



*Aligning resources with business need : Re-evaluation through engaging managers in guided self-reflection.*

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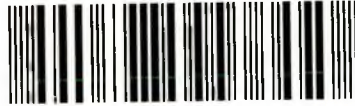
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**ALIGNING RESOURCES WITH BUSINESS NEED:  
RE-EVALUATION THROUGH ENGAGING MANAGERS  
IN GUIDED SELF-REFLECTION**

Andrew Norman Green

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of

Doctor of Business Administration  
Sheffield Hallam University

March 2007

For Lynne

*Heartfelt thanks for your support and your encouragement*

# Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Preamble.....	2
1.2	The Research Question and Objectives .....	4
1.3	Conceptual Background to the Thesis .....	5
1.3.1	A Structuralist Beginning .....	6
1.3.2	Structuralist Influences .....	10
1.3.3	A Move towards the Contextualist .....	13
1.3.4	Contextualist Influences.....	17
1.4	Structure of the Thesis .....	20
1.5	Contribution to Business and Professional Knowledge or Practice.....	23
2	Engagement through Context.....	24
2.1	Transaction-cost Economics-based Theory .....	25
2.1.1	The Coasian Insight .....	26
2.2	Resource-based Theory.....	30
2.2.1	The Firm as an Administrative Organisation.....	30
2.2.2	The Firm as a Knowledge Environment .....	32
2.3	Evolution-based Theory.....	35
2.3.1	Evolutionary Process .....	36
2.3.2	Cultural Evolution.....	39
2.4	Engagement in a Changing Business Context .....	41
3	Research Methodology & Method.....	46
3.1	Reality through Self-reflection.....	47
3.1.1	Home and Education.....	48
3.1.2	20 year Military Career.....	49
3.1.3	10 year Corporate Career .....	50
3.1.4	Summary .....	52
3.2	Personal Research Paradigm.....	53
3.2.1	Positivist Orthodoxy .....	53
3.2.2	Anti-Positivist / Interpretive Social Science .....	56
3.2.3	Critical Social Science .....	57

3.2.4	Discussion.....	59
3.3	Grounded Research Methodology & Method.....	64
3.3.1	Grounded Theory.....	65
3.3.2	Action Research.....	68
3.3.3	Reflexivity and Narrative Therapy .....	70
3.3.4	Action Learning .....	75
3.3.5	Summary.....	79
3.4	Conclusions – The Chosen Methodology and Method.....	80
3.4.1	Chosen Research Methodology .....	80
3.4.2	Chosen Research Method .....	81
4	Design of the Research Method: Guided Self-Reflection.....	82
4.1	Semi-Structured Conversation-style Interviews .....	84
4.1.1	Conversation Construction.....	84
4.1.2	Conversation Management .....	89
4.1.3	Conversation Capture.....	91
4.1.4	Conversation Interpretation .....	92
4.1.5	Conversation Feedback.....	94
4.1.6	Initial Model of GSR Approach.....	95
4.1.7	Data Records.....	95
4.2	Selection of the Research Participants .....	96
4.2.1	Selection of the Participant Organisation .....	97
4.2.2	Selection of Research Participants.....	103
4.2.3	Programme of Conversations.....	108
4.3	Attitudinal Ratings.....	108
4.3.1	Focus of the Attitudinal Ratings Approach .....	109
4.3.2	Ratings Scale.....	110
4.3.3	Ratings Instrument .....	111
4.3.4	Interpretation and Feedback.....	112
4.4	Summary .....	112
5	Presentation & Contextual Interpretation of Initial Narratives.....	114
5.1	Presentation of Initial Narratives .....	115
5.1.1	Bennie – Cabinet Portfolio Member for Resources.....	115
5.1.2	Bernie – Cabinet Portfolio Member for Strategic Planning.....	118
5.1.3	Daniel – Strategic Director Resources .....	121
5.1.4	Guy – Strategic Director Community Services .....	124
5.1.5	Jean – Strategic Director Children and Young People .....	127
5.1.6	Nikita – Head of Service, Schools Policy Performance & Planning .....	131
5.1.7	Lucy – Head of Service Property Services & Contracts.....	136
5.1.8	Elton – Director of Corporate Resources.....	139
5.1.9	John – Director of Corporate Resources.....	143

5.2	Contextual Interpretation of Initial Narratives.....	146
5.2.1	Dominant Discourse.....	147
5.2.2	The Leafy-Green Culture.....	147
5.2.3	Political Dimension.....	147
5.2.4	The Comfort Zone.....	148
5.2.5	Bunker Mentality .....	148
5.2.6	The Member / Officer Tension .....	149
5.2.7	Climate of Big-Project Failure.....	149
5.2.8	Self-Survival .....	150
5.2.9	Performance Management and Managing Performance.....	150
5.2.10	The ‘Doing’ Disease .....	151
5.2.11	Parochial-ness .....	151
5.2.12	Accountability.....	151
5.2.13	Treacle and Turgidity.....	152
5.2.14	The Taken-for-Granted Syndrome.....	153
5.2.15	The Built or Socially-Constructed Environment?.....	153
5.2.16	Personal Frustrations.....	154
5.3	Boundaries and Design .....	155
6	Presentation & Validation of Reflections on the Narratives.....	157
6.1	Re-Told Narratives in Business Contexts .....	158
6.1.1	The Nature of ‘Support’ .....	158
6.1.2	Intangibles – The Staff Away Day.....	159
6.1.3	Resource Decision-Making.....	160
6.1.4	Contract Management and Facilities Management.....	160
6.1.5	Unwritten Priorities.....	160
6.1.6	Whose Money? .....	161
6.1.7	Perceptions of Need .....	161
6.1.8	Expectation Management.....	162
6.1.9	Culture Shift – the Stumbling Block.....	162
6.1.10	Moving through Treacle .....	163
6.1.11	Will they Notice? .....	163
6.1.12	No Win Situation?.....	163
6.2	Interpretation via Common Participant Themes .....	164
6.2.1	Linking Activities to the Core Business .....	165
6.2.2	Changing from ‘siloism’ to ‘corporateness’ .....	167
6.2.3	Investing in the Working Environment.....	168
6.2.4	Linking Resources to Corporate Planning .....	170
6.2.5	Understanding Customers’ Needs.....	171
6.2.6	Viewing a Process as a Valuable Asset .....	172
6.2.7	Changing to a Client Ethos .....	173
6.2.8	Providing Choices.....	174
6.2.9	Changing from Cost to Value .....	175
6.2.10	Linking Major Initiatives .....	176



6.3	Parts 3 Conversations - Participant Reaction to Methodology and Method	177
6.4	Themes Significance Ratings – Reinforcing & Validating Awareness	180
6.4.1	Participant Engagement	183
6.4.2	Themes and their Organisational Needs	184
6.4.3	Priority and Utilisation of Resources	186
6.4.4	Utility of the Research Logic and Technique	187
6.4.5	Summary	188
7	Conclusions and Reflections	190
7.1	The Research Question	190
7.1.1	The Need for Engagement through Context	191
7.1.2	A Logic and Technique of Inquiry that Engages	192
7.1.3	Pilot Design and Deployment	196
7.1.4	Potential Value of the GSR Approach	201
7.2	Contribution of the Results of the Pilot	207
7.2.1	Professional Knowledge & Practice	208
7.2.2	Business Knowledge & Management Practices	209
7.2.3	Personal Knowledge & Practice	210
7.2.4	Research Epistemology & Methodology	212
7.3	An Exciting Future	212
	References	214
	Appendices	222
	Appendix A Themed Quotations from Conversations	223
	Appendix B Conversations Programme Interpretation	235
	Appendix C Themes Significance Ratings Research Instrument	239
	Glossary	243

# List of Figures and Tables

## Figures

Figure 1.1 – The Business Support Environment .....	14
Figure 1.2 – Business Support Environment Alignment .....	15
Figure 4.3 – Initial Model of GSR Approach .....	96
Figure 4.4 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment – The Harder Test .....	102
Figure 6.5 – The Revised Model of GSR Approach .....	189

## Tables

Table 2.1 – Characteristics & Contexts of the Dominant Theories of the Firm .....	43
Table 3.2 – Paradigms of Positivism, Interpretive Social Science and Critical Social Science ...	61
Table 3.3 - Summary of Differences among the Three Approaches to Research, Neuman (1997) .....	63
Table 3.4 – Three Major Approaches to Action Research .....	69
Table 6.5 – Themes Significance Ratings Results .....	182
Table 7.6 – GSR Interpretation of the Generic Stages of Narrative Therapy .....	205
Table 7.7 – GSR Interpretation of the Stages in the Action Learning Process .....	207
Table B.8 – Programme of Visits .....	236
Table B.9 – Parts 1 Conversation Data .....	238

# Acknowledgments

The author wishes to express his sincere appreciation to Professor If Price and Professor John McAuley for their supervisory assistance in the preparation of this manuscript. In addition, special thanks go to the course tutors for their constant guidance and encouragement, particularly Dr Barry Haynes and Dr Phil Askham whose own doctoral pursuits over this period were such an inspiration. Thanks are also due to the staff at the Facilities Management Graduate Centre for their consistently high level of professional and administrative support provided over the last four years.

Particular gratitude must go to the author's research participants for their time and insightful and enthusiastic contribution which so enriched the research outcome. Regrettably, but to preserve confidentiality undertakings, they must remain anonymous.

The Author has also greatly appreciated the friendship of his fellow members of the cohort, Mrs Rachel Macdonald and Mr Joe Nethercoat, and valued their academic and morale-boosting support.

# Abstract

This research addresses whether guiding managers to consider the link between their use of resources and the achievement of their corporate objectives can enable them to conceive of their business differently. The question arises from the Facilities Management (FM) narrative on the identification of resources and the pursuit of their alignment with the changing needs of the business for its support environment. This narrative comprises the two end-members of a spectrum: The dominant, structuralist perspective which sees facility managers constructing the support environment to align with the needs of the business to resolve FM issues; and the contextualist perspective which sees the need to engage business managers in re-evaluating their issues in the context of their support environment.

The need to engage managers through the context of the business is demonstrated through an interpretation of a review of three dominant theories of the firm. An approach that engages managers is then determined through framing the philosophical research paradigm of an FM Contextualist, through self-reflection and literature review. The resultant research method is labelled Guided Self-reflection (GSR) and allows the study of the perceptions and narratives of managers regarding their business, the 'resources' supporting it, and any benefits of seeking to align one with the other. The GSR approach is piloted with selected Local Government Authority Members and Officers using the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment as a convenient context. The research concludes that GSR did engage these senior managers who did then start to think differently about their business.

This research makes a significant contribution to business and professional knowledge and practice as a source of reference concerning the GSR approach: a technique that aims to increase management awareness of the potential for achieving business performance benefits by seeking an appropriate alignment of the support environment with the needs of the business.

# Confidentiality Agreement

Personal copies of the data disc supporting this thesis have been sent to each Examiner, the Director of Studies, and the Second Supervisor. The data on the compact disc reveals the true identity of each participant. Each recipient of the disc is therefore asked to please respect the Confidentiality Agreement that exists between the author, Sheffield Hallam University, and the participant organisation, in not giving any other person access to this data, or revealing in any other way the true identity of the Participants. Any other readers of this thesis can obtain a copy of the data disc, if necessary, by e-mailing the author at [agreen395@aol.com](mailto:agreen395@aol.com).

# 1

## Introduction

*“And a man said, Speak to us of Self-Knowledge. And he answered saying: Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights. But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart’s knowledge.”*

Kahlil Gibran (1923)

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This quotation from Kahlil Gibran<sup>1</sup> captures well the intent of this thesis. Reflection by me of my self-knowledge has led me to believe that I can help people improve their business performance through helping them embrace an understanding of Facilities Management (FM)<sup>2</sup>. The ‘thirst for the sound of [my] heart’s knowledge’ is the desire to put that belief into practice: This thesis attempts to do that.

This introductory Chapter starts with a preamble that positions the thesis as the latest stage in my personal and professional development. The purpose and focus of the thesis and the object of the inquiry that emerge from this personal and professional development are then given, together with the research question and objectives. Next, the conceptual background to the study is given in support of the research focus and the structure of the thesis. An introduction to Chapters 2 to 6 is then given together with the contribution they make in seeking to address the research question. The

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<sup>1</sup> The quotations at the start of each chapter are taken from ‘The Prophet’, by Gibran (2001). Born Gibran Khalil Gibran in 1883 in what is now Northern Lebanon, he published ‘The Prophet’ in 1923 and it is considered a masterwork of self-understanding. Gibran died of cancer in 1931 at the age of 48, in New York. All seven quotations together comprise his piece on self-knowledge and happen to have a particular relevance to each chapter and to the whole thesis.

<sup>2</sup> This is not intended to be interpreted as implying that this research uses the qualitative research method referred to as autoethnography. This point is further clarified in Chapter 3.



closing section describes the contribution this thesis intends making to personal, business and professional knowledge and practice.

## **1.1 Preamble**

I was introduced to FM practice in 1996. On leaving the Royal Air Force (RAF) that year I learnt that many of the responsibilities of being the Officer Commanding the Administration Wing of an operational flying Station or RAF Hospital were quite similar to those of being a Manager of a large, complex Facility. My understanding of the contribution that FM can make to business performance has changed over the years. Initially, through a consultancy remit, I was helping managers identify a more efficient and effective way of procuring and managing their support services. This expanded into helping them make decisions about the selection and use of a wider range of resources in terms of how those resources directly support the needs of their business. Optimising such an alignment of resources with business need became the next objective which I would encourage managers to pursue. This placed an emphasis on determining the value of the contribution of a given resource in terms of its contribution to achieving certain business needs or objectives.

Meanwhile, I was starting to adopt a perspective of FM that envisioned an integration and co-ordination of resources in such a way as to create a support environment. The management effort was then in creating and managing such a support environment in alignment with the needs of the business. This more holistic thinking was proving difficult for business managers to accept, and even if accepted, to then pursue within their organisation. There seemed to be a chasm between what the FM community believed they could contribute to improving the performance of the business, and what the business community believed the FM community was capable of.

This development in my perspective of FM represented a very structured approach, albeit one that I had attempted with some success to put into practice. However, the approach was also proving perilous for a consultant: Quite often the reasons for non-alignment that emerged from this approach could expose weaknesses in business processes some of which might be the responsibility of the manager (my client). I started to consider whether a more effective application of this aligning of resources

with business need might come from first building awareness in managers of the role of FM in support of their business.

I entered the DBA studies with this structured perspective of FM and the support environment in mind. My objective was to develop a process which could determine the degree of alignment of the support environment with the needs of the business at a point in time, and over time. In this way, I believed I could engage business managers in then closing the gap between the current and optimal alignment positions. A review of current professional and academic FM literature in the early years of the DBA studies changed this perspective and this objective.

This introduced me to the notion of the context within which an approach is set being a significant determinant of the outcome. It suggested that instead of appealing to the business to apply an FM perspective, within an FM narrative, it might be more effective to engage the Business in applying the tenets of an FM approach and within a more strategic business context. Some of the literature discussed this more contextual perspective of a support environment but I found no examples of its actual application within the FM domain. I presumed this contextual perspective and any attempts to operationalise it to still be in a relatively early stage of development. Conceptually, this thesis seeks to operationalise the perspective of the support environment held by contextualists.

This research inquiry is a continuation of a personal journey. It represents a major advance in my approach in helping managers understand the way in which 'FM' philosophy generally, and an understanding of the support environment specifically, can contribute to the business process.

The purpose of this inquiry therefore has two dimensions: Business Administration and Professional FM. The primary purpose of the inquiry is to enable managers to conceive of more effective and efficient routes to meeting their business objectives by re-evaluating those routes from a different, context-relevant perspective. The secondary purpose of the inquiry is to increase management awareness of the FM profession and its philosophy. The main focus of the inquiry therefore becomes the



development and piloting of a generic process which meets the primary purpose of the inquiry: The name I have given to this process is Guided Self-Reflection.

## **1.2 The Research Question and Objectives**

The object of inquiry for this thesis has evolved over the last four years. Initially, the object was a structured approach to the optimisation<sup>3</sup> of the business support environment. Literature reviews changed the perception of the support environment to one that was more contextual within a narrative of the business. This further evolved into the development of a methodology to enable managers to seek an appropriate alignment of resources with business need. The object of inquiry became:

*The narrative on the identification of resources and whether a guided reflection process helps the pursuit of their alignment with the changing needs of the business.*

Business justification for such an object of inquiry could reside in the route to identifying resources which may result in a more effective and efficient use of those resources: It may also reside in the actual pursuit of aligning those resources with the needs of the business which may reveal improvements in the way corporate objectives are met. Either or both of these routes may, therefore, represent sources of value-creating strategies, and may even confer some degree of competitive advantage on the host organisation.

The research question therefore becomes:

*Can guiding senior managers to consider the link between their use of resources and the achievement of their corporate objectives enable them to conceive of their business differently?*

The research objectives that will help address this question stem from an emphasis on the business context; on the guiding and enabling of managers; and on the need to develop and pilot a way of engaging the managers in the process. Accordingly, the following research objectives have been set:

- To demonstrate the need for engagement through the *context* of the firm;
- To devise a logic and technique of inquiry that engages managers;

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<sup>3</sup> The act of bringing to the most desirable or most efficient state

- To design and deploy a pilot version of the technique of inquiry; and
- To reflect on the potential for the technique to be of business benefit.

The next section describes the two ‘end-members’ of the same continuum: the structuralist and the contextualist perceptions of the support environment. In providing this conceptual background to the inquiry, support and some justification is given for the focus and objectives of the research, and also for the structure of the thesis.

### **1.3 *Conceptual Background to the Thesis***

The conceptual background to this study resides in one of the two mainstream alternative conceptual positions concerning the ‘business support environment’, its ‘resource management processes’, and the objective of ‘aligning those resources with the needs of the business’. The terms chosen by the author for these positions are ‘structuralist’ and ‘contextualist’ and are the two end-members of an FM spectrum. The Structuralist perspective might be considered dominant, though the need for the views of the Contextualist has been highlighted in different ways.

The Structuralist perspective of the support environment is more akin to that of traditional FM. It allows for the creation of a support environment through the integration and co-ordination of the objective, tangible assets comprising a built environment – its people, processes, and work spaces. It seeks to operationalise the perspective through optimising the support environment. Optimisation is sought through trying to align the support environment with the needs of the business through a business-inward-facing, issue-resolution specific approach aimed at reducing operating costs, and increasing the value for money spent on the support environment. The Structuralist perspective has an explicit, FM problem-solving focus, and its motivational direction is as a response to business issues. This school of thought does the FM thinking for the business and tries to *push* itself into the business.

The Contextualist perspective of the support environment is an organisation and business context-specific perspective. It also allows for the creation of a support environment but through the integration and co-ordination of the subjective, intangible assets comprising a support environment – the sub-environments of its people,

processes, and work spaces. It seeks to operationalise the perspective through a narrative-based, business context-specific approach. It is business-outward-facing and designed to be context-specific in seeking to explain and understand the business issues from a support environment perspective. It has a business issue focus, is implicit, and its motivational direction is to enable managers to conceive of their business differently. This school of thought enables the business to do the FM thinking and thereby allows itself to be *pulled* into the business. Furthermore, if the support environment is placed in the context of *being the business* (rather than simply supporting the business) then the contextualist FM perspective is used primarily to inform *routes* to the resolution of business issues, rather than to actually resolve FM issues.

These two alternative conceptual positions of the support environment emerge from the discussion below. The discussion supports the view that only the dominant perspective has been operationalised to any extent. Further discussion suggests a potential for significant business and professional benefit to be gained by seeking to operationalise the views of the Contextualists. Through this discussion a rationale is offered for this thesis seeking to develop and pilot the generic process of Guided Self Reflection primarily within the business domain, and to a lesser extent the FM domain.

### **1.3.1 A Structuralist Beginning**

In the late 1990s business and academic writing was emphasising that FM as a discipline, and as an organisation, had to evolve to a higher strategic level if the business was to reap most benefit from it (Price and Aklaghi, 1999; Hinks and Hanson, 1998; Nutt, 1999; Grimshaw, 1999). In his MBA dissertation entitled “Strategic Facilities Management through Cultural Change”<sup>4</sup> the author identified three main obstacles that appeared to be frustrating the realisation of this evolution:

- A lack of appreciation and understanding of the full business potential for both FM and non-FM organisations which a strategic capability within the FM industry would represent;

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<sup>4</sup> Green, A. N. (1999), “Strategic Facilities Management through Cultural Change”, Sheffield Hallam University, Dissertation for the Post-Graduate MBA in Facilities Management, Student Registration No. 98013137.

- A sense that there were external barriers to these higher-level aspirations of the FM organisation; and
- A reluctance by some organisations to assimilate or recognise a facilities planning capability within their business planning process.

The author noted the recognition by Nutt (1999) of a need to research these obstacles which seemed based on personal and organisational perceptions, and in particular:

- The degree to which FM contributes to the business process currently and potentially;
- The aspirations of the FM industry/providers;
- The opinions/assessments of the FM contribution to the business of strictly non-FM organisations, but including related industries such as property; and
- The significance to its members of the FM industry being recognised for its strategic contribution.

The focus of the MBA research was the role of such personal perceptions in effecting or resisting organisational change. The justification of the research area was that the changing facilities needs of businesses might be better met through seeking a consensus on the role of FM in support of the business: the consensus needing to be by those in the business, property and FM disciplines. The hypothesis tested was that,

*"A cultural change is necessary if those in the business management, property management, and facilities management disciplines are to work as a partnership in meeting the strategic business requirements of the client for a complete facilities solution."*

The Delphi Method (e.g. Linstone and Turoff, 1975; Sackman, 1975; Khan, 1993) was used because it systematically solicits and collates informed opinions from a group of experts on a particular subject. The Method envisages convergence toward consensus forecasts among a group of experts by controlled feedback. Anonymity is sought to reduce inter-personal bias and is assured through the use of questionnaires and electronic mailing. The controlled feedback is achieved through a series of iterations, in each of which participants have the opportunity to see the group responses to the

previous iteration. A statistical group response ensured that the opinion of each expert was represented in the final report.

The following specific conclusions from this earlier study became drivers of this DBA thesis:

*"The research bias in terms of the [FM] perspective and Facilities Business Interface had proved useful ... However, the subsequent research would be enriched by moving the emphasis away from a platform of FM, or being an FM, to that of organisational change within business."*

*"More analysis of the linkage between the response and its author would reveal valuable insight into cultural and organisational change. The responses were strongly influenced by the importance to that business of the subject matter."*

*"If a 'business support environment', 'accommodation' approach to supporting a business is recognised and adopted more widely, then [a] Facilities approach could more readily contribute to core business development."*

*"Change management is best achieved through enlightenment which then enables paradigm shifts."*

The results suggested that whilst the FM bias was intentional, it detracted from seeking a common route to improved business performance. Participants placed the importance of the subject matter in terms of its value to the business. Therefore, the contribution of a facilities approach to core business development depended upon creating the link between the 'accommodation', or 'environment', and its support of the business. Similarly, the focus for such a change should not be on managing its imposition, but on the creation of a change culture brought about by enabling Management to gain insights into the role of such environments in supporting the business: Placing the contribution of the support environment in a business context.

Green and Price (2000) tried to start this 'enlightenment' in their article based on the findings from the MBA dissertation. They noted that whilst the research was conceived as finding expert common ground on the future evolution of FM, it actually revealed differing perceptions of the FM role rooted in different backgrounds, mind-sets, and cultures, and held by the business, property, and FM disciplines.

They placed the research in context by emphasising how globalisation was requiring businesses to be agile: to be flexible and capable of timely change. A focus was being placed on the way in which business resource decision making was conducted in response to the nature of the business support environment. This desired environment



required the management of an integration and co-ordination of people, place and process. It also required the integration of business, property and facilities management. It was noted that these levels of integration were difficult to achieve because of the differences in organisational and professional cultures. Strategic facilities provisioning was offered as a means of addressing both types of integration.

The context included the Government's Public Private Partnership/Private Finance Initiative as an example of the need to bring together disciplines from different backgrounds, such as business strategy, property management, and facilities management, and to require them to work as a team at strategic, tactical and operational planning levels. The chasm dividing the current FM offer comprising operational and tactical components from the strategic business resource component was highlighted.

The way to clear this chasm was suggested as being twofold: the FM organisation had to demonstrate its ability to contribute to the strategic business development process; and business organisations had to recognise and embrace such a resource. This thesis pilots an approach which endeavours to achieve both by setting business support resourcing in the context of meeting business objectives and resolving business issues.

Another finding from this Delphi study was also embraced by the research approach. The context in which the experts placed culture drove the nature of their answers. Their attitude to change, and its assumed impact, were determined by personal knowledge and understanding of the subject. Additionally, views on change could relate not so much to the achievement of the desired change, but rather the relative ease of achieving such change through having a particular culture. This thesis seeks to engage participants in critically reflecting on their personal knowledge and understanding of their business from a support environment perspective. In this way it is possible that their attitude to strategic FM, and its potential for impacting their business, could lead to them embracing change rather than having to be changed.

Finally, Green and Price conclude that it was likely to have been the differing individual perceptions of FM, by those within as well as by those without FM, that caused the disparity in responses and that constituted the real issue to be tackled. So

whilst a strong agreement emerged that FM was starting to be accepted as a benefit to businesses, the debate centred on the perception of managers as to the management level at which FM does, should, or aspire to operate at: This rather depends upon the understanding those managers have of the role and scope of FM. Again, this thesis draws on these findings in the way it considers the perceptions managers hold of business support resources and of the merits in seeking to align those resources with the needs of their business: by placing FM and its support environment in the context of a business issue rather than an FM issue.

### **1.3.2 Structuralist Influences**

The Government's Private Finance Initiative (PFI), fundamental changes in the concepts of business accommodation, diversification of the rules governing the property market, and the increasing sophistication in outsourcing, are combining "to promise a much greater variety and more flexible set of business support environments for the future." (Jones, 2000) The language of 'business support environments' is used generally and specifically. It often translates into 'working environment' and 'workplace' but is not so commonly interpreted as an intangible environment, and even less often seen as a context within which to view the business. Jones recognises that changes in the workforce are resulting in 'super-producers' who require top-quality environments: or specific users of the support environment with specific requirements of that environment. It is not clear though whether he is really referring to the result of providing 'business support services' thereby creating a 'serviced environment' rather than creating a 'support environment'. The common feature however is that the environment has to be tailored to the needs of the user, "In all sectors, building users want space in the right but potentially changing locations on flexible terms reflecting their business needs." Jones, like other leading FM practitioners refers to 'optimisation': In his case (2000) the optimisation of the space within a property strategy. The intent seems to be the literal meaning of "to make as efficient as possible" (The Chambers Dictionary, 1999).

Measurement of FM performance is an essential element in an FM contract but rarely is seen in the context of a direct contribution to the achievement of business goals.

More often it is the subject of developing variable ways in which to measure service performance as a component of business performance (Hinks and McNay, 1999).

Then (1999) moves closer to the contextualist position in his study “to explain the need for strategic business planning to incorporate and, indeed, integrate the facilities dimensions of business delivery.” He offers an integrated resource management view of FM based on a comprehensive survey of published literature and a series of in-depth interviews (1996). As FM matured, he recognised a shift towards

*“resource integration with the emphasis on provision of enabling working environment where the issues of people, processes and property are elements of the same problem seeking a common solution.”*

An emerging theme which he believed warranted further research was,

*“the need for the development of conceptual models and frameworks for integrating the emerging evaluation tools and management development skills in business resource management, as they are applied to the provision and management of the corporate operational assets and associated facilities support services in their business settings.”*

The inference is a widening of the interpretation of operational assets and support services into business resources and within a business context. Then (1999) also sees a requirement for the consideration of the facilities implications of business decisions: He does so through the promotion of “meaningful dialogue between business corporate planners and real estate/facilities personnel.” Furthermore he identifies the requirement to raise awareness of the importance of closely aligning the real estate resource to the strategic intent. So although his interest is implicitly ‘real estate’ assets, Then is articulating the tenets of integrated resource, dialogue, and alignment. He still envisages an FM role that adds value by providing innovative and ‘facilities’ solutions to business challenges but sees the skilful manipulation of all business resources as being “the optimum balance between people, physical assets and technology.

In a paper ostensibly on FM as a profession, Grimshaw (2003) notes that within the diversification of the FM ‘profession’ methods from other disciplines such as linguistics are used. He cites the use by Markus and Cameron (2002) of discourse analysis to argue that “the statements made about the built environment reveal the way it is conceptualised.” This indicates an awareness, and acceptance, of these methods, but not of their potential active use within the business context.



In his editorial on 'New Alignments in FM', Nutt (2004) reflected on the four interrelated themes of the second 'Futures' conference held in March 2004. One of these themes was 'New Alignments' and was chosen for the title of that special edition of 'Facilities'. Nutt asks three questions of 'New Alignments',

- "How can we radically progress the ways in which property, facilities and services might be managed to support and sustain business and public sector endeavours of all kinds and across all sectors?"
- "What are the major business opportunities and professional challenges here?"
- "What new alliances and alignments need to be put in place now?"

The discussion around the support environment and its alignment with the needs of the business is one attempt at answering the first question. In this context, the support environment embraces 'property, facilities and services'. The ability to reveal to business managers the contribution of 'FM' to the performance of their business addresses in part the second question. The subject of this thesis starts to address the third question in the sense that by re-evaluating alignments such as the support environment, or integrated resource management, with the needs of the business improvements to existing alliances and alignments might be revealed.

In his own submission to this edition of *Facilities* Nutt promotes the need for property and facilities management to be aligned "as an essential and integral part of Business Resource Management, *alongside Business Finance, HR and IT.*" (Emphasis added). This draws attention to the need to understand clearly what is, and what is not, being aligned. Rather than excluding Business Finance, HR and IT from Business Resource Management, this paper promotes the support environment as comprising all resources. Such a view might also be seen as consistent with treating the 'FM' contribution to business within a total business context.

Referring to the paper by Green and Jack (2004), Nutt (2004) accepts the concept of the business support environment to the extent that he believes that that "ongoing research could revolutionise our understanding of the alignments, critical and non-critical, between the support environment and business success." However, whilst that research had a business context, it was seeking to put into practice a structuralist view of the support environment.

### **1.3.3 A Move towards the Contextualist**

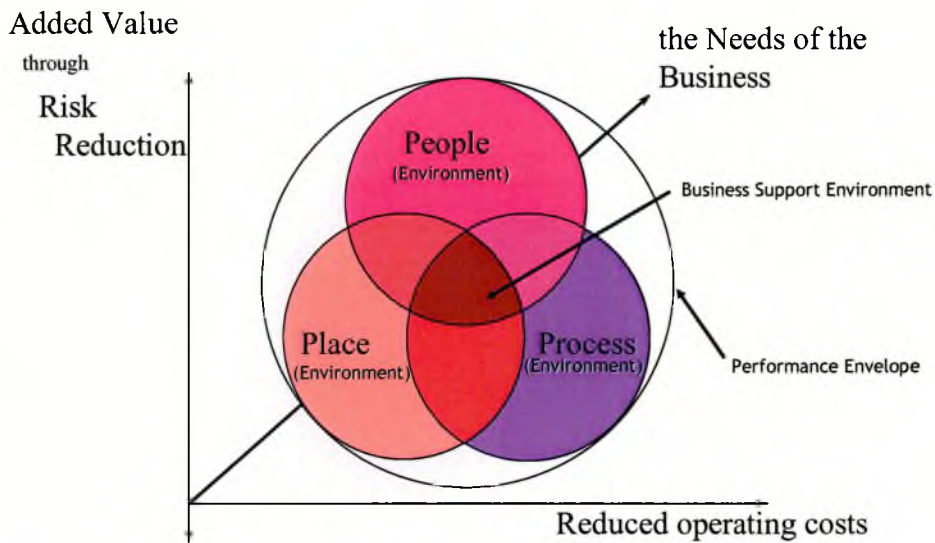
Green and Jack (2004) sought to further promote the business value of strategic FM by describing the concept of Business Support Optimisation and an approach by which to operationalise it. They took the position that a business organisation should consistently strive to meet the needs of its stakeholders. Any sub-optimal outcome would suggest that enhancement of business performance was possible in at least two areas: the effectiveness of the routes to achieving those stakeholder needs, and the efficiency of those routes. This was based on the assertion that an organisation that has created, sustained and managed a business-aligned support environment is likely to have a competitive advantage over those that have not done so. The test of this assertion would be a framework that achieved such an outcome.

In their approach, Green and Jack positioned the support environment as one that is created by the co-ordination and integration of its three sub-environments comprising people, processes and places. It is optimised through being created in total alignment with the needs of the business. The creation in alignment with the needs of the business is shown in Figure 1 below where the three Ps have Business Support Environment as their common overlap<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> The origin of the three Ps model is obscure despite its widespread usage in FM: The author is not aware of its use to explain the notion of the support environment.

## Business Support Environment



The Integration & Co-ordination of **People**, **Process**, & **Place**

Figure 1.1 – The Business Support Environment

Total alignment with the needs of the business is depicted in Figure 2 below where each of the factors within people, process and place are such as to be no more, and no less, than those required by that particular business. As this is achieved, the ‘current performance’ boundary moves toward the expanding ‘optimal performance’ boundary and diagrammatically the three Ps come together in total overlap, or alignment.

## Business Support Optimisation

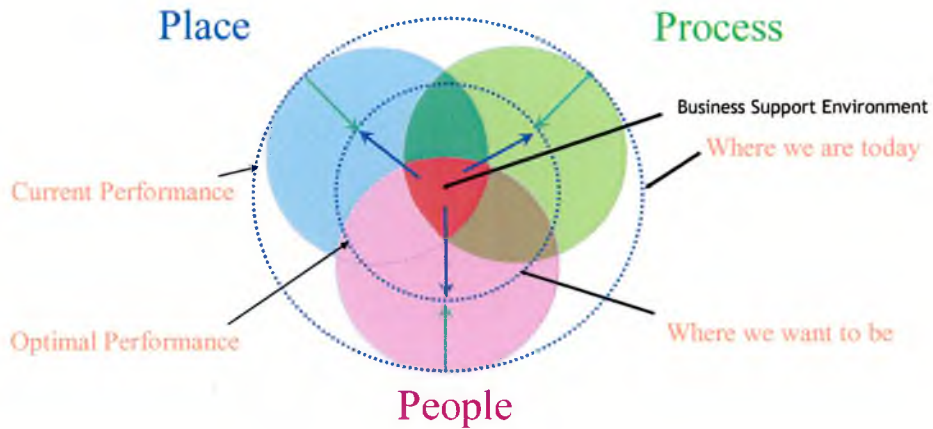


Figure 1.2 – Business Support Environment Alignment

The framework for such optimisation was a combination of two activities. The first activity was the mapping of all business activities in terms of the value of their contribution to the achievement of personal and corporate goals. The second activity was to recognise and take account of the stage of development in the life-cycle of the business.

As Dr Jack points out in his contribution to the Green and Jack paper,

*"The idea that [performance] measures should be derived from strategy is being replaced by the view that stakeholder needs are the fundamental perspective on performance (Neely and Adams, 2001)."*

This emphasis on 'stakeholder need' reinforces another significant driver of this thesis: Business logic is subordinated to the perception of 'need'. Using the language of value organisations can integrate those aspects of quality and performance measurement which have greatest utility. Value mapping develops measures that track the performance of the value drivers that impact on the target value outcomes that the stakeholders have set. The highest utility value drivers are identified using rating protocols along the dimensions of ease, opportunity and impact. The utility of these

drivers can then be positioned on the value map. Better informed resource decisions can be made regarding those activities with a low utility/value rating. The rating protocols are likely to be influenced by the nature of the support environment. In turn a different support environment is likely to accompany different stages in the development of an organisation. This last element of operationalising the business support environment considered by the paper was reinforced by the conclusion of Quinn and Cameron (1983) that:

*"major criteria of effectiveness change in predictable ways as organizations develop through their life cycles"*

They reviewed nine models of organisational life cycles and then integrated them in a summary model of life cycle stages. They then introduced a framework of organisational effectiveness developed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983, through Quinn and Cameron, 1983) which organises criteria of effectiveness into four models. Through a process of reducing and organising a comprehensive list of indices of organisational effectiveness they discovered three underlying dimensions which were consistent with the four major models. On returning to the summary model of the nine life cycle models they established a dominance of the criteria of a given summary model within a particular organisational effectiveness model. On applying these resulting relationships to a case study over three years, Quinn and Cameron arrived at certain key findings one of which had particular relevance to a model for business support alignment.

*"[The life cycle effectiveness model] predicts what criteria of success are likely to take precedence in what sequence, and it allows managers to anticipate the necessary changes"*

Green and Jack concluded that it seemed plausible that by integrating the three approaches (Business Support Environment, Value Mapping, and Organisational life cycles and effectiveness) a model could be constructed and deployed that could not only enable organisations to align their support environment with the needs of their stakeholders but also predict the dominant aspects of a support environment for the next stage in the development of the business organisation.

This paper presented a concept of the 'support environment' and sought to operationalise it in a structured way. In doing so, the approach was issue-resolution



specific: it was aimed at reducing operating costs and increasing the value for money spent on the support environment or 'FM'. The approach is explicit and its motivational direction is from the providers of the support environment to the business: they are doing the 'support' thinking for the business. The emphasis is on results rather than on building awareness in the business of the beneficial outcome of seeking alignment. However, the contribution of this paper to the conceptual background of the current study is in the way it promotes the thought that should managers be enabled to perceive such alignment as a measure of organisation effectiveness then they might embrace it.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.3.4 Contextualist Influences**

Nutt (2004) appeals for ways to align 'supply' with 'demand' where supply is the five primary resources (Financial, Human, Physical, Information, and Intangibles) collectively referred to as 'Infrastructure and Services' and representing 'Business Resources', and where demand is Business Requirements and Public Expectations. He suggests that to bridge the gap between supply and demand it will be necessary to,

*"Open up and create new opportunities for demand-chain versatility and ... to put flexible supply-chain arrangements in place with contingency provisions to support and sustain continuous demand-chain adjustments over time."*

His schematic of a foundation for a fundamental realignment of the supply-chain and demand-chain positions shows 'resource management' in the middle of the demand/supply/demand feedback loop. Whilst this approach seems rather structured, it does place the focus on total business resource management in the context of meeting changing business requirements. It also recognises the need for demand chain versatility which hints at the need for the business to become more aware of the role of the supply chain in meeting the business requirements.

Young (2004) wants operational services to move from a 'back office' function to one of aligning property, FM, IT and HR in acting together. This is another structuralist view, albeit a refreshingly holistic one. However, in a more contextual sense he notes

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<sup>6</sup> The author has since become more critical of the rhetoric of the People Process Place model. He believes such rhetoric to have quite rightly re-focused on the expanding area of alignment, and as such he has finally abandoned the 3-Ps model noting the significant part it has placed in his personal understanding of FM.

that such integration is intended to support those who share the ‘work is where you are’ principle.

Chotipanich (2004) moves the debate on context further in his research into the alignment of global, best practice FM with the local requirements of a given sector, country, location and culture. Once again, however, the approach is one of FM pushing the business. This thesis concerns itself with building awareness in the business of the vital contribution of FM, in the context of the business, so that the business pulls FM into its planning consideration.

In seeking an FM philosophy for the changing workplace, Cairns (2003) describes the workplace as, “The separate but related social, physical, technological and organizational contexts of work”.

He then sets out to,

*“first, provide a knowledge base that critically engages with the complexities and ambiguities of these diverse but interconnected contexts of work; second, engage with some of the failings of FM knowledge to date ...;and third, provide a knowledge base that can stand up to critical analysis from the other fields of knowledge, some of which overlap with that of FM.”*

These three objectives together capture two vital ingredients of this study: the need to achieve *critical engagement*; and the need for the knowledge base to withstand *critical analysis*. In grounding the dominant physical/social environmental relationships of the workplace, Cairns sees FM as having to “address issues of direct relevance to management at the organizational level” and be “underpinned by a set of theories relevant to the organisational context” if FM is to develop as a true management discipline. The focus for the application of FM knowledge must be the business, not FM if it is to become accepted by a wider audience. His view of the role of philosophy also resonates with the conceptual basis for this research.

*“to critically engage with and inform the needs and actions, and the underlying beliefs and values, of members of contemporary society.”*

Knowledge cannot be transferred if no account is taken of the background and experience of those who might benefit from that knowledge.

Philosophy described in Fowler and Fowler (1964) as that which deals with “ultimate reality” caused Cairns some concern because he saw a need for the philosophy of the workplace to be grounded in complexity and “multiple realities”. His use of the heterotopian workplace explored through the application of Janusian thinking strongly supports the need for managers to be able to tailor their support environment according to the business and personal needs of themselves and of the other stakeholders in the business.

*“Janusian thinking (Rothenberg, 1979, p. 55) posits that human beings are capable of holding, and commonly do hold two opposite and contradictory positions as being true at the same time”*

In applying Janusian thinking, Cairns allows for the workplace to be both physical and intangible, supporting and controlling, beautiful and ugly, loved and loathed “in a single manifestation as perceived by a single individual at a single point in time.” It seems that benefits could accrue from trying to align the workplace with the perceived needs for it of the user, and dis-benefits from failing to seek such an alignment. Heterotopia is explained by Cairns by his reference to Foucault (1994) as “space that is both utopian and dystopian, that serves multiple functions and holds multiple meanings simultaneously.” Cairns proposes “that the workplace is such a heterotopia, but it is not understood as such in most of the literature.” This rejection of an ‘ultimate reality’ leads to Cairns adopting a “contextual and ‘perspectivist’ approach,

*“such that we may seek to build up a range of rich pictures of what constitutes the ‘workplace’, from multiple perspectives.”*

This appreciation of the role of perspectives in understanding the acceptance or rejection of a given workplace by the user hints at an approach that in turn uses such perceptions to enable users and providers to re-evaluate their perception of the workplace – and perhaps its role in supporting the business.

In his discussion on putting his theory into practice, Cairns emphasises the need for data additional to the objective, quantifiable data that FMs are familiar with. He stresses the need for subjective, qualitative data “that provide perceptual understanding of the multiple socially constructed realities of the workplace.” He sees such data being gathered by “engage[ing] in discourse with the organizational actors, on their terms”



and through the development of the art of ‘strategic conversation’. In this way, options can be developed based on the “selection of the most relevant contextual solutions over time.” Cairns concludes that,

*“research of such processes should then lead to development of a new knowledge base of FM, one that is process-oriented, dealing with questions of ‘why?’ and ‘how?’ as well as being object-oriented, dealing with questions of ‘what?’ and ‘how much?’.”*

This proved to be a most insightful paper that gave shape and support to the conceptual positioning of this thesis, as well as to the implied need for an approach that helps a business understand better what role its support environment has in the performance of that business.

In conclusion, it does not seem to matter what nature of ‘support environment’ is the topic of discussion, or whether it is optimised. What is important is whether ‘it’ is appropriately aligned with the needs of the business. However, the ‘support environment’ may be optimised if or when an appropriate alignment of resources with business need is achieved.

## **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

This Chapter has presented the conceptual basis for this thesis. Two broad schools of thought regarding the support environment are identified, two end-members of a spectrum, as being those of the ‘Structuralist’ and of the ‘Contextualist’. The pursuits of the FM profession to be identified as ‘professionals’ and to be recognised as having a strategic contribution to make to business are recognised as being the ideals of both schools. However, even though their concepts have been operationalised to a certain extent, it is perceived that the Structuralists are struggling to fully engage business managers in seeing the true potential of FM. In contrast, the Contextualists are convinced that business managers are more likely to engage in applying the philosophy of FM if the support optimisation methodology is set within the context of their own business environment. However, no evidence has been found that such contextualist concepts have been put into practice in this way. This conceptual background supports the view of the researcher that there might be significant business, professional and

personal benefit from seeking an approach by which to operationalise the contextualist perspective of the support environment.

The Contextualists are challenging the Structuralist assumption that a single support optimisation methodology can be relevant to all businesses. The circumstantial evidence supporting this challenge rests in the fact that it has proved very difficult to engage managers in such a methodology. More factual evidence is offered in Chapter 2 through an interpretation of a review of three dominant theories of the firm, or business organisation. In presenting this evidence a need to engage managers instead through the context of their own business environment is demonstrated. The three theories reviewed are: the transaction cost economics-based theory; the resource-based or knowledge-based theory; and the evolution-based theory.

An approach is established in Chapter 3 that might best achieve such an engagement of managers through the context of their own business. The nature of personal engagement suggested an approach that recognised the background, experience and perspectives of the participating manager. This view had some support from the fact that the notion of the Business Support Environment had emerged from the personal, professional and business knowledge and practice of the author. Additionally, such engagement was more likely through the use of a logic and technique of inquiry that was commensurate with personal experiences, and that therefore flowed from a personal ontology and epistemology. Finally, a presumption is made that the author is also an FM Contextualist and so the resultant methodology and method could also be deemed to be close to the ontological and epistemological position of the contextualist. Therefore, in Chapter 3 the device is used of establishing a personal philosophical approach that can then indicate a compatible logic and technique of inquiry. A personal research paradigm is first established by engaging in some personal reflections on upbringing, family life, education, and career and personal development. This section is written in the first person to emphasise the personal nature of the expose. The three established research paradigms of the Positivist, the Interpretive Social Scientist (or anti-positivist), and the Critical Social Scientist were then reviewed together with the methodologies and methods that each of these paradigms embraced. A judgement is then made on which matched most closely the personal paradigm, and

a synthesis of these methodologies and methods results in a technique which is then termed Guided Self-reflection.

Chapter 4 draws upon the outcomes of Chapters 2 and 3 and presents the design of a research method and an approach for deploying it, as a pilot, in the participant organisation. The construction and intended deployment of the technique is recorded. Analysis of the data is through a codification process and this is described. The selection of the research participant organisation and participants is also described in this Chapter. Lastly, it was decided at the close of the conversations phase that a rating research instrument would be deployed and this is detailed.

Chapter 5 presents the narratives from the Parts 1 of the Conversations. They are presented in the form of a biographical summary for each participant together with their perspectives on resources. A contextual interpretation of these narratives is also provided.

Reflections on the narratives re-told in the Parts 2 and 3 of the Conversations are presented and validated in Chapter 6. Issues that seemed of particular importance to the participant are re-evaluated in the Parts 2 of the Conversations. Codification of the data revealed some of the personal and organisational tensions that could be responsible for certain business issues, and for influencing the ability to resolve those issues and this is discussed. A view of the culture of the organisation emerged as were some of its sub-cultures. Ten business issues are discussed around which there was consensus and on which comment was sought during the Parts 3 of the conversations. The Parts 3 were also used to provide a final re-assessment of the conversations and an initial comment on the utility of the Alignment methodology and Guided Self-reflection method. An account is then given of how the emergence of the business issues and the views on the methodology and method led to developing and issuing a research instrument following completion of the field work. The instrument uses a Likert rating system to rate the degree of agreement participants held concerning statements provided to them and which address each of the ten business issues. The analysis of this additional data is also given within Chapter 6.

Chapter 7 presents the conclusions of the research and also some reflections. The conclusions are set against the research objective and research question that emerged from this Chapter. The reflections comprise those on what would be done differently on the next deployment of the Guided Self-reflection method; the personal DBA learning experience; the contribution to business, professional and personal knowledge and practice that the thesis indicates and that flows from the initial intentions at Paragraph 1.8 below; and on the personal post-doctoral aspirations.

## ***1.5 Contribution to Business and Professional Knowledge or Practice***

It is the intention that this thesis demonstrates contributions to business and professional knowledge and practice from four perspectives.

From a personal perspective, it is intended to demonstrate that the personal development over the four years engagement in the DBA proposal has contributed to personal business and professional knowledge and practice.

From a business perspective, it is intended to demonstrate that this research contributes a new organizational development process which enables senior managers to conceive of their businesses differently through helping them re-evaluate the alignment of their resources with the needs of their business.

From a professional viewpoint, it is intended to demonstrate a repeatable generic process that puts into practice a contextualist perspective of the support environment.

From an academic perspective, it is intended that this research will demonstrate an epistemological and a methodological contribution. The epistemological contribution will reside in the particular use made of self-reflection and narrative therapy in helping determine the reasons for a person's view of reality. The methodological contribution will be evidenced through the application of a logic of inquiry which draws upon grounded theory, action research, narrative therapy, self-reflexivity and action learning methodologies.

