

**Advancing Agendas:  
A Grounded Theory of Engagement with Interagency Meetings**

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I , Janet Elizabeth Wood, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.  
Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been  
indicated in the thesis.

Signed .....

## ABSTRACT

In the UK, the development of integrated children's services over the past six years has led to an increased need for public sector managers to attend strategic, interagency meetings. However, there is little research in this field that can be used to support managers in ensuring positive outcomes from such meetings. The aim of this research was to identify the main concerns of managers attending strategic, interagency meetings and to develop a theoretical framework that can account for the ways in which they resolve these concerns. The research used classic grounded theory, an inductive methodology that results in a set of integrated, conceptual hypotheses that are grounded in the data. Data were obtained primarily from interviews and observation of meetings. The main concern of managers attending interagency meetings was identified as being to achieve the maximum personal value from engagement with the meetings. This main concern is resolved via the core category of 'advancing agendas', which accounts for most of the variation in the behaviour of the participants. The grounded theory of Advancing Agendas explains the social strategic process by which meeting participants: identify a personal agenda, that is, an understanding of what they want to get out of their engagement with the meetings; plan a strategy with which to advance this agenda; engage in the meetings and evaluate the outcomes of their actions. Advancing Agendas provides a framework that can be used by those who are chairing or attending interagency meetings, to support them in achieving the desired outcomes. Specifically, it can be used to understand the impact of meeting participants' differing motivations for attending meetings, to recognise situations in which group members' personal agendas conflict with the intended function of the meetings, and to identify ways of enabling full participation and engagement.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will:

- Describe the author's personal interest in the area of interagency working.
- Set out the socio-political context for the research.
- Discuss the impact of this context on speech and language therapy services.
- State the aims of the research.
- Describe and justify the structure of the thesis.

### 1.1 Background: the author's interest in interagency working

The author is a speech and language therapist (SLT) with experience of working within multi-agency settings. During the early part of her career, this included joint working with colleagues from education, social services and the voluntary sector, as well as with colleagues from other disciplines within the health service. Later on, the author was involved in working within a speech and language therapy service to mainstream schools during the time that it was being set up, evaluated and refined (Shaw, Luscombe and Ostime 1995). The author (née Ostime) took a key role within this process and thus developed an interest in understanding the factors that both support and hinder interagency working.

During the latter part of the 1990s, the author had experience of managing the speech and language therapy service to mainstream schools and, within this role, she worked closely with managers from other agencies, particularly education. One of her responsibilities was to set up a new service to support the communication needs of pupils with special educational needs who were attending secondary schools. This role provided first hand experience of the opportunities and challenges associated with interagency working at a strategic level. At around the same time, she embarked on a Masters degree and chose to conduct her research project on an evaluation of one specific aspect of joint working; that is, the effectiveness of training provided by SLTs to learning support assistants who are working in schools (Wood 1998).

Combining her interest in interagency working with new-found research skills, the author went on to take up a research officer post, working on a funded project that aimed to identify the knowledge and training needs of a wide range of early years practitioners; develop a training course to meet these needs, and evaluate its outcomes (Wood, Wright and Stackhouse 2000, Wright, Stackhouse and Wood 2008).

The course that was developed had a strong emphasis on promoting and supporting interagency working. Whilst working on this project, it became apparent to the author that, although good practice in interagency working often exists between individual practitioners, this can be blocked by the policies and systems that are set by managers. Furthermore, the literature indicated that there had been little research into interagency working at a strategic level (Law et al 2000). The research that had been conducted in this area relied on managers reporting on their own practices and the results of this research were, in some respects, conflicting. For example, education and speech and language therapy managers from the same locality sometimes provided different accounts of the nature and success of their joint working (Law et al 2000).

The combination of these experiences led the author to set out on her doctoral research, with an interest in examining strategic level, interagency working. A decision was made to focus on meetings, as this is where much of the joint working at this level takes place. The following section describes the socio-political context of interagency working that was changing and developing at a rapid pace during the early stages of this research.

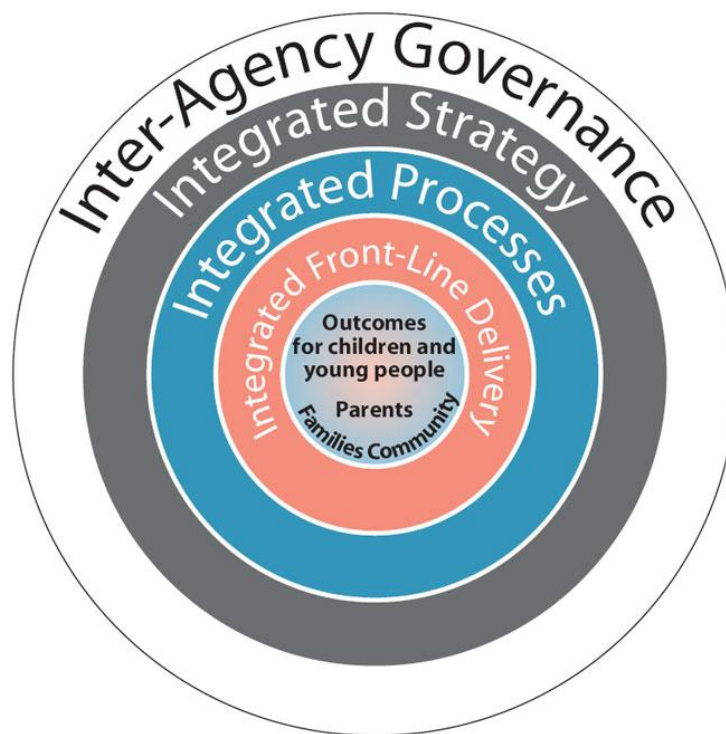
## **1.2 The socio-political context of interagency working**

### **1.2.1 Every child matters: the development of integrated children's services**

In 2003, the government published a green paper entitled 'Every Child Matters' (DfES 2003). This paper formed part of the response to the inquiry into the Victoria Climbié child abuse case. Within it, the government proposed a range of measures to reform and improve children's care. The overall aim was to ensure that all children achieve positive outcomes in the five areas that were felt to constitute well being, namely: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well being. In order to achieve this aim, there was a proposal to focus on action in four areas:

- supporting parents and carers
- early intervention and effective protection
- accountability and integration (locally, regionally and nationally)
- workforce reform.

Following a period of widespread consultation and debate in relation to the green paper, a guidance document, 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' (DfES 2004) was published and the Children's Act 2004 was passed in parliament. The latter of these provided a legal framework within which the recommendations from 'Change for Children' could be implemented. Central to the new policy was a requirement for integrated children's services at a local, regional and national level and a range of systems and structures were put into place in order to achieve this. At the level of the local authority, there was a requirement for the development of 'children's trusts': organisations with a strategic overview of the services for children and young people in that locality. An 'onion' model was created (see figure 1), to illustrate the ways in which children's trusts would support the intended outcome of well being for all children.



**Figure 1: Onion model of a “children’s trust in action”(DfES 2004)**

The elements of this diagram are explained in more detail within the 'Change for Children' document (DfES 2004) and these will be summarised in this section. The main organisational change at a front-line level was the development of Sure Start children's centres and extended schools. These built on the success of the Sure Start services that had been introduced following the general election of 1997 and fulfilled the philosophy of 'on the spot' services, where practitioners could work in multi-agency teams to deliver localised, integrated support to all children and families. Children's centres and extended schools were also designed to enable services to be built around

the needs of children, young people and families, as opposed to the previous focus on professional and service boundaries. Additionally, there was a requirement for a lead professional to be identified for any child that was known to more than one service, in order to maintain an overview of the case and to ensure seamless multi-agency service delivery.

It was recognised that there would be a need for integrated processes, in order to support the delivery of integrated front-line services. There was, therefore, a new requirement for the effective sharing of information between service providers. Since the publication of 'Change for Children' (DfES 2004), this has been operationalised as the 'information, referral and tracking' (IRT) system. In addition to IRT, a common assessment framework (CAF) was designed. This framework aimed, among other things, to reduce the number and duration of assessments that any one child was subjected to from different service providers, via the appropriate sharing of information.

In relation to the next layer out on the onion diagram, 'integrated strategy', there was recognition of the need for joint planning and commissioning of services. A requirement was set for each local authority to develop a strategic 'Children and Young People's Plan' (CYPP), to identify local priorities and plan relevant service developments. This was set within the final layer of the onion diagram, 'strategic governance', recognising that, across each of the planned changes, there needed to be robust arrangements for interagency cooperation and clear lines of accountability. There was a requirement for each local authority to appoint a Director of Children's Services, to oversee the job of rolling out the requirements of the Children Act (2004) in their locality. The director of children's services chairs the 'Children and Young Persons Strategic Partnership Board' and oversees the development and implementation of the CYPP. There was also a duty for each local authority to establish a 'safeguarding children's board', to replace the previous, non statutory child protection committees. At the time of writing, there are proposed legislative changes which will make the CYPP the responsibility of the Children's Trust Board, but these changes have not yet taken effect (DH and DCSF 2009).

### **1.2.2 Further relevant policy and legislation**

A move towards more integrated working had begun before the publication of the Every Child Matters green paper (DfES 2003) and has been strengthened since. In relation to changes that are relevant to speech and language therapy (SLT) services, there was a gradual shift towards joint working between SLT services and schools from the time

of the publication of the Education Act (1981). At this point, the term 'special educational needs' was first recognised and there was a move towards integrated education for children with such needs. This move was strengthened by the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfEE<sup>1</sup>1994) and the government green paper 'Excellence for all Children' (DfEE 1997), which resulted in the revised Code of Practice (DfES 2001) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001). The latter of these moved forward the agenda for inclusion of children with special educational needs and also provided a framework for developing partnerships between education and other agencies. At the same time, there was ongoing reform of the health service. The white paper 'The New NHS: Modern, Dependable' (DH 1997) proposed an NHS based on 'integrated care'; where health professionals collaborated with each other and with social care staff, in order to provide local, 'on the spot' services. This was followed by the Health Act (1999), which provided a framework for pooling budgets between health and relevant local authority services, opening the way for integrated management structures and joint commissioning of services.

These developments set the scene for the Every Child Matters green paper (DfES 2003), as was described in section 1.2.1. Since the publication of that paper, further policy and guidance has served to strengthen the position of integrated children's services. In 2004, the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services (DH 2004) was published. This recognised the role of the health service in moving forward the Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme (DfES 2004). In doing this, it set down standards for children's health care that specified the need for integrated, child and family centred services.

One of the proposals within the Change for Children programme (DfES 2004) was to appoint a Children's Commissioner for England and this was fulfilled in March 2005. The Children's Commissioner is independent of government and has the role of representing and promoting awareness of the voices of children and young people. The Commissioner is expected to work closely with professionals from all relevant agencies, within the framework of the Change for Children programme, in fulfilling his duties.

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<sup>1</sup> The government department that is responsible for education has had three titles over the past 10 years: Department for Education and Employment (DfEE); Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCFS). Each of these titles is used within this section, depending on the date of the publication that is being referenced.

In light of the rapid pace of change, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) commissioned a position paper, to represent the profession's view and position regarding the role of the SLT within the context of integrated children's services (Gascoigne 2006). This paper set out 15 recommendations within four key areas: delivering effective support, planning for maximum impact, systems for strategy and developing the workforce. Of most relevance to this research are the following recommendations:

- SLT service planning should always be carried out in partnership with other agencies.
- In each local authority area there should be an SLT professional lead for children, who can interpret national policy and ensure partnership working occurs in terms of integrated commissioning of SLT provision, strategic planning and operational delivery. The professional lead for children should be a member of key strategic, multi-agency planning groups and be empowered to make key strategic decisions on behalf of local SLT services.
- The role of the SLT must be seen within the wider workforce.
- Managers and service leads should work together with their allied health professional colleagues, as well as colleagues from education and social care, in the development of new roles, in particular the development of specialist advisory posts and cross-agency posts.
- Management opportunities across agencies and across professional boundaries should be developed.
- The challenges of the changing context mean that business and entrepreneurial skills sets will become more relevant for senior managers. Excellent communication and negotiation skills should also be developed by all SLT service leads as part of a portfolio of leadership competence.

The next government publication that was relevant to the context of interagency working was 'The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures' (DCFS 2007). This policy document strengthens the government's position relating to integrated children's services, by further specifying the need for and necessary nature of, multi-agency 'teams around the child'. This document makes specific reference to the need for SLT services as part of this multi-agency team. The Children's Plan (DCSF 2007) also makes reference to the, then forthcoming, Bercow review into the provision of services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). The final report from the Bercow review was published in July 2008 (DCSF

2008 b). The report clearly recognises the fact that communication skills are of central importance to a child's overall well being. It sets services for children with SLCN within the context of integrated children's services and makes a total of 40 recommendations in five areas. Of particular relevance to this research is the recognition that there should be interagency working in relation to the surveillance, identification and support of children with SLCN; that children's speech, language and communication needs should be prioritised by children's centres; that there is a need to identify best practice in relation to joint working and commissioning and that there should be a mechanism for monitoring the effectiveness of Children's Trusts in providing for the needs of children with SLCN. In particular, it is recommended that each Children's Trust appoints a senior member of the governing body to lead on speech, language and communication needs in the local area. The vast majority of the recommendations within the Bercow report were accepted by central government and their plan to meet these recommendations was set out in 'Better Communication: an action plan to improve services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs' (DCSF 2008 c).

From the perspective of health services, there have been a further two relevant publications. The first of these is 'High Quality Care for All: the NHS Next Stage Review', authored by Lord Dazi (DH 2008). This sets out a new strategy for improving the quality of health care services and recognises the need to support the personal professional development of health care staff as part of this. It also reinforces the policy of integrated services. The second publication, which arose directly from the NHS Next Stage Review is 'Framing the Contribution of Allied Health Professionals (DH 2008). Within this, there is a commitment to developing a high quality workforce in which allied health professionals (AHPs) are able to act as practitioners, partners and, where appropriate, leaders. Acting as partners relates to integrating care across professional boundaries and acting as leaders relates to developing leadership skills that are transferable from clinical and operational levels to a strategic level. This further underpins the need for speech and language therapy service managers to develop the skills required to work within interagency strategic partnerships.

Finally, one of the commitments within the Children's Plan (DCSF 2007) was that the Department of Health and the Department for Children, Schools and Families should jointly produce a Child Health Strategy. The publication of this was delayed by nearly a year but 'Healthy Lives, Brighter Futures: the Strategy for Children and Young People's Health (DH and DCSF 2009) was finally published in February 2009. One of the



commitments within this is a “system-level transformation” which is operationalised as including: the strengthening of local accountability arrangements for children’s health, by making Children’s Trust boards a statutory requirement, with increased responsibilities that include ownership of the local Children and Young Person’s Plan; improving the engagement of GPs within Children’s Trusts; the introduction of a guide to support the joint commissioning of child health services, primarily between local authorities and NHS primary care trusts (PCTs) and, lastly, the promotion of better joint use of data across organisations.

### **1.3 The impact of integrated children’s services on speech and language therapy**

The legislation and policy documents that have been reviewed in section 1.2 set out a number of new standards for SLT services. There is a requirement for service managers and clinicians to ensure that children and families are at the centre of the service, with SLT being provided as part of a multi-agency team around them. There is also an expectation that therapists should focus on prevention of speech, language and communication difficulties, as well as intervention; working within the context of children’s centres and extended schools.

With respect to the duties of service managers, the context has been set for an increase in the joint commissioning of services and for involvement in strategic planning of children’s services as a whole, not just the speech and language therapy service. In order to do this, SLT service managers should expect to be represented at interagency strategic forums, either directly or indirectly. Conversely, these managers should anticipate the involvement of partner agencies in the strategic development of their own services. Finally, managers need to consider continuing professional development in relation to the skills required for successful interagency working, including business skills and advanced communication and negotiation skills.

As yet, there is no specific research into the actual impact of the integrated services agenda on SLTs and SLT services. However, interviews conducted with five SLT service managers as part of this research, indicate that these managers are all, to a greater or lesser extent, involved in strategic, interagency forums. These interviews also indicate that some SLT services are being reviewed and re-designed, in order to fit into the new context of integrated children’s services.

## **1.4 Aims of the research**

This research aims to develop a grounded theory that explains the main concerns of public sector managers attending strategic, interagency meetings and the ways in which they resolve these concerns. To achieve this aim, the researcher used grounded theory (GT) methodology. Data were collected from speech and language therapy service managers and from members of a steering group. This group was meeting to facilitate the re-design of a speech and language therapy service for children under five years, in response to the agenda of integrated children's services.

## **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, with content as follows:

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Chapter One has presented the background for the research. It described the author's personal interest in the topic of interagency working and set this within a socio-political context. Chapter One also set out the aims of the research and this section describes the structure of the thesis.

### **Chapter 2: Selection and use of grounded theory methodology**

Chapter Two provides a detailed account of the nature of grounded theory methodology, the reasons for selecting it for this research and the implications of this for the way in which the research was conducted and written up. This chapter should be particularly useful for the reader who is unfamiliar with grounded theory methodology.

Chapter Two also serves to support the reader in understanding the structure of the thesis: as grounded theory is an inductive method, the researcher has to 'stay open' to what emerges from the data. One of the ways of achieving this is to avoid reading the literature until after the initial formulation of the theory. The literature is then used as a source of further data, for comparison with data collected within the research. In order to reflect this, the existing literature is reviewed within Chapter Five, after the grounded theory chapter (Chapter Four) of this thesis. Chapter Two explains the rationale for this in more detail.

### **Chapter 3: Method**

Chapter Three provides details of the methods used in the research. It describes the way in which data were selected for analysis, the researcher's role within the research process and the methods used to collect and code the data and to formulate and write up the theory. In addition, Chapter Three makes reference to appendices that contain examples of coded data and memos, in order to support the reader in understanding how the methods were used to derive the theory of Advancing Agendas.

### **Chapter 4: The grounded theory of Advancing Agendas**

Chapter Four sets out the grounded theory of Advancing Agendas that has emerged from this research. Advancing Agendas explains the process by which participants in strategic, interagency meetings, resolve their main concern of achieving the maximum personal value from their engagement with the meetings. The chapter begins with an overview of the process of Advancing Agendas and then explains each stage of it and the interaction between these stages. Chapter Four represents the main contribution to the literature from this research.

### **Chapter 5: Comparison with the literature**

Chapter Five provides a review and critical evaluation of the existing literature in relation to the concepts that have emerged from this research. This literature is used to either further support aspects of the theory or, where appropriate, to extend or modify it. Literature relating to partnership working and participants' behaviour in strategic meetings is reviewed and, where appropriate, this is supplemented by literature from other substantive areas in which similar concepts have been identified.

### **Chapter 6: Implications for professional practice**

Chapter Six contains a discussion of the implications of Advancing Agendas for professional practice. It brings together outcomes of the research with findings from the literature review, in order to make recommendations for managers who are chairing or participating in strategic, interagency meetings. These recommendations are then considered in relation to suggestions for continuing professional development, followed by a brief discussion of the broader implications of the research.

### **Chapter 7: Discussion and conclusions**

Chapter Seven begins with a discussion of what this thesis adds to the existing literature and this is followed by a critical evaluation of the research, with specific

reference to ways in which the methods that were used both did and did not match the tenets of GT methodology. The penultimate section of Chapter Seven examines future possible directions for research in this area and the concluding section summarises the key messages to be taken from this research.

## 2.0 SELECTION AND USE OF GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY

This chapter will:

- Describe the nature of grounded theory and compare it to other methodologies.
- Explain the implications of the nature of grounded theory, in relation to the way in which the research is conducted and reported.
- Set out the general issues that might be considered when selecting a methodology.
- Relate these issues to the selection of grounded theory methodology.
- Describe the history of grounded theory research, including the development of, so called, 'other types' of grounded theory.
- Provide a set of criteria for judging a 'good' grounded theory.
- Review the use of grounded theory within speech and language therapy.
- Summarise the justification for selecting classic grounded theory for this research.

### 2.1 Grounded theory compared with other methodologies

This section will describe the nature of classic grounded theory (GT) (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978, 1998) and compare it to other methodologies. This will support the reader in understanding the later sections of this chapter, which set out the justification for the use of GT methodology in this research.

#### 2.1.1 The nature of grounded theory

GT is "the systematic generating {sic} of theory from data" (Glaser 1978, p2). The aim is to generate a set of carefully grounded concepts that are integrated into hypotheses and organised around a core category. These hypotheses should account for much of the behaviour that is seen in a substantive area. They identify the main concern of the participants and the ways in which they continually process this concern (Glaser 1978, 1998, 2003). The specific methods that are used will be described in detail in Chapter Three but, briefly, they include the simultaneous processes of: open coding (identifying initial concepts and properties of concepts by comparing incident to incident and noting patterns), memoing (writing down thoughts about the data), selective coding (coding for concepts that relate to the core variable), theoretical sampling (using the concepts that have already emerged to make decisions about further data collection), theoretical coding (identifying the ways in which concepts relate to each other, in order to create

an integrated theory), sorting (organising memos into piles to support the development of the theory) and writing (using the sorted memos to write up the theory).

GT is a general method that can be used with any type of data: qualitative, quantitative or a combination of each of these (Glaser 1978, 1992). However, it has mainly been used with qualitative data and it is for this use that it is best known. The methodology is primarily inductive, in that the researcher enters the field without any preconceived concepts or hypotheses and allows the theory to emerge from the data. However, there is also a deductive element to the method in that, once initial data has been collected and analysed, the researcher follows a process of theoretical sampling, that is, using the initial analysis to deduce where to go next for further data collection (Glaser 1978, 1998).

Due to the fact that GT is mainly used with qualitative data, it is frequently misconceived as being a general qualitative data analysis (QDA) method. However, this has led to a number of researchers 'remodelling' the GT method, by combining some aspects of it with other QDA methods (Glaser 2003, Glaser and Holton 2004). Glaser has argued strongly against this remodelling, maintaining that GT is a complete method that "takes the researcher from the first day in the field to a finished written theory" (Glaser 2003, p 4). He states that it is not meaningful to talk about using a method that is 'based on GT' or that 'uses elements of GT'. There are fundamental differences between GT and general QDA methods and these differences mean that the two methods cannot be combined in a meaningful way: at least, not if the intended outcome is a conceptual grounded theory (Glaser 2003). The differences between GT and general QDA methods will be described below.

### **2.1.2 Conceptualisation versus description**

The key difference between GT and general QDA methods is the fact that GT aims to conceptualise the data, whereas general QDA aims to describe it. This difference has far reaching consequences and Glaser has written an entire book devoted to explaining them (Glaser 2001).

