding of the phenomenon. At this stage of the analysis there was also some movement between data from one category to another. This was due to a more sophisticated understanding of the data that surrounded the data in the thematic field and this process continued in the remaining iterations of the versions. In looking at the ways of experiencing in this version of the categories of description I was able to identify 'benefits' as a themes of awareness. This was opposed to the dimension of objectives which was identified as a different way of experiencing. At this stage of the analysis I was experiencing what appeared to be a level of inconsistency in the peripheral unattended data that constituted the margin and context, however I continued to record what I considered to be the unattended data.

### Categories of description – version 3

<b>Category A</b>	<b>No different to the Executive Director role</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Executive Sponsor role and Executive Director role are the same (PS007)	
Nothing distinct and unique about the role of Sponsor (PS004)	
It's all about doing the day job (PS005)	
There is a blurring of roles (PS006)	
Position within organisation defines who can carry out the role	
Skills for both roles are the same	
Authority and seniority but don't define the role (PS004)	
Seen by others as acting in substantive Executive role (PS004)	
Executive Director is synonymous with Executive Sponsor (PS008)	
<b>Category B</b>	<b>Utilising existing skills and experience to manage and control delivery over and above day to day management objectives</b>
<b>Thematic field</b>	
Experience replaces formal training (PS007)	
Using judgement and experience (PS002)	
Experience comes from failure (PS005)	
Ensure management grip (PS007)	
Can't separate experience gained from responsibility and position (PS005)	
Executive responsibility to focus on transformational activity (PS007)	
Executive behaviour is that of taking control and directing (PS009)	
Taking too much control and lose focus (PS009)	

<b>Category C</b>	<b>Seniority of position and authority to deliver major change objectives</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Seniority of position leads to Project Sponsor role (PS006)	
Substantive Executive position equals Project Sponsor position (PS007)	
Figurehead role (PS009)	
Executive Sponsors influence situations (PS008)	
Co-opt normal management arrangements (PS005)	
Leading and making it happen (PS004)	
<b>Category E</b>	<b>Clearly defined role separate from day to day activity</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Project Sponsor fully aware of role within a project (PS010)	
Understand the role and be consistent, unblock when stuck (PS009)	
Leading transformational change and delivering benefits (PS009) (PS002)	
Lack of clarity of who is accountable and responsible (PS002)	
Projects neatly packaged and stand alone from day to day (PS007)	
<b>Category F</b>	<b>Delivering change through a formal structure</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Large projects need a formal structure (PS006)	
Executive collective responsibility for change programmes through a structure (PS007)	
Governance arrangements are clearly defined (PS010)	
PRINCE2® too rigorous but structure focusses people's attention (PS005)	
PRINCE2® and other methodologies bring structure to delivery (PS009)	
Methodologies are tools (PS008)	
Clarity of governance arrangements sought Executive Project Sponsor clear about delivering objectives (PS009) (PS004)	
<b>Category G</b>	<b>Managing others to deliver successful outcomes in a project environment</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Methodology and structure to deliver projects successfully (PS010)	
Transforming others to deliver outputs (PS005)	
Taking people with you, solving problems (PS002)	
Define benefits to be delivered early in process (PS002)	
Reviewing the work other people do (PS005)	
Need to have a Project Manager and Project Team (PS005)	
Transformation comes from evidencing the benefits and involving people (PS005)	
<b>Themes of expanding awareness – version 3</b>	
<b>Skills</b> - managing people, managing projects, management processes <b>Vs</b>	
<b>Training</b> – PRINCE2®, project management, leading change, leading governance	

<b>Substantive role</b> – responsible and accountable in Exec role, experience and skills, taking responsibility, being accountable <b>Vs Sponsorship role</b> – specific role profile, training, knowledge of role, requirements of role
<b>Benefits</b> – what are we trying to achieve, why are we doing this <b>Vs Objectives</b> – delivering outputs, organisational objectives.
<b>Transformational change</b> – ‘big’ projects, not day to day, major projects, change structures <b>Vs day-to-day activity</b> – business as usual, normal business, transactional day to day, management structures
<b>Margin and Context – version 3</b>
Organisational maturity, Project Sponsor role as a figurehead, collective accountability

**Table 4:** Categories of description and the themes of expanding awareness - Version 3

#### 4.6.2 Categories of Description - Version 4

Version 4 of the categories of description has a further combining of conceptions with Category A and Category C coming together. As with version 3 this combining of categories represents further analysis of the categories against the transcripts both in terms of the individual transcripts and the collective data pool. The understanding of the phenomenon in this iteration of the analysis was shown to be aligning both the substantive senior role and the seniority of position as the experiential lens through which the phenomenon was understood and experienced. As described in 4.6 above this iteration of the version included a change of format of presentation in order to avoid any psychological tendency to use the category heading as a label against which the data can then be sorted and so the category labels became just the numerical coding and the heading became part of the overall description for the data pool in that category of description.

The themes of expanding awareness in version 4 were increased with the introduction of ‘responsibility and accountability’ and ‘structures of delivery’. There was a further refinement of the ‘benefits and objectives’ with a clear distinction between understanding what is required to be delivered and the actual delivery of objectives. The margin and context of version 4 saw the introduction of hierarchical position and authority.

## Categories of description – version 4

<b>Category A</b>	
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Role no different than the substantive role	
Seniority of position enables delivery of major change	
Executive Sponsor role and Executive Director role are the same (PS007)	
Nothing distinct and unique about the role of Sponsor (PS004)	
Seniority of position leads to Project Sponsor role (PS006)	
There is a blurring of roles (PS006)	
Position within organisation defines who can carry out the role	
Skills for both roles are the same	
Authority and seniority but don't define the role (PS004)	
Seen by others as acting in substantive Executive role (PS004)	
Executive Director is synonymous with Executive Sponsor (PS008)	
Substantive Executive position equals Project Sponsor position (PS007)	
Doing the day job with additional responsibilities	
Co-opt normal management arrangements (PS005)	
Executive Sponsors influence situations (PS008)	
<b>Category B</b>	
<b>Thematic field</b>	
Utilising existing skills and experience to manage and control	
Delivering over and above management objectives	
Experience replaces formal training (PS007)	
Using judgement and experience (PS002)	
Experience comes from failure (PS005)	
Ensure management grip (PS007)	
Can't separate experience gained from responsibility and position (PS005)	
Executive responsibility to focus on transformational activity (PS007)	
Executive behaviour is that of taking control and directing (PS009)	
Taking too much control and lose focus (PS009)	
<b>Category E</b>	
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Clearly defined role separate from day to day activity	
Project Sponsor fully aware of role within a project (PS010)	
Understand the role and be consistent, unblock when stuck (PS009)	
Leading transformational change and delivering benefits (PS009) (PS002)	
Lack of clarity of who is accountable and responsible (PS002)	
Projects neatly packaged and stand alone from day to day (PS007)	
<b>Category F</b>	
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Delivering change through a formal structure	

Large projects need a formal structure (PS006)	
Executive collective responsibility for change programmes through a structure (PS007)	
Governance arrangements are clearly defined (PS010)	
PRINCE2® too rigorous but structure focusses people's attention (PS005)	
PRINCE2® and other methodologies bring structure to delivery (PS009)	
Methodologies are tools (PS008)	
Clarity of governance arrangements sought Executive Project Sponsor clear about delivering objectives (PS009) (PS004)	
<b>Category G</b>	
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Managing others to deliver successful outcomes in a project environment	
Methodology and structure to deliver projects successfully (PS010)	
Transforming others to deliver outputs (PS005)	
Taking people with you, solving problems (PS002)	
Define benefits to be delivered early in process (PS002)	
Reviewing the work other people do (PS005)	
Need to have a Project Manager and Project Team (PS005)	
Transformation comes from evidencing the benefits and involving people (PS005)	
<b>Themes of expanding awareness – version 4</b>	
<b>Skills set</b> - managing people, managing projects, management processes <b>and</b> <b>Training</b> – PRINCE2®, project management, leading change, project experience	
<b>Substantive role</b> – day to day delivery, experience and skills, additional requirement of role, being accountable <b>Vs Sponsorship role</b> – specific role profile, training, knowledge of role, requirements of role	
<b>Identifying Benefits</b> – what are we trying to achieve, why are we doing this <b>and</b> <b>Delivering benefits</b> – delivering outputs, organisational objectives.	
<b>Transformational change</b> – 'big' projects, not day to day, major projects, change structures <b>Vs day-to-day activity</b> – business as usual, normal business, transactional day to day, management structures	
<b>Responsibility &amp; accountability</b> – Personal responsibility, collective responsibility, structures of accountability	
<b>Structures of delivery</b> – management structures, project structures, governance structures	
<b>Margin and Context – version 4</b>	
Project Sponsor role as a figurehead, collective accountability, hierarchical position and authority	

**Table 5:** Categories of description and the themes of expanding awareness - Version 4

#### 4.6.3 Categories of Description - Version 5

Version 5 of the iterations of the categories of description combined category F and category G. The delivery of change through a formal structure aligned with delivery

objectives and benefits in a project environment had emerged in the data. There was also a further refinement of the themes of expanding awareness and the dimension of substantive role Vs sponsorship role' became 'seniority of position'. This reflected what I considered to be a dimension that had been present in the data since the start of the analysis. Seniority of position had been a feature in the categories of description however at this stage of the analysis it was becoming a feature of expanding awareness in terms of how the role was experienced. The dimension of 'benefits and objectives' became 'benefit realisation' and knowledge replaced training in the 'skills set and training' dimension as the data revealed an understanding of particular knowledge of the Project Sponsor role and training became an element of skills. In this version of the analysis I undertook to explore whether or not there was a structural relationship between the categories of description by looking, for example, if category B was inclusive of category A. There was some evidence of relationship between the two however on reflection at the end of this analytical round I decided to do a further round of analysis and to come back to the exploration for structural relationships between the categories later in the process.

**Categories of description - version 5.**

<b>Category A</b>	
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
No different to the substantive role	
Seniority of position is enabling the delivery of major change	
Executive Sponsor role and Executive Director role are the same (PS007)	
Nothing distinct and unique about the role of Sponsor (PS004)	
Seniority of position leads to Project Sponsor role (PS006)	
There is a blurring of roles (PS006)	
Position within organisation defines who can carry out the role	
Skills for both roles are the same	
Authority and seniority but don't define the role (PS004)	
Co-opt normal management arrangements (PS005)	
Seen by others as acting in substantive Executive role (PS004)	
Executive Director is synonymous with Executive Sponsor (PS008)	
Substantive Executive position equals Project Sponsor position (PS007)	
Leading and making it happen (PS004)	
Executive Sponsors influence situations (PS008)	
<b>Category B</b>	
<b>Thematic field</b>	

Utilising existing skills and experience to manage and control	
It's all about doing the day job (PS005)	
Experience replaces formal training (PS007)	
Using judgement and experience (PS002)	
Experience comes from failure (PS005)	
Ensure management grip (PS007)	
Can't separate experience gained from responsibility and position (PS005)	
Executive responsibility to focus on transformational activity (PS007)	
Executive behaviour is that of taking control and directing (PS009)	
Taking too much control and lose focus (PS009)	
<b>Category E</b>	
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Clearly defined role separate from day to day activity	
Project Sponsor fully aware of role within a project (PS010)	
Understand the role and be consistent, unblock when stuck (PS009)	
Projects neatly packaged and stand alone from day to day (PS007)	
Leading transformational change and delivering benefits (PS009) (PS002)	
Lack of clarity of who is accountable and responsible (PS002)	
<b>Category F</b>	
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
Delivering change through a formal structure	
Large projects need a formal structure (PS006)	
Executive collective responsibility for change programmes through a structure (PS007)	
Governance arrangements are clearly defined (PS010)	
PRINCE2® too rigorous but structure focuses people's attention (PS005)	
PRINCE2® and other methodologies bring structure to delivery (PS009)	
Methodologies are tools (PS008)	
Clarity of governance arrangements sought Executive Project Sponsor clear about delivering objectives (PS009) (PS004)	
Methodology and structure to deliver projects successfully (PS010)	
Transforming others to deliver outputs (PS005)	
Taking people with you, solving problems (PS002)	
Define benefits to be delivered early in process (PS002)	
Reviewing the work other people do (PS005)	
Need to have a Project Manager and Project Team (PS005)	
Transformation comes from evidencing the benefits and involving people (PS005)	
<b>Themes of expanding awareness – version 5</b>	
<b>Skills set</b> - managing people, managing projects, PRINCE2®, project management, training, knowledge of role <b>and Knowledge</b> – leader of change, being a 'doer', deadline driven	
<b>Seniority of position</b> - requirement of role to be Project Sponsor	

<b>Benefit realisation</b> Identifying benefits early in the process, what are we trying to achieve, why are we doing this. Delivering benefits – delivering outputs, delivering organisational objectives, achieving what was set out to be achieved.
<b>Transformational change</b> – ‘big’ projects, not day to day, major projects, change structures <b>Vs day-to-day activity</b> – business as usual, normal business, transactional day to day, management structures
<b>Responsibility &amp; accountability</b> – responsible & accountable for decisions, personal responsibility and integrity
<b>Structures of delivery</b> – management structures, project structures, governance structures
<b>Margin and Context – version 5</b>
Figurehead, collective ownership, personal authority and experience

**Table 6:** Categories of description and the themes of expanding awareness - Version 5

#### 4.6.4 Categories of Description - Version 6

In version 6 below the descriptions of the categories are more detailed and ‘increasing in sophistication’ (Åkerlind, 2005) and I considered that the categories were now ‘optimal and parsimonious’ (Marton & Booth, 1997).

##### Categories of description – version 6

<b>Category A</b>	
<b>Thematic Field</b>	
	No different to the substantive role
	Seniority of position is enabling the delivery of major change
	Executive Sponsor role and Executive Director role are the same (PS007)
	Nothing distinct and unique about the role of Sponsor (PS004)
	It’s all about doing the day job (PS005)
	Seniority of position leads to Project Sponsor role (PS006)
	There is a blurring of roles (PS006)
	Position within organisation defines who can carry out the role
	Skills for both roles are the same
	Authority and seniority but don’t define the role (PS004)
	Seen by others as acting in substantive Executive role (PS004)
	Co-opt normal management arrangements (PS005)
	Executive Director is synonymous with Executive Sponsor (PS008)
	Substantive Executive position equals Project Sponsor position (PS007)
	Leading and making it happen (PS004)
	Executive Sponsors influence situations (PS008)
<b>Category B</b>	
<b>Thematic field</b>	
	Utilising existing skills and experience to manage and control (PS005)



Experience replaces formal training (PS007)
Using judgement and experience (PS002)
Experience comes from failure (PS005)
Ensure management grip (PS007)
Can't separate experience gained from responsibility and position (PS005)
Executive responsibility to focus on transformational activity (PS007)
Executive behaviour is that of taking control and directing (PS009)
Taking too much control and lose focus (PS009)
<b>Category F</b>
<b>Thematic Field</b>
Clearly defined role separate from day to day activity
Project Sponsor fully aware of role within a project (PS010)
Projects neatly packaged and stand alone from day to day (PS007)
Understand the role and be consistent, unblock when stuck (PS009)
Leading transformational change and delivering benefits (PS009) (PS002)
Lack of clarity of who is accountable and responsible (PS002)
Delivering change through a formal structure
Large projects need a formal structure (PS006)
Executive collective responsibility for change programmes through a structure (PS007)
Governance arrangements are clearly defined (PS010)
PRINCE2® and other methodologies bring structure to delivery (PS009)(PS005)
Methodologies are tools (PS008)
Clarity of governance arrangements sought Executive Project Sponsor clear about delivering objectives (PS009) (PS004)
Methodology and structure to deliver projects successfully (PS010)
Transforming others to deliver outputs (PS005)
Taking people with you, solving problems (PS002)
Define benefits to be delivered early in process (PS002)
Reviewing the work other people do (PS005)
Need to have a Project Manager and Project Team (PS005)
Transformation comes from evidencing the benefits and involving people (PS005)
<b>Themes of expanding awareness – version 6</b>
<b>Knowledge and skills set</b>
<b>Seniority of position</b>
<b>Benefit Realisation</b>
<b>Transactional or Transformational</b>
<b>Responsibility &amp; Accountability</b>
<b>Formal structures</b>
<b>Clarity of role</b>
<b>Margin and Context – version 6</b>
Project Sponsor role as a figurehead, collective accountability, hierarchical position and authority

**Table 7:** Categories of description and the themes of expanding awareness - Version 6

Version 6 maintains many of the descriptive elements of the categories of version 5 and category E moved into category F, this meant that the final outcome space would consist of three conceptions with seven themes of expanding awareness, however in regrouping the data in this round of analysis I found that I was able to distinguish the finer detail of the data in terms of identifying any data that did not align with the categories thus far which allowed me to look at the proposed categories and question whether or not they fully represented the collective data set or if there were aspects that had not been accounted for. Identifying similarities and differences within the categories was also explored more carefully in version 6 to test whether or not groupings of the transcript data reflected the same way of experiencing or if any identified differences represented a separate category not yet identified in the analysis. Further analysis of the presence or absence of inclusive relationships between categories was also explored further in version 6.

#### 4.6.5 Summary of analysis and final outcome space

The iterative process outlined above resulted in six versions of the categories of description and a summary of the version development is outlined in Table 8 below.

	Categories of Description						
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Version 1	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Version 2	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Version 3	A	B + D	C		E	F	G
Version 4	A + C	B + D			E	F	G
Version 5	A + C	B + D			E	F + G	
Version 6	A + C	B + D				E + F + G	
Version 6	<b>Conception 1</b>	<b>Conception 2</b>				<b>Conception 3</b>	

**Table 8:** Summary of the development of the categories of description across versions 1 - 6

Following the analysis the final outcome space and findings of this research study are presented below in Table 9.

(THEME) CONCEPTION		STRUCTURAL ASPECT (way of experiencing)							EXTERNAL HORIZON (MARGIN)
		INTERNAL HORIZON (themes of awareness) (THEMATIC FIELD)							
		Seniority of position	Responsibility & accountability	Transactional or transformational	Formal structures	Knowledge & skills set	Realising benefits	Clarity of role	
REFERENTIAL ASPECT (meaning) (Project Sponsor role experienced as .....)	<b>C1</b> <i>Just doing the day job</i> An additional requirement of the substantive role	Requirement to undertake role of Project sponsor	Same as substantive role	Understood as tactics and processes of project delivery	Delivery through existing management structures & governance	Understood as generic skill-set of senior manager			Delimits the role of Project Sponsor to that of 'figurehead role'
	<b>C2</b> <i>The capable manager</i> Managing and controlling through experience		Based on previous experience of the role	Understood as drawing on examples from past experiences of managing and controlling project outputs	Delivery through project management methodology for 'big' projects only	Understood as generalisable skills of experienced Project Sponsor role	Identifies benefits as part of delivering projects		Delimits the role of Project Sponsor to the scope of personal authority & experience
	<b>C3</b> <i>Wearing two different hats</i> A distinct and separate function operating within a project management framework		Based on scope of project and remit of Project Sponsor role	Understood as transformational change & cultural change	Delivery through project management methodology as preferred method for all projects	Understood as specific role profile and/or training in the role of Project Sponsor	Identifies benefits and understands responsibilities of realising them as being part of role	Seeks clarity to understand scope of role	Delimits the role of Project Sponsor to collective ownership within a defined structure

**Table 9:** Outcome Space – the categories of description and outcomes of this study.

The outcome space in this study, as in all phenomenographic research, represents the categories of description and final outcome of this research. It is described by Marton (2000, p105) as being “the logically structured complex of the different ways of experiencing an object”, acting as a “synonym for phenomenon”. The outcome space describes the composite of different experiences which collectively encompass the phenomenon and represents the phenomenon in the same way that the categories of description represent the conceptions.

The outcome space does not, however, capture all the possible ways in which a particular phenomenon can be experienced or conceived. It serves as a means of expression for communicating the ways in which people experience a particular phenomenon, in this study it represents how the participants constituted the Project Sponsor role and the variation therein (Yates, Partridge & Bruce, 2012).

#### **4.7 Following chapter – the findings**

In the following chapter the research findings from this phenomenographic study are presented in detail. The analytical procedures outlined above identified three ways or conceptions of understanding of the role of the Project Sponsor and of benefit realisation. The variation in ways of experiencing – or categories of description – along with the referential and structural aspects of each description are described and extracts from the data are presented to support the understanding of the conceptions. Finally, Chapter Five explores the structural relationship between the conceptions in terms of establishing whether or not there is a hierarchical relationship.