# 2

## Engagement through Context

*"You would know in words that which you have always known in thought. You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams. And it is well you should."*

Kahlil Gibran, 1923

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This study began some four years ago with a search for a single methodology by which to engage managers in aligning the support environment with the needs of the business. However, before being able to optimise a business in this way, there was the need to understand what the nature of a business organisation, or firm, actually was. To achieve this, a review of the three dominant theories of the firm was undertaken. This Chapter presents the review and explains how it was concluded that it is very difficult to understand what a firm is and therefore how to optimise it. In drawing this conclusion a single support optimisation methodology is seen to be rather too ambitious, if not unrealistic. However, the interpretation of this review does demonstrate the need for managers to be engaged within the context of their own business and does begin to indicate how such engagement might be achieved.

The dominant organisational theories of the firm reviewed are: the Transaction-cost Economics-based perspective, the Resource-based or Knowledge-based perspective, and the Evolution-based perspective. It has been assumed that literature on 'business' organisations can be seen as equally relevant to that covering other goal-directed organisations. The theories are reviewed in what appear to be their chronological and evolutionary order.



## 2.1 **Transaction-cost Economics-based Theory**

Standard economic theory assumes transaction costs to be zero. In his seminal paper of 1937, Coase challenged this assumption introducing positive transaction costs as the reason to form a firm, in order to economise such costs: “if the transactions are not to be governed by the price mechanism directly there *has* to be an organisation” (Coase, 1987, original emphasis). He saw the cost of using the price mechanism as being the main reason why it was profitable to establish a firm. He saw a firm consisting of:

*“the system of relationships which comes into existence when the direction of resources is dependent on an entrepreneur.” (Coase, 1937 p22).*

The transaction-cost economics-based perspective of the organisation tends to ally itself to the business organisation of the ‘Firm’ and is also referred to in the literature as opportunism-based, and economics-based. It is claimed that firms exist to the extent that they are efficient contractual entities (Coase 1937; Simon 1951, 1957; Williamson 1975, 1985). Property rights, incentives, and contracts share the focus of such a perspective and assume bounded rationality, opportunism, and functionalism.

### **Bounded Rationality**

People are assumed to be boundedly rational<sup>7</sup> when they are:

*“intendedly rational, but only limitedly so” (Simon, 1961, quoted in Williamson, 1993)*

*“realistically assumed to be unable to construct complete contracts with each other as autonomous market agents” (Weeks and Galunic 2002).*

### **Opportunism**

People are assumed to exhibit opportunism through “a deep condition of self-interest seeking that contemplates guile.” (Williamson 1993) There seems to be a belief that the boundary between healthy and unhealthy opportunism is at best blurred. Williamson (1985) describes opportunism as ranging from:

*“the incomplete or distorted disclosure of information, especially to calculated efforts to mislead, distort, disguise, obfuscate, or otherwise confuse.”*

To something that:

*“includes but is scarcely limited to more blatant forms [of deceit], such as lying, stealing, and cheating.”*

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<sup>7</sup> See also Simon, (1991)

## Functionalism

Functionalism relates to the way in which transaction costs are economised. It initially referred to the industrial firm in the way that it made use of productive resources:

*“for the purpose of supplying goods and services to the economy in accordance with plans developed and put into effect within the firm.” (Penrose 1959,<sup>8</sup> 1995)*

However, the assumption of functionalism being at the heart of the transaction cost argument has been seen as being constraining and unrealistic in that:

*“not only should transaction costs be economized but, given enough time the selection mechanism of competition will ensure that they are economized.” (Weeks and Galunic, 2002)*

The assumption has been further challenged because:

*“it ignores the concepts of power and sense-making that are central to our understanding of how organizational behaviour may become detached from efficiency considerations.” (Perrow, 1981)*

### 2.1.1 The Coasian Insight

In his lecture, ‘The Nature of the Firm: Meaning’ (1987), at the conference held in 1987 to celebrate the 50 years since his seminal paper, Professor Coase saw the limit of the size of the firm being set:

*“when the scope of its operations had expanded to the point at which the costs of organizing additional transactions within the firm exceeded the costs of carrying out the same transactions through the market or in another firm.” (Coase, 1937, Reprinted in Williamson & Winter 1993, p48)*

An implication of this is not so much that the firm cannot continue to grow once its transaction costs are greater than the market or the competition, but rather that the firm can only continue to grow if it can keep its transaction costs competitive. This requires the ‘economising’ of those costs which could be interpreted as needing the optimisation of the use of resources.

The “Coasian Insight” is that transaction costs differences are mainly responsible for market, hierarchy, and hybrid modes of organisation. In his lecture, ‘The Nature of the Firm: Influence’ (1987), Coase accepts as “largely correct”, and quotes, Williamson’s (1975) reason for the non-use of the “Coasian Insight” for over 30 years:

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<sup>8</sup> The 1959 work by Penrose was reprinted in 1995 with the addition of a Forward by her.

*"Transaction costs are appropriately made the centrepiece of the analysis (in the 1937 Paper) but these are not operationalized in a fashion which permits one to assess the efficacy of completing transactions as between firms and markets in a systematic way."*

Putting theory into practice is important if the business community is to accept and engage in realising the commercial value of the theory. However, it also implies that the 'fashion' that permits such engagement is rather important, and in that same lecture, Coase offers such a fashion as being:

*"the comparison of the costs of co-ordinating the activities of the factors of production within the firm with the costs of bringing about the same result by market transactions or by means of operations within some other firm."*

This places some significance on the particular way of co-ordinating the activities of the factors of production and on those whose responsibility it is to do the 'co-ordinating'. In referring to the basic reason for the existence of firms as being "the avoidance of the costs of contracting between factors of production", Coase raises the issue of the costs of such avoidance, and the implicit need to minimise them. This later explanation of the 'Insight' implies that efficient co-ordination of the activities of the factors of production of an organisation might afford that organisation a potential competitive advantage. However, organisations experience some difficulty in achieving such efficiencies which is due in part to intra-divisional competitions.

The need for a creative, and perhaps more holistic, approach to resourcing the business seems to emerge from the relationship Coase identifies between initiative or enterprise, and management:

*"Initiative means forecasting and operates through the price mechanism by the making of new contracts. Management proper merely reacts to price changes, rearranging the factors of production under its control." (Coase, 1937, Reprinted in Williamson & Winter 1993, p30)*

He seems not to be allowing, or expecting, management to be able to contribute directly to 'initiative' or to influence price and the nature of contracts through the re-arrangement of the factors of production. However, in identifying a gap in economic theory Coase does recognise the 'entrepreneur-co-ordinator', and possible two philosophical positions. He describes the gap as:

*"between the assumption (made for some purposes) that resources are allocated by means of the price mechanism [the market] and the assumption (made for other*



*purposes) that this allocation is dependent on the entrepreneur-co-ordinator.” (op. cit. p20)*

We are reminded that the main activity of a firm is running a business, and that this should not be neglected through a concentration on the firm as a purchaser of the inputs it uses. This places the focus on the business and suggests a need for responding to the needs of the business rather than on economising costs.

When Coase considers the integration of firms as a means of reducing the risk to the business of fraud, he is referring to fraud perpetrated in the market by those lacking honesty and integrity. These are intangible values that affect performance, and whilst he sees their achievement as a market cost that can be eliminated through integration, they actually continue to exist within the firm. Indeed, he admits that whilst he explains why firms emerge within markets, markets may also exist within firms.

The three stage programme that was entailed in operationalizing the Coasian insight or concept was based on the transaction being the basic unit of analysis, and was described as follows:

*“Identifying the microanalytic factors that are responsible for transaction costs differences among transactions, aligning transactions with governance structures in a discriminating way, and discovering and respecting the crucial intertemporal process features that predictably attend economic organisation.” (Williamson, 1993)*

**Microanalytic factors** matter in three basic respects according to Williamson:

- Behavioural Assumptions, where the two critical behavioural assumptions are bounded rationality and opportunism;
- Dimensionalizing Transactions, where the critical dimensions with respect to which transactions differ are identified as the frequency with which they occur, the degree and type of uncertainty to which they are subject, and the condition of asset specificity (the degree to which an asset can be redeployed to alternative uses and by alternative users without sacrifice of productive value); and
- Inter-temporal Process Features, recognising that a process outcome can have un-intended effects as well as the intended effects, and any model of organisation must take appropriate account of both kinds of effects.

Behavioural factors are taken into account by Coase as well when he notes that:

*"It is in the notions of identity and the learning of procedural rules and normative boundaries, that the foundation to a theory of what Firms are, in terms of what they do, explains why there is 'more of it' inside than outside." (Coase, 1937)*

Williamson identifies the organisational imperative of **aligning transactions** employed by the transaction cost economics strategy as being to:

*"align transactions (which differ in their attributes) with governance structures (the cost and competencies of which differ) in a discriminating (mainly, transaction cost economising) way."*

This was applied in the first instance to vertical integration (make-or-buy decisions).

The **inter-temporal process features** refer to the means of transforming a large numbers bidding competition in the first instance, into one of bilateral supply at the renewal interval. The essential ingredient for this transformation to occur is putting in place substantial investment in transaction specific assets. Without such investment, the initial winner gains no advantage over the non-winners. Thus, the approach requires that "both contract execution and ex post competition at the contract renewal interval come under scrutiny." The issue is not one of large, durable investments, rather:

*"the issues are (1) whether large and durable investments are redeployable or not and, if they are not, (2) the need for and ease of adapting to changing market and technological circumstances."*

Whilst this is focused on transacting activity, it refers to a need for business agility with an implicit requirement to consider alignment, and re-alignment of (transaction) resources with business need.

Williamson notes that:

*"Transaction cost economics maintains that the comparative study of economic organization requires the discovery and explication of process features." (Williamson, 1993)*

However, he points out that economists are sceptical of process arguments believing them to be unnecessary "if the interesting action in all 'properly formulated' problems" is explained by ex-ante incentive alignments that are "much more refined and fully developed than is the corresponding apparatus for assessing process." The economist will also claim that "the analysis of process requires considerable knowledge of the nano-economic details ..." Such a claim could be recognising that there is more value

to the organisation in engaging in a pre-process which seeks to fully understand how and why alignment with business needs is sought, than in an ex-post process of measuring the degree of current alignment.

Within the transaction-based theory, engagement is seen in the context of minimising risk to optimise opportunity, a view which would resonate with that of the FM structuralists.

## **2.2 *Resource-based Theory***

Resource-based theories of the firm move from the contractual context of a firm being a vehicle by which to economise transaction costs, to the context of the firm as a construct. In this theory the constructs of the firm envisioned are as an Administrative Organisation, a collection of productive resources, a learning environment, a context of discourse and learning, and a means of achieving a competitive advantage. Overall, engagement is seen in the context of intangible assets and knowledge.

### **2.2.1 The Firm as an Administrative Organisation**

The first big challenge to the Coasian theory of the firm is generally accepted as coming from Edith T Penrose in her book “The Theory of the Growth of the Firm” (1959, and re-printed in 1995 with the addition of a Forward by her). References to Penrose are references to this book.

Penrose (1959) makes it clear that her analysis is concerned “only with the incorporated industrial firm operated for private profit and unregulated by the state.” However, she sees the term ‘firm’ as a construct, and therefore sees the Coasian theory of the firm as a construct that investigates “...the way in which prices and the allocation of resources are determined.” She sees the theory as being part of the wider theory of value.

The firm is placed as an Administrative Organisation where economic activity inside the firm is carried on within an administrative organisation, whilst economic activity in the market is not. The motivation of the firm is seen by her as the search for profit

which she sees is synonymous with growth<sup>9</sup>. She talks of her theory of the growth of the firm being “essentially an examination of the changing productive opportunity of firms” and therefore this opportunity “will be restricted to the extent a firm ... is unable to respond to them.” This latter position implies that success for the firm rests in finding ways of responding to those productive opportunities. The consideration by Penrose of the firm as a Collection of Productive Resources is one such way in that it is administrative decisions that determine the disposal of those productive resources between different uses and over time.

Penrose makes a critical distinction between ‘her’ Productive Resources, and the Coasian Factors of Production: the term Factors of Production is applied equally to resources as it is to services whereas the term Productive Resources recognizes that:

*“Strictly speaking, it is never **resources** themselves that are ‘inputs’ in the production process, but only the **services** that the resources can render.” (original emphasis)*

Her logic is that the nature of the *service* is determined by the combination of resources and the way that they are used. She emphasizes the independence of resources from the services they can create, “resources consist of a bundle of potential services and can, for the most part, be defined independently of their use, while services cannot be so defined.” It is this distinction that she believes gives an individual firm its uniqueness.

Penrose also places an emphasis on the intangible resources available to a firm, as distinct from the tangible, physical resources. She refers to the productive services available to a firm as being from the firm’s own resources and, “particularly the productive services available from management with experience within the firm.” She talks of focusing attention on “the crucial role of a firm’s ‘inherited’ resources ...” which implies an active search for such corporate knowledge and an equally active intention to marshal those resources. It is the realization that the value to the business is not its resources per se, rather the *use* of those tangible and intangible resources.

The productive services required for a firm to expand comprise entrepreneurial and managerial services. However, for the purposes of analysis, Penrose refers to both as

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<sup>9</sup> It has been assumed that ‘profit’ and ‘growth’ can be interpreted as ‘meeting corporate objectives’ for the purposes of the not-for-profit organisation.

Managerial Services, believing managerial services to be the more important. In combining the ‘competence’ of management services and the ‘enterprise’ services of the firm in this way she is recognizing that management must work alongside high quality entrepreneurial services. She makes two assumptions for the analysis: Measurability and The Fundamental Ratio.

On measurability she recognizes that:

*“the productive services that the entrepreneurs and managers of any given firm are capable of rendering to that firm are not reducible to any common denominator and are therefore incapable of quantitative treatment.”*

However, she makes the assumption that such services can be measured, “that qualitative differences can in some manner be expressed as quantitative differences”. She does this in the belief that the relationships she expects to discover between the services exist “regardless of the statistical impossibility of accurately measuring them”.

Some managerial services will be required for current operations and Penrose presumes the rest will be available for an expansion programme. Differing amounts of these managerial services will be required for the same amount of expansion in different circumstances. This logic results in the second assumption which she calls “The Fundamental Ratio” and which she defines as:

*“the maximum amount of expansion will be determined by the relevant managerial services **available** for expansion in relation to the amount of these services **required** per dollar of expansion.”* (original emphasis)

The Fundamental Ratio is therefore a means of determining the capacity of the firm to support a growth opportunity at a point in time.

Ensuring that the *relevant* amounts of managerial services are available for expansion suggests a need for full engagement by the business managers in the context of the support their managerial services, their intangible assets, offer to their business.

## 2.2.2 The Firm as a Knowledge Environment

The resource perspective has been broadened to account for knowledge. The issue of ‘productive resources’ is likened by Kogut and Zander (1996) to knowledge and a learning environment when they say that the nature of those ‘productive resources’



seems likely to be influenced in two ways by the “normative territory to which members identify”:

*“Firstly it defines the conventions and rules by which individuals coordinate their behaviour and decision making... Second, identification sets out the process by which learning is developed socially through the formation of values and convergent expectations.” (Kogut and Zander, 1996)*

The beneficial creation is being recognised here of a social and learning environment which is shaped by organisation members having ‘convergent expectations’.

A resource-based theory of the firm was considered by Conner and Prahalad (1996) to be “an important step ... toward creation of more general, resource-based theory of performance differences between firms.” A debate has arisen between Conner and Prahalad (1996) and Foss (1996). Conner and Prahalad sought to build upon the opportunism-based, transaction-cost view by articulating a knowledge-based perspective that was independent of opportunistic considerations. Foss (1996), however, is adamant that reasons for the existence of the firm cannot be given without reference to the key elements of the contractual approach: incentives, property rights, and opportunism / moral hazard.

However, the resource-based theory of the firm is seen by Conner and Prahalad (1996) as being “centrally motivated by understanding performance differentials between firms.” Thus they view the existence of a firm depending upon the “firm’s performance in comparison to other firms, i.e. on creating sustained competitive advantage.” Therefore, they explain the existence of the firm in terms of “a firm’s superiority to two alternative forms of organisation, a collection of market contracts and other firms.” The separation into two parts of the existence issue is not accepted by Foss (1996). He holds that transaction-cost theory provides a single explanation of both the existence of the firm relative to the market and why a particular firm owns a particular combination of assets/resources.

However, Conner and Prahalad state that for a theory of performance differences between two firms there are additional factors required to those analysed in a theory of the firm. They reject the pure contractual interpretation of the nature of the firm. However, by accident or design, it is the purity of the treatment of these elements of firm theory that seems to be clouding the holistic objective of optimal performance.

In terms of performance, Kogut and Zander (1996) believe that rather than simply economising on costs, the firm creates “a context of discourse and learning that promotes innovation and motivated behaviour.” For them, the resource perspective has become contextual.

*“it is not transaction costs but the social knowledge embedded in the competence of individuals and the organizing principles of work that explains what firms are on the basis of what they know how to do.”*

Kogut and Zander (1992) join Conner & Prahalad (1996), Grant (1996), and others in arguing that Firms exist because they are better than markets at integrating and applying valuable knowledge to business activity. Such approaches assume that the interests of the individual and the enterprise are aligned<sup>10</sup>; and that individuals can and always do accurately identify *a priori* the profit implications of the Firm organization and market contracting when deciding whether to create a Firm, or are unfailingly selected out afterwards. The suggestion seems to be that the alignment of enterprise and individual interests is a feature of the potential to create additional value.

Although Williamson was speaking in respect of takeovers when he said the following, it seems to have application more generally; and specifically in relation to value management through resource optimisation.

*“Value enhancement is thus realised by squeezing out excesses of [managerial] discretion. The view that informs how to bring discretionary excesses under control is that which informs the study of externalities: all failures to allocate resources to highest valued uses invite redress.” (Williamson 1993)*

This focus on high-value activities is also present when viewing a theory of the firm as being a means by which to achieve a competitive advantage, or as “a subset of the substantive areas of endeavour likely to be associated with a company’s advantage vis-à-vis other firms.” (Conner and Prahalad, 1996)

It is the resources of the firm or organisation that enable firms to create, implement, and manage, value-creating strategies. According to Barney (1991), a ‘value creating strategy’ is conceived of and implemented by the firm resources represented collectively by the physical, human and organizational capital. The use of those

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<sup>10</sup> This alignment assumption is a bold one: It has been the experience of the author that such alignment is rarely even actively attempted, let alone achieved.

resources may even represent a source of competitive advantage which a firm is said to have:

*"... when it is implementing a value creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors and when these other firms are unable to duplicate the benefits of this strategy." Barney (1991), and Hitt & Ireland (1986)*

The notion of productive resources has been further interpreted in this section and has provided a knowledge context through which to engage in a theory of the firm. Knowledge is seen to be embedded in the collective network of the firm. Engagement has been through a context of discourse and learning in the way the productive resources can be influenced by the behaviours, values and convergent expectations of organization members. The search for superiority has also provided another context in which members are engaged in understanding the performance differences between firms.

## **2.3 Evolution-based Theory**

Both transaction cost and resource based theories tend to focus on the firm being created by administrative and managerial decisions and actions relating to the use, and potential use, of resources. The evolutionary perspective, summarized below by reference to Aldrich (1979, 1999), focuses more on interaction and competition in a resource constrained system.

In his book entitled 'Organizations and Environments' Aldrich (1979) found that:

*"a great deal of the literature in economic history, industrial economics, the social-psychology of organizations, organizational sociology, and political sociology could be integrated into an encompassing framework."*

In his work twenty years later (Aldrich, 1999) he continues to pursue an overarching framework 'that organizes an inquiry into the issues surrounding organizational change'. His use of the evolutionary approach to explain the construction of new organizations is drawn upon in this section to provide a general account of the evolution-based perspective on organisations. All references to Aldrich in this section are to his 1999 work.

Aldrich takes an evolutionary perspective of organisations stating that organisations are "goal-directed, boundary-maintaining, and socially constructed systems of human

activity”<sup>11</sup>. This sub-section first outlines the evolutionary process, then introduces indeterminacy as a key feature of evolutionary analysis, and a description of the two main focuses on units of selection. In this way it is suggested how this theory is focusing more on the need to understand the firm in the context of the other firms with which it competes or collaborates.

### **2.3.1 Evolutionary Process**

Evolution results from the four generic processes of variation, selection, retention and diffusion, and the struggle over scarce resources: Evolution will occur, Aldrich says “if processes generating variation and retention are present in a system, and that system is subject to selection processes”. His belief is that since the principles are generic, they apply to social as well as biological systems.

#### **Variation**

Any departure from routine or tradition is a variation according to Aldrich and such departures may be intentional or blind. Examples of intentional variations include the results of planning sessions and advice from external consultants. Blind variations include mistakes and misunderstandings. The greater the number of variations, the greater is the opportunity for change. However, it is the consequences of the variations that determine their selection and retention, not the cause of the variations.

#### **Selection**

Selection is generated, according to Aldrich, when forces “differentially select or selectively eliminate certain types of variations”. Selection criteria include forces such as the logic of internal organisational structuring, competitive pressures, and conformity to institutionalised rationality. Aldrich then identifies three selection processes: ‘within-organisation’ selection processes, and ‘organisation-level, and population-level’ processes. Selection processes within organisations can be influenced by pressures for internal stability, acceptance of low performance thresholds, and persistence of past selection criteria that have lost their relevance. The risks to such organisations include moving away from external relevance, and reduced resource

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<sup>11</sup> A definition liked by the author as it can be extended to include public sector organisations as well as private sector organisations

flow or legitimacy. Selection processes at the organisation-level risk fewer resources being made available to the organisation from their environment and hence their decline. Such processes would include problematic acts such as managerial incompetence. Selection processes at the population-level risk being affected by the variations that result in collective action within a population. This can remove certain potential sources of selection pressures. However,

*"Whatever their origins, selection processes operate by affecting the information and resources available to people, work groups, organizations, and populations."*

Variations in information are susceptible to individual perceptions, whilst variations in resource allocation tend to selectively reward certain actions.

### **Retention and Diffusion**

*"Retention occurs when selected variations are preserved, duplicated, or otherwise reproduced so that the selected activities are repeated on future occasions, or the selected structures appear again in future generations."*

Retention of selected variations within organisations is evidenced through stability in organisational structures and activities and promoted by the pursuit of existing procedures and systems. However, organisational change is likely if the organisation ceases to fit the selection criteria since the alternative that the organisation is selected out. Retained variations at the population level are those like managerial competence that all organisations use collectively to optimise the use of the resources of their environment. Retained variations at organisation level are passed between organisations and between staff. Diffusion of variations is enabled by the linkages between organisations such as mobility of staff and alliances. The diffusion can be limited by the ability of an organisation to breach organisational boundaries.

### **Struggle over Scarce Resources**

Aldrich observes that it is the struggle for scarce resources within and between organisations, and between populations, which can change the nature of selection criteria. The competition over resources is evident when personal and organisational goals are both pursued by members. Measures such as co-operatives arise between populations to protect scarce resources but such arrangements are vulnerable to short-term deviations. The higher the value to the organisation of a variation outcome the



greater is the influence over the allocation of scarce resources. Aldrich appears to promote a wide interpretation of resources and includes time as a particularly scarce resource.

### **2.3.1.1. Indeterminacy and Units of Selection**

A key principle of the evolutionary approach is the indeterminacy of outcomes. The future is an open question within an evolutionary perspective. Aldrich emphasises his belief that at the time of an event's occurrence the outcome is actually indeterminate since many outcomes are equally probable. Therefore, people can only construct solutions to specific problems and those solutions may eventually result in organisations: people cannot directly intend to construct those organisations. He warns that it is a mistake to ignore this sense of indeterminacy.

*"Imposing meaning on historical events from knowledge of outcomes is a tempting trap, but it is a mistake."*

Aldrich identifies two units of selection: routines and competencies within organisations; and entire organisations, or bounded entities, which carry those routines and competencies.<sup>12</sup>

Routines and competencies can be taken singly or in bundles, and they can be represented and expressed. It is the representations, the set of routines and competencies, which he says are manipulated such as in "designing deliberate variations": The expression in actions of these representations determines the selection of a variation.

If the routines and competencies form inseparable bundles then selection of variations can affect entire organisations. In addition, bounded entities can be treated as the unit of selection because the focus of the study is on organisational survival. Whichever rationale applies, Aldrich refers to entire organisations needing to have:

*"the characteristics of a bounded system and have boundary-maintaining processes organised around the persistence of the unit and the perpetuation of its activities."*

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<sup>12</sup> The author is alert to an intense debate in biology about selection on 'genes' or 'species' largely resolved by distinguishing replicators and vehicles (for replication): He does not see this debate affecting the thrust of his work and so he does not pursue it here.

### 2.3.2 Cultural Evolution

For Aldrich, like the Transaction-cost economics and Resource-based theorists, the firm is a boundary maintaining entity: It is an organism in effect, and is part of an ecology that exists between firms. This view has recently been challenged by the argument for the firm being an ecology in its own right: An argument which its proponents (Weeks and Galunic, 2002) explicitly claim to be a new theory – and in doing so representing the firm in another context.

They claim that the firm and the culture is itself one and is evolving through the same generic processes of variation, selection, and retention and diffusion of cultural modes of thought (values, assumptions, beliefs, ideas, knowledge). Using the term *meme* to refer collectively to these modes of thought they describe culture as:

*“a social phenomena, patterns of symbolic communication and behaviour that are produced as members of the group enact the memes they have acquired as part of the culture.” (Weeks and Galunic, 2002)<sup>13</sup>*

They explain these stages of the cultural evolution of the firm as follows:

#### Variation

Variety arises from altogether new memes and from novel combinations of memes. New memes arise through memes migrating into the firm as a result of existing members imitating their external experiences, or from new members resulting from changes in the firm. New memes will also arise from mutation which occurs through “copying errors in the processes of externalisation of memes and interpretation of their expressions.” (Weeks and Galunic, 2002) Variety is also increased through recombining existing memes. The social networks of the firm and new rules are seen as the first step in this process whereby memes move around the firm and into positions from where they can be combined. The second stage is the actual recombination of memes that were not until that point considered to be related: an established source of creativity and innovation referred to by Weeks and Galunic quoting Henri Poincaré (1908, p):

*“They (the finest ideas) are those which reveal to us unsuspected kinship between other facts, long known, but wrongly believed to be strangers to one another. Amongst chosen*

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<sup>13</sup> A theory anticipated by Price (1996) and developed by Price and Shaw (1998). The concept of the meme as a cultural replicator was first postulated by Dawkins (1976).

*combinations the most fertile will often be those formed of elements drawn from domains which are far apart."*

## **Selection**

Selection of a meme occurs when a member of the firm "consciously, or unconsciously, enacts a meme from among those previously internalised." (Weeks and Galunic, 2002) Internalisation of a meme occurs when a member of the firm, again consciously or unconsciously, "observes and interprets the cultural expression corresponding to that meme." (op. cit. 2002) The meme is selected as an outcome of having three different pressures acting upon it:

- Function – where the meme is selected in the belief that it will achieve some goal, or serve some purpose;
- Fit – where the meme is selected due to its fit with other dominant memes; and
- Form – where the meme is selected for its ease of imitation or perhaps its emotional resonance.

## **Retention and Diffusion**

Retention concerns the longevity, fidelity and fecundity of existing memes. Longevity refers to the reproduction of culture, or of the constituent rules and ideas of the firm, through individual words and behaviours. Fidelity concerns how accurately each meme is copied in being reproduced. In this regard, the patterns of control and identity within a firm lead to its members more readily accepting the reproduction of certain memes. Fecundity relates to how prolific a meme is within the firm: to what degree it is diffused in the firm. Memes in the minds of those with significant organizational influence, e.g. the CEO, are more likely to be diffused throughout the firm than by those with little or no influence.

It does seem that given a memetic viewpoint, the firm does provide fertile ground for the variation and selection of memes through presenting an environment that brings potentially complementary memes closer together than would a market environment, and through a managerial hierarchy whose responsibilities include the recombination of memes.

Weeks and Galunic therefore see firms form and evolve through the needs of those involved. Memetics, their parallel being with genetics, sought to explain how the very nature of people gave rise to groupings that satisfied individual wants and needs. The changes in nature over life therefore prompted changes in the organisation. Enhanced performance would result from recognising, understanding and supporting such memetic thinking.

## **2.4     *Engagement in a Changing Business Context***

Table 2.1 below contains some key characteristics and contexts of these dominant theories of the firm. In interpreting them, this section concludes that there is no one single understanding of what a firm is, and discusses the implications of that for engaging managers in adopting an FM philosophy.

The assumptions for each of the theories included the intangible quality of individual behaviour be it opportunism, spirit of enterprise, or the social systems. However, though common to each theory, the influence of personal behaviour on the organisation will vary according to the personnel. In turn, the personnel will vary according to such criteria as industry sector and whether the industry is commodity or service based. The assumptions regarding bounded or non-bounded systems also varied and whether a boundary is maintained or not, and whether the boundaries of one firm against another are similar will also determine the nature of the firm.

Each theory placed the firm functioning in respect of its understanding and use of resources. However, the interpretation of resources varied and included ‘productive resources’, ‘knowledge’, and ‘generic processes’. The way the resource was used in support of the business therefore also differed.

The processes followed by the theories all had a critical time dimension. There was a need to understand and recognise the benefits of investing early if inefficiencies were to be avoided at later stages. The changing demands for resources over time were identified as a feature that had to be determined: what governs growth and the speed and duration of growth? Time was needed to effect variations in routines and

competencies and to then select and retain them. However, the time dimension itself will vary according to exigencies of the business.

The attempt to align their use of resources with the changing demands of the firm was exercised by each theory. The nature of the resource, however, determines what is being aligned with what and therefore the alignment mechanism will vary.

Each of the theories strongly linked certain resources to certain organisation needs. However, the reason for management involvement differed according to the perception of what constituted resources: Factors of production were managed according to price changes; Productive opportunities were managed by the administrative organisation within the firm; and routines and competencies were managed within and between organisations and also between populations.

The need to gain a competitive advantage underpinned each of the theories. However, it did not necessarily result only from achieving the goals of: economising transaction costs; realising the potential of resources through the productive services; and successfully transforming the organisation through selective retention of variations. The competitive advantage was in the process of achieving those goals: How costs were economised; how the potential of the productive resources was realised; and how variations were identified, selected and retained.

Resources language was used in each of the theories, if not as the unit of analysis, then as a direct influence on the analysis. What resources were and what role they played differed but was critical to the desired outcome. 'Productive services' and 'routines and competencies' clearly placed processes as intangible resources – a category of resource not recognised by some. Each theory promotes resources as being the major factor in supporting the survival and growth of the organisation. The interpretation of resources widens from the tangible, physical assets to the intangible assets of knowledge, activities, and organisational structures. The focus also moves from the use of the individual resources to the management of a collection of resources which together form productive services.



Characteristics	Transaction-Cost Economic-based Theory	Resource/knowledge-based Theory	Evolution/Cultural-based Theory
Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bounded Rationality</li><li>• Opportunism</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some firms will grow in search of profit</li><li>• Spirit of enterprise</li><li>• Measurability &amp; The Fundamental Ratio</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bounded &amp; Unbounded system</li><li>• Evolutionary principles are generic &amp; therefore apply to social as well as biological systems</li></ul>
Functionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use of productive resources to economise transaction costs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use of knowledge to marshal resources</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use of the generic evolution processes</li></ul>
Process Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inter-temporal recognition</li><li>• Ex-ante investment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Determine principles that govern growth, &amp; speed &amp; duration of growth</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Variation, selection, retention &amp; diffusion, &amp; struggle over scarce resources</li><li>• Boundary-maintaining processes</li></ul>
Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Costs of co-ordinating activities</li><li>• Transactions with governance structures</li><li>• Ex-ante incentive alignment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ability to respond to changing productive opportunities</li><li>• Determined by the Fundamental Ratio</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Through competition over scarce resources</li><li>• Fitness of routines and competencies</li></ul>
Resource Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• By management reacting to price change</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• By the administrative organisation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Within and between organisations and between populations</li></ul>
Competitive Advantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Degree of asset redeployment</li><li>• Economised costs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Realising the potential of resources, through services</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Successful transformation through selective retention</li></ul>
Language (unit of analysis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transactions between Firms &amp; Markets</li><li>• Factors of production</li><li>• Resources</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Administrative organisation</li><li>• Productive services, resources, and opportunity</li><li>• Performance differentials between firms</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Systems of human activity</li><li>• Struggle for resources</li><li>• Routines &amp; competencies</li></ul>
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identity, rules &amp; boundaries responsible for success of the firm</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Crucial role of inherited resources</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evolutionary</li><li>• Memetic</li></ul>
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Needs of the business</li><li>• Risks to the business</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The firm as a collection of productive resources</li><li>• Wider theory of value</li><li>• Knowledge</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activities &amp; structures</li><li>• Bounded entities</li><li>• Organisational routines &amp; competencies</li></ul>
Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify characteristics &amp; drivers of the players</li><li>• Seek an alignment with the business</li><li>• Allow for the unintended outcomes as a feature of time.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify the productive services available and required per dollar of expansion</li><li>• Examine the changing productive opportunity of firms</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transform the organisation through identifying variations, selecting &amp; retaining them, and winning the struggle for scarce resources</li><li>• Conduct social construction studies</li></ul>
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Structured</li><li>• Cost economising</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Structured / Contextual</li><li>• Administrative Organisation</li><li>• Collection of Productive Resources</li><li>• Discourse and learning</li><li>• A means of achieving competitive advantage</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contextual</li><li>• Socially constructed system of activity</li><li>• Evolving cultures</li></ul>

Table 2.1 – Characteristics & Contexts of the Dominant Theories of the Firm

Each theory of the firm portrays the firm differently. Although there are a number of common denominators across the theories they still do not lead to a common identity of what a firm is. Without an accepted understanding of what the firm is, a search for a single methodology by which to optimise it is too ambitious, if not unrealistic.

The interpretations of the firm range from the structuralist Coasian view, through the part-structuralist, part contextualist view of Penrose, Kogut and Zander, Conner and Prahalad et al, to the contextualist views of Aldrich and Weeks and Galunic. Their characteristics determine their function, appearance and culture. The culture of a firm determines, or is determined by, the type and style of management. Engaging this management in adopting an FM Philosophy might be achieved if the approach takes account of the changing context of the business and of the role of the management within that business.

The review of literature suggested that the three dominant theories of an organisation can be seen as different contexts of an organisation, and can also be seen as together representing the discourse on the growth or evolution of the organisation. The growth can derive from economising transaction costs, from the optimal use of resources, from the acquisition, understanding and deployment of knowledge, and from the selection and retention of variations to the norms of the organisation. Growth is a product of improving performance in a way that provides a competitive advantage. The theories in this sense present organisational growth or evolution as a discourse on the use of resources in support of the business.

At one end of a spectrum the 'Transactionalists' seem to be suggesting that the firm can optimise, whilst at the other end the 'Evolutionists' are drawing attention to the fact that it will not necessarily optimise: it may simply become extinct.

This interpretation of the review of the dominant theories of the firm upholds the perspective of the support environment held by the contextualists: the individual firm is its own context and the successful engagement of managers in an FM philosophy is only likely to be achieved if attempted through the particular context of their firm.

Chapter 3 finds an approach that can engage managers in their business context by identifying a research paradigm which is sympathetic with the perspective of the contextualists - and also of the author.

# 3

## Research Methodology & Method

*"The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs rise and run murmuring to the sea;  
And the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed to your eyes."*

Kahlil Gibran, 1923

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The review of the theories of the firm started when the author was operating as an FM structuralist seeking to rationalise and optimise the transaction costs for the client organisation. However, development of his FM contextualist leaning (his 'hidden well-spring of [his] soul') needed the understanding and interpretation of the theories of the firm. In parallel, the development of an FM philosophy showed the FM contextualist believing that managers needed to be engaged through the context of their firm rather than through the resolution of FM issues. The interpretation of the theories of the firm demonstrated a need for such engagement through a method that recognises the prevailing business context in which the managers find themselves operating. Parallel reflection in this Chapter leads to a research methodology and method which can engage managers in embracing an FM Philosophy.

The chosen research methodology and method for this inquiry therefore needs to flow from the ontological and epistemological position of a contextualist. The presumption is that the author is such a contextualist. The Chapter starts with the author first engaging in self-reflection to help indicate his own current, personal, ontological and epistemological stance. He does this by reflecting on three distinct,

formative phases of his life. The personal nature of this section is demonstrated by the use of the first person writing style.<sup>14</sup>

Next, a review is undertaken of the three classical philosophical stances of the Positivist, through the Interpretive Social Scientist, or Anti-Positivist, to the Critical Social Scientist looking for resonance with the personal reflections and with the perspective of the contextualist. This enables a philosophical paradigm to be established which is moving towards that of the Critical Theorist but that currently sits on its boundary with that of the Interpretive Social Scientist.

The following methodologies and methods that are consistent with this research paradigm are then explored: Grounded Theory, Action Research, Reflexivity and Narrative Therapy, and Action Learning. This allows the formation of a methodology that is context specific, i.e. a process that engages with the managers. The method that flows from the research paradigm is named 'Guided Self-Reflection' (GSR).

### **3.1 *Reality through Self-reflection***

By the second year of my DBA journey, the studies had revealed to me a personal perspective and interest that I would not have thought likely. Developments in my consultancy methods suggested that I would be involving myself in the research phase through interaction with the actors and through my observation of them. I therefore attempted to engage in a process of self-reflection to better understand myself and the effect I might have on the researched and the research. I did this by reflecting on three formative periods in my life: my home-life and education; my 20-year first career in the Royal Air Force; and my 10-year corporate career in business consultancy: This section records and summarises those reflections.

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<sup>14</sup> This approach is not to be confused with that of autoethnography. Whilst the research documents to an extent the ethnic background and social history of the author, it does so only to increase the integrity of the research by enabling a research methodology and method to be chosen that is consistent with his personal ontology and epistemology. Self is not used as the only data source, and the author is not using his "own experiences in a culture reflexively to look more deeply at self-other interactions". (Holt, 2003)



### **3.1.1 Home and Education**

My Father was a career military man which fact may have been the driver for my own 20-year military career, even though I flirted with Chartered Accountancy aspirations initially. My mother was a Nursery Nurse, but interrupted her career to be at home to bring up her two children. We were a very close self-sustaining family.

Life was a series of moves about every 18 months - 2 years, within the UK and abroad. This developed a certain independence and self-assertiveness in me borne of continuously having to adjust to different places, different people, and different schooling. Our ethos was one of “waste-not-want-not”, and respect for ones elders, ladies<sup>15</sup>, people in authority, and society in general.

The decision to maintain the family unit removed any thoughts of being placed in boarding schools and so my sister and I always attended day-schools, which comprised State primary, grammar, and later comprehensive schooling systems. This exposed me to a wide cross-section of folk along with their excesses and their hardships developing in me an ability to understand, appreciate, and tolerate most points of view.

I commenced a one-year chartered accountancy foundation course at a polytechnic. With the final examinations successfully behind me, and an articulated clerkship arranged I decided the perceived drudgery of the accounting world was not for me. I accepted the invitation of the polytechnic to cross into the second year of a 4-year “thick-sandwich” BA Honours degree course in Business Studies, specialising in marketing. In the third year, what might have been a subliminal aspiration emerged and I joined the Royal Air Force as a commissioned officer on a graduate-entry scheme and completed my degree. Perhaps this was the first sign of an inner desire to combine an ordered, conservative life with a temptation to experience a less predictable existence.

Some 20 years after the under-graduate degree, and driven by the decision to voluntarily retire from the Service, I completed a 2-year Post-graduate diploma in Facilities Management at the College of Estate Management, followed by a further year to gain an MBA in Facilities Management at a “new” university. Whilst DBA

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<sup>15</sup> This was the era of issuing ‘calling cards’ to your new neighbours on the Married Quarters ‘patch’, of behaving as a gentleman, and of opening doors and giving up your seat for ladies

studies are not normally considered a career necessity in business, I have an urge to add some new knowledge to the business world in which I live and to perhaps use that knowledge to further focus my career: My DBA studies are also being conducted under the auspices of a “new” university. I have therefore not experienced the environments of the public school or the traditional University. Neither have I found academia particularly easy, with good results only coming from pure hard work. However, my learning experience has been very rewarding and has proved infectious.

All of this seems to suggest that I have an outcome-driven, means-to-an-end, approach to life and advancement.

### **3.1.2 20 year Military Career**

I entered the Royal Air Force as a commissioned officer and served a 20-year career leaving at an option point of my choosing. As an officer in the Administrative Branch my work and training addressed managerial and strategic remits. I had management responsibilities for people, finances, policies and procedures, and working, social and living accommodation. My strategic responsibilities concerned developing plans and policies to meet operational scenarios. Both levels of activity placed an emphasis on providing the right support to our personnel in a given environment. People were understandably treated as a key resource.

Great interest was therefore taken in the welfare of staff, and I received training in counselling to assist in that role. Much was known about each person and their families and I would often become involved in helping resolve domestic crises for members of my teams. This involvement in people and their concerns and problems helped me develop a ‘gut-feel’ about people which usually proved quite an accurate assessment. There was a strong ethic in the Service and personal standards were high.

My outlook had to be more holistic than specific. The bigger picture had to be understood if the military goals were to be achieved. Work was structured, orderly and timely with a significant emphasis being placed on planning, which was based upon agreeing options and selecting alternatives. Not surprisingly perhaps, the mission outcome prevailed over any profit motive.

Meanwhile I was now married with two children. We moved as a family, every couple of years, and served at 'home' and abroad. We were a close family and lived many of the 20 years in married quarters on base. This was rented accommodation the size of which depended on rank and family size. The 'patch', as it was affectionately referred to, was a safe haven just a few minutes walk from work and play: Commuting was something I had been spared. Your neighbours were all known to you and of course were very similar types to you. We bought and sold our own home a few times but rarely had an opportunity to occupy it. I considered my job as secure to the normal retirement age of 55 and could look forward to a good, index-linked pension. I probably rather took for granted what others might have seen as an ideal work-life balance.

I lived and worked in an essentially non-business environment. The military mission was always clear and perceived to be supported, and the roles of those involved in helping achieve that mission were understood. You knew what sort of person you were working alongside: You understood their background and training. I believed wholeheartedly in what I was doing and why I was doing it and time was not wasted challenging it. We perceived ourselves to be outcome driven. Promotion came through appropriate and timely training, examinations to demonstrate the required knowledge for future duties, and a proven multi-skilled ability and strong inter-personal skills.

### **3.1.3 10 year Corporate Career**

Towards the end of my 20<sup>th</sup> year in the Service I found myself telling friends that "things were not what they used to be": something I had heard on joining the Service – but from those with 30-35 years of service. The changes were primarily the result of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) having to become more commercially aware, and it was eroding the life-style and standards that had attracted me to the Service in 1976, and some of us thought that our ability to accomplish our mission was being weakened. However, I had thoroughly enjoyed my service career thus far and decided to leave before that changed.

In 1996 it seemed that most businesses associated with designing, building, funding and operating commercial and residential real estate were feeling a need to change

their name and/or business description to one that contained ‘facilities management’ or its abbreviation, ‘FM’<sup>16</sup>. I found myself with a skill-set that those in the ‘FM’ world found useful. Rather than opting for active managerial FM, I embarked on a management consultancy career with firms engaged in offering advice to the FM sector, particularly to those involved in projects commissioned under the burgeoning Private Finance Initiative of the Government.

Three aspects of private business that had an immediate impact on me were those that at the time of writing represented the title and remit of a senior individual in the Microsoft Corporation: people, profit and loyalty. Generally, those you encountered in management positions did not seem very good man-managers, mostly through lack of training, or perhaps incentive. There was little evidence of a strong corporate “esprit de corps”, more an environment of individuals with varying cultural, historical and biographical inheritance struggling to balance their work with their life, whilst competing for reward. The intense profit emphasis that drove this new working environment overrode everything it seemed. Loyalty was difficult to find, be it to the company or to those with whom you worked, with rivalry and perhaps survival coming first.

Even promotion could result from a profitable year, rather than from a balanced competence to assume the higher position. Generally, company, and individual ethics were weak. Work was conducted in splintered groups and sub-groups, breeding rivalry that rarely seemed to share a common corporate goal.

This corporate environment seemed to quite naturally present me as a ‘non-believer’; one who always had to challenge objectives and motives. I was rarely satisfied with what were presented as the facts, tending to find more truth in exploring the ‘fiction’: I would question what had not been taken into account.

I was uncomfortable with, and therefore always challenging, the ‘Blairism’ of life, the ‘Lying without Lying’, which people seemed very pleased with themselves about but which appeared unnecessary and even deceitful to me.

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<sup>16</sup> A view later endorsed in Price’s history of the discipline (2002)

### **3.1.4 Summary**

The people-factor runs through each of these personal experiences in the Home, Service, and Commercial environments. My upbringing appeared to prepare me well for my first career but my beliefs and ethics were rather challenged by the corporate experience. I have found it testing to adjust to what I perceive to be the business culture. My inter-personal skills are quite strong and genuine as a result of the Service training. Perhaps I have not made sufficient allowance for the effect on people of commercial pressures, but I have been surprised how little emphasis I saw being placed on developing interpersonal and people-management skills in staff.

The discipline of the Service instilled in me a goal-driven, team-driven approach. Processes could be top-down, or bottom-up, but they would include the three classic planning levels of strategy, tactics and operations. This rigour was not evident in my experience of business organisations. Whilst it was possible that this was a feature of trying to deliver management consultancy in a specific FM environment, I believed it was more likely to be applicable to the general business environments.

The Service placed great importance on building an 'esprit de corps' but such a strong group commitment was rarely present in the businesses that I came into contact with. However, I do accept that the social and cultural composition of business groups is very different to those found in a military service and probably exacerbates attempts to build a combined purpose. However, the value of building the right environment for the current task did not seem to be recognised in my commercial world.

On reflection, it does seem that I have a natural need to understand the objective and the approach by which to achieve it. However, I also believe the approach has an inherent value which might be greater than the objective it is seeking to achieve. Making the most of what you have is ingrained in me and so improving the efficiency and effectiveness of resources comes as second nature to me. I understand the potential for value residing in intangible assets and I am comfortable dealing with qualitative issues. I am surprised to find that I have moved my approach to life from a rather positive, clear, and distinct one to one that is much more challenging and critical. Lastly, I am intrigued to note how my perspective of the work environment has



changed over the years and it is this that has promoted an increasing interest in understanding the role of perspectives in effecting change.

I feel it will strengthen my research if I am able to conduct my inquiry in accordance with a research paradigm that represents as closely as possible my personal approach to life. I therefore reviewed the three main philosophical research paradigms to identify which of them appeared consistent with the outcomes of my reflections and with the GSR framework.

## **3.2 Personal Research Paradigm**

Capra (1988, in Darwin, Johnson and McAuley, 2002), describes a paradigm as:

*“the totality of thoughts, perceptions, and values that forms a particular vision of reality, a vision that is the basis of the way a society organises itself.”*

Each paradigm is described by reference to its distinct ontology, epistemology, methodology and method. Personal thoughts, perceptions and values represent the way the world is seen (ontology) and how it is known to be seen in that way (epistemology). This section seeks to establish a personal stance on these two philosophical elements and how they then determine the logic of the research inquiry (methodological position), and in turn the techniques of the inquiry (research methods).

The approach adopted was to match the experience, being and understanding that had emerged from the personal reflections and research interest, with a number of approaches to describing the three dominant paradigms: Positivism, Anti-positivism or Interpretive Social Science (ISS), and Critical Social Science (CSS)<sup>17</sup>.

### **3.2.1 Positivist Orthodoxy**

The ‘new’ scientific way of understanding which, according to Furbey (1998), who is drawn upon throughout this section, is distinguished from its world-view predecessor by two elements: rationalism, where “knowledge is gained through logical deduction and self-evident premises”; and empiricism, where “knowledge must rely upon detailed observation, careful experiment, and the experience of the senses”. These two

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<sup>17</sup> CSS is used to denote the science and the scientist.

elements combine in differing proportions to form the original, “dominant definition of science which has been called ‘the positivist orthodoxy’ or Positivism”.

Positivism was first applied to the natural world, Furbey reminds us, and over the last three centuries has been responsible for strong advances in natural sciences such as chemistry, biology and physics, and in applied sciences such as medicine and engineering. He notes that it was during the twentieth century that the principles of science were applied to the study of human affairs where it became an orthodoxy in economics and psychology. However, this application of positivism remained challenged in political science and sociology and human geography although it started to be applied in professional areas such as business studies. This challenge became stronger and prompted the development of an alternative approach he calls Anti-Positivism and this is returned to in the next section.