GT concepts are formed by naming patterns within the data, using the method of constant comparison. Constant comparison is a central tenet of the GT method. It involves comparing each incident within the data with other incidents, identifying the patterns that emerge and labelling these patterns with conceptual codes (also known as categories). The constant comparison of incident to incident supports the

researcher in identifying the properties of these categories and, as categories emerge, these are compared to successive incidents and, eventually, to each other. In order to do this, the researcher asks three questions of each incident in the data: 'what category does this incident indicate?', or 'what property of what category does this incident indicate?' and 'what is the participant's main concern?' (Glaser 1998, p 140). This process results in concepts that operate at a number of different levels. Hence, each category is a concept that is defined by its properties that are, themselves, lower level concepts. The categories are then compared to each other in order to identify higher level concepts, the highest of which will be the core category: the one that explains the majority of the variation in the behaviour of the participants and which can be used to integrate the rest of the concepts in a set of conceptual hypotheses (Glaser 1978, 1998). A more detailed description of this process will be presented in section 3.4.

The alternative method, as used in most qualitative research, is to identify themes within the data and to describe these themes, using examples from the data itself. This description may sometimes include the identification of concepts but these concepts are then described, rather than being compared to each other in the hierarchical manner that is the hallmark of a GT. In order to be able to generate a conceptual theory, the GT researcher must guard against such 'conceptual description'. At the same time, it is important to avoid the opposite problem of naming a concept on the basis of a single incident, rather than on a pattern that emerges from the comparison of several incidents.

Each incident within the data occurs within a specific context, that is, it will correspond to a particular time, place and person (Glaser 1998, 2003). However, when incidents are compared to each other in order to form a concept, this correspondence is lost, such that the concept is abstract of time, place and person. This property of conceptualisation can best be illustrated via the use of an example, as follows: a GT researcher may find that the concept that labels one pattern of behaviour within meetings is 'engaging' (see Chapter Four for this concept within the theory of Advancing Agendas). The concept of 'engaging' is formed from the comparison of a number of incidents within meetings. Each of these incidents is tied to a particular person, engaging in a particular meeting that took place in a particular setting and at a particular time. However, 'engaging' does not describe or explain any one of these incidents, but rather it explains something about the variation in the way that people might engage in meetings in general. Hence, 'engaging' becomes a concept with a number of properties, that can vary in a range of ways (for example, there can be 'Full

Engagers', 'Opportunist Engagers' and 'Non Engagers'). The concept of engaging does not describe a particular person, within the context of a particular incident, but rather a type of behaviour that may be observed within meetings in general.

The abstract nature of conceptualisation leads to an important feature of GT that sets it aside from other forms of QDA: the role of accuracy within data collection and analysis. Qualitative research that is based on description needs to be accurate in order to be considered valid and reliable. Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000), set out two ways in which this is the case. Firstly, the research report must accurately reflect the data, by avoiding bias and incomplete reporting and, secondly, the accuracy of what participants say or write in interviews and questionnaires must be taken into consideration, both in designing interviews and questionnaires and in analysing the data that arises from them. The former of these issues, accurate reporting of the data by the researcher, will be discussed below. The latter of them, the accuracy of what participants report, will be discussed later, within section 2.1.4.

In GT research, where the aim is conceptualisation, not description, accuracy does not have the same meaning as it does in general QDA research. A description can be accurate or inaccurate, complete or incomplete. A concept, on the other hand, labels a pattern. As long as the researcher is using the method of constant comparison and is being honest in the process of grounding the concepts in the data, then a concept just 'is'. It does not matter how many incidents have been examined in order to develop the concept, as long as there are enough of them to indicate a pattern. This means that the researcher can miss some of the incidents and the pattern will still emerge, assuming that it is a real pattern. Hence, there is no need for 'complete coverage' in capturing and analysing the data (Glaser 1998, 2003). This has broader implications for the way that GT data is collected and analysed and these will be discussed within section 2.2.

### **2.1.3 Openness versus forcing**

GT methodology requires the researcher to remain open to what emerges from the data. In practice, this means that the researcher has to "enter the research field with as few predetermined ideas as possible" (Glaser 1978, p2). Predetermined ideas could constitute a number of different things, including: professional concerns, a priori hypotheses, preconceived or pre-existent categories and theoretical frameworks. The presence of any of these predetermined ideas can cause the researcher to force the data, resulting in a theory that is not truly grounded because the concepts have not



earned their relevancy (Glaser 1978, 1998, 2003). Each of them is discussed in more detail below.

Professional concerns are issues that are well known, by members of a professional group, to be 'of concern' to that profession. A professional concern can derail a GT researcher who is a member of that group: there is a temptation to set out specifically to look for evidence of it, to preconceive the participants' main concern and hence block the discovery of a different, perhaps more real concern in the substantive area that is being studied. Similarly, a priori hypotheses are those that the researcher sets out specifically to test. Even where the researcher intends to take an inductive approach to research, it is possible to start off with an expectation of what might be discovered, perhaps because of a professional concern or because of what is already known from previous research. It is important that the GT researcher suspends this knowledge in order to avoid preconceptions (Glaser 1992, 1998).

Preconceived or pre-existent categories tend to be those that are prevalent within sociological and psychological research. For example, categories such as gender, social class, education and ethnicity. For researchers who are used to considering the effect of these factors, it can be tempting to ask questions such as 'what is the effect of gender on this phenomenon?' However, within GT research, this approach is considered to be another way of forcing the data. If these variables are relevant, they will emerge during the process of constant comparison and earn their place in the final theory. If not, they should be ignored (Glaser 1998, 2003).

The final potential source of forcing is that of preconceived theoretical frameworks. These can take a range of different forms, for example: a philosophical perspective, such as constructivism or feminism; a theory emanating from the current research literature, such as a theory of management or social interaction or, finally, a preconceived theoretical code, such as consequences of events (please see Chapter Three for further explanation of theoretical coding within GT research). Each of these theoretical frameworks would encourage the researcher to interpret the data in a specific way, hence forcing the data, rather than allowing the theory to emerge from it (Glaser 1992, 1988, 2003).

The GT approach of staying open to what emerges from the data can be contrasted to the generally accepted approach within QDA methodology. In the latter, the researcher is usually expected to start out with a theoretical framework, within which the data will

be analysed. Robson (1993) suggests that, even in inductive research, the researcher will start out with a tentative hypothesis that can be used to develop the framework for the enquiry. Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994), talk about setting out 'intellectual bins' that represent the categories that are likely to emerge within the research. These bins should be selected from a knowledge of current research and should be used to support the researcher in deciding which variables are likely to be most meaningful within their own research. Although this approach is inductive to a degree, it is unlikely to result in new theory as its main premise is to test existing ideas, rather than to generate new ones. Overall, then, GT can be described as being more inductive than general QDA methods. The requirement to be 'open to the data' in GT is important from the outset and is a fundamental part of each stage of the method.

#### **2.1.4 All is data**

The third main difference between GT and general QDA is the GT dictum 'all is data' (Glaser 1978, 1998, 2001). This dictum can be taken at two distinct levels. Firstly, it refers to data from any source, for example, interviews, observations, written documents, personal accounts etc. Secondly, it refers to everything that surrounds the data, for example how and why they are being presented and the conditions that they are being presented in. Glaser suggests that there are at least four types of data: baseline, properline, interpreted and vague (Glaser 1998, p9). By this suggestion, he means that some data will be given honestly: the best account of a situation that a participant is able to give (baseline data). However, other data will be based on what the participant thinks he should say (properline data) or on that person's professional interpretation of a situation (interpreted data). Finally, a participant may have little personal reason for talking to the researcher and may only provide vague or incomplete data (vague data).

In GT, it does not matter what type of data the researcher obtains, or even if there is a mix of different types of data. Part of the job of the GT researcher is to work out what type of data they have (Glaser 1998). Glaser (2003, p15) writes

*"the data is not to be disavowed as not objective, as subject(ive), as obvious, as constructed etc. There is always a perception of a perception as the conceptual level rises. We are all stuck with a 'human' view of what is going on and hazy concepts and descriptions about it. GT procedures sharpen the concepts systematically."*

In other words, all data is just one person's perception of a situation. Whether or not that perception is accurate or inaccurate, complete or incomplete does not matter. The researcher can use objectively observed data (either qualitative or quantitative), 'constructed' data or data that takes a particular political perspective (such as feminist or socialist). If data collection was restricted to one of these types, the researcher would be allowing a particular theoretical framework to be forced on the data (as discussed in section 2.1.3) and this would, therefore, no longer fit the tenets of GT. Whatever the nature of the data, the GT researcher is required to look for patterns, through the process of constant comparison, to conceptualise the participants' main concerns and the ways in which they resolve these concerns. This process has to start from a neutral perspective in order to ensure that the concepts that are discovered have earned their place in the theory (Glaser 1998).

In general QDA research, however, the honesty of what participants report is felt to be of greater significance when it comes to collecting and analysing data. Cohen et al (2000), for example, state that "in qualitative data, validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved". Additionally, much QDA research will occur within a specific research paradigm and will therefore assume a particular theoretical perspective, such as a constructivism, feminism etc. (see section 2.3.1 for more detail on research paradigms).

## **2.2 The nature of grounded theory: implications for conducting and reporting the research**

In section 2.1, the key features of GT methodology were established, that is: conceptualisation, openness to the emergence of theory from data and the axiom 'all is data'. The first two of these features each has specific implications for the way in which GT research is conducted and reported, which have not already been addressed within this chapter. These implications will be described in this section.

### **2.2.1 Implications arising from the nature of conceptualisation**

As has already been stated (see section 2.1.2), the concepts that are derived from the data within GT research are abstract of time, place and person. This means that the theory that emerges is also of an abstract nature. The emergent theory is a set of conceptual hypotheses that are open to modification, if new data emerges to support such modification. However, a grounded theory does not just explain how one group of participants resolve a concern, but rather how that concern might be resolved by

anyone, in any place and at any time. In view of this fact, Glaser (2003) urges GT researchers to avoid using excessive 'face sheet data'. By this, he means detailed biographic details of the participants of the research. He argues that this level of detail encourages description, rather than conceptualisation and is irrelevant to the emergent theory, in that it appears to tie it to a specific participant group. He also points out that the use of such data goes some way towards reducing anonymity.

Another implication of the nature of conceptualisation is the fact that complete coverage is not necessary when obtaining data (see section 2.1.2). This means that it is not necessary to tape record and transcribe interviews but that, instead, interviews and observations should be followed by contemporaneous field notes (Glaser 1998, 2003). Glaser (2003) points out a number of problems associated with taping. These are, firstly, the fact that taping encourages the researcher to collect excessive amounts of data, often around categories that have already been theoretically saturated. This wastes time and can prevent the theory from becoming delimited to the key concepts. It can also encourage description, rather than conceptualisation of the data. Secondly, taping and then transcribing prevents the researcher from being able to code and memo the data straight away, as is preferable, because the process of transcription takes time. Finally, there is a concern that taped interviews just become words, devoid of the context and additional comments that are a part of field notes. Glaser (2003) dismisses concerns over 'not remembering what was said' by suggesting that what is important will always be remembered, as memories will be triggered by the process of constant comparison. He also points out that key concepts will appear elsewhere in the data anyway and so would not be lost forever even if they were forgotten in the context of one interview or observation.

As well as dissuading researchers from the use of taping, Glaser (2003) advises against the use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) for data handling and analysis. He presents a long list of reasons for this: firstly, as is the case with taping, there is a feeling that the use of computers can encourage the collection of excessive data, hence blocking the process of delimiting the theory. Secondly, also similar to the issues that relate to taping, is the fact that computers can block the flow of coding and analysis, by demanding that the researcher waits until s/he is sitting at the computer to work. In GT research, it is important that a researcher stops to write memos about the data whenever relevant thoughts occur, and this might not be at the time that the computer is turned on. Finally, there are a wide range of reasons that relate to the fact that CAQDAS programmes are, according to Glaser,

more suited the descriptive work of QDA than they are to GT. For example, CAQDAS programmes are set up to be able to handle large amounts of data, to auto-code according to pre-determined categories and to retrieve data containing specific words or phrases, none of which are required within GT. There is a feeling that these programmes encourage the use of pre-selection of codes and the over fracturing of data. Additionally, there is the fact that some programmes do not allow for the flexibility required to change the names of codes as one moves from open to selective coding. In relation to data analysis, there is a feeling that computers force a superficial organisation of the data, hence blocking an evolving maturity in memos and pre-determining the process of theoretical coding.

Despite his concerns regarding the use of CAQDAS, Glaser (2003) does acknowledge that computers are now an accepted part of everyday life and that increasing numbers of researchers expect to be able to use them to support their work, in more ways than just word processing. In response to the concern of preventing computers from eroding and remodelling GT to general QDA, he states (2003, p43)

*“the resolution ... is logically in the hands of youth who are unbelievably computer fluent, who are not formed in competing QDA methods and who do GT as I have laid it out, often enough to experience its procedures sufficiently to weave them into computer software with minimal to no eroding.”*

The current researcher asserts that this situation is possible and did make use of CAQDAS for this research. The way in which it was used is be described in Chapter Three and there is a justification for this decision in Chapter Seven.

### **2.2.2 Implications arising from the requirement to ‘stay open’**

The second key feature of GT methodology is the requirement to stay open to what emerges from the data and restrict the impact of any preconceived ideas. Some of the implications arising from this have already been acknowledged (see section 2.1.3). However, there are further implications and these will be discussed in this section.

Firstly, initial interviews should be fully open. As it is not relevant to pre-judge the participants’ main concern, the researcher needs to listen to them, in order to discover what is important to them. (Glaser 1998, 2001) Of course, the researcher does not necessarily ask “what is your main concern?” but must ask a similarly open question, such as, “tell me about your experiences with ...”. During later stages of the research,

when a core concept has been identified and theoretical sampling has begun, it is possible to use semi-structured interviews, in order to develop a deeper understanding of the properties of concepts that have already emerged.

The second additional implication of the requirement to stay open is related to the use of the literature within the research process. This is something that Glaser has written on extensively (Glaser 1978, 1998, 2001, 2003). His position is that literature in the substantive area of the research should only be read later on, once the theory is beginning to be integrated. This is so that the researcher does not become preconceived by concepts arising from previous research. It is also the case that, until that point, it is not evident which literature should be reviewed, as the researcher does not know exactly what will emerge from the data. Reading later saves time spent reviewing irrelevant literature and is a faster process, as the researcher can skim through sections that did not relate to the emerging grounded theory. Once the researcher does review the literature, Glaser suggests that it should be read for ideas, by conceptualising what has been written by others. The emerging grounded theory can then be related to the literature through the integration of ideas. Previous literature can also be used as a source of additional data for the current research.

## **2.3 Selecting a methodology: general considerations**

Research methods text books (for example, Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, Creswell 1998, Miles and Huberman 1994, Robson 1993) suggest a range of issues that should be considered when selecting the methodology for a particular piece of research. These include: considering one's ontological and epistemological position; considering the relationship between methodology and the research question and, finally, assessing any practical limitations. Each of these considerations will be discussed below and then, in section 2.4, there will be a discussion of their relevance to GT research.

### **2.3.1 Considering one's ontological and epistemological position**

Ontology is the study of the nature of reality. It seeks to answer the question: 'does reality exist independently of people's conceptions of it?' or, alternatively, 'is reality something that is created within people's minds?' These opposing ontological positions can be described as 'realist' and 'relativist', respectively. Epistemology is the study of the nature of knowledge. Opposing epistemological positions are described as 'objectivist' and 'subjectivist'. The objectivist position is that knowledge exists in its own

right and can be acquired, whereas the subjectivist position is that knowledge has to be experienced, that there is no single truth but, rather, a range of different truths, as conceived by different people.

Ontology and epistemology are closely linked, as a researcher's ontological beliefs constrain their possible epistemological beliefs and vice versa (Guba and Lincoln 1998). So, for example, someone who takes a realist ontological position will be likely to hold objectivist epistemological beliefs. This is because, if someone believes that there is one, true reality, they are also likely to believe that it is possible to know about and understand that reality objectively. Conversely, someone who believes that reality is created within people's minds is likely to take the position that knowledge is subjective and is dependent on the 'knower'. The reason that it is generally important for researchers to consider their ontological and epistemological position, is that this constrains their choice of methodology (Guba and Lincoln 1998). A realist/ objectivist researcher is likely to take the role of a passive observer, looking for rules within what they observe. A relativist/ subjectivist researcher, on the other hand, is likely to interact with the subjects of the research, in order to discover how they construe their worlds. This link between ontology, epistemology and methodology is widely accepted and is frequently discussed within the research methodology literature (see, for example, Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, Seale 1999, Goulding 2002).

### ***Research paradigms***

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) set out four major paradigms for qualitative research, namely: positivist/ postpositivist, constructivist/ interpretive, critical and feminist/ poststructural. Each of these paradigms is described as being "a net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises" (p 33). Other researchers refer to a similar set of paradigms when discussing potential approaches to research. For example, Goulding (2002) compares the assumptions underlying positivist, interpretivist and postmodern paradigms, and Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) compare positivist, interpretive, critical and feminist paradigms. There is, therefore, broad agreement regarding the range of choices that might be made when selecting a research paradigm. The main research paradigms will be described below, along with the assumptions that are inherent within them and the criticisms that can be made of them.

The ***positivist*** paradigm has, historically, been the dominant paradigm within the natural sciences. It assumes a realist ontology and an objective epistemology. The

underlying assumption is that the world is rule governed and that the role of science is to discover these rules. Research generally follows the logico-deductive method, in which hypotheses are formed from theories, operationalised and then tested experimentally. There is an attempt to control for all confounding variables and the researcher takes a neutral and passive position. Findings are expressed in numerical terms, in relation to the statistical probability of an event occurring. As such, positivist research is necessarily of a quantitative nature.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, positivism began to be criticised for its "mechanistic and reductionist view of nature" (Cohen et al 2000, p17). This was particularly true within the social sciences, as human behaviour is complex and often difficult to define. It does not generally match the regularity and order of the natural world and so many of the assumptions underlying positivism are difficult to apply in a social context (see Guba and Lincoln 1998 and Seale 1999 for a discussion of this issue). Positivism has, however, continued to be a dominant force within the scientific community. Furthermore, there has been widespread criticism of the alternative, qualitative approaches, due to their apparent subjectivity and lack of scientific rigour.

The **postpositive** paradigm developed in response to the criticisms that were aimed at positivist social science and to the continuing pressure for qualitative research to be conducted more rigorously (Denzin and Lincoln 2003, Seale 1999). This paradigm is broadly allied to the realist ontology and objectivist epistemology of positivism but assumes a more 'subtle' reality, one that can never be fully understood. This ontology is sometimes referred to as 'critical realism' (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). Postpositivist research uses multiple methods in order to gain as full an understanding of reality as is possible. Experimental and quasi experimental research methods are used, but so are rigorously defined qualitative methods that lend themselves to structural analysis. There is a greater emphasis on inductive, rather than deductive methods, whilst some elements of positivism are retained, such as the search for causal factors. Methodologies such as analytic induction and ethnomethodology broadly fit into this paradigm (Seale 1999).

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) group **constructivism** and **interpretivism** together as one of their 'major' paradigms, although Schwandt (1998) describes slight differences between the two positions. In terms of their similarities, though, they both operate from a relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology and use a range of naturalistic methodologies. The aim of research within these paradigms is to "understand the



complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt 1998, p221). The researcher's role is, therefore, to interpret or construct meaning from the data. Researchers use inductive methods so that theory can emerge from the data and the emphasis is on developing rather than verifying theory. This is, of course, the opposite of positivist research in which hypotheses are defined at the start of the process and are then tested experimentally. Another major difference between the positivist and interpretivist paradigms is that, in the former, actions are seen as responses to stimuli; whereas in the latter, behaviour is seen as intentional and future oriented. This means that the researcher can only understand another's actions if it is possible to ascertain their intentions (Cohen et al 2000). Criticism of these paradigms focuses on the fact that subjective reports might be incomplete and misleading and that actors might be falsely conscious (Cohen et al 2000). Examples of methodologies within the interpretivist paradigm include phenomenology, ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism (Cohen et al 2000, Schwandt 1998). Variations on constructivism include radical constructivism, social constructionism and Guba and Lincoln's 'constructivist paradigm' (Schwandt 1998).

Paradigms that have developed more recently include ***critical theory*** and ***poststructural*** paradigms such as feminism, Marxism and cultural studies. These paradigms are all explicitly political and aim to shape, as well as describe, society. They are based on the assumption that the other major paradigms neglect political and ideological context and therefore present an incomplete account of social behaviour (Cohen et al 2000). However, critical and poststructural paradigms can be criticised for the fact that the researcher necessarily has a particular agenda whereas, in all other paradigms, the researcher is expected to be dispassionate and objective (Morrison 1995, cited in Cohen et al 2000).

To summarise; one's ontological and epistemological perspective have an influence on the way that data are collected, interpreted and analysed. This means that it is generally necessary to consider this perspective when selecting a methodology.

### **2.3.2 Selecting a methodology that can be used to answer the research question**

A second consideration in selecting a methodology is the relationship between it and the research question. Robson (1993) suggests that the research question has a strong influence on the strategy chosen so that, for example, a 'how many?' type research question might lead to a survey strategy and a 'why?' type research question

might lead to a case study strategy. In this context, Robson is using the term research strategy in a manner that is analogous to methodology. Cohen et al (2000) take a similar view, suggesting that, having set a specific research question, it is necessary to decide what type of evidence is required in order to answer that question. Types of evidence include, for example: statistically manipulable data, a description of a specific situation, or a report of multiple perspectives. An understanding of the type of evidence required, Cohen et al suggest, leads the researcher to a specific research design and methodology (for example, a survey, an experiment or an in-depth ethnography).

### **2.3.3 Assessing practical limitations**

A third consideration in selecting a methodology is that of any practical limitations. While it may be seen as being preferable to have a scientific rationale for the selection of a particular methodology, some researchers acknowledge the fact that practical limitations sometimes play a part. For example, Robson (1993) and Cohen et al (2000) both suggest that any research proposal must be feasible, given the available time, resources and opportunities. This means that, in some cases, the methodology may be selected as a response to considering these factors. For example, there is little point in choosing a methodology that will require several months of field work if the whole project needs to be completed within a short time frame. Similarly, as some methodologies imply the use of specific methods, there may be a practical consideration related to the type(s) of data that it will be possible to obtain. There may also be consideration of the specific skills of the researcher (for example, the skills associated with participant observation, interview techniques etc.).