## **Chapter Five – Research Findings**

This chapter details the findings of this research. The findings are outlined across nine sections. Following the introduction, section 5.2 presents the key findings of this research study. Sections 5.3 – 5.5 describe in detail the descriptive categories revealed by the data and constitutes the key findings supported by example quotations from the transcripts themselves. Section 5.6 outlines the structural relationship between the conceptions, through the themes of awareness. In section 5.7 the relations between the conceptions are explored and the hierarchical nature is outlined in section 5.8. A summary of the research results closes the chapter in section 5.9 and introduces the discussion chapter that follows.

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this research study was to explore the qualitatively different ways that individuals experience the role of Project Sponsor and how they conceive of that role in realising benefits.

The primary question therefore for this research inquiry was:

“What do NHS Project Sponsors understand of their role and of realising project benefits?”

The outcomes or results of phenomenographic research are presented as categories of description and an outcome space, the purpose of which is to describe the qualitatively different ways of experiencing the role of Project Sponsor and of realising benefits that emerged from the data. At the end of Chapter Four the outcome space for this research study was presented in Table 9. This chapter will present the findings in detail with an explanation of the conceptions and their constituent features and themes of expanding awareness.

### **5.2 Key findings**

Following a lengthy process of analysis of the participant interview data which was carried out over five months three qualitatively different ways of experiencing the Project Sponsor role and of realising benefits emerged, marked by variation along seven key themes of expanding awareness. The term ‘themes of expanding awareness’

is used significantly throughout this chapter and is the term used by Åkerlind (2004) to describe the themes of awareness, the structural aspects of the conceptions (Åkerlind, 2004). This term ‘themes of expanding awareness’ is used in this research as it shares the same language as the structure of awareness framework used in the analysis and outlined in Chapters Three and Four. These ways of understanding or experiencing, explained as the conceptions that make up the categories of description (Marton & Booth, 1997), of the Project Sponsor role are described as follows:

Conception 1	<b><i>Just doing the day job</i></b> An additional requirement of the substantive role of a senior executive.
Conception 2	<b><i>The capable manager</i></b> Managing and controlling change activity through experience.
Conception 3	<b><i>Wearing two different hats</i></b> A distinct and separate function within a project management framework.

**Table 10:** Three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role and realising benefits.

The shortened labels highlighted in bold are used below in the category descriptions to outline the meaning through which the role is understood, and represent what was described in Chapter Four, section 4.5 as assigning a metaphor.

The participants articulating each conception differed from each other through their varying ways of experiencing and understanding of the role of Project Sponsor in the context of realising benefits. Participants explored their experiences by identifying and talking about various aspects or knowledge of the role of Project Sponsor in the context of the organisations they had worked in throughout their careers in the health sector, drawing on examples to illustrate what they saw as significant or relevant experiences when carrying out the role of Project Sponsor. All the examples used by the participants were related to Project Sponsor experience within the health sector with the exception of one participant who when describing early experiences of the Project Sponsor role referred to experiences outside of the health sector.

### 5.2.1 Summary description of the three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role

In the following section I describe the three conceptions identified in this research study using data from the interview transcripts. The data, in the form of quotations, illustrates the meaning of each conception, or referential aspect, and the themes of expanding awareness present the way of experiencing, or structural aspects of the conception, against which the structural relationship is explored.

The summary descriptions in Tables 11 – 13 below give an overview of each conception and its constituent themes of expanding awareness, some of which are common across all three conceptions and some of which are specific to individual conceptions.

<p><b>C1</b> <i>Just doing the day job</i> – Project Sponsor role is experienced as an additional requirement of their substantive role: The role of Project Sponsor was experienced as an additional requirement of their substantive senior role. Participants experienced the role in the way as the substantive role expressed no distinguishable difference from the role they undertook on a day to day basis, but rather, an additional requirement of the substantive role. The themes of expanding awareness constituting the structural <i>how</i> aspects for individuals who expressed this conception were: <i>seniority of position, responsibility and accountability, transactional or transformational, formal structures and knowledge &amp; skill set.</i></p>
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**Table 11:** Summary of conception C1

**C2 The capable manager** – Project Sponsor role is experienced as managing and controlling through experience:

In this conception, the Project Sponsor role was experienced as managing and controlling through experience gained previously. The experience was intrinsic of the capabilities of an effective and experienced senior manager. This conception shared some of the same themes of expanding awareness experienced in conception 1 however there was an increasing breadth of awareness in the themes which were experienced in both C1 and C2. In this conception, the themes of expanding awareness included: *responsibility and accountability, transactional or transformational, formal structures, knowledge & skill set* and an additional theme of *realising benefits*. The theme of *seniority of position* was not an aspect of awareness in this conception.

**Table 12:** Summary of conception C2

**C3 Wearing two different hats** – Project Sponsor role is experienced as a distinct and separate function within a project management framework

In this conception, the Project Sponsor role was experienced as a distinct and separate function operating within a project management framework. The themes of conception 2 that were experienced in this conception were of increasing breadth of awareness. The aspects of variation experienced within this conception included: *responsibility and accountability, transformational or transactional, formal structures, knowledge & skill set, and realising benefits*. There was an additional theme in this conception which was *clarity of role*. As with C2 above the theme of *seniority of position* was also not an aspect of awareness in this conception.

**Table 13:** Summary of conception C3.

The themes of expanding awareness that constitute the structural aspects of each conception were delimited and organized as understandings of the Project Sponsor role in terms of certain essential aspects but with a different focus which manifests as different features of each conception. This is what is described as the internal and external horizon which presents the data from the participants' structure of awareness as being either in focus and relevant, out of focus but relevant or out of focus and not



relevant. This attended and unattended data outlined in Figure 2 in Chapter Four, section 4.5, constitutes the internal and external horizon and is discussed further in section 5.6.

Individual participants indicated views of experience that related to more than one referential conception at the individual stage of analysis and, as described in the previous chapter – Procedure of Analysis, section 4.4, the third stage of analysis involved grouping the individual descriptions into the collective categories that constitute the conceptions. The structural aspects of the categories are expressed for each conception in terms of the breadth of awareness and whether or not they constitute an expanding awareness for a particular conception. They are all, however, a representation of the collective data that form the overall outcome space of this research.

In Chapter Four I outlined the process and procedures of analysis undertaken in this research study and described how the coding of textual meanings was the beginning of the emergence of the early stages of the categories and of the themes of expanding awareness. The final labels for the themes of expanding awareness – the structural aspect or way of experiencing the conception – was not in place until version six of the iterative analysis process, however the major themes and key aspects of the features of the themes were emerging in the very earliest versions before the process of analysis was finalised and the outcome space was complete.

The outcome space is presented in two interrelated ways which represent the outcomes from this research study. They are:

1. The description of the conceptions or qualitatively different ways of experiencing the role of Project Sponsor and of realising benefits, i.e. the categories of description that represent the collective meanings that constitute the outcome space.
2. The themes of expanding awareness which signal aspects of similarity and difference between the conceptions and therefore the ways of experiencing the phenomenon. These differences make it possible for the inclusive relationships between the conceptions to be explained and mark the structure of the outcome space.

The remainder of this chapter will describe the categories of description that form the conceptions and the essential aspects and features of each theme of expanding awareness with examples of text from the interview transcripts to highlight how, through the analysis, the meaning of the essential aspects and features of the themes of expanding awareness has been arrived at from the data.

### **5.3 Conception C1 – just doing the day job (C1)**

Within this conception, the way of experiencing the role of Project Sponsor was as an additional requirement of the substantive senior role. The role is experienced as a function of the substantive senior position of the individual undertaking the role, there is no distinguishable difference between the role of Project Sponsor and the usual day to day senior role of individual undertaking the role. The central premise of this understanding is that the role of Project Sponsor is not considered any differently to undertaking the role of a substantive senior manager, so much so that in undertaking the substantive senior manager role it is assumed that the Project Sponsor role would be part of that undertaking anyway, as demonstrated in the extracts from the transcripts data below. This is particularly evident in the theme of expanding awareness that is *seniority of position* as outlined in section 5.3.1 below.

In considering the role of Project Sponsor the substantive position and associated responsibilities are at the forefront of participant's experience of the role in the example below:

Project Sponsor I think 99 times out of 100 is the actual bread and butter substantive role of the senior leader, not always the CEO, Director or whatever, who is responsible for taking forward that particular piece of work and what they will look to do either within their own team or will look to bring somebody in to manage that project and it will be somewhere for that individual to report into and it will manifest itself as the Project Sponsor [...] (PS004)

The substantive position of a senior leader was also expressed in the example below where the participant uses a project to illustrate how the two roles are experienced as one.

I am Executive Sponsor for the [name of project] but then why wouldn't I be Executive Sponsor for the [name of project] because I'm [title of substantive executive role] of the organisation so what is distinctive and unique about the role? – nothing as what I would want to do in those circumstances, and what I do, is meet on a regular basis with [name of Project Manager] and his team and also Chair the Project Board for delivery of the [name of project]. (PS004)

In the following example, there is a tension expressed between undertaking the role of Project Sponsor and being an Executive Director:

I don't draw a line between them [the Project Sponsor role and Executive Director role] and I feel a bit schizophrenic sometimes because when I'm talking about finance absolutely when you look at the numbers you've got to do something about the finance but then when I'm talking about quality I say absolutely you can't compromise on quality but that's the schizophrenia that goes with being an executive director and I think sometimes [...] you get polarized views where some people [...] and I know from experience at [name of health provider] that was a constant dilemma. (PS002)

The 'dilemma' of attempting to separate the two roles is a challenge in the example above but in the example below there is an alignment between what the responsibilities of the substantive role and Project Sponsor role are and how they are understood and experienced. The key feature here is that the two roles are indistinguishable from each other:

My substantive role is as an Executive Director, now as an Executive Director it's my job to make the Trust successful and I do that corporately with my Executive colleagues and with my non-executive colleagues [...] so if it doesn't happen it's because we haven't been able to make it happen so it may not always be my responsibility but ultimately the success of the Trust is my responsibility [...] now this project if it's integral to the Trust being successful then it's my responsibility to make sure that that project works. (PS005).

A feature of this conception is that the Project Sponsor role is understood, in terms of responsibility, accountability and governance as being experienced in the same way as the senior substantive position. Being responsible and accountable and taking responsibility as well as holding to account are all experienced as features of the substantive role regardless of what role is being undertaken:

..... because ultimately in trying to direct that project it is a clinical project and ultimately the decision-making ought to be with those who have a clinical responsibility, if it is something about whether there is a decision that we need to escalate a specific problem then I would assume that that is something that is made within the project team (PS010)

In the extract above the Project Sponsor role is experienced as taking no more responsibility within the project team than any other role. The overriding decision making and responsibility is experienced as lying with the clinician. There is no indication of the Project Sponsor role as being ultimately responsible if that role is not also the lead clinical substantive role undertaken. The role itself does not carry the responsibility for decision making but the substantive role of the clinician, whether as Project Sponsor or not, is experienced as being paramount.

The role of Project Sponsor in conception C1 is also be experienced as a means to an end which could be aligned to the understanding of the role being one and the same as the senior substantive role being undertaken as the example below illustrates:

[..] the role of the Project Sponsor is a just a mechanism to find a route for that project to the top of the organisation so there is some oversight on progress, direction, performance (PS008).

Within this conception, participants who expressed it considered that the senior day to day role was in fact in and of itself an indicator of the expectation that the role of Project Sponsor would be undertaken:

[...] I think when you are [name of role], it might be different for other Directors, you are always the [name of role] because you are ultimately the [status of accountability] whether you like it or not and whether you know what is going on or not you are the [status of accountability] so you have to hold that thought in your head at all times really. [...] it is

confusing for an organisation if you have a [name of role] that wears lots of different hats, I think they always have to be seen as [name of role] and actually in all conversations be the [name of role] because it is what you are always thinking – I'm always thinking well I am the [name of role] what are the consequences of that, that and that, not that I am the Project Sponsor for this particular project and the fact that[...], but it is slightly different for other Project Sponsors. (PS004)

There is also a presumption that the 'Project Sponsor' will not be seen in that role but will be seen in the substantive senior role that they hold:

And my guess is that is how people see you anyway even in a project setting, I think they do. (PS004)

The Project Sponsor role was experienced as just doing the day job but there was a key theme of expanding awareness in this conception that was the theme of 'seniority of position' as an aspect of variation that is only experienced in this conception, C1.

### **5.3.1 Seniority of position**

This theme indicated that the senior substantive position of the person undertaking the role of Project Sponsor was experienced as the only requirement for fulfilling the role itself. In outlining their understanding of the role of Project Sponsor participants experienced their senior position within the organisations in which they had worked as the measure against which their understanding of the role could be expressed. This focus on the senior position of an individual is expressed in the examples below:

Well I guess the clues in the title because to be, presumably to be, an Executive Sponsor you have to be an Executive Director so the recruitment of a sponsor for the Project Sponsor [role] is fairly limited and ring fenced (PS002)

This alignment with the senior leadership role is experienced as an expectation in the example below:

I've had no training about how to be a project sponsor and I suppose I don't think you need to have a separate license to be a sponsor as being

an executive director my perhaps controversial view is if you're an executive director by default you should be able to be an executive sponsor. (PS002)

The two are inseparable [experience and position], you get there by virtue of your experience, and I'd struggle to separate the two. I think if you've got a sponsor who is inexperienced then that person can still work but you can still have a project that is imperfect, [...] you suddenly discover that you are 20% short on what you thought you were going to get and we all make that mistake and we all make it once, but there is an example of something where I wouldn't make the mistake again (PS006)

In the following example there is a clear expression of understanding that the role in which the Project Sponsor is seen as undertaking is in fact the senior substantive role and the role of Project sponsor is experienced as notional:

[...] I got on with the job of running the project and managing it so this notion of a distinction between sort of sponsorship and so on didn't really exist - I went for support in that role to the Chief Exec and my Director but wouldn't have seen them as sponsors of the project I would have seen them in the role that were in which was CEO. (PS004)

The examples above highlight the experiences of seniority of position as a feature of understanding but the impact was experienced differently. The extracts from the data above demonstrate that the focus for the participant was their senior substantive position and the juxtaposition of Executive Director and Project Sponsor roles gave rise to experiences of being in a 'dilemma' and feeling 'schizophrenic' in undertaking both roles, however the expectation and understanding of the role of Project Sponsor was that the role of Project Sponsor is undertaken by people in senior positions as part of the 'day job'.

#### **5.4 Conception C2 – the capable manager (C2)**

In this conception participants experienced and understood the role of Project Sponsor in terms of their experience generally and of projects specifically, from the perspective of the role they were undertaking at that time, how they approached the role from an

experiential perspective over the lifetime of their professional careers and participants used examples and phrases such as “my own personal view, probably built on experience, awareness and common sense” and “it’s my professional judgement”. This conception is very much about understanding the role and the requirements of the role through ‘reflecting’ on previous experience of the role. That could be direct experience or through being managed by a Project Sponsor. This expressed experience is always in the context of delivering projects but also it is about managing and controlling activities and how such experience can shape the understanding of the what the Project Sponsor role is about.

Project benefits appear as a focus in this conception but in the context of managing and controlling through experience the focus on benefits in terms of the Project Sponsor role is a focus on identifying benefits as part of the project development activities that the Project Sponsor would undertake.

Addressing project delivery issues in terms of what responsibility the role carries and decisions made about the how a project is delivered and the relationship with the substantive role is experienced in the example below:

[...] the notes are clinical notes and drivers are clinical and I’m the [name of substantive role] and it’s going to be about patient safety and that’s going to be the driver. There are massive cost improvements to be delivered around it but the primary responsibility has to be delivered to the clinicians and that is good quality notes so that’s why it came to me and also I’ve got a good background in IT. I’ve sort of learnt about IT I’ve sort of grown up with it. (PS003)

Going back to that other example I was giving around changing the way dementia care was delivered, that was driven by a financial imperative to reduce cost and making it happen was something that had to be done [...] I needed to use what was main stream management capacity to do that job so I probably diverted management time for the purpose rather than having something extra to support that to happen. (PS006)

Now I can chair that meeting, I can act as sponsor for that meeting when people hit brick walls I can suggest alternative routes based on my knowledge of the organisation, I can suggest that some things might not be as straight forward as some people think and maybe they need to divert their resources towards something else so that is how I would see myself being responsible in that particular role. (PS005)

The additional theme of expanding awareness which was “realising benefits” is explored further below. The theme of ‘seniority of position’ which was a feature of conception 1 was not present in this conception.

There was a focus in this conception on ‘management and control’ through how the Project Sponsor role was experienced. In the example below the participant experienced the use of ‘control’ within a Project Sponsor role as having a negative impact:

.... we have had a Project Sponsor who has had a direct operational responsibility for part of the project delivery and that has not worked because by the very nature of that has meant that they have got so involved in the detail, wanted to take so much control that they kind of forgotten the focus of the stepping back, the gauging the external, engaging other executives and focus much more on the operational....

[and] that created more noise and slowed things down... (PS009)

This observation of a Project Sponsor who was very involved in the detail of the project was experienced as having a negative impact and a focus on the use of control, too much control, was experienced as slowing down the progress of the project.

In conception C2 there was also a move towards experiencing the role through the use of language commonly associated with the community of practice that is project management, for example referencing project management methodologies in the responses and highlighting formal training as a benchmark of skills and abilities as in the examples below:

..... if you asked me about PRINCE2® management and projects you’d get very little from me in terms of depths of knowledge around it ... I



understand the concept and I understand that it is a way of managing projects but I've had no formal training ... (PS002)

The themes of expanding awareness experienced within the conception C2 were experienced at an expanding level of awareness to those experienced in conception C1 and the theme of seniority of position was not experienced at all. The 'themes of expanding awareness' concept will be explored further in section 5.6 below.

#### **5.4.1 Realising benefits**

Benefits are not a feature of focus in conception C1 but in conception C2 where identifying benefits is a focus participants expressed as their understanding of the role of benefits in describing the management of project delivery.

In the excerpts presented in section 5.6.5 the term benefits and benefits realisation was used in the questions that were asked of the participants and in answering those questions the participants chose to use alternative words to represent the word 'benefit' and those alternative words were objectives and outcomes. This didn't happen on all occasions and with all participants but the words were used interchangeably by participants and this was the how the responses to the questions were addressed.

#### **5.5 Conception C3 – wearing two different hats (C3)**

In this conception, the Project Sponsor role was experienced as a distinct and separate function operating within a project management framework of some sort. Participants who expressed this conception experienced the themes of expanding awareness of conception C2 but the themes were experienced at a more expanded level and this conception also experienced a further theme which was 'clarity of role', outlined further below.

I think it is probably quite good to have someone as a sponsor that is not trying to do all the doing as well so you have somebody who is slightly removed from the actual hands on delivery bit [...] the person who was also being responsible for making it happen [...] but was slightly hanging back from the practical hands on detail I think. (PS006)

It felt like with their operational hat on rather than with their executive sponsor hat on and I think we have struggled .... (PS009)

I know that at a fairly high level that the only game in town is to become more efficient and that's why as Project Sponsor with this project I'm trying to focus on the remit of my role and those efficiencies will come at various rates but part of this is a culture shift for this organisation.  
(PS002)

This conception represented the most expanded example of the experience of the role of Project Sponsor and a further theme of expanding awareness that was not experienced in either of the other conceptions was present in conception C3 and that was the theme of 'clarity of role'.