Positivism, ISS (or anti-positivism), and CSS emerged from a major re-evaluation of social science that began in the 1960s which Neuman (1997) bases his assessment on. He recognises that “the three alternatives to social science are the core ideas distilled from many specific arguments”. The ISS and CSS paradigms are considered in the subsequent sections.

Furbey (1998) reminds us that a “Positivist ontology insists that reality consists in what is available to the senses.” Neuman adds that:

*“Humans are assumed to be self-interested, pleasure-seeking rational individuals. People operate on the basis of external causes, with the same cause having the same effect on everyone.” (Neuman, 1997)*

Positivism is seen by Bryman (2001) as having an objectivist ontology “that implies that social phenomena confront us as external facts that are beyond our reach or influence.” (In light of the constant development of interpretation of positivism and its alternatives, Bryman may have meant that the facts were *currently* beyond our influence.) Such objectivist ontology leads to a positivist epistemology that knowledge can be established through observation of the external facts. The world out-there has to be confirmed by the senses.

Positivist methodology relies on the use of experimentation to test and validate theories. Furbey (1998) sees their techniques of inquiry as being predominantly

quantitative and being used to “measure the existence, strength and direction of relationships between the elements comprising the universe.”

Seeking to understand, and even change, the perceptions held by business leaders of the value to their business of its support environment falls within the study of human affairs. However, an alignment of personal views of the world with those held by the positivist is difficult, possibly in part due to the following significant limitations positivism appears to have when it is applied to the social sciences.

The reliance of the positivist on external observation precludes capturing the inner meanings of people. Positivism is deterministic in that “it explains behaviour as the result of external factors acting upon people, determining the way in which they react” (Furbey, 1998). However, this ignores the fact that humans think as well as act: they actively interpret events and choose alternatives accordingly.

Positivism embraces analysis through deconstructing reality into its smaller parts and then looking at the way each part affects each other. The study of human affairs, or social science, embraces synthesis and involves to a large degree the study of group phenomena, not individual phenomena. Furbey (1998) highlights the dilemma that the positivist social scientist has with “a methodology based on breaking reality down into separate pieces ... when we want to focus upon the character and effects of collectivities”.

The use of the experimental method of the positivist in social scientific research presents two particular problems: Firstly, the conditions of complete experimental control result in people being studied in abnormal conditions producing results of limited value; Secondly, the subjects of the study are aware of being studied and unnatural behaviour can result.

Finally, “there is no world [out there] independent of our perception of it” (Furbey, 1998). This comment refers to the problems with the positivist claims that they can make a distinction between facts and values. Their claim to objectivity is weakened by the reality that their own interpretation of the world is based on their own experiences, perceptions, and preferences. This circularity of epistemology helped explain some of the personal reflections and shape a personal epistemological position. This circularity

is termed the Epistemological Paradox and is expressed by Johnson & Duberley (2000):

*"We can all discriminate the warranted from the unwarranted, the rational from the non-rational, and the scientific from the non-scientific, but the way we do this is based on the same understanding of the nature of knowledge: I know what I know because of how I have come to know it."*

It was in seeking to understand better the "how I have come to know it" part that seemed to have application to organisational change interventions. The route to this understanding and the answer to the paradox could reside in "the development of reflexivity - noticing sceptically our own preunderstandings." (Johnson and Duberley, 2000) If the research participants were encouraged to reflect on their own epistemological positioning, as the author had trialled, then perhaps an alternative narrative of their use of resources would emerge that might improve their business.

### **3.2.2 Anti-Positivist / Interpretive Social Science**

Furbey (1998) sees the anti-positivist perspective, or that of Interpretive Social Science (ISS), as one where reality consists of:

*"free, conscious actors who are active in endowing the world around them with meaning and acting upon the basis of those meaning systems"*

He states that anti-positivists know this to be the case through an account for the meanings of people for their values and actions:

*"The logic of inquiry that flows from this anti-positivist ontology and epistemology ... is that understanding comes ... through seeking to understand the actor's own perceptions and interpretations of the world."*

The techniques of inquiry that flow from this include participant observation and informal, open-ended interviewing and see the researcher becoming involved with the actor, and with qualitative data being generated.

From an early emphasis on optimisation and an element of wanting to impose 'alignment' a personal epistemological insight of the author had been the need to *understand* or *interpret* human behaviour rather than to *explain* it: and this is what differentiates the Positivist from the Anti-positivist. Bryman (2001) states that,

*"[interpretism] is predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action."*

The personal interest of the author in the sources of intangible value, like the Support Environment, rather than the actual tangible assets, appears to have its parallel in *constuctionism* (also referred to as constructivism), rather than in *objectivism*: an ontological difference between the anti-positivist and the positivist paradigms. The positivist would therefore likely see the support environment and its meaning as having an existence that is independent of the social actors comprising that environment<sup>18</sup>. However, the anti-positivist would likely consider the support environment to be a “social construction(s) built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors” (Bryman, *op. cit.*).

### 3.2.3 Critical Social Science

Neuman (1997) defines social science in terms of Critical Social Science (CSS) which he interprets as:

*“a critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves.”*

Bryman (2001) says that:

*“What makes critical realism **critical** is that the identification of generative mechanisms offers the prospect of introducing changes that can transform the status quo.” (original emphasis)*

Neuman (1997) states the purpose of CSS as being to change the world. More specifically he states that “social research should uncover myths, reveal hidden truths, and help people to change the world for themselves”.

The scale of change aspirations a researcher may have in embracing CSS appears to range from the fundamental to the radical: from the readily acceptable change to the strongly resisted change. The *outcome* of deploying a CSS philosophy might also range significantly in terms of the willingness or ability to embrace the change-need being exposed or promoted. An inquiry into building an awareness of the potential benefits of adopting the support environment concept could help people embrace change, but it could also result in resistance to change. This research needs to remain alert to these possibilities since it is only really intended to promote reasons for change

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<sup>18</sup> The dominant structuralist concept of the support environment probably carries the same claim (see Chapter 1)



and to leave management the choice of whether to adopt such change, e.g. where the intervention was offering a person, or a group, a different perception of a given reality (such as the support environment) in the hope that such a difference might promote an improvement in business performance.

The more subtle change theme featured in the position that Gill and Johnson (2002) gave to critical theory as being:

*“concerned with organizational change – not just in the form of a distinctive analysis and critique of current management theory and practice but also in the form of a moral imperative to engender democratic social relations **and thereby shift the balance of power to currently marginalised groups.**” (emphasis added)*

Here, violent change is not envisaged, but rather the swaying of opinion gently in another direction. Thus the “marginalised groups” could be the facility and property management groups engaged in supporting their corporate businesses through creating and managing the appropriate support environment. Promoting such support within a business context might increase the chances of such groups being recognised for their potential strategic contribution.

For Newman (1997), CSS ontology consists in:

*“a social reality that evolves over time. It may be misleading on the surface and have unobservable enduring real structures of power underneath.”*

The epistemological position of the CSS is one where truth is not based on the evidence but as a reflective and critical consensus. The CSS knows that people have unrealised potential which “can be realised if they dispel their illusions and join collectively to change society” (Neuman, 1997).

The methodological stance of the CSS is that of critical theory. Neuman (1997) describes a good critical theory in terms that appear to resonate with the research objectives when he says:

*“A good critical theory teaches people about their own experiences, helps them to understand their historical role, and can be used by ordinary people to improve conditions.”*

The stance combines the nomothetic methodology of the positivist, based on the discovery of universal laws, with the ideographic methodology of the anti-positivists, concerned with the understanding of the unique and the particular.

The favoured techniques of inquiry for the CSS are the historical-comparative and action research methods, with the latter addressing the facilitation of democratic agreement.

### 3.2.4 Discussion

On reflection, there had been an uninformed view of the personal research paradigm of the author at the start of the second year of the DBA. However, there was a conviction that the research would be enhanced if it remained true to and comfortable with the personal ontological and epistemological position, rather than with a philosophical position adopted solely for the purposes of the research. The need to embrace a field of research that was both quantitative and qualitative was also envisaged. The view at that time was that the research would also need to be interpretive, and reflect on the environment within which businesses functioned. Furthermore, it was felt that in order to allow for other theories to emerge from an initial research question an inductive approach was indicated. Lastly, a need to engage with the ‘actors’ in collecting the data was recognised. In this way, additional routes to business performance improvement might be revealed to those actors through their reflection and critical consensus.

The self-reflection had helped to place these thoughts in the context of the philosophical positions which had been explored. Fundamentally, there was recognition of the need to integrate the contribution of human subjectivity with the objectivity of resource identification and management and therefore the positivist notion of dualism<sup>19</sup> was left behind.

This personal shift in what is known and how it is known suggests a transition through the Three Ontological Positions identified by Schein (1998): The *Rational Economic* people maximising self-interest; the *Social* people who wished to work together and be sociable; and those *Self-actualisation* people who are autonomously self-motivated. There seemed to be evidence of such a transition in the research interests thus far: comfort was found in using the metaphor of the Firm as a Business Support Environment – an environment created to directly support the business of the organisation; Interest in the sources of competitive advantage is with those sources that

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<sup>19</sup> the existence of the two independent worlds of subjectivity and objectivity

sit within the business support *environment*, or with the Business Support Environment as that source; and there is a focus on those sources of greatest utility, and particularly those that are intangible and subject to personal perception.

A personal belief in a “theory neutral observational language” (Gill and Johnson, 2002) had surfaced and with it belief in the three implications which Gill and Johnson (2002) believe doubters of such a language face:

*“management research may be morally founded upon a technical imperative to improve the efficiency, effectiveness or health of an organization through the analysis of how things really are.”*

*“if all knowledge is a social product, why should the culturally relative products of some organizational groups acquire greater epistemological and social standing at the expense of alternative ways of knowing and acting.”*

*“because all knowledge is socially constructed, the only moral legitimation for knowledge can be consensus established through argument and analysis ...”*

This last need to establish consensus to legitimise knowledge is an important feature for this research. Personal experience over 10 years of working in consultancy companies had revealed a real inability to reach consensus amongst stakeholders for a particular course of action: manifested in failing business initiatives. It was therefore likely that the logic of inquiry would include the need to reach a consensus, or the need to understand the reasons for failing to achieve a consensus. This suggested that the consensus being sought around the value of seeking an alignment of the support environment with the business might be enhanced if the route to that assessment of value was more reflective and critical: and owned by those reaching the consensus.

This apparent personal tendency towards the critical theorist was tempered by a comfort found in the paradigm of the Interpretive Social Scientist. The personal philosophical paradigm was settling somewhere on the boundary between the two: depicted by the bold line in Table 3.2 below which summarises the key characteristics of the paradigms of Positivism, Interpretive Social Science, and Critical Social Science.

	<b>Ontology</b>	<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Method</b>
<b>Positivism</b>	Reality consists in what is available to the senses Ordered universe, atomistic, observable	Knowledge derived from sensory experience Knowledge can be established through observation of the world "out there"	Experimentation to test and validate theories Nomothetic – based on the discovery of universal laws	Observation, experiment and quantitative measurement
<b>Interpretive Social Science or Anti-Positivism</b>	Reality consists in a framework of meaningful action which human beings create Social reality is negotiated, interpreted	Knowledge can be established through an account of people's meanings for their values and actions Knowledge derived from everyday concepts & meanings	Seeking to understand the actor's own perceptions and interpretations of the world Ideographic – concerned with the understanding of the unique and the particular	Participant observation and informal, open-ended interviewing
<b>Critical Social Science</b>	Natural & social realities are social constructs Social reality evolves over time	Truth is not based on the evidence but as a reflective & critical consensus	A mix of nomothetic and ideographic	Historical-comparative Action Research

Table 3.2 – Paradigms of Positivism, Interpretive Social Science and Critical Social Science

The summary of the answers to the eight questions Neuman (1997) posed in describing the assumptions and ideas of Positivism, Interpretive Social Science, and Critical Social Science are given in Table 3.3 at the end of this section: The personal paradigm is again positioned between ISS and CSS in this summary.

In association with the summaries in Tables 3.2 and 3.3, the personal reflection had made it possible to recognise how the view of life had changed over the years, perhaps influenced by the changing working environments. There was some personal aspect in each of the philosophical paradigms. This change in the view of life could be seen as a transition from that of the Positivist, through that of the Interpretative Social Scientist, to that of an emerging Critical Theorist. More likely is the notion that certain characteristics of that personal view of reality have become dominant due to the changing personal perceptions of life and the working environment. Either way, the

ontological and epistemological position seems consistent with that of the contextualist.

To some extent the research methodology and method flows from this personal philosophical paradigm that straddles that of ISS and the CSS. This suggests that the methodology needs to be a blend of seeking to understand the perceptions and interpretations of the world of the participants, with some experimentation to test and validate theories. The method would need to be a blend of participant observation and informal, open-ended questions, with an emphasis on action research. However, the chosen methodology and method must also be grounded in the nature of the research which is inductive. The next section therefore seeks to ground the research methodology and method.

	Positivism	Interpretive Social Science	Critical Social Science
<b>1. Reason for research</b>	To discover natural laws so people can predict and control events	To understand and describe meaningful social action	To smash myths and empower people to change society radically
<b>2. Nature of social reality</b>	Stable pre-existing patterns or order that can be discovered	Fluid definitions of a situation created by human interaction	Conflict filled and governed by hidden underlying structures
<b>3. Nature of human being</b>	Self-interested and rational individuals who are shaped by external forces	Social beings who create meaning and who constantly make sense of their worlds	Creative, adaptive people with unrealized potential, trapped by illusion and exploitation
<b>4. Role of common sense</b>	Clearly distinct from and less valid than science	Powerful everyday theories used by ordinary people	False beliefs that hide power and objective conditions
<b>5. Theory looks like</b>	A logical, deductive system of interconnected definitions, axioms, and laws	A description of how a group's meaning system is generated and sustained	A critique that reveals true conditions and helps people see the way to a better world
<b>6. An explanation that is true</b>	Is logically connected to laws and based on facts	Resonates or feels right to those who are being studied	Supplies people with tools needed to change the world
<b>7. Good evidence</b>	Is based on precise observations that others can repeat	Is embedded in the context of fluid social interactions	Is informed by a theory that unveils illusions
<b>8. Place for values</b>	Science is value free, and values have no place except when choosing a topic	Values are an integral part of social life: no group's values are wrong, only different	All science must begin with a value proposition; some positions are right, some are wrong

Table 3.3 - Summary of Differences among the Three Approaches to Research, Neuman (1997)



### **3.3 Grounded Research Methodology & Method**

*"methodology reflects the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher ... whereas methods are secondary concerns around the techniques used for data collection". (Llewellyn, 1993, through Parker and Roffey, 1996)*

In this statement Llewellyn implies that methods are in some way less strongly philosophically linked to the ontology and epistemology of the researcher, serving more as a data collection service. In contrast to this view, the data collection methods chosen for this research need to quite strongly reflect the personal ontological and epistemological position that was established through the last two sections. If this is achieved then the research process should be more fulfilling, and the research output should therefore be richer.

The research method that is in sympathy with the methodology will need to build consensus around: what constitutes resources; what role those resources have in meeting business needs; whether seeking to align those resources with business needs is beneficial to the business; and whether the support environment concept helps enable such an understanding.

A grounded research methodology has research methods that have as their main purpose "to identify, develop and relate concepts and categories" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, through Parker and Roffey, 1996). This has a fit with the understanding developed in Chapters 1 and 2 of relating key concepts such as alignment, with perspectives on resources and their utilisation.

The need to engage with the participants in understanding their view of the use of resources and their reasons for that view presented a probable need to draw upon elements of an action research methodology. The need to establish a participant's pre-understanding of resources and their alignment with the needs of the business suggested a particular reliance on reflexivity and narrative therapy. Lastly, the desire to adopt an enabling approach to the field research suggests a need to borrow from an action learning methodology.

Therefore, the methodologies which are in some degree applicable to the personal philosophical paradigm are now reviewed, and a research method is created that borrows from each of the methods related to those methodologies.

### 3.3.1 Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed a methodology for generating theory called Grounded Theory. The two sociologists later developed divergent methodological approaches to grounded theory and this led to two definitions:

*“a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop and inductively derive grounded theory about a phenomenon”. (Strauss and Corbin 1990, through Parker and Roffey, 1996)*

*“a general methodology of analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area”. (Glaser 1992, through Parker and Roffey, 1996)*

It seemed prudent to not exclude quantitative data and in that respect the Glaser definition is preferable. Such a method actively seeks to elicit theory and practice which is particularly relevant to this research where it is hoped that theory and practice will come from an attempt to operationalise a concept. A second aspect that they emphasised in referring to Jones (1985), and which seemed highly relevant to the research area, was that:

*“there must be a genuine attempt to understand the world of the actors **as they have consciously or unconsciously constructed it**, and to provide the foundations for developing a theory that will serve as a future basis for explanation.” (Jones 1985, through Parker and Roffey, 1996, emphasis added)*

The belief was that the support environment was mostly an unconscious construction but that if understood in terms of resource alignment with the business might become more consciously constructed and thereby benefit the business.

The involvement of the ‘researched’ alongside the ‘researchers’ was also critical to the research area so that enablement or empowerment might occur. The need for the researcher to be “seen as an important part of the discovery process” (Laughlin 1995, through Parker & Roffey, 1996) was again important if the intervention approach was to be valued.

In stating that grounded theory generates theory that “will fit and work”, Glaser and Strauss (1967, through Parker and Roffey, 1996) identify another personal requirement

for the research: It is an imperative for the research output to be of practical use to organisations.

A further reinforcement of the use of this methodology was its two central features:

*“that it is concerned with development of theory out of data and the approach is **iterative or discursive** ... meaning that data collection and analysis proceed in tandem, repeatedly referring back to each other.” (Bryman, 2001, original emphasis)*

A need had been recognised to conduct a discursive and iterative process with the participating senior managers (the actors) if a narrative of their initial perceptions of resources and the role of resources was to be constructed; to then offer a deconstruction of that narrative; and then to understand how those initial perceptions might change as the narrative is reconstructed.

Grounded theory research can be assessed in terms of how well it has assisted the relationships between concepts in guiding future action in the area studied. Parker and Roffey (1996) refer to the concepts in terms of their Fit, Understanding, Generality and Control, which are a reclassification of the key criteria offered by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) for assessing the grounded theory process.

Since grounded theory is theory grounded in data, there is a need in grounded theory research to think about data in theoretical terms. To help increase such sensitivity Strauss and Corbin (1990, through Parker and Roffey 1996) identified the techniques of Questioning, Text Analysis, Strategies for making comparisons, and Challenging implied assumptions about the *meaning* of a research phenomenon. The three main categories of data found in grounded theory research are data collection, data generation, and experiential data.

The grounded theoretical framework comprises concepts that are an aggregation of codes, which themselves are differentiated by dimensions and sub-dimensions. The coding family comprises Open Coding, Axial Coding and Selective Coding. According to Strauss (1987, through Parker and Roffey, 1996) coding was the result of “raising questions and giving provisional answers (hypotheses) about categories and their relations”.

The Codes are monitored and stimulated by the writing of Theoretical Memos. Categorisation of the codes results from developing dimensions and enables a focal core code (or focal category) to emerge. The extent to which the relationship between such categories and the most tangible characteristic of an idea, object, event, activity or relationship explains or describes the research phenomenon was referred to as Conceptual Density. This codification approach seemed to have application in understanding intangible resources and their perceived value to the business.

Parker and Roffey (1996) contrast the statistical sampling procedures used in positivist quantitative research with the grounded theory research use of theoretical sampling. They refer to Strauss and Corbin (1990) using theoretical sampling to:

*“sample events, incidents, and so forth, that are indicative of categories, their properties and dimensions, so that you can develop and conceptually relate them”.*

Thus, an example would be a grounded theory study of the drivers of continuous business improvement that begins with interviewing key personnel responsible for business improvement processes then moves to “selected ‘theoretical samples’ from other areas of the organisation based on the concepts developed from coding and categorizing the initial interviews” (Parker and Roffey, 1996).

The consensus from the analysis by Parker and Roffey (1996) of Glaser (1978), Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) was that

*“rigorous grounded research will sample until: no new or relevant data appear; all elements of the theoretical paradigm are covered; and relationships between categories have been validated.”*

The rigour of the grounded theory methodology was noted, but the initial capture of an emerging theory may well be possible with less than a full application of the grounded theory. Its requirement for the researcher not to commit himself to a pre-existing theory when entering the research site, but to allow one to emerge is particularly relevant. Already, prior to undertaking this research, attempts to engage clients in aligning their support environment with their business need had generated a new theory: re-evaluating the alignment from a different perspective may reveal new routes to meeting personal and organisational goals. In conclusion, there were certain aspects of this approach which could be incorporated in the emerging methodology.

### 3.3.2 Action Research

Bryman (2001) defines action research as,

*“an approach in which the action researcher and a client collaborate in the diagnosis of a problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis.”*

The application of an action research method may need to recognise that the ‘clients’ (research participants) might not consider themselves to have a specific problem in relating resource utilisation to business need, rather the general one of how to improve business performance.

McKernan (1996) in Darwin, Johnson, and McAuley (2002) defines action research more fully as follows:

*“Action Research is the reflective process whereby in a given problem area, where one wishes to improve practice or personal understanding, inquiry is carried out by the practitioner – first, to clearly define the problem; secondly, to specify a plan of action – including the testing of hypotheses by application of action to the problem. Evaluation is then undertaken to monitor and establish the effectiveness of the action taken. Finally, participants reflect upon, explain developments, and communicate these results to the community of action researchers. Action research is systematic self-reflective scientific inquiry by practitioners to improve practice.”*

Whilst the mention of “improve practice or personal understanding”, and “systematic self-reflective scientific inquiry” were consistent with the nature of this research, the thoroughness of the “testing of hypotheses” and “evaluation ... to monitor and establish” seemed too constraining.

However, like Grounded Theory, Action Research can involve the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data which would be necessary in the research. Additionally, it is an iterative process which again would be necessary if the stories of resource initiatives of the participants were to be re-told in an attempt to identify the value of the contribution of such initiatives. The stages of this particular iterative process of Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect, would need differing emphases in recognition of the quite limited period of time available to conduct the field work.

The three major approaches to action research were summarised by Darwin, Johnson, McAuley (2002) in Table 3.4 below: They based it upon Carr and Kremmis (1986) and Grundy (1987).

Interest	Knowledge	Medium	Science	Fundamental Interest
Technical	Instrumental (causal explanation)	Work	Empirical- analytic or natural sciences	Controlling the environment through rule-following action based upon empirically grounded laws
Practical	Practical (understanding)	Language	Hermeneutic or 'interpretive' sciences	Understanding the environment through interaction based upon a consensual interpretation of meaning
Emancipatory	Emancipatory (reflection)	Power	Critical sciences	Emancipation and empowerment to engage in autonomous action arising out of authentic, critical insights into the social construction of human society

Table 3.4 – Three Major Approaches to Action Research

Interestingly, this Table emphasised again the personal positionality as being between the interpretive and critical social sciences. It could be seen how the research might fall within the ‘practical’ interest where fundamentally ‘a consensual interpretation of meaning’ was being sought. However, the goal expressed by McKernan (1991) through Darwin, Johnson and McAuley (2002) did not fit particularly well: “The goal of practical action researchers is understanding the practice and solving immediate problems.” Moreover, “the change focus is muted, and rests primarily at the individual level.” (Darwin, Johnson and McAuley, 2002) In the reflexivity aspect of the planned research it was very important that work was primarily at an individual level in order to obtain as true and untainted a narrative as possible. Thereafter, it was envisaged that a more collective view would be taken and some consensus amongst the individuals sought.

This emancipatory aspect could apply to those participants who feel that their position or their cultural fit with the organisation might require certain of their opinions to be suppressed. As Gill and Johnson (2002) noted:

*“For management researchers ally themselves with critical theory, those individuals and groups whose perspectives are ordinarily silenced in organizations must be given a voice through action research.”*



On balance though, treating the involvement of the research participants as knowing they had a shared problem to resolve needed to be considered with caution; the research being more about inducing such a revelation. Moreover, it was difficult to categorise the envisaged research as meeting the three minimal requirements for action research set by Carr and Kemmis (1986) in Darwin, Johnson and McAuley (2002):

- *The project takes as its subject-matter a social practice, regarding it as a form of strategic action susceptible of improvement.*
- *The project proceeds through a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, with each of these activities being systematically and self-critically implemented and interrelated.*
- *The project involves those responsible for the practice in each of the moments of the activity, widening participation in the project gradually to include others affected by the practice, and maintaining collaborative control of the process.*

The social practice could be that of creating the support environment by a particular use of resources in a particular way. However, the planning and acting elements of the cycle were unlikely to be applicable. Additionally, the envisaged fieldwork would represent a pilot and would not therefore include all those ‘responsible for the practice’. That said, it would be the intention to extend the pilot to wider participation as the selected variation became diffused.

In a similar conclusion to the use of grounded theory, elements of action research might draw upon, but the technique would not be deployed in its entirety. However, full action research might become relevant in the post-doctoral pursuit of the outcomes from this research.

### **3.3.3 Reflexivity and Narrative Therapy**

The personal self-reflexivity was most enlightening: it identified the shift in the philosophical stance, and allowed a greater appreciation of other perspectives which in turn, to a certain extent, changed the pre-understanding. The act of reflection effectively created a story, or a narrative, of segments of a life, the interpretation of which would probably change in the re-telling depending on the perspective taken. Even such an initial experience of the link between reflexivity and narrative therapy indicated that these two approaches could be considered in the following way.

Research participants could first narrate their pre-understanding of the role of resources in relation to business performance. They would then reflect upon that narration and then re-tell the story. Lastly, they would assess whether the two stories have significant differences which could represent a shift in their perception of resources and the contribution those resources make to improving business performance. The potential relevance of these two approaches necessitated their review to assess their possible contribution to the research method.

### **3.3.3.1. Reflexivity**

The personal philosophical reflections had prompted a consideration of the actual perceptions managers have of resources and of the use of those resources in meeting business objectives. The focus of attention started to shift to the means of understanding why people held the view they did about the use and role of resources, whether that view might change if they were guided through a period of reflexivity, and whether that change of view might reveal different routes to achieving their objectives.

Success in recruiting the research participants would depend upon the ability of the researcher to help them identify a precondition that was problematic and worthy of greater thought and understanding: This might be, for example, the continual search for increased efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources.

The ‘thought and understanding’ would engage reflexive thinking because as Darwin, Johnson and McAuley (2002) remark:

*“When we are learning non-reflexively we do not raise to the level of consciousness the core issues that lie behind the theory or the practical action – they are “taken for granted”*

So, for example, thinking reflexively might generate a different view of the reality of ‘resources’: perhaps revealing assets that were hitherto not perceived as resources, or perhaps, resources that were not hitherto perceived as directly influencing business performance.

Gill and Johnson (2002) describe two types of reflexivity. *Situational reflexivity*, which is more “the monitoring by an ethnographer of his or her impact upon the social situation under investigation”, and *epistemological reflexivity*, which is “where the

observer attempts hermeneutically to reflect upon and articulate the assumptions he or she deploys in apprehending and interpreting his or her own observations.”

Both types of reflexivity apply to this research but in slightly different ways. *Situational reflexivity* will determine a major outcome of the research which will be whether the perceptions of resources and their uses, held by participants at the outset of the research, have actually changed during the field-work. *Epistemological reflexivity* has both a major input to the research and a major outcome of the research: The researcher will have assumed the concept of ‘alignment of resources’ in capturing and interpreting the data, and will also need to assess the effect of ‘guiding’ the reflections of the participant in this manner. Bryman (2001) helps to address this very issue when he says:

*“the term carries the connotation that social researchers should be reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases, and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate.”*

Such reflection has been part of the development of the research methodology, but is also a central feature of the research method. Gill and Johnson (2002), and Bryman (2001) were emphasising the reflexivity by the researcher rather than the researched. This view has been embraced and acknowledged in that the hope would be to create a new understanding of the use of resources in the participant through the reflexivity of the researcher. However, the intent is to also facilitate such reflexivity in the researched as well, so that the ‘new understanding’ is discovered, and thereby owned, by them.

### **3.3.3.2. Narrative Therapy**

Besley (2002) reminds us that narrative therapy was initially developed as a form of family therapy by Michael White (Adelaide, Australia) and David Epston (Auckland, New Zealand) in 1989.<sup>20</sup> However, she points out that narrative therapy is part of a broader movement within humanities and social sciences referred to as ‘the linguistic turn’ which seeks to shift the discussion “to the meta-level to study the language of

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<sup>20</sup> This use is the subject of White and Epston, 1989, 1990.

representation rather than the referents or objects themselves”: It is this ‘turn to narrative’ that has application to this research.

A narrative comprises “events, linked in sequence, across time, [and] according to a plot” (Morgan, 2000). She identifies the generic stages of narrative therapy as follows, alongside which are suggested specific interpretations that might help frame the research:

- Naming the problem – sub-optimal use of resources;
- Tracing the history of the problem – tracing organisational structural, ethical, and cultural influences;
- Exploring the effects of the problem – exploring under-performance from a ‘use of resources’ perspective;
- Situating the problem in context: Deconstruction - understanding perceptions of ‘resources’ and their contribution to meeting personal and corporate objectives;
- Discovering unique outcomes – discovering valuable links between resources and corporate outcomes; and
- Tracing the history and meaning of the unique outcome and naming an alternative story – tracing the reasons for the link being ‘hidden’ and discerning how to address those reasons.

Barry (1997) outlines how narrative therapy shuns expert imposed solutions and instead:

*“entails careful reading, acknowledgement and reflection of client stories; and opens space for the authoring of alternative stories which counter hegemonic discourses so that there is no longer a sole dominating account of the problem.” (Barry, 1997)*

If the problem was the need to improve the use of resources then employing these characteristics of narrative therapy could enable a story to emerge of how to achieve this, which could be different to the prevailing dominant story: One which builds awareness, rather than leads the discussion, about such improvement being achieved through seeking to align the use of resources with the needs of the business.

Barry goes on to stress that narrative therapy is concerned with facilitating change. This concern is very relevant to the research aspirations. Barry offers further support for the relevance of narrative therapy to this inquiry:

*"narrative therapy is thoroughly steeped in considerations of philosophy, literary theory, history and anthropology – it provides an enticing model of how scholarly work in the humanities might be linked to practice." (Barry, 1997)*

Barry identifies two orienting tenets in narrative therapy. The first is a basic assumption among most narrative therapists "that people's lives are heavily influenced by the sense-making stories they tell about themselves." The second is "that stories and power are fundamentally interconnected."

Again, if the "problem" is not appreciating the value of seeking to optimise resource utilisation, then the two tenets conspire to make self-initiated change difficult. Barry discusses a number of methods for "devictimizing" the victimized. Thus, if research participants were to recognise through self-reflexivity a number of biases contriving to leave them with their current opinion of resource utilisation, then these methods may help them see the 'problem' in a different way. The methods Barry describes are Influence Mapping, Problem Externalisation, Identifying Unique Outcomes, and Story Audiencing. Each of these methods would seem to have a contribution to make to the research.

In their work on a narrative view of strategic discourse, Barry and Elmes (1997) quote from Martin (1986):

*"By changing the definition of what is being studied, we change what we see; and when different definitions are used to chart the same territory, the results will differ, as do topographical, political, and demographic maps, each revealing one aspect of reality by virtue of disregarding all others."*

This strongly supported a growing personal conviction that the narrative approach strongly suited the research: the reality of resource utilisation held by business leaders could change if they viewed it with a resource alignment perspective.

The 'communication' perspective of the term 'narrative' was particularly insightful where:

*"Narrative is a form of "meaning making." ... Narrative recognizes the meaningfulness of individual experiences by noting how they function as parts of the whole." (Polkinghorne, 1988, in Barry and Elmes, 1997)*

Two aspects of this perspective could help frame the research. Firstly, it is quite easy to imagine the narrative of the role of resources being somewhat different from an author who was a chartered surveyor by profession, than from one who was a chartered accountant, and from another who was a facilities manager. If each such author were enabled to consider these other parts of the whole resources narrative, represented by these different perceptions, then they might change their perception of a concept such as aligning resources with business needs.

Secondly, relevant questions from the researcher, guided by resource alignment considerations, may enable the participant to re-assess the strength of the linkages between the various parts of his or her business.

The output from applying the logic of inquiry thus far would be a collection of pre-understandings that would have been subjected to guided, relevant questioning, and then analysed. The next stage would be to try and establish some consensus on the usefulness of applying a resource alignment perspective in seeking to meet business objectives. A consensus would also be sought on the contribution to business improvement of deploying this particular methodology and method. Seeking a measure of the degree of this consensus could also continue to build awareness in participants of aligning resources with business need.

### **3.3.4 Action Learning**

As Dr David Botham<sup>21</sup> points out in his forward to Revans (1998), the linking of understanding to doing or action is not new, suggesting, for example, that such a link was made by Confucius in 500 BC. However, Professor Reg Revans is credited as pioneering the Action Learning approach when he introduced the term in the 1940s during his work with the coal mines in England and Wales. Quotations in this section are attributed to his 1998 work unless otherwise referenced.

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<sup>21</sup> At the time of writing the Forward, Dr Botham was Director of the Revans Centre for Action Learning and Research at the University of Salford



The purpose of Action Learning is to promote organisational change through local action and learning. According to '12Manage Rigor and Relevance' (2006), a World Wide Web site providing a basic explanation of over 400 management methods, models and organisational theory, Action Learning can be defined variously as:

*"An approach to individual and organizational development."*

*"A process for bringing together a group of people with varied levels of skills and experience to analyze an actual work problem and develop an action plan."*

*"An experience-based approach to developing people that uses work on meaningful problems as a way to learn."*

The site notes that action learning typically comprises experiential learning, creative complex problem-solving, acquisition of relevant knowledge, and co-learning group support.

The purpose of Action Learning according to Revans is:

*"to make useful progress on the treatment of problems/opportunities, where no solution can possibly exist already because different managers, all honest, experienced and wise, will advocate different courses of action in accordance with their different value systems, their different past experiences and their different hopes for the future."*

The objectives of Action Learning are:

*"to make useful progress upon the treatment of some problem or opportunity in the real world;*

*to give nominated managers sufficient scope, variable but sustained, to learn for themselves, and in the company of colleagues, how best to approach ill-structured challenges to which nobody can, at the outset, suggest any satisfactory response; and*

*to encourage teachers and others in management development to perceive their missions afresh. They should no longer try to teach managers anything about how to manage, but should see themselves as having to contrive, with senior managements, the conditions in which all managers, including those at the top, learn with and from each other in the pursuit of their common and everyday duties."*

These objectives align themselves well with the personal sentiments and motivations of this research: to facilitate an appreciation of the merit in seeking a closer alignment of resource utilisation with the needs of the business; to do so in an enabling way; and to have participants learn from viewing their 'common and everyday duties' from a different perspective. However, the emphasis at this stage is on the individual rather than the group.

Revans described Action Learning with the formula:  $L = P + Q$ , where Learning (L) occurs when Programmed (P) knowledge is combined with insightful questioning (Q). Programmed knowledge is traditional instruction and is required to solve challenges that have a right answer. Insightful questioning, or critical reflection, is required for challenges that have no right answer.

*"our principal interest is in Q, the idea of action learning. We do not reject P; it is the stuff of traditional instruction."*

There are twenty 'inalienable' assumptions of Action Learning programmes which Revans cites: The following are most pertinent to gaining a basic understanding of this approach.

*"Action Learning is cradled in the task itself, asking whether that task can be done so that, merely by reflecting upon how it currently seems to be done, the very doing of it supplies the learning generally offered far from the scenes of managerial activity."*

This appears to support the desire to ask participants to reflect upon how they currently use their resources, so that they may 'learn' of different routes to achieving their objectives.

*"That which may be known cannot be applied until insightful questions have been asked: P may be necessary, but, in the absence of Q, cannot be sufficient."*

The intention to invite participants to consider their business from a resource alignment perspective will require the insightful questions to be asked that are rooted in that perspective.

*"Problems and opportunities are treated by leaders who must be aware of their own value systems, differing between individuals, and of the influences of their past personal experiences. These will strongly influence their subjective judgements and, hence, their predisposing willingness to take risks. Such risks are diminished to the extent that further discriminating questions are posed and answered; this demands exploratory insight (Q)."*

This assumption that problems require insightful questions supports another of the research intentions: to enquire about the backgrounds of each participant so that the participant, and the researcher, can place their subjective views of resources and alignment in the context of their own 'value systems' and 'past experiences'.

Revans sees insightful questions being the route to solving *problems*, "about which no single course of action is to be justified by any code of programmed knowledge (P)", leaving P to address *puzzles*, "from which escapes are thought to be known (troubles

with programmed solutions) even although the escape or solution may be hard to discover”. Aligning resources with the needs of the business is more of a problem than a puzzle since programmed knowledge appears to stop short of seeking such alignment from within a business issue context.

The ‘set’ is seen as of central importance to Action Learning, and differentiates Action Learning from the emerging, preferred research method. A set is a group of managers who:

*“learn to give to and to accept from other managers the criticism, advice and support needed to develop their own managerial powers, all in the course of identifying and treating their own personal tasks.”*

It is important to Revans that the set mainly reports, analyses and plans real-time action “continually being taken by the participants in their operational backgrounds”. What is envisaged for this research is a ‘set’ that comprises a group of senior managers but whose members as individuals, not as a group, are initially engaged in re-evaluating the alignment of their resources ‘in the course of identifying and treating their own personal tasks’. Whilst feedback to individuals of any group consensus would be provided, intra-group feedback and discussion is envisaged as a continuing, post-doctoral, stage of the research. Similarly, the outcome of this stage of the research will hopefully be the discovery by participants of new routes to achieving their personal and corporate objectives, but those routes would also only be explored at the next research stage.

The Action Learning process requires:

- The objective of the Action Learning group to be clarified and the group to be formed;
- The issues to be analysed and actions identified for resolving them;
- The problem to be presented to the group and then re-framed following a series of questions guided by the Action Learning consultant;
- A goal to be identified the achievement of which would resolve the re-framed problem;

- Action strategies to be formed and implemented; and
- The cycle to be repeated and the learning to be captured.

This strength of the approach has a strong contribution to make to the envisaged research. The need for reflection and feedback could be reinforced by drawing upon the reflexivity and narrative therapy approach. The insightful questioning (Q) would come from the introduction of a resource alignment perspective. The ‘problem’ would be how to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the use of resources. However, formation of an appropriate group of senior managers with the time to work in a group on the research project may be difficult to achieve, and anyway as stated already above, is likely to be beyond the scope of this stage of the research. Indeed, the use of one-on-one conversations as a preliminary stage to the classical Action Learning process is potentially the innovation that this research brings. A major reason for this preliminary stage is to capture more candid answers than might have emerged from a group discussion. Sharing these individual views anonymously at the group discussion stage could be a more powerful start to the process.

### **3.3.5 Summary**

This review of the research methodologies and methods associated with the personal paradigm has not revealed any single approach to be totally applicable to the research, but rather a blend of elements of each of them.

Grounded Theory provides reinforcement for a methodology that grounds the theory in data, and allows concepts to emerge from the codification of the data. It meets the need to ‘enable’ participants by allowing for personal realisation emerging from the data. However, the full rigour of data codification of the Grounded Theory approach is not considered necessary for the purposes of this research phase.

Action Research meets the need to ‘build awareness’ of alignment, or to ‘improve practice or personal understanding’ through the iterative process of data collection, data interpretation, and playback. However, the inquiry is to be carried out by the researcher guiding the practitioner rather than by the practitioner alone.

Reflexivity and Narrative Therapy meet the need to engage the participant in the process. Reflexivity achieves this by inviting participants to reflect on how and why they have arrived at their current position, and what role resources have had in doing so. The generic stages of Narrative Therapy very closely represent those of the emerging research method. Of particular importance is the way such a process might facilitate the generation of ‘unique outcomes’ or ‘magic moments’ which is a vital step to the realisation of different routes to achieving personal and business objectives.

Action Learning very closely matches the ethos of the research. It does so in the way it seeks to engage participants in self-realisation through adding to their ‘programmed knowledge’ through ‘insightful questioning’. The variations to this method for the purposes of this research would be switching the emphasis from the group level to the individual level, and basing the insightful questions on a chosen perspective: in this research the perspective being that of seeking an appropriate alignment of resources.

### ***3.4 Conclusions – The Chosen Methodology and Method***

In this chapter an exercise in personal self-reflection has been combined with an overview of the main research approaches to establish a personal research paradigm. The research methodologies and methods indicated by that paradigm were then reviewed to establish the chosen research methodology and method.

#### **3.4.1 Chosen Research Methodology**

The route to recognising the personal ontological and epistemological position led the researcher to consider a methodology that can embrace a field of research that is both quantitative and qualitative, that needs to be critically interpretive, and that needs to reflect on the role of resource utilisation in improving organisational performance. An inductive approach was indicated to allow for other theories to emerge from an initial research question. There was also a need to engage with the participants to collect the data which could then be used to help them discover potentially new routes to business benefit through reflective and critical discourse.

The chosen research methodology has its influence in Grounded Theory and Action Research: through engaging managers in seeking an appropriate alignment of resources with the needs of the business, alternative means of meeting corporate objectives might be revealed, some of which might prove more effective and efficient than the current practice.

### **3.4.2 Chosen Research Method**

The chosen research method represents a blend of Grounded Theory, Action Research, Reflexivity and Narrative Therapy, and Action Learning. It will be a form of intervention which engages managers in critical self-reflection and which is guided by relevant questions related to a resource alignment perspective. The intervention will take the form of an iterative process of informal, open-ended conversations which permit narratives to be told, interpreted, played-back, and re-told. The data collected will be predominantly qualitative and will be interpreted through codification. The nature of this method is captured in its name which is 'Guided Self-Reflection' (GSR).

The research project represents a pilot of the methodology and method with a belief that the benefits of the approach to the organisation will emerge from the practice and the data.

As Glaser (1992, in Parker and Roffey, 1996) notes:

*"much of originality or creativity is not new ideas – since most ideas are already known in some way – but new connections between conceptual ideas ..."*

The pilot process draws upon existing philosophies, theories and practices some with their roots in the 'Socratic method'<sup>22</sup> of 469 BC. However, the process is 'new' in its composition and its application within a business context. Additionally, the research pilots a process which may prove effective in providing 'new connections' between the achievement of personal and organisational goals and the particular perspective of resources.

In Chapter 4, the design of the Guided Self-reflection research method is presented and the manner of its intended deployment in the field is described.

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<sup>22</sup> "a method of questioning unaffected by preformed conclusions, used by Socrates to expose feeble arguments or develop latent ideas in his pupils." (The Chambers Dictionary, 1998)



# 4

## Design of the Research Method: Guided Self-Reflection

*"No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge."*

Kahlil Gibran, 1923

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The essence of what the author wanted to achieve and came to label the Guided Self-reflection (GSR) method was the engagement of the participants by the researcher in self-reflection, guided by relevant insightful questions. In this way the implicit knowledge of the participant, "that which already lies half asleep" might be considered afresh and result in a new 'dawning'. Engagement requires the creation of an expectation in participants that their involvement in the process will be an interesting, pleasant and rewarding experience. Self-reflection requires willingness in participants to reflect on their personal experiences and to seek to understand them better. Guidance requires an underlying theme or perspective to be behind each exploratory question the researcher asks, and for those questions to be asked with due regard to sensitivity and etiquette.

The design of this method was based on the following assumptions:

- The term ‘Resources’ will be commonly used, but not commonly understood. Different people will have different understandings of the term ‘resource’ and such an understanding will implicitly, or explicitly, place a value on that resource in terms of its contribution to the achievement of the aims or goals of their organisation;
- Whatever the type of organisation the participant group might be drawn from there would exist business-critical reasons why it would need to be seeking to optimise the utilisation of at least their high-value resources. Thus, whether the participant group was part of a Private or a Public organisation, or part of a profit-based or not-for-profit organisation, the need to demonstrate good husbandry or stewardship of corporate resources would be equally important, albeit for perhaps different reasons;
- The term ‘business’ within the *Business* Support Environment refers to commercial and non-commercial organizations;
- The inter-personal emphasis of the chosen research method, and the need for the deployment method to be recognised as a pilot, would be better met through selecting an organisation which was known to me and me to it;
- Participants would be prepared to defend or challenge the means by which they make their resource decisions; and that
- The objectives of the research would be adequately met by a high-level codification of the data: The utility of the method being revealed sufficiently at this level of analysis to draw meaningful conclusions.

This Chapter describes the design of the research method that emerged in outline from Chapters 2 and 3. The first section describes the construction and management of the three-part conversation. The initial model of the GSR process is provided. Next, the selection of the participant organisation and individuals is explained and the participants are introduced. The last section describes the Attitudinal Rating System that was employed to provide further feedback to participants and to seek their agreement to certain resource and research findings.

## **4.1     *Semi-Structured Conversation-style Interviews***

Primary research data would be generated through a series of semi-structured conversation-style interviews and captured on digital voice recorder. The conversations would be guided by an understanding of resource alignment. The analysis of the data would be by codification through repeated play-back, at home and in transit, and by full and partial transcriptions. Feedback to participants would be conducted during the subsequent Parts of the three-part Conversations and by issue of the Abstract, Introduction, and Conclusions and Reflections following acceptance by Examiners of the thesis write-up.

### **4.1.1     Conversation Construction**

The approach designed to harness the desired techniques of narrative therapy and reflexivity comprised a one-on-one conversation that would be conducted in three parts with each of eight to twelve participants representative of the senior management of the participating organisation.

The device of dividing a single conversation into three parts emphasised to participants that each part was integral to the same conversation but was also reliant upon an intervening period of reflection. Participants would be asked for between one and two hours of their time to be set aside for each part of the conversation intending that such a generous time allowance would enable a free-flowing discussion. The style of questioning would follow a basic structure but would be informal and have the latitude to ask questions in response to what were thought to be significant replies. A minimum two-week interval was planned between Parts 1 and Parts 2, and between Parts 2 and Parts 3 to enable reflection, analysis and feedback.

#### **4.1.1.1.   *Parts 1 of the Conversations***

The Parts 1 of the Conversations were designed to engage the participant in the process through their being able to talk freely about themselves, their work and their views on resources. The session would start by inviting participants to talk about matters that were routine to them, about the nature of their work brief and about their route to that brief. Listening to them describe their current work brief would provide the first

opportunity to discern any of their concerns and particular challenges. To help them provide an account of their route to their current post it would be suggested that they might want to include aspects of their upbringing, education, and career. It would be explained that this information is often important in placing the right interpretation on some of their views by being able to place those views in context. The last component of this conversation would be to enquire what role they felt resources had played in helping them achieve their business objectives in one or more of the work roles that they would have described by that stage. This was designed to elicit their perception of resources and of the role of those resources in meeting their business objectives. It would also provide some of the influencers of those perceptions.

These topics formed the following questions to draw upon to guide the target conversation areas. The questions were approved by the Sponsor but were not developed through further specific research:

- Q 1. I am aware of your role title, but could you please tell me what your role involves?
- Q 2. Could you tell me something of your route to this role, going back to home-life or education and interests, and including your career highlights?
- Q 3. How does the way in which you were supported in your corporate/private/public sector department compare with the support you receive in your current department?
- Q 4. What do you consider to be 'resources'?
- Q 5. Which resources do you judge have contributed most to increasing organisational effectiveness and efficiency?
- Q 6. Is the way in which resources are combined/integrated/coordinated significant?
- Q 7. Can you offer me any examples of winning combinations of resources?
- Q 8. What do you consider the Business of the Organisation to be?

Q 9. How critical to the business are resource selection and resource management, and why?

Q 10. Do you have any questions that you would like to ask me?

Q 11. May I just confirm the date for our next session?

In this way it was planned to gain the flexibility to respond to the development of the conversation whilst being able to introduce the concepts on which their views were needed.

During the Parts 1 of the Conversations, it was intended that Participants would have provided their perceptions of resources and their perceptions of the contributions those resources made to meeting corporate objectives. The relevant, resource-based questions were designed to start to build awareness in the Participants of the additional organisational benefit that could flow from seeking to strengthen such a linkage. A device was needed that would enable Parts 2 and 3 of the Conversations to be conducted in a particular way that would fulfil the objectives of the interpretation of the Conversations. The decision was taken to use a device which could represent a coalescence of Participant perspectives on resources and the roles of those resources in helping resolve the business-critical issues which should have surfaced during the Conversations. Formulating and playing back common business-impact themes as a means of reinforcing Participant awareness of the clear linkage required between integrated resources and the needs of the business was chosen as such a device. In this way it was intended to provide an interpretation of the primary data which had a valuable focus for the Participants.