## **2.4 Glaser's perspective on the selection of grounded theory**

In several of his books, Glaser has stated that GT is just one methodology amongst many; that no one methodology is better than another but rather that each one is suitable for its own purpose (Glaser 1978, 1998, 2003). He acknowledges the many factors that researchers are 'expected' to consider when selecting a methodology, but states that the choice of GT is usually the need for, and the promise of, relevancy; that choosing GT implies generating a conceptual grounded theory (Glaser 2003). In other words, the need for a relevant, conceptual theory as the research product is the one factor that should drive the selection of GT as the methodology for a particular study.

Furthermore, armed with an understanding of the nature of GT (see section 2.1), it becomes evident that the alternative considerations, as described in section 2.3,

become largely irrelevant. It is, however, important for the GT researcher to understand the nature of these considerations, in order to be able to make the case for their lack of relevance to GT. Firstly, while Glaser accepts the epistemological diversity inherent in many methodologies (Glaser 2003, p82), he points out that much of the debate regarding the epistemology of different methodologies relates to the perceived accuracy of the data. As GT aims for conceptualisation, not description, accuracy in this sense becomes an irrelevant issue. GT is able to use all types of data: it does not matter whether this is complete, incomplete or vague, interpreted or constructed (Glaser 1978, 1998, 2001, 2003). Because of this, GT manages to transcend research paradigms.

Secondly, in GT, the questions that drive the research are always, 'what are the main concerns of the participants?' and 'how do they continually resolve these concerns?'. In a GT study, the research question does not identify the phenomenon to be studied. Rather, as the problem emerges from the data, the specific research questions emerge too and these are then used to guide theoretical sampling (Glaser 1992, p25). This means that the questions are determined by the research itself and the commonly stated consideration of selecting a methodology that can be used to answer the research question becomes irrelevant.

Finally, as GT uses any form of data, there is less need to consider the type(s) of data that it will be possible to obtain. However, there are other practical considerations to be taken into account. GT is a complex methodology that takes both time and experience to learn and it is not suitable for a researcher who is unable to leave aside preconceived concepts and theories in order to 'trust in emergence' (Glaser 1978, 1998). This may particularly be the case for researchers who have already been trained in the principles of general qualitative data analysis (QDA).

## **2.5 History of grounded theory methodology**

### **2.5.1 The origins of grounded theory**

GT methodology was developed by the sociologists Dr. Barney Glaser and Dr. Anselm Strauss, within a study on the 'Awareness of Dying' amongst patients and staff in hospital wards for the terminally ill (Glaser and Strauss 1965). Glaser and Strauss then went on to write another book in which they described this new method and presented their rationale for developing it (Glaser and Strauss 1967). They stated that they had wanted to create a new methodology that would improve the capacity for social

scientists to generate, rather than verify theory, in order to close the perceived gap between theory and research. They felt that their new methodology would support a move away from the, then current, focus on 'grand theory', towards the generation of substantive theory, which would have greater relevance for most researchers. In order to achieve this, Glaser and Strauss felt that they needed to bring a new perspective to concepts such as sampling, reliability, validity and the construction of hypotheses. They wanted to move away from the tenets of positivist, quantitative social science and "ground theory in social science itself .. generating it from the data" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p10). Charmaz (2003) describes a number of ways in which Glaser and Strauss's work was revolutionary. She states that it challenged: the arbitrary divisions between theorists and researchers; the view that qualitative research is only valid as a precursor to the 'more rigorous' quantitative research; the belief that qualitative methods are necessarily impressionistic and unsystematic and that they can only result in description, not theory, and, finally, the assumption that there should be a separation between data collection and analysis. Charmaz (2003) also suggests that Glaser and Strauss were revolutionary in providing written guidelines for systematic qualitative data analysis as, up to that point, there had been a tradition of oral mentoring, rather than more substantive mentoring, within qualitative research.

In order to further understand the roots of GT, it is useful to consider the backgrounds of its originators. Glaser had trained in quantitative sociology, studying with Lazarsfeld at Columbia University and Strauss had come from the 'Chicago School' (1920's to 1950's), trained in symbolic interactionism by Herbert Blumer and Everet Hughes. Glaser (1998) has described the way in which they 'discovered' GT methodology, by combining and building on skills and techniques that they had each developed within their careers. Several aspects of GT are derived from the principles of the quantitative survey work that was conducted by Lazarsfeld. These include the principles of forming probability statements to describe patterns of behaviour, of identifying indices of behaviours and of identifying a core index that can be related to all the other indices. Other aspects of GT are derived from Glaser's other experiences: the study of Explication de Text in Paris and the study of theory construction with Merton. These experiences supported, respectively, the practice of ascertaining exactly what is being said, without additional interpretation and the development of theoretical coding. Finally, all this was combined with aspects of qualitative work that Glaser learned from Strauss, in particular the concept of people as 'meaning making animals'. Strauss had been trained in the identification of constructed meaning, but Glaser took this and used

the principles to identify the “genuine meanings ... perspectives ... concerns ... and motivational drivers of participants” (Glaser 1998, p32).

### **2.5.2 Different ‘types of’ grounded theory**

After the publication of 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory' (1967), Glaser and Strauss continued to work together and wrote further GT studies (Glaser and Strauss 1967 and 1971; Strauss and Glaser 1970 and 1975), all of which were concerned with chronic and terminal illness. Glaser also wrote another GT methodology text book, 'Theoretical Sensitivity' (1978). This detailed the advances in procedure that had developed within Glaser and Strauss's further work. Sometime after this point, however, Glaser and Strauss took separate academic paths. Strauss had begun working with another collaborator, Juliet Corbin and, with her, wrote a new 'how to' book on GT methodology (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Glaser was unhappy with the direction of this book, feeling that Strauss and Corbin had moved away from the original principles of GT. In particular, Glaser identified that the method, as described by Strauss and Corbin, forced the data, rather than allowing theory to emerge from it (Glaser 1992). Glaser corresponded with Strauss in an attempt to persuade him to withdraw or rewrite the Strauss and Corbin book, or else call their 'new' methodology something different. Glaser published some of this correspondence, including a letter that contained the question "you wrote a whole different method, so why call it 'grounded theory'?" (Glaser 1992, p 2). However, Strauss and Corbin did not comply with these requests and hence 'Straussian' grounded theory was born. Since this point in time, the original method, as used in this thesis, has become known as 'Classic GT'. The differences between the two methods will not be discussed in detail here, as the 'Straussian' form is felt to be not relevant to this research. All references to GT in this thesis relate to Classic GT. If the reader is interested in reading more about the differences between Classic and Straussian GT, s/he is referred to Glaser (1992) for further detail.

As already noted in section 2.1.1, a number of researchers have 'remodelled' GT, in practice developing numerous other 'new forms' of GT. However, just one of these forms has become influential, that is the, so called, 'constructivist GT' (Charmaz 2000). As Charmaz's method is frequently cited in other work, it will be explained briefly, here. Charmaz (2000) suggests that Classic and Straussian GT are, respectively, situated within the positivist and post-positivist research paradigms. This statement is based on her perception that both 'forms' of GT assume a realist and objectivist position: that they require the researcher to assume the position of a distant, expert observer; that they limit entry into participants' worlds and that they involve the use of objectivist

procedures. Charmaz goes on to propose that this position is not tenable in the light of current thinking on qualitative research paradigms and, to counter it, she proposes “another vision”, that of a “constructivist GT”, that can take the middle position between positivism and postmodernism. She interprets Glaser’s writing (1978, 1992) as implying that the researcher can gather data untroubled by personal bias or experience and suggests that a constructivist GT would recognise the fact that data analysis reflects the interaction between the participant and the researcher. It would therefore produce a theory that reflects a reality, rather than *the* (objective, true and external) reality.

Glaser (2002) wrote a response to the position proposed by Charmaz (2000). In this, he re-asserts the fact that GT can use any type of data, that constructed data are just one type and that, by restricting data collection in this way, the researcher is forcing a theoretical perspective on the ensuing theory. He suggests that GT will often uncover multiple perspectives among participants but that the process of conceptualisation enables the researcher to find the underlying pattern. Glaser agrees that some data are interpreted but states that this refers to the participant’s interpretation, not the researcher’s, which should be left out of the equation. He goes on to point out that constructivism is an epistemological position that aims to increase the accuracy of the interpretation, a concept that is only relevant for description, not conceptualisation (as already discussed in section 2.1.2). In this way, Glaser demonstrates that Charmaz’s criticisms of Classic GT are based on an inaccurate understanding of its methods.

So far, this chapter has explained the nature and background of GT. The next section will set out the criteria for judging the credibility of a grounded theory and this will lead onto the final two sections, which consider the use of GT within the discipline of speech and language therapy and the selection of GT methodology for this research.

## **2.6 Judging a grounded theory**

GT research has its own criteria for evaluation. These are: fit, work, relevance and modifiability (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978, 1998). The criterion of ‘fit’ refers to whether the theory fits the data, that is, whether the concepts adequately express the patterns that are evident within the data. In this way, fit is analogous to the concept of validity in experimental research. In order to fit the data, concepts must have emerged from it and must not have been forced. The criterion of ‘work’ relates to the extent to which the theory can be used to account for the way in which the participant’s

main concern is resolved. If a grounded theory works, it should be able to “explain what happened, predict what will happen and interpret what is happening” (Glaser 1978, p4). ‘Relevance’ refers to whether the theory is meaningful for the participants and others whose behaviour can be explained by it. A relevant GT has ‘grab’ (Glaser 1998) and is instantly understood and recognised by those to whom it relates. Finally, the criterion of ‘modifiability’ arises from the fact that a grounded theory is a set of hypotheses, not facts. That means that a GT can never be right or wrong. As long as it fits, works and is relevant, then it is an adequate explanation for a particular set of data. However, if new data are compared to it and found to differ in some way, then the theory needs to be modified in order to account for the new data. Glaser (1998) asserts that the legitimacy of GT is the proof of the product. Once someone has read a number of well constructed grounded theories, or has had experience of doing GT, the relevance and grab of the theories are sufficient to give credence to the methodology.

In terms of recognising whether a researcher has conducted a GT study in an appropriate manner, it is useful to refer to the criteria set out in the Journal of Advanced Nursing. Grounded theory methodology is used frequently within nursing research and the editorial board of this journal has produced a set of criteria for judging a grounded theory study. These criteria are available on the journal’s web site, for use by authors and peer reviewers<sup>2</sup>. Firstly, they stipulate five elements that are essential for grounded theory research. These are: concurrent data collection and analysis, theoretical sampling used as part of the analysis, identification of a core category grounded in the data, first and second level coding and theoretical saturation. They suggest that the theory may not be fully integrated, but this could be added to a more general set of criteria, as it is also a desirable feature. Secondly, the editorial board suggest two elements that are not compatible with grounded theory research and these are: all data being collected and then analysed afterwards and the identification of discrete themes with no linking core category. Overall then, these criteria, along with those of fit, work, relevance and modifiability, can be used when reading and evaluating GT research.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.journalofadvancednursing.com/default.asp?file=guidequalitative>, last accessed 9/7/09

## 2.7 Use of grounded theory within speech and language therapy research

GT methodology has been used in a broad range of disciplines, including health, education, business, management and marketing (Glaser 1998). GT has been used within speech and language therapy, but not extensively and so there is a significant opportunity to develop its use within this discipline. A review of the literature using a wide range of electronic databases<sup>3</sup>, identified 18 published studies that relate to speech and language therapy and that claim to use GT methodology. A list of these studies and details of the ways in which they used GT can be found in Appendix 1. A similar review conducted by Skeat and Perry (2008a) identified eight papers, including all of those identified here. Of the 18 studies identified by the literature review, only one (Skeat and Perry 2008b) fulfils the criteria for a full classic GT, as described in section 2.6. The Skeat and Perry study made use of simultaneous data collection and analysis, theoretical sampling, constant comparison, conceptualisation of data, open and theoretical coding and memoing. The study explains the way in which a participant group resolved a main concern, a core category was identified and the findings were integrated into a theoretical framework. One other study (Hersh 2003) came very close to a conceptual theory using Straussian GT, but this was not fully integrated.

All of the remaining 16 studies constitute good, academic research, but they all use the term grounded theory in a way that misconceives classic GT. Of these, three studies used many elements of either Straussian or Classic GT (David and Whitehouse 1998, Slingsby 2006, Trulsson and Klingberg 2003). In each of these studies, the data had been conceptualised but none of them appeared to have used theoretical coding (Glaser 1978, 2005) and hence none of them resulted in a full theoretical framework. The rest of the identified studies (see Appendix 1 for details) resulted in a description of themes arising from the data and just two of these were partially conceptualised. None of them contained a core category or resulted in a theoretical framework. Each of these 13 studies used elements of the methods used within GT. Several of them used the term 'GT' to refer to the method of obtaining codes and themes directly from the data, in an inductive manner (for example, Soklaridis, Oandasan and Kimpton 2007, Markham and Dean 2006, King et al 2007, Newton et al 2007, Magnus and Turkington 2006, Bruce, Parker and Renfrew 2006). Others used the language of classic GT but

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<sup>3</sup> Databases used for this search were: AMED, ERIC, MEDLINE, PsychINFO, PubMed, Web of Science, CINAHL Plus, IBSS and Social Sciences Citation Index. These were accessed via University College London's gateway to electronic resources, MetaLib.



failed to demonstrate an understanding of its meaning. For example, Mroz and Letts (2008, p 79) state “it is important to note that the result of a grounded theory study is the generation of a theory, consisting of a set of plausible relationships proposed among concepts and sets of concepts”. However, this study is purely descriptive and does not involve the conceptualisation of data or the development of a theoretical framework.

These findings compare well to a much larger literature review carried out by Thulesius and Grahn (2007). These researchers searched the database PubMed during 2005-6 to identify studies referring to the use of GT methodology. Out of those identified, the abstracts of 200 consecutive studies were examined and it was surmised that less than 10% of them represented the use of full classic GT. Thelusius and Grahn state that “most of the studies were descriptive and lacked a core variable theory, which is required in classic GT”.

There is, evidently, some interest in GT methodology within SLT but there is a great deal of misconception regarding the exact nature of GT. This has implications for the development of the use of the methodology within the profession. Published articles that incorrectly report the use of GT only serve to exacerbate the misconception. Six of the papers that were identified from the literature review for this study were published in the *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* (IJLCD). This is the official journal of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and is distributed to all members of that college, as part of the terms of membership. The IJLCD does not have any guidelines for authors wishing to submit a paper relating to a GT study, or for reviewers of such papers, as is the case for the *Journal of Advanced Nursing* (see section 2.6). However, the one paper identified in this review that did use classic GT (Skeat and Perry 2008b), is one of the six to be published in the IJLCD. It was preceded by another paper in the same volume (Skeat and Perry 2008a), which explains the methodology in detail. This latter paper concludes that “this methodology lends itself to speech and language therapy research, particularly where theoretical frameworks are few and far between and/ or where clarity is needed about underlying social processes” (Skeat and Perry 2008a p 108). This statement provides support for the current research and also a starting point for discussion regarding the future, accurate use of GT methodology within SLT research. This will be taken up within Chapter Seven.

## 2.8 Selection of grounded theory for this research

As has been stated in Chapter One, the current researcher began this research with a general interest in investigating strategic, interagency meetings. A decision was made to use an inductive methodology, as there was very little previous research within the topic area on which to base a priori hypotheses. Specifically, GT methodology was chosen but this decision was based on a misconceived understanding of it, as a number of papers that had previously been published within the field of speech and language therapy had misused the term 'GT' (as has been discussed in section 2.7). Glaser (2003, p81) acknowledges that this is a potential problem for novice researchers; that it is easy to choose to do a GT research study for the wrong reasons, based on a "remodelled" view of what GT actually is. During the early stages of data collection and analysis, the researcher used a methodology that was more akin to general qualitative data analysis (QDA) and this resulted in the need for a high degree of re-analysis of data at a later stage, once the true nature of GT became apparent. This will be discussed further within Chapter Seven.

At the point at which the researcher discovered the true nature of GT, a decision had to be made as to whether to back track on the process of the research, in order to follow the tenets of GT or whether to continue with a QDA study. At this time, a decision to use classic GT was made for the correct reasons, as discussed in Glaser 2003 (p 81-83). That is, it was decided that a classic GT study in the substantive area of strategic, interagency meetings would achieve a theory with a high level of relevance and that a conceptual grounded theory would constitute a significant addition to the literature in this area. The opportunity to attend three GT seminars with Dr Glaser, in April and October 2007 and April 2008, was highly supportive in enabling the researcher to proceed in this manner.

The next chapter describes the methods used in classic GT and sets out the way in which they were used within this research.

## 3.0 METHOD

This chapter will:

- Provide an overview of the methods used in this research.
- Describe the nature of the data.
- Describe the ways in which the data was selected and collected.
- Explain the role of the researcher in relation to contact with the participants.
- Describe the specific methods that were used to analyse the data and the ways in which these methods were applied within the research.
- Provide links to appendices that contain examples of data and data analysis.

### 3.1 Introduction

This research used classic grounded theory (GT) methodology, as originated and described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1978, 1998). The participants were seven speech and language therapy service managers and 23 members of a strategic, interagency steering group. Data were obtained from interviews and observations. The specific methods used to select and analyse the data and to develop the theory were: open coding, memoing, identification of a core category, selective coding, theoretical sampling, theoretical coding, sorting and writing. Each of these methods and their application to this research will be described in section 3.4.

### 3.2 The data

#### 3.2.1 Selection of data sources

In order to identify an initial source of data, the researcher looked for an interagency group which was meeting regularly, in relation to the strategic development of a speech and language therapy service to children. The intention was to observe the group's meetings and to conduct interviews with some group members. The researcher began by developing a network of contacts, asking about potential participant groups and following up on any leads. Unfortunately, this method resulted in a number of 'dead ends', as some potential groups failed to materialise, other groups turned out not to be working at an interagency level and one group did not want to participate in the research. After these set-backs, a decision was made to pursue a more directed approach. This entailed the researcher conducting semi-structured interviews with five speech and language therapy (SLT) service managers, regarding the types of interagency forums that they were involved in and the nature of their involvement. This

process led to the identification of a suitable group, which was then used for initial data collection (see section 3.2.2 for more detail about this group).

The original intention had been to use the SLT manager interviews purely as a means of gaining access to a participant group. However, later on in the research process, it became apparent that these interviews contained valuable data in their own right and so they were analysed and integrated with the rest of the data. Furthermore, some of the managers were re-interviewed at a later date, as part of the process of theoretical sampling (see section 3.2.5 and also section 3.4.5 for an explanation of theoretical sampling).

### **3.2.2 The interagency steering group**

Most of the data were obtained from an interagency steering group that was set up to advise on the redesign of a speech and language therapy service to children under five years. The redesign was taking place in order to enable the service to meet the recommendations arising from the 'Every Child Matters' agenda (DfES 2004). There were 17 people who were initially invited to join the steering group but, over the course of five meetings, a total of 23 people were actually involved in it. Not all group members attended each meeting and some members did not attend at all. The group members included representatives from speech and language therapy, NHS primary care trust management, health visiting, sure start, local authority management, education, GPs, early years development and childcare partnership and speech and language therapy service users. Most of the members were managers, operating at a range of levels within their organisations. However, there were also some practitioners and the service users. The steering group initially agreed to meet for three, two hour meetings, at three monthly intervals but, at the end of this period, they decided to hold a further three meetings.

### **3.2.3 Data obtained from the steering group meetings**

The researcher video recorded each of the first five steering group meetings. In addition to this, she collected paperwork that related to the meetings and observed some de-briefing meetings and informal conversations between group members. Initially, the researcher transcribed the meetings from the video recordings. However, a growing understanding of the nature of GT methodology led her to discard these transcriptions at a later stage. Instead, she re-played the recordings, constructed field notes from them and based the analysis on these field notes.

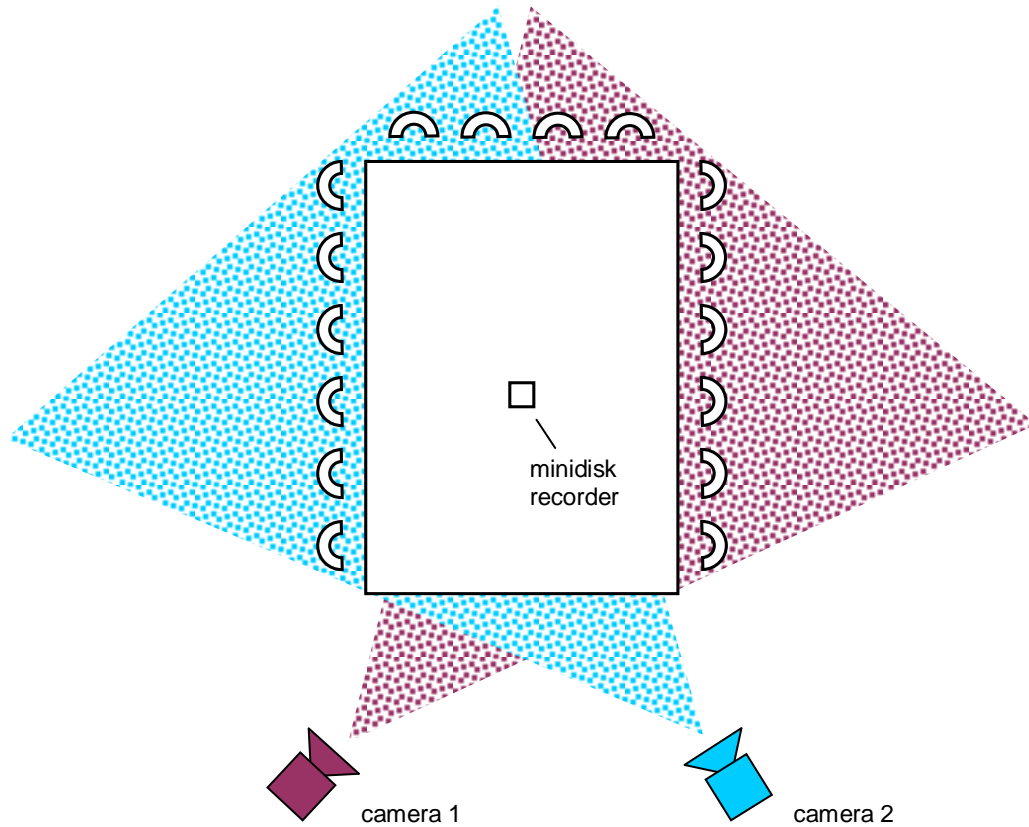
***Making the video recordings of the meetings***

The researcher set up the room and the recording equipment prior to the start of each meeting. She remained in the room while the group members arrived but did not stay once the meeting had started. Two video cameras with internal microphones were used to record each meeting. Three different cameras were used across the five meetings and these were a Panasonic NV-RZ15, a Panasonic NV-DS28 and a Canon MV450i. The steering group members were asked to sit round three sides of a rectangular table and the cameras were positioned in the back corners of the room (see figure 2). The left hand camera was positioned to record the right side of the table and half of the back and the right hand camera was positioned to record the left side of the table and the other half of the back. In this way, it was possible to capture most of the participants on the recording, most of the time. However, due to the size of the room and the availability of suitable tables, participants were often sitting very close together. This meant that, as people shifted their chairs or leant forwards or backwards, other people were occasionally obscured from the cameras. In addition, there were latecomers to some meetings and, on more than one occasion, a latecomer sat at the open end of the table, obscuring the view of part of the group. For meeting four, the researcher was unable to attend to set up the recording equipment. On this occasion, one of the group members offered to operate the equipment herself. The researcher met with her prior to the meeting, to demonstrate how to use the equipment, and returned later, to collect the tapes. The recording from this meeting was of sufficient quality to create field notes but not all participants were in sight of the camera all of the time.