#### **5.5.1 Clarity of role**

The theme of clarity of role was a theme only experienced in conception C3. The clarity was related to the specifics of the role itself and drawing a distinction between the Project Sponsor role and any other role. Where this theme was expressed participants talked about seeking clarity and also the consequences of not having clarity and the impact on the Project Sponsor role in either or both of those circumstances:

I wrote the description of an executive project sponsor for our PMO which was a couple of years ago, so when we first established the fact that we needed a programme of work I started by identifying the governance requirements and looking at the role sponsors, managers, leaders etc. and trying to differentiate and be very clear about well what is the difference between a sponsor and somebody who leads and manages. (PS009)

I don't think it needs to be difficult as long as roles are clearly defined I think it is manageable to have a number of people in one capacity or other with the project but I think you do need to define who is doing what and who is responsible for what (PS006)

... and I suppose it's whether we should expect people to do those roles without having the clarity about what it means and I suspect it's a bit subjective in terms of how we probably don't define it sufficiently well or give people the tools always to do that job ... (PS002)

I was Project Sponsor in the main although I don't know that on all occasions the role of Project Sponsor is not clearly [...] I was heading up the projects but I don't believe we had somebody who was project sponsor so I was both leading it and driving it but I was the most senior person involved so it was probably a combination of so I think the role was not sufficiently defined in terms of that's a Project Sponsor role. (PS008)

[...] you knew that the executive sponsor would come in and would be the person where you escalated things to and would make change [...] it was very clear [...] we had a project team working on a capital build scheme in [Place name] and it was very clear who was who and what the role of the exec sponsor was [...] (PS009)

Now with this particular project I am not the Project Sponsor for this piece of work that is BLANK (name of PS), that's his to be the Project Sponsor for in terms of, it is a bit complicated though because I am the, I am responsible for BLANK in the organisation so there are some complexities there in terms of who is responsible for what so there is probably some work to do to clarify some of that but BLANK is the defined project lead, Sponsor, for that piece of work. (PS005)

I have some reservations about what it is that the programme management office think the Project Sponsor does and what I as a Project Sponsor think I do and this is fairly live and current [...] I've asked for

clarification of it [...] particularly the terms of reference for project that I'm the sponsor of. (PS002)

[..] project managers can get too hung up on the bureaucracy and forget what the point is and I think what you need is a really good project manager and a good project lead and a good exec sponsor [...] because I think between them that should be like the little power but each being clear that they have got different roles. (PS009)

I think where it is different is you need to take a longer timeframe in terms of the approach you are taking, it's often about a longer time span looking at the project as a whole, I think the bit about saying, being clear about where and how decisions are made as well because it may not be just the sponsor making the decisions it may be that decisions have to be made by the project group, maybe things have to be escalated to the Trust board, but it is the Project Sponsors responsibility in terms of knowing and understanding where decisions should be taken I think that is part of the role and I think that is more important if you are thinking about the governance arrangements of the project that actually you are clear about understanding how and where decisions should be made. (PS008)

## **5.6 The structural relationships between the conceptions – themes of expanding awareness.**

The three qualitatively different ways of experiencing the role of Project Sponsor and of realising benefits are seen as an inclusive structural relationship between conceptions 1-3, which have an increasing breadth of awareness through the themes of expanding awareness. The categories are related to each other even though each conception represents different ways of seeing the same phenomenon, in the case of this research this is the understanding of the Project Sponsor role and of realising benefits. Such relationships or links are to be expected in the phenomenographic

approach as the focus of the methodology is to find the variation between categories showing the qualitatively different ways of understand the same phenomenon (Bowden *et al* in Bowden & Green, 2005). The aspects of the relationships for this research study can be seen in the themes of expanding awareness across the three conceptions. That variation, along five interrelated themes of expanding awareness, act to logically link and separate the conceptions. There are, however, two other themes of expanding awareness that appear in only one conception each.

A key feature of each themes of expanding awareness experienced within the categories of description is that the variation is experienced and understood differently. For example, responsibility and accountability is a theme of for participants across the three conceptions, but responsibility and accountability is experienced differently and in more inclusive ways hierarchically. This variation in understanding between conception C1 to conception C2 and conception C2 and C3 is arranged as a branched hierarchy and is explored further at the end of the section outlining the themes of expanding awareness and can show some indication of an expansion of thinking if included with some aspects from lower in the hierarchy (Åkerlind, 2005a, 2008).

The remainder of this section will document the relation between conceptions 1 – 3 and show the empirical evidence for the structural relationships and hierarchical structure.

### **5.6.1 Responsibility and accountability**

In conception C1 responsibility and accountability are features of the Project Sponsor role and are experienced in the same way as the senior substantive position in that the responsibilities of the role are not differentiated and are understood as one and the same as the substantive senior role being undertaken. There is then, a sense that there is no distinction between the roles. In undertaking the role of Project Sponsor the understanding is that issues of responsibility and accountability are not delegated to the Project Sponsor undertaking a given project but such issues sit with the substantive post regardless of the presence of a Project Sponsor leading the project:

responsibility and accountability in my mind [...] I think most of the people in the room agreed [with me] which is unless things have changed we have a system of devolved accountability and responsibility so each of the clinical and non-clinical divisions are responsible and accountable for delivery of their financial performance, safety and quality targets etcetera, [...] so I'm very clear if you ask me to describe accountability and responsibility that's how I see the model working (PS002).

Even when the role is experienced as sitting within a 'project management approach' the role is experienced as being within the substantive role:

So I saw that as being my role so yes that distinction about whether it was a project, it was a project [within the project management office functions] within my role, I was doing other things but it was a key area of work and I was accountable for that and I was accountable for making sure it happened and I worked closely with other colleagues within the Division to work through issues and problems and make it happen so it is a slightly difficult one in terms of saying well where do you draw the line in terms of what is normal management and what isn't (PS006)

Within conception C2 understanding of the role of Project Sponsor was through what had been experienced before, in the example below the experience was that of the substantive role as a benchmark of how the Project Sponsor is experienced in terms of responsibility and accountability. Variation from conception C1 in this theme is that the role of Project Sponsor is experienced as a separate role but the comparison to previous experience in the substantive role are expressed as relevant to addressing issues of responsibility and accountability in carrying out the Project Sponsor role. Participants talked about their experience in the context of what that means to them from a responsibility and accountability perspective and by drawing on their previous experiences of the role they draw on comparisons from their substantive role:

[...] most of that has come about as a by-product of my role so there is almost an assumption that you have the skills, if you are in a certain sort

of role [...] I think my background lends itself to the responsibilities and accountabilities of a Project Sponsor and control and planning. (PS007)

The relationship between the two conceptions, C1 and C2 is that Project Sponsor role is understood in the context of what the substantive role 'lends' to the Project Sponsor role – the two roles are understood as being different but there is a relationship between the two so the conception 2 can be said to be inclusive of conception 1. This is what Bowden refers to as 'nesting', when each category or conception of a phenomenon is subsumed into another (Bowden & Green, 2005).

In conception 3 the responsibility and accountability is understood as being based on the scope and remit of the Project Sponsor role and is experienced within this conception as being focussed on the boundaries of the scope of the project. There is a clear distinction for participants who experienced this theme on understanding what they are responsible for in terms of the scope of the project and the accountability of their role as Project Sponsor within that scope. A project is clearly distinguished as a distinct entity outside of the day to day role as the examples below illustrate:

There are tangible projects which produce things that are physical and there are projects which produce things which are structural [...], and I think that is tribute to a structural project that was put in place and it was an ambitious one but it was one where everybody was given clear responsibilities and my role as a Sponsor was to make sure everybody prioritised those. (PS005)

This distinction between responsibilities and accountabilities is also experienced in the example below and here there is referenced to clarity of the responsibility and accountability through the arrangements in place around the Project Sponsor role itself:

[..] I suppose the Project Sponsor role [...] in terms of governance there are two things; I think there needs to be a formal arrangement for managing projects where there is a clear accountability arrangement but there is also a transparency in terms of where and how decisions are made. (PS006)

In looking for the inclusivity of the relationships between the conceptions the example below demonstrates that the relationship between conception 2 and conception 3 is evident, however any relationship between conception 3 and conception 1 is less apparent as the example below demonstrates:

[...] I'm not saying that [...] can't do project leadership [...] I suspect we probably all have a slightly different view about what that is [...] people who have come from a management background will have a more traditional understanding if you like of what Project Management requires and how to get a project delivered. (PS006)

Here the reference to the 'management background', in terms of understanding the requirements of the leadership role of a project (as the Project Sponsor role is expressed here), shows the inclusivity of the 'previous experience' focus of conception 2, it doesn't however show any inclusivity of conception 1. This indicates that there is a 'branching' of the hierarchy of the structural relationships between the conceptions where conception 2 is inclusive of conception 1 and conception 3 is inclusive of conception 2, but conception 1 is not inclusive of conception 3 as Figure 3 in section 5.8 demonstrates.

### **5.6.2 Transactional or transformational**

In conception C1 transactional activity and transformational activity were a feature experienced as business as usual operational day to day activity, and, major change activity respectively but the focus of this feature was on the tactics of project delivery. The terms 'transactional' and 'transformational' were interchanged with phrases such 'day to day activity', 'normal business' indicating transactional and 'big change projects' or 'major schemes' indicating transformational. There was a distinct separation of the day to day from the project activity and what was experienced in this distinction was the managing or controlling aspects of the activity being undertaken. For this theme of expanding awareness, the focus was the tactics and operational actions of delivery and participants who experienced this theme drew on the distinction between what transactional and transformational activity means to them in their substantive role as outlined in the examples below:



[...] the relatively mundane and transactional such as “Mary’s leaving at the end of November I won’t replace the post or I’ll reduce the hours and therefore that’s a CIP” {Pause} and it in my head that’s kind of transactional day to day management (PS002)

I just felt that it was right to focus on transformational, I think the transactional stuff is great but I think the Divisions should just get on with the transactional stuff, it’s their individual stuff (PS007)

[...] it’s been labelled as transformation so there was a sense that everybody was so busy doing what they do that nobody had the time to think of how differently to work – they just didn’t have the headroom and so the transformation team would in some way provide them with that headroom, the work, the data for example, that they needed to inform which direction to take would come from the transformation or the Project Management Office, the techniques that they could use, Micro Systems™, Lean™, that type of thing [...] (PS005)

The focus within conception C2 is on past experience of managing and controlling through delivering transformational or transactional change and recognising the impact of such change on others as the example below illustrates:

I started doing organisational change years and years ago at [Name of provider] and if I looked back at it now and the first one I did I’d think oh god that was terrible but the more you do the more you realise the importance of doing it well and the more you realise the importance of trying to take staff with you even when the message is extremely difficult because you have to (PS002)

...so as long as you have transformed people to produce outputs that are recognisable to them not only have you done a one-off project but you have provided a sustainable way to operate in the future. (PS005)

For participants experiencing conception C2 there is an understanding of the need to take the lessons learned from previous experiences of delivering transformational or transactional activity and the influence that such an approach can have on the staff being managed. The expanded awareness in conception C1 from conception C2 is the reflection on the experience of transactional and transformational activity undertaken previously and how that can have a positive effect on influencing staff in the activity currently being undertaken. The distinction between past transactional and transformational activity and how to 'take staff with you' in the present is expanding the awareness from recognising the function of transactional and transformational activity to taking the experience to influence others.

Within conception C3 the focus on understanding the Project Sponsor role as a distinct and separate function shares the theme of expanding awareness of transformational change activity as the driver for delivering organisational change. Day to day activity is experienced as being completely different to transformational and it is the focus on the transformational that is a feature of focus for the Project Sponsor role. In contrast to conception C1, where the focus was on the tactics of project delivery to distinguish between transactional and transformational, in conception C3 participants who expressed it emphasised a distinction between the role of Project Sponsor in focussing on transformational organisational change at a more strategic organisational level:

.. that's not my job, cos if that were my job then to be honest you could get someone else to do it whose paid significantly less and it would happen just the same to my mind, my focus is around how do we get more transformational stuff that we can help and support you deliver.

(PS007)

[...] so I'm really interested in getting to the transformational stuff and making it happen if I'm honest. (PS003)

[...] transactional day to day management – yes it delivers a CIP – but there needs to be more of the transformational so the BIG organisational changes which will transform (PS002)

In each of the examples there is a focus on the transformational being a feature of the Project Sponsor and separate to the substantive role which is seen as more day to day transactional.

The variation of the theme of transformational and transactional delivery between the three conceptions is evident from the data:

The only way you can get transformation is if you can evidence that there is a substantial benefit from this, it has to be different to the day to day transactional stuff and, as Project Sponsor, I am aware that I will play a role in distinguishing the difference between major change benefits and day to day service benefits. (PS005)

### **5.6.3 Formal structures**

Within conception C1 in this theme of expanding awareness, the structures focussed on were recognised as the existing structures in place for day to day business. There was also an aspect of focus when describing the structures of delivery and governance within this theme. Structures could be organisational structures used for managing day to day operational business or distinct structures of management for other activity, for example project management structures, what was in focus in this theme was that the structures were a feature of experience of the Project Sponsor role, In the following example delivery structures are experienced as being an integral part of project delivery and something for the Project Sponsor to be engaged with. Reporting within a structure is also a feature of focus within this theme:

So, I suppose what I am describing is there is a world of managing a project where actually there wasn't, in true classical project management sense, a Project Sponsor and Steering Group it was sort of me doing the work and almost reporting to myself but into the senior team [...] (PS006)

[...] the only structure would have been through having meetings but since then been aware of what [...] it gives you a sense of what that project structure would be, going in to those meetings and then hearing what the reports are starts to give you a bit more understanding of the governance behind what the project has to offer. (PS010)

In the two examples that follow existing management structures are seen as the appropriate and desired route through which the Project Sponsor manages a project so the focus on structure is a feature here but the existing structures of management are experienced as an appropriate mechanism:

I think we need to do something that sends the right message externally that we have got the right governance arrangements but, but what we do internally really has to focus on well how do we support the only people who really can make the change which are those that are delivering the services and how do we find an easy way of accounting for what they are doing and articulating what they are doing and finding a way of demonstrating that that is making progress [...] I think we can often invest a bit too much time in thinking about the governance and new models. (PS004)

[...] what I did I co-opted normal management arrangements on the basis that this was going to be the Estates core – this would be how we would work in the future and so once you took on a responsibility as part of this project it stayed with you [...] so I made sure that they compiled all of the things that they should have compiled anyway as normal business [...] and once that I was clear that that was running they were going to work to a timetable that would deliver. (PS005)

Within conception C2 the structures referred to the delivery of projects through a project management methodology but the significant feature of focus in this theme was that experiences expressed were about the relevance of the size of projects.

Projects of a certain size described as 'big' or 'major' or of significant financial value were deemed to appropriate for delivering through a project management structure that sits outside of the day to day delivery structures of the organisation. Building on conception C1 where structures were a feature of focus of how Project Sponsors deliver projects, the structures were over and above the general management structures and the themes of expanding awareness in conception C2 were that the structures of delivery were experienced as project management structures for projects of a certain size, complexity or value:

..it also depends on the scale and type of project as well – I think in some cases it probably is more important that others that you have somebody who is overseeing but slightly removed so that they can be impartial, objective and provide that extra leverage when it is needed if the project falters or gets stuck on something – I think if you don't have that some projects are not as complex, not as wide ranging and can be delivered almost as a part of a management role I think .. (PS006)

I have never religiously used any project management methodology .... I'm not somebody who would want to use a, I mean PRINCE2® was good because it was a relaxed version of PRINCE® which was a nightmare I thought. I don't have a lot of time for rigid frameworks which is why I don't like or don't know why we ought to set up lots of different things to do things I would rather people be creative and think through how they solve things so looking at things that we do here I'm not the biggest fan of PMO's. (PS004)

In conception C3 the structures experienced by Project Sponsors were project delivery structures through a project management methodology for all projects. Project plans, timeline and governance were referenced in describing the structures utilised to deliver projects. Formality and accountability were described as the structures through which the Project Sponsor role delivers projects. This builds on the structures described in conception C2 as there was no reference to size being a feature of this

themes of expanding awareness. All projects were experienced as being subject to a project management structure for delivery:

If I think about the BLANK project now there is a very clear PRINCE2® style management approach being constructed around it [...] to just be able to put some clear boundaries and framework around it is slightly less easy than if you were doing something like a discreet BLANK project where you are going to be [...] delivery as well as delivering change. (PS006)

I think the formality of having a project board, formality of having accountability and reporting around how that project is going, how the money is being spent, whether the timetable is being kept to and all the PRINCE2® methodology if you like which ensures that everybody knows at any point in time where that project has got to what the risks are around the project. (PS007)

[...] you make sure you have the dedicated focus discreetly on that project and you don't let the day to day get in the way of delivering a key project so I think it is a helpful discipline to use a framework like that where that is feasible to do that job and in many ways you'd say well ideally we'd use that approach more. (PS003)

[...] you can only look at things like PRINCE2® methodology for project management and that's very rigorous its very thorough [...] the assumption is you use PRINCE2® methodology you don't miss anything this wasn't that – this was a much more dynamic process that produced an output by a given time and that was an important way to focus people's attention. (PS005)

[...] but there is something about almost standing back and saying OK in terms of this project and this project management arrangement and these governance arrangements who makes this decision, how do we

make that decision to make sure it is done within keeping in terms of the project structure that you have set up so it is a more formal way of making decisions I think and making sure that you are keeping within the framework you have set up and that the authority is right in terms of where decisions is made. (PS003)

I looked at PRINCE2<sup>®</sup>™ I looked at various different methodologies, there is a NHS change model that has recently been produced [...] So I looked at a variety of different sources all of which are very clear about this role in terms of unblocking and challenging so in order to do that I felt that needed to be, practically we needed to give those people space to do that and we needed a way to do it. So really I used an amalgamation of various things all of which said the same thing and just pulled it together into language that this organisation would understand. (PS009)

Well it's more the overall governance arrangements so although we have got a plan, we have got a Project Sponsor, we've got a resource put into the project we've agreed a plan, we've got a timetable for that [...] the way in which the project is currently set up in terms of the governance needs to be firmed up [...] now we now need a more formal project board and that needs to be accountable formally to BLANK Strategy Board as the governing body [...] so that it is properly linked in formally and accountable[...] (PS006)

#### **5.6.4 Knowledge and skills set**

The focus of this theme within conception C1 was on the generic skill set of a senior manager and the Project Sponsor role was experienced as requiring the same skill set. As with the 'seniority of position' theme above this theme drew alignment with the senior manager role. There was no experience of training expressed as an element of the skill set associated with the Project Sponsor role and in fact when formal training was experienced it was seen as having a negative impact:

I've been PRINCE2® trained at some point in my career, most of it in one ear out of the other, yes I do fully recognise the role of Executive Sponsor of a project (PS004)

The following examples reference the senior role as holding the required skill set to carry out the role of Project Sponsor:

If you are an Executive Director there ought to be a view that you should have the skills and capabilities to be an Executive Sponsor ..... it kind of goes with the territory of the job ..... (PS002)

I think it's kind of interchangeable\_ you might bring different skills to bear in terms of doing different parts of different jobs but the skill set has got to be broadly similar and you have got to be operating at that sort of level. (PS002)

I don't see any real difference in that sense because I bring to the executive sponsor role my knowledge skills and experience as an executive director and I don't change hats necessarily between the two \_ I have different functions when I'm discharging my executive director role. (PS003)

Professional qualifications required to carry out the senior management role are also experienced as aligning with skill set required to carry out the Project Sponsor role:

Sometimes you look at Exec positions and you end up as project lead and you maybe don't have the skill set associated with delivering detailed projects because we are all very different I just happen to think that Project Management aligns well with my education and training as a [name of professional role]. (PS007)

[...] so if you asked me about PRINCE2® management and Projects in a you'd get very little from me in terms of depths of knowledge around it, I understand the concept and I understand that it is a way of managing



projects but I've had no formal training .... I've had no training about how to be a Project Sponsor and I suppose that I don't think you need to have a separate license to be a sponsor than to be an executive director my perhaps controversial view is if you're an executive director by default you should be able to be an executive sponsor. (PS008)

The external horizon or 'margin' of this category delimits the role of Project Sponsor to that of 'figurehead' as outlined in the example below:

[...] if your sponsor is too involved they can't bring any challenge to the project manager or to the team and it ends up being a figure head role. (PS009)

This participant described an understanding of the Project Sponsor role that was less involved in the detail of the project in order to bring challenge to the project manager, indicating that a Project Sponsor who is too involved can be seen as being a "figure head role". This experience of the Project Sponsor role is at the margin of conception C1 in that it represents a context that is not directly relevant to the theme of the conception but is at the margin of understanding of the role as being understood as an additional requirement of the substantive senior role.

Within conception C2 this theme of expanding awareness the feature that was most in focus was the generalisable skills of the Project Sponsor role as experienced previously with reference back to the substantive role and questioning the participants understanding of what a project is and what a sponsor is. Defining the skill set required to carry out the role and addressing issues of behaviour and past experience are the features in focus in this theme:

[...] the vast majority of it has been through personal experience and the role that I've occupied [...] (PS002)

Sponsor to me is someone who has given you something, sponsor is somebody who puts something – it could be money, it could be resources but they are contributing something towards your endeavour and so for me to be a sponsor it would be that I am contributing experience, I'm

contributing insight I'm contributing frameworks, that type of thing would be what I'd contribute to that, but it's not just about chairing a meeting it's actually about contributing something, something constructive.

(PS005)

I see a project as something as neatly packaged on its own stands alone from what you would class as your day to day job role. (PS007)

I guess some of it is the subconscious thinking so I don't in the way that I don't naturally at all switch between hats of exec director or exec sponsor or whatever I think the way I think and I guess I am the product of my experience over however many years and I guess I am what I am and I am. (PS002)

[...] experience – I have never done any formal project management, probably experience in terms of what I have seen work so the structure we have got in place now is still incredibly tight and small but never the less it is an infrastructure that we are trying to wrap things around [...]