#### **4.1.1.2. *Parts 2 of the Conversations***

The Parts 2 of the Conversations were designed to review and re-evaluate the interpretation of the Parts 1 of the Conversations. The review would seek clarification and amplification of what the participant was perceived to view as a resource and what role the participant felt that resource had in meeting their business or corporate objectives. The Conversation would be used to try and understand better the drivers of those perceptions and the process by which those resources were identified and

optimised. During this session indications would be sought of the participant shifting their understanding of resources and their use, and of adopting any of the ‘resource’ language that they may have encountered for the first time in Part 1. Any significant ‘moments’ or revelations that the conversation had evoked would also be noted. The Parts 2 of the Conversations were also designed to provide feedback to participants whilst allowing a check of the consensus of the participants on any emerging common themes that reflected the notion of resource alignment.

These intentions for this session formed the following *aide mémoire* (*am*):

- am 1.* Clarify and Amplify perceptions of resources and their roles
- am 2.* Explore any declared process of resource identification and optimisation
- am 3.* Discern drivers of perceptions of resources
- am 4.* Evidence of adoption of ‘resource’ language
- am 5.* Note and explore any significant moments
- am 6.* Check consensus on any emerging themes relating to resource-driven performance improvements
- am 7.* Confirm the date for the final session

The Parts 2 of the Conversations were also designed to provide a mechanism for further exploration of the initial narratives, and to provide the Participants with an opportunity to reflect on those earlier narratives. The mechanism would work by playing back to Participants these pertinent aspects of their narratives and perceptions and, together with personal reflections during the intervening periods, enabling their clarification and re-evaluation. It would also provide an opportunity to re-evaluate the interpretation of the initial narratives and surface additional reflections. An element of the play-back would be offering for comment to each Participant, themes which appeared to be common to their fellow Participants and which impacted the business.

The analysis of the Parts 2 of the Conversations will have reinforced some earlier interpretations of the narratives, revealed some new issues to explore, and helped to consolidate the list of business-impact themes around which there appeared to be

Participant consensus. The Parts 3 of the Conversations were to facilitate a final form of re-assessment of the interpretation of data by the Participants and by the researcher, and to seek the degree of consensus held by Participants on the business-impact themes.

#### **4.1.1.3. Parts 3 of the Conversations**

The Parts 3 of the Conversations would again seek clarification and amplification, and also re-assessment, of particular elements of the Parts 2. They would try and evidence any further reinforcement of the perceptions of the participant of the role of resources and any shifts in those perceptions over the three sessions. In this Part, the apparently common resource-linked themes that were emerging from their fellow participants would again be played back to the participant and their comments on them sought. Lastly, the intention would be to close the conversation by thanking them for their support and asking them whether the logic of seeking to align resources with business need, and the technique of guided self-reflection that they had involved themselves in had helped them in any way.

The *aide mémoire* for this session would be the same as for the Parts 2 with the following additions:

*am 8.* Thank the participant for their support

*am 9.* Ask for any feedback from them on the methodology and method

Throughout all three Parts, the researcher would listen for two particular themes to emerge, and if they did not, then a suitable opportunity would be seized to introduce them to the conversation. The one theme would be linkages between the resolutions of one or more important business concerns and a resourcing issue. The other theme would be realisations that difficult 'power' or 'customer' relationships might be capable of resolution or enhancement through the linkage of their role to the achievement of corporate aims and objectives.

The analysis of the Parts 3 of the Conversations was to be presented as a synthesis of Participant perceptions into business-critical themes: Ten themes were considered to be a reasonably representative number for the research purposes. The Themes



Significance Ratings research instrument, described at paragraph 4.3 below, was to be issued to each Participant to help verify the interpretation of the data and to further build awareness of the GSR approach.

## **4.1.2 Conversation Management**

Careful and thoughtful management of the conversations was necessary in order to surface and capture the best data possible: Expectation management and a professional but relaxed atmosphere would be the main contributors to this outcome.

### **4.1.2.1. Expectation Management**

Participants would have been enrolled by the Research Sponsor within the participant organisation. The Research Sponsor would have given participants an initial briefing based on discussions s/he would have had with the Researcher. The expectations of the participants concerning their role in the Conversations would be further managed by e-mailing each participant the following half-page introductory brief. It was designed to explain succinctly to each participant what was being asked of them and why.

*Good morning xx,*

#### **DBA RESEARCH - BRIEF IN ADVANCE OF OUR FIRST CONVERSATION**

*In advance of our first conversation in support of my research, I thought it might be helpful to provide the following short brief.*

*The 'Support Environment' combines the three key resources represented by People, Processes and Places. If it does so in a way that consistently meets the ever changing support needs of the organisation, then it represents a significant route to enhanced organisational efficiency and effectiveness.*

*My research questions whether organisations fail to optimise this support environment because they either do not perceive its existence, or they perceive it to add no significant value to their performance.<sup>23</sup>*

*My proposition is that we hold a 2-part or 3-part conversation about this, loosely structured in the following way and allowing a minimum of two weeks between meetings for reflection by us both and for analysis by me:*

*Conversation Part 1 – notes some sources of one's personal perspectives, and some of the resources that may be driving increases in organisational effectiveness and efficiency*

*Conversation Part 2 –surfaces some common concerns which may indicate the role of perceptions in identifying sources of improvement in organisational performance*

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<sup>23</sup> It was decided that this original version of the research question was appropriate for this briefing because at this stage the act of guidance was not intended to be too overt an objective of the research. The original version was nevertheless still consistent in essence with the final version given in Chapter 1 as "Can guiding senior managers to consider the link between their use of resources and the achievement of their corporate objectives enable them to conceive of their business differently?"

*Conversation Part 3 – reflects on the outcomes of the conversation, and on the conversational technique itself*

*Thank you for finding the time to meet with me. My hope is that this approach will in some way also be of benefit to you.*

*Best Regards*

*Andrew*

The participants would then be contacted to ensure that they understood the brief and were content with it. At that time a date for the Part 1 of the Conversation would be agreed with each participant as would, ideally, the dates for the Parts 2 and 3.

Permission would be obtained from each participant to record each conversation using a digital voice recorder to facilitate ease of data integrity, management and analysis. Participants would be assured that an e-Copy of their three-part conversation would be available to them if they wished to exercise their intellectual property rights.

#### **4.1.2.2. Professional but Relaxed Atmosphere**

The logic was that the content of the conversations would be more genuine and heartfelt if a professional but relaxed atmosphere was created. The participants would all be senior managers in their organisation. In deference to their positions of responsibility, and as an indication of the importance placed on the research area, the Researcher would wear a business suit for the conversations, unless it had become known in advance that more relaxed dress was the norm. A conversational style would be adopted from the beginning of the session and an effort made to ensure that topics were treated professionally, but with realism, and with humour where appropriate or where initiated by the participant. Ideally, a meeting room would be used for each conversation in the belief that disruptions would be less likely than if the office of the participant was used.

To help put the participant at ease the Researcher would speak to them briefly about his background and how he came to undertake the DBA programme. They would then be reminded of the approach being taken and the reasons for doing so. They would be thanked for finding the time to participate in the research. The participants would be further reassured by emphasising that whilst the questions taken together form a structure, participants were quite at liberty to talk freely about what those questions meant to them. Participants would be asked if they were comfortable with this

approach. The introduction would end by stressing that everything they chose to talk about would be valuable data and relevant to my research, and that they therefore could offer un-restrained, un-filtered reflections and recollections.

### **4.1.3 Conversation Capture**

The plan was to capture the conversations initially by digital voice recorder and then through full or partial transcriptions of those recordings.

#### **4.1.3.1. Digital Voice Recordings**

The qualitative prime data, the initial narratives of the participants, was to be recorded. Therefore, the recorder had to reliably capture good quality voice recordings on a durable medium. It had to be sufficiently sensitive such that it could be placed at an unobtrusive distance from the participant and yet still capture clearly audible, informal, conversations. For speed, efficiency and minimal disruption to the participant, the recorder set-up procedure needed to be quick and simple with no reliance being placed on physical wire connections, and with no requirement to change recording medium or batteries during a conversation. The recording medium had to allow easy access to the recordings, and to marked sections within a recording. The total data set had to be stored compactly such that it could easily accompany the hard-copy thesis.

In order to meet these basic requirements the advice of a company which specialises in providing voice recorders and transcription services to researchers was sought<sup>24</sup>. Their recommendation was accepted and the Olympus DS-2200 digital voice recorder was bought, complete with stereo microphone and transcription kit. A larger memory card (xD-Picture Card) from another specialist provider provided some 35 hours of high quality recording time. One set of batteries easily powered up to three full two-hour recording session. The recorder was the size of a modern mobile telephone and would sit unobtrusively in the small desk-top holder provided. The digital recordings could be sent by e-mail for such purposes as third party reviews and transcription. The total expected data set could be stored as data files on one standard digital compact disc.

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<sup>24</sup> [www.ndeva.co.uk](http://www.ndeva.co.uk)

#### **4.1.3.2. *Transcription***

At the time of purchasing the digital voice recorder the vendor was asked to describe their transcription services. Based on their experience they advised that they would charge between twelve to fifteen pounds per hour, and that an allowance should be made of three to five hours transcription time per hour of recording, depending on the nature and quality of the recording. To appoint professional transcribers would have cost between £2160 and £4500 based on recording three conversations each of up to two hours with each of a maximum of ten participants: the decision was taken on cost grounds to keep the transcription task in-house.

#### **4.1.4 Conversation Interpretation**

At the outset of these studies the presumption was made that the data would need to be interpreted by fully transcribing all the recorded conversations and then using Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to fully code the scripts. However, as the research focus and methodology formed, the nature of the research lent itself more to being coded from a mix of multiple listenings and full, partial transcriptions, and a higher-level use of CAQDAS. In this section, the rationale for this approach to interpreting the data is provided and the informal and formal methods of codification that were chosen are described.

##### **4.1.4.1. *Rationale for Chosen Method of Interpretation***

The recorded narratives needed to be interpreted to gain insight into the resource perspectives of the participants, the cultural contexts behind those perspectives, the more significant business issues facing the participants, and the role of aligning those resources to meet those business needs. Additionally, the interpretation of the narratives would look for any indications that the guidance being given from a resource alignment perspective was being of help to the participants in viewing differently the routes to meeting their business objectives. Of particular importance for engaging the participants in the research would be identifying the business issues on which there was participant consensus. The resolution of these issues was likely to be paramount to the organisation. Issues that appeared to be potentially significant but on which there was no consensus would also be coded: Such issues may be being taken

for granted and not yet be being seen as a cause of organisational under-performance. If the interpretation showed that they had emerged from the logic of trying to align resources with business need then senior managers may reassess the priority they were giving to those issues.

Therefore, it was decided that a higher level codification would be adequate to achieve these interpretation needs. The nature of the fieldwork being a pilot also meant that it was unnecessary to capture every detail of the resource perspective or every level of business issue. On this basis it was decided to treat the perspectives as aspects or concepts of a category. Core categories or themes would be identified which represent those organisational issues that might be resolved differently if they were being looked at from a resource alignment perspective. This rationale effectively represents an application of the Pareto Principle<sup>25</sup>, or 80:20 rule, where, in this case, eighty per cent of the significant conclusions would come from the high-level, twenty per cent, codification of the data.

#### **4.1.4.2. Informal Codification**

The informal codification was to be by repeated exposure to the data. This would include listening to the recorded sessions during commuting journeys since they can represent some three to four hours per working day. Codification of sequences of recording would amount to conscious and sub-conscious surfacing of resource perspectives, personal and organisational cultural contexts, and individual and thematic business challenges. Codes would be captured in these instances either by Dictaphone or by handwritten notes.

Additionally, the recording of a previous session would be listened to again the day before attending the subsequent session, and during this listening further notes would be made. This informal codification would benefit from reflection in between these listenings. Lastly, the Parts 1 Conversation would be fully transcribed as those sessions would be providing the foundations for the emerging alignment perspectives. Those

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<sup>25</sup> "The Principle was suggested by management thinker Joseph M. Juran. It was named after the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto, who observed that 80% of income in Italy was received by 20% of the Italian population. The assumption is that most of the results in any situation are determined by a small number of causes." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pareto\\_principle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pareto_principle)

parts of the Parts 2 and 3 Conversation that supported the coded data from frequent listening would also be transcribed. The ratio of 3-4 hours of transcribing time per hour of recording would ensure a fairly comprehensive understanding of the target data.

#### **4.1.4.3. Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS)**

In keeping with the rationale offered above, a wide research of the CAQDAS market was unnecessary. One such market product called NVivo was recommended by colleagues who had used it successfully. Further support for its use was found in Bryman (2001). Also, coincidentally, the Sheffield Hallam University Faculty of Organisation and Management, within whose DBA programme this thesis sits, had just started to issue licensed copies of NVivo to their students and so this particular CAQDAS software was selected.

NVivo would replace the manual tasks of writing marginal codes, cutting-and-pasting the codes, and forming reports. It would also enable the text to be coded whilst reviewing it and for the coded text to be easily retrieved at a later stage. In this way NVivo would be used to code resource perspectives, main business challenges, and perhaps cultural contexts by attribution to the individual and by theme. Finally, using NVivo even in this modest way would provide an option to extend its use in the further interpretation of the data in the intended post-doctoral research.

#### **4.1.5 Conversation Feedback**

Three levels of feedback were to be offered to participants which it was intended would benefit them and their organisation. At each level the feedback would consist of examples where a resource alignment perspective had appeared to help surface new business issues, or to present different understandings of a business issue, or to suggest different approaches to resolving those issues, or a combination of the three.

Feedback would be provided during the field-work by playing back to participants at Parts 2 and 3 of the Conversations, selected narratives and emerging business themes taken from the interpretation of the previous Parts 1 and 2 of the Conversations respectively. Additionally the Parts 3 of the Conversations would include a summary of the common themes, or business issues, which had emerged at that stage from the interpretation, and also the potential role of a resource alignment perspective in

surfacing and seeking to resolve those issues. Furthermore, after completion of the field-work and the preliminary interpretation of the Conversations a more comprehensive collection of the key themes that had emerged and which represented a consensus view would be provided to participants. The themes would have emerged from an aggregation of the coded extracts from the recorded narratives. Such themes would ideally represent the role of seeking resource alignment in finding different routes to improving the performance of the organisation.

Lastly, after approval of the thesis by the Examiners, a copy of the Abstract together with the Introduction, Conclusions and Reflections would be offered to participants.

#### **4.1.6 Initial Model of GSR Approach**

Throughout the three-Part Conversation, awareness is increased in the participants of the resource alignment logic and the GSR technique. Simultaneously, critical reflection takes place during and between the Parts of the Conversation by both participant and researcher. This is depicted in Figure 4.3 below together with the objectives of each Part of the Conversation and the procedures by which to meet those objectives.

#### **4.1.7 Data Records**

A compact disc containing data files is included in a pocket in the thesis document. The data files comprise the complete recordings of all three Parts of each Conversation held with each participant, the complete transcriptions of each of the Parts 1 of the Conversations, and the partial transcriptions of each of the Parts 2 and 3 of the Conversations. Coded data is at Appendix A.

The recordings are in Microsoft Windows Media Audio format, and the transcriptions are in Microsoft Word Document format. The following data file title format is used for both the recordings and the transcriptions:

<Name of Participant> <Part Number of Conversation> <Day, Time, Month, Year  
when Part took place>



# Initial Model of GSR Approach

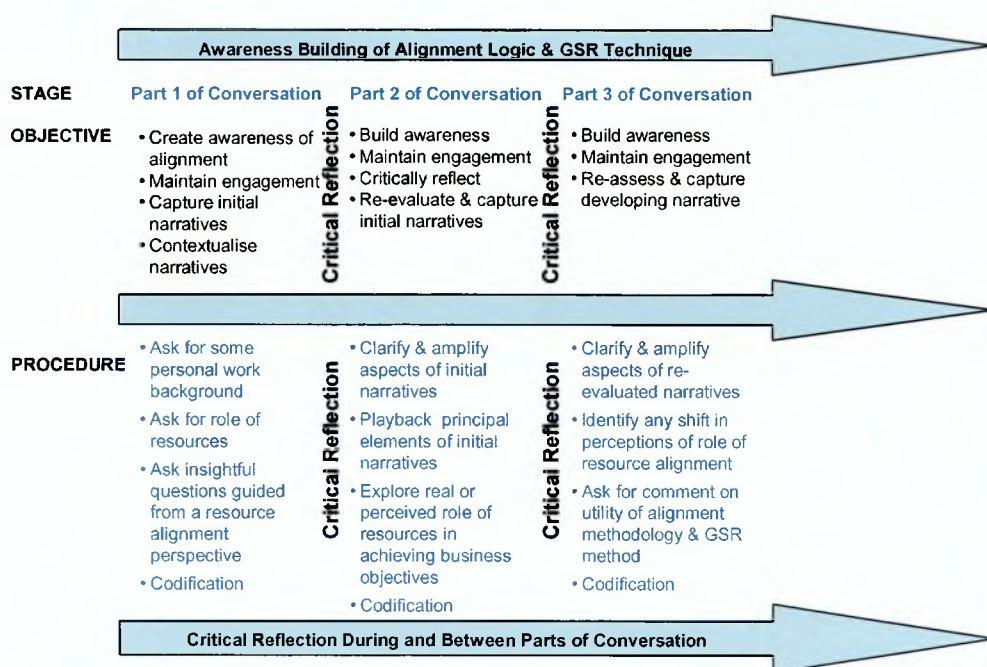


Figure 4.3 – Initial Model of GSR Approach

## 4.2 Selection of the Research Participants

The contextual nature of the approach, the research resource available, and the objectives of the research dictated the scope of the participation. Engaging with more than one organisation would have produced logistical support beyond that available. Additionally, the quantity and complexity of the data that would have flowed from more than one participant organisation would not have allowed adequate interpretation of it within the resources available. More fundamentally, it was judged that a pilot involving 10 to 12 participants from the same organisation would provide sufficient evidence of the potential of the GSR approach.<sup>26</sup>

This section describes the selection of the Participant Organisation and its structure. Some background is then provided to a major incentive for the Participating

<sup>26</sup> But see Para 7.2.3.1 regarding post-doctoral aspirations to engage with multi-stakeholders.

Organisation to involve itself in the research. Lastly, the selection of the individual Participants from that Organisation is described and they are each introduced.

#### **4.2.1 Selection of the Participant Organisation**

Two organisations presented themselves as possible research participants: Both being consultancy clients at that time. One was a major motorcar manufacturer and distributor, and strongly represented the private, shareholder-driven organisation: The other was an English County Council, which represented the public, not-for-profit, stakeholder-driven organisation.

The work with the motor-manufacturer involved helping them firstly to understand better their business support needs and then secondly, to help them through the tender process to select a specialist service management provider. The County Council had asked for help in developing their property rationalisation strategy such that operational objectives could be clearly linked to their tactical and strategic parent objectives.

The client within the motor-manufacturing company was the Facilities Manager, who reported directly to the HR Manager. These two gentlemen were motivated in quite different ways: the Facilities Manager was keen to be introduced to new ideas and new approaches to delivering support services to the business in a more holistic manner; the HR Manager was keen to contain, control, and own any new thinking in his area of responsibility. The client within the County Council was the Head of Property Services and Contracts, and the instruction had come courtesy of one of her staff who was a friend of the researcher and a fellow student. The client reported to the Strategic Director for Resources who was noticeably younger than his peers, an MBA graduate and very keen to be innovative and to embrace change.

The commission with the motor manufacturer had started with both the client and his line manager being very interested and intrigued with the notion of the Business Support Environment, its alignment with the needs of the business, and the holistic approach to resource decision-making and resource-optimisation. As the approach became better understood the client recognised how he could, or even should, be influencing the performance of the organisation in a much broader context. However,

the line manager started to view the approach with some caution, which later manifested itself as a perceived threat to his position and his authority<sup>27</sup>. Whilst the line manager was interested to read a synopsis of the research, in confidence, he chose not to involve himself or his organisation in it at that time.

In the course of the consultancy commission with the County Council it was the client who showed some resistance to embracing the approach, perhaps because she felt threatened rather than encouraged by the challenges that it had started to highlight in the current Property Services<sup>28</sup>. However, as part of the consultancy remit the researcher was introduced to the Strategic Director Resources who was the line manager of the client. He was particularly interested to learn of the DBA programme and the focus of the research. This led to his offering to sponsor the research into his organisation provided he could satisfy himself that his organisation would benefit from such participation. To enable him to assess this benefit, he was given sight of a copy of the approved Programme of Research. The research methodology and method was discussed and an assessment of the time commitments expected of participants was made.

It seemed appropriate that, given the inductive nature of the research, an offer from an organisation that had come not from a distinct process of selection, but from pursuing research interests through consultancy commissions, should be seriously considered. However, whilst the potential sponsor was making his deliberations, the following considerations were given to the appropriateness of a County Council as the participating organisation in respect to the intended research.

The consultancy commission had revealed a significant change in the performance criteria for the 2005/06 round of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) conducted annually by the Audit Commission. The 'Use of Resources' category had been elevated to an 'Element' in its own right and this fact was a main reason for the

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<sup>27</sup> This experience reinforces the rationale adopted in Chapter 3 for using a research method that built awareness of the Business Support Environment concept before seeking to align it with the needs of the business.

<sup>28</sup> This is further experience of the rationale cited in Note 27 above.

Client and Sponsor seeking to understand better the nature of resources, their treatment of resources and the decision-making processes relating to resources.

Another significant feature of the County Council was its public service ethos. There was a heart-felt drive within the Council officers that they were in their job solely to deliver the services needed by their key customers: the local community. Furthermore, the quality and relevance of those services depended to a great extent on the efficient, effective and economic use of Council resources. Finally, they were keenly aware that resources had to be treated as a corporate asset and that a change in culture was probably needed for this to become the case.

With this knowledge, it was concluded that selected senior managers from this County Council could form a participant group well-suited to the research. When, a few days later, the Sponsor readily agreed to involve himself and some of his colleagues in the research, the offer was enthusiastically accepted.

The following two sub-sections describe the structure of the chosen participating organisation and then its main incentive for volunteering to participate. Such a description should help place the selection of participants in context, and provide a background against which to place the output of the conversations.

#### **4.2.1.1. Structure of Participant Organisation**

*“English councils are made up of three main types: single tier, county and district. In many areas a single all-purpose council provides all of the local government services. These 'single tier' councils are usually (but not exclusively) found in urban, metropolitan areas. In other areas, there are county councils, each with a number of smaller district councils within their borders.” ([www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk))*

The Participant Local Authority is an English County Council with four District Councils within its borders. Political leadership of the County Council is through 50-plus Elected Members representing 40-plus divisions of the County. There is a Cabinet of nine Members: a Leader, a Deputy Leader, and seven Portfolio Members. Managerial leadership is through the Chief Executive's Management Team comprising a Chief Executive and eight officers. The eight officers comprise six Strategic Directors and two Corporate Directors. The role of the Strategic Directors is to provide strategic management of the Council, strategic leadership within their portfolio of services, and performance management of the Heads of Service. There are twenty

Heads of Service each having the professional and budget accountability for the delivery of their Service. Of these, sixteen have the responsibility for the delivery of what they refer to as 'front-line services', and the remaining four take responsibility for the delivery of 'Support Services'. Heads of Service fulfil their responsibilities through the next tier of officers who are designated, 'Team Leaders'.

The Cabinet composition of the two participating District Councils varied slightly. The one has a Cabinet of 10 Members comprising the Leader and nine Portfolio Members. Its managerial leadership is provided by a Chief Executive and two Directors supported by sixteen Heads of Service.

The other also has a Cabinet of 10 Members but comprising a Leader, Deputy Leader, and 8 Portfolio Members. As part of a change initiative this District Council altered its managerial leadership structure towards the end of 2005. From having a director for each of Community and Housing Services, Corporate Resources, Customer Services, and Planning and Major Projects, they changed to having two strategic directors with the one being responsible for an enlarged Resources portfolio. The number of Heads of Services was reduced from twenty down to ten.

#### **4.2.1.2. *An Incentive for Participation: Audit Commission's CPA***

The essential criterion for the participating organisation, and the basis of one of the six research method assumptions, was the demonstration of a strong resolve to continuously improve organisational performance through the better use of resources. Such a resolve would also help maintain the research focus and momentum. The CPA provided this incentive and its framework is explained below, drawing upon two particular Audit Commission Reports of 2005 and 2006<sup>29</sup> so that the potential relevance of the research to the 'use of resources' element of this framework and to one of its themes: 'value for money' can be demonstrated.

Single tier and county councils were first assessed on their Use of Resources in the late summer of 2005 with the results (or 'judgements') being published in December of that year. The first Use of Resources self-assessments of district councils were

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<sup>29</sup> Use of Resources June 2005, Use of Resources February 2006

conducted during the winter of 2005. The new 2006 CPA frameworks<sup>30</sup> for both County and District Councils have been subject to consultation and the confirmed frameworks are to be published at the end of July 2006. The approach to resource optimisation, through guided self-reflection, could represent a very practical route for the participating organisation to demonstrate improved performance through the CPA assessment system which is described below.

The CPA, administered by the Audit Commission, places great importance on Local Authorities evidencing each year the value for money they are realising from their use of resources. The process by which Local Authorities are to evidence this value appears to strongly support the concept of aligning resources with business need. It also reinforces the likelihood of the act of seeking to achieve such alignment being accepted as an intangible resource with the potential for enhancing organisational performance.

The CPA has been a catalyst for the improvement in council services since its introduction in 2002. A new framework for CPA has now been introduced in single tier and county councils from 2005 to 2008 called, 'CPA – The Harder Test (2005)'<sup>31</sup>. Figure 4.4 reproduces the structure of this framework but only provides 'Key Lines of Enquiry' (KLOE) and 'Audit Focus and Evidence' entries in respect of the Element of research interest, the 'Use of Resources': Its supporting structure is shown in blue.

Figure 4.4 shows the Use of Resources Element contributing to the performance categories of the Direction of Travel and the overall CPA star category. It can be seen that the Use of Resources Element comprises 5 Themes of financial management, one of which is Value for Money. The Value for Money Theme is itself assessed through two KLOE together with their areas of Audit Focus and Evidence as shown. Lastly, to assist the councils in evidencing their Value for Money performance, Criteria for Judgement / Descriptors are provided.

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<sup>30</sup> Use of Resources, Guidance for Councils – 2006 assessment

<sup>31</sup> CPA-The Harder Test October 2005,

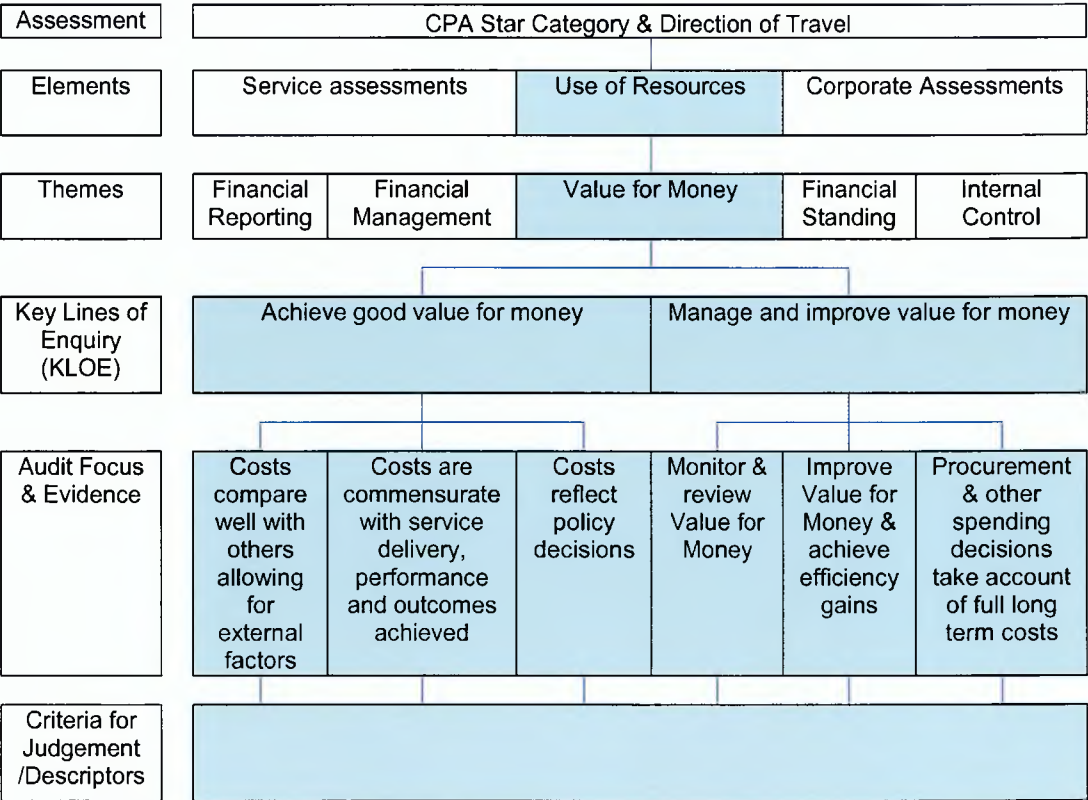


Figure 4.4 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment – The Harder Test

The assessment system is as follows and is relevant in its highlighting the importance of the Use of Resources Element and Value for Money Theme. The overall assessment for the three Elements contributes to the Direction of Travel assessment. The Direction of Travel assessment indicates the progress being made, or otherwise, by the council in achieving improvements and is:

- Improving strongly;
- Improving well;
- Improving adequately; and
- Not improving adequately (or not improving)

The overall assessment of a council is given by the award of a CPA star rating as well as the Direction of Travel assessment. The CPA star categories are 4 stars, 3 stars, 2 stars, 1 star, and 0 stars, with 4 being the highest. So, for example, using these two



assessments the Audit Commission might judge a council to be ‘a three-star council which is improving strongly’.

The three Elements are scored on a scale of 1 to 4 where:

- 4 = well above minimum requirements – performing strongly
- 3 = consistently above minimum requirements – performing well
- 2 = at only minimum requirements – adequate performance
- 1 = below minimum requirements – inadequate performance

Each Theme is assessed using the same 4-point scale as the Elements, and all five are then aggregated to form the overall score for the Element.

In the 2006 CPA (due confirmation and publication by end-July 2006) it is likely that the Value for Money theme will be accorded greater importance in arriving at the overall CPA star category. The Audit Commission proposal is that a minimum score of three (out of a maximum of four) will be required for the Value for Money theme if the overall score for the Use of Resources element is to be a three or a four. For this reason, the focus of Local Authorities on this Value for Money theme has sharpened.

From the scoring system outlined above it can be seen that the blue-shaded areas make a significant contribution to the overall CPA results. The Use of Resources element and its Value for Money theme are very closely linked to the general alignment of resources with the needs of the council, and specifically to the intangible resource of the Business Support Environment. For these reasons the CPA context and requirements seem to provide a significant and an understandable incentive for the Participant Organisation and a strong justification for the emerging research area.

#### **4.2.2 Selection of Research Participants**

A suitable cross-section of potential participants was identified in conversation with the sponsor. He was content to brief them on the research project but winning their agreement to becoming members of the group of research participants was rightly judged to be the task of the researcher. In this section the criteria that the selected research participants were to meet are explained. The selection of the participants and their enrolment are then described, and they are identified by title and by pseudonym.

#### **4.2.2.1. Participant Criteria**

Senior managers can seek to improve individual and organisational performance by choosing to use resources in a particular way that helps achieve strategic, tactical (managerial) and operational objectives. The perspectives that senior managers have of resources will influence the way in which they select and use such resources to achieve those objectives. The way they choose to use those resources will influence the quality of the contribution that particular use of resources will make to improving individual and organisational performance.

Therefore, the research participants were to be able to provide a senior management perspective of resources and of the contribution those resources make to the achievement of their personal remit and to the achievement of the corporate goals. Additionally, the perspectives of those indirectly involved in managing corporate resources were to be captured, as well as those whose prime responsibility was the management of corporate resources, believing that the combination of the potentially different perspectives would enrich the research data.

It was concluded that the ideal research participant group would comprise those participants with a work brief that had a strategic and resources focus, and those who had a work brief that had just a strategic focus. Moreover, if each of the three top tiers of Council management (Portfolio Cabinet Member, Strategic Director, and Head of Service) could be represented in each focus area, then the range of perspectives would be richer. Finally, representatives from one or more of the District Councils were to be included to add a resource perspective gained from having a closer relationship with the citizens than that possible by those representatives within the 'headquarters' at County Hall.

Each of the three top tiers of Council management has a strategic aspect to their role: Portfolio Cabinet Members interpret the service needs of the citizens and set the Council policy that meets those needs; Strategic Directors, irrespective of their specialist skills, have a prime responsibility to direct strategy using their skills as a competent general manager; and Heads of Service are required to work with a longer-term vision of how to deliver their Service to meet the agreed policy. Amongst these

three tiers there are also those who have a particular resources emphasis to their role. The conclusion was reached that the participant group could be drawn from these three tiers of management. The earlier consideration was to include an 'expert' who, although at Team Leader level, would be able to participate on the basis of his understanding of the approach to the business support environment, gained through his association with the author and through the courses that both have undertaken over the last eight years.

Within the County Council structure, political leadership of 'resources' rests with the Portfolio Member for Resources who has responsibility for Communications and Consultation, Finance, Information Technology, Legal and Democratic Services, Property Services, and Organisational Development and Human Resources. Managerial leadership of 'resources' is exercised by two directors working in close association with this Portfolio Member: Organisational Development and Human Resources is delivered by a corporate director with the other components of the Resource Portfolio being delivered through a strategic director by four Heads of Service, one of whom has responsibility for Property Services and Contracts.

The positioning of resources within the two District Councils is slightly different and is reflected in the Managerial Leadership structure of the Councils: The one includes Personnel, Communications and Marketing, and Facilities Management within the Chief Executive's Department, with a Director of Corporate Resources having Finance, Customer Services, Switchboard and Security within his brief; the other changed its structure towards the end of 2005, as mentioned earlier, from having a director for each of Community and Housing Services, Corporate Resources, Customer Services, and Planning and Major Projects, to having just two corporate directors with the one being responsible for Resources.

#### **4.2.2.2. Participant Selection and Enrolment**

Using the criteria set above, the target research participants from the County Council and the District Councils were agreed with the sponsor.

The number of participants was governed by the quality of the data that would be collected and by the practical limitations of time by the participants and by the

researcher. The quality of the data would come from having participants who met the selection criteria and who represented together the three top tiers of Council management. The data would be richer if at least two participants were drawn from each tier within the County Council, and one from the highest tier possible in each of two of the four District Councils. The Resources Directorate needed to be represented, as the resource specialists, but representation from the other Services was not as subject-critical to the research and could be arbitrary. The expected return on their time investment in a research project, rather than in a business-focused consultancy commission, meant that reliance had to be placed on the judgement of the sponsor regarding the number of participants he felt he could ask to become involved. Each participant represented potentially up to thirty hours of my time based on six hours of conversation and four times those six hours for transcription and interpretation. Meeting these constraints resulted in identifying the following twelve target research participants:

#### **County Council – Strategic Focus**

- Cabinet Portfolio Member for Strategic Planning (including Waste Management Policy)
- Strategic Director Community Services
- Strategic Director Children & Young People
- Strategic Director Schools
- Head of Service for Schools Policy, Performance and Planning
- Head of Service for Transportation

#### **County Council – Strategic & Resource Focus**

- Cabinet Portfolio Member for Resources
- Strategic Director Resources (and Sponsor)
- Head of Service for Property Services and Contracts (and previously, a Client)
- Team Leader for Asset and Facilities Management (and fellow student)

#### **District Council – Strategic & Resource Focus**

- Director of Corporate Resources (later to become CEO of another District Council)
- Director of Corporate Resource (later to become Strategic Director Resources)

Of those who agreed to become research participants, it was the Portfolio Members who needed the most persuasion to allocate some of their time; even to the cause of research. Several telephone calls, an offer to limit each conversation to one hour, and the revelations that the researcher was both a rather mature student and a retired Royal Air Force Officer proved to be decisive factors in winning their support. Additionally, the Strategic Director Community Services only agreed to become involved on an assurance that the duration of each of the conversations would be limited to a maximum of one hour. A few wanted to experience the Parts 1 of the Conversations before confirming their involvement in the Parts 2 and 3.

Two target participants declined the invitation to become involved in the research: The Head of Service for Transportation, through pressure of work; and the Strategic Director Schools, who had initially agreed to participate but who withdrew, before becoming involved in the research, due to the urgent need to plan and manage a major change in her portfolio.

At an early stage of the research planning, the Asset and Facilities Management Team Leader had agreed to be included as an 'expert' participant if the final research design required one. However, the focus of the research had become the capture and interpretation of the perspectives that the participants had of resources and the use of those resources. It was decided that a participant who was known to view resources in a similar way to the researcher, and who had a similar understanding of them, would not contribute significantly to the research outcome. The Team Leader was therefore thanked for making himself available for inclusion in the research but informed that it was no longer relevant to the research to include an expert participant.

The final lists of participants therefore comprised the following Elected Members and senior officers and are listed under the relevant criterion. To enable easier attribution throughout the thesis, but to maintain anonymity, a pseudonym<sup>32</sup> has been allocated to each Member and Officer.

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<sup>32</sup> The pseudonyms represent the names of characters that are featured in an Elton John, 1990 musical compact disc. They were allocated in alphabetic order subject to gender clashes and similarity with actual names.

**County Council – Strategic Focus**

Bernie	Cabinet Portfolio Member for Strategic Planning (including Waste Management Policy)
Guy	Strategic Director Community Services
Jean	Strategic Director Children & Young People
Nikita	Head of Service for Schools Policy, Performance and Planning

**County Council – Strategic & Resource Focus**

Bennie	Cabinet Portfolio Member for Resources
Daniel	Strategic Director Resources (and Sponsor)
Lucy	Head of Service for Property Services and Contracts (and Client)

**District Council – Strategic & Resource Focus**

Elton	Director of Corporate Resources (later to become CEO of another District Council)
John	Director of Corporate Resources (later became Strategic Director Resources)

**4.2.3 Programme of Conversations**

The Programme of Conversations continued to change throughout the field-work. This was due in part to the changing priorities of the Participants: It was also due in part to the fact that some Participants wanted to decide their continued involvement on their experiences of completed Parts 1 of the Conversations. The resultant Conversations Programme is provided at Appendix B.

**4.3 Attitudinal Ratings**

Two particular concerns arose during the field-work that caused the approval of the research sponsor to be sought to design and deploy an additional research instrument. His only condition was that any further demands on the time of the participants were not to exceed twenty minutes.

The first concern was that it had not been possible to form a firm conclusion regarding the resource linkage that Participants were attaching to the consensus they were reaching around a common business improvement theme; and regarding the priority

they were according to that theme. It was relevant to learn whether the consensus was being reached with a full appreciation of its potential to improve the use of resources; to learn whether the priority being given to that theme was being driven by that level of appreciation; and to learn whether the resources being made available were commensurate with that priority.

The second concern was that not all Participants had volunteered feedback on the contribution that the research logic and technique might be capable of making to the resolution of the themes. This might have been due to the generic question about the efficacy of the methodology and method, asked specifically at the close of the Parts 3 of the Conversations, proving awkward for some Participants to answer. This might be overcome by using a research technique which enabled questions to be specifically related to whether the methodology and method was seen as enabling the understanding and resolution of the critical organisational needs represented by the themes.

It was decided to address these concerns by devising an additional research instrument based upon the formal structure of an attitudinal ratings approach. This approach was chosen for its potential to obtain valuable insight into these two concerns through asking the Participants to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to statements of and about each theme. The results might also provide some additional indication of the degree of consensus Participants had around the business improvement themes.

This section presents the focus of the attitudinal ratings approach, the choice of ratings scale, and the rating instrument<sup>33</sup>. It then describes the approach taken to analysing the rating codes and to providing feedback to participants.

### **4.3.1 Focus of the Attitudinal Ratings Approach**

The year-on-year improvements in the results earned by the Authority in their annual CPA were evidenced by their best Use of Resources: Such evidence had been indicated by the Participants as being critical to the achievement of their strategic

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<sup>33</sup> Additional guidance was taken on Likert scaling from three web sites: <http://en.wikipedia.org>, [www.socialresearchmethods.net](http://www.socialresearchmethods.net) and [www.icbl.hw.ac.uk](http://www.icbl.hw.ac.uk) each fully referenced in the References section.



goals. Therefore, the Use of Resources criterion of the CPA seemed a highly relevant primary focus for the attitudinal ratings approach. There were also indications that Participants had yet to fully appreciate the magnitude of the contribution that a different understanding of resources could make in this area: not only in demonstrating the better use of resources, but also in significantly contributing to the achievement of the key themes that they had identified. It was therefore decided to ask Participants to indicate the contribution they perceived the use of resources could make to a given business improvement theme; and the degree of correlation between the priority being given to resolving that theme and the resources being allocated to its resolution.

The secondary focus for this approach was the contribution that the adoption of the alignment methodology and the Guided Self-reflection method could make to the resolution of the themes. This was done because of a sense that Participants were encouragingly beginning to understand how they might benefit the organisation through the use of the research approach they had involved themselves in. However, this degree of revelation and comprehension could evaporate if it were not reinforced by the close of the field-work. The secondary focus of this ratings approach was therefore to help reinforce the contribution that the research approach could make to the clarification and resolution of the consensus themes.

### **4.3.2 Ratings Scale**

The proposal to the research sponsor was that Participants are asked to allocate a single score of 1 through 10 against 5 questions standard to each theme. This would indicate the variation in the strength of vitality each participant has around each of ten business improvement themes.

The sponsor believed the 10-point scale to be too ‘granular’ with the differences between, for example, a score of 7 or 8 being small and possibly inconsistent between respondents. He favoured a 5-point scale because he felt that he and his fellow participants would not be able to make the differentiation necessary on the larger scale. The compromise was a 6-point Likert scale, to ensure a measure of either agreement or disagreement by not including an ‘undecided’ option, and to change the 5 *questions* to

5 statements which participants are required to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with.

### **4.3.3 Ratings Instrument**

The additional research instrument now represented a table with three columns. The first column contained ten themed statements each of which boldly stated what was needed to enhance organisational performance in the themed business area. The ten themes were those judged to have readily emerged from the data as having the most potential for improving the performance of the Authority and around which there appeared to be participant consensus.

The second column placed against each themed statement the same five statements about the realisation of that theme. Three of the five statements related to the role and priority of resources in realising the theme. The other two statements related to the role of the research logic and technique that had been deployed throughout the sessions: The logic being that of seeking to align resources with business need, with the technique being that of Guided Self-reflection. The statements were as follows:

#### ***Priority and Resource Statements***

*[Meeting the need of this theme] will lead to improved use of resources*

*A high priority is being given to [meeting the need of this theme]*

*Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of [meeting the need of this theme]*

#### ***Research Logic and Technique Statements***

*Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business needs' will put the [meeting of the need of this theme] in context*

*The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help [meet the need of this theme]*

The last column required the participant to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with the five claims using a six-point Likert scale. A measure of the significance the participant placed on each themed statement would be indicated by the

level of agreement or disagreement that the participant declared they had about the five claims.

Agreement was obtained from the sponsor to deploy this additional research instrument which was termed the, 'Themes Significance Rating' exercise. Each Participant was issued the Microsoft Excel workbook at Appendix C which comprises an introduction and briefing worksheet as well as the rating worksheet.

#### **4.3.4 Interpretation and Feedback**

The attitudinal ratings instrument yielded quantitative data which was interpreted by individual participant and by participant group. The interpretation was placed in context by drawing upon the interpretation analysis of the qualitative data represented by the Conversations. The complete interpretation of the Themes Significance Rating exercise is given in Chapter 6.

The actual deployment of this research instrument represented a form of additional feedback by way of its content: The conclusions drawn from the interpretation of the responses would form part of the thesis Conclusions at Chapter 7, a copy of which would also be given to each Participant by way of feedback.

### **4.4 Summary**

In summary, the ingredients used to develop the research method emerged from the work in Chapters 2 and 3 to design the Guided Self-reflection technique. It comprises a Conversation of three Parts with a requirement for at least two weeks for reflection by Participants and Researcher between Parts 1 and 2, and between Parts 2 and 3. Each Part represents a semi-structured conversation-style interview.

The research Participants enrolled comprise two Elected Members and seven senior Officers from an English County Council and two of its four District Councils. The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of the Audit Commission presented itself as an incentive for participation by the County Council and District Councils and has been the context for the deployment of the Guided Self-reflection method.

The experience of the field-work prompted an approach to the Research Sponsor to agree to an attitudinal ratings research instrument being issued to reinforce and verify the research findings: Approval was given and the instrument was designed and termed the Themes Significance Rating exercise.

In Chapter 5, the initial narratives collected in the Parts 1 of the Conversations are presented and a contextual interpretation of them is offered. Chapter 6 presents and validates the reflections on the re-told narratives which emerged from the Parts 2 and 3 of the Conversations.

# 5

## Presentation & Contextual Interpretation of Initial Narratives

*"But let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure;  
And seek not the depths of your knowledge with staff or sounding line.  
For self is a sea boundless and measureless."*

Kahlil Gibran, 1923

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The Participant narratives arising from the Parts 1 of the Conversations comprised the perspectives each Participant holds of their business and of the 'resources' supporting it, and any benefits they perceive through seeking to align such perspectives. The full transcripts of these narratives are on the enclosed data compact disc.

The interpretation of the Parts 1 of the Conversations revealed insights into the personal and organisational cultural context of Participant views; uncovered topics and narratives that merited further inquiry at the Parts 2 of the Conversations; surfaced business-critical themes which appeared to engage Participants quite strongly in considering the alignment and resource utilisation issues that the themes represented; and lastly, captured early reflections by Participants on the utility of the research methodology and method.

In the first section of this Chapter, the principle findings from each Participant narrative are provided. The findings are presented in the form of a biographical

summary of the Participant (mostly drawn from the Parts 1 of the Conversations but with some of the detail having emerged during the Parts 2 and 3) followed by a short synopsis of the perceptions held by the Participant of this term 'resources'. These perceptions constitute what the Participant believed resources to be and the extent to which those resources were used to contribute to the achievement of personal and organisational goals.

The second section presents an interpretation of these initial narratives in terms of the personal and organisational issues that appear to provide the context for the biographies and resource perspectives of the Participants.

Together the sections also help set the boundaries within which the research takes place, and help in the design of the second and third Parts of the Conversations.

The Conversations Programme is provided and explained at Appendix B together with a breakdown of the time consumed in the Parts 1 of the Conversations by the Participant and by the Researcher.

## **5.1 *Presentation of Initial Narratives***

### **5.1.1 Bennie – Cabinet Portfolio Member for Resources**

Bennie had a first career of over 30-years in the oil industry with Shell working in Italy and other parts of Europe, leaving around 1992 as the Marketing Director (Commercial) for Shell in the UK. He was elected to Cabinet Portfolio Member for Resources in May 2005 following 12 months as spokesman for the previous incumbent although Bennie retains various responsibilities he held as a Council backbencher. A life-long Conservative, Bennie is active through various Conservative Party Committees, membership of the Carlton Club and being a Parish Councillor. He lives in his own property which is part of a National Trust village.

Bennie graduated from Manchester University as a chemist. His first role, around 1957, was with a small detergent manufacturer in Manchester where he specialised in altering the properties of water in order to clean items such as clothes, bottles, and cars. The same science was needed to address the concerns about foam on sewage outlets

and bio-degradable diversity and this led to him spending the first ten years with Shell in their Chemical Industry Administration in London, which later became Shell International Chemical Company. Bennie gradually transferred to the more commercial side of chemicals and worked in Italy for 3 years as the Shell Detergent Manager. After a year back in London he was appointed to run a department supplying feedstock to ICI and the big chemical plants in the UK where he acquired a number of big contracts. He then gradually moved into the oil side of Shell progressing to Retail Manager, and then to Commercial Director of the UK oil products.

On leaving Shell Bennie did five years as the Resources Director of the British Road Federation, chaired a storage company which ran fuel oil storage on the mouth of the Manchester Ship Canal, and started, and still runs, a consultancy company in the oil industry, consulting on marketing and distribution of products.

Bennie interprets resources as being, “the engine-room ... of the County”. He believes that, “Nothing happens in the County without some input from somebody within the Resources Portfolio.” This starts to give the impression that he sees resources as having a front-line role. However, he actually labels the role of resources as, “the sort of back-office of the whole outfit”, giving the impression that he has an aspiration for resources that has yet to materialise. Conversely, he could genuinely believe resources to be a back-room function albeit one with a front-office impact. Irrespective of which emphasis might be true, Bennie definitely treats the Portfolio as a corporate function.