A separate audio recording was also made at each meeting, using a Sony MZ-N710 digital minidisk recorder with an external Sony Electret Condenser ECM-S80 table microphone. This was placed in the middle of the meeting table (see figure 2). The audio recording was made as a back up, in case of problems with the audio track on the video cameras. The audio recording was not eventually used, as the video cameras adequately recorded both visual and audio aspects of the meetings.

It was necessary for the researcher to dictate the arrangement of the tables and chairs so that all participants could be captured on the video camera. However, the intention was to have a minimal impact on the running of the meeting, so no other suggestions were made regarding seating once the group members arrived. There was one exception to this: prior to the first meeting, one member had given permission for her voice to be captured on the recording, but not her face. The researcher therefore

suggested that she sat at the open end of the table, where she could have her back to the camera. At the second meeting, this participant chose to sit in full view of the camera and adjusted her consent form accordingly.



**Figure 2: Position of video and audio recording equipment for the meetings.**

Once the chair person was ready to start each meeting, the researcher pressed the 'record' button on the video cameras and the minidisk recorder. She then made a hand clap in view of both cameras, to enable later synchronization of the recordings, and left the room. A note was made of the start time and the researcher returned to change the video tapes and minidisk as needed. At the end of the meeting, the researcher returned to collect the tapes and dismantle the equipment.

### ***Editing the video recordings and creating field notes***

Following each of the steering group meetings, the video recordings were transferred to a computer, creating one .mpg1 file for each tape that had been used. The video files were then edited within Adobe Premier Pro video editing software, as follows. Firstly, all the files for one meeting were loaded into the same editing 'project'. The recordings from the right hand camera were loaded as video track 1/ audio track 1 and those from the left hand camera were loaded as video track 2/ audio track 2. The wave

forms from the two sound tracks were then compared in order to synchronize the recordings from the two cameras. The synchronization was checked by playing both tracks together. If there was any 'echo' by the end of the recording, then one track was stretched such that it exactly fitted the other. One of the sound tracks was then muted and the edited version was re-recorded as a single .mpg 1 file, containing two video tracks and one audio track. The two video tracks were arranged side by side so that the researcher could view a single image of the whole meeting.

The videos were then watched within Videolab computer software (Coleman 2001) so that field notes could be made for each meeting. Videolab software enables the researcher to simultaneously watch the video and type into a Microsoft Word document, inserting links between particular points in the video and the associated points in the field notes.

#### ***Collecting further data from the meetings***

One group member emailed the meeting agendas and minutes to the researcher and also gave her a copy of any handouts after the meetings. While the researcher was in the room before and after the meetings, it was possible to listen to conversations that occurred between group members, including de-briefings that occurred between the meeting organisers. Where these conversations were relevant to the research, field notes about them were made as soon as possible afterwards. Group members were always aware of the researcher's presence during such conversations. In addition to this, the meeting organisers arranged a planning meeting between meetings two and three, which the researcher was invited to audio record.

#### **3.2.4 Data obtained from interviews with steering group members**

Following the third meeting, all the group members were asked if they would be willing to participate in an individual interview with the researcher. A verbal request was made at the end of the meeting and this was followed up by a letter sent to all group members by email. The letter reminded participants of the aims of the research and of the agreement regarding confidentiality. It also explained that the interview would take place at a time and place convenient to the participant. Ten participants agreed to an interview and, of these, eight people were interviewed. Arrangements were made with the remaining two but these were later cancelled by the participants, due to ill health and were not re-arranged. One of the participants remained on long term sick leave and the other one proved difficult to re-arrange for practical reasons.

### ***Planning and conducting the interviews***

The interview questions were based on concepts that had emerged during coding and analysis of the meetings' data up to that point. Eight open questions were devised altogether, although not all questions were relevant for all the interviewees. A list of these questions can be found in Appendix 2)

The researcher met each interviewee at their place of work and the interviews were recorded using a Sony MZ-N710 digital minidisk recorder, with an external Sony Electret Condenser ECM-S80 table microphone. The researcher and the interviewee sat at a table or desk, with the minidisk recorder and microphone placed between them. The researcher asked the open questions, as appropriate to the interviewee and follow up questions were asked as necessary, in order to gain clarification of what had been said or to further probe a particular concept. Wherever possible, interviewees were allowed to continue talking without interruption. If it was felt that the topic had been adequately covered, or if the response was not relevant to the research, the researcher moved the interviewee on to another topic.

### ***Creating field notes***

After the interviews, the researcher wrote up field notes as soon as possible, usually within a few hours. These notes set out the key issues that had arisen during the interview. At a later stage, the recordings of the interviews were re-played and additional field notes were made at that time. Examples of field notes can be found in Appendix 3.

### **3.2.5 Data obtained from interviews with SLT service managers**

As has already been described (see section 3.2.1) interviews were conducted with five speech and language therapy service managers at the start of the process of data collection. These interviews were recorded in the same way as the interviews with the steering group members. The data from these interviews were not used initially but, during the process of theoretical sampling (see section 3.4.5), the recordings were played back and field notes were written about them so that they could be analysed and integrated with the rest of the data. Additionally, three more interviews were conducted with speech and language therapy service managers during this process, in order to saturate the concepts that had emerged from the data. One of these managers was someone who had been interviewed initially and the other two were not. These later interviews were not recorded but field notes were written as soon as possible after they had taken place and always within the same day. Recordings were



not made as, by this time, the researcher was more confident about collecting data in the manner recommended by Glaser (1998, 2003).

### **3.3 Researcher's role in relation to contact with the steering group participants**

Gold (1958, cited in Mays and Pope 1995), describes four possible roles for a researcher conducting observational research. These are: complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant and complete observer. The four roles differ from each other along two dimensions. Firstly, whether the researcher is observing covertly or overtly and, secondly, the degree to which the researcher becomes a member of the group being observed. The complete participant is a covert observer who seeks to become a fully participating member of the group. The complete observer also takes a covert role, but does not interact with the group at all. The other two possible roles describe overt observation, i.e. where the researcher makes him or herself known to the group and seeks permission to conduct observational research in their midst. Of these roles, the participant-as-observer seeks to become a full participant, while the observer-as-participant has more limited interaction with the group.

In this study, the researcher took the role of observer-as-participant, that is, overt observation but with minimal participation with the group. This role is sometimes also called non-participant observer (Cohen et al 2000). Initial contact with the group was made via both the speech and language therapy service manager and another group member, who was given operational responsibility for the organisation of the meetings. This person was able to provide the researcher with contact details for all the other group members. The researcher then wrote to all the group members, explaining the background to the research, setting out its aims and proposed methods and inviting each group member to participate. Group members were asked to reply by email and, if they were willing to participate, to sign a consent form and bring it with them to the first meeting. A further email was sent to non responders shortly before the meeting. In this email, the researcher stated that, if she did not hear to the contrary, she would assume that the group member was willing to participate in the research. Spare copies of the information letter and consent form were taken to the first meeting and the researcher ensured that everyone present had given informed consent before the video and audio recording was started. All of the group members agreed to participate.

Although the researcher did not remain in the room during the meetings, some informal discussion occurred between her and various group members before and after meetings and at the time of the interviews. Additionally, regular contact was maintained with the meetings' organiser, regarding issues such as dates of meetings, venues and details of new group members. Verbal feedback given to the researcher indicated that the group remained positive about her involvement throughout the time that data were being collected.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

In GT research, data collection, coding and analysis happen simultaneously. There are a number of specific steps in the method, namely: open coding, memoing, identification of a core category, selective coding, theoretical sampling, theoretical coding, sorting and writing and none of these steps can be missed (Glaser 1978). Although the researcher gradually moves forward from data collection to a finished, written theory, the route towards this point is not a step by step one. Instead, the research process is based on a "set of double back steps" (Glaser 1978 p16). This means that, although the focus of the analysis changes and develops as the process progresses, several of the steps are in use at any one time. Additionally, the researcher returns to previous steps, as needed. In practice, this means that the researcher starts with open coding and then begins to write memos about these codes. Theoretical sampling is used to identify new sources of data and, as a core category is identified, the coding becomes more selective. At this time, memos become more theoretical but the researcher continues to collect and code new data until the theory becomes 'saturated', that is, until no new concepts arise from the data. Eventually, the researcher begins to sort memos and develop theoretical codes to explain the relationship between concepts. At this point, it is possible to start writing up the memos, but the act of doing this may spark new memos, which also need to be sorted into the developing theory.

The remainder of this section will describe each of these steps in detail. Following the description of each step, there is a text box that outlines the way in which that step was applied within the current study. The text boxes also provide some examples from the data and references to appendices that contain further examples. At this point in the thesis, these examples will serve to illustrate the method but their exact significance to the theory of Advancing Agendas will become apparent once the reader has also read Chapter Four.

### 3.4.1 Open coding

Open coding is the method by which the researcher begins to conceptualise the data. Initially, it involves comparing each incident in the data with other incidents, on a line by line basis. Each incident may be represented by as little as a word in the data or by a sentence or two or, occasionally, a paragraph (Glaser 1998). As patterns in the data are noted, these patterns are coded with a conceptual label. Then, as the concepts are identified, each incident is compared to existing concepts, as well as to other incidents, in a process known as constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss 1967). By doing this, the researcher builds up layers of conceptualisation. As the theoretical framework is built up, some concepts emerge as the main categories and other concepts emerge as the properties of these categories. The properties of a category are gradually identified via the process of constant comparison, until new incidents do not yield further properties, at which time the category is said to be saturated. Each incident is an indicator of a particular concept and the various indicators for one concept are interchangeable, in as much as any one of them is sufficient to illustrate it. Later on in the analysis, the categories form into a hierarchy, with one of them emerging as the core category (see section 3.4.3). Once that stage has been reached, the researcher ceases open coding and begins selective coding (see section 3.4.4).

While coding the data, the researcher continually asks three questions (Glaser 1998 p 140), namely:

“what category does this incident indicate?”

“what property of what category does this incident indicate?”

“what is the participant’s main concern?”

Categories are generally labelled with ‘\_ing’ words: either verbs or gerunds (i.e. nouns that are used as verbs). This ensures that the focus remains one of explaining the participants’ behaviour, in relation to the ways in which they process their main concern. Categories are identified by comparing many incidents, so finding the name that best fits a category may take time. Indeed, as the researcher identifies more and more properties of a category, it is sometimes necessary to change its name, to one with a better ‘fit’. (Glaser 1998, p 143). The name may be one that is generated by the researcher or it may use words actually used by the participants. The latter of these methods is known as ‘in vivo’ coding.

Open coding is a fast process: the researcher has to keep moving through the data, accepting that, at this stage, there is likely to be confusion regarding what is being

discovered. It is important not to dwell too long on any one incident, as it is only the comparison of many incidents that leads to the identification of a pattern. Open coding fractures the data, which contributes to the feeling of confusion and it is only later on that this feeling is resolved, as the process of theoretical coding (see section 3.4.6) re-arranges the data into a theory (Glaser 1998).

### ***Open coding within this research***

In the early stages of open coding, a large number of codes were developed in response to the three questions described above (for example, “what category does this incident indicate?”). To begin with, many of these codes were descriptive but, as the process of constant comparison continued, groups of codes were identified as being the properties of higher level concepts, and were therefore combined. This helped to lift the analysis from a descriptive to a more conceptual level. For example, from the observations of the meetings, it was apparent that the meeting participants contributed in a range of different ways. These contributions were initially coded as, for example:

→ asking question	→ seeking opinion	→ introducing topic
→ making statement	→ deflecting	→ responding
→ giving opinion	→ suggesting action	→ agreeing
→ disagreeing	→ referring back	→ summarising

Ultimately, however, all these codes were combined within the concept ‘contributing’ and a memo was written regarding the various properties of it. At the same time, consideration was given to other aspects of contributing, such as the impact of individual contributions on other participants and this resulted in the emergence of new codes.

As the researcher developed skills in conceptualisation, it became easier to identify higher level conceptual codes straight away. This meant that, for example, when the steering group interviewees talked about the perceived benefits of their engagement with the meetings, the code ‘benefit judging’ was quickly identified. The various properties of benefit judging were then recorded in memos, rather than being coded individually within the data.

Appendix 3 contains two samples of coded data, one from early on in the process, following the observation of the first steering group meeting and one from an interview with a steering group member, following meeting three.

### 3.4.2 Memoing

Memos are used to capture the researcher's ideas about categories, their properties and the ways that they relate to each other (Glaser 1978, 1998). The process of writing memos begins as soon as the researcher starts collecting and coding data and continues until the writing up of the theory is complete. However, the nature of the memos will change and mature across this time. In the early stages of analysis, particularly during open coding, memos are mostly used to capture ideas about what the categories and their properties actually mean (Glaser 1998). This might include ideas about the boundaries of categories and the relationships between their properties. Later on, memos become more theoretical; proposing, for example, hypotheses regarding the relationships between categories. Memos are also used to highlight gaps in the emerging theory, thus indicating possible directions for theoretical sampling (see section 3.4.5). Eventually, memos are used to integrate categories into a single, meaningful grounded theory; one which fits all of the data and which explains the ways in which the participants process their main concern (Glaser 1998). Throughout the analysis, memos are used to raise the conceptual level of the data. One of the ways that the researcher achieves this is by writing memos that further conceptualise earlier memos.

Memos are individual and private things and, because of this, it is important that a researcher is not constrained by rules that specify what should and should not be included in them (Glaser 1998). However, there are some rules that are important to follow. Firstly, the researcher must stop to write a memo as soon as an idea is conceived. It does not matter what this interrupts, as waiting for a convenient moment might mean that the idea is fully or partially forgotten, or that it becomes muddled with subsequent ideas. Stopping to write memos does slow down the process of coding but this is advantageous, as it ensures that the emerging codes really do represent patterns in the data, rather than being based on single incidents. A memo might consist of a sentence or a paragraph or it might cover several pages. It should be written quickly, so as to capture the moment and the researcher should not worry about its form, including aspects such as spelling, punctuation and grammar (Glaser 1998). Much of the conceptualisation that occurs within grounded theory analysis takes place, initially, at a preconscious level and this can be blocked if the researcher slows down to

worry about the form of a memo. Where necessary, it is possible to write a few words or sentences that capture the main points and then return to fill in the detail later. As with all aspects of GT, the ideas and hypotheses proposed within memos are modifiable, so there should be no pressure on them being 'right' at any one point in time. They are used to 'free up' memory capacity, by recording existing thoughts and enabling the researcher to move on to thinking about further aspects of the theory. As a GT is multivariate, with categories overlapping and integrating in a range of different ways, it is rarely possible for a researcher to hold all of these ideas in mind at one time (Glaser 1998).

The researcher should build a large fund of memos, as these will form the basis of later writing and can also be used for future articles and presentations relating to the research. Memos should be given headings that specify the categories that they relate to, so that they can be easily sorted later on (see section 3.4.7). Additionally, any other categories that are mentioned within them should be highlighted in some way, so that the sorting can be done flexibly, in as many ways as is necessary (Glaser 1978). It is good to link memos to specific incidents in the data, both for the purpose of illustration and to check that the memos are truly grounded. However, it is best to keep memos physically separate from the data so that they can be accessed and sorted independently.

#### ***Memoing within this research***

Memos were written throughout the process of the research. The initial memos were written in response to specific sections of coded data. Each memo was given a title that included a) the name of the concept (or concepts) that it related to and b) the document and line number for the relevant section of data. For example: "enabling participation 1:64" was a memo that was written about the concept of 'enabling participation' in response to a section of data from line 64 of document 1 (observation of the first meeting). The initial open coding memos were typically used to: record the properties of concepts as they emerged; identify links between concepts, and record thoughts about 'best fit' names. Where other concepts were discussed within a memo, these were highlighted in green, to make them more easily identifiable during the later step of sorting memos. Most of the early open coding memos consisted of one or two sentences or, at most, a short paragraph. Appendix 4 illustrates each of these aspects by presenting a print out of some of the 'enabling participation' open coding memos. As the analysis progressed, the memos matured, such that there began to be a greater focus on the links between concepts and their respective boundaries. The thoughts

expressed in some of these memos changed over time and sometimes memos were added to at a later date, illustrating the way in which the structure of the theoretical framework developed. These more mature memos were sometimes, but not always, longer than the earlier memos and some parts of them were eventually included within the write up of the theory, with only minor modification. Examples of such memos can be found in Appendix 5.

In the late stages of the analysis, memos were written to: a) explore possible theoretical codes, in order to integrate the concepts into the single theoretical framework of Advancing Agendas (see section 3.4.6), and b) to support the process of writing (see section 3.4.7).

### **3.4.3 Identification of a core category**

The core category explains how the participants resolve or process their main concern. It is also sometimes known as the core variable, as it accounts for most of the variation in a pattern of behaviour. The core category is related to most, if not all, of the other categories and their properties and, as such, it is central to the emerging theory (Glaser 1978). While coding the data, the researcher should continually and consciously look out for possible core categories, by questioning what the participants' main concern is and trying to identify the ways in which they process this concern. When a category is identified as being a potential core, the researcher should work to saturate this and related categories, via selective coding and theoretical sampling (see sections 3.4.4 and 3.3.5). Once a potential core has been saturated, it is possible to 'try it out', to see if it meets the criteria of a core category, as described above (Glaser 1978).

The core category will re-occur frequently in the data and will take more time than other categories to saturate. It will have immediate 'grab', such that someone who is reading the resulting theory will be able to relate it easily to their own experiences. The core category will be highly variable because of its relationship to all the other categories and, as such, it will be highly modifiable (Glaser 1998).

The identification of a core category takes time and requires the analysis of a large amount of data. Sometimes a category might emerge that appears to be a core but which cannot be linked to all other categories. Where this happens, it is likely that the researcher has identified an important, possibly sub-core, category. However, it is necessary to continue with the analysis in order to find a category that has the power to integrate the whole theory. It is possible for one set of data to result in two (or even

three) core categories (Glaser 1978). Where this is the case, it is only possible to focus on and write up one at a time, but it is then possible to return to the data to further saturate and write up the other.

#### ***Identification of the core category of Advancing Agendas***

The concept of Advancing Agendas emerged relatively early in the process of analysis, at around the time that the researcher attended her first GT seminar in April 2007. Advancing Agendas was used to encapsulate the fact that all the participants had something that they wanted to get out of the meetings – be this personal or professional gain or else altruistic involvement. However, it was some time before this concept was identified as being the core category. Indeed, Advancing Agendas was initially considered to be the participants' main concern and, at that time, it was felt that 'engaging' might be the core category. However, further analysis failed to link all the other concepts directly to 'engaging' and it became apparent that Advancing Agendas was the means by which participants processed their main concern, rather than being the main concern itself (please see Chapter Four for further detail).

#### **3.4.4 Selective coding**

Once the core category has been identified, the researcher begins to selectively code for this category and those that relate to it (Glaser 1978). Any data that does not relate to the core is ignored from now on. This delimits the theory, enabling the researcher to deal with more data, faster. The codes that are developed during open and selective coding are also known collectively as substantive codes.

#### ***Selective coding within this research***

In this research, a large amount of data had been collected and coded before Advancing Agendas was identified as being the core category. In fact, the memos arising from this data were already beginning to be sorted (see section 3.4.7) by the time that the core emerged. This meant that there was a relatively short period of selective coding, mostly in relation to the later interviews with SLT service managers (see section 3.2.5) and, to some extent, in relation to re-examination of the existing data. Appendix 6 contains a list of all the concepts that were considered during selective coding.



### 3.4.5 Theoretical sampling

As described above, data collection, coding and analysis happen simultaneously within GT research. Once the initial data have been coded and analysed, the emerging concepts are used to direct further data collection, using the process known as theoretical sampling. As categories emerge, the researcher aims to saturate them, and actively seeks out sources of data that will enable this. To this aim, ideas about which categories need saturating and where to theoretically sample are recorded in memos. During the open coding phase, the ideas for theoretical sampling are likely to be broad, such that the researcher will sample in any direction that seems relevant. Then, as the conceptual framework emerges, theoretical sampling is used to ensure the relevance, fit and workability of the developing theory (Glaser 1978).

The use of theoretical sampling means that decisions about which groups to sample are not made at the outset of the research. Similarly, no commitment is made to a certain number of hours of observation or a certain number of interviews. Instead, the need for specific data is deduced from the inductive analysis of existing data. Although GT has this deductive element to it, it is important to note that the source of the deduction is the codes which are grounded in the data, not pre-existing theories from the literature. Glaser (1978 p 38), describes theoretical sampling as “deduction at the service of further induction”.

Theoretical sampling focuses and delimits the collection and analysis of data. It ensures that the researcher does not keep on collecting data that adds nothing new to the analysis and that all new data fulfils the need to identify and saturate relevant categories and their properties (Glaser 1998). By collecting and analysing data simultaneously, the researcher is able to ask and seek answers to questions about the fit, relevance and workability of emerging categories and the relationships between them. This would not be possible if all the data were collected first, as is the case in many alternative methodologies (Glaser 1978). Where new data does not fit the emerging conceptual framework, the latter needs to be modified to take account of what has been discovered.