(PS007)

[..] they are not used to behaving in that way they are used to taking control and directing and but we are getting quite into the detail and I think sometimes you need to be able to bring challenge and what tends to happen is that if your sponsor is too involved they can't bring any challenge to the project manager or to the team [..] (PS009)

In conception C3 the knowledge and skills set experienced as being relevant to the Project Sponsor role were more complex than conception C2, with specific skills outlined and the knowledge associated with the role of Project Sponsor were more clearly defined. The role of the Project Sponsor in relation to other project

management roles was also referenced and the idea of training in the role was introduced:

I think I would want somebody who understood the value of project management to start with and understood the structure of project management and why it's important and why it gets you where you need to get[...], I think they need to be strong enough to hold people to account and where things are off track to intervene, [...] somebody who is able to let people get on with the job, [...] but also have that ability to say actually I have something to offer here [...] be clear about it, not afraid of conflict, having the ability to hold to account is really important (PS009).

I think that is really important that you have, that everybody can see and I think the Project Sponsor has to ensure that that is the case, that all those things are there, that they are working that there is a proper governance arrangement in place around it, and that is part of the job I think making sure that this is being managed well as a project [...] equally I accept that it might be me it might be that some other colleagues might not have got the necessary skills to act as an executive sponsor particularly if they don't know what the executive sponsor is expected to do. (PS002)

I think there are issues probably about the training and the skills of people who are doing Project Sponsor type roles because unless you know what that role is you are potentially going to interpret it in a different way so for example has BLANK had Project Management training [...] I'm not saying that he can't do project leadership [...] in terms of my understanding in terms of your understanding in terms of everyone else's understanding I suspect we probably all have a slightly different view [...]. And I suppose it's whether we should expect people to do those roles without having the clarity about what it means [...] we probably don't define it sufficiently well or give people the tools always to do that job. (PS006)

I went on a PRINCE2® 2 day course many years ago and I thought that's complex because PRINCE2®, you've got to be careful with project management methodology in an organisation this size, [...] he sat outside the project and he documented in an amazingly graphic detail the complete failure of the project and did nothing about it [...] (PS003)

In the example above the reference to PRINCE2®, a certificated Project Management Methodology, the participant chose to use that terminology in addressing the questions which were about change and benefits. This indicates an experience of managing projects within a context associated with a specific set of skills and methodologies that the participant felt relevant to express

.. having a more consistent approach [...], making it clear about how we undertake a role in a particular organisation [...] so that others have an expectation about what that means, others know what it is a Project Sponsor should do [...] that we have a particular style of managing in this organisation [...] there would be a consistent approach and that the governance. (PS007)

I think most of us have an understanding of projects and project management but specifically that focus on what does the Project Sponsor do, what do they bring, how should they operate [...](PS005)

#### **5.6.5 Realising benefits**

In the conception C2 the themes of expanding awareness 'realising benefits' is a feature of focus. In this conception benefits are experienced as part of project delivery and are expressed as something that are considered an indicator of project success. Benefits are not a feature of focus in conception C1 but in conception C2 where realising benefits is a focus participants who experienced this theme expressed the role of benefits when describing the management of project delivery as the examples below illustrate.

[...] at the beginning when they said what would success look like the success criteria weren't about pounds' shillings and pence ... [...] and they've shown and presented to the board that they've made significant inroads on those success criteria [...] driver was really about improving the quality of their service. (PS002)

[...] so you are working backwards from a vision through objectives deadlines milestones – you have then got project plan because you have worked out what you are going to be doing whether you have got enough capacity [...], but by mapping out the work backwards from the point you want to get to you can actually then construct the resources you need to achieve it. (PS005)

In both of the examples above there is a description of the benefits as being an indicator of success, both excerpts recognise benefits as being part of a process and of being recognised early in the process but this is in the context of a delivery mechanism:

Well the clear benefit was – because it was always billed and it still is billed even though it does give up some capacity as a qualitative scheme this will improve the quality [...] (PS004)

[...] success then becomes dependent upon correctly defining the objectives in the first place because you get set a set of objectives that were unachievable or the wrong objectives and then come out the other end with a different set of outcomes and they don't marry up. (PS008)

In conception C2 there is an understanding of the role benefits play in the early stages of developing improvement activity but the focus is on the identification of benefits in this conception.

In conception C3 this theme was expressed as identifying benefits at the beginning of a process and then realising them at the end of the delivery of the change. As with

conception C2 benefits were seen as an indicator of success but the variation in this theme was the focus on realising benefits as well as identifying them. An understanding of benefits in terms of identification, analysis and realising of benefits is better developed in this conception than in conception C2 and there is a hierarchical element to this theme of expanding awareness from conception C2 through conception C3. The examples below illustrate the inclusivity of the understanding of benefits from conception C2 in conception C3:

[...] where you have got something that is tangibly about introducing a new or developed service then right from the start you are very clear about what the benefits are you are trying to achieve in terms of what improvements are you going to make to patient care [...] in many ways when you are talking about a project which will bring benefits relating to patient care you start off with benefits and you then hopefully deliver those benefits. (PS006)

I am more structured in my thinking and I like to see the beginning to the end with a timescale in it milestones [...] that I like to have thought it all through at the beginning with the project board, project team, set the stall out, know what the clear objectives are and know what the outcomes are, what I don't like doing is conceptualising a project with some ethereal deliverables and benefits, getting so far into the project discovering other things, [...] because of things we haven't thought through. (PS008)

With that one we did quite a lot of work we set up some new services in the community and then we evaluated those [...] I think it clarified for us that the path we were taking was the right path and it was having the desired effect in terms of the benefits for patients [...] (PS006)

I'm used to doing benefits analysis on projects of a high value where usually the benefits will either be about money, saving money,

efficiencies, it might be about quality, quality of service, quality of data, or it might be about process in a sense of we are trying to get more patients though or we are trying to make patients journey smoother, slicker, so you would normally on a project do a benefits analysis and say [...] what are our expected outcomes from that so normally it's return on investment in three years so they would look at it from that perspective. (PS007)

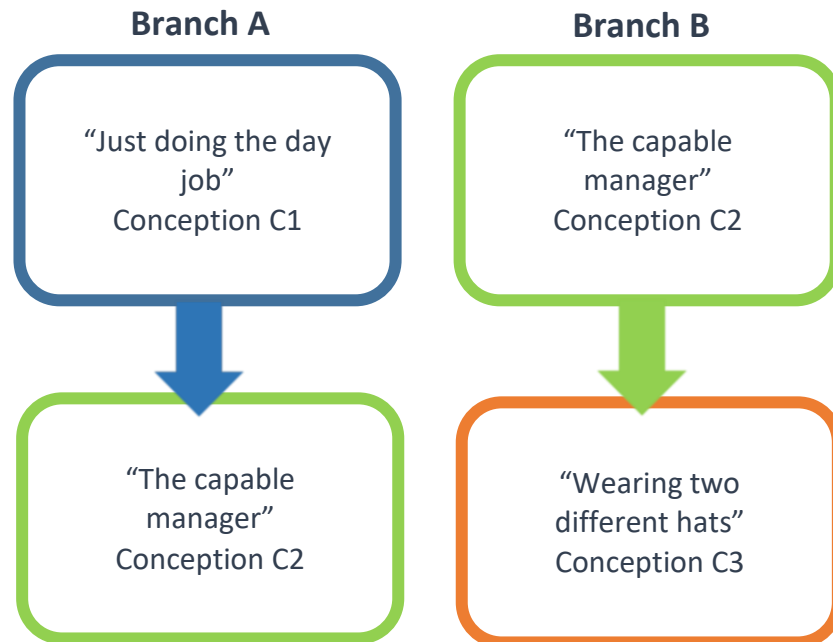
Being a sponsor involves as I say contributing something, you have to give some leadership for example for a project and that leadership is to give everybody a voice but to guide people towards some sort of outcome milestone conclusion and you have to be able to give direction, take the majority with you, and that's a technique [...](PS005)

[...] somebody who understands the nature of the project as well, so somebody who understands enough to understand what the outcome is and how to get there and keep that in mind throughout the process [...] (PS009)

[...] people don't always understand the impact of a change there is no doubt we have made changes along the way [...] and we have had unintended consequences and you have to manage it but [...] should be about how an organisation learns to make change better as they go forward and refines the approach that they use for the benefits [...] so the more you can learn about effective change management the better [...] (PS006).

## 5.7 Relations between the conceptions of the understanding of the Project Sponsor role.

The relationships between the conceptions outlined in the section above show the themes of expanding awareness in each of the categories suggesting a branched hierarchical structure as shown in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3:** Relationship between categories based on the themes of expanding awareness.

The relations between the categories that make up the themes of expanding awareness are inclusive in nature in terms of conception C2 being inclusive of aspects of conception C1 across four themes of expanding awareness namely, *responsibility and accountability, transactional or transformational, formal structures and knowledge and skills set*. Conception C3 is inclusive of aspects of conception C2 across five themes of expanding awareness which are, *responsibility and accountability, transactional or transformational, formal structures, knowledge and skills set and realising benefits*. Through analysing the transcripts further, it was possible to look for evidence of any hierarchical relationships amongst the conceptions by asking questions of how variation across the conceptions could be explained in each of the themes of expanding awareness. This was then followed by questions of the major common



issues that have different meaning across the conceptions and looking at what ways the conceptions become more inclusive.

This resulted in the following explanation of the inclusive nature across some conceptions along with a hierarchical aspect between some of the expanding themes as presented in the Tables 14 & 15 below.

<b>Branch A Themes of expanding awareness</b>	<b>Conception C1 <i>Just doing the day job</i></b>	<b>Conception C2 <i>The capable manager</i></b>
Responsibility and accountability	The responsibilities and accountabilities of the Project Sponsor role are understood as the same as for the substantive role	The responsibilities and accountabilities of the Project Sponsor role are understood based on previous experience of the role
Transactional or Transformational	Transactional or transformational activity is focussed on tactics and actions of project delivery	Transactional or transformational activity is focussed on examples from past experience of managing and controlling
Formal structures	Formal structures are through existing management structures and governance	Formal structures are project management structures but only for 'big' projects
Knowledge and skills set	There is a focus on generic skill set of the senior manager	There is a focus on generalisable skills of Project Sponsor role

**Table 14:** Branch A – relationships between conception C1 and C2 and the themes of expanding awareness.

<b>Branch B Themes of expanding awareness</b>	<b>Conception C2 <i>The capable manager</i></b>	<b>Conception C3 <i>Wearing two different hats</i></b>
Responsibility and accountability	The responsibilities and accountabilities of the Project Sponsor role are understood as being based on previous experience of the role	The responsibilities and accountabilities of the Project Sponsor role are understood as being based on scope and remit of Project Sponsor role
Transactional or Transformational	Transactional or transformational activity is focussed on examples from past experience of managing and controlling project outputs	Transactional or transformational activity is focussed on transformational change and cultural change
Formal structures	Formal structures are project management structures but only for 'big' projects	Formal structures are project management methodology based for all projects
Knowledge and skills set	There is a focus on generalisable skills of Project Sponsor role	Focus is on specific role profile and/or training in the role of Project Sponsor
Realising benefits	Identifies benefits early in project development	Identifies benefits early in project development and understands responsibilities of realising them as part of role

**Table 15:** Branch B – relationships between conception C2 and C3 and the themes of expanding awareness.

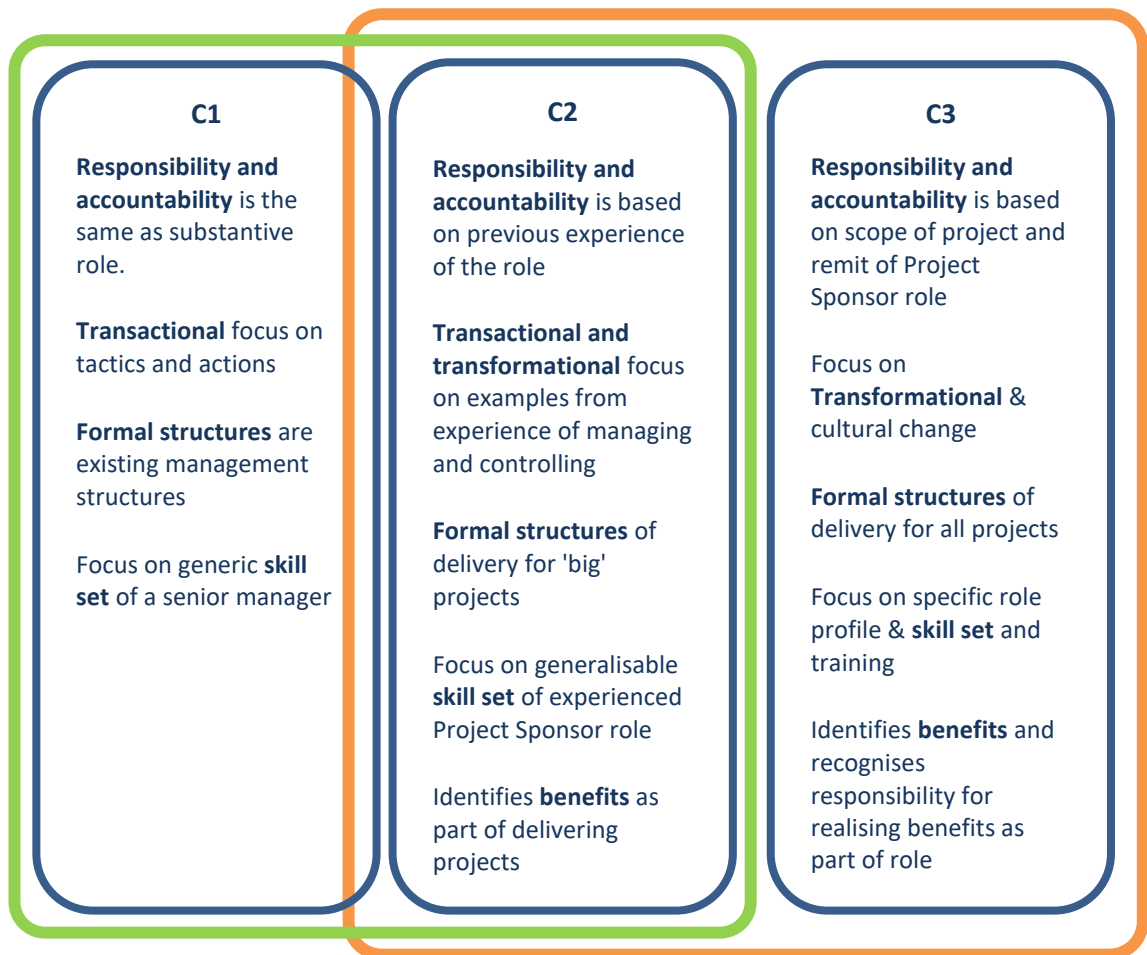
### **5.8 The hierarchical nature of the conceptions of the role of Project Sponsor and of realising benefits**

This section outlines the basis for the hierarchical nature of the conceptions and describes how this hierarchical aspect is reflected in the themes of expanding awareness outlined in the findings above.

Within conception C1 the role of Project Sponsor was understood as an additional requirement of the substantive senior position of the individual undertaking the sponsorship of a project. The focus of this category was on the seniority of position and participants who expressed this conception experienced no distinguishable difference between roles. In expressing the Project Sponsor role participants identified existing management structures and existing responsibilities and accountabilities as the means by which project activities are experienced and delivered and there was no experience of benefits or benefit realisation expressed as a function of the Project Sponsor role within this conception C1. Benefits were, however, experienced as a

feature of focus of the Project Sponsor role and a theme of expanding awareness in both conceptions C2 and C3. The focus on benefits was on identifying and realising benefits as a function of the Project Sponsor role. In conception C2 benefits were expressed as an indicator of the success of a project in the context of what benefits had been identified early in the project development process and the identification of benefits was expressed as a feature of the Project Sponsor role. In conception C3 benefits were also experienced as a feature of focus of the Project Sponsor role but there was a further complexity to the theme of realising benefits in that the Project Sponsor role was understood as not only identifying benefits but also for having responsibility for realising them or being responsible for ensuring they were realised. In this research study, there was a focus in the research question on the understanding of the Project Sponsor role of realising benefits. This focus on benefits materialised through the findings of this research as a theme of expanding awareness in two of the three conceptions, C2 and C3. There is variation in the understanding of benefits in the themes of expanding awareness and an inclusive nature in the hierarchical relationship between the two conceptions in which benefits are a feature of focus. This will be explored further in the section below.

The three conceptions of the role of Project Sponsor that constitute the categories of description described in the section above are variations in understanding of the Project Sponsor role and of realising benefits and the conceptions share certain themes of expanding awareness, however there is variation between the conceptions in terms of the themes of expanding awareness. This variation between themes can be described as branching. Conception C2 branches into two and in each of the branches there is a 'nested' hierarchy between the conceptions showing how they are related hierarchically. This hierarchy is evident in two of the three conceptions and across five themes of expanding awareness as outlined below in Figure 4.



**Figure 4:** – Nested hierarchy of conception C1 and C2, and of C2 and C3.

### 5.9 Summary of the findings

The development of the categories of description and themes of expanding awareness that led to the final conceptions and themes of expanding awareness outlining the structural relationship between the conceptions was described in detail in Chapter Four. The development of the conceptions took place through six versions or iterations of the categories of description and over the course of the analysis the preliminary categories of description reduced in number from seven to three and the themes of expanding awareness increased from four to seven. In version 4 the idea of structurally inclusive relationships between the categories or conceptions was first explored but it wasn't until the final iteration, version 6, that the structurally inclusive relationships, where they existed, were fully revealed.

The three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role and of realising benefits revealed an inclusive relationship between conception C1 and C2 and also between conception C2

and C3. This inclusivity was across some of the structural aspects of the conceptions and where the inclusive relationship existed it was also hierarchical, for example in conception C2 and conception C3 there was an inclusive relationship between the theme of expanding awareness that was 'realising benefits'. In conception C2 benefits were experienced as being identified at the beginning of project development whereas in conception C3 benefits were experienced as being identified early in the process of development and there was also understanding of the Project Sponsor role as being responsible for realising benefits. In this example conception C3 is inclusive of conception C2 and the awareness and understanding of conception C3 in relation to benefits realisation is broader and more complete.

## **Chapter Six: Discussion**

This chapter has an introduction, 6.1, and five further sections. Section 6.2 summarizes the research aims and the findings with their conclusions. There is a review of the findings of the research with the existing literature on the role of the Project Sponsor and of realising benefits in section 6.3 and this is followed by section 6.4 which looks at the variations of understanding of realising benefits purported from this research and in relation to the emerging literature on benefits realisation. The chapter concludes with section 6.5, a summary and outline of the original contributions to knowledge and professional practice, which will be expanded on more fully in the conclusions chapter that follows, and a brief summary of this chapter in section 6.6.

### **6.1 Introduction**

The findings of this research presented an understanding of how the Project Sponsor role is experienced through three qualitatively different conceptions, (that portray the meaning), and across seven themes of awareness (the ways of experiencing the role) that constitute the outcomes of this research study.

At this point in the discussion I think it is worthwhile to address the titles of the themes of awareness that constitute the structural aspects of the final outcome space, and also to look at the labels given to the referential aspect of each of the conceptions, and then to outline how the titles and labels were arrived at.

In Chapter Four the procedures of analysis were outlined in detail and an overview of the stages and steps undertaken were described. For both the structural and referential aspects of the categories the essence of what was emerging from the transcripts was captured in the versions presented. It is not necessary to go back over the process of analysis here; however, it is relevant to say that through the process undertaken the titles of the themes of expanding awareness and, at the end of the analysis process, the labels for each of the three conceptions were formed. In attempting to capture in a short descriptor the overall meaning of the individual conception, the label represents the essence of the conceptions, in other words the label articulates *how* a conception is experienced by the participants of the study in order to capture the meaning of their understanding of the phenomenon – in this case

the role of Project Sponsor. The titles of the themes of awareness represent the 'what' that is the core of the theme. So, in describing the 'how' or way of experiencing the conceptions, the themes of awareness titles provide the 'shorthand' to how the conception is experienced.

Four of the themes of awareness are mutual across all three conceptions, however the themes are experienced in different ways in each conception and, in two of the conceptions, C1 and C2, there is an inclusivity of meaning.

This means that the conception of *the capable manager* includes and expands on four of the themes that are also present in the conception *just doing the day job*.

The Project Sponsor role is experienced through an understanding of the themes of responsibility and accountability, an expression of transactional and transformational features associated with the project environment, and an understanding of formal structures and knowledge and skills. These are the themes through which the phenomenon is understood. There is a hierarchical element to that experience and understanding between these two conceptions, C1 and C2, and this explored further later in this chapter.

There is a theme of awareness that is only present in conception C1, and a further theme of awareness that is only present in conception C3.