When asked to describe the core business of the Authority he said it was, “about providing for the community certain ...services ... and operating them on their behalf.”

He was acutely aware of the budget constraints within which the Council is obliged to function, but not purely in terms of cash as a resource. The relevance of the budget to the needs of the Authority was paramount in his mind:

*“... what people tend to do each year is look at their budget and see what extra they need. They never look at the base budget, never go and say, do we really need to do this?”*

He made it clear to me that they had to build on the foundations of the needs of today, not those of the 1920s. With people accounting for much of the budget, he had been surprised to learn that the Council did not have a set establishment for the justification and control of the staff complement, something that he was, “tidying up”.

With regards to people, Bennie wants to plan careers within the organisation more than is done at present and to strengthen performance management. In his days in a major multinational organisation he recalled with some fondness that:

*“if you had people feeling ill-done by or discontent, the line-manager was held accountable for that, and his performance would be judged accordingly”.*

He spoke of the ethos and culture of an organisation dictating organisation results:

*“Bit like a pub really, the landlord, why are some pubs good and some not? Exactly the same premises, change the landlord, goes down hill.”*

He raised the need for the Cabinet, at least, to be bonded corporately, but was, “not sure what we’re doing to ensure that corporate bonding, quite honestly at the moment”.

He recognised the importance of identifying the expectations and needs of staff and fully supported the ongoing organisational health survey that had been completed recently remarking that, “no matter how clever you are as a manager, you may think you know what’s going on out there, but boy, you don’t really”.

He is particularly passionate about the workforce working as one remarking that, “... bonding together of a workforce is massively, massively important.” He identifies some “very real, intangibles” that can adversely affect organisation performance. He believes that if people are not valued “in the way which they perceive to be right” then they will not work well together. He also believes that the concerns employees have are “not necessarily associated with pay, but position, recognition, all of those things are important to people, and they want to be valued”. He captured this last issue with a delightful recollection of his own rise through the ranks of a multi-national:

*“So, gradually 2-3 people, 2 people, office of your own. Carpets didn’t go to the walls. They were a foot in, then a bit closer, then to the wall. Your tea, trolleys used to come around in those days. A lady used to come in and bring you a cup of tea, in the afternoon or whenever you want it. Then at a certain level you get tea, and a biscuit. And then, at the very highest level, you’d get your tea on a tray, with a silver teapot to pour out tea, and then, finally, you had carpets, big office, and still the tea would arrive, but it would arrive in what was called a dry pot. So the silver teapot would arrive, but no water in, tea*



*in, and your secretary would make it for you, freshly brewed tea: that was the ultimate. Now wait, the point about this is that, these status symbols today would be frowned upon, but they were very important. People would rather have their carpet finished than a 2%, 3% increase in salary."*

Whilst knowing that such symbols were outdated, he knew the role they played in making people feel valued was still as important and relevant today as it was then.

### **5.1.2 Bernie – Cabinet Portfolio Member for Strategic Planning**

Bernie studied natural science at university and completed his National Service thereafter. He spent his career in the pharmaceutical industry with two companies: the initial 5 years with ICI, and the remainder with Glaxo. He went to Glaxo because they were a pure pharmaceutical industry where "all the eggs were in one basket" in contrast to ICI where pharmaceuticals was in many ways a poor relation to a plethora of other activities. The city view of Glaxo at that time he says was that it was the only 'quoted university' being quite academic and very research based.

After a while in Europe, Bernie spent three years in Latin America and Colombia. After a tour back in the UK he returned to run Brazil as specifically one company, the Brazilian company, and to oversee everything in the rest of the Western hemisphere south of the USA. After a couple of years he moved the base of operations from Brazil to Miami. He came back to the UK to run the UK Company, Allen and Hanburys, which was a major trading subsidiary of Glaxo. From there he undertook the strategic planning for Glaxo and then took retirement.

His years in service overseas enabled Bernie to retire early from Glaxo and he developed an interest in Local Government through working in a charity setting. He was later approached to stand for his District Council in which he was successful, and progressed to winning a seat in the County Council.

Five years ago, when the County Council system of local government changed to that of cabinet government, Bernie shadowed the Planning and Transportation portfolio, before running the brief for the following four years. In May 2005 the Leader of the Council split the portfolio into Strategic Planning, and Transportation. Bernie opted to

retain the Strategic Planning brief for another term of office and was obliged to accept the Waste Policy remit being grafted on as a separate entity.

It was not surprising to appreciate that the experience gained through his senior roles with Glaxo suited Bernie well to his Strategic Planning brief with the Council. It also probably accounted for his perception of resources being based on a strategic perspective: one which brought a frustration of not being able to match the resource requirement of an activity to the business contribution of that activity.

He recalled how relatively straight forward resource allocation had been in business, “where you say, well he’s responsible for that, he needs the staff to do it, and it’s a top-to-bottom exercise” emphasising that in the Council “our day-to-day running has political dimensions, that’s the key difference”. Bernie also highlighted the fact that the resource allocation process was slower in Local Government than in business,

*“because one does not spend public money lightly, and you have to be accountable to just about anybody and everybody you can think of, and that in itself creates a turgidity.”*

It was also in one sense a less effective process, he thought, due to it being, “a much more difficult and complex, interwoven environment than the single-mindedness of business”. He recognised that prioritising resource allocation was also made more testing for the same reasons,

*“it’s very hard then to prioritise for example how much tarmac you put down on roads and how much resource you divert to strategic planning”.*

He did think, “business saw itself as the servant of its customers, as we do”, but noted some of the pressures that are specific to an Authority from certain high-priority customers such as children in danger, and elderly people, who are unable to look after themselves in any way.

Bernie found the approach of the Government to measuring success to have, “got completely out of hand”, but recognised it as the obligatory route to funding. So even though, “there’s all these awful inspections”, he is committed to earning good results, “because it reflects, and it has an effect ultimately on how much money the Authority gets”. He readily comments on the approach being something of a ‘non sequitur’.

Bernie highlighted how being measured on customer satisfaction created a necessary trade-off in resource allocation. He provided an example from his previous Portfolio of Transportation where having been recognised for achieving a very high standard in the structural condition of the roads based on long term maintenance costs, he then had to satisfy the perception of the Public regarding, “whether they’ve got a bumpy ride or not”. Therefore, he had to then,

*“get on with doing some more cosmetic maintenance because that’s what people want and I’m being measured on customer satisfaction.”*

He also had to address the issue of demonstrating and measuring the value to the Authority of the intangible nature of Strategic Planning. He had two key strategic objectives which he personally championed: he did not want the Region “tampering” with Green Belt boundaries, nor did he want the planned growth for the north of the County to be disrupted by those who wanted to see growth in the south. His point was that whilst, “Those are pretty high-flown ambitions and we can only achieve them through an influence role”, winning the necessary resources for that influencing role was far more difficult than for outcomes that can be achieved through direct action.

A significant issue for Bernie was trying to link resource to an activity on the basis of its value to the Authority. He also had to contend with being a relatively small Service albeit one with a big leverage:

*“Education [have] got a whopping great budget ... and you know, they can do a lot of things within that envelope without exciting any attention. On Strategic Planning you know, twenty people or fifteen people, whatever you do is going to be difficult, and yet the actual leverage of that support is enormous, but hard to prove.”*

He said that although there were different ways of working within the Cabinet, “there’d be universal support for the fact that we don’t get enough day-to-day back-up for what the output is”.

When asked whether the lack of a linkage was simply because the Authority does not place an emphasis on linking the value of an activity to the outcomes desired, Bernie thought, “there is an element of that ... it’s certainly acute at Member level, maybe at Officer level as well”. He saw this evidenced in the mismatch between, “what’s

expected and the actual influence on important aspects, and the resource that goes into it”.

Bernie believed there was link between funding and the Corporate Plan objectives but he thought it was not as strong as it should be, “because the two are prepared almost in isolation, not isolation, but there’s an element of disconnection in time”.

Bernie had presented a clear understanding of the power, or leverage, of intangibles, and also the need to resource an activity according to its contribution to the achievement of corporate objectives. Whilst he had emphasised the money resource, he had done so in relation to it funding the requisite people, process and place resources. He had not identified the ‘support environment’ as one of his intangibles. Finally, he diplomatically identified a strategic challenge for the Authority when he remarked,

*“... if you really said, demonstrate how you are weighting your resource, financial resource, in relation to your objectives, I think you’d find it would be quite tricky.”*

### **5.1.3 Daniel – Strategic Director Resources**

Daniel considers himself fortunate to be from a middle-class background and to have had a very comfortable childhood. He had been fortunate and privileged in life having, “parents [who] were [still] together, I had brothers and sisters who I still speak to”. He is married with a son, and at 38 years of age believes he must be one of the youngest directors in Local Government.

Daniel left school with four science A-levels, and advanced one of them, geology, to a three-year BSc degree, leaving university in 1988. He liked the outdoors, had a background as a Scout, and after considering the Army for a career joined the Hong Kong Military Police as an inspector at the age of 23.

He returned in 1994 and joined the Surrey Police during which he started a distance-learning MBA. After 4 years Daniel left police service for business moving through the management of a rent-a-car office, to 3 years of working for Giro Bank, Basingstoke, as an operations manager, and then in 2000 to a project manager position with Hyder Business Services, Welsh Water. Meanwhile, he had completed his MBA and successfully deployed some of his new disciplines in his working roles.

He then accepted a post with Bedfordshire County Council for the next three years, prior to starting his current position in July 2003, which commenced with a priority being placed on his experience of SAP implementation.

Daniel appears to be basically process-driven, perhaps resulting from his training in geology and police work. However, his experiences with society through his police career seem to be the prime reason for his passion to support his Local Authority in building communities.

Daniel clearly understands the intangible nature of ‘communities’ and believes in striving to satisfy the needs of those in the communities. This understandably strategic view of the role of the Authority is matched by his strategic view of the role of resources in helping to build those communities. He believes that “resources must be integral to the organisation” and that it does not really matter how resources are procured,

*“provided the relationship across that interface [between provider and receiver] is there and the tendrils from resources knit vary carefully into the organisation.”*

He also pointedly states that,

*“If the organisation takes a view that resources are in some way something that sit outside what they do as a day job, then the thing is doomed to failure.”*

It is clear from the way he says this, and what follows, that his organisation takes such a view. He thinks that the Authority sees resources as “something which does things to the organisation” rather than something which “provides really very professional services”. What inspires this comment is his conclusion that there is an expectation within the Authority that resources are there to conduct transactional activities, thereby leaving the front-line services to devote themselves to serving customers on that front-line. However, he believes that “a lot of the transactional activity should sit more sensibly in the departments and services that originate the transactions.” He sees Resources as being responsible for investing time in the education and mentoring and coaching necessary to achieve this.

His apparent passion for processes and their re-engineering are the possible reasons behind this view. He introduced a concept which he calls, “The Competent General

Manager” which seems to have emerged from his experience of implementing SAP. He thinks that SAP and similar systems,

*“assume a certain level of general manager competence on everybody in the organisation, irrespective of what their specialist function is.”*

Significantly, he thinks that as a generalisation, Local Authorities do not assume that level of competence. Interestingly, if he is successful in creating his ‘competent general managers’ then he will have moved much closer to optimising the use of Council resources.

He recognises that,

*“culturally as an organisation we are less inclined to see things as a process, we tend to do things as a series of linked activities, and we’re less inclined to do as we’re bleeding well told.”*

This hints at the difficulties that he faces in enabling the organisation to recognise the value of working together in pursuit of an ultimate, common goal.

Daniel also sees the potential for the role of resources to extend outside the organisation.

*“... why should ourselves, the Districts, the NHS, the Fire Service all have separate HR teams and separate Finance teams, why can’t we do it all in one, why can’t we have a single shared service centre?”*

Such tactical relationships he believes will enable resources to “indirectly exert some political leadership on adjacent bodies”.

Daniel laments that resources finds itself the traditional target for budget cuts which results in less “bums on seats” which compromises the ability of the resources portfolio to influence organisational performance.

However, Daniel recognises that “in theory, Resources has quite a strong ability to influence the organisation”. He was alluding to the leverage that intangibles could exert on organisational performance, if the organisation were prepared to allow them to. He gave the following stark example,

*“there’s this clear evidence [MORI] that says brand is more important than our ability to manage the budget, and yet we’ve got a PR team of two and an accounts team of one hundred and eighty.”*

His frustration is that:

*“unless you can reduce them [issues like changing cultures, and creating productive working environments] to pounds, shillings and pence, it’s very difficult to convince the politicians ... it’s very difficult to demonstrate the business case for doing that”.*

Throughout the conversation Daniel returned to the theme of improving systems and processes in the Authority by re-design and closer management, as if this was his chosen route towards the better use of resources. So, for example, in order “to take some of the work out of the system” he asked the Head of Finance to own a particular process and to ask, “why on earth as an end-to-end process is that not really working.” On process management, he observed that, “If you’ve got somebody whose job it is to chaperone the process and make sure that it works, then oddly enough it works better.”

Significantly, I could not detect an emphasis by Daniel in seeking to align the use of resources with the needs of the business. Rather, he appeared to be devoting his efforts to improving the use of resources by ensuring that the right processes were in place and were well managed. Ironically, the need for a process to align resources with the needs of the business did not emerge very strongly.

However, there is no doubt about his holistic vision of the strategic direction for the Authority, “We must be an advocate for the County, we must represent the County, we must represent communities, we must build communities.”

#### **5.1.4 Guy – Strategic Director Community Services**

Following a Grammar School education, Guy obtained a Law degree and in keeping with his desire to work in the Public Sector, he joined Rutland District Council 23 years ago, where he received a good grounding in all areas of administration. He then moved through various posts: Committee administration in Cambridgeshire County Council; Service planning and corporate management of the West Glamorgan Health Authority; 10 years in Central Secretariat and Committee Administration at Berkshire County Council; 5 years as Corporate Director for Strategy and Resources at West Berkshire Council, which was one of the new Unitarys; then took his current post.

Guy has an interest in the politics of choice in terms of democracy, and public services, and the value that that adds to people’s lives. He has a general empathy with public

services and the contribution that they make to our lives, and a particular focus on the provision of citizen choice.

The Community Services portfolio embraces: Adult Learning, Libraries & Heritage (includes things like the Museum), Youth & Community Service, Public Protection (which encompasses Trading Standards, Births Deaths & Marriages, Coroner's, Emergency Planning and the key services around Community Safety, which includes a Community Safety Team, Youth Offending Service, and hosting the Drug Action Team); and Services in the Environment area which include Country Parks, Countryside Strategy, Rights of Way, and Gipsies & Travellers.

An early experience for Guy at Rutland was that, "there weren't any resources, and we used to therefore outsource and buy-in an audit service, for example." His four key resources are People, Money, Property and Information.

People vie with Information as the key resource for Guy, "the people with the skills to support you in delivering your ambitions and accountabilities", and his biggest frustration is that, "there just aren't enough people". "It's the scarcest resource we've got and we don't manage it particularly, or we don't prioritise how we manage that resource."

Guy would like to see budget flexibility to cope with the abnormal demands that arise during the year,

*"you've got your core support and that's fine for the normality of things, but when you want to do good things, when there are problems, crises, whatever, you need that flexible resource, so I think some budget around that is something I feel is important."*

His frustration with property is that, "we never have truly a strategic view of where the property is, and actually how we integrate that with service delivery." He wants a public view of buildings to be taken so that opportunities to provide one-stop services to citizens are not lost through, "wasting money on property and maintenance and all the rest of it".

Although Guy claimed that people were his most important resource, his passion for his fourth resource, Information, is palpable and dominated the conversation.



*"... half the time we don't even attempt to manage information or see that it is the life-blood of the organisation, and without information we can't make decisions, we make the wrong decisions and without decision-making you don't provide services, or the services that people want".*

Information seems to be his language for articulating the basic organisational challenges facing the Council.

*"...whoever is the owner of that information needs to take personal responsibility to make sure it's fit-for-purpose, if you can get some of those quite basic fundamentals which everybody agrees with, but if you can actually get that done, your processes run"*

Guy believes the Authority takes for granted the existence of information, "without understanding how it fits in."

Asked whether there was a particular combination of these four resources that is particularly useful or powerful, Guy remarked that,

*"you need to look, what are the big outcomes of getting all these resources , you know, the four things, or whatever may be other things on the list, but if you, what are the outcomes of getting all that working in harmony, you pretty much cracked anything you want to do, haven't you?"*

Asked whether such harmony can be achieved, Guy thinks that,

*"if you can get one person to take an overview, and to see the links and to manage them, which is you know the Director of Resources, whatever you want to call that type of role, somebody that can take an overview, then yeah."*

Guy sees the Authority as a public service organisation which exists to deliver one outcome: the provision of those services that meet the needs of the people. "Everything we do needs to be focused on, you know, is it contributing to that outcome".

He thinks that the Council underestimates the importance that the working environment places on internal and external customers. Externally, he believes that,

*"we are prioritising, we are excluding people, as we sit here, by the way our employees behave, by the way we design our buildings, by the way we publicise ourselves".*

Internally, he believes that,

*"wherever we put our people to work, their working environment, I mean it's obvious isn't it, just plays such an important role on how they perform, how they value the organisation, how they think the organisation values them, how they're motivated, their well-being, their productivity, their pride."*

He adds colour and realism to this aspect when he says,

*"people are walking past the same crappy piece of corridor, the same awful desk every day and are thinking, well I don't really want to do this but I can't be arsed to go and get another job or whatever, but I'm just not feeling very valued and therefore very productive."*

He did not think that anybody was focusing, to the extent that they should be, on establishing this more collective approach. He did say that responsibility for the working environment was with each manager. However, he did not think the environment was fit-for-purpose, "because I don't think we think it through". He believes that the Corporate Management Team needs,

*"to be having some more serious discussions about what our working environment style should be, what our ethos should be, because of the importance on outcomes, because at the end of the day it affects the delivery of our service to the individual."*

Guy is very aware of the need to establish the right relationship between what the business needs in support of its business of direct service delivery, and what the support environment is delivering. Asked about the mechanisms that the Authority uses to achieve a consensus of what those business needs are, Guy admits that he does not have,

*"much visibility about that, of any mechanisms, and I think that one of the ways that manifests itself is that he who shouts loudest gets most".*

A similar view is voiced in respect of the support services in the Resources portfolio, "there doesn't seem to me to be any coherent structure for debating with Services what's on offer."

His general concern for this area of determining business needs and then matching and managing the resources required to meet those needs is summarised neatly when he asks, "... how are we going to get these massive things in harmony and delivering better outcomes for services?", and then provides the answer himself, "I think we're just way-off at the moment. It's a difficult one."

### **5.1.5 Jean – Strategic Director Children and Young People**

Jean is the youngest of seven children from an Irish farming family. A convent education in Ireland resulted in a Leaving Certificate comprising eight subjects. She then completed a 2-year HND in business administration before moving to London and joining the Civil Service. Over a 5-year period, Jean later completed a post-graduate

programme to earn membership of the Chartered Institute of Housing. She later completed an MA. Jean is married and has two children.

Jean has a passion for efficiency, organisation, and practical business systems. She has a very strong sense of social justice favouring enablement and empowerment over paternalism.

In the early eighties, Jean moved from the Civil Service to work in Press and Publicity and other roles at the Greater London Council. She then took the post of Head of Service with the Housing Benefits Service at Greenwich Council. In the early nineties, she was sought by the London Borough of Brent, to be their Head of Housing Benefit and helped them become the first Council to win a Charter Mark for Excellence for their Revenues and Benefits Service.

When Brent decided to outsource the service, Jean and two colleagues attempted a management buy-out (MBO) but lost to EDS<sup>34</sup>. However, she personally won a large outsourcing contract with the London Borough of Hackney which she used to broker a position with one of the other MBO bidders, CSL<sup>35</sup> of Deloitte Touche, later taking responsibility for their outsourcing business in their London Region. From there Jean moved to Islington to renegotiate their outsource contract with IT Net.

She applied for the post of Strategic Director at her current Council because the role appeared to satisfy her love of diversity and change. She was appointed Strategic Director for Adult Social Care. Eighteen months later, in February 2004, she was moved to the Children and Young People Portfolio to help them recover from a period of poor performance. The portfolio comprises Children and Families, Commissioning Policy and Performance, and Special Education Services.

Jean has a view of resources which is heavily influenced by the contributions and needs of the individual and the team. She thinks,

*"there's something about internal resources, around resilience, determination, persistence ... that comes from the sort of person you are and what you have learned over your life, and what you have allowed life to teach you."*

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<sup>34</sup> EDS – Electronic Data Systems, leader in the technology services industry it invented

<sup>35</sup> CSL – was the outsourcing arm of Deloitte Touche

She tends to arrive, almost coincidentally, at the resource issue through her focus on meeting individual and team needs. On the individual level she is keen to,

*"try and fix what they [the staff] want you to fix, if it's reasonable, because they're the ones who do the job and, as far as you possibly can, for me, you should take their frustrations away"*

She cites the obstacles to achieving this as the inadequacies in their business systems, accommodation, procedures and processes. On a team level, she believes that, "We've [the senior management team] done a tremendous amount of work on us as a team, because we weren't a team at all".

She sees the ability of the Council to use their resources efficiently and effectively to be held back as if moving through 'treacle' and she cites culture as the root cause. She sees the County as a,

*"very nice place, very comfortable, you could work here all your life, probably not deliver much, but you'd never get sacked, you'd never even get told off, you know, it's, very little edge to it."*

She sees the culture needing to change to embrace more directive action in the organisation and to start holding people to account.

Her view of the core business also reveals her main resource focus. She describes the business of the Council as, "providing the best quality services, most responsive services we can, at the lowest cost to our communities." She thinks that places them in the business of, "making decisions about resources, where resources go, both people and money." However, she also thinks they are, "in the business of leadership for our community".

It seemed that her involvement in outsourcing since the late eighties has lead to Jean emphasising the importance to service procurement and delivery, of partnering and the concept of the client. She concludes that certain services should be market tested, "to see if we could get a better provider at a lower cost". Whilst she does not offer a resource decision-making process by which she reaches that conclusion, she does identify the theory,

*"I think my approach in terms of resources is incredibly rigorous around, if this is what we have said our priorities are, then how are we going to move resource to match those priorities"*

She thinks it is very easy to move the budget or resource in the current year, but, “what’s incredibly hard is to get into the guts of the organisation and move resource in an area.” This becomes an issue for her when she reflects on the imbalance of resource allocation over the years and the current need to, “lever out large-scale resources from them [the over-resourced service] to our priorities” She thinks, “we’re pretty hopeless [at using] a precious resource somewhere else”.

Her approach would be to, “empower managers and staff much more with resources provided [there are] systems and accountabilities in place”. It is this latter pre-requisite that she does not believe is yet in place.

Jean identifies the main resources as capital, believing that they are “enormously rich in that respect”; intelligence, recognising it as an untapped organisation resource; and property and buildings, “and all of that”.

The core issue for Jean that she sees restricting organisational development is a lack of business systems. Jean sees the better use of resources coming from having the right systems, processes and enablers in place together with the use of appropriate performance indicators to help measure progress against objectives. She does not believe that,

*“we have through our business systems levered out the kind of resources we need to run property, for the way we say are a priority”*

Again, in reference to the apparent historic disproportionate allocation of resources across the Services she notes that, “It’s to be able to afford the nice carpets and the desks is a manifestation of how much resource they’ve had.” She does not think they have systems that are rigorous enough to identify this sort of inequality of resource allocation.

“And also for me there’s a big dimension on staff: staff morale, staff recruitment, staff retention”. Here Jean is alluding to achieving a working environment that meets the needs of the staff. Asked whether there was a system that identifies the business value of achieving the appropriate working environment, she did not think so,

*“it’s certainly for me a source of frustration and disappointment that even now there still isn’t such a system in place.”*

In the absence of a declared system to achieve the equitable and business oriented allocation of resources, Jean observed that the planned amalgamation of services that is being required of local authorities will be helpful in manifesting the issue.

*"I think what they'll find is, staff are starting to say, well hang on a minute, we're now a combined portfolio, you know, I am sitting with my grubby walls around me and my ... grubby carpet or whatever, and I've got Education colleagues ... down the corridor sitting in a plush office. So I think that's going to be a big issue over the next year when the services start to come together."*

The location of the 'Executive' in a separate building from the tower block housing all the other County Office staff had raised concerns amongst some Participants of their being an 'Ivory Tower' culture. On this aspect of functional location, Jean was quite clear,

*"I don't think you're accused of Ivory Tower because of your location, I think you're accused of Ivory Tower because of your lack of visibility."*

Jean felt that the working environment provided for the elected Members was insufficient for their needs. I asked who in the organisation was responsible for ensuring that business needs for support were met. She felt that, "No one does it here in my view, and I've practically given up on it now."

Jean believes in the client ethos, possibly from her exposure to outsourcing, and this could be the influence behind her belief that,

*"the business support system should very much be annually reviewed, in terms of opinions of its clients about, how well do they perform, how responsive are they, and are they giving value for money"*

Jean appears to sum up her view of the Council approach to support services in her comments about property,

*"I don't think there's any strategy whatsoever around: this is the property we've got, these are the people we've got, these are our needs, and this is what we're proposing to do about it, zilch."*

### **5.1.6 Nikita – Head of Service, Schools Policy Performance & Planning**

Following a grammar school education whilst living in Kent, and a gap year in which amongst other jobs he found himself stacking shelves in a major food store, Nikita completed a history degree and a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education: a teaching

qualification. He enjoyed History as a discipline which encouraged analytical skills and reasoning. He commenced 6 years of teaching at a school in Kent in 1982 which became selective at what is now Year 9, resulting in a fully Comprehensive school for two years and then effectively a Secondary Modern school.

On coming out of teaching, he looked at a couple of private sector posts, and was very close to being appointed to a management consultancy position. However he accepted a post in Bedfordshire County Council, where within the Area Education Office, he gained a wide range of experiences including personnel matters, educational visits, admissions, governance, and education welfare matters. Nikita remained with Bedfordshire until 1997 when he moved to Luton Borough Council, which became a Unitary Authority, and set up a new team looking at school support and governor issues, to which was added Transport, and then Admissions. He then moved to Hertfordshire County Council in 2001, a month before they were launching their new Children's Schools and Families department.

Nikita then moved to his current post in November 2003. He again joined a new team formed on his appointment: It brought together what were previously the Planning Performance and Information team and the Old Schools Organisation service.

Perhaps not surprisingly given his teaching background, people were the first resource identified by Nikita, particularly in terms of their quality and quantity,

*"it was a fairly new school, reasonably resourced, good dynamic staff, so there was good peer support, good Head of Department ... very supportive Head Teacher so, the system worked well. You felt a real sense of common purpose ..."*

He appeared to be trying hard to temper a natural tendency towards authoritarianism with a genuine desire to establish a regime of good relationship management,

*"My style of management, I think, has always been reasonably collaborative, although at the end of the day it's not sort of management by straw-poll."*

Nikita recognised the organisational benefit of manifestly valuing staff and these were amongst his examples: awarding staff an extra day of leave to be entitled 'Excellence Day' in thanks for helping that Council earn top performing Council status; holding a Managers' Away Day at a comfortable location and starting later than the normal working day; giving new employees the Council lapel badge on joining; and holding

Celebration of Learning lunches for staff who have used their own time to advance their learning.

When he first went into local authority work he felt that,

*“people weren't particularly concerned about budgets ... you had sufficient staff to do the job you needed to do, it wasn't particularly pressurised.”*

The cash resource featured strongly in our conversation, and Nikita was especially keen to ensure, or challenge, the value being received for a given sum of money. He had experienced two views on this: The one where he had willingly accepted additional duties because, “... people will put on another role to someone who's doing well” but noting that the Authority had done so, “without actually reflecting that in terms of remuneration”; The other where the original job brief was with an organisation who “were very demanding of staff, but I did feel that we were very well rewarded for what we were doing.”

The need for something to be fit-for-purpose was recognised in a simple example,

*“... you had meeting rooms, they were all set-up with these ceiling-mounted projectors, screens there, so you didn't have people 'faffing' around at the start of a meeting.”*

Nikita effectively identified time, for example to innovate, as an important resource, but one that was unfunded. He reflected back on his experience at a very high performing Unitary that,

*“was able to do things that it needed to do, you know, if it needed to commission some research, it would commission the research, rather than asking someone, could you fit that in amongst your work”*

That was in contrast to his current Authority where,

*“you haven't got the financial flexibility to be as innovative as you would like ... because you're spending your resource on delivering what you must deliver.”*

Processes through which to achieve greater efficiencies and effectiveness included the Medium Term Plan which Nikita thought was developing into, “a facility that will enable us to drill down into budgets more clearly, establish where the economies are”.

Nikita had recently co-located his service from disparate areas on 3 floors of a tower block on to a single floor, “to get people working more closely together, to get a sense of being a team ... and to give them a good working environment.” Managing



resources to improve performance had been a motivator for the Service co-location. Nikita recalls that,

*“we had a staff working party that pulled together all the ideas, and [he hoped] that people in the main, feel that something beneficial has come out of it.”*

He had reduced his space requirement in the new configuration from using a rather outmoded approach to space standards:

*“the County Council’s got a space measurement per person which is typically hierarchical ... you have one square inch if you’re paid a certain amount and eighteen square yards if you’re paid a different amount but, OK, that set our overall requirement for the Service.”*

In respect of his own cellular office he said, “this is perfectly adequate and this also works as a meeting room for others if I’m not in, so we’ve doubled-up our resource in that way.” The distinct impression was given that this was a defensive position for his desire for a personal office that he felt uncomfortable justifying.

Improvements to the working environment were starting to be identified but had yet to become an active focus for the organisation. An Organisational Health Survey had prompted one-on-one interviews with the more task-oriented grades which had revealed some instant staff improvements: trailing wires had been identified as trip-hazards, and slow, laborious facsimile machines had prompted replacement with highly efficient versions. However, Nikita was disappointed that such issues had not presented themselves more naturally. He felt that whilst environments that were fit-for-purpose were being created from within some Services, it was not happening as a result of a central initiative. So, whilst he knew that if he asked people what it was that he could do about their working environment that could improve it, then generally, people would identify something that would actually make them more effective as a worker. However, he said with some passion:

*“I have never come across in any organisation I’ve worked, any effective property strategy in terms of working out how was it that we could get the best out of staff, the driver tends to be, how can we fit the staff into the available space ... I don’t think the property strategy here has got off the ground yet.”*

However, it then became clear that for Nikita, and by implication the organisation, even if they had a property strategy, it would not naturally be synonymous with an accommodation strategy,

*"an accommodation strategy that might look at things like, well OK, we could make better use of space if we started scanning all of our files, you know, I know it's tangential to the use of property but, it's important ..."*

Nikita believes in the merit of efficiency reviews, but is rather critical, and even cynical, of how they are conducted.

*"I have absolutely no problem with looking for efficiencies, what I have a problem with is someone setting a figure when they haven't a clue what they're talking about, in terms of detail."*

He said that the County Council was instituting some Root and Branch Reviews for the future which he thought was productive, "providing they get the cross-Council representation, not hand-picked people".

According to Nikita, the core business of the Council was to meet its statutory obligations in the best way possible. However, to his mind he,

*"would doubt whether anyone in the Council is fully au fait with what is the business of the Council, as in every statutory responsibility."*

Furthermore, he felt that there were many things that they, and all other Authorities, do that they did not have to do in the way that they did them: They could do them very differently.

As with each Participant, the processes the Council has and uses to ensure that options for meeting their business needs are generated for Members was explored with Nikita. He said,

*"I am not convinced that any Council really analyses some of its processes as regularly as it ought to, to ensure that it gets the outcomes it wants."*

This topic moved into questioning whether Nikita felt that the resourcing of the business was being approached holistically. He did not feel that there was any sense of cohesion in this area and gave a simple example relating to improved space utilisation by adopting a more efficient document filing system:

*"I'm not actually going to gain anything financially by removing a few filing cabinets, but as an organisation we could, and those are some of the difficulties we face really."*

### **5.1.7 Lucy – Head of Service Property Services & Contracts**

Lucy is married with two children. Her interests are history, literature and the arts. Her parents were shop-keepers and keen Methodists. Lucy and her sister received private education in their latter school years. She and her husband were Sunday School Leaders, and Lucy had trained as an Ordinand with the church ministry.

She left school at sixteen and joined the Terrier Section of the Estates Department of Leicester Council. During this time she obtained an ONC and HNC in Business Studies and Public Administration.

After ten years she left Leicester to have her children. Lucy enrolled on an Estates Management Course at Leicester Polytechnic, which she funded by working at a fast food restaurant for two years. Although hating the job, it gave her an appreciation of people, and she received people management training.

Moving to a local Estate Agents Lucy worked on a part-time contract before qualifying under new maternity rules to be re-appointed to her previous job at Leicester Council. She transferred to the first vacant Trainee Valuer post in a fifty-strong Corporate Estates section, qualifying as a Chartered Surveyor over the next few years.

Lucy then took the post of Deputy Property Manager for the Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Co-Operative Society. She left eighteen months later following merger activity and went to Peterborough Council, as Deputy to the Property Head of Department and later as their Estate Services and Building Programme Manager. At this time she was studying for the NLGO MBA. Lucy was then appointed Head of Property at the Borough of Pool from where she was appointed to her current post.

As the Head of Property Services, Lucy manages some 140 staff delivering Contracts, Procurement, Health & Safety, Building Surveying and Maintenance, and Asset Management with Facilities Management services. As the Corporate Property Officer she is responsible for the Council's land and buildings property base. Lucy is performance managed by the Strategic Director Resources.

Her opening comments revealed Lucy to believe 'siloism' to be limiting her attempts to create a holistic approach to the utilisation of resources,

*"It would be interesting to see also if there's some key themes that are sort of recurring through it [the research] or if, effectively we are all sort of silos, all operating in our own little world."*

Her perception is of a short-fall in the Organisation,

*"What it does lack if anything is, and I think it has been recognised at COMT [Chief Officer's Management Team] level, is that it lacks the cohesion of cross linkages".*

The recurring themes and the cross-linkages are a reference to her belief that it is essential that the Council adopts a more collective approach,

*"the only way the Council can start to make any of these efficiency gains is by actually pooling some of those resources, because it's only collectively that we can make them."*

It was not clear at this time whether Lucy was really only targeting economies of scale, or whether she was hinting at aligning resources with business need.

Lucy sees one aspect of the support environment as being support to the individual and has taken career decisions based on the quality of that support,

*"I had a tremendous opportunity there, which I took with both hands, of a learning resource and a supportive environment in which to learn."*

Lucy gave me the impression that tight budgets were stifling innovation because,

*"instead of being able to concentrate on a lot of the strategic side of things, you were actually concentrating on the budgetary function."*

This was already resonating with a point of concern that Guy had provided: that of not being able to actually fund innovation initiatives; perhaps for not recognising the relative value, or leverage, that the initiative represented. One example Lucy gave of this was a strategic property review as something that had never been done, but needed to be done, and done properly: the resource implications of undertaking such a review had prevented the review taking place.

She also believes her Service is seen by the Council as a budget area that can better withstand cuts than the externally facing Services. This view appears consistent with her natural tendency to try and preserve her Service. She sees her 'back-office' function as supporting "the Council's aims and objectives and all of the services", but she is also,

*"very much aware that we could, if we're not careful, find ourselves being rationalised, to such a degree of almost non-existence, because we're an easy target."*

At the least, this suggests that her attempts to promote the critical contribution her Service could be making to the achievement of the Council aims were failing; at worst she may not yet be aware of such a potential for her Service. One of the issues she faced appeared to be the language problem of 'FM',

*"If we call it an 'Office Accommodation Strategy' we can get it through, if we say it's an 'FM Strategy' well, what's that got to do with tables and chairs?"*

With this comment Lucy is highlighting the challenge ahead of her to alter the perceptions held by her internal 'customers' of the Property Service to the point where they can understand its function, and the contribution it can make to their Service. Similarly, the silo issue arises again when she says that part of the problem is the, "silo mentality, which is hearts and minds stuff really." In addressing this, she sees a need for a:

*"re-education of what we [Property Service] do, as well as them [the other Services] having an understanding that, well actually, this is a really complicated area, we'd rather you do it".*

It is only recently that her role as Corporate Landlord is being recognised in that initiatives with property implications are being passed to her for timely comment. Hitherto she has had some instances where she has caught sight of reports that had not been copied to her, and yet they had significant property implications for the Authority. On turning that issue around, and querying her involvement in contributing to business improvement discussions from a property-use perspective, she replied, "That has only just started to happen". She reveals that they have just launched a pilot project within the Resources Directorate exploring the business effect of new ways of working.

Lucy describes the business of the Council as being,

*"to provide essential services, and a choice of essential services, in a variety of ways within the public sector remit".*

When asked whether there is a process that generates choices of delivery of the statutory and essential services, Lucy is hesitant, “Well, there’s consultation that happens a lot more than it used to”. She recognises though that,

*“in some ways we are the ... last resort provider of services, and we catch and capture the elements that otherwise would drop off the edge.”*

Lucy also considers the statutory obligations of the Council to be additional to these essential services. She is very aware that “the Council is a financial machine, it’s a business machine, and my business case needs to reflect the business of the Authority.” She feels that the recently released, first ever, Council Plan will enable a common understanding of the main aims and purpose of the Council. The need to be able to evidence the linkage between those aims and purpose was reiterated by Lucy when she said,

*“we need to align our services to the Council Plan because otherwise there are functions that are not supported by the Council.”*

The Council Plan is implemented through a 3-year Medium Term Plan (MTP) which was introduced only last year and, “was perhaps slightly clumsy because it hadn’t been used before”. Lucy thinks the MTP is wrongly viewed as a financial tool, because it comes from Head of Finance. She believes that,

*“it needs to come from ... the Director of Resources so that it’s seen as a resource tool, and I feel that over time ... that will happen.”*

### **5.1.8 Elton – Director of Corporate Resources**

After finding that he had failed his A-levels, Elton continued what had been a fill-in job as a payroll clerk for Essex County Council whilst retaking his A-levels through evening classes. Passing 2 A-levels enabled the County to sponsor him as a trainee accountant under the Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. Seven years later, and now a qualified accountant, he left Essex and worked at two London Boroughs: Redbridge then Hackney. Elton then spent sixteen years in private consultancy working for KPMG, Deloitte and Touche, and then Vantage Point, a management buy-out from BDO Stow Hayward. Throughout this period he strengthened his core skills and experience around finance, IT, and business change. In pursuit of a more balanced work-life style, Elton applied for his current post in autumn 2001, starting work in

March 2002. He does not regret the move but would not discount going back into consultancy.

Elton is the Director of Corporate Resources for a District Council, and together with his two fellow directors and the Chief Executive form the Corporate Management Team that provides an interface between Elected Members and the services. He has responsibility for 140 staff covering 5 services: Financial Services (30); Legal Services (20); Revenues and Benefits (40); Information Technology (25); and Customer Services (25), which includes two area offices. He sets the context within which those services operate and allows the managers to manage their services with minimal interference from him. He also has number of sub-strands of activity: Chairman of a National E-Government project which is sponsored by the ODPM, with his District Council being the Lead Authority; E-Government champion within the District; Efficiency Champion within the District; and the Information Sharing Champion.

(Post-script: In January 2006 Elton moved to another District Council on appointment as their Chief Executive)

Sixteen years in consultancy left Elton with a firm focus on people as the key resource,

*“very interesting period, and very focused on resource management, the resources being the consultants that you have.”*

On the working environment Elton says the offices where he is located are “a little bit tired”, not particularly well set-out, and lack the right impact on his staff. Interestingly, whilst his offices in the High Street are more modern and open plan, their application of quite strict space standards means that,

*“whilst it’s a more modern environment, maybe it’s not as attractive as they [the staff] would like because they do feel a bit sort of squashed and pressured.”*

Location of the offices was also an issue,

*“we’re currently split over three offices and ... that’s not good productive use of our time ... certain services are divorced from each other and there’s not enough interaction between those services, which means that we’ve got a bit of a fragmented organisation at the moment.”*

Elton reflected on his consultancy working practice,

*"I suppose one of the advantages of consultancy is that you get the opportunity to work quite a bit at home, under your own steam, and I always enjoyed that, so maybe that was a positive aspect of 'place'."*

Perhaps this personal experience had influenced the launch of a pilot project for mobile working that had equipped some staff with mobile devices to allow mobile and flexi-working. However, it had rather emphasised the indirect nature of their initiatives to improve efficiency by highlighting that fact that quite a number of his staff were lacking the very basic IT skills such as, "they don't know how to reply to an e-mail".

With regard to processes, Elton told me that they have processes for planning and developing their services in the future, and processes for deciding future budgets, and "that all works pretty well". However, coming to a developing theme with Participants he later said that,

*"managing those finances and trying to redirect the money into the areas where it's most needed is often quite a challenge."*

This suggested that the process for doing so might not be robust. I was trying to determine whether there was an overarching process emerging into which I could place the various processes being mentioned; without such an overarching process I could see the potential benefit to the organisation of the sub-processes not being realised. A likely answer started to form when Elton said,

*"We are planning to move forward on a sort of business process re-design initiative, but on a rolling basis through individual services in the coming twelve months ... that should take into account the people dimension and the place dimension as well, and I guess we haven't actually appointed anyone to do any of that work as such"*

This seemed to be reinforced when asked whether there were any initiatives to try and identify good combinations of resources and to move towards creating them, Elton remarked, "Maybe not overtly, but maybe subconsciously, perhaps."

It was interesting to hear that they had started to move into succession planning as well, but it was difficult to ascertain whether Elton saw such a process as being of value in itself, regardless of whether the resultant plan is judged capable of realisation.

Although he could think of a number of areas where they had generated increased productivity, he admitted that it had been more by chance than by design, offering the following example:



*"in Environmental Services they have increased the number of taxi licence applications that the same team dealt with by about fifty per cent, which by any measure is an increase in efficiency, but it's more because that's the demand coming through the door, rather than ... and therefore they've had to work harder to generate it."*

Elton was drawn to the concept of systems thinking<sup>36</sup> as part of their process re-design work by thoughts such as, "is it more important to process a benefit application quickly or ... accurately, and I would argue it's the latter". Their process re-design efforts were targeting processes to deal with existing needs. Asked whether he had any processes by which he could interpret the needs of the business in terms of the resource requirement, Elton described a top-down process of identifying outcomes, the aims and objectives needed to achieve those outcomes, the actions required to achieve the aims and objectives, and then the resources required to complete the actions.

Asked how he determined those high-level outcomes, Elton described how they have external pressures that feed into the Service directly, such as legislation where he gave the example of the new licensing provisions. Elton moved on to describe how the various inputs coming in from all sorts of areas were then consolidated down into Service plans which were then collated together in terms of budget planning, commercial planning and Human Resource planning.

Returning to the high level outcomes again and asking what business he believed they were delivering, Elton said that they were,

*"working for the good of the community, promoting an active community, promoting an active economy, protecting the environment locally, and just making it a good place to live ...but it's often difficult for people to see outside their own service area."*

This latter issue he explained by seeing the business at another level where it is "a collection of fairly disparate businesses" where these businesses equate to Services and where "effectively the services are silo based and ... there's a lack of inter-relationship between them." An example he gave of this latter was to ask, "What is the connection between your bins being collected and your council tax being collected?"

The big issue that Elton was addressing was linked to meeting the aspirations for the organisation in becoming "outcome-focused, customer focused, and all the rest of it".

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<sup>36</sup> Elton acknowledged the influence on his thinking of Senge et al. (1998)

The issue was how to persuade the organisation to achieve improvements by changing from

*“doing it in an incremental basis within their Services rather than looking at fundamental or radical re-design in terms of the way they do things”.*

### **5.1.9 John – Director of Corporate Resources**

John comes from the Midlands and went direct from school to work for Birmingham City Council, the equivalent of a current Unitary Authority. He completed a four-year diploma course to become a qualified Public Health Inspector (Now a totally degree-based qualification resulting in qualifying as an Environmental Health Officer) and added separate qualifications such as Noise Certificate, and Air Pollution Certificate. He then completed a three year DMS (Diploma in Management Studies), in two years, sponsored by the Council but having to make-up the working time spent studying. There were 2000 staff in his department and he was a fourth tier officer.

In 1987, after 8 years as a Deputy Environmental Officer, John won promotion to Chief Officer on being appointed to head a new department formed from the merging of the former Housing and Environmental Health departments. To advance his career further, and helped by his experience and knowledge of urban renewal, John moved to his current District Council, expecting to be there for three or four years, but staying for 25 years for reasons which included family and schooling.

Around 1997, in the middle of Local Government Reorganisation, he took the opportunity to put all the resource functions together. He brought all the property together under the Property Director, and put Environmental Health with Leisure and Community, leaving him with a Resources Directorate. As the Director of Corporate Resources, he worked closely with the Resources Cabinet Member and Internal Affairs Cabinet Member. His brief comprised corporate administration, committee administration, Finance, IT, Legal, Personnel, Revenues, Internal Audit and Risk Management, and Governance.

He is now running a ‘Managed Change’ initiative which has seen a change of Chief Executive, and the assimilation of the four directors down to two and of the twenty

Heads of Service down to ten. John is one of the two Corporate Directors and he has responsibility for Resources

John describes his role as,

*"the engine room for the Authority ... we provide the support mechanisms that help the Services to run, and you can see that really in the structure, you know, the financial services, the legal services, the HR, all that".*

He has tried to concentrate resource on "providing the services out there, not looking after people in here" but he stresses the fact that the Government has brought in increasing numbers of controls such as Freedom of Information, procurement issues, governance issues, and business continuity, all of which he says requires managing via a central resource in an Authority of their size. John then described a combination of centralisation and de-centralisation of resources that suggested that he was still trying to rationalise his resource utilisation. "We got a Procurement Manager and she advises on not just purchasing but contracts as well, so there's another support mechanism". He goes on to say "What I want to see is a centrally managed business support function" but he then seems to oppose that notion when relating a difference of opinion he has with his Head of Finance:

*"he thinks we should centralise the people within the core, because he says that's the only way you'll find out whether it's being run efficiently or not, and I accept that, but I think you need the business support nearest to the Service they support ... so we've got to come up with some sort of tactical compromise."*

Asked to describe his use of the term, 'business support', John told me that it referred to "post, collect the post, photocopying, invoice processing, all that for the directorates".

His perception of Facilities Management was revealing in that he described it as "one of the areas we haven't got quite to grips with at present". It was currently spread between his department and the Planning and Property Directorate, but they had recently had KPMG assess the situation and they had advised them,

*"Just to centralise it basically so, they look at the property, the buildings and what have you, and we run the caretaking, the cleaning, and all of that side of it".*

His view of the business of the Authority started with pointing out that Local Authorities were "a bit of an amorphous mass really, in the sense that we provide

individual services ... to the public, whatever they might be". He does then, however, cite another commitment, "the bottom line is becoming more important but there's the social element which tends to skew some of the business decisions". He believes there is a fundamental difference between the private sector approach to resourcing and that of the public sector,

*"the business [referring to the private sector] would say, this is the support, these are the resources we need, rather than us saying, these are the resources we've got, how are we going to use them."*

John seems to be addressing space allocation from an hierarchical perspective when he says of a building project,

*"one of the things was to take away cellular offices from people who should never have had them in the first place, by that I mean, we had a policy that only Directors and Heads of Service had cellular offices."*

He tempers that comment in saying,

*"it makes us sound as if we're a bunch of megalomaniacs, but we're not, it was just to bring some sort of consistency across the organisation".*

Neither comment gave much reassurance that John viewed accommodation in terms of its being 'fit-for-purpose'.

The use of accommodation was mentioned in two ways. The Police were housed across the road from the Council offices and were considering moving out of the Town to better accommodation. John saw the community advantage of having the Police headquartered within the Town and combined this objective with optimising the use of his own accommodation by persuading the Police to relocate to spare Council accommodation. When he was talking about the unauthorised creation of cellular offices, his ready acceptance to enforce the hierarchical right to space was noted. Now John was at least concerned about the well-being of those staff he saw suffering by the profusion of the 'illegal' cellular office when he said,

*"and where does it appear, on the outside of the building, you know, by the window, so the poor staff in the middle, all of a sudden they find they can't see day-light because they're surrounded by offices, so we cleared them away".*

In reference to their approach to efficiency gains, John laments, “one of the problems with local government, I think, is it’s too easy to say yes”. He describes a process of ‘decision conferencing’ that they are using to address this issue,

*“we meet with Members, with Directors, and look at the Services, or look at the costs and say right, do we want to be in all these Services the way we are now, and part of the Managed Change process is saying to the Members, you have to review the Service.”*

One approach to this review has been for Members to require zero-based budgeting to be introduced in 2006 which John and his team are, interestingly, hesitant about but, “that’s what they want, I think it’s a bit of an old-fashioned idea, some you win, some you don’t”.