Once the memos begin to reduce in scope for any one category, it indicates that that category has been saturated, as there is nothing new to write about it. At this point, the researcher ceases to theoretically sample for that category and focuses on other parts of the emerging theory.

***Theoretical sampling within this research***

The initial source of data for this research was the first three steering group meetings. These meetings were observed and the data arising from them was coded and analysed, as described above. At this point, a decision was made to collect further data from that group, but this time in the form of interviews, such that the concepts that had emerged from the observation data could be explored in more detail with individual participants. These interviews were conducted over a period of just a few weeks and similar questions were asked of all the interviewees. However, the data from each interview were used to inform follow-up questions asked of subsequent interviewees. Where possible, consideration was also given to the ways in which the behaviour of interviewees had been observed to differ, in relation to the concepts that had already emerged from the data. For example, as the concept of attendance was of interest, it was useful to have interviewed participants with a range of patterns of attendance, ranging from those who had attended regularly, to one participant who had stopped attending. Attempts were also made to interview a participant who had never attended but this turned out not to be possible. Similarly, it was useful to have interviewed participants who appeared to have had differing levels of obligation to attend and those who had played both active and more passive roles within the meetings.

Following these interviews, the researcher decided to observe further steering group meetings, in order to explore the concept of change over time in relation to the nature of participants' engagement. At the same time, the researcher did some 'retrospective' theoretical sampling, by returning to interviews that had previously been conducted with SLT service managers. Finally, once the theoretical framework had begun to emerge, the researcher sought out further interviews with SLT service managers, in order to check whether new data would fit the current framework and to further saturate concepts that were less well developed.

**3.4.6 Theoretical coding**

Theoretical codes conceptualise the way in which substantive codes relate to each other. In other words, they are used to weave the categories that have been identified during open and selective coding into a theoretical framework (Glaser 2005).

Theoretical codes are more abstract than substantive codes and they are not attached to specific pieces of data. However, they do need to emerge from the data in the same way that substantive codes do. Specifically, they emerge from later, more theoretical memos and from the process of sorting memos (see section 3.4.7).

Glaser describes a number of “theoretical coding families” in his books (1978, 1998, 2005) and some of these have been listed within Appendix 7. Glaser does not describe these so that they can be used as a ‘picking list’ from which to select codes to fit the data in hand. Rather, he reports them as a means of sensitising the researcher to a broad range of potential codes. He states that it is important for the researcher to be aware of and sensitive to, a range of potential codes, as this supports openness in allowing theoretical codes to emerge from the data (Glaser 1978, 2005). Knowledge of only a few potential codes might result in the researcher looking for these codes in particular and forcing them onto the data. Sometimes the researcher will find that a previously described code will emerge from his or her data, or, perhaps, a variation on a code that has already been described. Often, a number of theoretical codes will emerge and it may be that this results in novel combinations of previously described codes. However, it may also be the case that a completely new theoretical code will emerge, that is, an entirely new way of explaining the relationship between concepts.

Theoretical codes are implicit within any theoretical explanation. It is therefore possible for a researcher to read existing theories, from any academic field, and identify the ways in which concepts have been related together (Glaser 1998, 2005). In fact, one of the pleasures of GT methodology is that it is possible to take theoretical codes from one academic field and use them to explain the relationship between concepts in a different field. In order to illustrate this point, Glaser discusses the ‘random walk’ model from biochemistry, in which a number of variables are present in a particular situation but which are in chaos until a new variable enters and creates order amongst all the variables. This model, or theoretical code is then used to explain what happens in some human situations, such as a crowd milling aimlessly until a leader arrives or concert goers chatting randomly until the music starts (Glaser 1998). Because of this ability to share theoretical codes across disciplines, Glaser (1978, 2005) recommends that GT researchers should identify the theoretical codes in the broader literature, as a further way of becoming sensitive to a range of potential codes.

Theoretical coding is a frequently misunderstood step in the process of GT (Glaser 2005). Theoretical codes are not always explicitly stated in the final written theory, but they are implicit within it. It is possible to get ‘so far’ with a GT by conceptualising the data via substantive coding, but this only results in conceptual description. In fact, it seems that this is what has happened in many of the papers that claim to use GT methodology but which fall short of presenting a full conceptual theory (for example

some of those papers described as resulting in conceptual description in Appendix 1). It is the power of theoretical coding that enables the researcher to form hypotheses about the relationships between categories, and this lifts the resulting paper from conceptual description to a full GT. Theoretical coding helps the researcher to reach theoretical completeness because the theoretical codes become an emergent guiding framework and this results in the ultimate stage of saturation (Glaser 2005).

### ***Theoretical coding within this research***

The main theoretical code within the theory of Advancing Agendas is a social strategic process with four stages, which are: agenda setting, strategy planning, engaging and evaluating (see Chapter Four for full detail). Glaser (1978) describes a process as being something that happens over time, that has at least two stages. He goes on to discuss different types of process in his 1998 book, including variations such as 'basic social structural process' and 'basic psychological process'. Advancing Agendas has been called a social strategic process as it is one that involves participants interacting with each other in order to achieve both individual and common goals.

In addition to this core theoretical code, each of the four stages has one or more theoretical codes that link the concepts within it. Agenda setting has three main concepts which demonstrate interdependence; that is, each one has an impact on the development of the other two. The stage of strategy planning is a psychological process, acting along a continuum and with a cutting point of withdrawing from engagement if certain conditions are not met. Then the third stage, engaging, is a complex process, with one element (reacting and adapting) influencing all the other concepts and resulting in a typology. Finally, the stage of evaluating acts as a cyclical loop, feeding back into each of the previous stages of the overall model.

### **3.4.7 Sorting**

Once substantive coding is mostly or fully saturated, it is time for the researcher to start sorting the memos, in order to develop the outline or framework of the theory. This involves putting memos into piles, according to the similarities and connections between them. Assuming that the researcher has built up a large fund of memos by this point, the process of sorting requires a lot of space: preferably a large table or something similar. The aim of sorting is to find a place in the theory for all the concepts and properties that relate to the core category. This means that the process also involves a degree of re-sorting as, if a concept does not seem to fit into the framework,

the latter needs to be adapted in order to allow it in. Of course, if a concept does not relate to the core in any way, then it should not be expected to fit and should be discarded at this point. Where a particular memo is relevant to more than one part of the theory, it should be physically cut up so that it can be put in more than one pile. Alternatively, a note needs to be made about where else to 'pass the memo on to' (Glaser 1978).

As the researcher sorts memos, new ideas about connections and theoretical codes are likely to emerge and these should be noted in new memos that are, themselves, sorted into the emerging framework. It is important to note that this process involves sorting ideas, as recorded in memos, not incidents (Glaser 1978). This ensures that the resulting theory remains conceptual and does not fall back into the realms of description. Preconceived ideas about the overall framework must be avoided, in the same way that preconception is avoided in all other steps of the GT method. A framework that is allowed to emerge from the process of sorting will fit all the data and will work to explain most of the variation in the ways in which the participants process their main concern. It will be multivariate and highly integrative, as real life is integrated. In order to achieve this, the researcher needs to constantly move back and forwards between the memos and the developing framework, checking the fit of each concept. This helps to slow down the pace of sorting, hence keeping the developing theory firmly grounded in the data (Glaser 1978).

Sorting also serves to identify areas of the developing theory that are less well developed and, where this is the case, it is possible to return to theoretical sampling if resources allow this. The researcher should stop sorting when "theoretical completeness" has been achieved (Glaser 1978). Theoretical completeness is the point at which the researcher has developed a theory that sufficiently explains the way in which the participants process their main concern, with a minimum number of concepts that "fit, work, have relevance and are saturated" (Glaser 1978, p125). It is often possible to do more: to explain a wider variation of behaviour or to further saturate categories, but the researcher needs to acknowledge the limits of time and personal stamina. A good GT should be sufficient to explain the data available and further elaboration can always be left for future research (Glaser 1978).

#### ***Sorting within this research***

Once the main concepts were relatively saturated and the researcher had built up a large fund of memos, these were printed out and hand sorted. Initially, the memos that

related to specific concepts were grouped together and then piles of memos were moved around on a large table, to represent the relationships between them, with memos that related to these relationships placed appropriately. Where necessary, more than one copy was printed of some memos, so that these could be put in more than one place. This was particularly necessary where one memo contained thoughts on more than one aspect of the theory. The researcher tended not to cut up memos so that the context of a particular thought was never lost.

The initial sort supported the development of the theoretical framework and so this process took place alongside the step of theoretical coding (as described above). As was explained at the start of section 3.4, the various steps within the GT method do not happen sequentially and so further theoretical sampling and coding took place after the initial attempt to sort the memos. This enabled weaker aspects of the theory to be further saturated. In particular, both the retrospective analysis of the original SLT service manager interviews and the new SLT manager interviews occurred after the initial attempt at sorting memos. Furthermore, the step of writing (see section 3.4.8) resulted in the need to re-sort some of the memos, such that sorting continued right up to the time when the theory was fully written.

### **3.4.8 Writing**

The end products of sorting and theoretical coding, namely several piles of memos and a theoretical framework, provide the basis for writing up the theory. Essentially, all that the researcher needs to do is to write up the piles of memos, within the framework. When writing up, it is important to maintain the conceptual level that has been achieved during the preceding steps. In order to do this, the researcher should write about concepts and the relationships between them, not about people or incidents from the data. A GT is a set of conceptual hypotheses regarding the ways in which a group of participants process a main concern. The hypotheses are those that best fit the data but they will always be modifiable in light of new data. Incidents from the data are illustrators of the concepts within the hypotheses but they are not proof of the theory. Within the write up, incidents can be used to illustrate concepts but, as the various indicators for each concept are interchangeable, only one or two are needed for each illustration. A greater emphasis on illustration can lead to a false impression of the illustration providing proof of the theory, as would be the style within descriptive research. Glaser (1978) suggests writing the theoretical statement first and then following this with an illustration, if needed, rather than vice versa. This ensures that the focus of the section is the theory, not the illustration. He also suggests (1978,

1998) that the researcher should decide on an 'illustration dosage' dependent on the intended readership: a paper with a higher dosage of illustration would be lighter and easier to read, whereas one with a lower dosage would tend to be more theoretically dense and, perhaps, more suitable for an academic audience.

It is considered good practice to begin the paper with an outline of the theory, in order to introduce each section and the ways in which different sections relate to each other (Glaser 1978). This may be written first or last, according to the researcher's preference. Even at the stage of writing, however, the researcher may discover that some parts of the theory are not well integrated or that part of the framework does not fully fit. This is not problematic but it does mean that there needs to be some re-working of the theoretical coding and sorting. In fact, attempting to write up the piles of memos can be a good way of working through a problematic area that seems difficult to integrate. This is just another example of the way in which the GT method consists of a series of 'double back steps' (see section 3.4). Similarly, the researcher is not expected to produce a finished manuscript after the first attempt at writing up. Instead, Glaser recommends that the first draft focuses purely on getting the story of the theory down on paper, and that subsequent drafts focus on clarifying ideas and editing (Glaser 1998 p 202). Also, once the first draft of the theory has been written, the researcher should start reading the current literature in that substantive area. This literature can then be used as further data, to be integrated with the theory in subsequent drafts (Glaser 1978, 1998).

### ***Writing within this research***

Once a theoretical framework had been identified via the steps of theoretical coding and sorting (see sections 3.4.6 and 3.4.7), the researcher began to write up the resulting theory. In doing this, it became apparent that the explanations for links between some concepts did not work in the way that had been imagined. This resulted in a need to write new memos and to re-sort some of the existing ones. An example of a memo that was written at this stage can be found in the 'further thoughts' section at the end of the memo entitled 'what is strategy planning?' in Appendix five.

In writing up the theory, incidents from the data were selected in order to illustrate each concept, whilst being mindful of avoiding too much description. Additionally, models were drawn to further illustrate the relationship between concepts. However, the researcher was careful to ensure that these models served only to add to a written

explanation of the concepts and their relationships, rather than to replace such an explanation, as advised by Glaser (1998).

The researcher began reading the existing literature whilst completing the step of writing up and the current theory was then compared to it in a subsequent chapter (see Chapter Five). In a very few cases, concepts identified within the existing literature were used to modify Advancing Agendas. The main incidence of this was the development of a new theoretical code to integrate the concepts within the stage of 'evaluating' (see section 4.4), after reading about complexity theory (see Chapter Five).

### 3.5 Use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software

Data analysis within this research was supported by the use of Atlas.ti, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) software package. There are a number of CAQDAS packages on the market, including Atlas.ti, N6, Nvivo and MaxQDA. Each of these packages share the same basic functions but they also each have distinct advantages and disadvantages. Lewins and Silver (2008) describe and compare the functions of the most commonly used packages and these are, firstly, the ability to display data on the computer screen in order to mark and code specific sections of it, usually within a margin to the side of the data; secondly, the ability to interrogate the database and to search for and retrieve coded data and, finally, the option of writing about the data and linking this writing to sections of data. In addition to the basic functions, most CAQDAS packages also enable the researcher to define links between codes in order to support the development of theoretical frameworks.

In order to select a CAQDAS package for the current research, the researcher attended a seminar in which a number of packages were presented and the features of each one were demonstrated<sup>4</sup>. Following attendance at this seminar, a decision was made to use Atlas.ti, as this package contains a number of features that were felt to be particularly appropriate for use in supporting GT analysis. The researcher was aware that the use of data analysis packages is not generally recommended within GT research (see Glaser 2003). However, she felt able to provide a rationale for their use in this instance, and this issue will be discussed further within Chapter Seven. In the rest of this section, technical terms relating to Atlas.ti are written in bold italics and an

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<sup>4</sup> The CAQDAS seminar that was attended by the researcher was organised by the CAQDAS Networking Project, an organisation that is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to promote and support the use of CAQDAS. <http://caqdas.soc.surrey.ac.uk/>



annotated screen shot of the programme that illustrates these terms can be found in Appendix 8.

The first of the features of Atlas.ti that supports GT analysis is the interactive nature of its *margin* and *object managers*, which helps to keep the researcher close to the data. The margin is used to record codes and to indicate links to memos that relate to specific sections of the data. The four 'objects' in the programme are *primary documents* (data), *quotations* (highlighted sections of text), *codes* and *memos*. Each of these objects has a 'manager' that displays all the relevant items (for example all the codes that have been used) and that allows the researcher to navigate around them. In Atlas.ti, it is possible to view large amounts of data and all of its associated codes at any one time and, if required, to highlight a code that has been used and then navigate directly to other sections of data that have been given the same code. This is particularly helpful for the process of constant comparison. Having compared two or more sections of data in this way, it is also possible to write a memo and then drag and drop it onto the section, or sections, of data that it relates to. Conversely, the researcher can read a section of data and immediately navigate to any corresponding memos. Each of these functions was used within this research.

The second helpful feature is that Atlas.ti does not impose its own hierarchy on the coding system. Instead, the researcher is able to develop codes freely and then, if required, sort these into groups or 'families' of codes. Additionally, if further analysis indicates the need, it is possible to remove codes or to merge or split them. Again, each of these functions was used within this research. In particular, code families were used to link concepts that were properties of higher level concepts as this enabled easy comparison between them.

Finally, the third feature of Atlas.ti that is supportive for GT analysis is the way in which memos are created, labelled and stored. Memos can be written as stand alone documents or they can be attached to specific sections of data or to specific codes. Each memo can be given a title that will aid the process of sorting and it is also possible to define a number of 'types' of memos, for example, the types 'open coding memo' and 'theoretical memo' were created for this research. The researcher is also able to use memos that have already been written as further sections of data, that can then be coded or written about themselves. This is particularly helpful for increasing the conceptual level of the analysis.

There is one further feature of Atlas.ti is potentially supportive to GT analysis, although this could be considered to be more controversial. That is, following initial analysis, it is possible to create 'networks' that link codes to each other and define the nature of these links, for example, 'is a cause of', 'is part of', 'is associated with'. There is a list of predetermined relationships that are set up within the software but the researcher is also able to define new relationships, if desired. The reason that this could be controversial is that it does, potentially, replace the process of hand sorting of memos. For this reason, the researcher decided not to use this feature within this research.

## 4.0 A GROUNDED THEORY OF ADVANCING AGENDAS

This chapter will:

- Explain the grounded theory of Advancing Agendas that has emerged from this research. In order to do this there will be:
  - an introduction; setting out the participants' main concern and an overview of the theory.
  - an explanation of each of the four stages of the theory and the interaction between them.

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the grounded theory of Advancing Agendas, which was developed using the methodology of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1978, 1992), as described in Chapters Two and Three. The theory of Advancing Agendas identifies the main concern of public sector workers involved in strategic, interagency meetings and provides a theoretical framework that explains the way in which they process this concern. The data for this research were obtained from speech and language therapy service managers and from members of an interagency steering group, who were meeting to facilitate the re-design of a speech and language therapy service for children under five years of age. Advancing Agendas has been found to 'fit' the data and to 'work', in terms of explaining most of the variation in the behaviour of the participants. The fact that the theory fits the data and works to explain it, means that it is also 'relevant'. However, as with all theories, it has the potential to be further modified in the light of new data. Fit, work, relevance and modifiability are the four criteria of a well constructed grounded theory (Glaser 1992).

#### 4.1.1 Participants' main concern

The main concern of participants of strategic, interagency meetings is ***to achieve the maximum personal value from engagement with the meetings***. Some participants engage with meetings because they perceive a personal or professional gain, some because of an altruistic sense of collaboration and others because they feel obligated. Some participants attend meetings regularly and participate fully, others less so or not at all. Some identify costs associated with their engagement, such as time away from other duties and, for some, the costs outweigh the benefits, such that they decide not to engage or to do so minimally. On one level, this variability gives the appearance of each participant having a different concern. However, the common concern of

'achieving maximum personal value from engagement with the meetings' is the issue that unifies their comments and behaviour.

#### 4.1.2 Resolving the main concern: An overview of Advancing Agendas

Meeting participants resolve the main concern of achieving maximum personal value by **advancing agendas**. Advancing Agendas, the core variable from this data, is a social strategic process with four stages: agenda setting, strategy planning, engaging and evaluating (see figure 3). Although it seems that all meeting participants go through these stages, it is not necessarily an explicit, conscious process for all of them. **Agenda setting** is the stage in which meeting participants consider what they want to achieve from their engagement with the meetings, thereby setting a personal agenda. This is followed by the stage of **strategy planning**, in which they decide how to go about advancing their agenda. Within this stage, meeting participants may ask themselves questions such as: "what should I do or say within the meetings?" and, even, "should I attend the meetings?". Then, during the meetings themselves, meeting participants play out their strategies, by **engaging** in the meetings in a range of different ways. Throughout this process, participants are continually **evaluating** the outcome of their actions and, in light of this evaluation, they may re-set their agendas, re-plan their strategies and adapt the manner of their engagement. At the same time, the actions of each person constantly interact with those of others, resulting in an ever changing environment that further fuels the need to evaluate outcomes and to adapt agendas, plans and actions.

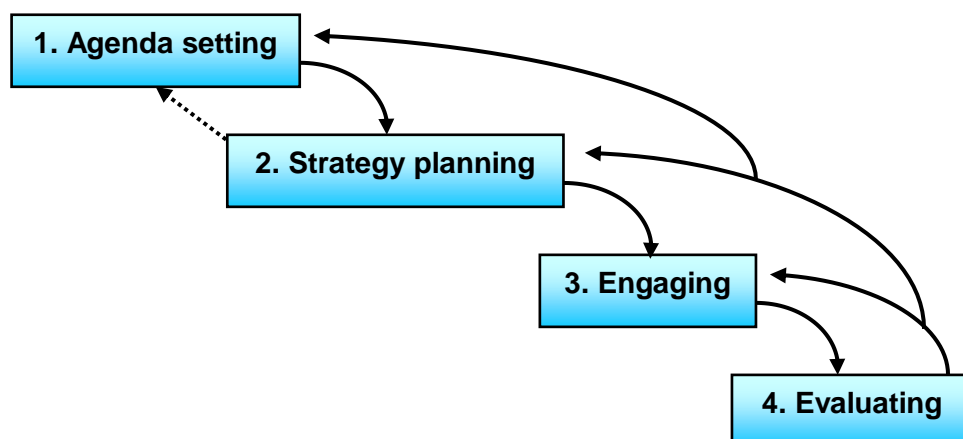


Figure 3: An overview of the process of Advancing Agendas

The following sections will set out each of the four stages involved in Advancing Agendas. Quotes from the data will be used to illustrate some aspects of the theory. These will generally be quotes from the researcher's field notes but will also include some direct quotes from participants. Direct quotes will be differentiated by the use of inverted commas.

## **4.2 Stage 1: Agenda setting**

Participants of interagency meetings each have a personal agenda. The term 'personal agenda' is sometimes used colloquially, with negative connotation. In this context, however, 'personal agenda' is used in a more general sense, namely a description of what a participant aims to achieve from their engagement with the meetings. More specifically, a personal agenda is the combination of a participant's perception of what it is possible to achieve from the meetings and of what it is desirable to achieve. There are three main properties of the process of agenda setting and these are: function perception, role perception and value judging. There is a complex pattern of interaction between these three properties and meeting participants may start the process of agenda setting with any one of them. In this section, each of the properties will be explained separately, followed by an explanation of the ways in which they interact.

### **4.2.1 Function perception**

When people are invited to attend interagency meetings, they form an individualised perception of the function of the meetings. Function perceptions are influenced by information that is given to participants by the chair or meeting organisers (for example, the terms of reference or a list of the aims and objectives of the meeting). However, this is not the only factor that is influential, as each participant forms a slightly different function perception and some participants form a broader perception than can be gleaned from the given information alone. Some participants form a detailed perception and are then able to list meeting functions in specific terms. Others describe the functions in more general terms, indicating that their perception is less well formed. This could be because they have forgotten, or have failed to read or understand information that they have been given, or because the information was insufficient or inadequate. Examples of function perceptions for interagency meetings include (in no particular order): testing ideas, developing ideas, shaping the strategy, seeking views and perspectives, giving information, gathering information, creating a

collective understanding, influencing others, engaging others, triggering reflection, rubber stamping, culture setting, networking and obtaining commitment to action.