In C1, *just doing the day job*, the theme of seniority of position is a feature. This theme plays a dominant role in this conception as it provides a level of understanding and awareness of the role of Project Sponsor that indicates that the lens through which the role is understood is that of the substantive senior role.

Conception C3 is the only conception that has the theme of awareness that is clarity of role. The *wearing two different hats* conception can be said to be different to the other two conceptions in that the four themes of awareness shared by the other two conceptions are not inclusive and are not hierarchical in C3. The theme of clarity of role is evident in the data for this conception as there is a clear link to the awareness and understanding of the *wearing two different hats* conception as being about understanding the scope, remit and responsibilities of the role itself, a finding that will be discussed further below.

An interesting outcome of this research is that the theme of realising benefits is only experienced across two of the three conceptions, C2 and C3, and realising benefits is experienced in different ways across both. There is also an inclusive and hierarchical nature across the two conceptions in terms of the theme of realising benefits. In the conception of *the capable manager*, benefits appear as a theme of awareness in relation to identifying benefits as part of the understanding of the role of Project Sponsor. The understanding and awareness of this theme in the conception *wearing two different hats*

is further expanded and is inclusive of the understanding of the theme in C1, *the capable manager*, and thus includes identifying benefits and having a responsibility to realise benefits. This is an interesting outcome of this research as realising benefits was a focus of the questions asked in the interviews, however through the analysis of the data the *how* the Project Sponsor role is experienced and understood does not include an awareness of benefit realisation or benefits per se across all of the conceptions identified as the qualitatively different ways that the role is understood. There is evidence in the literature this could be in support of the findings of others in relation to the attributes and skills associated with the role and this will be explored further below.

## **6.2 A brief overview of the research aims, findings and their conclusions**

The aim of this phenomenographic study was to explore the qualitatively different ways that individuals experience and understand the role of Project Sponsor and to describe how they conceive of that role in realising benefits. In order to address this the research question posed was:

“What do NHS Project Sponsors understand of their role and of realising project benefits?”

This study asked a number of questions through semi-structured interviews with participants to identify the qualitatively different ways in which the Project Sponsor role is understood, and, what is conceived of the role in realising benefits. The qualitative analysis produced descriptive categories, or conceptions, of how the Project Sponsor role is conceived of and the collective conceptions resulted in an



outcome space that reflected how the Project Sponsor role is experienced. The outcome space identified three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role that are structural in nature and this is revealed through the themes of expanding awareness which group together the critical differences between the conceptions. These conceptions form the categories of description that are relational, experiential, content-oriented and qualitative (Marton, 1986). Consequently, it could be said that some of the categorisations reflect conceptions that are more complete, in terms of awareness of how the themes that constitute the conceptions are apprehended, and therefore how the phenomenon in question, in this case the Project Sponsor role and benefits realisation, is understood (Marton & Booth, 1997).

For the purpose of this research, and in order to understand the definition of the meaning placed on the use of the word in this context, a conception can be described as “people’s ways of experiencing or making sense of their world” (Sandberg, 2000, p.12).

The variation in understanding of the Project Sponsor role, indicated by the three phenomenographic conceptions outlined in the findings chapter, suggests that the role is experienced in increasingly complete ways and with expanding awareness of the benefit realisation phenomenon (Paakkari, 2012). The variation of understanding, though experienced individually by the participants has been analysed as a ‘collective’, as per the phenomenographic approach, and the findings presented as a collective outcome space (Marton & Booth, 1997). This focus on the ‘collective’ is what Marton (1981) refers to as “the collective mind” and in attempting to understand the variation in experience it is necessary to understand the collective anatomy of awareness – in other words the different ways in which different phenomena can be experienced. In exploring questions of experience of the Project Sponsor role and of realising benefits this research has focussed on a specific aspect of the role that is not explored anywhere else in the literature; namely how *understanding* of the role and of realising benefits is experienced from the position of the Project Sponsors themselves. There is research that has addressed particular aspects of the Project Sponsor role such as sponsor impact on practice-based learning within a project (Sense, 2013); The role of the Project Sponsor is generally perceived to be ‘peripheral’ and, as evidenced in the

literature, there is a lack of a singular notion or definition of the role itself (Sense, 2013; Kloppenborg, Stubblebine, & Tesch, 2007) this research study adds to the knowledge and understanding of the role and of realising benefits and makes a contribution to the professional practice and the knowledge that currently exists in the literature in relation to the Project Sponsor role and realising benefits.

The findings represent the qualitatively different ways in which the Project Sponsor role and realising benefits is understood.

Through the three qualitatively different conceptions the Project Sponsor role is experienced as:

Conception C1            *Just doing the day job*

– the Project Sponsor role is understood as an additional requirement of the substantive role.

Conception C2            *The capable manager*

– the Project Sponsor role is understood as managing and controlling project activity through experience.

Conception C3            *Wearing two different hats*

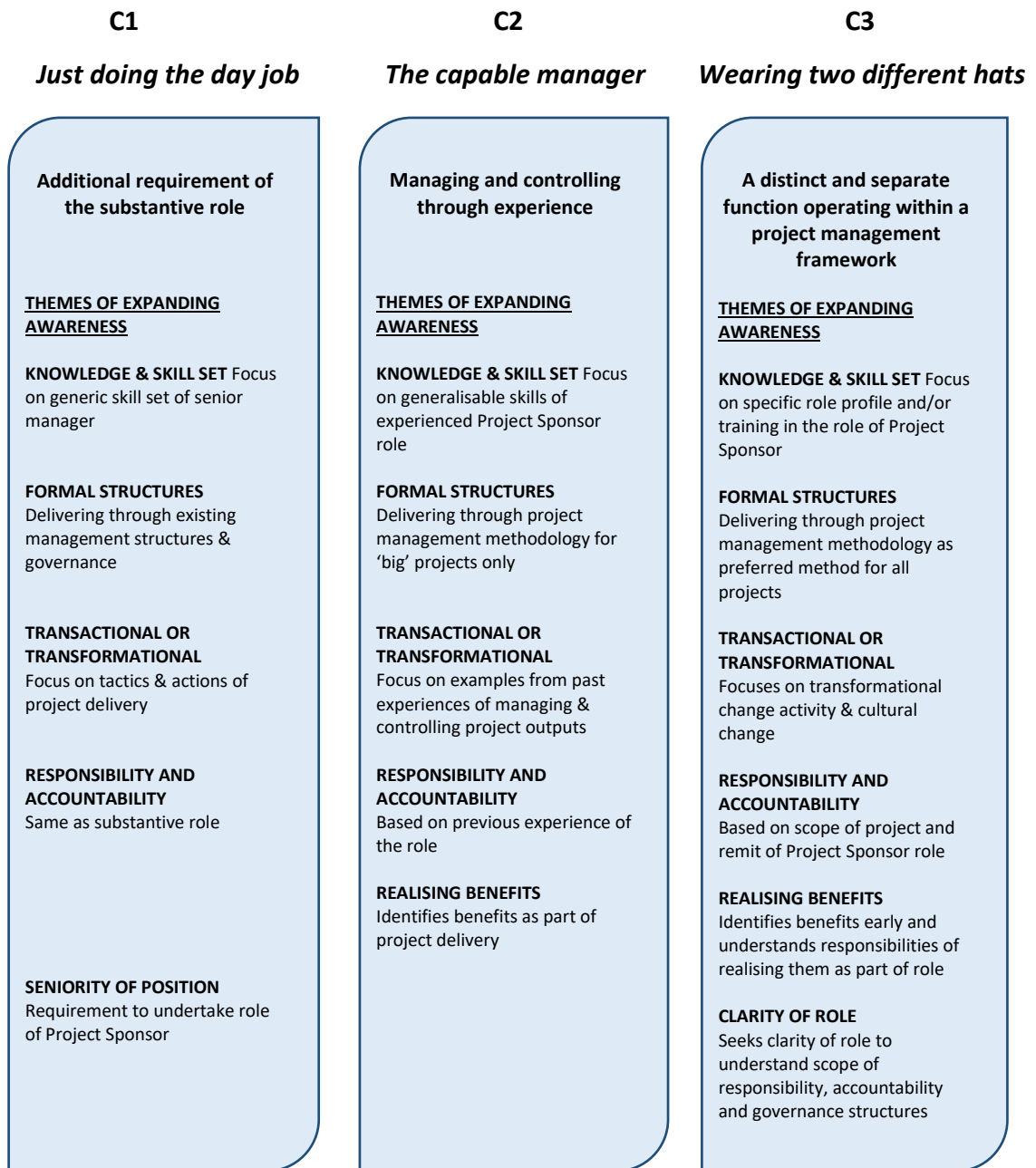
– the Project Sponsor role is understood as a distinct and separate function operating within a project management framework.

The conceptions have a number of the same themes of expanding awareness, namely; *responsibility and accountability; transactional or transformational; formal structures and knowledge and skill set*. There are, however, a number of themes of expanding awareness that are not present across all of the three conceptions. In conception C1 there is a theme of expanding awareness, *seniority of position*, which is not a theme of awareness that is a feature in the other two conceptions. In conception C2 and conception C3 the theme of expanding awareness of *realising benefits* features, however this theme is not a feature in conception C1, and in conceptions C2 and C3 the theme is experienced at a different level of awareness with an expanding awareness of the theme in conception C3. In conception C3 there is a further theme of expanding awareness that only features in this conception that is *clarity of role*. This

theme of awareness is about proactively seeking clarity of the Project Sponsor role in order to understand the scope and remit of the role, and to enact the governance required of the role within a defined governance structure. This theme of *clarity of role* is different to the theme of *responsibility & accountability* as the focus is on proactively seeking clarity of the role as part of the experience of the role in understanding the scope. This signifies there is an understanding of the role as being 'different to' and 'not the same as' other roles being undertaken because an understanding of the scope and remit is being sought.

The themes of expanding awareness, including those that feature across all three conceptions, have different foci according to how the conception is experienced. Though the conceptions reveal three qualitatively different understandings of the Project Sponsor role, some participants experienced more than one conception at the same time (Chen, Partington & Wang, 2007). Conception C2 is inclusive of conception C1 where the themes of expanding awareness that are mutual to both conceptions exist. Conception C3 is inclusive of conception C2 in the benefit realisation theme of expanding awareness. However, conception C3 is not inclusive of conception C1 and, there are also mutually exclusive themes of awareness, in conception C1, *seniority of position*, and in conception C3, *clarity of role*. The conceptions, then, form a complex picture of increasing awareness and completeness of meaning and of conceiving of the role of Project Sponsor across some but not all themes. The structural aspects between the three different ways of experiencing is both relational and inclusive in the mutually shared themes of expanding awareness as outlined in Figure 5 below. The themes of expanding awareness of each conception meant different things to the participants holding different conceptions – in other words a variation of meanings of the same theme in different conceptions reveals a structural relationship between the conceptions (Marton & Booth, 1997; Chen, Partington, & Wang, 2007).

Figure 5 below presents the three conceptions and the relationship between them in terms of the themes of expanding awareness.



**Figure 5:** Summary of categories of description and their structural relationship

### 6.3 Three Conceptions of the Project Sponsor role

In this section I revisit the literature on the Project Sponsor role and benefits realisation and discuss the findings of this research in the context of each of the conceptions with their component themes of expanding awareness, suggesting how the qualitatively different ways of experiencing the role can present insights into the

understanding of the individuals who are undertaking the role to better comprehend how that role can contribute to benefit realisation in projects.

In phenomenography, the focus of awareness of the phenomenon in question, in this case the role of Project Sponsor, is what is experienced and how it is experienced. Of interest is the way in which a phenomenon is experienced structurally and referentially (Marton & Booth, 1997). In the research the Project Sponsor role was reflected through the three qualitatively different ways way of experiencing and understanding the role and indicates that there are complexities of variation and of awareness of the role in terms of realising benefits. The themes of expanding awareness in each category indicates that there are different kinds of access to understanding of the role of Project Sponsor.

### **6.3.1 An additional requirement of the substantive role – C1, just doing the day job**

In this conception, the Project Sponsor role is experienced as being an additional requirement of the substantive senior position of the individual undertaking the sponsorship of a project. The themes of awareness, the structural aspects of this conception, represent 'what' is experienced in terms of understanding of the role. These ways of experiencing are through the themes of responsibility and accountability; transactional or transformational; formal structures; knowledge and skills set and seniority of position. The experience of the role, the referential aspects or the 'what', is that of 'just doing the day job', there is no differentiation between the substantive and sponsor roles and undertaking the Project Sponsor role is understood as a general requirement of the senior role. This perception of the role experiences a generic knowledge and skill set of a senior manager, which would support the view that the people best suited to the role of Project Sponsor are senior executives with business experience (Englund & Bucero, 2006; Begg, 2009). However, this view does not take into account the additional benefit that training in the role can bring to a project or an organisation in terms of project success (James, Rosenhead, & Taylor, 2013). There is strong consensus in the literature that the role of Project Sponsor is often neglected in the organisations and that very few senior executives or managers who undertake the role have had any training in the role. The assumption can be that

without a background or experience in project based activity those undertaking the role will struggle and projects will not be successful, or worse, fail (Van Der Molen, 2015; Englund & Bucero, 2006;) The themes of expanding awareness in focus in the *just doing the day job* conception are at a less developed level of understanding, in other words, the themes of expanding awareness are less complete in this conception. The theme of awareness *knowledge and skill set* in this conception is focussed on the experience of a generic skills set of the senior manager undertaking the role. This generalist skill set is placed firmly in the context of the senior position of the person undertaking the role. This relationship between the skills utilised in carrying out the senior substantive position and the skills required to undertake the Project Sponsor role being the same and generalist is at odds with the view that the sponsorship role is more about attitude and behaviour than specific skills, however an experienced skill set can be seen to enable a natural progression into the role of Project Sponsor for a Project Manager who is used to operating within task related boundaries and is looking to move to the next level (Madsen, 2015). Some managers believe they are good Project Sponsors because of their previous business experience but this is not necessarily a view supported by the literature and some level of training in the role responsibilities and project management is required (Englund & Bucero, 2006). Within the data there are examples of the senior position and skills required to undertake that substantive role as being 'assumed' as being the appropriate skill set for undertaking the Project Sponsor role. In terms of looking at the success of projects in addressing the impact of the Project Sponsor role there is more attention placed on sponsor behaviour, rather than skills or knowledge, and the impact of that behaviour on the outcome of a project. Where skills and knowledge are addressed, in particular in the practitioner bodies of knowledge literature, this tends to be aligned to processes and functions to be carried out in the role (Project Management Institute, 2013; James, Rosenhead, & Taylor, 2013). There is evidence that some of the defined behaviours deemed to be appropriate to undertake the role of Project Sponsor are aligned to the 'executive' position of role holder but this is not clearly stated as being skills required to undertake the role and in some cases this can be refuted as being irrelevant and, as stated above its the 'attitude' of the sponsor that is seen as being more important than

executive position (Kloppenborg, Tesch & Manolis, 2014). There is alignment however, with the sponsor role and 'leadership' in addressing the question of role itself (Hall, Holt, & Purchase, 2003; Strang, 2005). Such issues of leadership appear to arise from the definition within praxis literature of the role of Project Sponsor, one of which is "a person or group that provides resources and support for the project ..... and is accountable for enabling success" (PMBOK® Guide, 2013, p.563). The association of the Project Sponsor role with the requirement to be able to provide resources and be accountable is more likely to fit with the substantive role of an executive or very senior manager and as such the assumption of both the Project Sponsor role and being in an executive/senior manager position is made. Helm and Remington cite specific attributes of the role of Project Sponsor as being necessary in order to be effective and 'seniority' is one of the nine attributes identified as necessary (Helm & Remington, 2005). This research has highlighted that the focus on 'seniority' of substantive position is not only present in the data but is also assumed as being a pre-requisite in order to carry out the role of Project Sponsor, however Helm and Remington (2005) go further in their study in stating that "appropriate seniority" is a fundamental requirement of an effective sponsor in certain types of projects. In terms of the likelihood of a project being successful the more senior the Project Sponsor the more likely the success of the project (Graham & Englund, 1994)

This theme of expanding awareness, *seniority of position*, as experienced in this research, is in focus when participants were understanding their senior position within the organisations in which they worked as the pre-requisite of undertaking the role of Project Sponsor per se. The research has found that at the margin of awareness is the idea that the Project Sponsor role is a 'figurehead' role. The assumption that within some organisations the Project Sponsor role is seen as being just a figurehead which is never called upon and therefore there is little if any investment in the role in terms of training (James, Rosenhead, & Taylor, 2013). In the findings of this study the peripheral awareness of the figurehead role is treated as being data that is unattended, in other words it is not in focus and it is not relevant. However, the focus of this conception C1 is that the Project Sponsor role is experienced and understood as not differentiating

between the substantive senior role and the Project Sponsor role. Where there is a lack of experience of the role itself there is evidence that in undertaking sponsorship of a project it is more likely that the Project Sponsor will be ineffective or weak which could result in an inability to provide clear direction or to escalate problems and, potentially, project failure (James, Rosenhead, & Taylor, 2013).

Many of the practitioner bodies of knowledge and the research that addresses sponsorship of projects suggests that the Project Sponsor role should be undertaken by a senior executive and this research underlines that premise in the case of this conception of the role (Begg, 2009; Graham & Englund, 1994; Project Management Institute, 2013; Van Der Molen, 2015; West, 2010; APM, 2012; Helm & Remington, 2005). However, this research is also suggesting that the alignment of the sponsorship of projects being undertaken by a senior executive sits with an assumption that the required skills and experience to undertake the role of sponsor are the same as those required to undertake the senior executive role.

Throughout the themes of awareness that constitute the structural aspects of this conception there is a focus on aligning the Project Sponsor role with the substantive role, the management structures that are understood as an enabler to deliver management of activity and provide governance are the management structures that are already in place for delivery and governance of the usual day to day activity. Deemed as adequate and appropriate this again demonstrates that the project Sponsor role is not conceived of as been different to the substantive role. In some cases the participants expressed the view that “we suffer from ‘projectitis’ and always have to add more infrastructure instead of utilising what we have already got” (PS004) and “why would we need another project board, we should use what meeting structure we already have” (PS002). Within the practitioner bodies of knowledge the management, escalation and governance structures are given a prominent role in providing the framework by which a project can be managed successfully and there is a clear distinction drawn between ‘business as usual’ structures of delivery and project management structures of delivery (Project Management Institute, 2013; APM, 2012). In the case study of two NHS PFI schemes, Patel and Robinson (2010) noted that “A key lesson learnt is that the organisational and management structure of capital projects



should always have clear accountability arrangements with a single project sponsor responsible for the stewardship of the project.”. The accountability and governance arrangements help to provide clear leadership responsibilities and simplify decision-making arrangements, and project governance cannot be achieved by organisational structures alone (Patel & Robinson, 2010 p. 228).

### **6.3.2 Managing and controlling through experience – C2, the capable manager.**

The understanding of this conception is associated with experience. The Project Sponsor role, understood as ‘managing and controlling’, is based on the experience gained from undertaking the role previously.

There is focus on the experiential aspects of undertaking the role and this includes attention on the past experiences of individuals who expressed this conception of drawing on previous experience in undertaking the role.