John has a concern over succession planning, not based on the possible merits of engaging in the process, but on the high average age of the senior management team,

*“The Chief Exec came about sixteen years ago, and to give you an idea, most of us, and this is one of the problems that has concerned me, succession planning, that all the directors are about my age.”*

John pondered an approach to better resource utilisation,

*“let’s just review that, have we built in a review process? Is it working or isn’t it? We haven’t done that, I don’t think, in the past, we’ve tended to do it and make it work, which might not always be the best, you know, we could perhaps take a bit of time out and look at it.”*

## **5.2 Contextual Interpretation of Initial Narratives**

Only Guy, Nikita and John have remained with the public sector throughout their careers. Bennie and Bernie completed full careers in the private sector retiring from company director positions. Daniel brought police force experience to the Council together with a few years in the commercial private sector. In between their Public Sector appointments, Jean and Elton have both worked for commercial consultancy firms albeit with predominantly Public Sector clients. Lucy took some commercial appointments at critical points in her family life. These work experiences combine with their life experiences to suggest some of the cultural issues behind the perceptions the Participants have of their organisation and of an integrated resource perspective, and these are highlighted below.

### **5.2.1 Dominant Discourse**

It proved quite difficult to overcome the dominant discourse on business issues and processes. There was a need to adopt the same language as the Participants in order to engage them and to try and interpret the cultural issues that might be underpinning their individual and joint perspectives on resource integration and the resulting 'support environment'. Indeed, the transaction-costs perspective was a distinct comfort zone for most Participants with others recognising the *working* environment, but not a socially constructed environment.

With a police background and its reliance on rules and regulations, Daniel is not surprisingly process oriented. As the Resources Director, this is probably the right approach for the Council at this time as it seeks to start to build a corporate culture from a collection of 'silos'. His promotion of the concept of the competent general manager is an attempt to build awareness of the skills and responsibilities expected of a manager, believing this to be one route to a lean organisation.

### **5.2.2 The Leafy-Green Culture**

There is a clear perception by the majority of Participants that the 'leafy green' County culture runs through the Authority resulting in an organisation with 'very little edge' to it as Jean remarked.

Guy contrasted the "leafy-green" image of the County Hall area with the "black, single mother" image of a less-advantaged area of the County. The Authority, and perhaps hence the organisation, has a culture of non-accountability or, conversely, a lack of 'directed behaviour' as Jean phrased it.

### **5.2.3 Political Dimension**

Guy highlighted the political dimension to working at a senior level in a Local Authority around which there was consensus. There is Politics with a capital 'P' which is practiced by the Elected Members and interpreted by the Officers. However, there is also politics with a small 'p' which he refers to as "the politics of choice in terms of democracy, and public services, and the value that that adds to people's lives."

### **5.2.4 The Comfort Zone**

It was interesting to note that no Participant felt their job, or those of others in the Authority, was at risk from under-performance. Indeed, Nikita had experienced how the more efficient you were, the more work was allocated/transferred to you – without receiving the commensurate remuneration – as if this was an easier route to achieving the task than insisting on the original task owner fulfilling his/her obligations.

Those that had stayed within Local Government for their careers were content with the positions they had attained. Those that had been ‘outside’ gave reasons for joining the Authority as a strong sense of social responsibility, and the need to escape the long hours of the commercial job. As Daniel told me about his last private sector appointment, “that wasn’t the way I wanted to live my life, I wasn’t that ambitious ...I wasn’t going to sacrifice everything.” Jean felt that consultancy was lonely for a team-player and returned to local government accordingly. Elton saw consultancy as “getting too much like hard work” but also that he was becoming stale, needed a change, and wanted to think about his work/life balance.

Partnership working has been a preferred work style for most Participants and within the Authority this style seems synonymous with lengthy debate prior to action. It might be that this is part of the comfort zone, notwithstanding claims to the contrary.

### **5.2.5 Bunker Mentality**

Daniel explained why in his opinion it was difficult to focus on corporate resource efficiency when people want to act independently in pursuit of their own activity, “Culturally ... we tend to see things as a series of linked activities ...” There was much evidence of this ‘bunker mentality’ which was commonly termed ‘silos’. Lucy sees overcoming a lack of cross-linkages within the Authority as relying upon “trying to break down this sort of silo mentality, which is hearts and minds stuff really.” Elton sees the Services and the business as effectively silo-based but notes the lack of inter-relationship between the Services and between the Services and the business.

### **5.2.6 The Member / Officer Tension**

There was polite, but clear, tension between the Officers and the Members. Members generate policy and the Officers implement policy. The tension exists around how effectively each does their job. How do Members seek to understand citizen's wishes and decide on policies? How do Officers generate the options for policy implementation for the Members to choose from? These two questions received unconvincing answers during the Conversations leaving the feeling that the 'busi-ness' of all the 'doing' was stealing from those activities with the greatest leverage.

### **5.2.7 Climate of Big-Project Failure**

It was a near consensus amongst Participants that the implementation of two recent major or 'Super' programmes was a failure. Both projects represent corporate initiatives that have widespread appeal: Customer First, and SAP. The Super-Programme Manager for Customer First is Guy, and Daniel is the Manager for SAP with each sitting on the other's Project Board. Ironically, the Customer First initiative had stalled due to funding deficits borne of poor project planning in part through weak communication. Daniel sees the poor implementation of SAP being because staff have not embraced 'lean'<sup>37</sup> thinking which includes the promotion of conducting transacting activities at the point of the transaction. He gives the example of there being a data entry team in HR which would not be necessary if the Services entered the data onto the SAP system directly, instead of sending handwritten forms to HR for data entry: Conversely, staff cite examples of poor SAP implementation being due to such fundamental issues as the training being conducted before the software was available to use, and the software still not operating properly. Nikita believes there is a "sense of the emperor and his new clothes about this". Guy believes that they just do not manage the basics well.

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<sup>37</sup> The 'Lean' thinking refers to the re-engineering of existing processes by eliminating the low/no value activities. The term was coined by Womack et al. (1990) to describe the Japanese-derived approach to car manufacturing and to distinguish it from mass and craft manufacturing.



### **5.2.8 Self-Survival**

There is a tangible sense of looking after your self within the Authority. This occurs at different levels within the organisation. John was saying how he was ready to step aside in the new District Council structure if that was deemed necessary but (after 25 years service) was clearly working to avoid that outcome. Heads of Service, Nikita and Lucy were particularly protective of their Service and unwittingly perhaps overlooked alternative actions that could benefit the Authority more than the chosen one. Guy believes that it is a case of ‘he who shouts loudest gets most’, and quotes people as commonly saying, “it’s not my job, I’m busy, you know, someone else has got to do it”. There is also clearly some substance to the claims that some Services are given greater priority than others and that some act as if it is a free economy. Lucy is aware of her vulnerability through outsourcing.

### **5.2.9 Performance Management and Managing Performance**

There was some consensus that the emphasis on meeting performance targets, particularly those required by Central Government, risks stealing the resource needed to actually improve performance. This type of performance management seems to be considerably out of balance with the requirement to manage the performance of staff. Both Bennie and Bernie came from corporate cultures that prized good, caring, personnel management. They had witnessed the corporate benefit that derived from overtly valuing staff. Jean repeatedly told me of the value of team work and valuing people, Nikita was trying with some success to invest his time and effort in his staff, but the other Participants did not seem to share the passion for this management aspect.

Bernie is positively incensed by the “surfeit of numerical measures, which frankly I think has got completely out of hand”. He sees it as “central bureaucracy gone mad, because they want to sit at the centre of the web and measure it all and be able to tell us all how to do everything.”

Elton notes that the performance targets are imposed on the Authority and therefore “they drive the way the business goes, and the way that people respond to them, and that may not necessarily be the best way of doing things”<sup>38</sup>.

### 5.2.10 The ‘Doing’ Disease

*“It’s a disease, which I mean it’s probably incurable because we are by nature people who want to be doing things, and be busy doing things”*

With this comment, Bennie captures a recurring issue which faces the Authority. It is his belief that if managers spent more time thinking about the future needs of the Council and the Authority rather than pondering another set of performance or target figures then the Authority would benefit more. The meetings culture probably fits in here as well, where no one has time to do anything because the day is full of back-to-back meetings. This sort of ‘doing disease’ might be a cause of the reluctance, if not the actual inability, of senior managers to place a serious value on thinking through their needs. The classic example could be the way they set the budget *before* they set their Medium Term Plan.

### 5.2.11 Parochial-ness

*“These are the guys (Parish Councillors), you know, they are concerned about what happens in Iraq, but there’re much more concerned about who’s going to cut their grass verge.”*

This is the practical, human, Bennie facing the reality of Local Government when trying to assess the needs of the citizens. The challenge the Council faces is balancing perceived needs against real needs. Another example given in different scenarios by Nikita and Bernie is that of filling in pot-holes in the roads being more appreciated by the Electorate than disruptive road work – even though the latter is aimed at reducing long-term maintenance costs.

### 5.2.12 Accountability

*“There’s always a duck-out somewhere down the line. There shouldn’t be really”*

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<sup>38</sup> These Participants will perhaps have welcomed the recognition by Ruth Kelly MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, on 5 July 2006 in her speech to the LGA Conference that “80% of the performance reporting produced by councils is information required by Whitehall and only 20% is of direct local benefit. ... we are setting up a practitioner group – the Lifting Burdens Task Force - it will tell us which requirements cause the most aggravation on the ground and which add the least value – so that we can then agree packages of burden reduction through the Central Local Partnership. This means a dramatic reduction of as many centrally set targets and indicators as is possible.”

This comment arose when discussing the lack of clear accountability and responsibility within the Authority. Management by committee emerged as a strong reason for this. Lucy shared the details of nine policy papers she had to prepare and submit over a four-month period, only a few of which would pass through an executive committee in that period. After a career of being in charge of staff and of directing and delivering corporate business, Bennie finds the lack of accountability for policy *delivery* a challenge. The idea of only setting policy and then leaving policy interpretation and delivery to those who are not even reporting to him is alien to him. He views budget accountability with similar scepticism. On the one hand he sees budget holders being obsessed with their budgets, but on the other hand notes that no-one has been able to tell him how many staff the Council employs. I think he sees a perversity in the way the Council is target-driven, performance-driven, whilst missing performance improving opportunities through a more corporate approach. Interestingly, Bennie clearly believes that he has had to be persuaded to do everything in his career, joining Shell, transferring to the Commercial division, standing as a Conservative in a Liberal Democrat seat. It seems he prefers to play-down his achievements, “trolling around the world, it’s OK, sounds grand, but it was horrible” – or perhaps he wants ultimate accountability to be with other than himself.

It appeared to be a similar situation at the District level with John remarking that the reason the Leader wanted to give the Heads of Service more responsibility was because they “hide behind their coat-tails”.

### **5.2.13 Treacle and Turgidity**

Bernie blames the political dimensions of the Council brief for leaving him frustrated that Local Government is “not as flexible and fast-moving as business is.” This is shared by those from the consultancy arena. Jean described working in the Authority as like moving through treacle. Elton was maybe tempered by his profession as an accountant, but he also appeared to want quicker change than the District was capable of: He accepted a CEO post with another District Council shortly after the field work finished. Bernie saw that “having to be accountable to just about anybody and everybody you can think of ... creates a turgidity”. He sees the Public Sector becoming

“bogged down because it has far too many priorities most of which are imposed, and far too much interference from Central Government”. There is also a certain drag on innovation through a fear of losing out. A typical example of this is centred on watching capital savings that flow from a Service initiative being taken into central accounts with no benefit going to the generator of the savings. A possible rationale for the ‘treacle’ and ‘turgidity’ might have been that the Council had a transaction cost that would prove un-competitive if competition existed.

#### **5.2.14 The Taken-for-Granted Syndrome**

There was a view that much of the data and information within the Authority never becomes knowledge because it is never challenged: its existence is taken-for-granted. A reason offered for this was the lack of processes to capture and interpret the data in terms of the needs of the Authority.

It is also possible that the business issue on which there was no consensus, ‘Viewing a process as a valuable asset’, see sections 6.3.6 and 6.5 below, was also an example of a ‘taken-for-granted’: Processes may represent a source of additional performance improvement but are not seen as such.

#### **5.2.15 The Built or Socially-Constructed Environment?**

The working environment is seen generally as something that should be liked by those in it if productivity is to be high. However, it is not yet seen as something that should be designed to emanate the desired corporate culture and ethos. Bennie has a perspective on the working environment that appears shaped by two potential extremes: a privileged work life in a company that was never short of money, but also a conviction that making people feel valued will strengthen a company.

From his strategic planning perspective Bernie is well aware that whatever his fifteen to twenty people are going to do is going to be difficult “and yet the actual leverage of that support is enormous, but hard to prove.” He extends this logic to his expectations of better support for the work of the Cabinet members. He shares his room with his part-time secretary and laments the lack of appropriate facilities for Members.

*"Everybody thinks they should be in open plan etcetera, etcetera, and have a meeting room for when they can't be in open plan, and it's very hard to argue against but, I don't operate in that way".*

Strategic Directors share the same floor with the Members. Each has their own room. Jean believes such cellular layouts do not restrict the ability to meet colleagues for a chat, or to drop in to each other officers: Guy holds a directly opposite opinion of the layout, believing that people hardly see each other, team-building is made difficult, and that the layout does not help casual conversations. Meanwhile Lucy is struggling to introduce a much needed and wanted accommodation policy partly because Service Heads act independently and feel they own their property, and partly because Service Heads have only recently learnt that Lucy is the Corporate Property Officer with professional responsibility for all corporate property. Guy laments that "some of our buildings are a disgrace because we don't invest in the basic environment".

There is a recognition of the value of creating the right working environment but there is no process for doing so, and perhaps no real belief in it. For example, regardless of the 'fit-for-purpose' rhetoric, senior managers still find reasons for their own office: "it's available as a general meeting room when I am out"; "not everyone can have a big office like this, that's part of the hierarchical stuff"; "it was just to bring some sort of consistency across the organisation".

### **5.2.16 Personal Frustrations**

Whilst he clearly seeks personal accountability in people, Bennie wants it to have a corporate focus. His frustration is "people thinking in 'silos' by service". He even refers to his Cabinet colleague as "unitary Bernie" as someone whose focus remains on delivering his own brief.

Bernie sees that "Performance measuring is out of control – it's become an end in itself" He is a strategic planner. His move to Glaxo from ICI was because "ICI was into everything ... and I wanted to get into a pure pharmaceutical company where it was all the eggs were in one basket." He is focused on specific strategic objectives requiring internal dealings with Districts and external dealings with Regions and Central Government. "Local Government has its fingers in a lot of pies. It hasn't got that single-mindedness I referred to."

Guy adds another frustration that is shared by many of the participants: insufficient people. However, he hints at the culture of the inevitability of such a resource being scarce: “there just aren’t enough people, and people are pulled in so many different ways, that’s been a feature of everywhere I’ve worked and even here, *well, you know, it’s a County Council*” (emphasis added). He believes the shortage of people results in not being able to “get people to turn up at meetings, to deliver, to respond to things” because they are all too busy. It is noteworthy that the reason was not being expressed in terms of priorities where the higher priority meetings or tasks were capable of being resourced, leaving the lower priority meetings or tasks to be abandoned. It is possible that this frustration stems from the recognised lack of proper management of information which leads to poor decision-making.

The lack of a clear property strategy was another shared frustration which manifested itself in participants not knowing where the property is and how it is being integrated with the Services. Jean is frustrated by the lack of a process that matches service to need, “No-one does it here in my view, and I’ve practically given up on it now”. However, Lucy sees her role frustrated by there being “24 Heads of Service, each one responsible for their own little bits, each one responsible with different budgets”, and matters such as a Lettings Policy where “every man and his dog seems to have had a go at letting property across the Authority, and everyone seems to be an expert.”

### **5.3     *Boundaries and Design***

In addition to the valuable data that emerged from the Parts 1 of the Conversations about the participants themselves, the researcher was able to discern some of the boundaries that participants were setting for the rest of the research. For example, the perception of resources was not generally straying into the intangible categories. The recognition of the importance placed on the measured performance of the Authority gave the focus on the use of resources. The political electoral cycle meant that a four year term resulted in at best 2 years of real progress after allowing for the post- and pre-election activities and this lowered planning horizons. The presence of a Silo mentality was vivid and seen as a major hindrance on the achievement of corporate

goals. These boundaries were important to recognise, if the initial strong and willing engagement of participants was to be maintained, and to understand better, for the influences they might have on participant perceptions.

The experience of this round also helped in the design of the Parts 2 and 3 of the Conversations. Questions to the researcher about the methodology and method and its effectiveness started thoughts of how such perceived effectiveness could be measured: This led to the deployment of the Ratings Instrument. The quite quick coalescence of issues around business themes helped promote the notion of using those business themes to retain and promote engagement.

# 6

## Presentation & Validation of Reflections on the Narratives

*"Say not, 'I have found the truth,' but rather, 'I have found a truth.' Say not, 'I have found the path of my soul,' Say rather, 'I have met the soul walking upon my path.' For the soul walks upon all paths."*

Kahlil Gibran, 1923

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The structure of this Chapter flows from the interpretation of the Parts 1 of the Conversations which revealed insights into the personal and organisational cultural context of Participant views; uncovered topics and narratives that merited further inquiry at the Parts 2 of the Conversations; surfaced business-critical themes which appeared to engage Participants quite strongly in considering the resource alignment and utilisation issues that the themes represented; and lastly, captured early reflections by Participants on the worth of the methodology and method.

In Parts 2 of the Conversations, Participants were asked questions that sought to clarify and amplify their initial narratives. In answering the questions, the Participants were effectively 're-telling' those narratives based on further self-reflection. Re-evaluating the narratives in this way revealed Participants to be recognising resource alignment in association with particular business contexts: It is these contexts that are presented in the first section of this Chapter.



In Parts 3 of the Conversations, Participants were again asked clarification and amplification questions. This iteration was designed to provide a final re-assessment of the narrative each Participant had provided regarding the re-evaluation of the alignment of resources with the needs of the business. Additionally, they were asked to reflect on the relevance of their narratives to ten most prominent, common, Participant business themes. These themes had emerged from a synthesis of the interpretation of the initial narratives, and the re-told narratives from the Parts 2 of the Conversations. Lastly, Participants were asked a direct question at the close of the Parts 3 of the Conversations regarding their views on the efficacy of the research methodology and method. The presentation and interpretation of the business themes, and the judgement of the utility of the research, together form the second section of this Chapter.

The third section of this Chapter seeks to provide reinforcement and validation of the interpretations of all three Parts of the Conversations, and of the utility of the alignment methodology and GSR method. This is accomplished through an interpretation of the responses to the deployment of the 'Themes Significance Ratings' research instrument.

The last section of this Chapter presents a revised model of the GSR process which has emerged from this pilot deployment of the technique.

## **6.1 Re-Told Narratives in Business Contexts**

The analysis of the Parts 1 of the Conversations generated a number of business contexts that were selected for re-evaluation in the Parts 2 of the Conversations. The contexts were selected for the way they appeared to help Participants recognise the benefit of seeking a greater alignment of resources with the needs of a business objective. The re-told narratives that were set within a business context are presented below.

### **6.1.1 The Nature of 'Support'**

*"I don't have enough support on a day-to-day basis: I need a full-time PA. Support for Cabinet Members is woeful. The additional support has had to come from the Services. It's not related to the activity, and hence priority and back-up cannot be assessed."*

This quote from Bernie captured the issue of weak linkages between support activities and corporate outcomes. It was interesting in that the need for a relationship between the activity and its support was recognised, but the relationship did not extend below the Cabinet and the Strategic Directorates. Asked whether a Member could be funded by the Services that comprised his or her portfolio Bernie replied that the budget was not structured in that way at the time. Resources were seen by some as everything which was not actually a Service, everything that was outside of the 'sharp functions'. The need was recognised for resources not to be divorced from the sharp end but there was no active process to achieve that. The SAP implementation, Sapphire, was cited as being such a process but it was seen by most as a poorly implemented initiative and more as an accounting tool than a resource integration tool.

### **6.1.2 Intangibles – The Staff Away Day**

The Staff Away Day represented a narrative that told the right story but one with an unintended outcome. A Staff Away Day had been organised by Nikita for his staff. Of the two usual venues one was reasonably local and though functional, it was considered to be in a rather shabby condition. The other venue was further away from the County Hall but was a Stately Home of some comfort and status. Nikita arranged the Away Day for his staff because he wanted them to feel wanted and appreciated and took them to the local functional venue. However, in a recent Organisational Health Survey one outcome had indicated disquiet by the staff about their managers. On enquiring further about this, it transpired that 'Staff' actually did mean staff, as opposed to 'managers'. It also transpired that the Managers Away Day had been at the Stately Home: a 'significant moment' occurred for Nikita highlighting how the well-intentioned initiative for the staff may have back-fired. Apart from the staff perceptions management issue that this had exposed, the whole issue of ineffective and inefficient provisioning of conferencing and meeting facilities was exposed.

### **6.1.3 Resource Decision-Making<sup>39</sup>**

When asked about the processes that the Authority uses for making resource decisions, Nikita drew on their approach to the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act to emphasise his view,

*“... there was an audit done, and a priority then about where we were going to spend money, and you could walk around the place and gradually you saw the ramps are being put in, the doors, you know, the lavatories are being changed, and all the rest of it, because there was a statutory thing behind it, corporately though, we don't have a similar approach”*

He clearly understood the rigour of meeting a corporate obligation. However, he also recognised that the same prioritising approach had yet to be put in place for resourcing all agreed corporate aims.

### **6.1.4 Contract Management and Facilities Management**

Another ‘significant moment’ occurred whilst exploring a resource trail with Lucy. Comments from some of the Participants noted the poor quality of the cleaning in the offices. Part of the problem was the standards of performance criteria in the contract; another was the inadequate management of the contractors. It transpired that the Contract Procurement Department were also trying to manage the contract rather than asking the Facilities Management Department to do so. The ‘significant moment’ was twofold: the realisation by the Contract Procurement Department that there was someone better placed to take the burden from them; and the realisation by Lucy that since this was not an isolated example, there were probably manpower efficiencies to be made in the Contracts Procurement Department.

### **6.1.5 Unwritten Priorities**

An example was given by Daniel of the gap in the approach the Council had in capturing all its priorities. It arose when discussing the ability of the Authority to know without further investigation, which activities were contributing to which priorities. Given this knowledge the Authority could then match limited resources to the higher priorities.

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<sup>39</sup> I was inspired to inquire into RDM (Resource Decision-Making) around 1996 from the work that Dr D D Owen undertook for his PhD Thesis and which he drew upon as the then Co-Director of the Post-Graduate Diploma in Facilities Management at the College of Estate Management, University of Reading.

*“we prioritise according to Council aims, which is great, but there are some unwritten aims here which are about maintaining the safety and well-being of its people that you know, that go without saying, you know, and those ought to also be there as well, as priorities, the unwritten priorities.”*

This view was reinforced by other Participants and might have its roots in the lack of rigour behind interpreting and meeting Council aims, which in turn could be due to the tensions between the Elected Members and the Officers. This led to questioning the reliance placed by the Officers on the perceptions the Elected Members had of the needs of the electorate.

### **6.1.6 Whose Money?**

Talking to Guy about his use of resources resulted in his giving an example of a rationalisation he was effecting within his libraries remit. What was disheartening him was the fact that the capital saving that was likely to accrue would be taken into the central budget and almost certainly another Service other than his would benefit. The point that his initiative was going to reward another's department was rather consistent with the Weeks and Galunic stance: The council is a loosely bonded ecosystem rather than a single, goal seeking, boundary maintaining organisation. A discussion followed about the lack of rigour around business cases for such initiatives where the allocation of capital receipts could have been agreed in advance. A need for a strong corporate spirit was stated within which the fund-raising and fund-disbursements would be understood in advance.

### **6.1.7 Perceptions of Need**

The discussion with Bernie had moved to the difficulty in matching the customer needs with the efficient use of resources. He was highlighting the reality that the customers of the Council had short-term needs that actually diverted resources from making long-term efficiencies: He drew on Transportation for his example,

*“... but they do, they want a smooth ride and they want it safe, that's the crystallisation of it, which is a bit different to saying, I want a structurally sound road that isn't going to cost us a fortune in three of four years time to put right.”*

What he was also alluding to intentionally or otherwise was the need to improve the interpretation and management of customer perceptions. He was also echoing a common view, and one held by his fellow Participants, that mandatory adherence to

meeting the ‘wrong’ performance targets was leading to sub-optimal resource utilisation.

### **6.1.8 Expectation Management**

It was difficult not to notice that it was nearly impossible to see through the grime on the windows of the ground floor offices occupied by Daniel. Comments were invited on this observation from him and from one or two of the other Participants. Daniel sat with his back to the window, which looked out onto an internal courtyard. He was not at all concerned. The room was still light enough to work within. Guy saw the situation as indicative of the poor cleaning standards generally and a lack of appreciation of the potential for damaging the corporate brand. The conversation then moved to seeking to understand the expectations of internal and external customers and meeting those expectations on the basis of their ‘value to the business’.

It was apparent from the variety of comments by other Participants on this subject area that the cost culture still prevailed over that of value. A linked view had referred to the poor state of the toilet rooms in County Hall with the Participant suggesting that the positive impact on employee well-being, and feeling of worth, would be significant by simply providing modern, clean, toilet facilities for staff. This was usually associated with a barbed comment about the apparent lack of an accommodation strategy.

### **6.1.9 Culture Shift – the Stumbling Block**

John was providing his views on the alignment of resources with the needs of the business when he said:

*“The biggest stumbling block I think, to all this [alignment], is the culture shift that’s required, you know there’s all these turkeys in this organisation who don’t want to vote for Christmas, and you can understand that but it is a blockage in the organisation ...”*

He had recognised the need for a change of thinking if alignment was to be reached. Although it appeared that he saw culture change as an act in itself, he was receptive to the idea that it could also be seen as a by-product of seeking consensus on the best use of resources: that the stumbling block was not primarily a culture that had to be changed, but of a business focus that had to be changed.

This linked to other Participants' observations around the need to develop an external and internal client ethos, which was rather poignant given the Customer First initiative that was currently faltering. Perhaps in the terms of Aldrich, the Customer First 'variation' failed to be selected or retained, resulting in the next evolutionary stage of the organisation faltering.

### **6.1.10 Moving through Treacle**

Jean and Lucy separately provided a colourful metaphor when describing the resistance that they met when trying to achieve almost anything within the Authority. They referred to it as "the treacle of [the Authority]" where the faster one wanted to move the greater became the resistance to that move. However, the sobering realisation was that they both appeared resigned to the situation. Although Jean did agree that if the impact on the business of the Authority of the request not being met – or of the resources being out of alignment with the needs of the business - was big enough, then the treacle would lose its viscosity. This brought the discussion back to the need for consensus on the worth of an activity in relation to its contribution to meeting corporate objectives. It also had echoes of a firm only being able to grow if it keeps its transaction costs competitive.

### **6.1.11 Will they Notice?**

Bennie was expanding on his earlier thoughts on interpreting the needs of the customer so that resource allocation is targeted.

*"The question, 'Will they Notice', is a good question to ask really ... are the public actually noticing any difference, as a consequence of what we're doing? We're spending vast sums of their money but do they see the difference?"*

This view had become incisive because he seemed to be really challenging the way the Authority was determining its priorities. He was implying a need to re-appraise the 'Value for Money' calculation in terms that included intangibles.

### **6.1.12 No Win Situation?**

John told a humorous anecdote of a situation that proved not to be the 'No Win' situation he had initially portrayed it to be. In advance of major renovations on the Council Office site, he had had to overcome strong objections from a team he needed

to move temporarily into Portakabins. Then once they were safely relocated they complained of a need for air-conditioning units to cope with the heat of the summer sun: and these were duly fitted. They then realised that they were in a more spacious and pleasant environment than their previous accommodation and playfully taunted John by telephoning him on a hot afternoon when the sun was shining directly into his non-air-conditioned office to let him know how wonderfully cool they were.

When the new accommodation was ready for occupation the same team complained about being re-located because of the relatively cramped conditions they would be occupying. “They moan when you move ‘em out, and they moan when you move ‘em back. You can’t win”, he said. We then spoke about perceptions of ‘good’ working environments and he felt that trying to actively understand, manage and communicate those perceptions in this case might well have helped ease that situation.

## **6.2 *Interpretation via Common Participant Themes***

As common Participant themes arose from the analysis they were introduced into the Parts 2 of the Conversations. Only Daniel and Nikita did not receive feedback on such themes because the availability of Participants and the time constraints of the research programme caused the Part 1 of the Conversation with Lucy to slip into the time allotted for the Parts 2 of the Conversations (the Conversations Programme at Appendix B refers).

At the Parts 3 of the Conversations all the common themes that had emerged were shared with the Participants. Questions to try and elicit the strength of agreement the Participant had about each common theme were asked. An attempt was also made to gauge their perception of whether the common themes shared a common business focus by asking further relevant questions.

Notwithstanding the programme time constraints, eight of the Participants received feedback based on six or more Parts 2 of the Conversations. This feedback to Daniel was based on the interpretations of just three of the Parts 2 due to his strict observance of the ideal scheduling: the programme commencement in mid-June, and an allowance of just two weeks in between the Parts of the Conversations. However, as the Research

Sponsor, and Strategic Director of Resources, he was the best able of the Participant group to withstand this reduced feedback at that stage: He was updated at the time of agreeing the content of the Themes Significance Ratings instrument.

This section looks at the ten most prevalent common themes that emerged from the re-evaluation and re-assessment stages of the process. Whilst Participants recognised these themes they did so according to the perspectives they hold of what ‘resources’ are, and of the contribution those resources make to improving business performance. An interpretation is offered, seen through the resources perspective, of how each theme has emerged as a route to improving the performance of the Council business. The manner of the emergence of the theme also offers an indication of the view by Participants of the alignment of their resources with the needs of their business and that of the Authority.

### **6.2.1 Linking Activities to the Core Business**

*“at least for every paper that comes to LAG [Leader’s Advisory Group], and comes to Cabinet there should be a statement of how does this relate to the Corporate Plan”*

An underlying premise was used that the selection and management of resources were reliant upon understanding the activities that were needed to meet the outcomes required by the business of the Authority. This required a clear consensus of the business of the Authority, its stakeholders and the outcomes expected by those stakeholders.

There was a general consensus that the business of the Authority comprised essential and desirable streams. The essential business related to meeting their statutory obligations with the desirable business being related to delivering the services the electorate was asking of their Councillors. There was then some variation in the scope of activity needed to meet a given statutory obligation. There was also debate over which desirable business had effectively become essential business within the expectations of the electorate. The following is a fair representation of the perceived scope of the business of the Authority.

*“So at one level it’s a collection of disparate businesses which are about delivering services to customers ... on a more strategic level though ... the business of a local authority is about being a community leader, and a community advocate, about looking for improvement in the community”*



*"our core business I think is quite clearly building a community and representing that community"*

*"I'm quite clear; the outcomes of the business are around community building, we're in the community building business"*

*"to provide essential services, and a choice of essential services, in a variety of ways within the public sector remit"*

*"... in some ways we are the ... last resort provider of services, and we catch and capture the elements that otherwise would drop off the edge"*

*"the core business of the Authority is about providing for the community, certain ... services, and operating them on their behalf"*

The stakeholders included Central Government, the local electorate and their elected Members, and the Council Officers and their staff. The various understandings of the Council business lead to various assessments of the required outcomes and their priorities.

The outcomes ranged from improvements in the CPA Star grading to the less tangible outcome of building a better community. The new Corporate Plan had been issued and published on the Council Intranet, complete with its stated aims and objectives, but it seemed as if it was too new to be intimately understood and for there to be agreement on its implementation. The 3-year Medium Term Plan (MTP) was the vehicle for implementing the Corporate Plan but it was only in its second annual iteration and adherence to it was not clearly and frequently evidenced. Indeed, Lucy had observed on how the function of the MTP was perceived to be an accounting one, but she was involved in a subtle movement to change the MTP to a resourcing device. This hint of the clandestine was indicative of the cultural disquiet that was tangible.

The Services seemed so involved in delivering what has always been delivered and what has recently been imposed on them to deliver that there were few attempts to link their activities directly, or indirectly frankly, to the aims and objectives in the Corporate Plan.

*"there seems to be that missing co-ordinating linkage somewhere"*

There was little evidence of senior management intentionally seeking to link activities directly to the needs of the business but the relevance of the linkage was not lost on some.

*"we need to align our services to the Council Plan [meaning Corporate Plan] because otherwise they're functions that are not supported by Council"*

This missing link left a crucial gap in the Use of Resources audit chain.

Some of the Participants had a clear understanding of that audit trail, and some believed that the Corporate Plan and its delivery vehicle, the MTP, provided the linkages between outcomes and service delivery. However, none could identify or describe a process which ensured the creation of options for the service delivery and the optimal selection of the required resources. Using the resource perspective exposed these deficiencies.

However, it was also clear that if those who believed their core business to be 'building a community' understood how to describe the creation of a community and to identify its needs, then they were in effect providing an interpretation of the construct of a support environment.

### **6.2.2 Changing from 'silos' to 'corporateness'**

*"there's a great desire, and has been for some time now, to try to cross-cut to help people not think in their own particular little, you know, silos, as they're called, but to think more broadly"*

There seemed little doubt that many of the explanations that were given for not having certain processes in place were rooted in the Services acting almost independently from the central Council, and even the Resources Directorate was not excluded from this observation.

*"I don't think you should look at what we call resources, I think you should look at everything outside the sharp functions [Resource Directorate services like Finance, HR etc.] and sort of treat them as a whole, because how you divide those up at that level is another matter."*

It was suggested that this was sometimes due to the funding for a Service being ring-fenced. The reason cited by most Participants was 'silos', a mostly historical situation where the services behaved as silos in the belief that they could better meet their objectives by avoiding interference from the Centre or other services. In partial defence of this position, the Services had not appreciated the assistance that was available from their sister services and the Central Council.

*"effectively the services are silos based, and the business is silo based and ... there's a lack of inter-relationship between them"*

*"They [the members of a British Federation] were simply there to protect their own stake, and it's a bit the same here"*

In contrast to 'siloism', 'corporateness' emerged as being the state of mind required if all Heads of Service were to genuinely work together in achieving the outcomes of the two main business streams of the Authority.

*"I think there is a 'corporateness', in the sense that most people whatever bit of the organisation they are in recognise that we want to be a top performing Authority ... but having said that ... by its highest level ... the support beneath it doesn't have that 'corporate-ness'"*

*"if anybody should be bonded corporately, it should be the Cabinet. I'm not sure what we're doing to ensure that corporate bonding quite honestly, at the moment"*

Certain initiatives were proclaimed as having the intent to create a sense of corporate purpose, e.g. Customer First, but both the intent and the initiative floundered because that very initiative was acting in isolation of some of the other key corporate initiatives. The silos are acting like organisms within the corporate ecology where each Silo seems to be only concerned about the transactional costs between other silos rather than between the Authority and its customers. There was consensus that in order to achieve the increases in effectiveness and efficiency being sought the culture of 'siloism' would have to be changed into one of 'corporateness'.

*"I think it has been recognised at COMT level ... that it [the organisation] lacks the cohesion of cross-linkages"*

### **6.2.3 Investing in the Working Environment**

*"We must have brand attribute of value for money and low-cost service delivery but high quality service delivery, and what the right support environment does, it enables that to happen, in what is essentially a very complicated business"*

The concept of the working environment was recognised by all the Participants. To some it appeared to be simply the environment within which the work takes place where 'environment' was synonymous with 'place' or 'space', albeit that it may not sometimes be functionally appropriate.

*"... one is the space and property the people actually have at the moment doesn't bear any relationship to I guess what they need"*

For others it was an environment that influenced employee perceptions of well-being and probably therefore, influenced job satisfaction and work productivity. For the participants with this latter view there was a need to actively create the right working environment for their staff. One view was that this was not being done.

*"if you go through a John Lewis, it's very clear that you're into different departments or whatever, but ... everything has still got that class about it, that touch about it, that quality. If you walk through the buildings, the offices here, you know, you could be in different parts of the town, or different towns, are we bothered about that? John Lewis are bothered about it aren't they, but maybe they've got different motivations ... but they think about it, we don't."*

Other Participants spoke of how they were starting to pilot new ways of working such as remote-working and flexi-working, and even re-configuring their work space and location.

Responsibility for understanding and creating the desired working environment was generally seen as resting with Property Services but most did not believe that there was an Accommodation or Property Strategy that addressed this issue. Indeed, many did not believe an Accommodation or Property Strategy of any sort existed.

*"so those policies about what the environment should look like and consequently how much we're prepared to invest in that environment should be taken by the top management group of the Authority, and of course we don't, we espouse these values but we don't therefore think, what does that mean in terms of the working environment."*

Only an Organisational Health Survey was cited as an example of a direct attempt to evaluate working environments. Space standards were mentioned as one way to achieve some consistency in the use of space, but they were driven by status rather than by operational need. The working environment was recognised by most Participants as being an asset with business value, but not one that was being used by the Authority as a corporate resource and as a business improvement device.

*"I think there's a false premise there that says, we oughtn't to be spending money on providing facilities, and actually, that's what good service is about"*

*"I think you could make a very strong case for investing more attention at a senior level in that environment because it conditions everything we do"*

There was also a feeling that the working environment was of significant value to the Authority but no-one had yet given a high enough priority to the task of demonstrating that value.

*"if we were to spend money, or expend effort, we'd rather do it on some other things, rather than that [the working environment], we know it's important, we know it has an impact, but not enough, but I think that decision may be taken by default rather than through proper debate and analysis, and a few facts and figures to back it up."*

#### **6.2.4 Linking Resources to Corporate Planning**

*"the Corporate Plan just went through the Council yesterday, and the finances were sorted out months ago, they had to be, because it's on a different timescale. Now, because people know what they're doing there's a linkage, but I'll bet it's not as strong as it could be."*

A number of the Participants revealed that the planning and budget cycles needed to be more closely aligned with each other. Currently, the Council budget was set before the plan was written. The finite nature of the budget was fully appreciated as was the inevitability of its inadequacy. However, the greater significance of this reality was that best value for money was difficult to demonstrate.

The allocation of the budget was not based on the corporate agreement of the resources necessary to meet the agreed business outcomes for that budget period.

*"but the tying up of it [other Services' resource requirements] has been very hit-and-miss, and a lot of it has been almost sort of sifting through and realising, oh, someone's doing something over there. So it hasn't been terribly joined-up."*

Instead, the budget for the forthcoming year was being based on the budget from the previous year, adjusted up or down according to questionable factors.

*"So you get a culture which is driven by the urgent, rather than the important, and it might be urgent **and** important, but generally speaking it is not."*

The Corporate Risk Register comprises the higher categories of risk identified by each of the Services. An enquiry as to whether risk to the business was used to determine resource allocation prompted the view that it probably was not. One example given was the actual fact that there was no corporate security policy at the time. Another example used the highest risk on the Education Risk Register of Educational Visits resulting in serious injury or death of a student:

*"that's the highest risk you can possibly get ... so we put in a growth bid on that basis for an Educational Visits Board and they ... would make sure that the school had ... complied with our requirements. It didn't get through the bidding process ... so no, we don't have a risk-based funding regime."*

Whilst transferring money between budget headings was possible within a given Service, it was very difficult to do so between Services. Therefore it was difficult to

adjust the budget to meet a change in priorities. This situation resulted in an inability to readily substantiate the funding allocated to a given activity.

*"Domiciliary Care was seen as an area of growth effectively, where money has to be poured in, and yet it's [the] Contracts Team who are actually pulling those care agreements together, and they were seen as an area of low priority"*

Through using a resource perspective, Participants had identified the need for a resource decision-making process that would provide greater visibility of the business reason for the spend and would help move towards an optimum use of resources, e.g. by removing duplication of activity.

### **6.2.5 Understanding Customers' Needs**

*"we provide a service ... and we say to the purchaser of that service, this is the service you're getting and this is what it's going to cost you, which is the wrong way round really, because the world doesn't work like that, does it?"*

When discussing stakeholders and their expectations with Participants, there was agreement that the most important stakeholders were the electorate, the public. The discussion would then move to how the needs of the public were being determined and resourced.

*"you can do the best job in the world, but if you're perceived not to be doing well, you're not doing well, it's that that matters, and they're not often the same thing"*

There was agreement that the elected Members had the responsibility to determine the needs of the external customers of the Council. It was then the responsibility of the Officers to translate those needs into services and to manage their delivery. Many of the Participants were unclear how the Members established the needs of the electorate: Some were somewhat cynical:

*"I think they are elected and they come to the Council and they represent largely their own views"*

There seemed to be just an assumption that either Members or the Officers somehow knew what the public wanted. Some identified a lack of public consultation leaving the Members vulnerable to misrepresentation of public needs by pressure groups, and to misperception of what they are hearing in their round of civic duties.

When the conversation moved to consider the needs of the internal customer there was a feeling that apart from a biennial Organisational Health Survey and the staff

appraisal system, little was being actively pursued to establish those needs that affected personal and organisational productivity and performance. The Participants recognised that a significant element of individual need related to their work environment. Short term gains were being made by individual services but the organisation as a whole was not giving this issue a high enough priority.

## **6.2.6 Viewing a Process as a Valuable Asset**

*"I think succession planning, with all its imperfections, is a discipline that we should all go through because, if for nothing else, it shows up major weaknesses that are on the horizon."*

When the Participants were describing a particular process they were asked whether the process in itself might be seen as a route to business improvement. Generally, Participants were treating processes as a means to an end, in the same way as individual projects, or programmes of projects, were a means of achieving an intended outcome. One view offered was that staff may see a process as something that is "done to them" and that the senior management challenge is to "break down that myth".

One observation indicated how the MTP could be used to challenge such a myth in a way that would start to recognize the inherent value of the process as well as the outcome at the end of the process: what could be expressed as a 'process to a process', or a 'pre-process'.

*"I think the MTP message is still viewed very much as a financial tool. It comes from Head of Finance, it's seen as a financial tool. I actually believe that it needs to come more from ... the Director of Resources so that it's seen as a resource tool, and I feel that over time that will change, and that will happen."*

One example used as the root of the inquiry was their Customer First initiative. This strategic initiative is a programme of projects designed to move the organisational focus onto serving the customer. It was seen as one of five or six strategic initiatives which together would deliver key corporate outcomes. It went significantly over budget during the period of the field work and was suspended whilst a reassessment could be made. It stalled apparently because it was not running in harmony with the other strategic initiatives. That did seem to be the case, but also appeared that no deliberate action had been taken to identify and address the issues that the implementation of Customer First was likely to generate.

Succession Planning was given by a number of Participants as a process that they believed had value in itself. However, only one of the District Councils used succession planning for this reason. The other District Council together with the County Council spoke of using succession planning only for the value of its final outcome, but felt that the nature of a relatively short four-year political cycle rendered the chances of success slight, and therefore of little value.

SAP was also cited as a process with an inherent value.

*"the future is about using SAP to change the culture from one of, I don't do detail, to, yes, I do understand what's going on in my organisation"*

Many of the issues that Participants were raising were issues that would have been identified had an overarching process been used to align resources with the needs of the business. It appeared that the research method had not built a significant awareness in Participants of the value of a process for its own sake.

### **6.2.7 Changing to a Client Ethos**

*"I suppose you could argue that Customer First is about defining and building our skill set around customer interaction, you know, we've traditionally not been particularly good at that, and our credibility to feed back to customers, treat people as customers, from the off really, and treat them as fee-paying customers more importantly, as opposed to just being a bit of a pain."*

Three Participants had devoted their careers to local government; Two had experienced short periods of working in the private sector during their career; and the remaining four Participants had made the private sector a significant part of their careers. The client ethos was strong in those with private sector experience and spoken of as something the Authority should have. The concept was understood by the three career civil servants but they seemed to be content to wait for it to happen, rather than to actively participate in promoting it. It appeared that the Authority was relying on Customer First to move them to a client culture but there was no real belief in that expectation. There had been no pre-process to build that belief and it is therefore perhaps not surprising that on numerous occasions the root cause of the problems being encountered in their efforts to build a corporate culture were identified as poor client relationship management. This resonated with the view of Kogut and Zander



(1996) that knowledge, as a ‘productive resource’ was influenced by the “normative territory to which members identify”.

This theme is linked to that of understanding the needs of your customers but the emphasis is different. Instead of the need to concentrate resource on understanding a customer need, this theme concerned calling for resource to be found to meet and manage that need through the ‘client’ sister services and fellow staff.

### 6.2.8 Providing Choices

*“if we looked first of all at what we must do statutorily, and then built from there actually as [to] what would make us a good Council ... it would give you a really solid basis for insuring efficiency of operation and allow Members to make real choices, and I don’t think Members get real choices anywhere.”*

The lack of choices from which to select a given course of action or service was a common reason given by Participants for not being as innovative as they needed to be. The reasons given by Participants for the lack of choices fell into two categories: no intent to develop choices; and, desire to provide choices but no resource to do so. The need for choices supported by a business case was at strategic, tactical and operational levels. The business case would provide the alternative routes to making the stated contribution to one or more of the key aims and objectives as stated in the Corporate Plan.

At the strategic level it was felt that the Senior Management Team should be allocating time to provide Members with a range of options each of which meets the needs of the electorate, as discerned by the Members.

*“I think to an extent with your statutory stuff you’ll get to a stage of saying, well actually regardless, this is what it’s got to be, but then you can start doing some horse-trading, you can say, well actually we’d like it to look like this on this admissions package but that means we can’t do what we would normally do on public footpaths. But it’s choices, so you’ve got to have the resource tied up to it.”*

At the tactical level some were resigned to the fact that Government-imposed performance targets dictated the way in which something had to be done and stifled the creation of choices of service delivery. It was said reluctantly and as if had there been a way of meeting those targets in a different way, it would be seized upon.

*“ if you have targets, they drive the business, those targets are imposed on us, we don’t have any choice and therefore they, they drive the way that the business goes, and the*

*way that people respond to them, and that may not necessarily be the best way of doing things, but because those are the targets we have to comply with, we don't really have a lot of options."*

At the operational level the conversations were addressing the utilization of resources in certain services and it was the need to generate alternatives to the current approach that was often raised as a route to greater effectiveness and efficiency. One Participant captured this view when referring to the business of the Authority as being,

*"to provide ... a choice of essential services, in a variety of ways within the Public Sector remit, and that really reflects the ones that we are empowered to do, because obviously we're not empowered to do housing, but within that field ... it's providing that variety, that choice as cost-effective and efficiently as possible."*

Also at the operational level there was a certain frustration over the lack of cross-service communication about an issue regarding the options available for its resolution. In reality a service was taking a unilateral decision which impacted badly on one or more sister services when a more constructive approach would have been to say,

*"look we've got budget difficulties, we've got recruitment difficulties, we've got three choices, what do you think? Something simple like that doesn't happen."*

A need for a systematic approach to the generation of business cases that contained options and alternatives and their resource implications arose from this area of discussion.

### **6.2.9 Changing from Cost to Value**

*"So, in terms of the support environment, I think we keep coming back to this value-for-money, low-cost thing. The bottom line is, the politicians see Resources and support services as being a cost ... so therefore we've traditionally been hit quite hard with efficiency savings, I don't doubt that the same thing will happen again this year."*

The discussions of how the Participants matched their resources to service delivery were usually based on cost. This was not surprising given the general practice of starting with the budget and then deciding what services could be delivered within that budget. The positive aspect to the discussions was that different ways of doing something were being considered. The less positive aspect was that the 'something' was not being routinely challenged, either because they had not thought to do so, or because they did not have the resource to allocate to that exercise.

The ever more demanding CPA visit by the Audit Commission was also requiring the Authority to critically appraise specifically the efficiency and effectiveness of their use of resources and the value they were achieving for their money.

Time as a resource re-emerged in this theme. The general view was that the low priority being placed on re-assessing or re-designing processes was based on the cost of doing so rather than the value. However, some Participants had revealed that the Authority was planning to conduct zero-based budgeting in 2006. Some challenged the purity of it being classical zero-based budgeting but there was agreement that the approach would force them to justify expenditure in terms of value to the business. This seemed to be an endorsement of the value of a 'pre-process'. Several of the Participants felt that nugatory time was being spent on managing the budget and meeting performance criteria that actually had little to do with the performance of the business.