The variability of meeting participants' individual perceptions is manifested in a number of ways. Firstly, where a meeting or set of meetings aims to fulfil a range of functions, these functions may be given differing levels of importance by different people. Within these data, for example, a number of the steering group members described what they viewed as being the *primary* function of their meetings, and these views included:

*"to shape the strategy and take on board the different perspectives"*

*"to provide a collective understanding of what is going on"*

*"to engage the thinking of a range of partners"*

*"to inform users and stakeholders about the stages that (the SLT management team) are at"*

*"to enable partnership working and networking"*

Secondly, the same function can be perceived slightly differently by different participants. In the data from the steering group meetings, for example, several participants perceived that 'sharing information' was one of the functions of the meetings. However, within this, there were differing expectations regarding the balance of giving and receiving information from the point of view of the meeting organisers. Some participants expected there to be an equal balance between these two functions, but this was not always the case, as illustrated by the following field note:

*X stated that it is inevitable that the meetings will be led by speech and language therapy, with more of them talking and feeding back, rather than being led by the people in the group. She feels that this would have been different if, for example, the group had been set up by service users.*

A third source of variability relates to the breadth of participants' function perceptions. Although some participants perceive a broad range of functions, others form a more restricted view and, in extreme cases, a participant might focus on one function to the

exclusion of all others. In the steering group data, for example, the comments and actions of one meeting participant indicate that he only considered the most obvious function of an interagency steering group: to steer the (redesign) project. He did not appear to take account of other possible functions, such as giving or receiving information and networking.

Conversely, some participants assume a broader range of functions than those that are explicitly stated. Additional functions may be assumed from the wider context in which the meetings are taking place, perhaps being considered as being 'unwritten functions' of that type of meeting. Within the steering group data, a number of participants commented on the function of 'setting a culture of joint working'. This function was not explicitly stated within the objectives of the meetings but could be assumed from the socio-political context in which the meetings were taking place: that is, the context of the development of integrated children's services (as has been described in Chapter One).

A final source of variability occurs when participants form unique, highly personalised function perceptions. This process will be described in more detail in section 4.2.4, as it relates to the interaction between aspects of agenda setting. Briefly, though, it occurs when participants start the process of agenda setting with value judging (see below) and then 'create' meeting functions to support their intended outcome.

#### **4.2.2 Role perception**

As well as forming a perception of the function of the meetings, meeting participants form an individual perception of their role within the meetings. Some participants find it difficult to perceive a role for themselves at the outset. Others have a strong sense of their own role but this perception is different for different participants. In the steering group data, for example, some participants described themselves as having a proactive role: to ask and answer questions, to challenge ideas and to offer advice. Other participants described their role in more passive terms: to listen and receive information, to be an observer and to answer questions if asked. Of course, some participants described both active and passive aspects of their roles but the key point is that no two people appeared to perceive their role in exactly the same way. This indicates that, as is the case with function perception, meeting participants use a range of sources in order to form a perception of their role. One of these sources is written information that is given by the meeting organisers. Other sources include past experiences and personal expectations.

Some participants perceive a role that is based on the nature of their job title or position. For example, a team leader may assume roles such as: 'ensuring that information is fed back to other members of the team' or 'ensuring that information that is reported about the work of the team is accurate'. Others may be aware that their position indicates a particular role but decide to take on an additional or alternative role. This is illustrated by field notes from an interview, as follows:

*X acknowledges that there is a difference between her role on paper and her actual behaviour in meetings. She suggests that her role is probably to ensure that the service has systems in place in order to take on board information that is coming from the meetings ... but that she has also taken on the role of challenging the service herself, of playing devil's advocate.*

Finally, some participants consider that they should, and do, play a particular role, but then do not demonstrate this through their behaviour. In the steering group data, one of the participants spoke frequently and at length in each of the meetings but, in an interview, described part of her role as being:

*"to be there as an observer ... to say less rather than more."*

Meeting participants may fail to play the role that they intend to because of a conflict between different elements of their role perception. Alternatively, this situation may occur for other reasons, such as a lack of opportunity within the meetings (see section 4.4.4 for further discussion of this point).

One of the commonly perceived roles for participants in interagency meetings is to act as a representative for others. Many meeting participants recognise that one person cannot necessarily represent a whole population. However, partial representation is seen as being preferable to no representation and meeting participants acknowledge that, even if there were several representatives from any one group, it would not be possible to account for everyone's views. Individual participants are seen as being either more or less representative of their sub groups by other participants, although this perception appears to be based on the degree to which the representative participates, rather than any specific awareness of their ability to represent the views of others.



In addition to the roles that meeting participants perceive for themselves, some people are given a specific role, such as chairing or taking minutes. Even these roles, however, might be perceived in a personal way. For example, the chair person for the steering group meetings commented on the fact that there are alternative ways of chairing meetings but that she decided to take on the role of:

“creating an open, transparent environment for people to speak as they want to ... in order to support participation”.

Although many meeting participants have a well defined role perception before attending their first meeting, this is not the case for everyone. When participants are initially unclear of their role, they experience a phase of role confusion. During this phase, participants are likely to seek out a role for themselves by using strategies such as asking others for clarification and/ or playing a ‘wait and see’ game, in which they discover a role through participation. Some participants feel that they ‘fall into a role’ via this process and, despite continuing uncertainty, come to accept this. This process is summed up in the field notes from one of the interviewees:

*When X got to the first meeting, she wasn't sure what her role was going to be. She spoke to (another group member) about her view of her role and then assumed that she was going to have a listening role and to be there to answer questions if asked. X is still not totally sure but she thinks that she is there to be a representative and a voice, if necessary. In hindsight, she feels that it would have been useful to have more information about her role at the start but comments that she has now fallen into a role and wonders if, perhaps, that is enough.*

There are differing views on whether or not it is necessary for meeting participants to have a clear sense of role at the outset. Some feel that it is important for this to be the case, whereas others feel that it is better for participants to find a role that they are comfortable with, rather than being given a specific role to fulfil. The rationale behind this view is that too close a focus on a specific role can restrict broader participation.

### **4.2.3 Value judging**

Meeting participants judge the value of their engagement with the meetings by weighing up the associated benefits and costs. These could be benefits and costs to themselves or to their employing organisations.

***Benefit judging***

Participants will generally identify a range of benefits to themselves. These benefits may be associated with personal or professional gain, such as gaining knowledge, obtaining an insight into others' perspectives and having an opportunity for networking. Alternatively, benefits to self may be of a more emotional nature, such as the enjoyment or satisfaction associated with working as part of an interagency group. Self benefits may even be as simple as having the opportunity to do something different, obtaining a degree of variety within the normal working week.

Additionally, participants may identify benefits to their employing organisation. These include benefits such as gaining knowledge to support the development of their own service, gathering intelligence to support decision making and being able to pass on information to colleagues. Field notes from this data that illustrate benefit judging include:

*X thought it would be interesting to find out what was going on. She and her colleagues had already negotiated a package for SLT for the school and she thought that they might be able to start up something earlier on, in the nursery, if she found out was going on in early years.*

*X wanted to gain an understanding of what is and is not important to the other group members.*

*X laughed and said that the meetings gave her space from the tedium of the rest of her day.*

Meeting participants may also consider the value of their engagement in relation to the benefit it gives to the group as a whole. Examples of benefit to the group include participants' ability to provide information, make suggestions and answer questions, as illustrated in the following section of data:

*X's team had already tried similar things and she felt that she could support SLT via their experience.*

Different meeting participants will identify different benefits and some will be aware of potential benefits that do not apply to them at that time. For example, participants may judge that there is a potential benefit in receiving information but then decide that this

information is not useful to them; either because it is information that they already have or because it is not relevant to their current job.

### ***Cost judging***

The main cost that is associated with engagement with the meetings is time. Busy professionals are all aware of the need to prioritise their time and time spent attending meetings and travelling to and from them is time that cannot be spent on other things. This cost may be expressed in a variety of ways, for example, not being able to complete other tasks, being less available to clients or having to delegate tasks to others. Additionally, some participants may attend meetings in a voluntary capacity or else attend outside their normal working hours. This is particularly the case where service users are involved in the meeting process. For these people, there is the added cost of juggling personal time and other commitments such as child care, leisure plans and the like.

### ***Weighing up the benefits and costs***

Considering the fact that the main cost associated with engagement with the meetings is time, the question that fuels value judging is, "is this a good use of my time?". In order to answer this question, meeting participants need to consider the level of potential benefit, in relation to the amount of time spent. They may ask themselves how real the benefits to themselves or their organisation are likely to be and, secondly, how valuable their contribution is likely to be to others. Some meeting participants require benefits to themselves or their organisation in order to perceive a value in their engagement, while others are more altruistic and are content with the fact that they are benefiting others. Field notes from the data that illustrate different perspectives on weighing up the benefits and costs include:

*X said that she had already gained some useful information and that the meetings were going to be a good use of her time, in terms of finding out more about what was happening.*

*X felt that he didn't make a significant contribution in the meetings and didn't have anything else he wanted to contribute that wasn't being added by someone else. That is why he decided that it wasn't worth the time to be involved.*

#### 4.2.4 The interaction between properties in agenda setting

The process of agenda setting; that is, the process of meeting participants deciding what they will aim to achieve from their engagement with the meetings, involves a complex interaction between function perception, role perception and value judging (see figure 4). For many participants, function perception is the starting point for setting an agenda. However, this is not the case for everyone and the process of agenda setting can also begin with one of the other aspects. Participants' function perceptions and role perceptions strongly influence each other. Where a participant has a strong sense of the function of the meetings, that participant is likely to consider their own role as being to support one or more of the functions. For example, where a participant perceives one of the functions of the meetings as being to 'seek views and perspectives', that person is likely to consider part of their role as being to share their perspective on the issues being discussed. Conversely, when a participant is unclear about the function of the meetings, that person is likely to have difficulty with identifying a role for themselves. They then need to go through a process of 'role seeking', as was described in section 4.2.2. Sometimes, though, a participant will start off with a strong sense of their own role within the meetings and then infer meeting functions from that. For example, a participant may be aware that they have been invited in order to represent their organisation and then infer that one of the functions of the meetings is to determine the opinions of other organisations.

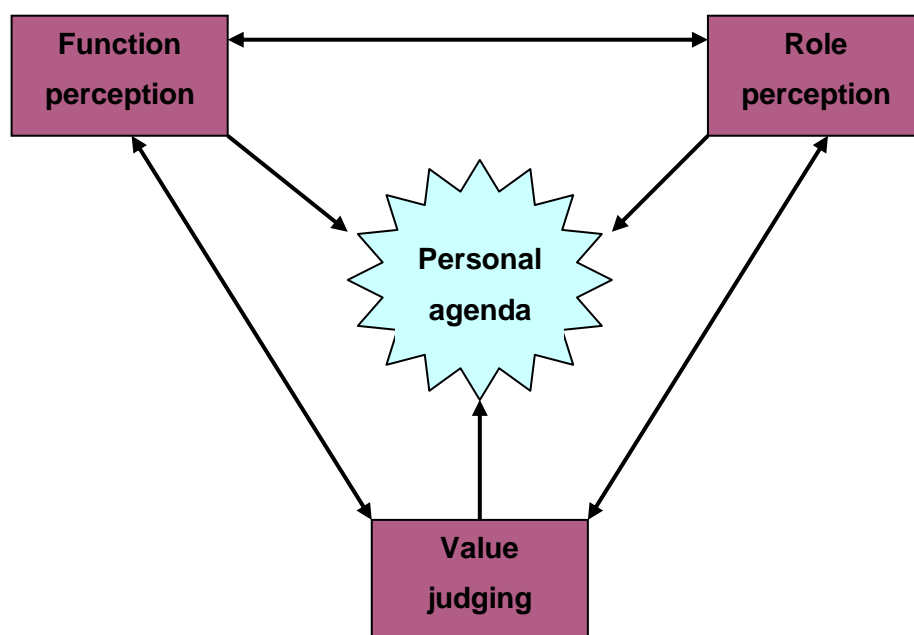


Figure 4: A model of stage 1: agenda setting

In most cases, a participant's value judgement will be based on their perception of both the function of the meetings and their own role within the meetings, especially where the participant has a strong sense of function and role. In order to consider the value of their engagement with the meetings, meeting participants will ask themselves, firstly, how real the benefits to themselves or their organisation are likely to be and, secondly, how valuable their contribution is likely to be to others. The answer to these questions will be heavily dependent on their function and role perception. For example, a participant who perceives their role as being to listen to information and who also identifies a positive value in receiving that information, is likely to decide that engagement is a good use of time. Conversely, a participant who perceives their role as being to give advice and who does not feel able to give any, is likely to decide that engagement will not be a good use of time. Participants who are unclear about the meeting functions or their role within them, may find it difficult to judge the value of their engagement, as they have little to base this judgment on. A further interaction between function and role perception and value judging occurs where participants form a very restricted perception of the function of the meetings (as was described in section 4.2.1). Participants who do this are least likely to perceive a positive, overall value arising from their engagement, as their restricted function and role perception limits the extent of any potential benefits.

In some cases, meeting participants begin the process of agenda setting by identifying a potential benefit associated with engagement with the meetings. They then assume a role for themselves that would support this. This 'role creation' may also go one stage further, with the participant perceiving a function, or 'pseudo-function' to fit the role. These pseudo-functions are not true functions of the meetings, in that they are not generally recognised as such by other participants. However, individual participants may give as much credence to them as they do to the true functions, eventually coming to believe that they are part of the reason for the meetings being set up. Examples of pseudo-functions in the steering group data included: 'triggering others to reflect on their own practices', 'obtaining a commitment to action', 'educating others', 'engaging new partners' and 'being seen to be inclusive'.

By the end of the process of agenda setting, interagency meeting participants obtain an understanding of what they are able to get out of their engagement with the meetings and of how this relates to what they would like to get out of them. Hypothetically, different personal agendas may be:

*To find out what is happening in order to use that information in the development of my own service.*

*To be seen to be willing to consult, in order to gain respect and recognition.*

*To share my expertise in order to support the overall development of children's services in this locality.*

Each participant will have at least one element to their personal agenda and most participants will have more than one. Participants are not always consciously aware of 'having an agenda' but they are generally able to talk about what they aim to get out of their engagement with the meetings. The development of a personal agenda enables a meeting participant to move on to the next stage of Advancing Agendas, namely strategy planning.

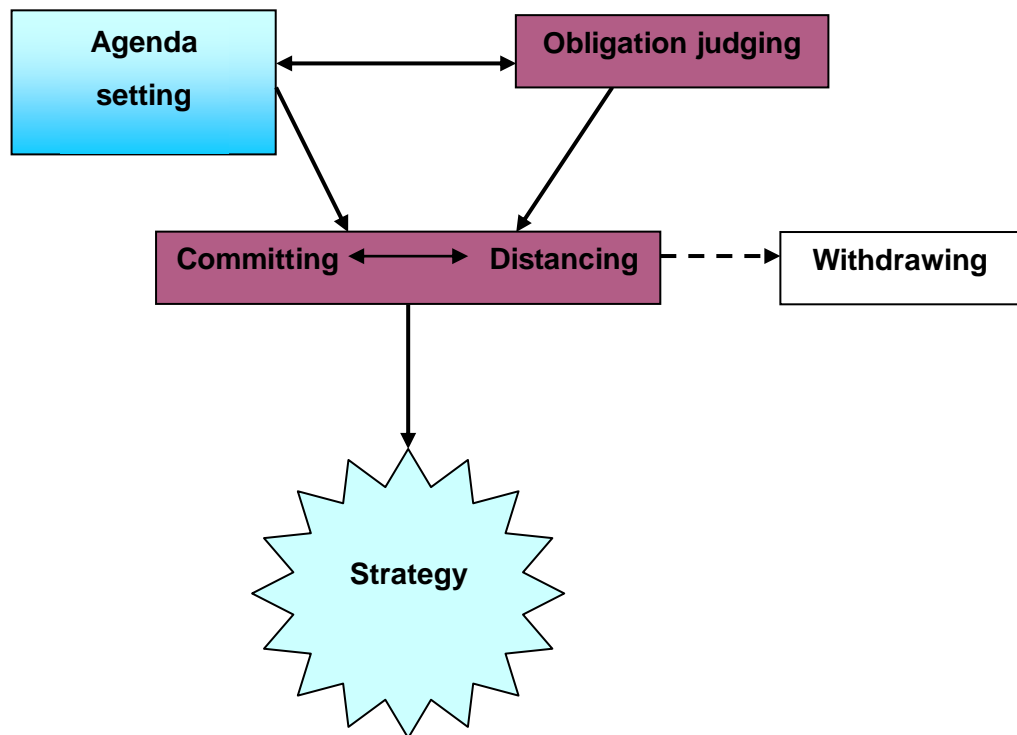
### **4.3 Stage 2: Strategy planning**

Strategy planning is the second stage of the process of Advancing Agendas. In this stage, participants plan a strategy that will enable them to fulfil their personal agendas. This involves making decisions about the nature and degree of their engagement with the meetings. Strategy planning has two main properties: obligation judging and committing/ distancing. Additionally, there is a consequence of extreme distancing, namely withdrawing (see figure 5). Each of these properties will be explained below.

#### **4.3.1 Obligation judging**

Obligation judging is the element of strategy planning in which meeting participants consider the degree to which they feel obliged to engage with the meetings. A sense of obligation may arise for a number of reasons. Some of these reasons relate to a participant's position within their organisation, such as being the only person who can represent a particular team or organisation, or being 'nominated' to attend by a senior colleague. This is particularly true in the case of statutory interagency meetings. Other reasons relate to the broader context, for example, experiencing a feeling that there is a socio-political expectation to collaborate with other agencies. Finally, some participants will feel a sense of self-imposed obligation, just because they have been invited to attend or, later on, because they have already accepted an invitation to attend. Of course, these reasons are not mutually exclusive and some participants may feel obliged to engage with the meetings for more than one reason. Conversely,

not everyone experiences a sense of obligation and the same conditions may result in different levels of obligation for different people.



**Figure 5: A model of stage 2: strategy planning**

There is a two way relationship between agenda setting and obligation judging. Where there is a high level of obligation, a meeting participant may spend less time setting an agenda, that is, less time considering what they can achieve and want to achieve from their engagement with the meetings. In extreme cases, a participant might start off with obligation judging and then set their agenda within the context of being obliged to attend.

A sense of obligation can also help to balance any perceived costs, leading to the concept of a ‘legitimate cost’. For example, some participants may feel obliged to engage with an interagency forum because of the current socio-political context. Those participants can, then, use their sense of obligation to legitimate time spent away from other duties, which would otherwise have led to a sense of guilt:

*X said that we live in a complex society with a well justified desire for checks and balances. He said that, if the politicians decide that they want to spend*

*their money on people conducting consultations, then that is fine but it does come at a cost.*

Additionally, some participants will take account of their perceived value within the meetings when judging the degree to which they feel obliged to engage. In other words, a participant who perceives that they have a valuable role to play within the meetings may feel obliged to engage for that reason.

### 4.3.2 Committing and distancing

Committing and distancing is the second property of strategy planning. Meeting participants use their personal agendas and the outcome of obligation judging to decide on the degree to which they are willing to commit to the meetings. Committing and distancing are opposite ends of a continuum that describes each participant’s level of commitment to the meetings. Some will make a strong commitment, others a weaker one and still others will decide to distance themselves. It is important to note that committing and distancing are concepts that explain the participant’s psychological attitude towards engagement and this is not always matched by behaviour. For example, it is possible for a participant to have a strong commitment to engagement with the meetings but to be unable to engage, for reasons outside their control. Equally, it is possible for a participant to distance themselves from the meetings psychologically, but to appear to engage from the point of view of their behaviour. Table 1 illustrates the way in which a participant’s level of commitment can be ascertained from an understanding of the clarity of their personal agenda and their level of obligation.

		Strength of personal agenda	
		Strong	Weak
Level of obligation	High	Committed	Distanced
	Low	Fairly committed	Very distanced: may withdraw

**Table 1: Level of commitment in relation to strength of personal agenda and level of obligation**



The meeting participants who are likely to be most committed are those who have a strong personal agenda and who also have a high sense of obligation. This includes, for example, participants who perceive a clear role for themselves within the meetings, who anticipate a value from their engagement and who feel obliged to represent their service or organisation. Those participants with a strong personal agenda but a low level of obligation are also likely to be committed, as they will be able to perceive benefits to themselves. However, their commitment may be less strong, resulting in them prioritising other commitments when they feel under pressure. Participants with a weak personal agenda, for example those who perceive less of a role for themselves within the meetings or who anticipate a low value in engagement; are likely to be distanced from the meetings, even if they have a high level of obligation. Finally, those who are likely to most distanced of all include participants who have both a weak personal agenda and a low level of obligation. These participants may distance themselves to the extent of totally withdrawing from the meetings, both psychologically and behaviourally. This is a key element of the theory of Advancing Agendas as it represents a cutting point, namely a point at which a potential meeting participant decides to become a non-engager (see section 4.4 for further discussion of this concept). One interviewee summed up the property of committing and distancing very well:

*X said that she feels there are different types of group membership. The first of these is membership of people who are there because of a genuine interest and an agenda, not in a cynical way but rather meaning that they have a purpose and can perceive a positive outcome. The second type is people who have a role, organisationally. X said that she feels that some of these people are there because they need to be, because of their organisational position, but that they appear less interested in the outcome of the work.*

The process of committing or distancing results in an intention to engage in the meetings to a particular degree and in a particular manner. This intention forms one aspect of a participant's strategy for engagement and may involve a commitment to attend and/ or a commitment to contribute. Attending and contributing will be explained in more detail in section 4.4, 'engaging'. Hypothetically, a participant's intention to engage could be, for example:

*To attend regularly and contribute my views as appropriate.*

*To agree to attend but to send a colleague if I'm very busy at the time.*

*To read the minutes and send my comments but not to attend in person.*

These intentions are then linked to personal agendas, as described at the end of section 4.2, in order to form the participant's strategy for engagement. In this way, the first of the above examples could become, for example:

*To attend regularly and contribute my views as appropriate, in order to be seen to be willing to consult and to have an input into the development of the service.*

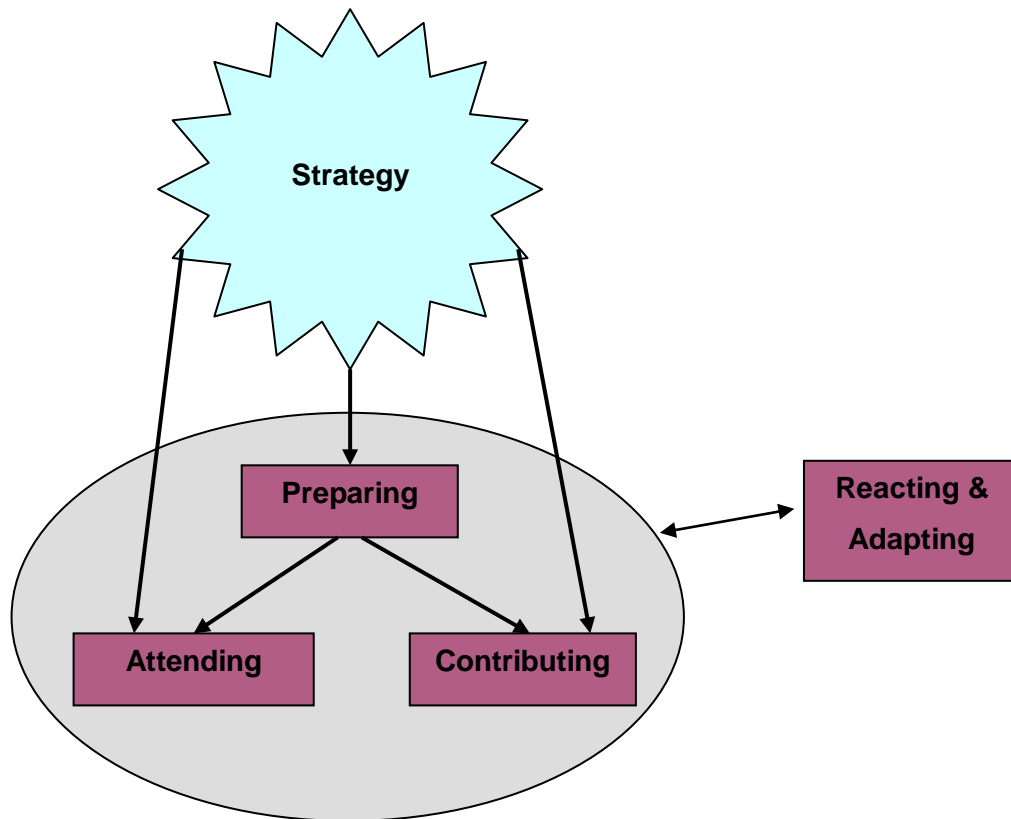
Not all participants are consciously aware of having a strategy and few are able to express their strategy in these terms. However, participants are generally able to talk about their intentions regarding their level of attendance and the nature of their contribution. Once a meeting participant has planned a strategy, they are ready to move on to the third stage of the process of Advancing Agendas, namely engaging.