The inclusive nature of this conception is experienced across four themes and as such the experience of this conception includes the aspects of the themes in conception C1 but at an expanded level of completeness. Drawing on examples from past endeavours there was a tendency to use those examples as the vehicle by which the understanding and experience of the Project Sponsor role could be expressed. Across the four themes of expanding awareness that were present in this conception and common to conception C1 there was a variation to how the themes were understood. In conception C1 responsibility and accountability, as a theme of expanding awareness, was experienced in the same way as the substantive role, in other words there was no distinction or differentiation of experiencing responsibility and accountability in undertaking the role. In conception C2 responsibility and accountability was experienced based on the having undertaken the role previously and it was through the lens of previous experience that the responsibilities and accountabilities of the role in this conception were understood. In expressing the responsibilities and accountabilities of the role participants regarded their past experience as being relevant to draw on, and the expanded awareness recognised the broader nature of not only experience as a senior manager undertaking the role but also specific experience of managing and controlling activity and outputs as being relevant in this

conception of the role. Reference was made to 'assuming' that the background and experience of an individual was an indicator that 'lends itself' to the responsibilities and accountabilities of the Project Sponsor role. This supports the research undertaken by Hall, Holt & Purchase (2003) who highlighted a series of 'softer' issues revealed through their study which suggested that management skills may be more important than technical skills for public sector Project Sponsors. Highlighting the need to cope with the different demands placed on the Project Sponsors the study suggested that they needed to "develop long-term relationships and acquire significant experience of their role" (Hall, Holt & Purchase, 2003). This focus on 'past experience' was a feature throughout the themes of awareness in this conception but 'past experience' is not discussed in the literature. Of the nine attributes identified as key attributes of the Project Sponsor role in Helm and Rimington (2005), none make reference to 'past experience' specifically but there is reference to specific characteristics such as courage and willingness and ability to motivate (Helm & Remington, 2005). An interesting aspect of the Helm and Rimington research is that the participants of the research were all Project Managers. As the participants of my phenomenographic study were or had recently been Project Sponsors the themes of awareness in conception C2 of experiencing and understanding the Project Sponsor role through expressing 'past experience' as a lens through which undertaking the role should be based, offers an alternative understanding and awareness of the role from the perspective of the Project Sponsors themselves. There is a further view of the role of expertise and skills however, and though expertise does not necessarily come from experience it is noted that the Project Sponsor's attitude can be seen as being more important than expertise and skills (Zetlin, 2012). There was no reference made to attitude or behaviours portrayed by Project Sponsors in this research and a lack of self-awareness and self-reflection in general on the attributes required to undertake the role. This could be related to the questions that were asked and is not necessarily a reflection on the how the participants understood the role of Project Sponsor. The role of experience in this conception was expressed both as a positive and necessary requirement of the role but also experience was expressed in the context of having a lack of experience. Participants, discussing how they came to take on the role

of Project Sponsor expressed an expectation by others that they would undertake the role saying, "it was kind of expected that I would know what the role of Project Sponsor was" and "I broadly understand what the role is" (PS002). This experience of expectation by others has been described as 'the accidental Project Sponsor', whereby individuals reach a senior management level in an organization and, based on success in a particular area, are told that they are now going to be a Project Sponsor. No training or support and guidance is offered but despite the lack of experience the expectation is that they will undertake the role (James, Rosenhead, & Taylor, 2013). Participants who expressed this conception drew on their previous experiences of managing general business activities and projects articulated a distinction between certain types of projects to identify the types of structures appropriate for delivery. This judgement of distinction between certain types of project, for example high financial value or large scale capital projects, was a distinction drawn to identify the appropriate formal structure required for managing a project. Experience is not necessarily gained from direct experience of projects but an understanding of project management is a necessary requirement in a Project Sponsor being able to judge whether or not a project is being well managed (Begg, 2009).

In this conception, the theme of benefits realisation emerges for the first time in the research. The Project Sponsor role identifies benefits as a function of the role in this conception and understands the role as having a requirement to identify what the benefits of projects are. The identification of benefits is an integral part of the role being undertaken as a Project Sponsor in this conception and the process of identifying project benefits is experienced as part of the project delivery process. This view accords with Bryde (2008) study the results of which support the traditional view of project sponsorship being a senior manager role whereby the individual takes responsibility for the activities including the defining of business benefits and defining project objectives. There is however a clear focus in this research of the identification of benefits being aligned to the development and delivery of a project in the early stages. The realisation of benefits is not a feature of this conception.

### **6.3.3 A distinct and separate function operating within a project management framework – C3, wearing two different hats**

The Project Sponsor role is experienced in this conception as a distinct role and function that operates within a project management framework. There is evidence that this is the most complex conception in terms of completeness of understanding of the role and benefits realisation. The additional theme of expanding awareness that is experienced in this conception is the theme of *clarity of role*. This theme emerged from the data as being separate and different to or a variation of *responsibility and accountability* in that seeking clarity to understand the scope of responsibility and accountability assigned to the role is a requirement of undertaking the role. The theme of *clarity of role* also aligned with decision making within the role and there is a distinction drawn with seeking clarity of the role in terms of understanding the remit and scope of the role and seeking clarification of the role itself. The National Audit Office (2006) concluded that senior level engagement is crucial to delivering IT-enabled business change in three ways, one of which was to create a clear decision making structure with agreed lines of accountability in order for the right decisions to be made in line with business strategy. The NAO study identified 24 examples of successful projects and programmes and asked nine key questions (National Audit Office, 2006). Clarity of structure and accountability in order for the right decisions to be made in a business change environment is recognised as being aligned to the senior level role and project sponsorship undertaken by experienced and skilled individuals was cited as being essential in the case studies presented.

In this conception of *wearing two different hats*, there is a clear distinction in experience of the role that indicates a more complete understanding across the themes of awareness than was experienced in the other two conceptions. There is a more mature understanding of the role and participants who expressed this conception articulated the differences between roles, including other project management roles, and expressed expectations of how the role should be undertaken and perceived value of understanding the role profile and experience of the role. Despite the Project Sponsor role being accountable for project success (Crawford *et al.*, 2008), there is a lack of understanding across organisations of what sponsorship

and the Project Sponsor role entails and where the sponsor role is defined it is not done so in any depth, the definition can be of a role of 'authorization', or being the signatory to contracts or the route to the funding of a project, but a broader definition of what the role of Project Sponsor involves would support the premise of seeking clarity of role to gain a more complete understanding of the role itself (Van Der Molen, 2015; Englund & Bucero, 2006). There are some references to sponsorship in both the literature and the practitioner industry standards, APM® (2012) and PMBOK® (2013) amongst others, but the Project Sponsor role is not the primary focus and this could go some way to explaining why there is a need for Project Sponsors to seek clarity of the role as part of their experience of the undertaking of the role (Crawford *et al*, 2008). The project management literature has, until recently, highlighted that the role of Project Sponsor is unclear in many organisations (Englund & Bucero, 2006) and has been largely taken for granted (Crawford *et al*, 2008) and my research has identified that the Project Sponsor role is experienced in a variation of ways and with varying degrees of clarity, with two of the three conceptions of the role identified in this research having no focus of awareness of the theme of clarity of role. This can result in confusion of both processes and roles for all members of a project team, including the Project Sponsor (Sense, 2013).

The ways of experiencing the role in this conception is more complete than in conception C1 or C2 as there is an expansion of the themes of awareness. The individuals who expressed this conception experienced the Project Sponsor role at a more complete level and the central focus for this conception was the distinction of the Project Sponsor as being a separate function operating within a project management framework. The sponsorship role provides a critical link between corporate and project governance and recognising that as Project Sponsor there is a distinction of role that metaphorically has one foot in the permanent organization and one foot in the temporary project organisation (Crawford *et al.*, 2008). Across each of the themes of awareness of this conception C3 there is a focus on the requirements of the Project Sponsor role as a specific role with an identifiable profile, individuals experienced responsibilities and accountabilities within what was perceived as the scope and remit of the sponsor role. There is recognition that in undertaking the role

the responsibility to recognise the difference between the usual day to day business of the substantive senior role and that of Project Sponsor is required. Individuals expressing this conception understood the role as differentiating between day to day delivery and delivery of change. The skills required for undertaken the Project Sponsor role, as experienced in this conception, are developed through training in the role as well as experience of the role. Project Sponsors have identified the need for a broad range of skills and more priority to be given to training and development and there should have a greater emphasis on managerial rather than technical skills (Hall, Holt & Purchase, 2003). Of the three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role, conception C3 was the only one that experienced awareness in the theme of knowledge & skills set as requiring training in the role of Project Sponsor. This recognition of the role training plays in the development of the Project Sponsor acknowledges that some sponsors may not have a background or experience in project based activity and ability to undertake the role should not be assumed based on the senior substantive level an individual has reached within an organisation (James, Rosenhead, & Taylor, 2013).

#### **6.4 Variations of understanding of realising benefits in the role of Project Sponsor**

Benefits realisation was a focus of the primary question in this research study and the findings suggest that though benefits feature as a theme of expanding awareness in two of the three conceptions that describe the qualitatively different ways in which the Project Sponsor role is experienced, benefits are experienced differently. The terminology surrounding the word 'benefit' is defined differently across the literature and the vagueness with which expected benefits of a project can be defined could be, to some extent, explained by the variation of definitions that exist (Reiss *et al.*, 2006). Often, the people responsible for delivering benefits are not the same people who are responsible for directing and managing projects and programmes, this is especially true when benefits are realised well beyond the end of the delivery of a project, or when there are different levels of activity across a large and diverse group of stakeholders (Sapountzis, Yates, Kagioglou, & Aouad, 2009). When this is the case, ensuring continuity between the early identification and definition of the benefits to

be achieved at the beginning of the project, and benefits realisation at the end and in transition into normal business activity is essential.

Through the three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role identified in this research, benefit realisation was not a central focus in conception C1 – just doing the day job. The central focus for this conception is the substantive role, and the Project Sponsor role is not distinguished as anything other than an additional requirement. Across the themes of awareness, there is an emphasis on the substantive senior role and seniority of position, benefits and benefit realisation does not feature as a focus. In both this research and the project management literature there is general consensus that it is usually a senior executive that acts as Project Sponsor (Kloppenborg, Tesch, & Manolis, 2014; Englund & Bucero, 2006; Association for Project Management, 2006). With a focus in conception C1 on seniority of position it was a surprising outcome of this research that there was no focus on benefits in experiencing the Project Sponsor role, this could support the contention that one of the challenges to effective sponsorship is a failure to recognise or define the sponsor role. This, along with a lack of provision for training and guidance for executive sponsors, and the need for acceptance of the role and responsibilities by the executive sponsor would indicate there is less understanding of the remit of the role for those who are charged with undertaking it (Crawford *et al*, 2008). The experience of the Project sponsor role as being one and the same as the substantive senior role being undertaken would support the view that training and guidance, if made available to senior executives undertaking the role, would give a more complete understanding of the scope, remit and responsibilities of the sponsor role (West, 2010; Englund & Bucero, 2006; James, Rosenhead, & Taylor, 2013).

In conception C2 – the capable manager, benefits feature as a theme of awareness but the focus is on ‘identifying’ benefits. Conversely, in the literature the Project Sponsor role is responsible for, not only the identification of benefits, but also benefit realisation and this is described in expressing the stages of the project cycle and the sponsor responsibilities within those stages (Begg, 2009; Van Der Molen, 2015; Englund & Bucero, 2006). Early identification of the benefits of a project are aligned with the initial stages of project delivery and benefit realisation is often a focus during

the later stages of project delivery as the project outcomes move through business change into business as usual. In the APM Body of Knowledge (2012), the Project Sponsor role is described as being ultimately accountable for the realisation of the benefits of a project. In this practitioner guide the management of benefits, outlined as a process, describes both identifying and realising benefits as part of the benefits management process and places responsibility for this with the organisation rather than with a particular role. However, by stating that the Project Sponsor is the owner of the project business case and is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the benefits, accountability for benefits realisation sits firmly with the Project Sponsor role. In this research benefits are experienced in conception C2 as being identified within the context of the development of a project, and as being a responsibility for the Project Sponsor role. For those who expressed this conception this focus on just identifying benefits is in contrast with both the practitioner literature and project management literature and this variation of meaning in this conception could represent a less complete understanding of benefits and benefit realisation. There is however, some level of understanding of benefits in this conception, albeit a less complete understanding than that experienced in conception C3.

This is an interesting outcome of this research, participants experienced benefits in this conception with a focus on identifying benefits early in the project lifecycle, this understanding of the benefits as a theme of awareness was aligned to the responsibilities of the sponsor in delivery of the business objectives. A focus on the identification of benefits rather than identifying and realising benefits shows a variation of the way in which the theme of awareness is experienced and a less complete understanding of benefit realisation. In highlighting the main activities of the sponsor role there is agreement in the literature that one of the main functions to be undertaken is identifying and realising benefits (West, 2010; Englund & Bucero, 2006; Van Der Molen, 2015; Perkins, 2014). In this conception, C2, the central focus was on controlling and managing through experience, and this included experiencing the role of Project Sponsor as taking control of the project activities and project delivery through the structures that are in place. The act of identifying benefits is experienced as part of this undertaking, but as the focus is on the actions of project delivery,



benefit realisation, which often comes after the project has been delivered, is not focussed on in this conception. Recent empirical research exploring the success factors of projects has highlighted sponsor behaviours at different stages of the project life cycle and found that successful behaviour at the closing stage of a project included the sponsor's role ensuring that the initial reasons the project was launched are still valid (Kloppenborg et al., 2014). This would indicate that following the initial identification of benefits the realisation of those benefits would come much later in the closing stages of a project and beyond (Sapountzis et al., 2009). In order to fulfill any requirement of responsibility for benefit realisation the Project Sponsor will need a more complete understanding of benefit realisation in all stages of the project lifecycle if responsibility is aligned to the sponsor role.

Benefit realisation is a focus of conception C3 and those who experienced this conception in this research expressed a more complete understanding of the theme by expressing the responsibilities and requirements of the Project Sponsor role as being to both identify and realise project benefits. Benefit realisation is not as well developed as project management in either the literature or practitioner bodies of knowledge and, coupled with the Project Sponsor role being relatively unexplored in research literature, there is lack of knowledge on how both benefits realisation and the sponsorship role impact each other in the project environment. Given that if the practitioner bodies of knowledge, if a role or responsibility is identified, the senior executive role is identified as being responsible for benefit realisation, it would address a gap in the literature if both the sponsorship role and benefits realisation were further explored. In more recent project management literature, benefits management and benefit realisation are both placed firmly as a responsibility of the Project Sponsor role and who also owns the benefits and is accountable for them (Begg, 2009). The focus on benefits management is varied across organisations and in some there is more attention given to cost management than benefits management but benefits and how they are managed is something in which the Project Sponsor should be interested in, and they should create the right conditions for benefit realisation to take place (Van Der Molen, 2015).

Through the conceptions outlined above the participants of this study experienced benefits in terms of their understanding of the role of Project Sponsor; realising benefits was an endeavour that aligned to the role of Project Sponsor in the context of delivering projects. This was very much an undertaking that happened early in the process of project delivery and the way of experiencing benefits were in the context of identification rather than realisation.

The variation of understanding of realising benefits in conception C3 is that benefits are experienced in a more complete way with identification of benefits and benefit realisation expressed as features of focus in this conception. Benefit analysis was also a feature of focus for this conception, aligning with an understanding of the Project Sponsor role as being about the development of the early stages of an undertaking of transformational change. The benefits management cycle identified in Jenner (2012) begins with the identification and quantifying of the benefits and the accountability for the 'optimization' of benefit realisation is identified as an accountability of the Project Sponsor. Interestingly for Flyvbjerg (2006) an emphasis on realising benefits by the Project Sponsor is not necessarily as the basis for managing benefit realisation but in order to justify the costs required to deliver the project. The focus on benefits as part of 'managing and controlling' project delivery in conception C2 suggests an understanding of benefits identification as a process of project delivery which could support Flyvbjerg's theory however in this research the variation experienced across conceptions C2 and C3 indicate that the more complete structure of awareness in conception C3 of realising benefits is centred around the main focus of the conception, that of the Project Sponsor role as a distinct and separate function operating within a project management structure.

The variation of ways of experiencing benefit realisation across the three conceptions indicates a complex understanding by those undertaking the role of the benefit realisation terminology and experience of what is understood in terms of the Project Sponsor role and realising benefits.

## **6.5 Summary & Outline of contributions to knowledge and professional practice**

The original contributions to knowledge and professional practice that arise as a result of the review of the findings of this research are summarized and presented in Table

16 below, with a wider explanation of the contributions made outlined further in Chapter Seven that follows.

<b>Research Findings</b>	<b>Contributions to the fields of knowledge</b>	<b>Contributions to the fields of practice</b>
Additional initial step in the analytical approach	Contribution to the Phenomenographic research approach process of analysis for sole researchers	
Three conceptions of the role of Project Sponsor	Three qualitatively different understandings of the role of Project Sponsor.	<u>Individual level - contribution to practice:</u> Implications for self-awareness in carrying out the role of Project Sponsor. <u>Organisational level - contribution to practice:</u> Implications of leadership capabilities of individuals undertaking the role.
Seven themes of awareness of the role of Project Sponsor	Four themes of expanding awareness of differing levels of completeness across the three conceptions of the role of Project Sponsor. One theme of expanding awareness associated with only one conception, present across two different conceptions of the role of Project Sponsor.	<u>Individual level - contribution to practice:</u> Implications for understanding of maturity of experience in role <u>Organisational level - contribution to practice:</u> Implications of requirements for recruitment to role of Project Sponsor
Two levels of understanding of Benefits Realisation	Two qualitatively different understandings of realising benefits across two conceptions of the role of Project Sponsor	<u>Individual level - contribution to practice:</u> Implications of awareness of benefits and their purpose in the project environment. <u>Organisational level - contribution to practice:</u> Implications of the position of benefit realisation as an organisational outcome
An increasing and hierarchically inclusive level of understanding of the role of Project Sponsor	Individual and organisational maturity of experience of the role of Project Sponsor.	<u>Individual level - contribution to practice:</u> Implications for the understanding of experience in Project Sponsor role. <u>Organisational level - contribution to practice:</u> Implications of a more complete level of understanding of benefit realisation across project outcomes.
Knowledge of how the Project Sponsor role is experienced by Project Sponsors undertaking the role	Knowledge of 'what' and 'how' the Project Sponsor role is experienced and understood from the perspective of the Project Sponsor	<u>Individual level - contribution to practice:</u> Implications of the role of self-reflection in undertaking the role of Project Sponsor <u>Organisational level - contribution to practice:</u> Implications of organisational focus for development of the role of Project Sponsor.

**Table 16:** Summary of the contributions to knowledge and professional practice

## **6.6 Summary**

This chapter has discussed the research study findings and given an overview of the contributions to professional practice and knowledge of this research. The discussion outlined the three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role and the themes of expanding awareness that constitute the structural aspects or ways of experiencing those conceptions. The understanding of each of the three conceptions was explored in the context of the existing literature, and the variation of the themes of expanding awareness within the conceptions were discussed with a particular focus on the variations of benefits realisation. Finally, the summary of the contributions to professional practice and knowledge were presented along with an outline of both the individual level and organisational level impact. The following chapter, Chapter Seven, will present the conclusions to this research study and will expand on the summary of the contributions to knowledge and professional practice. The chapter will close with a critical examination of this research.

## **Chapter Seven – Conclusions**

This chapter has six sections. Section 7.1 presents an overview of the conclusions of this research study and considers the original aims of the research through addressing the research question. In section 7.2 the implications for practice, summarised in Table 16 in Chapter Six, are expanded further. Section 7.3 discusses the wider implications for the field of knowledge as outlined in Table 16. In section 7.4 the limitations of the research are discussed and suggestions for future research in this area are made. The methodological reflections are discussed in section 7.5 and this is followed in section 7.6 by a brief summary of the impact on my own professional practice with a reflexive view of my learning and concluding comments and reflective observations of undertaking this research study close the chapter.

### **7.1 Conclusions Overview**

In undertaking this research, I have addressed the question “What do NHS Project Sponsors understand of their role and of realising project benefits?”. The aims of the research were to explore the ways in which individuals experience and understand the role of Project Sponsor and to describe how they conceive of that role in benefits realisation. There are a number of reports and reviews that have addressed the issue of who or what is responsible for high profile project success and failure in the public sector, and in particular in the health sector, (Patel & Robinson, 2010; National Audit Office, 2006; Champion-Awwad, Hayton, Smith, & Vuaran, 2014; House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2013). This research has considered the Project Sponsor role specifically as this role is more often than not a senior executive role with responsibility for the success or otherwise of a project and is accountable to the organisation at board level. This understanding is reflected in both the project management practice literature and academic literature which goes some way to explaining why there is a focus on this role in the research in the field (Begg, 2009; Bryde, 2005; Englund & Bucero, 2006; PMI, 2016). The focus for this research has been on what is experienced in this role and how it is experienced, and, as is the case with all phenomenographic research, this focus on the *way in which* the Project Sponsor role is experienced, the structural and referential aspects of a person’s way of making

sense of the Project Sponsor role, is a focus on the meanings on which knowledge about the role rests.

In exploring the ways in which individuals experience and understand a phenomenon, in this case the role of Project Sponsor, this research has made an original contribution to practice and practice literature by adding a different dimension to the existing knowledge of the Project Sponsor role. A dimension that does not assume that individuals undertaking the role have the same or similar understandings of the role and through exploring the variation in experiencing the role, a more complex picture of meaning that captures the essence of the role has been uncovered.

The findings of this research are represented by 'outcome space' presented as Table 9 in Chapter Four, and what follows in sections 7.2 and 7.3 are the detailed descriptions of the original contributions this research makes to both professional practice and to knowledge.

## **7.2 Implications for professional practice**

There are five areas from the research findings of this study that contribute to the field of professional practice and I have identified the original contributions at both the personal and organizational level, which is expanded further below. In addressing the contributions to professional practice, I have also reflected on the impact of the findings from this research on my own professional practice and this is outlined in section 7.6.