#### **6.2.10 Linking Major Initiatives**

*"it seems to be that every time we enter into a major project, for want of that holistic, sort of, overview, if you like, and it's largely financially driven I suspect, we always ... underestimate what we are going to need."*

The major strategic initiative that was cited by every Participant was the implementation of the SAP Benefits Realization project. All agreed that the authority needed such a system, but only the implementer was able to be more positive than negative about the success of the project. The other eight Participants expressed their disappointment in the implementation of SAP on a range from 'disastrous' to 'could have been more effective' depending on their nature.

During the same period of implementation of the SAP project, there were at least another four strategic initiatives running: Customer First Programme, Children's Services Programme, Local Working, and Efficiency Reviews. Customer First was mentioned alongside SAP Benefits Realization as being less than successful. Both initiatives had been volunteered by the Participants as the root of whichever organisational shortfall they were describing at the time, and as examples of how the Authority struggles to manage big programmes and projects. The Participants also commented on the need to limit the number of strategic initiatives the Authority should

launch at any one time, and for that number to be clearly under the umbrella of a master programme and programme manager.

*"this is a classic problem really with organizations like this, decisions are committee decisions, there's nobody held accountable, there's no one person who has the full picture."*

Once again, the issues around 'silos' and 'corporateness' echoed those around projects and programmes. They also emerged from the conversations on the holistic nature of seeking to align resources with business need.

### **6.3 Parts 3 Conversations - Participant Reaction to Methodology and Method**

This section offers an interpretation of the views received from the Participants over the course of the three-part Conversation on the research method that they had involved themselves in and the methodology that underpinned it.

At the close of the Part 1 conversation Jean had said,

*"I understand what you're doing and I think it's very valuable, Andrew, and I would say good luck with it and I hope you don't come across the [Authority] 'treacle'".*

It appeared that Jean had had some realisations of the benefits of the approach in its actual delivery, but her strength of self-belief appeared to preclude her acknowledging those benefits. At the close of Part 3, when asked had it been of any value to her at all, she commented:

*"Well, not really, to be honest Andrew, I mean it's been an interesting approach, for me, I think I said to you earlier at the outset, what will it lead to in terms of outcomes, it's been nice to talk to you, reserve judgement, I'm not sure if that is a sound methodology, seven hours, what difference did it make."*

This was not surprising, for the following two reasons. Firstly, Jean presents herself as an intelligent, driven, highly motivated, team oriented, and particularly efficient operator: I suspect that she would not readily subscribe to initiatives that were not her own. Secondly, I believe that she agreed to participate in the research in the belief, or hope, that it would be a catalyst for change. When she realised that it was *merely* a pre-process, she rightly, or wrongly, decided her time could be better spent doing something else.

The consensus view, however, was more encouraging and supportive and included the following comments,

*"I find the process very helpful, it's good because it provides me with an opportunity to reflect on what we're doing, whether we could do things in different ways, and sort of actually bounce ideas and have them challenged, which is good."*

*"personally, I found it more useful than I think I thought it was going to be, partly because I wasn't absolutely sure what the scope was, but I think as we've gone into it, it became clearer, ... but it just strikes me ... if there's been ... 30 hours of senior management discussion, input, on this, that not to take one or two nuggets from it and do something in terms of COMT or something, ... would just seem bizarre."*

*"I've found it useful so far, because it's helped me to you know, marshal some of my thoughts as well, and ask questions, so it's been useful I think, good."*

*"so, again ... the purpose of engaging with you on this piece of work ... always was an external perspective, and you may come up with a different set of priorities for the organisation, or areas of focus at least"*

This last comment is of interest in that whilst the Participant is allowing for the approach to generate some new thinking, he is still expecting that thinking to come from the 'consultant', rather than from the Participants themselves.

*"I've not quite thought of it in those terms, although ... you triggered the thought in me that at its infrastructure role this Directorate is a business support directorate, isn't it, we support the business"*

This comment was a definite shift in perception. The fact that the shift stopped at the 'infrastructure' role is natural after such a relatively short exposure to the approach. It suggested that applying Guided Self-reflection to a current business issue, which was of critical importance to the Participants and their teams, might help shift them towards a more holistic, corporate ethos.

*"but given that I'm sitting there painting this picture of this dynamic and agile organisation, with a shifting sands context around the environment in which we work, to not revisit the prioritisation process ... is frankly madness in that context"*

The working environment was already seen by the Participant as an important resource, but the value in this comment was his use of the approach in helping him re-prioritise this resource.

*"an occupancy cost, that's not a bad idea actually, what's it costing me, or what's it costing the Council to occupy this office, or this building"*

The discussion with this Participant about his use of resources had moved from cost to value. The concept of asking his managers to place a cost on their occupancy of their space was then considered. The actual cost might be interesting, but what he

recognised might be of greater value was to analyse the possible reasons for including the cost lines they would have used, and those that they chose not to use, or had not thought of using.

*"in the context of rolling into a CPA process, early part of next year, when one of the areas they look at specifically, are ambition, priorities, focus of resources against priorities, and so on, then the sort of questions you're asking, even if the question is asked and left hanging, it's a challenge for the organisation which I think is healthy and timely as well"*

This was another refreshing comment. It suggested that for this Participant, and perhaps for some of the others, the approach they had participated in might not have resulted in illuminating 'significant moments' of realisation during the conversation, but had nevertheless caused them to think differently about their business.

*"I think, that today has been very good, very useful to me I think, it's enables me to revisit the model ... and yeah, I found it useful, I mean that ... will help me a lot I think in the next few months"*

The model referred to was a restructuring of a Directorate to meet the fundamental changes within the Council that were planned for the turn of the year:

*"I think, this sort of technique appeals to me because I'm a quite self-reflective person, so the idea that stuff is played back to me and I can reflect on it is quite a powerful technique in my world"*

Perhaps a case of 'preaching to the converted', but nevertheless an encouraging remark that perhaps suggests that the approach has helped place a greater value on the technique of self-reflection, and on the use of a facilitator to initiate the technique within the organisation.

*"I think sometimes it's quite useful, it's part of this taking stock. As I say, I'd be interested eventually with the results and how they all come together and whether I'm the only one that's sort of sitting out there on a limb"*

This comment came from the Participant who was probably the most animated of the Participants on the subject of 'silos'. She saw the business need for a more corporate culture and experienced a level of frustration, certainly at Head of Service level, that her vision was not widely shared.

*"I suppose really by talking about things that are impinging on our individual lives at the time, you begin to see a pattern that you didn't see"*

This is certainly one of the really exciting comments to be logged. This Participant appears to be acknowledging the role of a resource alignment perspective at an organisation level.

## 6.4 Themes Significance Ratings – Reinforcing & Validating Awareness

At this stage of the interpretation of the data there appeared to be a general consensus that each theme represented a critical organisational need, and that the research methodology and method had been helpful in identifying these needs and in determining ways of meeting them. To try and reinforce in Participants this consensus and the awareness of the alignment methodology, the Themes Significance Ratings instrument referred to in Chapter 4 was issued. This section presents the results and provides an interpretation of them together with a summary.

The responses are presented in Table 6.5 below which provides from left to right across the page: full details of the ‘Need’ represented by the Themes, labelled 1 through 10; the Statements about each Theme, labelled A through E; and the rating given by each Participant against each statement for each theme, on a Likert scale of 1 through 6. Ratings that represent agreement are coloured green; red indicates ratings representing disagreement. A legend is included.

The following interpretation of the results addresses the degree of Participant engagement; the principal findings regarding the ‘Themes & their Organisational Needs’; the priority and utilisation of resources; and the utility of the research logic and technique.



Guided Self-Reflection: A thesis submitted as part of the Doctorate in Business Administration

No.	Themes & their Organisational Need	Theme Significance Ratings	Participants' Response Rating							
			Bernie	Bernie	Daniel	Guy	Jean	Nikita	Lucy	John
1	Linking Activities to the Core Business of the Authority - ALL Council activities need to have a clear link to a single agreed statement of the core business of the Authority.	Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing the appropriate number in the appropriate box in line with the statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		A Creating this link will lead to improved use of resources			4	6	6	6	6	5
		B A high priority is being given to creating this link			3	4	4	4	4	4
		C Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of creating this link			3	3	4	3	5	4
		D Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put the creation of this link in context			5	4	5	4	6	3
2	Changing from Siloism to Corporateness - the culture of 'siloism' needs to change to one of 'corporateness'	E The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help create this link			5	5	2	4	5	4
		A Effecting this change will lead to improved use of resources			6	6	4	4	6	5
		B A high priority is being given to effecting this change			5	3	5	5	3	4
		C Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of effecting this change			4	2	5	5	3	4
		D Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put this change in context			5	5	5	4	5	4
3	Investing in the Working Environment - more attention needs to be invested at senior level in the evaluation and provision of the working environment	E The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help effect this change			5	5	2	4	6	4
		A Making this investment will lead to improved use of resources			4	6	4	5	6	4
		B A high priority is being given to making this investment			3	2	2	2	3	3
		C Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of making this investment			1	2	5	2	2	3
		D Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put this investment in context			4	5	4	5	5	4
4	Linking Resources to Corporate Planning - a stronger linkage is needed between Corporate planning and the resources needed to implement the plans	E The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help deliver this investment			4	5	2	5	6	4
		A Creating this link will lead to improved use of resources			6	5		6	6	6
		B A high priority is being given to creating this link			5	4		3	3	5
		C Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of creating this link			5	4		3	2	4
		D Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put the creation of this link in context			5	5		5	5	5
5	Understanding Customers' Needs - a greater understanding must be achieved of the needs of external customers and internal customers	E The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help create this link			5	5		5	6	4
		A Achieving this understanding will lead to improved use of resources			6	6	6	5	6	5
		B A high priority is being given to achieving this understanding			5	5	6	5	4	4
		C Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of achieving this understanding			5	5	6	5	3	4
		D Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will help achieve this understanding			4	5	5	5	5	4
6	Viewing a Process as a Valuable Asset - a process, not just the outcome of a process, needs to be viewed as a valuable asset in its own right	E The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help achieve this understanding			5	5	2	5	6	4
		A Establishing this view will lead to improved use of resources			3	5	2	4	6	4
		B A high priority is being given to establishing this view			2	2	4	5	2	3
		C Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of establishing this view			2	2	2	4	2	3
		D Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put the establishment of this view in context			3	4	2	4	5	4
7	Changing to a Client Ethos - all categories of service providers need to change to a client ethos	E The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help establish this view			3	4		4	6	3
		A Effecting this change will lead to improved use of resources			4	5	6	6	6	6
		B A high priority is being given to effecting this change			4	2	3	4	2	5
		C Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of effecting this change			4	2	3	4	2	4
		D Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put this change in context			4	4		4	5	4
		E The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help effect this change			4	4		5	6	4



Guided Self-Reflection: A thesis submitted as part of the Doctorate in Business Administration

No.	Themes & their Organisational Need	Theme Significance Ratings									
		Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing the appropriate number in the appropriate box in line with the statement									
8	Providing Choices - a requirement for the systematic provision of choices needs to be established	A	Establishing this provision will lead to improved use of resources	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		B	A high priority is being given to establishing this provision	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		C	Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of establishing this provision	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		D	Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put the establishment of this provision in context	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		E	The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help establish this provision	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	Changing from Cost to Value - the culture of 'cost' needs to change to one of 'value'	A	Effecting this change will lead to improved use of resources	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		B	A high priority is being given to effecting this change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		C	Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of effecting this change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		D	Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put this change in context	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		E	The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help effect this change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
10	Linking Major Initiatives - a stronger link is needed between major initiatives	A	Creating this link will lead to improved use of resources	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		B	A high priority is being given to creating this link	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		C	Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of creating this link	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		D	Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put the creation of this link in context	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		E	The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help create this link	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
			Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing the appropriate number in the appropriate box in line with the statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No.	Key Themes	Theme Significance Ratings									
		Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing the appropriate number in the appropriate box in line with the statement									
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Legend

Degrees of DISAGREEMENT

Degrees of AGREEMENT

Rating Scale

1 Strongly Disagree

2 Disagree

3 Inclined to Disagree

4 Inclined to Agree

5 Agree

6 Strongly Agree

Table 6.5 – Themes Significance Ratings Results

### 6.4.1 Participant Engagement

The Themes Significance Ratings instrument was issued in January 2006. This was due to the time needed to interpret the data and to conclude that the additional instrument could serve as feedback to Participants whilst also gathering validation data. The potential problem with this issue date was that it represented a two to four months gap since I had last met with the Participants. The possible advantage was that there had been further time for self-reflection, albeit probably sub-conscious self-reflection.

To their credit five of the nine Participants responded within four weeks of receiving the instrument. Nikita asked to be given guidance over the telephone to help him complete the ratings and this was agreed to. At each hastening both Bennie and Bernie continued to say that they would try and find time to complete the return: Time clearly did not present itself and the belief is they were genuine in their intentions to complete the return but it never moved high enough up their priorities list. Jean returned her spreadsheet with very little data along with a note saying that she was having difficulty completing it and had probably given as much time to my research as she could afford.

All Participants appeared to enjoy participating in the three Parts of the Conversations remaining committed and engaged throughout: this seemed to be confirmed by their complimentary comments at the close of the Parts 3. The possible exception was Jean and the following possible rationale for this is offered.

Jean agreed to a request for a telephone conversation of up to 20 minutes with her to explain the spreadsheet requirement and guide her through the completion of the ratings. The conversation was terminated after only ten minutes when she was called away to an urgent matter. By then she had provided the data that is in the above Table 6.5. Her engagement had appeared strong throughout the three Parts of her Conversation but allowance now had to be made for perhaps having miss-read her commitment. In Part 1 of the conversation she accounted for 75% of the time allotted. This was at the lower end of the spread but was consistent with her answers whilst not being noticeably short, being delivered quickly, leaving time for more questions to be asked than in other Conversation Parts. This pattern prevailed in Parts 2 and 3 where

little new information was offered, tending instead to just confirm the Part 1 content and to listen to the feedback. The lengths of the Parts 2 and 3 were shorter than the Part 1 which could indicate a failing enthusiasm but this was not apparent at the time. She was alone in not seeing the technique of Guided Self-Reflection of potential value, although she did rate the methodology as being useful to five of the six themes that she had allocated marks.

She was clearly very proud of her achievements and felt she had been given good reason to believe she was highly valued by the Authority: Her time was therefore particularly valuable to the Authority and she was covetous of it. The Ratings instrument was an addition to the original requirement and she may have felt there was a better use of her time than in completing it.

She also revealed a strong background and belief in outsourcing and interpreted many of the support services as being candidates for at least market testing if not ultimately outsourcing. She saw the resourcing issue being capable of resolution simply through outsourcing and she was perhaps frustrated that this action had not yet been taken, or even actively considered. Such a view also indicated little belief in, or enthusiasm for, an approach that could determine whether a particular service was suitable for outsourcing, or whether it might be nearer to being a core competency than was currently thought, and therefore deserving of different treatment. Together with her declared strong focus on customer, team, and project management/fire-fighting it was concluded that her interest was in some form of immediate action coming from involvement in the research, not in a longer strategic approach. The belief is that she had an expectation that the approach may be a way of at least thinning the 'treacle' of the organisation. When she realised that the method was 'only' something of a pre-process to such a result, her enthusiasm waned. For any one, or a combination, of these reasons, it is concluded that Jean had disengaged from the research by the close of the Part 3 of the Conversation.

#### **6.4.2 Themes and their Organisational Needs**

The principal findings around the 'Themes and their Organisational Needs', are presented under the following themed sub-headings.

#### **6.4.2.1. *Weakly Expressed Statement***

It seems that Theme 6, 'Viewing a Process as a Valuable Asset', was not considered to be an important organisational need and this could be because the need was not expressed clearly enough. Its roots were in examples given during the Conversations such as 'succession planning' where Participants recognised the value to the organisation of the 'seeking' to achieve an objective, even if the chances of 'actually' achieving that object were judged as remote. It also represented the oft expressed opinion by Participants that they did not place enough value on devoting time to thinking and planning: Seeing a process of thinking and planning as valuable in itself seemed to be something they were acknowledging. Indeed, with the exception of Jean, the general consensus was that the research technique was helpful in meeting the needs of the Themes, and the technique is itself this type of pre-process, or preparation-for-a-process. This result could also be a reflection of the current culture of the Authority where 'intangible resources with significant value' is still rather an illusive notion.

#### **6.4.2.2. *Wrong Priority leading to Inadequate Resources***

Participants believe that Themes 3 (Investing in the Working Environment), 8 (Providing Choices) and 9 (Changing from Cost to Value) each have the potential to improve the use of resources but that too low a priority and inadequate resources are being given to realising those improvements. These findings reflect an organisation striving to change its 'treacle' and 'silos' culture to one more suited to modern organisational needs.

#### **6.4.2.3. *Strong Customer Ethos***

Theme 5 (Understanding Customers' Needs) received exceptionally strong agreement across all Statements, with only Jean not agreeing the applicability of the research method, and Lucy judging resources to be inadequate. This is not surprising given the Service-orientation of the Authorities, but it is particularly encouraging to note the agreement to the utility of the methodology and method.

#### **6.4.2.4. *Utility of Alignment Principle Agreed***

The strong agreement across the Statements for Theme 1 (Linking Activities to the Core Business of the Authority) and Theme 4 (Linking Resources to Corporate

Planning) appear to endorse the utility of the alignment principle. The sentiment for Theme 1 is that there are inadequate resources being allocated to this activity. Nikita and Lucy believe that Theme 4 has not been given a high enough priority and (probably) therefore insufficient resources.

### **6.4.3 Priority and Utilisation of Resources**

With the exception of Theme 6, there was general agreement that meeting the needs of the Themes would lead to the improved use of resources. Where there was disagreement with Statements B and C, with the exception of Themes 6, it was likely that it indicated a desire to have the Authority start giving a higher priority to those needs and to resourcing those priority tasks, rather than an indication of disagreement with the importance of the organisational need of the Themes.

There are six out of ten of the Themes where Participants believe a high priority is being given to meeting the need of the Theme. The Themes to which a majority do not feel a high priority is being given are 3, 'Investing in the Working Environment', 6, 'Viewing a Process as a Valuable Asset', 8, 'Providing Choices', and 9, 'Changing from Cost to Value'. For Themes 3, 8 and 9, where it was agreed that improved use of resources would flow, the result suggests that Participants would want to see the priority raised. However, in the case of Theme 6, the result from two Participants is commensurate with their rating of Statement A. The majority of Participants do not agree that adequate resources are available to meet the needs of Themes 1, 3, 6, 8, and 9. These results would be expected for Themes 1, 3, 8, and 9, given the ratings awarded against these Themes for Statements B, although Statement A for Theme 6 was awarded majority agreement.

Six of the seven Participants generally disagreed with the Statements A through E in respect to Theme 6 suggesting that they may not actually agree that Theme 6 represents a critical organisational need as it is currently expressed. In contrast, although there are a majority of five Participants disagreeing with Statements B and C of Theme 3, Investing in the Working Environment, it is likely that this is because they would genuinely want to see a higher, resourced, priority given to this Theme given

their agreement to its Statement A. Daniel is in strong disagreement with Statement C to Theme 6 implying that resources for this priority are actually scarce.

Guy, Nikita and Lucy all disagree generally with the priority and resources being given to the majority of Themes. Daniel disagreed with these Statements B and C in respect of four Themes. With the exception of Theme 6, this seems to indicate a general dissatisfaction with the priority and resource accorded to these Themes given that they all agree, some strongly, that meeting the needs of these Themes would lead to improved use of resources.

#### **6.4.4 Utility of the Research Logic and Technique**

With the exception of Jean, there was strong consensus amongst Participants that the research logic and technique would be helpful in meeting the needs of the Themes. It is also possible that where there was disagreement on these Statements D and E in respect to Theme 6, that it was more because Theme 6 was not understood than because the logic and technique could not help meet that need.

There is consensus across the Participants that the logic of 'aligning resources with business needs' would help put the needs of all Themes in context. Again there is consensus that the technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help meet the need of nine of the 10 Themes. Theme 6 has one Participant remaining undecided, with three agreeing and three disagreeing.

Even Theme 6 shows four of the seven Participants agreeing that the research logic and techniques, Statements D and E, would help meet the organisational needs. However, there is much stronger agreement and consensus across the Participants to these two Statements in respect of the needs of the other nine Themes.

It is notable that Jean was alone in disagreeing with Statement E for all of the five 'Needs' she rated, and abstained from rating those Statements for the other five needs. She did agree with Statement D for five of the needs, joining the majority in disagreeing in respect of Theme 6 and abstaining from rating the other 4. So, she was content with the logic of alignment, whilst quite obviously not seeing the value in the

chosen method. It is also possible that she had reasons for not choosing to demonstrate her support for it.

### **6.4.5 Summary**

#### ***6.4.5.1. Improvement in Resource Utilisation is Achievable***

Eight of the 'Themes and their organisational Need' were judged unanimously as being capable of leading to an improved use of resources if addressed (with two abstentions by Jean); Elton was alone in disagreeing to this in respect of Theme 8, 'Providing Choices', and even Theme 6, 'Viewing a Process as a Valuable Asset' received majority agreement to this point.

#### ***6.4.5.2. Allocation of Priority and Resource is Misplaced***

There is a general agreement, with the exception of Theme 6, that too low a priority is being given to realise the improvements possible in the use of resources, and that where the priority is high, that there are inadequate resources to meet the priority action.

#### ***6.4.5.3. Research Methodology and Method are Applicable***

There is a strong consensus amongst Participants, with the exception of Jean, that the research logic and technique would be helpful in meeting the organisational needs of the Themes.

#### ***6.4.5.4. The Revised GSR Process***

The generic GSR process [tabulated in Chap 4] had envisaged meeting the need to 'engage' participants through participant interest in the research method and the possibility that it might reveal to them some new routes to achieving their business objectives. It recognised the need for critical reflection during and between the three Parts of the Conversations. Lastly, it was designed to build awareness of the logic of alignment and the technique of GSR through initial narration, followed by a re-evaluation and re-assessment of those narratives.

As the field work progressed, it became apparent that the 'engagement' was also being achieved by participants being able to increasingly re-evaluate resource alignment within the context of specific business narratives, issues and themes. It was also judged

necessary to attempt to validate and reinforce the research findings through the deployment of an attitudinal ratings research instrument. This revised model of the GSR process is depicted in Figure 6.5 below.

## Revised Model of GSR Approach

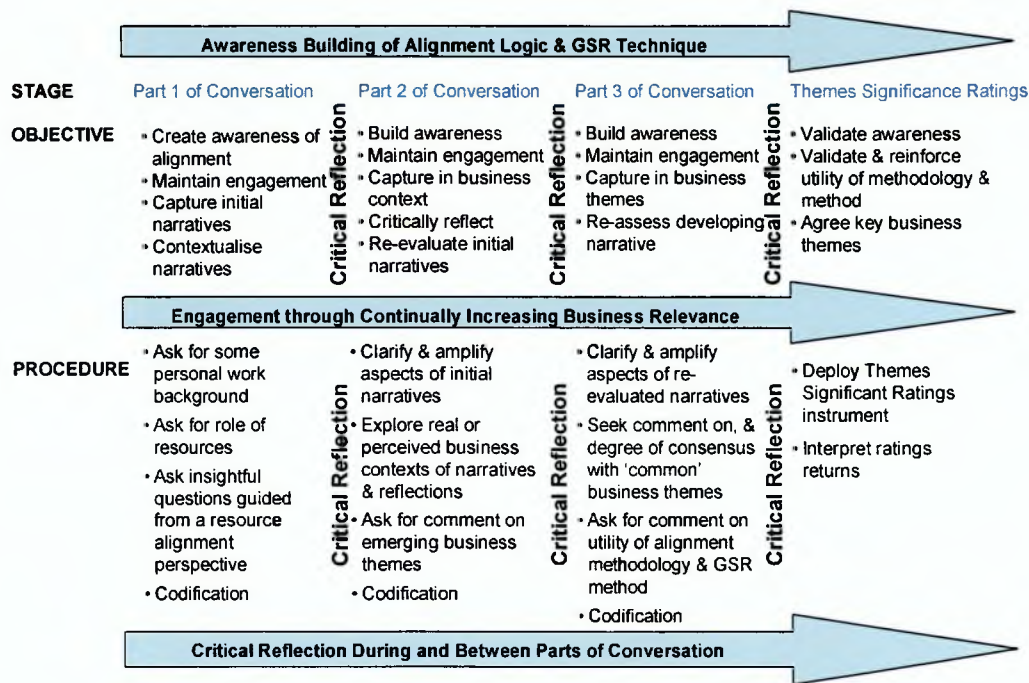


Figure 6.5 – The Revised Model of GSR Approach

In the final Chapter the conclusions drawn from this research and the reflections on the research are presented together with the contributions the research makes to personal, business and professional knowledge and practice.



# 7

## Conclusions and Reflections

*"The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed. The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals."*

Kahlil Gibran, 1923

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This final Chapter sets out how the research question has been answered and the four research objectives met. In answering the fourth objective, and based on the outcome of the pilot deployment of the GSR approach, a critique of the potential value of the GSR method is given. Particular attention is given to its potential advantages and limitations, through a comparison with a full application of an Action Learning approach. A discussion is then provided on how the results of the study might contribute to the development of professional and business knowledge and practice. The contribution to a generic understanding of the business support environment is offered within the professional arena. The Chapter closes with an update on how these studies have influenced the personal and professional life of the author and on the aspirations he has for the post-doctoral era.

### **7.1 The Research Question**

The research question arose from a personal attempt during professional consultancy commissions to engage senior managers in viewing their business issues in terms of how well their business was supported by its support environment. Early attempts were based on an initial belief that a universal solution to optimising the support environment could be found. This matured into the notion that a move towards an

optimised support environment could be made through trying to align the support environment with the needs of the business. The degree of non-alignment could then be addressed by management. After further study the goal became one of seeking to engage managers in aligning their resources with the needs of the business in such a way that they could identify better routes to alignment which they would own. The desire to create a method of such engagement, GSR, led to the framing of the research question:

*Can guiding senior managers to consider the link between their use of resources and the achievement of their corporate objectives enable them to conceive of their business differently?*

This research question was to be answered through meeting the following four research objectives:

*To demonstrate the need for engagement through the context of the firm*

*To devise a logic and technique of inquiry that engages managers*

*To design and deploy a pilot version of the technique of inquiry*

*To reflect on the potential for the technique to be of business benefit*

The following four sub-sections each address one of the research objectives and describe how those objectives were met.

### **7.1.1 The Need for Engagement through Context**

The conceptual background to the study in Chapter 1 explored the two end-members of the support environment spectrum. At the one end were the FM Structuralists of the late 1990s such as Hinks and Hanson, Nutt, and Grimshaw, who were still deploying a single support optimisation methodology within an organisation within the context of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the use of resources. At the other end of the spectrum were the FM Contextualists such as Cairns and Price, who believed that the philosophy of FM could only be embraced by managers if it was seen within the context of the business by those managers. The levels of engagement of these two approaches are quite different: The Structuralists are engaged by the management to help solve FM issues, whereas the Contextualists seek to engage the management and enable the management to solve their own business issues. The challenge for the Contextualist is engaging management in this way.

A review of the three dominant theories of the firm had been conducted during this research period to try to understand what a firm is. The theories were those based on transaction-cost economics, resources and knowledge, and evolution and culture. The original logic behind this review was that a firm or organisation had to be understood if it was to be optimised: the logic became that the firm had to be understood if a method of engaging managers in that organisation was to be identified. In Chapter 2 the review is presented and interpreted in terms of some key characteristics and contexts of the three theories (see Table 2.1 above). There are some common denominators such as the language of resources and their use in trying to generate profit and give the firm a competitive advantage. However, there are far more differences between the theories and they make a single understanding of what a firm is, very difficult. The understanding of resources varies from having a value in itself to having potential value if combined with other resources and if the combination is then managed effectively. The conclusion drawn in Chapter 2 is that there is no single understanding of what a firm is and therefore a search for a single support optimisation methodology is unrealistic. Engagement of managers would have to be tailored.

This tailoring becomes possible when viewing each theory of a firm as a context within which business is being conducted: a structured cost-economising context; a part-structured, part-contextual administration of productive resources context; and a context of socially constructed systems. The interpretation of the review demonstrates that there is a need to engage managers within the context of their own business.

### **7.1.2 A Logic and Technique of Inquiry that Engages**

It is presumed that for the FM Contextualist approach to be operationalised the logic and technique of inquiry used would need to flow from the ontological and epistemological position of the FM Contextualist. The personal journey of the author had started with a positivist view of the world where the support environment was constructed and then its alignment with the needs of the business was measured. In pursuing this research he realised that his view of life had changed to one which was more interpretative and reflective. Concurrently, his conceptual perspective of the support environment had moved strongly towards that of the Contextualist. It was

decided that the research paradigm of the author might be close to that of the Contextualist. Seeking to identify the research paradigm of the author therefore could provide insight into the logic and technique of inquiry that might engage managers within their business context.

Chapter 3 firstly records the personal reflections of the author. The three main research paradigms are then reviewed and the personal reflections are mapped against them. The paradigms are those of Positive Orthodoxy, Anti-Positivist or Interpretive Social Science (ISS), and Critical Social Science (CSS). The mapping showed that the personal research paradigm of the author was on the border of ISS with CSS. The methodologies and methods consistent with ISS and CSS were then reviewed: Grounded Theory, Action Research, Reflexivity and Narrative Therapy, and Action Learning. The conclusions reached were that a methodology drawn from Grounded Theory and Action Research was relevant, and that a method which combined elements of Action Research, Reflexivity and Narrative Therapy, and Action Learning was appropriate.

Grounded Theory met the need to enable participants through personal realisations emerging from the data. Action Research methodology would help build awareness of alignment through a version of the iterative process of data collection. It is the elements of Reflexivity that engages the participant in the process through the natural desire to reflect on life and its accomplishment. The generic stages of Narrative Therapy closely represented the envisaged research method, particularly its propensity to yield 'magic moments', moments of insight. Lastly, Action Learning increases the emphasis on engagement through self-realisation.

The resultant research methodology is that:

*Through engaging managers in seeking an appropriate alignment of resources with the needs of the business, alternative means of meeting corporate objectives might be revealed, some of which might prove more effective and efficient than the current practice*

The chosen research method is called Guided Self-Reflection (GSR) and is:

*a form of intervention which engages managers in critical self-reflection and which is guided by insightful questions related to a resource alignment perspective.*

The extent to which this approach engaged participants was very encouraging and is reported below. Each of the Participants was most willing, even eager, to engage in each Part of the conversation. All Participants effortlessly completed their allotted time, occupying some 75-89% of the Parts 1 with their own narrative: Indeed a number of them continued after they had been alerted to the expiration of the scheduled time. Without exception, each Participant volunteered candid opinions and assessments of their own business area and their working relationships with their sister Services and the Corporate Centre. They were keen to narrate the story of their journey to their current position within the Authority. In sharing their recollections and reflections, some were particularly lucid and recounted in some depth their family upbringing, education and careers. Others chose not to volunteer much about their upbringing and education, but spoke extensively about their careers and their achievements.

Some Participants had not made sufficient allowance for the fieldwork 'only' being a research project which they had volunteered to participate in, and had accordingly raised their expectations of personal or organisational benefit too high. They had been briefed that the approach was intended as an internal initiative to improve organisational efficiency and effectiveness and that full engagement was only likely when that motivation existed. Most Participants understood this situation and accepted organisational benefits could emerge in return for their staff time, but were not guaranteed.

That said, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) administered by the Audit Commission provided a strong incentive for the Participant organisation to involve itself in the research. The Use of Resources Element and its Value for Money Theme of the CPA are very closely linked to the notion of the Business Support Environment and to the alignment of resources with delivery of the Council objectives. Participants were interested in the subject area and particularly receptive to new ideas. They were keen and willing to talk about their background and interested in exploring the role of resources in their current and previous posts.

Each Participant revealed a 'pet' resource, e.g. Guy and his 'information', which was particularly well understood and about which they were keen to talk: The discussion

flowed naturally into linked areas and other resources. Participants were willing to consider the resource perspective and were interested in discussing the alignment concept and its application. They shared their views freely of 'other' resources such as the 'support environment'.

Participants were particularly keen to discuss their current business issues and were very open in doing so. They were especially candid and frank about their strategic initiatives and what is, and what is not, working about them. They were equally open about Service-level business issues and whilst never personal in their criticism, were very factual about where the responsibility for their resolutions rested. They were vocal in their irritation with Central Government interference and its tendency to see the Authority as an agent of central government. Voicing other tensions such as between Officers and Elected Members seemed to confirm their complete comfort with their openness.

Participants were fully committed to the Conversations but the Themes Significance Ratings exercise had been an unwanted addition to the original brief for three of them. All Participants completed all three parts of the Conversation, even though the time intervals between parts had to be rather flexible. Indeed, as noted above, most Participants knowingly exceeded the allotted time in order to say what they had wanted to say. Two of the Participants failed to complete the Themes Significance Ratings instrument, and a third managed only a partial return. The remaining seven responded with the same willingness as they had to the Conversations.

There was a degree of dis-engagement from Jean and, with regard to the Ratings instrument, also from Bennie and Bernie. A possible reason for this could be that they saw no risk to themselves of not pursuing my perspective, and little personal benefit in doing so. They may have had an indifference to the outcome that led to them not wanting to explore their own value systems any further. The Ratings Instrument was not part of the original request and this may also have contributed to this outcome.

There is evidence in Chapters 5 and 6 that the logic and technique of inquiry was effective with participants starting to think differently. The business contextual setting

was a major factor in gaining such strong engagement, be it a corporate or personal business context.

### **7.1.3 Pilot Design and Deployment**

#### **7.1.3.1. Pilot Design**

Chapter 4 describes the design of the GSR and its method of deployment. The initial model of the GSR approach is given at Figure 4.3. It is a three part conversation allowing time for critical reflection by the participant and the researcher between Parts 1 and 2, and Parts 2 and 3. The objectives of each Part are given along with the procedure to be followed. Throughout the approach awareness is built of the alignment logic and the GSR technique. The model was revised based on the experience of the deployment and is at Figure 6.5. Two features were added. Firstly, the deployment had revealed that the greater the degree of business relevance the topics and questions had to the participant, the greater was the degree of their engagement. The second feature to be added was a fourth stage of the approach: the issue of a Themes Significance Ratings instrument. It had become apparent during the Parts 2 and 3 of the Conversations that a more formal feedback was needed on the worth to the participants of the research methodology and method. This was due to some of the participants not being so forthcoming on such a judgement when face-to-face with the researcher. It was also judged to be a further method of building the awareness of the approach and seeking consensus on the key business themes that had emerged during the conversations.

#### **7.1.3.2. Deployment of the GSR**

Eight senior officers and two Elected Members originally agreed to participate in the research. They allocated up to two hours in their diaries for each of the three Parts of the Conversations knowing that a minimum period of two weeks was required between each Part for reflection and interpretation. The plan had been for each of the Parts 1, 2 and 3 to be completed within one week. On this basis the field work would have taken 7-8 weeks to complete. Due to availability of participants the field work actually took four-and-a-half months to complete and took place between 15Jun05 and 02Nov05. Appendix B provides a detailed interpretation of the Conversations programme.

Chapters 5 and 6 present and interpret the narrative data collected during the field work. Chapter 6 also presents and interprets the quantitative data collected through the Themes Significance Ratings instrument. Those interpretations that help address the research question are given below.

### **Context and Culture**

Participants had the following varying views on what business they were engaged in.

- Delivering services to customers from a collection of disparate businesses
- Being a community leader
- Building and representing a community
- Providing a choice of essential services
- Being a last resort provider of services

This provided the context within which they were considering what resources were and what contribution those resources were making to that business. The contributions differed according to whether the context was strategic, tactical or operational in nature. The Authority was not a transaction cost economising organisation per se, but the nature of a Publicly funded body meant that they concentrated heavily on economising costs. The Authority had champions for innovation and change but was constrained to an extent by silos of activity still existing and competing for survival or replication, and therefore resources. However, the emphasis placed by the CPA on value for money rather than cost, had started the shift from a cost culture to a value culture. This was readily supported by those Participants with a Human Resources (HR) background, experience of private sector employment, and by retired captains of industry.

A significant characteristic of the County Council was its public service ethos. There was a heart-felt drive within the Council officers participating in the research that they were in their job solely to deliver the services needed by their key customers: the local



community. The quality and relevance of those services depended to a great extent on the efficient, effective and economic<sup>40</sup> use of Council resources.

Personal and organizational cultural issues were revealed by Participants intentionally, and unintentionally. They were keenly aware that resources had to be treated as a corporate asset and that a change in culture was probably needed for this to become the case. A more focused, organisation-driven application of GSR (as opposed to research-driven) could surface personal and organizational cultural issues that could be used constructively by senior managers. The cultural issues revealed could give a focus for targeted change and a wider understanding of the root causes of some business issues.

### **Resource Linkage**

The participants' narratives were linked to 'resources' by gently guiding the act of self-reflection. The guidance came through questions that were relevant to the participants' narratives. The questions originated from the understanding of the researcher of the business benefit that might accrue by actively seeking to align the use of resources with the ever changing needs of the business. Participants were asked to reflect upon the perspectives they held of 'resources' and of the influence those resources had on business performance.

The Local Authority had strong views on resources but the conception of what constituted a resource was generally rather narrow. An example was the interpretation by John of 'business support' as "post, collect the post, photocopying, invoice processing, all that for the directorates".

By agreeing to a three-session approach, Participants were given an opportunity to re-evaluate and to reassess their earlier narratives based upon further reflections in the intervening periods, and upon hearing the common themes and perceptions that were emerging from the participant group. The holistic nature of the alignment principle allowed relevant questions to be asked to expand on an issue at any level the Participant was using, be it strategic, tactical or operational. Enabling this re-evaluation

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<sup>40</sup> 'Economy' is the price paid for what goes into providing a service; 'Efficiency' is a measure of productivity; and 'Effectiveness' is a measure of the impact achieved and can be quantitative or qualitative (Audit Commission, 'Use of Resources Guidance for Councils – 2006 assessment')

and reassessment of personal narratives seemed to allow Participants to broaden their understanding of 'resources', generate new perspectives on known themes, and promote a desire to develop existing and new resource decision-making techniques.

Several instances had arisen where Participants recognized new relationships between resources, such as HR absentee data perhaps indicating an unhealthy or unwelcome environment, and identified certain phenomena as resources for the first time, such as processes. This recognition was perhaps helped by the 'Use of Resources' category of the CPA being elevated by the Audit Commission to an 'Element' in its own right, causing the Client and Sponsor to seek to understand better the nature of resources, their treatment of resources and the decision-making processes relating to resources.

The Themes Significance Rating returns showed that Participants had believed that linking activities to the core business and linking resources to Corporate planning would improve the use of resources. They also indicated that Participants had recognized that the rightful high priority to creating those links was not always being matched by adequate resources.

### **Thinking differently**

Some of the sources of personal perspectives of some of the Participants had been challenged. Participants were found using the language of 'support environment' and 'alignment' more as the Conversations progressed through their three Parts. Their appreciation of what constitutes resources, and how they were linked, also widened over the course of the discussions. Some 'significant moments' occurred where the discussion triggered a realisation. For example, Nikita realised that in his efforts to engage with his staff by arranging an 'Away Day' he had unwittingly reinforced a barrier between 'managers' and 'staff': His staff had heard that the managers' Away Day had been held at a far more comfortable venue than the venue that had been chosen for their Away Day. Such 'significant moments' would be indicative of the output from an application of the GSR approach which was motivated by an organisational need, rather than by a research need.

Participants were uncovering resource links with the potential to drive performance improvement, such as linking the two major strategic initiatives of 'Customer First' and the implementation of SAP. It was found that Participants were identifying the missing links between certain activities and organizational outcomes. They recognized the performance implications of this and also noted the disproportionate resource priority given to creating the link. Business critical issues were identified and again the priority to address the issue was judged too low and, or, the resources needed to address the issue were judged inadequate.

The perceptions that some Participants held of their business altered from using a resource alignment perspective to enquire about that business and their business issues. New resource priorities were recognised and the link was made between those resources and the achievement of one or more corporate objectives.

Participants were generating some new perspectives on known themes. Looking at the resource implications of a business issue or theme had helped Participants take a wider understanding of that theme. There were also instances where consideration from a resource perspective of business initiatives which were thought to be failing had revealed to Participants missing relationships that if in place may have benefited the initiative. One example was when Lucy discovered that the poor quality of the cleaning was actually due to the Contract Procurement Department believing they had responsibility for the management of that contract, but with little resource to do so, where management ownership actually rested with the Facilities Manager.

Resource decision-making had been promoted in the minds of Participants. The act of following a resource trail had revealed to Participants some different approaches to making resource decisions. Disconnections between planning and financing the plans were exposed when trying to explain how the plans supported the corporate objectives in resource terms

### **Utility of the Research Methodology and Method**

The majority of Participants had judged the research methodology and method to be helpful. It was found that the majority of the comments from Participants at the close

of Parts 3 of the Conversations thought the approach had been helpful. Additionally, the majority of ratings in the Themes Significance Ratings exercise agreed that the methodology and method would be helpful in placing business issues in context and in resolving them.

### **7.1.4 Potential Value of the GSR Approach**

The conceptual background to the study was presented in Chapter 1 and concluded that this research was an attempt to operationalise the Contextualist perspective of the support environment. The context was that of the business organisation. The pilot deployment of the GSR approach has, to an encouraging extent, engaged senior managers in viewing their businesses differently through being guided in their re-evaluation of the alignment of their resources with the needs of their business. The potential value of the GSR approach is significant.

The business opportunities exist in commercialising what could be seen as GSR Phase 1, and also in developing a GSR Phase 2 which builds on the outputs of the earlier Phase.

#### **7.1.4.1. GSR Phase 1 Development**

The researcher possibly heeded a little too much the caution by Bryman (2001) when he said that:

*“social researchers should be reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases, and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate.”*

On reflection the researcher probably stayed within the comfort zone of the Participants which was nearer the transactional level than the border of the interpretive and critical inquiry levels, possibly denying himself some richer data. There was also a hint of being personally comfortable at the process and transactional level and therefore not fighting this temptation more strongly. However, this was due in part to the nature of Participant involvement in the research not being driven by a critical business challenge. The next deployment of GSR should gently take Participants outside their comfort zones and inquire more into the intangible areas of environment, culture, relationship management, and barriers to change.

The open-ended questions used in the conversations emerged from the logic of the approach and were used with the agreement of the Sponsor. They appeared to work well in prompting lucid, relevant narratives but were not substantiated by preliminary tests, thereby losing an opportunity to enhance the questions. Further research will underpin the open-ended questions used in future deployments of the GSR.

The deployment of the research method in the field mostly worked as intended. Each participant found the conversations a pleasant and enjoyable experience which was accepted as evidence that the attempts to create such an environment had been successful. However, the following operational issues arose which would need to be addressed for the next deployment.

- The number of one-on-one parts of the conversation would need to be reduced from three to two, and a group session incorporated as the third part to discuss the business themes around which there was consensus;
- The duration of each Part should be kept to one hour by being more focused on the key issues. The feasibility of this approach was proved by the requirement of Guy, Bennie and Bernie to limit the parts to one hour;
- To give benefits of concentration intensity and to reduce travel time the Part Conversations should be clustered. The resultant programme became quite fractured and the output possibly suffered slightly as a result;
- In order to leave ample time for interpretation and reflection in between Parts, a subsequent Part should only be started after completion of all the earlier parts. An intended research constraint on the programming of the conversations was to complete all the Part 1 Conversations before moving to the Part 2 Conversations and likewise to complete all the Part 2 Conversations prior to starting the Part 3 Conversations. Matching the diary commitments of the participants with those of the Researcher caused this constraint to be removed. However, this did weaken the rigour of the approach and the constraint should be met, not removed, on the next deployment.

- The plan had been to use a meeting room for each conversation. However, that had to be abandoned in preference for the offices of the participants. This was in deference to the fact that managers were helping the research more than they were helping themselves. In practice, the office locations worked well, with few interruptions and only a few occasions where outdoor noises challenged the sensitivity of the voice recorder. For individual sessions in the future whilst it might still be preferable for practical reasons to use a dedicated meeting room, due consideration would have to be given to the possibility that engagement could be weakened if the conducive ambiance of a personal office was seen to be forfeited.
- Transcribing took around four hours per hour of recording. The transcribing time varied according to the clarity of diction of the participant, which was influenced by regional accent, volume and speed of speech, and clarity of content, which was influenced by use of unfamiliar terms and external noise. A full deployment of the method would probably need to allow for the use of professional transcription services. However, whilst the transcription of the Parts 1 of the Conversations was laborious the exercise did ensure full immersion in the data.
- The NVivo software was very useful even to the limited extent that it was used, and wider use of this software should be considered in the next deployment of the method.

In essence GSR Phase 1 has to be streamlined and made more effective for deployment as an organisational improvement intervention. It has to take less time to deploy, be more professionally delivered and involve genuine stakeholders.

The deployment of GSR Phase 1 as a research pilot had to take account of the exigencies of the participant organisation and individuals. It also had to recognise the differing motivation for participation in a research project as compared to an agreed internal business initiative. This in part resulted in the meetings programme spanning over four months instead of the target eight weeks. However, even though the target eight weeks could be an acceptable time frame within which to complete the GSR

approach, it is likely that it would have to be condensed into a much more operationally relevant time frame.

The improvements to the GSR Phase 1 would therefore need to address the time constraints without losing its effectiveness. More comprehensive pre-briefing of participants would need to take place, so that the best value could be expected from the one-on-one time. The framework of insightful questions would need to be trialled and tested to ensure their relevance to the deployment. The time taken to interpret the narratives would need to be much shorter and this would require using a professional transcription service. Greater familiarity and fuller use of the codification software would also yield time-savings.

Participants would need to be selected on the basis that they had a Revans' problem that they were looking for guidance in resolving. Stakeholder analysis should be employed to ensure that all voices are heard or at least represented. In this context, consideration also needs to be given to the range of stakeholders. The reason for choosing a single participant organisation for this research stage was given in Chapter 4. However, a feasibility study should be conducted into the merits of involving participants from several organisations which together represent the same industry or market, or perhaps belong to a commercial partnership such as one falling within the Government initiative of Strategic Partnering Agreements.

With these refinements, the GSR Phase 1 approach has the potential to be developed into a very effective organisational intervention.

#### **7.1.4.2. GSR Phase 2 Development**

The generic stages of Narrative Therapy (Morgan, 2000) are given in Chapter 3 and reproduced in Table 7.6 below for ease of reference. The stages were drawn upon, as indicated in the 'GSR Interpretation' column, to frame the GSR approach. The first application of the first five stages can no doubt be refined. However, it is the sixth stage which represents a development opportunity for the GSR approach which the author is already realising within his current professional role (the role and its relevance to this research is explained further in Para 7.2.3 below).

The ‘problem’ within Narrative Therapy has been interpreted for the GSR approach in the way that Revans (1998) differentiates it from a ‘puzzle’. A problem has no single course of action which can be justified by any code of Programmed knowledge: Programmed knowledge is used to solve ‘puzzles’ “from which escapes are thought to be known even although the escape or solution may be hard to discover”.

Stage No.	Stage	GSR Interpretation
1	Naming the problem	Sub-optimal use of resources
2	Tracing the history of the problem	Tracing organisational, structural, ethical and cultural influences
3	Exploring the effects of the problem	Exploring under-performance attributable to use of resources
4	Situating the problem in context	Deconstruction – understanding perceptions of ‘resources’ and their contribution to meeting personal and corporate objectives
5	Discovering unique outcomes	Discovering valuable links between the use of resources and corporate outcomes
6	Tracing the history and meaning of the unique outcomes	Tracing the reason for the link being ‘hidden’ and discerning how to address those reasons

Table 7.6 – GSR Interpretation of the Generic Stages of Narrative Therapy

The pilot deployment of the GSR Approach had time only to note and superficially explore any unique outcomes, or ‘magic moments’ which emerged during the Conversations. A more structured approach is needed to trace and address the hidden links. Such an approach would probably engage a group of stakeholders, who ideally would be drawn from those seen individually in the earlier round, and be based on a facilitated session to ensure that progress and agreed actions continue to be owned by participants. Developing this Stage 6 within the GSR approach envisages using Action Learning methods.

The GSR approach drew upon Action Learning in the way that it used insightful questions to unlock the implicit knowledge (I) that participants have. The following quote from a participant is an example of this:

*“I’ve not quite thought of it in those terms, although ... you triggered the thought in me that at its infrastructure role this Directorate is a business support directorate, isn’t it? We support the business.”*

The Action Learning approach was described in Chapter 3 and is reproduced in Table 7.7 below to show the envisaged GSR interpretations of each stage in the process.