## **4.4 Stage 3: Engaging**

Engaging is the third stage of Advancing Agendas and it is the stage in which meeting participants play out their strategies, in order to advance their agendas. There are four main properties of engaging: preparing, attending, contributing and, finally, reacting and adapting. Each of these properties relates to one aspect of a participant's behaviour in relation to the meetings. In the following sections, each of these properties will be explained briefly and this will be followed by a description of the different types of engager that have been identified from this data. Please see figure 6 for a model of engaging and its relationship to a participant's strategy.

### **4.4.1 Preparing**

Participants begin their engagement with the meetings by preparing to attend them and/ or preparing to contribute to them. When preparing to attend, participants need, at the very least, to mark the date and time in their diaries and keep this space free. They may also need to deal with diary clashes and prioritise other work, to ensure that they have time to attend. Where participants will be attending outside their normal working hours or in a voluntary capacity (as is the case for service user representatives) they may need to reorganise their personal commitments, such as child care and the like.



**Figure 6: A model of stage 3: engaging**

Preparing to contribute relates to the effort that a participant puts into being ready to make a useful contribution to the meeting. This might involve, for example, reading the minutes of the previous meeting and any other written information that is sent out in advance. It might also involve preparing questions to ask or information to contribute within the meetings, for example:

*X said that she put some question marks on the paperwork before attending, for things to clarify if they weren't addressed in the meeting.*

If a participant does not expect to attend the meeting in person but wants to contribute in other ways, s/he will need to find another way of doing this, such as forwarding comments to the chair person or passing them on to another representative.

Participants' personal agendas and planned strategies influence the degree to which they prepare, as do external factors that are outside their control. For example, committed participants and those who perceive an active role for themselves are likely to aim to be well prepared for meetings. Those who are distanced will only prepare if

they feel obliged to and those who perceive a passive role for themselves will tend to focus on preparing to attend, rather than on preparing to contribute.

#### **4.4.2 Attending**

Most participants that engage with the meetings will attend at least some of them. However, it is also possible to engage without attending meetings, by contributing in other ways and at other times (see section 4.4.3). Of those participants that do attend, there is a continuum of attending that ranges from attending regularly, punctually and staying for the whole meeting, to attending less regularly, arriving late and/ or leaving early. The participants that put least effort into preparing to attend are, of course, most likely to end up missing meetings or parts of meetings because they fail to deal with diary clashes. Some committed participants with very busy schedules still manage to be regular and punctual attendees, so it seems that commitment is more important than scope of work schedule in determining level of attendance. Similarly, commitment is more influential than level of obligation in this matter, as participants that feel obliged but distanced from the meetings are often amongst those that attend sporadically. In the data from the steering group meetings, the chair person spoke about participants demonstrating their commitment by giving the meetings a “protected place” in their diaries.

When participants fail to attend, the intended meeting outcomes may not be achieved, especially if input from a particular participant is necessary in order to progress a specific agenda item. In this way, regular attendance supports positive meeting outcomes and lack of attendance inhibits them. When a chair person is given advance notice of a participant’s absence for all or part of a meeting, it is sometimes possible to rearrange the agenda to take account of this, hence mitigating the impact of the absence. Unexpected absences are more disruptive and, furthermore, participants that announce part way through a meeting that they will need to leave early, can be viewed negatively by other participants.

Meeting participants can, of course, only attend if they have been invited to do so. This means that those people who have the responsibility for selecting and inviting group members have a major role to play in determining attendance. There are different methods that can be used in selecting membership. One method is to invite members with a view to the specific roles that they will be able to fulfil. For example, inviting some people because of their positional power and therefore their ability to sign off decisions, some because of the expertise they have to offer and therefore their ability

to provide advice, and then others because of their ability to represent specific groups. Alternatively, it is possible to invite a range of stakeholders without consideration of the specific roles they might fulfil, but rather with a more general feeling that they should be included. Indeed, it is possible for two people to be jointly involved in selecting and inviting members for a new group and for them each to be deploying different strategies for doing this. Some invitations to attend will be directed to a specific person and this is generally the case for those who hold positions of authority. Other invitations may be given to a whole group of people, with the expectation that one of them will volunteer to attend, in order to represent the group.

#### **4.4.3 Contributing**

The majority of participants who attend meetings make contributions within them and these contributions serve to, for example: control the meeting, share information and opinions, solve problems and identify actions. There are, of course, numerous ways in which these contributions can be formed and these include: asking a question, seeking another participants' opinion, introducing a new topic, making a statement, deflecting a question to another participant, answering a question, giving an opinion, responding to a comment, suggesting an action, agreeing or disagreeing with another participant, referring back to a previous comment and summarising the discussion.

To a great extent, the type of contribution that a participant makes is influenced by their personal agenda and strategy. For example, a participant who is attending the meetings in order to gather information is more likely to ask questions than to suggest actions. Similarly, a participant who is expecting to share their knowledge and expertise is likely to answer questions, respond to others' comments and give opinions. However, participants are rarely restricted to just one or two types of contribution, such that, for example, those that tend to answer questions may also ask them on some occasions.

Contributions also vary in terms of the manner in which they are made. Some contributions are made spontaneously, whereas others are elicited by a specific request to contribute; some contributions are brief and concise, whereas others are longer; some are relevant to the current discussion and follow on from what others have said, whereas others appear tangential or interrupt other speakers and, finally, contributions may be made either verbally or non verbally. Non verbal contributions include the use of paralinguistic utterances, body language and facial expression. For example, a participant might say "mmm" to indicate agreement (paralinguistic

utterance), give a look of surprise that serves to question another participant's contribution (facial expression), or else gesture to indicate that another participant should have a turn to speak (body language).

Participants that have attended meetings are able to make further contributions between meetings by, for example, feeding back information to colleagues or following up on action points. Additionally, non-attending participants are able to make contributions, if they wish to, via telephone or email or else by engaging in discussions within alternative forums, such as other meetings that have an overlapping group membership. One interviewee talked about a non-attending group member whose contributions were, nevertheless, viewed positively:

*X said that it was disappointing that [name] hadn't been able to attend any of the meetings but X knew she was engaged because she had demonstrated a knowledge of what they were trying to achieve within her emails.*

Finally, it is also possible for non-attending group members to contribute to the process passively and unintentionally. This is because people who hold key roles within an organisation can provide a level of authority to the proceedings by virtue of the fact that their name appears on the list of group members, even if that person sends their apologies to each meeting.

#### **4.4.4 Reacting and adapting**

The opportunities that participants have to engage with the meetings, that is, their opportunities to prepare, attend and contribute, are continually affected by: personal pressures, the engagement of other group members, the format of the meeting and the meeting environment. Participants react to each of these factors and adapt the manner of their engagement in a range of ways, as described below.

##### ***Reacting and adapting to personal pressures***

Meeting participants sometimes experience personal pressures that impinge on their ability to engage with meetings. They may have health problems, ranging from the inconvenience of a cold to more serious or long term health problems. Alternatively, they may experience pressure on their time caused by, for example, additional work load or else duties at home, such as caring for family members. These pressures may prevent the participant from being able to attend meetings, despite an intention to, or

they may result in a need to leave meetings early, in order to deal with other priorities. Pressures caused by work load are illustrated by the following field note:

*X noted that some senior managers tended to 'fly in late and leave early'. She thinks of them as having a problem with the "size of their briefs (!)".*

Alternatively, personal pressures may prevent a participant from being able to contribute in the manner that they intended, because they haven't had time to prepare sufficiently. For example, a participant may not have been able to read pre-meeting documentation or to seek the views of the colleagues that they should be representing within the meetings.

### ***Reacting and adapting to the engagement of other meeting participants***

Each participant's ability to prepare, attend and contribute is also affected by the manner in which other participants engage with the meetings, such that everybody's engagement occurs within a constantly changing environment. The ability to prepare is dependant on meeting paperwork being circulated in reasonable time. This paperwork includes minutes of the previous meeting, the agenda and any documents that are to be discussed within the meeting. A lack of timely paperwork can hinder a participant's opportunity to prepare questions and comments. In extreme cases, it may even prevent a participant from being able to attend because, for example, they were given insufficient notice of the date of a meeting.

Then, within the meetings themselves, each participant's ability to contribute is affected by the nature of others' contributions. In meetings that function well, participants frequently support each other. They do this by inviting input from others, by making contributions that serve to maintain the dialogue and by demonstrating that they are listening to and value what others have to say. Invitations to contribute may be general, such as "does anyone else have a view on this?" or they may be directed at a specific person, perhaps someone who is expected to have an informed opinion on the current topic, for example:

"And I'm just looking at {name} really, in terms of Sure Start. The Connect system wouldn't support it either, would it?"

General invitations may or may not be successful in prompting a contribution. Their success depends on a range of factors, such as the format of the meeting and the

types of engager that are present (see below for further discussion of these factors). Conversely, invitations that are directed to a specific person are very likely to elicit a response and, when 'quiet' participants are invited to contribute, this can sometimes result in them becoming more active and spontaneous contributors afterwards. However, not everyone likes the feeling of being "put on the spot". When meeting participants know each other, or have been given an opportunity to introduce themselves at the start of a meeting, it is more likely that they will invite each other to contribute. This is because personal knowledge enables each participant to consider others' likely experience before attempting to include them in a discussion.

An alternative means of enabling others to contribute is that of making a straight statement that relates to the topic. Statements can take many forms but those that present a personal opinion are particularly likely to be responded to. For example, the following statement, taken from the steering group meeting data, initiated a discussion that several participants contributed to:

*"I was just thinking it ... it's the sort of thing that can lead people to be unfairly disappointed, if they don't understand the process."*

Of course, questions can also be used to maintain dialogue and these are used frequently in most discussions, including those that occur within meetings.

Participants' ability to contribute is supported by others demonstrating that they are listening to and value what is being said. This can happen in a number of different ways. At a simple level, participants may use verbal reinforcers (such as "yes", "uh huh", "mm") and encouraging non verbal communication (such as heads nods), to indicate that they are listening. Alternatively, they may refer back to earlier contributions, in order to offer an interpretation, to seek or give clarification or to expand on what was said. They may even specifically praise an earlier contribution, for example:

*"That was so helpful, that's exactly the kind of input that we were hoping for in these meetings."*

Even in successful meetings, the supportive behaviour that has been described above is unlikely to be demonstrated by all participants, all of the time. Indeed, the contributions of some participants may actively hinder contribution by others.



Participation can be hindered by participants that speak very frequently and/ or at length, such that others have fewer opportunities to speak. These 'verbal' participants may also interrupt frequently, perhaps by contributing their views as soon as another speaker pauses or else by talking over the top of others. Additionally, when others respond to what they are saying, they may fail to take note of what has been said before continuing with their turn. Another way in which participants may hinder contribution is by making others feel undervalued; by questioning, criticising or correcting what they say. Of course, it is sometimes necessary to question and correct other's contributions, as this ensures a balanced and accurate outcome to discussion. However, it is possible to do this in a way that does not undermine others, such that it has a lesser impact on hindering contribution.

Finally, some participants may hinder others' ability to contribute by repeatedly using discipline specific terminology that is not understood by all participants. This effectively creates a sub-set of meeting participants that are unable to understand and contribute to a particular discussion, as they do not share the relevant knowledge.

*X said that she had been working with these people for about four years and still does not understand some of the language that they use. She thinks that it must, therefore, be difficult for service users to fully engage with the process.*

Typically, the participants that hinder contributions are those that are in a position of authority in relation to other meeting participants. Their behaviour serves as both a sign of this authority and a means of maintaining control over the meeting. However, not all participants that are in a position of authority hinder others' contributions and, occasionally, there are more junior participants who speak at length, interrupt and question others' contributions. To some extent, the way in which individual participants behave is dependant on their role perception (see section 4.2.2). For example, if a participant perceives part of their role as being 'to play devil's advocate' or 'to ensure the accuracy of information that is shared', then that person is more likely to question and correct others' contributions.

The above sections have set out the ways in which the preparation and contribution of others can affect a participant's ability to contribute. However, it is also possible for others' level of attendance to affect opportunities to contribute. For example, if specific participants fail to attend a meeting, some agenda items may be postponed or only partially dealt with and this may prevent others from contributing in the way that they

intended to. They may, for example, be unable to ask the questions that they wanted to, or be unable to foster new professional relationships. Where a number of participants fail to attend, the tone and focus of the meeting may change drastically. This can result in some meetings being less successful than others with respect to generating broad discussion, especially when many of the participants that do attend perceive themselves to have a passive role in the meeting process. The inclusion of just one or two more active participants can be enough to overcome this effect, perhaps because their willingness to contribute encourages others to do the same.

### ***Reacting and adapting to the format of the meeting***

The structure of a meeting is another factor that influences a participant's ability to contribute. For example, different agenda items will be more or less likely to engage different participants and, additionally, some items will provide fewer opportunities for people to engage in general discussion, as their focus is one of information giving. When an agenda has several 'information giving' items in a row and most of the participants are prevented from making significant contributions, they may become used to taking a listening role. It can then be difficult for the chair to obtain broader contribution from them within the following agenda items. This is illustrated in the following section of data:

*X commented that, in the first few meetings, the emphasis was mostly on information giving and reporting back. She suggested that this set up a dynamic from the beginning: one that disempowered people from putting forward ideas.*

However, it is also the case that a certain amount of information giving is inevitable: meeting participants need to receive information in order to have something to respond to, challenge and discuss.

The level of formality of a meeting is another way in which format affects contribution. In formal meetings, the agenda is set in advance, within the structured framework of: apologies, minutes of the last meeting, matters arising, specific agenda items and any other business. Within this framework, there is an expectation that certain participants will 'speak to' specific items and there is also an unspoken protocol, dictating that issues will only be raised under the relevant agenda item. This 'formal' format is required within most organisations, in order to provide a level of authority to both the proceedings and any decisions that are made. However, participants can sometimes

feel constrained by the formality, especially if they are unsure about their position in relation to other meeting participants. Less formal meetings, such as open stakeholder meetings and 'away days' can enable more active participation, as they give participants permission to be more creative and challenging. They may also provide opportunities for participants to become involved in setting the agenda. However, whilst informal meetings may be more creative and participatory, they do not usually carry sufficient authority within an organisation for the decisions made within them to be 'rubber stamped'.

### ***Reacting and adapting to the meeting environment***

The meeting environment can also affect participants' ability to contribute, although the effect of this is likely to be less significant than that of the factors already discussed. If the room is too cramped, participants may not be able to see and make eye contact with everyone at the meeting and this can constrain their ability to interact. Participants often react to this situation by moving their own chair but this may only make matters worse for other participants. In extreme cases, some participants may switch off or decide that it is too difficult to contribute to a particular discussion because of difficulties in making use of non verbal communication. Similarly, noise from air conditioning units or from outside the room can distract participants and prevent them from being able to hear each other properly. Finally, a room that is too hot or too cold, or which has strong sunlight shining onto participants' faces will be uncomfortable and, again, this can hinder active participation. Sometimes, these issues can be easily addressed but, at other times, dealing with one only causes problems with another. For example, opening a window to deal with a hot, stuffy room may increase noise levels from outside.

### **4.4.5 A typology of engagers**

Participants all engage with meetings in different ways and, indeed, the same person might engage differently with different sets of meetings. A typology of engagers has been identified from these data. Each type has been given a name and has been assigned a hypothetical motto that best describes that type's motivation for engagement. These types of engager are described below. As with most categorisation systems, not all meeting participants fit neatly into one category and participants can move between categories over time or display elements of more than one type of engager at any one time. However, this typology does account for the majority of variation in the behaviour of meeting participants. In this section, female and male pronouns have been used in relation to alternate types of engager, in order to

avoid the more clumsy he/ she construction. However, each type of meeting participant can, of course, be either female or male in reality.

### ***Full Engager***

*"I'm committed to attending these meetings and to contributing fully."*

The Full Engager perceives herself to have a valuable role that relates to supporting the overall function of the meetings. She is able to identify significant benefits associated with her engagement and these benefits outweigh any costs. These factors result in a strong and clearly defined personal agenda. The Full Engager also has a sense of obligation to engage, and this may be driven by either personal belief systems or by expectations of others. The combination of a strong personal agenda and a sense of obligation results in a high level of commitment.

The Full Engager prepares well for meetings. Where other priorities conflict with the demands of the meeting, she works round these as much as is possible such that she rarely, if ever, misses meetings or parts of meetings. She does, therefore, arrive punctually and stay to the end. The Full Engager reads the meeting paperwork in advance, considers her possible contribution and follows up on any relevant action points. Within the meetings themselves, the Full Engager takes an active role. She tends to contribute in a range of ways and for a range of purposes, for example, to clarify and give information, to share opinions, solve problems and suggest actions. She has the necessary interpersonal skills to adapt her style of contribution if she experiences pressures from other participants, from the format of the meeting or from the meeting environment. The Full Engager is generally valued and appreciated by other meeting participants.

### ***Restricted Engager***

*"I'm committed to attending these meetings and to contributing fully but I haven't been able to do this effectively."*

In terms of clarity of personal agenda and level of commitment, the Restricted Engager is very much like the Full Engager. However, the Restricted Engager is unable to adapt to personal or external pressures that affect his manner of engagement and, therefore, he fails to advance his agenda effectively. The Restricted Engager may miss meetings for reasons such as ill health or conflicting commitments. Alternatively, if he is able to attend, he may be unprepared or else be unable to adapt to pressures

arising within the meeting. For example, he may not have the interpersonal skills to participate in a discussion that he is not specifically invited to contribute to, or else he may not be able to adapt his style of interaction to take account of participants that speak at length. It is also possible for the Restricted Engager to be constrained by either the format of the meeting or the environment of the meeting room. For example, he could be unused to attending formal meetings and find it intimidating to contribute in this environment, or he could be unable to overcome problems related to a poor seating plan. The Restricted Engager that attends meetings appears to be a passive contributor but this does not match his intention.

### ***Absent Engager***

*"I am keen to contribute to these meetings but I don't have time to attend them."*

The Absent Engager is committed to engaging with the meetings but not to attending them. Her personal agenda relates to being kept informed about developments and ensuring that her views, or those of her organisation, are represented. She perceives a value in advancing this agenda but does not perceive an overall value in participating actively with discussion and debate within the meetings. This is because the cost of time spent attending meetings is greater than any added benefit she would gain from being there in person. The Absent Engager does not feel obliged to attend meetings but she is likely to have a sense of obligation in relation to engaging in a more general sense.

In order to contribute without attending, the Absent Engager finds alternative ways of doing this. She tends to read the minutes and any other meeting paperwork that is sent to her and aims to pass on her comments before each meeting. There are various ways of doing this. The Absent Engager may discuss her views with other meeting participants in the context of other meetings, she may phone or email another participant to pass on her comments or, finally, she may send someone else to represent her in the meetings, usually a more junior colleague. Where the Absent Engager makes thoughtful and valuable contributions in one of these ways, it is possible for her to be valued by other meeting participants, despite her lack of attendance.

### ***Passive Engager***

*"I don't think I've got much to contribute to these meetings but I want to find out what is happening."*

The Passive Engager identifies a role for himself that is primarily associated with receiving information and, to some extent, responding to specific questions that are asked of him. He does not believe that he has the knowledge or experience to actively engage with discussion and debate and so does not perceive this to be part of his role. Despite this fact, the Passive Engager believes that there is an overall value associated with his attendance at the meetings, either for himself or his organisation. This belief results in a strong agenda and, if he also feels obliged to attend, a strong sense of commitment.

The Passive Engager keeps the dates and times of meetings free in his diary and reads the meeting paperwork before attending. He is committed to fulfilling his role and is therefore willing to respond to questions that are asked of him. However, the Passive Engager makes very few verbal contributions and rarely contributes without being specifically invited to do so. He is also likely to feed back information to colleagues between meetings and may take personal notes in order to support this role.