This research has addressed the question of *what* an individual experiences and understands of a given phenomenon and in exploring *what* is experienced and *how*, this research has presented a collective outcome space that does not go beyond the outcome itself, or phenomenographic norms, to offer any recommendations or theoretical perspective. The original contributions to practice highlight the ways in which this research can go beyond the outcome space as the conclusion and offer additional benefits from this research undertaking.

### **7.2.1 Three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role**

The findings of this research have presented three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role which have implications for the individual and the organisations in which they operate. At an individual level, the variation identified in this research of how the Project sponsor role is understood adds a depth and complexity to the meaning of the role itself and allows those individuals undertaking the role an opportunity to reflect on their own practice through being more self-aware of this variation of meaning. As the literature is beginning to reflect the fundamental role played by the Project Sponsor (Helm & Remington, 2005), the ability to reflect on one's own practice through considering the variation identified through this research can only add to the knowledge of those undertaking the role. Additionally, if project leadership is not just about specific skills but about approach and how individuals relate to each other (Madsen, 2015), consideration of the variation of meaning and experience of the Project Sponsor role will add another level of understanding and meaning.

In the recent study by Bresnen et al (2015), "leaderism" as an emerging culture in the NHS was examined in relation to managerial practices and identity. Attempting to capture how some of the variations in managerial practice and organisational context influence managers' changing conceptions of their role, the study identified a "clear and consistent distinction" between management and leadership (p.459). With management skills considered to be acquired through training, practice and experience, and leadership skills seen as being acquired naturally (Bresnen et al, 2015). The clear distinction identified between the ways of experiencing the Project Sponsor role in the three conceptions of the role identified in this research, and the distinction between the managerial and leadership roles identified in the Bresnen et al (2015) study have some parallels. The Project Sponsor role is usually identified as a senior leadership role, and in the case of this research the three conceptions of role identified at the senior leadership level encompass aspects that the Bresnen et al (2015) study identified as at different levels – namely management and leadership.

At an organisational level, there are implications for leadership in terms of the leadership capabilities of the individuals undertaking the role. Throughout the literature there are references to the role of sponsorship and how this aligns with the

leadership of an organisation, placing the responsibility for sponsorship with the executive level of an organisation (Englund & Bucero, 2006; James, Rosenhead, & Taylor, 2013). The variation in experience of the role of Project Sponsor has implications for an organisations' capabilities and skill mix at the very senior level if this variation of understanding is not considered when taking account of the transformational change agenda that may be required to deliver strategic objectives. Securing the involvement and input from from different areas of an organisation requires excellent interpersonal skill to be employed and much of this is likely to take place at a senior executive level requiring the Project Sponsor to negotiate with other executive colleagues, a broader understanding of the experience of the sponsorship role will ultimately enhance the organisations ability to ensure that the interests of the organisation as a whole are reflected in the transformation goals (Schroeder, 2015).

### **7.2.2 Seven themes of awareness of the role of Project Sponsor**

The seven themes of awareness identified in the research are experienced differently across the three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role, and at varying levels of completeness. The themes of awareness contribute to the understanding of maturity of experience of an individual in the role, with the variation between the conceptions of the same theme, where this occurs, adding a dimension of depth that could otherwise be missed if themes were understood in isolation only. The seven themes represent, in this research, the structural aspect of the way of experiencing the role, which adds to the literature that is already in existence that focusses on the competencies or behaviour of individuals who undertake the role (Söderlund, 2004; Strang, 2005) . This research is adding a different dimension to the understanding of the role through identifying the themes that individuals attend to in terms of their awareness of experiencing the role. The conventional view of how projects are managed and project management per se can be said to be rooted in mainstream approaches to studying projects, with project management bodies of knowledge emphasising the role of key project players as implementers concerned with control and content (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). The identification of the seven themes of awareness purported in this research suggests an alternative lens through which



understanding of a specific role within the project management environment can be viewed and offers an alternative perspective to the current academic literature and practitioner bodies of knowledge.

For organisations who struggle with defining the role of Project Sponsor or understanding their role in developing the skills and competencies of those charged with undertaking the role, this research contributes to the field of practice and the literature by suggesting a range of themes of awareness through which the role of Project Sponsor is experienced and understood that can influence the requirements identified by organisations as being necessary for recruitment to the role. Where it exists, the current focus in the literature is on the attributes and attitudes of the Project Sponsor or sponsorship role (Helm & Remington, 2005; Strang, 2005; Kloppenborg, Stubblebine, & Tesch, 2007; Kloppenborg, Tesch, & Manolis, 2014). The themes of awareness identified offer an alternative view of the way in which the role itself is experienced which could present a different focus for organisations to consider when recruiting to the role of Project Sponsor.

### **7.2.3 Two levels of understanding of Benefits Realisation**

In addressing the question of what individuals understand of the role of Project Sponsor and what do they conceive of that role in realising benefits, this research has focussed on an aspect of the role that is often aligned to the responsibilities of the role – the aspect of benefits realisation (Kloppenborg & Tesch, 2015). Holding the executive sponsor to account for the realisation of project benefits is seen as crucial to delivering project success and ensuring that capabilities and benefits of the project are realised is quoted as a key sponsor behaviour in both the practice and academic literature (Perkins, 2014; APM, 2012c; Kloppenborg, Tesch & Manolis, 2014). An interesting and unexpected finding of this research is that despite the focus in the practice literature and academic literature on benefits realisation being a responsibility of the sponsorship role, the findings of this research suggest that there is a variation of understanding of benefits realisation for individuals undertaking the role that is expressed through the themes of awareness that constitute the ways of experiencing the role. If the value of the Project Sponsor is the outcome of the value of the project

and role to the organisation, then expanding the knowledge of the organisation in factors that may impact on the selection of individuals who will undertake the role is going to be beneficial (West, 2010). The two levels of understanding of benefits realisation identified in this research contribute to the awareness of benefits and their purpose in the project environment for individuals undertaking the role of Project Sponsor, (APM, 2012a; Van Der Molen, 2015). For organisations there are implications of the position of benefits realisation as an organisational outcome which supports the practice literature highlighting that at a project level there needs to be clarity of understanding from the onset of a project in terms of benefits realisation as to whether the project is delivering outputs or benefits (APM, 2012a; Jenner, 2012; Breese, Jenner, Serra, & Thorp, 2015). In the 2012 joint survey by APM and CIMA, 69% of respondents cited that their organisation's current approach to benefits management only provides value some of the time or never with only 42% of respondents in the same survey claiming that executive commitment during the project implementation phase most positively supports the realisation of benefits in their organisation (APM, 2012c).

There is clear focus on the role that benefits and benefit realisation plays within organisations and an alignment with the executive role and the commitment of that role to the project throughout the phases of the project.

The three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role identified in this research provide a framework of reference for benefit realisation and though only two of the conceptions, C2 and C3, experienced benefits as part of the Project Sponsor role, conception C1 with a focus on the substantive role highlights the contrast in awareness in this conception on benefits and benefit realisation. This research expands the awareness of organisations in terms of understanding the position of benefits realisation for executive sponsors who are undertaking the role and addressing gaps in recognising the role and purpose of benefit realisation in the project environment. Additionally, where there is confusion about the processes individuals would engage or about the role itself in achieving project goals, the contribution of awareness of two levels of understanding of benefits realisation adds to the practice-based learning that already exists (Sense, 2013).

#### **7.2.4 An increasing hierarchically inclusive level of understanding of the role of Project Sponsor**

The three conceptions identified in this research are presented in the outcome space in Table 9, Chapter Four. The conceptions are the varying ways in which the role of the Project Sponsor is experienced and understood and this variation manifests itself in the ways of experiencing the Project Sponsor role. The outcome space indicates a hierarchically inclusive structure across five of the themes of awareness and as such can serve as a tool for evaluating the development that may occur in an individuals' understanding, that is, how the understanding moves from one level of conception to the next, and what is experienced evolves to include both levels of conception in the collective meaning. Being aware of the hierarchical nature of the conceptions can also help individuals to be mindful of the variations in ways of experiencing the Project Sponsor role, and to consider the differences between their current way of understanding and the more advanced ways of understanding that they may be moving towards (Paakkari, Tynjälä & Kannas, 2011). For benefit realisation, one of the five themes of awareness that form the hierarchically inclusive structure, there are implications of a more complete level of understanding of benefits realisation experienced through conceptions C2 and C3. This supports the literature that identifies the sponsor as being accountable for the project benefits and their realisation on successful completion of the project. The literature suggests that identifying benefits early in the project development process is a key aspect of the Project Sponsor role, however, being committed to the project to see through the realisation of benefits when the project is successfully completed is a responsibility of sponsor role, and understanding this difference of variation of experience of benefits realisation can support individuals and organisations to achieve a successful outcome overall (Englund & Bucero, 2006; Van Der Molen, 2015; Kloppenborg & Tesch, 2015)

#### **7.2.5 Project Sponsor role as experienced by Project Sponsors undertaking the role**

The contribution to the fields of practice at both an individual and organisational level include implications for the role of self-reflection in undertaking the role of Project Sponsor and implications for the development of the role of Project Sponsor in

organisational settings. This research has centred on the role of Project Sponsor as experienced by the Project Sponsor. The focus of the research was not on the subject of the Project Sponsor role, or on the individual who is undertaking the role, but the relationship between the two. In this context the contributions to practice are twofold. Firstly, the knowledge that the research findings bring to the role of self-reflection and the implications for development of the role within organisations means that considering the three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role will give individuals and organisations a different level of awareness and perspective on the role. This is useful when considering the training requirements of individuals as it can contribute to the design of appropriate training to support individuals from the position and perspective they identify with. A lack of training in and knowledge of the role of Project Sponsor is recognised as an area of weakness, where the competencies of an individual are often 'assumed' (Zetlin, 2012; Crawford *et al*, 2008). Secondly, organisations can assess their capabilities to achieve successful outcomes in project delivery with regard to the individuals who are required to undertake the role of Project Sponsor by having an awareness of how individuals undertaking the role perceive of their role. This is particularly true when the responsibilities for realising benefits are considered with the findings of this research suggesting that benefit realisation is experienced at two different levels.

#### **7.2.6 Summary of Contributions to Professional Practice in terms of the Project Sponsor role and benefits realisation.**

The findings of this research make five distinct contributions to the field of professional practice in terms of the Project Sponsor role and benefits realisation. Firstly, the three varying conceptions of the Project Sponsor role contribute to organisational understanding of the role itself, project sponsorship in general, and how it is perceived by the individuals who are undertaking the role. Understanding the role across the three varying conceptions enables organisations and individuals to consider the appropriate leadership capabilities required when undertaking the role of Project Sponsor. Leaders in organisations who are undertaking the role of Project Sponsor can consider that undertaking in the context of the three conceptions identified in this

research leading to opportunities for self-awareness and self-reflection on their own particular approach and practice in undertaking the role.

Secondly, the seven themes of awareness identified across the three conceptions offer a framework through which the Project Sponsor role is experienced. This framework, or lens, gives insight into the maturity of experience across the three conceptions, highlighting the differing levels of experience of the same theme. This can contribute to the understanding of the requirements for recruitment to the role by offering a different perspective to the skill set required. Organisations, in considering the seven themes identified, can highlight potential skill gaps in experience when recruiting to the role, thereby adapting the recruitment criteria to fill the skills gap identified for a given project.

Thirdly, the two levels of understanding of benefits realisation identified highlight the need for awareness of benefits and their purpose in the project environment. Benefits realisation is identified within the literature (Begg, 2009; Van Der Molen, 2015; Englund & Bucero, 2006) as being a key responsibility of the Project Sponsor role; the findings of this research suggest that benefits realisation is understood and experienced differently and at differing levels across the three conceptions of the role. For organisations which are delivering transformational change through project management processes, in adopting the role of Project Sponsor there is an opportunity to consider how benefits realisation is experienced by those undertaking the role which will support the delivery of benefits as an organisational outcome.

Fourthly, the findings of this research highlight the hierarchically inclusive nature of the understanding of the Project Sponsor role which adds a level of complexity for both individuals and organisations when considering the Project Sponsor role within the project environment. An understanding of both the variation and hierarchical nature of the conceptions, along with an awareness of the relations between the themes that constitute the conceptions, adds a further depth of knowledge to project sponsorship and its place in the project environment for individuals and organisations engaging in project management activity.

Fifthly, knowledge of how the Project Sponsor role is experienced by those who are undertaking the role contributes to organisational understanding and focus for future

development of the role and its purpose in the project management environment and for benefits realisation in particular. This understanding of experience of senior leaders undertaking the role can contribute to the development of the governance structures of projects and the responsibilities of those who are tasked with the sponsorship of transformational change.

These contributions to professional practice add to the limited existing knowledge of the Project Sponsor role and benefits realisation but also offer an opportunity to challenge thinking in professional practice that, through the professional 'bodies of knowledge' and management literature, describe sponsorship against a criteria of actions and behaviours that do not consider how sponsorship is experienced by those who undertake the role. This research offers that perspective and highlights the variation of experience of the role of Project Sponsor and of benefits realisation. The following section outlines the contributions to the field of knowledge.

### **7.3 Implications for the field of knowledge**

There are six original contributions to the field of knowledge identified in the research findings, and those contributions add to the academic knowledge that already exists. In undertaking this professional doctoral research study as a practitioner I recognise the significance of making an original contribution to professional practice, but also appreciate that the findings should contribute to the field of academic knowledge also. Defining what an original contribution is can be a challenge as I myself have discovered, however I have settled on an interpretation of an 'original contribution to knowledge' that I think represents what I was hoping to achieve when I began this research journey and that is to come up with my own interpretations and categorisations that have arisen from my research question, sample, method and analytic/theoretical approach. "It is in the thinking-for-myself process that the[ir] originality lies" (Thompson, 2015). Those contributions are outlined further below.

#### **7.3.1 Additional initial step in the analytical approach**

The inclusion of an initial step to the analytical process undertaken in this research study makes an original contribution to the phenomenographic research approach

process of analysis for sole researchers. Often phenomenographic researchers work individually during the analysis stage; however some researchers argue for a more collaborative approach to the analysis and suggest that additional researchers during this phase can encourage greater open-mindedness and awareness of alternative perspectives (Bowden & Green, 2005; Trigwell, 2000). For Åkerlind (2012), there are many phenomenographic doctoral theses that indicate that high quality research in the phenomenographic approach can be achieved by individual researchers working alone. This research makes a contribution to that position by introducing an initial step to the analysis process that is not identified elsewhere in the academic literature. That step is to listen to the recorded interviews at least twice at the beginning of the analysis process. In most phenomenographic analysis the first step of the analytical process is to read the interview transcripts searching for meaning or variation in meaning (Åkerlind, 2005a; Larsson & Holmström, 2007; Bowden & Green, 2005). The introduction of a step before the reading of the interview transcripts allows the researcher to maintain focus on the individual transcripts and the collective experience throughout the analytical process (Åkerlind, 2012). This level of exposure to the data during the initial stages is particularly useful for sole researchers who will not have the opportunity to benefit from what Bowden (2005) refers to as 'devil's advocacy', whereby the analysis is subject to individual scrutiny followed by collective team discussion in the context of playing devil's advocate. As phenomenographic research is based on the collective voice of the data set, this initial step enables the researcher to contemplate the transcripts, via the recorded data, as whole before the detailed reading of the interview transcripts begins.

### **7.3.2 Three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role**

The outcome of this research is three qualitatively different understandings of the role of Project Sponsor. The three conceptions of the role contribute to the existing knowledge and have implications for how the role is understood and conceived of by those undertaking the role, organisations adopting the role as well as the wider project management community of practice. Existing literature that has addressed the role of Project Sponsor has, on the whole, focussed on the attributes, behaviour and attitudes

of individuals undertaking the role and has argued the importance of the Project Sponsor role for achieving project success, along with identifying training and lack of training in the role on project success (Kloppenborg, Tesch & Manolis, 2014; West, 2010; Sense, 2013). This research study provides an understanding of the role of Project Sponsor in terms of the *how* the role is understood and the ways in which it is experienced. The three conceptions of the role provide an opportunity for further research to be undertaken around the structural aspects identified as the themes of awareness and also to explore in other contexts and through other methods in terms of academic contribution and the contributions to the fields of practice.

### **7.3.3 Seven themes of awareness of the role of Project Sponsor**

The seven themes of awareness of differing levels of completeness identified across the three conceptions of the role of Project Sponsor provide a framework of the ways in which the role is experienced and offer new knowledge of the structural aspects of 'how' the role is understood.

The variation across the three conceptions of the Project Sponsor role gives an insight into the qualitatively different 'ways of experiencing' and portrays a level of complexity to the experience of the role that adds to the existing knowledge.

### **7.3.4 Two levels of understanding of Benefits Realisation**

Two qualitatively different understandings of realising benefits across two conceptions of the role of Project Sponsor are suggested in the findings. This contribution adds to the existing literature on benefits realisation that suggests that benefits management is poorly developed in the literature compared to other aspects of project management and the recent research that does exist has been on the whole concerned with the practices undertaken (Breese, Jenner, Serra & Thorp, 2015). In the 'modern paradigm' of management science as suggested by Darwin *et al* (2002), there are seven supporting themes that characterise the paradigm, one of which is the 'Split between thinking and doing'. When applying these characteristics to the existing management literature and guidance, and to the findings of this research, there is a



distinction between the benefits planning process and the implementation of the activities which lead to benefit realisation (Breese, Jenner, Serra & Thorp, 2015). The findings of this research would support that view, in terms of what is experienced of benefits realisation, and offer an additional level of awareness of the benefit realisation process in relation to the Project Sponsor role.

There is some consensus in the literature that benefits 'do not just happen' through delivering projects, and it is suggested that there needs to be an understanding of how benefits are to be identified and subsequently realised (Reiss *et al*, 2006). Assuming that the key individuals understand the implications of identifying and planning benefits and benefit realisation would be 'risky' (Sapountzis, Yates, Kagiolou & Aouad, 2008. P.78), however gaining commitment early in the project process is seen as smoothing the path to a successful outcome in terms of realising benefits (Bradley, 2010). Two qualitatively different understandings of realising benefits identified in two of the three conceptions of the role of Project Sponsor adds a further dimension to the limited knowledge on benefits realisation. There was, however, no experience of benefits 'in focus' in conception C1.

### **7.3.5 An increasing hierarchically inclusive level of understanding of the role of Project Sponsor**

The outcome space (Table 9, P.88) suggests a hierarchically inclusive level of experience and understanding of the Project Sponsor role identified through this research. This variation in the ways of experiencing the role suggests that there are implications of individual and organisational maturity of experience that are contributing to the understanding of the role of Project Sponsor. The structure of the hierarchy gives a framework through which learning can occur and through this hierarchy the maturity level in terms of *how* and *what* is experienced of the Project Sponsor role can be explored.

### **7.3.6 Project Sponsor role as experienced by Project Sponsors undertaking the role**

Knowledge of 'what' and 'how' the Project Sponsor role is experienced and understood from the perspective of the Project Sponsor is presented in the outcome

space, the primary finding of this research study. This offers a different dimension of focus through which to understand the role from the perspective of individuals who are undertaking the role or have experienced the role previously. The contribution to knowledge is in the direct testimony of the participants of the ways in which they experience the role and the meaning that gives to what they subsequently experience the role to be. This dimension is in contrast to literature that focuses on activities undertaken by the role (Perkins, 2005b) and behaviour and attitudes (Helm & Remington, 2005; Kloppenborg, Tesch & Manolis, 2014; Van Der Molen, 2015), and presents knowledge based on what individuals experience as opposed to what individuals do or how individuals behave in the role.

#### **7.4 Limitations and future research**

The findings of this research represent an understanding of the role of Project Sponsor that is conceived of in three qualitatively different ways and these conceptions describe how the participants understand the aspects of reality of the phenomena that is the Project Sponsor role (Marton & Pong, 2005). The conceptions form the categories of description that represent the primary outcomes of phenomenographic research, presented as an outcome space and results of this research, and the structurally significant differences that clarify how people define this aspect of their world that is the Project Sponsor role (Sherman & Webb, 1988).

As with any research undertaking there are limitations to this study including the characteristics that influenced the interpretations of the findings from this research study, and these are outlined below.

This study was limited to the collection of rich data through semi-structured interviews within one organisational context, and the principal role of the Project Sponsor was both the focus of the research and also the constituted the data source via the contributing participants, in terms of the interview data itself. Future research on the ways in which the Project Sponsor role is understood could include participants from a range of organisational contexts and from the perspective of other project management roles, such as the Project Board Members, Senior Supplier. This would

give a different perspective to the role of Project Sponsor and would produce ways of experiencing the role that may differ or agree those identified through this research. Though this research had access to over 30 individuals who identified in one way or another with the role of Project Sponsor or with the title of Project Sponsor, the selection criteria of this research narrowed the field of available participants. A broader criterion and expanded time frame would potentially give a wider participant audience the opportunity to participate in future research in this area. Finally, any of the findings in this research study may warrant further specific and deeper study and the same subject matter within a different contextual environment, whether health related or other publicly funded, private or third sector would be worthy of consideration for future research.