However the opportunity exists to use it as the pre-process for a full Action Learning process. The output of what might become known as GSR Phase 1 would be the 'Unique Outcomes' and they would represent the 'object' to be clarified at Stage 1 of the Action Learning process (or 'GSR Phase 2').

Stage No.	Stage	GSR Interpretation
1	The object of the Action Learning Group to be clarified and the group to be formed	'Unique Outcome' from GSR Phase 1 is clarified and stakeholders identified
2	The issues to be analysed and actions identified for resolving them	Seek an interpretation of the Unique Outcome and identification of the likely 'hidden' problem(s) through individual conversations with each stakeholder
3	The problem to be presented to the group and then re-framed following a series of questions guided by the Action Learning consultant	Stage 2 interpretations of the problem presented to the stakeholders as a group which is then posed insightful questions by the GSR consultant and the problem re-framed
4	A goal to be identified the achievement of which would resolve the re-framed problem	A goal to be identified the achievement of which would resolve the re-framed problem
5	Action strategies to be formed and implemented	Action strategies to be formed and implemented
6	The cycle to be repeated and the learning to be captured	The cycle to be repeated and the learning to be captured

Table 7.7 – GSR Interpretation of the Stages in the Action Learning Process

Clarification of the Unique Outcome would identify those with a direct interest in understanding it (the stakeholders) and resolving its 'hidden' problem. Stage 2 would have a parallel with GSR Phase 1 in that interpretations of the Unique Outcome and identification of the likely 'hidden' problem(s) would be sought through individual conversations with each stakeholder. The Stage 2 interpretations of the problem would be presented to the stakeholders as a group in Stage 3. The group would be posed insightful questions in order to re-frame the problem. This stage also parallels GSR Phase 1 in its iterative nature of the problem being presented ('told') and then reframed ('re-told'). Stages 4, 5 and 6 would be the same for both approaches. Unlike the Action Learning approach, GSR Phase 2 would have a contextual setting and the insightful questions would be based on a specific perspective.

Based on the above, the author believes that the GSR 2 approach has the potential to be developed and made commercially viable.

**7.2 Contribution of the Results of the Pilot**

The research demonstrates contributions to professional and business knowledge and management practices. It also contributes to personal knowledge and practice.

### 7.2.1 Professional Knowledge & Practice

The major contribution of this study to professional knowledge in terms of the generic understanding of the support environment is that it does not matter what that environment is, or is called. It has been referred to variously as the support environment, the business support environment, the service support environment, and the serviced environment. Similarly, it actually does not matter either whether the 'environment' is optimised. What is important is whether it is appropriately aligned with the needs of the business. To summarise this point, the (support) environment *may* be optimised if /when an appropriate alignment of resources with business need is achieved.

There is another aspect of the GSR approach that appears to be novel in this professional area of FM. This study has shown there to be value in the goal of *seeking an appropriate* alignment, rather than a goal of achieving alignment. An example of this was the total belief Bernie had in succession planning: not for the intended end outcome of a successor being available when needed, but for the benefit to the organisation of the rigour needed in just planning such succession.

The Structuralists have attempted to use a single support optimisation methodology and it has been the *Facility Managers* who have made that attempt. Cairns (2003) cautioned against such a single solution and he and his fellow Contextualists are right to do so. In seeking to operationalise the Contextualist perspective of the support environment, this research has had some success in engaging the *business managers* in seeking an appropriate alignment of resources with business need.

Seeking to align resources with business needs often reveals linkages, or combinations of resources, which were 'unsuspected' at the outset of the process, but which are critical in re-aligning the use of those resources. A reason the linkages may have remained hidden is that the cultural modes of the organisation and more specifically the members of the organisation have not perceived the existence of such linkages. An implication is that changing those cultural modes, or memes ((Price, 1996, Price and Shaw, 1998, Dawkins, 1976), perhaps through changing the perceptions of the individuals, would change the nature of the 'environment'. It also implies that those

individuals who resist acquiring the new alignment meme would be selected out of the organisation.

The research may also therefore have offered a route to spreading the FM Philosophy meme. The GSR approach benefited from being grounded in the four generic evolutionary stages of growth (Aldrich, 1999, and Weeks and Galunic, 2002): variation, selection, retention and diffusion, and the struggle for scarce resources. Seeking an appropriate alignment of resources with business need becomes institutionalised in effect, as a legitimate source of variation. It would be selected because it acquires resources or legitimacy. The retention of the variation activity (the research methodology and method) would occur if it becomes an integral part of the planning cycle. The nature of the inquiry becomes, in effect, a variation which is selected and then retained by internal diffusion. The research builds awareness of the variation and starts the diffusion. The struggle for resources might be eased through a consensus on the best value allocation of resources to the needs of the business. The contextual perspective of the support environment becomes operationalised if the approach is diffused throughout the organisation and ultimately the population. This GSR approach can therefore be positioned as a 'variation' offered for 'selection' and 'retention' by managers: Diffusion of the approach could represent an operationalisation of the contextual perspective of the support environment. A risk in the participant organisation is that the spreading meme reinforces the diversion of resources to the silos rather than releasing them to the Authority.

The variant model of People, Process and Place, used by DEGW in the mid-80s has played a pivotal role in articulating the development of the strategic contribution of FM. However, the model has given way to the expanding notion of alignment and was abandoned in this paper on those grounds.

### **7.2.2 Business Knowledge & Management Practices**

*"The starting point of any effective change effort is a clearly defined problem"*  
(Beer et al, 1990)

In this quote, and given that they are referring to a problem in Revans' terms, Beer et al lend emphasis to a key benefit of this research to management: it represents another

means of trying to understand the root cause of a business issue and how that issue might be resolved. The main contribution that this research makes to business knowledge and management practice is a promising new generic organisational intervention called, Guided Self-Reflection. The GSR approach creates awareness in senior managers of the contribution that *seeking* an appropriate alignment of resources with business need can make to improving organisational performance: In doing so there is now some evidence in Chapters 5 and 6 that it enables those managers to conceive of their businesses differently. The future potential for this approach is outlined above at Para 7.1.4 and if realized should reinforce this initial contribution.

The GSR approach is rooted in Socratic learning which the author readily accepts is hardly new. However, he does believe that guiding the analysis of the business from a context-specific perspective with time for feedback and reflection might well be new, or at least might not have been operationalised in FM.

### **7.2.3 Personal Knowledge & Practice**

In the last year of studying for this DBA the author was invited to apply for a post with a niche consultancy specialising in Relationship Management (RM). They were aware of the nature of his research area and shared his view that the outcome of the studies could complement the strategic end of their business. The post was offered and accepted.

The GSR approach potentially provides the missing auditable rigour to a process that the company have been using for some ten years. Interestingly, the process was being used as a commodity, not as an enabling organisational intervention.

For the five months leading up to the submission of this thesis the author has been facilitating workshops built on the interpretations of one-on-one interviews, or individual questionnaires, designed to gain insights into the RM issues that might be frustrating and supporting business performance improvement. The approach being developed is a combination of the GSR Phases 1 and 2 outlined above at Para 7.1.4. Individuals are seen one-on-one and then come together as a group. Before they assemble for the group workshop they will have received a non-attributable synthesis of the interpretation of their narratives. The Workshop then results in an action plan

that they have designed to address the issues which sit behind the problems which emerged from the narratives.

The studies have enabled the author to understand his own issues that were underpinning his own problem with seeking to optimise the support environment. The discipline of researching and writing a thesis has provided him with new skills. The nature of the studies, and particularly those that input to Chapters 2 and 3, have widened and deepened his understanding of himself and his view of the world. The early application of those new skills and outlook has already confirmed the GSR approach as being generic. The alignment perspective whilst still sitting in the background, has been replaced with an RM perspective. However, the contextual setting and the engagement and enabling of participants still apply. The current working environment should therefore allow the author to realise the potential for the GSR approach whilst advancing his post-doctoral studies given below.

#### **7.2.3.1. *Post-Doctoral Aspirations***

This thesis considered the application of GSR by the business. It introduced to business managers the support environment concept and engaged them in considering how they might meet their objectives through a support environment perspective. One of the post-doctoral aspirations of the author is to consider what additional organisational benefit might accrue if the GSR was applied to the FM community/Leaders. Engaging them in reflecting on how they would operationalise their support environment if they viewed it through a business perspective, i.e. reverse the role-play and perspective emphasis.

This deployment of GSR met the intention of building awareness: it was a form of 'sensitivity training' as Revans (1998) would probably have described it. Whilst such sensitivity training has value in itself, it was intended as a preparatory stage to addressing a real-time organisational challenge. The intention therefore is to:

- find an organisation that wants to commit to a full involvement in *their* deployment of the GSR method, initially using the resource alignment perspective, perhaps starting by approaching the Participant County Council

(in which case the existing data would be fully transcribed and codified, again using NVivo, to enrich the interpretations);

- develop the application of the GSR method to helping Local Authorities enhance their performance in the Use of Resources element of the CPA, perhaps by incorporating it into their planning cycle;
- extend the application of the GSR to multi-stakeholder partnerships to meet the requirements to evidence active relationship management;
- research Action Learning more widely in seeking to realise the potential for the GSR Phase 2 approach identified in Para 7.1.4.2 above. Such research should give consideration to adding 'I' to the Learning equation so that it becomes,  $L = P + Q + I$  to indicate the *Implicit* knowledge that the process is trying to surface from within the participants.

### **7.2.4 Research Epistemology & Methodology**

This research also makes the following epistemological and methodological contributions:

- The epistemological contribution resides in the particular use made of self-reflection and narrative therapy in helping determine the reasons for one's view of reality.
- The methodological contribution is represented by the use of a process to induce new concepts around phenomena where the process draws on a blend of grounded theory, action research, narrative therapy, self-reflexivity and action learning methodologies to stimulate the innovative ideas.

## **7.3 An Exciting Future**

This research makes a significant contribution to business and professional knowledge and practice as a source of reference on the Guided Self-reflection approach. GSR is a pioneering technique that could be deployed in a variety of ways for the benefit of managers and their organisation. Its power comes from its propensity to engage participants in re-evaluating their business issues from a different perspective. It has a

kaleidoscopic effect in helping managers to see the elements of their programmed knowledge coming together in a different pattern: sufficiently different to perhaps help resolve a business problem, or to improve business performance. The future for GSR and its users is a particularly exciting one.



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# Appendices

# **Appendix A**

## **Themed Quotations from Conversations**

### **Core Business of the Council**

*"So at one level it's a collection of disparate businesses which are about delivering services to customers ... On a more strategic level though, ... the business of a Local Authority is about being a community leader, and a community advocate, about looking for improvement in the community"*

*"our core business I think is quite clearly building a community and representing that community"*

*"I'm quite clear, the outcomes of the business are around community building, we're in the community building business"*

*"to provide essential services, and a choice of essential services, in a variety of ways within the Public Sector remit"*

*"... in some ways we are the ... last resort provider of services, and we catch and capture the elements that otherwise would drop off the edge"*

*"the core business of the Authority is about providing for the community, certain ... services, and operating them on their behalf."*

### **Use of Resources**

#### **Resources is a Corporate Function**

*"in this portfolio that's what we are, we are a corporate function"*

#### **Resource Decision-making / Allocation**

*"on the Disability Discrimination Act where there was a legal, statutory requirement to make sure that people with disabilities can go in and out of buildings and could get services, there was an audit done, and a priority then about where we were going to spend money, and you could walk around the place and gradually you see the ramps are being put in, the doors, you know, the lavatories are being changed, and all the rest of it, because there was a statutory thing behind it, corporately though, we don't have a similar approach"*

*"we prioritise according to Council aims, which is great, but there are some unwritten aims here which are about maintaining the safety and well-being of its people that you*

*know, that go without saying, you know, and those ought to also be there as well, as priorities, the unwritten priorities"*

*"There are different ways of working within the Cabinet, but I think there'd be universal support, for the fact that we don't get enough day-to-day back-up for what the output is."*

*"a proper business case needs to be drawn up in terms of upgrading Green Park, because I'm absolutely convinced that there are umpteen meetings, and actually, again, it probably doesn't reflect well on the Council overall, but of senior managers throughout the organisation that take place other than at Green Park"*

*"I think in a way it would be far better if the funding of the Portfolio Member was done by the services they cover"*

*"it seems to be that every time we enter into a major project, for want of that holistic, sort of, overview, if you like, and it's largely financially driven I suspect, we always ... underestimate what we are going to need"*

*"the Corporate Plan just went through the Council yesterday, and the finances were sorted out months ago, they had to be, because it's on a different timescale. Now, because people know what they're doing there's a linkage, but I'll bet it's not as strong as it could be"*

*"Now, we have a risk register, and on our risk register our highest risk in this Service is Educational Visits, because in terms of impact, that's the highest you can possibly get, in terms of probability you obviously want to reduce it. So we put in a growth bid on that basis for an Educational Visits Board and they would make sure that schools had submitted forms related to the visit they're going to undertake, would check through the ratios, would make sure that it was forwarded on to our PE advisor, if it was a hazardous activity, would make sure that the school had our clearance, that, yes this complied with our requirements. It didn't get through the bidding process, when I put in a growth bid for it. So, no, we don't have a risk-based funding regime"*

*"I don't think you should look at what we call resources, I think you should look at everything outside the sharp functions and sort of treat them as a whole, because how you divide those up at that level is another matter"*

*"so the processes, the three sort of main key areas (Finance, HR, Property), are being brought together by the MTP, maybe in a bit of a subliminal way, and maybe not everybody quite realises what is happening with that ... but there is this sort of merge of those three areas within the MTP which then informs Council of what it can do for its money")"*

*"I think the MTP message is still viewed very much as a financial tool. It comes from Head of Finance, it's seen as a financial tool. I actually believe that it needs to come more from ... the Director of Resources so that it's seen as a resource tool, and I feel that over time that will change, and that will happen ... maybe they've (Heads of Service) felt this has been more of a process done to them as a financial tool rather than anything else, and I think it's partly breaking down that myth."*

## **Role of Resources**

*"what we are talking about ... is really about behaviours and techniques which make the organisation, which look towards the way in which the organisation works versus what the organisation does, which is about specialisms and so forth"*

*"I think at the moment resources are still seen as something which does things to the organisation, whereas, actually, the real vision around resources should be, it's there to provide really very professional support services, and a lot of the transactional activity should sit more sensibly in the departments and services that originate the transactions"*

*"all I'm really trying to say is that ... there's a mismatch there between what's expected, and the actual influence on important aspects, and the resource that goes into it."*

*"Resources is the engine-room really of the County"*

*"... it (Resources Portfolio) really is the sort of back-office of the whole outfit. Nothing happens in the County without some input from somebody within the Resources portfolio"*

*"within this organisation property is not regarded as being strategic but purely operational"*

## **Process**

*"what tends to happen is that the HR senior officer will be in touch with his counterpart in (other Counties), but he won't be in touch with Shell, BP, Lloyd's Bank, Berkley's Bank, and he should be, because the job is not so different ... and I think that the ideas have been tried and rejected, and have been developed all the time in these sectors, which I'm not convinced we're sharing, to be honest."*

*"therefore it's a very different relationship to business, where you say, he's responsible for that, he needs the staff to do it, and it's a top-to-bottom exercise, and it's not got this political dimension, if it has, it's political dimension which goes on at very high Board level, and doesn't affect the day-to-day running, whereas our day-to-day running has political dimensions, that's the key difference"*

*"Most staff could have told you that it wasn't working well, but I don't think there was a willingness to listen. There was, again, this slavish adherence to the Project Plan, which perhaps hadn't received wide enough consideration"*

*"so it's a much more difficult and complex, inter-woven environment than the single-mindedness of business, and therefore in one sense, less effective"*

## **SAP**

*"the Council knows where it's going, but, unfortunately there's a failure to recognise failure, it's the 'Emperor and the New Clothes' bit"*

*"I know that there are still people in this organisation printing their e-mails out, so if you're printing your e-mails out, there's pretty much no chance at all that you're effectively managing ... the SAP system in your organisation"*

*"we were replacing a General Ledger System with an Enterprise Resource Planning System and that was an intellectual step-up for everybody"*

*"the future is about using SAP to change the culture from one of, I don't do detail, to, yes, I do understand what's going on in my organisation"*

## **Planning and Risk**

*"What you need to look is at what might happen to cause that expectation to change and to look at the risks associated with those changes – either up or down."*

## **Communication**

*"it just seems weird to me, to be perfectly honest, that there's an organisation which is saying all the right things, and despite ... trying to get through the layers of the bureaucracy ... they can still produce reports which haven't been anywhere near the service areas"*

## **Governance & Accountability**

*"So I think at Corporate level, Members agreement of priorities is quite immature, not in the sense of the literal word there, it's not well-developed"*

*"I think they are elected and they come to the Council and they represent largely their own views"*

*"this is a classic problem really with organisations like this, decisions are committee decisions, there's nobody held accountable, there's no one person who has the full picture."*

*"We tend to have a committee here, a committee there, maybe a chairing committee, but you know, it's my committee and so my hands are tied. There's always a duck-out somewhere down the line."*

## **Performance Management**

*"I'd like to plan careers within the organisation more than we do, I would like to have performance management much stronger than it is today."*

*"We are not entirely in control of our own performance in a way."*

*"The question, "Will they notice?" is a good question to ask really. ... are the public actually noticing any difference, as a consequence of what we're doing? We're spending vast sums of their money but do they see any difference?"*

*"you can do the best job in the world, but if you're perceived not to be doing well, you're not doing well, it's that that matters, and they're not often the same thing"*

## **Efficiency Savings**

*"I have absolutely no problem with looking for efficiencies, what I have a problem with is someone setting a figure when they haven't got a clue what they're talking about, in terms of the detail."*

*"I do think we need to look at peer reviews of services because when Heads of Service offer up efficiency savings, many of them offer up efficiency savings that they know won't be accepted, because they are politically unsound as far as Members will be concerned, so they've done their bit."*

## **Information v Knowledge**

*"we've got information overload, but knowledge is what we lack, there's information everywhere"*

## **Working Environment**

### ***Ivory Tower***

*"I've had the odd comment about, oh, we don't come onto the first floor, the Old County Offices is full of ... but I mean that's a nonsense really, ... I think at one time it might have been important, I think it's getting less and less so now" (Bennie 1: 00:49:04)*

### **Impact on people**

*"flexible working, which is a struggle, because if you work from home your manager doesn't know who you are so when there's promotions going, nobody recognises you"*

*"anything from the carpet on the floor, to the level of IT provision, and the catering facilities we provide for employees, given that every, all these sort of hygiene factors do contribute to people's morale, productivity, motivation, retention rate, etc"*

*"even if people aren't conscious of it, I think it impacts, I think things like the light, the ventilation, the noise factor, those things, if we don't get those right and think about those for employees, who, perhaps, are bothered by them, giving them fatigue, headaches, distraction, just, you know, malaise, if we don't actually think about those and get them right, then I think we're not even fulfilling our health and safety responsibilities, now I'm not suggesting that the place is a health-hazard, but actually, how do we know that all those things are in place, so I think in terms of, my view would be very high."*

*"I think there's a false premise there, that says, we oughtn't to be spending money on providing facilities, and actually, that's what good service is about"*

### **Valuing People – The Dry Tea-pot**

*"So, gradually 2-3 people, 2 people, office of your own. Carpets didn't go to the walls. They were a foot in, then a bit closer, then to the wall. Your tea, trolleys used to come around in those days. A lady used to come in and bring you a cup of tea, in the afternoon or when you want it. Then at a certain level you get tea, and a biscuit. And then, at the very highest level, you'd get your tea on a tray, with a silver teapot to pour out tea, and then, finally, you had carpets, big office, and still the tea would still arrive, but it would arrive in what was called a dry pot. So the silver teapot would arrive, but no water in, tea in, and your secretary would make it for you, freshly brewed tea: that was the ultimate. Now wait, the point about this is that, these status symbols today would be frowned upon, but they were very important, People would rather have their carpet furnished than a 2%, 3% increase in salary .... Persons being valued, maybe you're being valued, moving up your, progress, you know, visible. Tea with biscuits brought, half-knowing Andrew, but it was incredibly, what's the word I'm looking for, incredibly motivating, amazing. Now all that, I forgot about the loos of course, the private loos (the key to the loo) these were real, and it sounds so stupid really, but it had value. Now, for that, think of something else ...but it did have a value, it made people feel valued."*

*"I don't think they were doing that by accident, it was a designed approach to making people feel valued, and that's very, very important."*

*"why don't we pay the salary for the job? Why do people have to be here 5 years doing the job to get their first full salary? What, where is the justice in that?"*

### **Information**

*"if we were to spend money, or expend effort, we'd rather do it on some other things, rather than that (the working environment), we know it's important, we know it has an impact, but not enough, but I think that decision may be taken by default rather than through proper debate and analysis, and a few facts and figures to back it up."*

### **Responsibility**

*"so those policies about what the environment should look like and consequently how much we're prepared to invest in that environment should be taken by the top-management group of the Authority, and of course we don't, we espouse these values but we don't therefore think, what does that mean in terms of the working environment"*

### **Equity**

*"so we don't have people arguing, well that may be OK for that service, but I've got specific reasons why I've got to do it in this way"*

*"I'm talking about some standards, some corporate standards and principles which are applied across the piste, and being very clear about what is provided for you, because that's how we manage things around here, and where you can have some input to that, and to allow something to be at the whim or the inclination of a Head of Service I think is wrong."*

*"one is the space and property the people actually have at the moment doesn't bear any relationship to I guess what they need"*

*"equity about if you want to improve property, and we're not taking a corporate view we're talking about a sort of service basis"*

*"There are other things which are more complicated, about some services are easier, in terms of getting external funding ... other services don't, but nothing is done about that to level it up"*

*"if you go through a John Lewis, it's very clear that you're into different departments or whatever, but ... everything has still got that class about it, that touch about it, that quality. If you walk through the buildings, the offices here, you know, you could be in different parts of the town, or different towns, are we bothered about that? John Lewis are bothered about it aren't they, but maybe they've got different motivations ... but they think about it, we don't."*

### **Business Value**

*"in fact you could do an economic argument that says, investing another million pounds in getting our properties up to a business-like standard, would actually reap the benefit, couldn't you?"*

*"I think you could make a very strong case for investing more attention at a senior level in that environment because it conditions everything we do."*

*"I think we're talking about, can we measure it, is there some way of saying, if you did this, that and the other, the impact on performance, morale, reputation, etc, would be this, now if you can measure it, I think it gets done."*

## **Support Environment**

*"We must have brand attribute of value for money and low-cost service delivery but high quality service delivery, and what the right support environment does, it enables that to happen, in what is essentially a very complicated business"*

*"so you get a culture which is driven by the urgent, rather than the important, and it might be urgent **and** important, but generally speaking it is not"*

*"so I suppose we have our hearts in right place, in terms of the support environment, and demonstrating through the brand that we are very efficient, I think we are efficient within the context in which we operate, but we probably don't necessarily manage the context particularly well."*

*"So, in terms of the support environment, I think, we keep coming back to this value-for-money, low-cost thing. The bottom-line is, the politicians see resources and support services as being a cost, ... so therefore we've traditionally been hit quite hard with efficiency savings, I don't doubt that the same thing will happen again this year."*

*"the amount we spend on support services and the support environment, versus what we get back from it is or is not value-for-money"*

## **Corporateness from Siloism**

*"if anybody should be bonded corporately, it should be the Cabinet. I'm not sure what we're doing to ensure that corporate bonding, quite honestly at the moment"*

*"I think (siloism) is certainly within Heads of Service level, and departmental structures going down, and even, to some extent, within COMT"*

*"effectively the services are silo based, and the business is silo based and they are, there's a lack of inter-relationship between them"*

*"I think there is a corporateness in the sense that most people whatever bit of the organisation they are in, recognise that we want to be a top performing Authority, there's pride in (the Shire), as a County and as a County Council, amongst people ... But having said that, at sort of, by its highest level you can think of you know, the support beneath it doesn't have that corporateness."*

*"but the tying up of it (other Services' resource requirements) has been very hit and miss, and a lot of it has been almost sort of sifting through and realising, Oh, someone's doing something over there. So it hasn't been terribly joined-up"*

*"there's a great desire, and has been for some time now, to try to cross-cut to help people not think in their own particular little, you know, silos, as they're called, but to think more broadly"*

*"there seems to be that missing co-ordinating linkage somewhere"*



*"I think it has been recognised at COMT level ... that it (the organisation) lacks the cohesion of cross-linkages"*

*"services for example ... make some change, ... employ people, ... do things from the point of view of, IT support, they don't think that that's going to... impact on them, or the savings... it impacts on the people providing the service to them like IT, like HR, like Payroll, like all that, all those costs are there which they seldom even think about, because they're there, why should they, they're not part of their budget even"*

*"I think that this lack of corporateness, if you like, has been recognised and some of the structure we have at the moment is aimed at overcoming that."*

*"we have things like communications, small example, where things are wrong, each service seems to have ... the feeling to go off and publish whatever they like, as long as they stick a sort of roundel with [Named] County Council in the corner"*

*"They (the members of a British 'Federation') were simply there to protect their own stake, and it's a bit the same here."*

### **Perceptions of Need**

*"... one of the difficulties of the current organisation of the County Council is all the Strategic Directors are positioned over the road so they're not seen as much, and that isn't, it's not a good message"*

*"but they do, they want a smooth ride and they want it safe, that's a crystallisation of it, which is a bit different to saying, I want a structurally sound road that isn't going to cost us a fortune in three or four years time to put right."*

*"there needs to be quite a lot of work on public consultation, which is lacking at the moment, because there's almost a great assumption that either the Officers or the Members know what the public want"*

*"I understand that the area of biggest complaint that you get is about pot-holes, in virtually any County Council, across the country people, moan about pot-holes. I did once hear someone suggest, well, why do you bother filling them in then, people always moan about pot-holes, give them something to moan about and get on with the rest of your core business, because you're never going to keep people happy about pot-holes."*

*"pressure groups may not necessarily reflect the views of the individuals ... the elected members could have a misrepresentation almost, or a misperception of what it is that they're there to provide ...so really I think that there needs to be a lot more public consultation onto that."*

*"... this is perfectly adequate and this also works as a meeting room for others if I'm not in"*

### **Aligning Resources to Priorities**

*"we provide a service ... and we say to the purchaser of that service, this is the service you're getting and this is what it's going to cost you, which is the wrong way round really, because the world doesn't work like that, does it"*

*"Domiciliary Care was seen as an area of growth effectively, where money has to be poured in, and yet it's Contracts Team who are actually pulling those care agreements together, and they were seen as an area of lower priority"*

*"I guess, there does need to be a process to align overall resources to priorities, I think it's done quite informally at the moment, it's done via the budget-setting process, it's reconfirmed by Cabinet, it's part of the CPA process, explicitly, and ... I think that sort of thing will have quite a significant impact on us because we will see these questions in the CPA questionnaires that talk about priorities and resource, and ... we'll look at those and look for ways we can demonstrate that we're doing that."*

*"at least for every paper that comes to LAG, and comes to Cabinet there should be a statement of how does this relate to the Corporate Plan"*

*"The biggest stumbling block I think, to all this (Alignment), is the culture shift that's required, you know there's all these turkeys in this organisation who don't want to vote for Christmas, and you can understand that but it is a blockage in the organisation ... so you try to introduce something that will bring about efficiencies, and because people see that it's a threat, to their jobs, or what they've always done, or their freedoms, or whatever, they're going to try and scupper it."*

*"maybe you could relate them directly at two levels ... one the Corporate Plan, and the other, a relevant Service Plan ... because the Service Plan should also relate to the Corporate Plan"*

*"we need to align our services to the Council Plan because otherwise they're functions that are not supported by Council"*

## **Growth Agenda**

*"I think there's a much ... bigger scenario ... the Growth Agenda, because the Growth Agenda is going to affect every service we've got, and a lot of other services out there which we impinge on, like the Health Service, ones that we scrutinise, that we have relationships with ... but we don't actually run them ... I think we're half-way to resolving it , in pulling all those functions together, in a coherent way to cope with the Growth Agenda, because if we are going to have a step-change in the requirement for services, there has to be some real joined-up thinking"*

## **Budgeting**

*"and so the only thing we can manage are those controllable costs, and if we don't manage those well, we might as well go."*

*"... we need to not just keep building on foundations laid in the 1920s, but build on foundations which are the needs of today."*

## **Capital and Revenue**

*"there are certain simplifications in business which don't exist in the Public Sector, for example in the private sector it's very clear what capital and what revenue is, it is not clear in the Public Sector"*

*"so it's set for us (Council Tax), and so the only thing we can manage are those controllable costs, and if we don't manage those well, we might as well go. That's all we can manage, just those. And that lesson you know has to be driven home."*

### **Nudge Funding resulting from Budget coming before Plan**

*"what is of no use, and everybody would acknowledge this, is dreaming up a series of priority areas and then not making sure you've funded them, simply because you can't bite the bullet of effectively diverting money from other priorities, other things."*

### **Changes to Core Funding**

*"what I don't think I've ever really seen in Local Government is anybody really making a sea-change to core funding"*

*"what people tend to do each year, is look at their budget and see what extra they need. They never look at the base budget, never go and say, do we really need to do this?"*

*"Nobody's told me that we're going to do zero-based budgeting, and if we are, I can tell you that it will fail ... there is a case, a strong case for querying the effectiveness of base-funding ... we need to challenge, a knowledgeable challenge to existing patterns of expenditure."*

### **Role of the Business Case**

*"I wasn't asking Members for more money, there was no need for a business case"*

*"... despite the fact that there will be revenue implication it will be more than double, treble-fold back on the benefits to the Authority, and ... that's the point ... to put over ... to gain support, because the Council as a whole is a financial machine, it's a business machine, and my business case needs to reflect the business of the Authority"*

*"1% Council Tax equals 2 million pounds, as a capital receipt per annum, so if it costs 50 thousand pounds to employ someone with on-costs and I can show that they will generate that 1% off the Council Tax it's putting it again into that context."*

### **Role of Heads of Service**

*"They've (the Heads of Service) essentially sort of got three ... roles. One is this sort of corporate thinking, Competent General Manager and a bit of specialism, and ... the specialism thing is increasingly less important to the organisation."*

*"Managing people, is like managing people effectively, ... all need to do it well, and I think that the ideas have been tried and rejected, and have been developed all the time in these (Private) sectors, which I'm not convinced we're sharing, to be honest"*

### **Concept of the Client or Customer**

*"I suppose you could argue that Customer First is about defining and building our skill set around customer interaction, you know, we've traditionally not been particularly good at that, and our ability to feed back to customers, treat people as customers, from the off"*

*really, and treat them as fee-paying customers more importantly, as opposed to just being a bit of a pain."*

*"I would expect a Competent General Manager to be able to understand their interface with their customer and to manage that in a way that is sensitive to the type of person that they've got whether they've be an internal or an external customer."*

## **Intangible Assets**

### **Processes to a process**

*"if you don't have any internal promotion above a certain level, it means that you wash your hands of succession planning, and I think succession planning with all its imperfections, is a discipline that we should all go through, because if for nothing else, it shows up major weaknesses that are on the horizon."*

### **Qualitative Value**

*"I think increasingly it's not just about hard numbers, I think it is about qualitative stuff"*

*"if you clearly devalue people, or don't value people in the way which they perceive to be right, then you cause disunion, and people don't work together so well, people are not helping, supporting each other, and these are the intangibles, I mean, well they are intangible but they are very real, you know, they're very real, intangibles."*

## **Usefulness of Approach**

*"I find the process very helpful, it's good because it provides me with an opportunity to reflect on what we're doing, whether we could do things in different ways, and sort of actually bounce ideas and have them challenged, which is good."*

*"personally, I found it more useful than I think I thought it was going to be, partly because I wasn't absolutely sure what the scope was, but I think as we've gone into it, it became clearer, ... but it just strikes me ... if there's been ... 30 hours of senior management discussion, input, on this, that not to take one or two nuggets from it and do something in terms of COMT or something, ... would just seem bizarre."*

*"I've found it useful so far, because it's helped me to you know, marshal some of my thoughts as well, and ask questions, so it's been useful I think, good."*

*"so, again ... the purpose of engaging with you on this piece of work ... always was an external perspective, and you may come up with a different set of priorities for the organisation, or areas of focus at least"*

*"I've not quite thought of it in those terms, although ... you triggered the thought in me that at its infrastructure role this Directorate is a business support directorate, isn't it, we support the business"*

*"but given that I'm sitting there painting this picture of this dynamic and agile organisation, with a shifting sands context around the environment in which we work, to not revisit the prioritisation process ... is frankly madness in that context"*

*"an occupancy cost, that's not a bad idea actually, what's it costing me, or what's it costing the Council to occupy this office, or this building"*

*"in the context of rolling into a CPA process, early part of next year, when one of the areas they look at specifically, are ambition, priorities, focus of resources against priorities, and so on, then the sort of questions you're asking, even if the question is asked and left hanging, it's a challenge for the organisation which I think is healthy and timely as well"*

*"I think, that today has been very good, very useful to me I think, it's enables me to revisit the model ... and yeah, I found it useful, I mean that ... will help me a lot I think in the next few months"*

*"I think, this sort of technique appeals to me because I'm a quite self-reflective person, so the idea that stuff is played back to me and I can reflect on it is quite a powerful technique in my world"*

*"I suppose really by talking about things that are impinging on our individual lives at the time, you begin to see a pattern that you didn't see"*

*"I think sometimes it's quite useful, it's part of this taking stock. As I say, I'd be interested eventually with the results and how they all come together and whether I'm the only one that's sort of sitting out there on a limb"*

## **Evidence or Indications of Change Influence**

*"but anything that involves property must be signed off by 'Lucy' (Head of Property) now, something we introduced relatively recently ... Q. Has that happened, Daniel, since sort of March, April time? A. Yes probably, yes, relatively recently, I don't think it happens particularly consistently ..."*

*"I also now have got a series of meetings with a time-table over the next two or three months with every single Head of Service, and it's with myself (Lucy) and [one of her Team Leaders], and we're going through each of the property requirements and talking to each Head of Service to try and tease out of it more of what they see their requirements are for the next three to five years, and how their departments are going to be changing ..."*

*"initially I'm starting up the first set-up meetings which haven't happened before"*

## ***Appendix B***

### ***Conversations Programme***

### ***Interpretation***

The visit programme changed quite regularly in response to the changes in the diaries of the participants. Of the sixteen changes made to the programme, twelve changes were shared by the five Directors, with four changes being made by the two Heads of Service. The two Cabinet Members made no changes to the original appointments which may be a reflection of the discipline borne of their first career experiences as senior corporate business men. The resultant programme of Conversations is at Table B.8 below and is self-explanatory except perhaps for the ‘Conversation Experience’ columns. They show the experience that the researcher had accumulated prior to seeing that Participant for that Part of the Conversation. So, for example, when the researcher met Lucy for their Part 1 of the Conversation, he had already held the Parts 1 of the Conversations with the other eight Participants, as well as having held the Parts 2 of the Conversations with two of the other Participants.

Pseudonym	Title of Post Held	Pre-Brief		Conversation Experience			Part 1 Conversation		Interval		Conversation Experience			Part 2 Conversation		Interval			Conversation Experience			Part 3 Conversation		Total
		Sent		Pt 1	Pt 2	Pt 3	Conversation Date	Changes	Duration	Days	Pt 1	Pt 2	Pt 3	Conversation Date	Changes	Duration	Days	Pt 1	Pt 2	Pt 3	Conversation Date	Changes	Duration	
	<b>Political Leadership</b>																							
Bennie	Cabinet Portfolio Member for Resources 1-hr max requested	24-Jun-05		6	0	0	111430Jul05		01:12:18	50	9	7	5	301300Aug05		01:01:40	37	9	9	7	061300Oct05		01:06:06	03:20:04
Bernie	Cabinet Portfolio Member for Strategic Planning 1-hr max requested	14-Jun-05		1	0	0	171200Jun05		01:07:31	75	9	8	6	311130Aug05		01:09:27	63	9	9	8	021130Nov05		01:12:07	03:29:05
	<b>Management Leadership</b>																							
Daniel	Strategic Director Resources	14-Jun-05		0	0	0	151130Jun05		01:48:42	28	8	0	0	141100Jul05	060800Jul05	01:09:03	13	9	3	0	271130Jul05			
Guy	Strategic Director Community Services	24-Jun-05		3	0	0	291100Jun05	291000Jun05	01:48:42	29	9	4	1	281330Jul05	191330Jul05	01:09:03	33	9	8	5	301400Aug05	281315Jul05	01:39:36	04:37:21
	1-hr max requested													091200Jul05	081200Jul05						191100Jul05			
Jean	Strategic Director Children & Young People	14-Jun-05		4	0	0	081000Jul05	151500Jun05	01:00:33	20	9	6	1	281430Jul05	00:50:59	01:19:25	5	9	6	2	021400Aug05	00:54:56		02:48:28
														211500Jul05	211500Jul05									
Nikita	Head of Schools Policy Performance & Planning	14-Jun-05		2	0	0	171415Jun05	01:29:02	01:19:25	32	8	1	0	190830Jul05	01:16:37	01:19:25	14	9	6	1	021000Aug05	00:59:49		03:48:16
																					020830Aug05	01:38:01		
Lucy	Head of Property Services & Contracts	18-Jun-05		8	2	0	211130Jul05	01:47:06	01:16:37	25	9	6	5	151030Aug05	01:16:37	01:16:37	16	9	9	6	311430Aug05	01:38:01		04:41:44
								251630Jul05																
								281430Jun05																
								131430Jun05																
								02:00:31																
	<b>Avonbury Vale District Council</b>																							
Ellen	Director of Corporate Resources	24-Jun-05		6	0	0	111000Jul05	281000Jun05	01:31:32	14	9	2	0	251000Jul05	01:31:32	01:31:32	15	9	6	3	091200Aug05	01:29:36		05:01:39
																					091000Aug05			
																					01:40:49			
	<b>Wycombe District Council</b>																							
John	Director of Corporate Resources	06-Jul-05		7	0	0	140830Jul05	01:24:48	01:24:48	14	9	3		280830Jul05	01:24:48	01:26:26	14	9	6	4	110830Aug05	01:40:49		04:32:03

Table B.8 – Programme of Visits

The field-work was completed within a four-and-a-half month period. The first Part 1 of the Conversation took place on 15Jun05 with the last of the Part 3 of the Conversations being held on 02Nov05. Only two Participants managed to maintain a two-week interval between Parts 1 and 2 of the Conversations. Of the others, one managed three weeks, four stretched the interval to 4 weeks, and the two Portfolio Members required seven and eleven week intervals. Five Participants managed to retain the interval between Parts 2 and 3 of the Conversations to around two-weeks. Of the other four, one squeezed the gap to just 5 days, with two stretching it to five weeks and one to nine weeks: one of the five week intervals and the nine week interval being the Portfolio Members. Some thirty-eight hours of conversation were recorded as data files. The coded data that I draw upon in providing the perceptions of 'resources' held by Participants was generated using the NVivo software. Table B.9 below, gives, by Participant and by meeting date, the time duration of the Parts 1 Conversations, and the percentage of the word-count attributed to each of them. On average, Participants accounted for 80% of the word-count in these Parts 1 of the Conversations, within a range of 75% to 89%. My time was consumed by the initial welcome, briefing, questioning, and closure. This balance of 80:20 moved to nearer 60:40 for the Parts 2 of the Conversations as I started to provide feedback from the earlier session. The Parts 3 of the Conversations had a ratio nearer to 50:50 as the feedback now included the common themes that had emerged. The relevance of this data to the interpretation of the narratives is that the weight of analysis is with the Parts 1 of the Conversations, with the Parts 2 and 3 of the Conversations being used to re-evaluate and re-assess this prime data and then to synthesise this prime data into a collection of common themes.



	Parts 1 Conversations			
	Day Time	Duration	Word Count	
	Month Year	[hh:mm:ss]	Total	% of Total
Bennie	11 14 30 Jul 05	01:12:18	10,719	79.37%
Bernie	17 12 00 Jun 05	01:07:31	8,781	74.80%
Daniel	15 11 30 Jun 05	01:48:42	19,141	89.07%
Guy	29 11 00 Jun 05	01:00:33	9,823	77.36%
Jean	08 10 00 Jul 05	01:29:02	14,810	75.49%
Nikita	17 14 15 Jun 05	01:47:06	15,770	77.91%
Lucy	21 11 30 Jul 05	02:00:31	18,889	82.65%
Elton	11 10 00 Jul 05	01:24:48	11,634	82.66%
John	14 08 30 Jul 05	01:34:43	12,236	79.73%
<b>Totals</b>		<b>13:25:14</b>	<b>121,803</b>	<b>79.89%</b>

Table B.9 – Parts 1 Conversation Data

In order to accommodate the operational requirements of each participant, nineteen separate journeys were made to the County Hall three of which were via the home of one of the Cabinet Members, and three of which were via one of the participating District Councils. Twenty-six hundred road miles were travelled equating to sixty hours of travelling time.

## ***Appendix C***

### ***Themes Significance Ratings Research Instrument***

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE FINAL PHASE OF THE RESEARCH - ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE OF KEY THEMES

Firstly, I must thank you all wholeheartedly for participating in my research thus far. Following discussion with Ian, I am now providing you with feedback in the form of a chart which lists the ten themes that I found most significant, places against each theme 5 standard statements relating to the successful resolution of the theme, and asks to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement on a response scale of 1 to 6. The request is intended to take only 15-20 minutes of your time to action.

In addition to briefing you on this last request for your input, I thought it might also be helpful to re-state the rationale behind the research and its title, "Aligning resources with business need: Re-evaluation through engaging managers in guided self-reflection". The logic of my research inquiry is that the use of resources is optimised when a support environment is created in such a way that it can consistently meet the changing support needs of the business of the organisation. In this context, a 'Support Environment' is one that is created in direct support of the business through the integration and co-ordination of the three key resources represented by People, Processes and Places. If such optimisation is attempted, then not only could the outcome significantly enhance organisational economy, efficiency and effectiveness, but the route to achieving that outcome could be of even greater business benefit. I refer to such a route, or approach, as one of 'Aligning resources with business need'.

I believe that the technique of this research inquiry, that which you have kindly involved yourselves in, could constitute such an approach to achieving this 'alignment'. The technique seeks to engage senior managers in this notion of the support environment and in pondering its potential to add significant value to organisational performance. I tried to achieve this engagement through three, one-to-one conversations with each of you in your general capacity as senior managers working for the same organisation: In the first session I sought to engage you by asking you to narrate your journey to your current posts, and to reflect on the contribution that 'resources' had made to that journey. The second session was held to seek clarification on certain resource issues, and the third session was used to play back general themes for your interest and comment. I allowed a minimum interval of two weeks between sessions for personal reflection on the previous session by both participant and researcher. The sessions and the self-reflection were 'guided' through my questions being based around those three key resource areas of people, process and place. I believed that this particular approach would enable the desired 'Re-evaluation through engaging managers in guided self-reflection'.

Could I now ask you to open the 'Themes-Significance Ratings' sheet, read each Theme, consider each of the five statements alongside each theme, and to then indicate the strength of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by inserting the appropriate number in its relevant rating column, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = inclined to disagree, 4 = inclined to agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree. Please could you then e-mail the completed sheet directly to me at: [agreen395@aol.com](mailto:agreen395@aol.com), ideally before the end of February. I will, of course, forward copies of my analysis to each of you.

Lastly, I will forward in due course an MSWord document comprising the collection of quotes that I found particularly relevant, grouped under the themes that I felt they belonged to. This is primarily for your personal interest, but if reading them generates thoughts that you would like to share with me, e.g. themes that you judge to be more important than the ten I chose, themes that you feel are missing, etc. then I would be delighted to receive them.

Thank you again for giving so generously of your time. My hope has always been, and remains, that your involvement in this research project has in some way also been of benefit to you.

Best Regards

Andrew

Guided Self-Reflection: A thesis submitted as part of the Doctorate in Business Administration

No.	Key Themes	Theme Significance Ratings	Response Rating					
			1	2	3	4	5	6
		Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing the appropriate number in the appropriate box in line with the statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Inclined to Disagree	Inclined to Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Linking Activities to the Core Business of the Authority - ALL Council activities need to have a clear link to a single agreed statement of the core business of the Authority.	<p>Creating this link will lead to improved use of resources</p> <p>A high priority is being given to creating this link</p> <p>Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of creating this link</p> <p>Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put the creation of this link in context</p> <p>The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help create this link</p> <p>Effecting this change will lead to improved use of resources</p> <p>A high priority is being given to effecting this change</p> <p>Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of effecting this change</p> <p>Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put this change in context</p> <p>The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help effect this change</p> <p>Making this investment will lead to improved use of resources</p> <p>A high priority is being given to making this investment</p> <p>Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of making this investment</p> <p>Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put this investment in context</p> <p>The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help deliver this investment</p> <p>Creating this link will lead to improved use of resources</p> <p>A high priority is being given to creating this link</p> <p>Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of creating this link</p> <p>Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put the creation of this link in context</p> <p>The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help create this link</p> <p>Achieving this understanding will lead to improved use of resources</p> <p>A high priority is being given to achieving this understanding</p> <p>Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of achieving this understanding</p> <p>Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will help achieve this understanding</p> <p>The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help achieve this understanding</p>						
2	Changing from Siloism to Corporateness - the culture of 'siloism' needs to change to one of 'corporateness'							
3	Investing in the Working Environment - more attention needs to be invested at senior level in the evaluation and provision of the working environment							
4	Linking Resources to Corporate Planning - a stronger linkage is needed between Corporate planning and the resources needed to implement the plans							
5	Understanding Customers' Needs - a greater understanding must be achieved of the needs of external customers and internal customers							



Guided Self-Reflection: A thesis submitted as part of the Doctorate in Business Administration

No.	Key Themes	Theme Significance Ratings	Response Rating					
			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Inclined to Disagree	Inclined to Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing the appropriate number in the appropriate box in line with the statement	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	<b>Viewing a Process as a Valuable Asset</b> - a process, not just the outcome of a process, needs to be viewed as a valuable asset in its own right	Establishing this view will lead to improved use of resources A high priority is being given to establishing this view Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of establishing this view Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put the establishment of this view in context The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help establish this view Effecting this change will lead to improved use of resources A high priority is being given to effecting this change Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of effecting this change Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put this change in context The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help effect this change Establishing this provision will lead to improved use of resources A high priority is being given to establishing this provision Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of establishing this provision Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put the establishment of this provision in context The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help establish this provision Effecting this change will lead to improved use of resources A high priority is being given to effecting this change Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of effecting this change Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put this change in context The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help effect this change Creating this link will lead to improved use of resources A high priority is being given to creating this link Adequate resources are available for the high priority task of creating this link Adopting the logic of 'aligning resources with business need' will put the creation of this link in context The technique of 'guided self-reflection' could help create this link						
7	<b>Changing to a Client Ethos</b> - all categories of service providers need to change to a client ethos							
8	<b>Providing Choices</b> - a requirement for the systematic provision of choices needs to be established							
9	<b>Changing from Cost to Value</b> - the culture of 'cost' needs to change to one of 'value'							
10	<b>Linking Major Initiatives</b> - a stronger link is needed between major initiatives							

# Glossary

**CAQDAS** – Computer Assisted Qualitative Analysis Software

**CCT** – Compulsory Competitive Tendering

**COMT** – Chief Officers Management Team

**CPA** – Comprehensive Performance Assessment

**CSS** – Critical Social Science

**DBFO** – Design, Build, Finance, and Operate

**FM** – Facility Management, Facilities Management, Facility Manager, Facilities Manager

**GSR** – Guided Self-reflection

**IMOU** – International Memorandum of Understanding

**ISS** – Interpretive Social Science

**KLOE** – Key Lines of Enquiry

**LAG** – Leader’s Advisory Group

**MBA** – Master’s in Business Administration

**MBO** – Management Buy-Out

**MoD** - Ministry of Defence

**OCO** – Old Council Offices

**PFI** – Private Finance Initiative

**RAF** – Royal Air Force

**SAP** – Systems, Applications and Products in data processing. Now known generically as ‘SAPPHIRE’ under which heading is advice on how to apply the solutions that SAP has implemented for businesses.

**SMT** – Senior Management Team

**The Coasian Insight.** The 1937 paper by (now Professor) Ronald Harry Coase entitled “The Nature of the Firm” represented an insight that transaction costs differences are mainly responsible for market, hierarchy, and hybrid modes of organisation.