### **7.5 Methodological reflections**

This section of the conclusions chapter is not intended to revisit the methodological considerations outlined in Chapter Three, but rather to take the opportunity to reflect on the methodology and its application in this research study and to outline the learning I have taken from this doctoral undertaking in terms of the phenomenographic approach.

In embarking on this research study I have chosen to explore in depth an issue that is of particular interest to my professional role and in doing so I have embraced the challenge of not only undertaking an original piece of research but also to consider at length the most appropriate methodology in which to frame my research question and research undertaking. My choice of phenomenography as the research approach is outlined more fully in Chapter Three, so what follows here is a critique of the 'lessons learned' from applying this research approach to the chosen research question and subsequent analysis of the research data within the tradition of phenomenography. There are three main outcomes I take from this reflection on the methodological choice I made at the beginning of this research journey and each is outlined further below.

The focus of this research was to understand what Project Sponsors understand of their role and of realising benefits and in order to explore this I adopted a research

approach that would allow me to explore this understanding of the Project Sponsor role. I asked questions of the participants that would elicit responses to capture the essence of the awareness individuals held in relation to what they understand of the role itself and how they understand it. In phenomenographic research it is argued that there are a limited number of qualitatively different ways of experiencing a phenomenon (Marton, 1981; Åkerlind, 2012). Marton and Booth (1997) contend that the participant group for phenomenographic research should be a small number chosen from the participant population. This research involved participants from one organisation and one subject area, the Project Sponsor role. The data generated from the interviews undertaken was manageable in terms of the analysis process itself, but it was challenging in terms of the time frame the analysis spanned. In consulting the literature in search of an appropriate number of participant interviews for phenomenographic research I have found that variation in sample size is commonplace and the context of the meaning of 'participant population' is the critical factor in determining what an appropriate number of interviews is for conducting phenomenographic research. It would be helpful for novice researchers conducting phenomenographic research to have an awareness and understanding of this before they plan the data collection stage of their research.

The second area of reflection in terms of the methodology is the process of analysis undertaken in phenomenographic approach. After concluding the research and transcribing the interviews I began a process of analysis that took more than five months to complete. This is not an unusual amount of time to dedicate to the analysis process (Lupson, 2007) and for some researchers the length of time spent on the analysis along with a proactive break from the data of several months before returning to conclude the process is seen as enhancing the quality of the final data output and conclusions (Åkerlind, 2005). Given that the aim of phenomenographic research is to consider interview data as a set, a large amount of data would need to be handled in manageable components but without losing any integrity (Åkerlind, 2012).

Reasonable restrictions on the number of interviews are also suggested as a means of managing the data (Trigwell, 2000). This should be an early consideration for any

researcher undertaking the phenomenographic approach and, in particular, when very large data sets are generated through this research method.

Finally, on reflecting on the interviews questions produced for this research undertaking I considered the final questions generated following the pilot interview. I reduced the number of questions and adjusted my style of asking questions and conducting the interviews as a result of the feedback and my own observations of the pilot interview itself. Having completed the interview process of this research study I consider that some of the questions asked did not stimulate a response directly related to the question asked and on reflection this could be because of an over enthusiastic approach to allow the participants enough opportunity to fully express their response and not to close down the direction they were going in. This approach certainly added to the richness of the data but in future research I would be mindful of this when constructing the interview questions and would consider conducting more than one pilot interview in the future.

Having reached the end of this research journey I hope to embark on the beginning of my research career and in doing so I hope the learning outlined here in terms of my experience of the phenomenographic approach will serve both myself and others well by giving due consideration to the 'lessons learned'.

## **7.6 Concluding comments and reflective observations**

The undertaking of this doctoral research journey has been for me an endeavour of personal insight in which I have developed both as an individual and as a practitioner researcher. Adopting a reflexive approach to the research process has enabled me to maintain a critical distance between myself and the research data as far as possible, being fully aware of my own views and having an appreciation of how these views came into being (Radnor, 2001).

In order to meet this challenge of maintaining a critical distance I sought to engage with the data through a lens of transparency in which I have brought to the forefront my own experiences and presuppositions as a conscious exercise in 'bracketing' my 'a priori' knowledge (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).

In arguing that the phenomenographic research approach would benefit from a more rigorous consideration of how to engage with individuals lived experience, Ashworth and Lucas (2000) set out a series of guidelines for the conduct of phenomenographic research. Outlining what was suggested as a key issue for phenomenographers, to be able to justify the research approach, the guidance suggests that “the process of analysis should be sufficiently clearly described to allow the reader to evaluate the attempt to achieve bracketing and empathy and trace the process by which findings have emerged.” (p. 306). I have acknowledged earlier in this thesis the challenges I have found in achieving bracketing but recognise that I have taken steps to address this and have demonstrated what Sandberg (1997) refers to as ‘interpretative awareness’ in order to enter the lived experience of the participants of this study. In Chapter One, the introductory chapter of this research, I presented an overview of my professional career and outlined my motivation in undertaking this doctoral study. In the process of carrying out this research I have been in the privileged position of not only having access to the senior executive team as participants of this study in the specialised acute trust in which this research was carried out, but I have also had day to day access to the first-hand experiences of the same executive team as they undertook the role of Project Sponsor in a number of circumstances. I was very aware of my responsibility as researcher to ensure that this experience, which did not form part of the scope of this research study, did not impact or influence the processes and outcomes of this research. Avoiding what was described in Chapter Four, section 4.1 as ‘distortion’ (Bowden & Green, 2005) was a challenge and I have reflected on this further below.

Conducting research in one’s own organisation, described by Hewitt-Taylor (2002) as ‘insider research’, the researcher may have to deal with a range of issues and problems beyond their control. The challenges I faced as a researcher not only from within my own organisation but with participants who were my day to day work colleagues was less of an issue whilst undertaking the research interviews. The real challenge came during the analysis phase when I was experiencing at first hand the real-time interaction of the interviewees in the working environment in which they were carrying out the role of Project Sponsor, whilst at the same time attempting to analyse

the interview transcript data basing my analysis on that data only. Reflecting on this I realised that I minimised my contact with the interview participants during the analytical period wherever possible, and when that approach was not possible I consciously disengaged from conversations relating to projects, sponsorship and project benefits. On reflecting on my experience of conducting research from within the organization in which I work, I recognise that 'being an insider' gave me access to the informal organisation and all the problems that also exist, being immersed in the local situation gave me access to the 'contextually embedded knowledge which emerges from experience' (Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010, p.4). In recent months, and following the data analysis phase of the study, I have continued to be aware of the privileged position I hold in having access to both the knowledge from the data generated through this research study as well as the knowledge of being on the inside of the organisation. This has given me an opportunity to look at my own professional practice, as outlined in Chapter One, section 1.4, in terms of generating the changes to practice required in order to embed the learning from this research undertaking. The participants of this research included all of the executive director board members, who agreed that in supporting the undertaking of this research study they would welcome the opportunity to consider the research findings and outcomes and reflect on the impact and influence the findings could have within the organisation going forward. I look forward to engaging in a discussion of the research outcomes with senior colleagues over the coming months.

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## Appendices

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## **Appendix 1 Research Outline and Participation Invite:**

### **Information Sheet for DBA research undertaken by Denise Turner.**

#### **1. Working Title of Proposed Research Investigation:**

Public Sector Project Management: Exploring Sponsor behaviour and benefits realisation within projects.

#### **2. Purpose**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information and please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

#### **3. What is the purpose of this research project?**

This research will glean insight and understanding from the exploration of Project Sponsor behaviour and experience that influences decision making within the context of 'benefit realisation'. For the purpose of this research the term 'benefits' will have a specific context and meaning related to your role as a Project Sponsor in the project environment. The focus will be upon the way in which the concept of 'benefits' is understood by the interviewee, i.e. the Project Sponsor.

#### **4. Why have you been asked to take part in this research?**

You have been chosen because you are/or have been a Sponsor of a project that has been delivered within the public sector. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form and you can still withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason.

#### **6. How will the research be undertaken?**

The research methodology for this project is within the discipline of phenomenographic research and the phenomenographic method and principles will be adopted to analyse the data. The data itself will be the interview transcripts - 12 interviews will be conducted with 12 individuals. Each interview will last about an hour and will be transcribed by the researcher. Analysis will then be carried out on the data to identify categories of description that capture comprehensive meaning. Further analysis is carried out using phenomenographic techniques to present the categories of the collective interviewees conceptions or understanding of the role of Project Sponsor.

#### **7. What do you have to do?**

You are asked to make yourself available for an interview that will require about one hour of your time. The interview will be semi-structured in that there will be some questions that the researcher will ask all participants, but there may be additional

questions specific to the interviewee based on follow up to the answers given. All interview data will be collected in a single interview and you will not be required to undertake any additional interviews or provide additional answers to questions once the initial interview concludes.

**8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

The main disadvantage for participants is the time factor. It is anticipated that the time commitment will be approximately 60 minutes in duration.

**9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The participants will be given a summary of the research and an opportunity to discuss the findings. It is also hoped that this work will help to develop better processes and an understanding of how; if at all, individuals, operating within the role of Project Sponsor, make decisions to progress benefit realisation within the context of the project environment.

**10. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?**

If the research activity stops earlier than anticipated for some unforeseen reason(s) each participant will be notified and an explanation provided.

**11. Will taking part in this research project be kept confidential?**

All the information collected by the researcher, i.e. interview transcripts, during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications or in the thesis itself. The organisation(s) you refer to from current or past experience of the role will not be identifiable in the research and all references to specific places and people will be anonymised at the point of transcription. The recorded interviews will be destroyed once the research has concluded.

**12. What type of information will be sought and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?**

The researcher will transcribe the interviews to produce transcripts which will form the data of this research. The transcripts will be analysed and categories of description will be identified within the data. The researcher can provide you with a copy of your transcript if required. When all the data has been collected and analysed any findings or deeper understanding gleaned from the data will form part of the conclusions from the research. A summary of the findings from the research can be made available if required.

**13. What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results of the research will appear in the researcher's thesis scheduled for completion at the end of 2016. Before and after this date the researcher may use the results, which will be anonymous, to write papers for academic journals, other publications or for presentations to conferences.

**15. Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is being undertaken by Denise Turner, Part-time DBA Student at Sheffield Hallam University. Denise is studying for a Doctorate in Business Administration and is self-financed.

**16. Contact for further information.**

Student	Director of Studies
Denise Turner Sheffield Business School Sheffield Hallam University Stoddart Building Arundel Gate Sheffield  Email: Denise.Turner@student.shu.ac.uk	Dr. Richard Breese Sheffield Business School Sheffield Hallam University Stoddart Building Arundel Gate Sheffield  Email: R.Breese@shu.ac.uk

You will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

*Thank you for your time and consideration.*



**Appendix 2**

**DBA RESEARCH CONSENT FORM (COPY)  
Study undertaken at Sheffield Hallam University**

<b>Name of Researcher</b>
<b>Denise Turner</b>
<b>Working Title of study</b>
Public Sector Project Management: Exploring Sponsor behaviour and benefits realisation within projects

**Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study, ring the appropriate responses and sign and date the declaration at the end. If you do not understand anything and would like more information, please ask.**

- I have had the research satisfactorily explained to me in verbal and / or written form by the researcher. **YES / NO**
- I understand that the research will involve:  
Recording of semi-structured interview lasting approx. 60 minutes. **YES / NO**
- I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without having to give an explanation. **YES / NO**
- I understand that all information about me will be treated in strict confidence and that I will not be named in any written work arising from this study. **YES / NO**
- I understand that any audiotape material of me will be used solely for research purposes and will be destroyed on completion of your research. **YES / NO**
- I understand that you will be discussing the progress of your research with others at Sheffield Hallam University **YES / NO**

I freely give my consent to participate in this research study and have been given a copy of this form for my own information.

**Signature:**

.....

**Date:**

.....

### Appendix 3 Analysis stage - Photographic record of analytical steps:

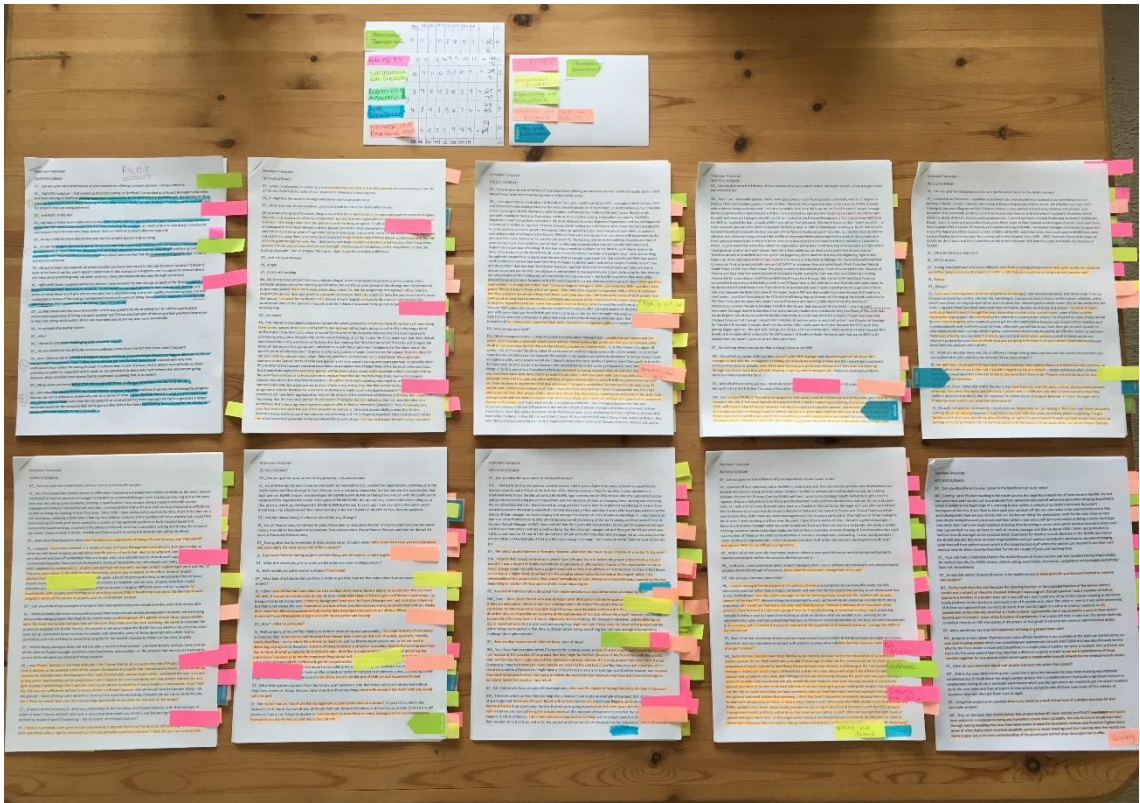


Photo 1: Sample of coding of transcript data

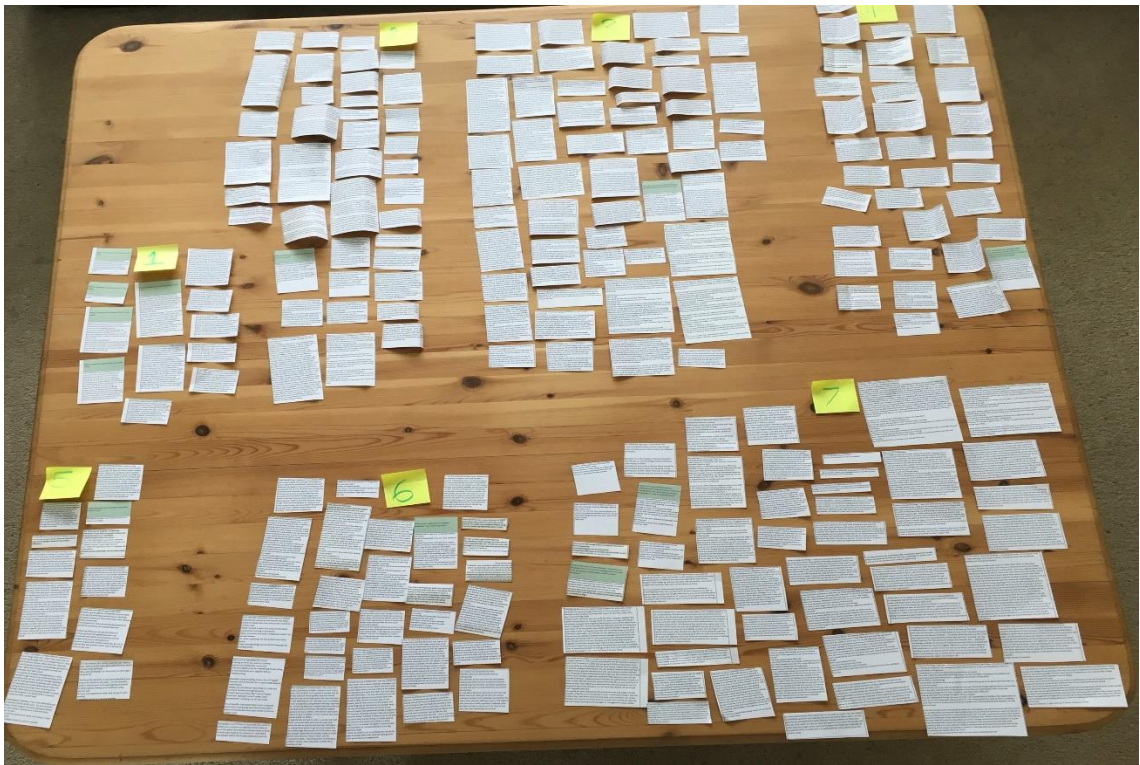


Photo 2: Sample of sorting of initial descriptive themes

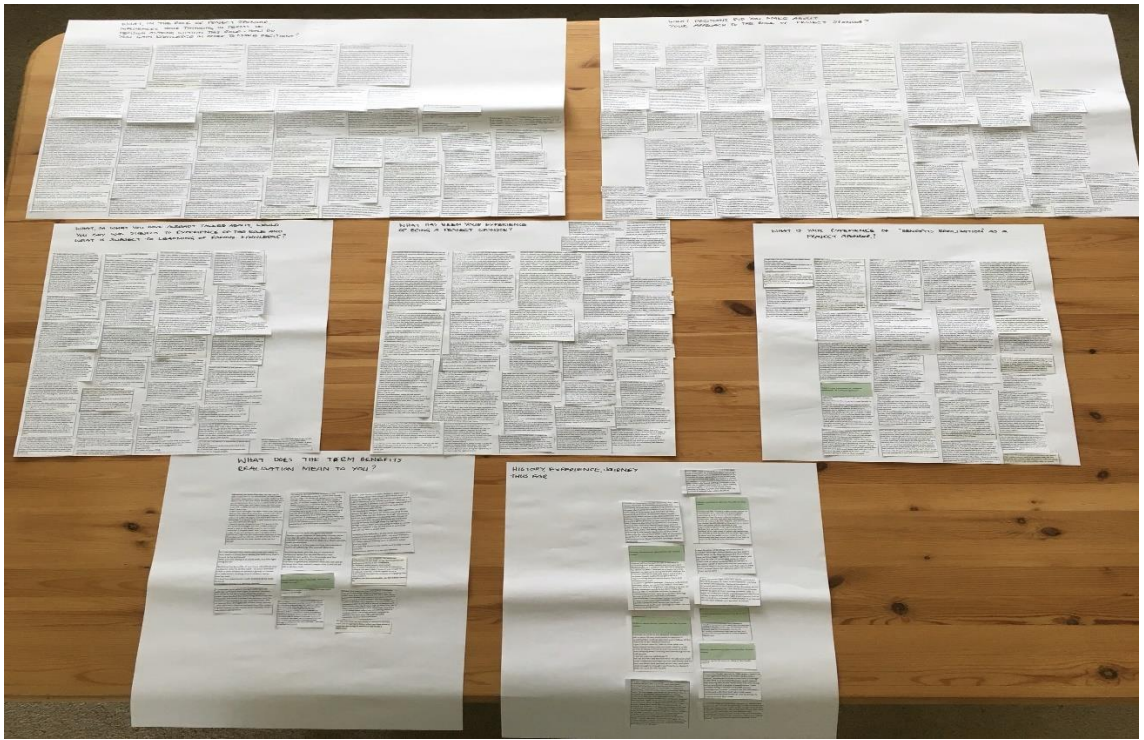


Photo 3: Sample of initial development of the categories of description.