### ***Opportunist Engager***

*“I’m not especially interested in the outcome of these meetings but I’m attending because I’m getting something out of it for myself.”*

The Opportunist Engager has a strong personal agenda that focuses on what she can gain personally from her engagement with the meetings. She may, for example, want to network with other meeting participants, gain some ‘inside information’ or ensure that her pet issue is kept firmly on the agenda. She is not especially interested in what she can contribute to the meeting process in return. The Opportunist Engager is both committed and distanced, in different ways. She is committed to advancing her personal agenda and this is likely to involve attending regularly and contributing frequently. However, as her underlying motivation is egocentric, she is distanced from the main work of the other meeting participants. She gets involved in it only to the extent that she needs to, in order to meet her own aims.

Within the meetings, the Opportunist Engager can behave in a range of different ways, depending on the nature of her agenda, so it is not possible to describe a typical pattern of contribution. However, some examples include: an engager who wants to gain inside information and asks a lot of specific questions; an engager who is motivated by networking and always arrives in good time to talk to other participants as

they arrive and, finally, an engager with a pet issue who is assertive in getting her voice heard. Some Opportunist Engagers will promise actions but fail to carry them out if they are not of personal value. Other meeting participants may or may not be aware of the Opportunist's personal agenda, depending on the degree to which she 'plays the game of engaging' in order to advance it.

### ***Altruistic Engager***

*"I'm committed to engaging with these meetings because my input is benefiting others."*

The Altruistic Engager is the opposite of the Opportunist Engager. He makes it his duty to fully understand the function of the meetings and he identifies specific ways in which he can fulfil a role that supports positive meeting outcomes. He perceives the value of his engagement in terms of what he can offer others, rather than what they can offer him and he is willing to bear significant costs in order to engage, as he perceives it to be the 'right thing to do'. The Altruistic Engager's personal agenda might be, for example, 'to share specific knowledge or skills' or 'to represent the views of a group of stakeholders'. He has an internally driven sense of obligation and is highly committed.

The Altruistic Engager is always well prepared for meetings. He is a regular and punctual attendee, reads any paperwork in advance and contributes actively within meetings, following up on actions as necessary. He shares many attributes with the Full Engager, the main difference being that the Full Engager does not engage for altruistic reasons alone. The Altruistic Engager's selfless willingness to support the meeting process is generally well received by other participants.

### ***Distanced Engager***

*"These meetings are not a priority for me but I'm attending because I'm obliged to."*

The Distanced Engager feels obliged to engage with the meetings because it is what others expect of her, or because it is what is expected of someone in her position within her organisation. The Distanced Engager has a clear understanding of the role that she is expected to fulfil and is aware of the ways in which this role could be of benefit to others. However, she perceives there to be little overall personal value associated with her engagement and she is therefore distanced from the meetings psychologically.

The Distanced Engager's personal agenda is to fulfil her obligation to attend with as little cost to herself as is possible and this means that, although the Distanced Engager generally attends meetings, she does not put a significant amount of effort into her engagement. She does not necessarily prepare well and may end up arriving late or leaving early as she fails to deal with conflicting priorities in advance. The Distanced Engager will tend to read meeting paperwork at the meeting itself, rather than in advance and may need to be reminded to follow up on actions that she has promised to carry out. Once at the meeting, she is generally willing to contribute as fully as she is able to and is therefore likely to contribute in a range of ways and for a range of purposes. However, it is possible that her attention will wane when she perceives that the topic of discussion is of less relevance to her. Other participants are likely to be frustrated by the Distanced Engager's lack of commitment and preparation.

### ***Try-and-See Engager***

*"I'm not sure whether these meetings are of any value or not so I'll go along to find out."*

The Try-and-See Engager does not have a clear perception of his role within the meetings and this may be partly attributable to the fact that he does not fully understand the function of the meetings, either. This situation could arise because he did not receive sufficient information about the meetings or because he was unable to make sense of such information. He may also have limited experience of similar meetings on which to base his perceptions. As the Try-and-See Engager does not know what his role within the meetings might be, it is not possible for him to make a judgement about the value of his engagement and, therefore, he has a weakly defined personal agenda and a low level of commitment. He only feels obliged to engage if he has been instructed to do so by a more senior colleague. The Try-and-See Engager is, however, willing to find out more about the meetings before deciding whether or not to further commit to engaging with them.

The Try-and-See Engager will attempt to clarify his role by attending at least one meeting and, potentially, by discussing his role with others. It is difficult for him to prepare well for meetings as he is not clear about what he will be expected to contribute once there. However, he is committed enough to read the meeting paperwork in advance and will probably be punctual. Within his first meeting he may or may not contribute actively, depending on what he discovers about his potential role.



***Occasional Engager***

*“I don't have to attend these meetings but they're quite useful so I'm doing my best to attend.”*

The Occasional Engager has a clear sense of the function of the meetings and of her role within them. She identifies that there is some benefit associated with engaging with the meetings, which could be a benefit to herself, her organisation or others. Overall, she perceives that this benefit outweighs the associated costs of engagement but this is finely balanced. It is therefore possible for the balance to tip the other way some of the time, for example when other demands on her time are particularly strong. The Occasional Engager is not obliged to engage with the meetings and so she is likely to disengage with the process when she perceives the overall value to be negative. The Occasional Engager, therefore, intends to attend and contribute as much as is possible, bearing in mind other priorities that are likely to take precedence some of the time.

When the Occasional Engager feels able to engage with the meetings, she does so in a committed manner: she attends punctually and makes an active contribution. However, the fact that she misses some meetings can limit the extent to which she is able to engage deeply with the issues. Other participants may value the contributions that she does make but they feel unable to rely on her ongoing engagement.

***Minimal Engager***

*“I'm not very committed to these meetings but I'm going along when it fits in with my other priorities”*

The Minimal Engager does not have a strong personal agenda, perhaps because he does not have a good understanding of his role within the meetings, or because he is unsure about the benefit of his engagement. He also feels a low level of obligation to engage and this means that he is relatively distanced from the meetings. However, because the Minimal Engager feels a degree of obligation and/ or because he perceives a potential, future value of engagement, he maintains a low level of input and does not withdraw completely from the meeting process.

The Minimal Engager attends meetings sporadically. He tends to look at the agenda in advance and decide whether the items for discussion in that meeting are relevant to him or not before agreeing to attend. He may attend the start of a meeting but then

announce that he needs to leave, part way through and without prior warning. Alternatively, he may attend a meeting but then not engage once there. When this happens, he may appear to be taking notes but, rather, be writing for other purposes, such as constructing a 'to do' list. Similarly, he may appear to be listening but, instead, be thinking about other things. At times, however, the Minimal Engager may become more actively engaged, listening actively and participating in discussion and debate. This occurs when he perceives a particular agenda item to be of relevance to him. The inconsistent behaviour and lack of commitment of the Minimal Engager frustrates other participants.

### ***Non Engager***

*"It's not worth my while engaging with these meetings"*

The Non Engager withdraws totally from the meeting process. She does not perceive there to be any benefit associated with engaging, either for herself or for others and, as engagement always carries a cost, she concludes that it is not a valuable use of her time. Additionally, the Non Engager does not feel obliged to engage and so she feels no commitment to the meetings. She does not, therefore, attend meetings and does not intentionally contribute to the meeting process in any other way. However, if a Non Engager's name remains on the list of group members, she may contribute unintentionally, by virtue of her name being associated with any decisions that are made.

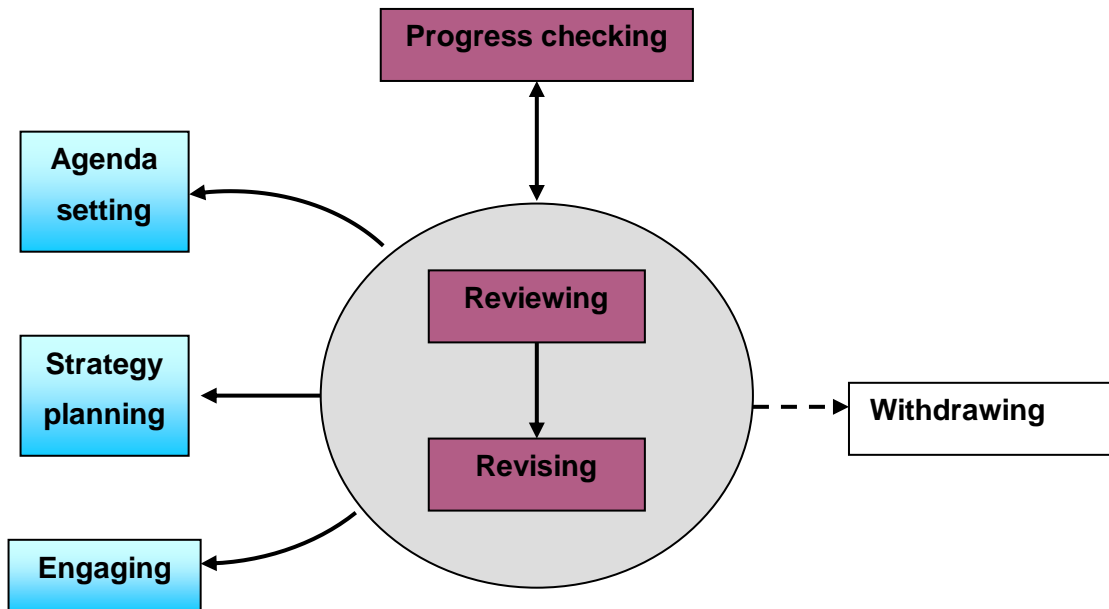
## **4.5 Stage 4: Evaluating**

In 'evaluating', the fourth stage of Advancing Agendas, participants evaluate the outcome of their actions. Evaluating can begin at any time after participants have begun their engagement and it may result in them modifying aspects of their agenda, their strategy for achieving it or their method of engaging. As each participant modifies his or her actions, this has an impact on the opportunities provided to others, resulting in an ever changing environment that further fuels the need to evaluate outcomes, creating a cycle of planning, evaluating and modifying actions.

### ***Progress checking***

Initially, participants ask themselves whether or not they are resolving their main concern of "achieving maximum personal value from engagement with the meetings" (see section 4.1.1), which involves them considering whether or not they have been

able to advance their agenda. This step of 'progress checking' can be a means to an end but, more typically, it acts as a trigger for more detailed evaluation of outcomes, via the steps of reviewing and revising. Reviewing and revising are the two main properties of evaluating (see figure 7) and these will be explained below.



**Figure 7: A model of stage 4: evaluating**

#### 4.5.1 Reviewing and revising

If a participant has been unable to achieve maximum personal value from engagement with the meetings, this could be due to: an inaccurate perception of either the function of the meetings or the participant's role within them; inaccurate judgement of the potential costs and benefits of engagement; an ineffective strategy or, finally, an inability to prepare, attend or contribute in the manner intended, because of difficulty in adapting to influencing factors. In reviewing outcomes, participants may consider some or all of these options, either consciously or sub-consciously. As discussed in previous sections, each of these issues is interrelated and so it can be difficult, or even irrelevant, to pinpoint a single, underlying cause for a lack of progress. Instead, participants will consider what it is possible to change in order to improve the situation, by, for example, re-setting their agenda or re-planning their strategy, hence the next step, 'revising'. Revising can lead to participants engaging to either a greater or lesser degree with the meetings and, where a participant comes to the conclusion that there is

no reason for them to continue engaging, they may withdraw from the process totally, becoming a Non Engager (see section 4.4.5).

Participants may also revise their agendas and strategies as a result of a process of group forming. In some cases, where members of a group have met and worked together over a period of time, their understanding of each other improves and this supports the development of a shared sense of purpose, or a shared agenda. This can result in participants feeling more comfortable within the group and, therefore, more willing to engage actively, as illustrated in the following field note:

*X stated that she feels that the group has developed a sense of maturity, in that familiarity is allowing difference to occur and is allowing people to share ideas that they may have had before but hadn't necessarily had the confidence to say. X doesn't think that anyone can help that to happen particularly quickly but that it is the nature of the group coming together.*

There are so many possible combinations of variables within reviewing and revising, that it is not possible to explain them all. However, some potential scenarios will be provided below, by reproducing memos that were written about some of the steering group participants.

### **Scenario 1**

X began her association with the meetings as a Distanced Engager. She was obliged to attend because of her position within her organisation but she did not perceive there to be an overall personal value in attending. When she spoke to the researcher at the start of the process, she talked about it being "yet another meeting" and mentioned the fact that she spent increasing amounts of time in meetings that were of little benefit to her. In the first meeting that she attended, she did not contribute significantly. However, in the following meeting she became more actively involved in the discussion and spoke of the value of the steering group in relation to drawing parallels with developments in her own service. It appeared that she had decided that the benefits to her were greater than she had originally perceived them to be and, because of that, she became more committed and felt willing and/ or able to contribute more actively.

### **Scenario 2**

X was aware of the cost of time spent engaging with the meetings and was pleased to find out that the meetings always finished on time. Because of this, she was willing to

commit to attending, as she was able to predict how much time she needed to devote to the meetings

### ***Scenario 3***

X attended his first meeting as a Minimal Engager. His perception was that there were significant costs associated with engaging, not just for himself but for the sum of all the people involved. He was unsure how much benefit he could bring to the meetings but decided to attend in order to evaluate this. After attending one meeting, he concluded that he was unable to contribute anything novel that other participants were not also able to contribute. He therefore decided that there was no added benefit associated with his engagement and, in view of the significant costs that he had already identified, he decided not to attend further meetings or to contribute in any other way.

### ***Scenario 4***

X is a Passive Engager who has attended meetings in order to receive information that she can take back and share with colleagues. She was unsure how useful the meetings would be to begin with but, after attending three meetings, she has ascertained that the information is useful to her and this has strengthened her commitment to engaging.

### ***Scenario 5***

X hoped that she would get key managers to agree to specific actions within the meetings. When these key people failed to attend regularly, she decided that she needed to find an alternative forum for seeking their agreement. In doing this, she adapted her personal agenda for the meetings.

## **4.6 Summary**

Advancing Agendas is a grounded theory that explains the way in which participants of interagency meetings ensure that they achieve the maximum personal value from their engagement with the meetings. It is a social strategic process with four stages: agenda setting, strategy planning, engaging and evaluating. Stage one, agenda setting has three main properties: function perception, role perception and value judging. These three properties interact with and influence each other in the development of a personal agenda. Within stage two, strategy planning, this personal agenda is considered in relation to the participant's perceived level of obligation to engage, leading to a process of committing to or distancing from the meetings and

resulting in a strategy for advancing the personal agenda. In stage three, engaging, each participant intends to prepare for, attend and contribute to the meetings in a range of ways, as determined by his or her personal agenda and strategy for advancing this agenda. However, participants are not always able to engage in the way that they intend to, as they continually have to react to personal and external pressures and adapt the manner of their engagement accordingly. Eleven different types of engager have been identified from this research and these are: Full Engager, Restricted Engager, Absent Engager, Passive Engager, Opportunist Engager, Altruistic Engager, Distanced Engager, Try-and-See Engager, Occasional Engager, Minimal Engager and Non Engager. These types of engager are categorised according to the properties of agenda setting, and strategy planning. In stage four, evaluating, participants start by checking whether or not they have advanced or achieved their agenda. Then, if necessary, they review their agenda, their strategy and/ or their method of engagement and revise any aspect of these properties that are felt to be inadequate or inappropriate.

In the following chapter (Chapter Five), the theory of Advancing Agendas will be discussed in relation to existing, relevant literature and then the implications of it will be discussed within Chapter Six.

## 5.0 COMPARISON WITH THE LITERATURE

This chapter will:

- Describe the way in which the existing literature was used within this research.
- Review and critically evaluate the existing literature.
- Integrate the theory of Advancing Agendas with findings from the existing literature.

### 5.1 Use of the literature within this research

The traditional way for researchers to make use of the existing literature is for them to study it prior to starting their research, in order to embed their research questions within existing knowledge in the substantive area. However, as was described in Chapter Three, the literature is used in a different way within grounded theory (GT) research. In GT, it is important that researchers do not become preconceived by previous research findings, as this may lead to them forcing concepts onto the data, or making interpretations about the relationship between concepts that do not fit or are not relevant. Instead, GT researchers should allow the theoretical framework to emerge from the data and, for this reason, the literature is not studied until the researcher is at the stage of sorting and writing up the memos<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, as the researcher does not know at the outset which concepts will emerge from the data, this way of working avoids time being spent on reviewing literature that turns out not to be relevant to the resulting theory.

Once the literature is accessed, the researcher uses this as further data that can be woven into the theoretical framework, via the process of constant comparison<sup>5</sup> (Glaser 1998). In this way, the literature is used to either further support aspects of the theory or, where appropriate, to extend or modify it. The theory can be extended or modified by adding additional concepts or properties, or by identifying new relationships between existing concepts (Glaser 1998). As a grounded theory is a set of modifiable, conceptual hypotheses, this process is not problematic. It is also the case that literature from one discipline can be used to add insight to a theoretical model in a different discipline. This is because the process of conceptualisation that is used within GT has the power to transcend traditional boundaries (Glaser 1998). In view of this, the researcher should not only review the literature within the substantive area of the research but should also look at literature in other areas, to find papers in which similar concepts have been identified or discussed.

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<sup>5</sup> Please see chapter three for an explanation of these terms.

The current researcher followed these guidelines and began reading the literature once she was at the stage of sorting and writing up the memos. Initially, literature was reviewed that related to meeting behaviour and partnership working. The researcher began by searching for articles related to these topics using a wide range of relevant electronic databases<sup>6</sup>. Relevant references that were identified within these articles were also followed up and, where authors were identified that had written several relevant papers, the researcher examined their personal web pages in order to check whether they had written additional, relevant papers. This latter action did not, however, result in the identification of any new papers. The researcher took care to consider the quality of any papers that were identified, by critically analysing the research methods that had been used. If any papers were found that appeared not to have been obtained from sound research, they would have been rejected. However, it was not necessary to reject any of the identified papers on these grounds.

Once the literature relating to meeting behaviour and partnership working had been identified, more general searches were conducted on each of the main concepts that had emerged within Advancing Agendas, for example, 'personal agenda' and 'engagement'. The process described above was also used for these searches. However, very little of the literature that was accessed in this way was found to be relevant. For example, there was a significant body of literature containing the key words 'personal agenda' but much of this related to personal agendas within journalism and had no relevance to the way in which the concept had been used in Advancing Agendas.

In the following sections, the literature relating to meeting behaviour, specifically that associated with board meetings, will be reviewed first, followed by the literature relating to partnership working in general. Finally, there is a section on complexity theory. The researcher came across papers that discussed complexity theory while conducting the more general search on partnership working and realised that complexity theory was relevant to Advancing Agendas.

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<sup>6</sup> Databases used for this search were: AMED, ERIC, MEDLINE, PsychINFO, PubMed, Web of Science, CINAHL Plus, IBSS and Social Sciences Citation Index. These were accessed via University College London's gateway to electronic resources, MetaLib. Further literature was accessed by following up references within relevant papers and by searching for further work by relevant authors.



## 5.2 Board meeting research

### 5.2.1 Relevance of the board meeting literature to this research

The delivery and governance of public sector services within the UK has undergone significant change during the period from the 1980s onwards (Cornforth 2003). In particular, there has been a policy of removing organisations from the direct control of local authorities or central government and, instead, moving towards a model of independent governance within trusts and quangos. This has meant that the private sector model of governance via an elected board has become common place within the public and third (voluntary and non-profit) sectors (Cornforth 2003, Farrell 2005, Peck 1995). In addition, the agenda of 'joined up, interagency working' that has been championed since the election of the Labour government in 1997, has led to the development of interagency organisations and partnerships and, therefore, the establishment of interagency boards (Glasby and Peck 2006). Examples of these include Children's Trust Boards, Children and Young People's Partnership Boards, Local Strategic Partnership Boards and Joint Commissioning Partnership Boards. Furthermore, guidance from central government on the role and governance of Children's Trusts has suggested that a well functioning board is central to the delivery of effective, integrated services (DfES 2005, DCSF 2008 a).

Since the use of boards to govern public sector organisations has become part of the political landscape, interest in measuring their effectiveness has grown, leading to an increasing body of research in this area (Cornforth 2003, Farrell 2005). Much of the research that relates to the behaviour of meeting participants focuses on board level meetings. Indeed, it appears that there is little, if any, literature that relates to strategic meetings below the level of the board, such as were the main focus of the current research. However, it seems appropriate to use the board meeting literature for comparison with the theory of Advancing Agendas for two reasons. Firstly, a small amount of the data collected for this research did relate to board meetings, as some of the speech and language therapy (SLT) service managers that were interviewed were involved in such meetings. Advancing Agendas has, therefore, already been extended in this direction, to some extent. Secondly, both board meetings and the steering group meetings from which much of these data were collected, share the primary aim of shaping strategic development. In view of these facts and the fact that there is very little literature on other types of meetings, the board meeting literature will be used as a source of comparative data within this chapter.

Several researchers have identified the fact that public and private sector boards share key features in terms of their constitution, roles and responsibilities (Glasby and Peck 2006, Farrell 2005). This has led to the view that it is appropriate to extrapolate findings from research relating to private sector boards (Glasby and Peck 2006) and to apply theoretical models of corporate governance to the public sector (Freeman and Peck 2007). It is also the case that, within the socio-political climate of integrated children's services, some of the interagency partnerships that exist will include representatives from public, private and third sector organisations (DCSF 2008 a). This is a further reason for considering research that relates to board meeting behaviour in each of these sectors when comparing the existing literature to the theoretical model of Advancing Agendas.

In the following section, the literature relating to behaviour in board meetings will be compared to and integrated with the theory of Advancing Agendas. In order to do this, each of the four stages of Advancing Agendas, namely agenda setting, strategy planning, engaging and evaluating, will be considered and relevant findings from the existing literature will be discussed in relation to them. Naturally, terms such as 'agenda setting' are not used in the existing literature in the same way that they have been used within the current research. However, the ideas that relate to these concepts have been discussed in the literature and this is what will be presented in the following sections.

### **5.2.2 Comparison of the board meeting literature to Advancing Agendas**

Much of the literature on board meetings focuses on governance issues, such as whether or not boards fulfil their prescribed functions. There does not appear to be any existing literature that considers the advancement of personal agendas or engagement within meetings. Nevertheless many of the concepts that were identified within Advancing Agendas can be found in the board meetings literature, as can discussion of some of the links between concepts. For example, concepts such as function and role perception, type of contribution and factors that effect contribution are all considered and this research can therefore be used to support or modify Advancing Agendas.

There are a few papers relating to board meetings that are of particular interest, as they have each examined public or third sector boards using the combined methods of observation of meetings, questionnaires or interviews with meeting participants and examination of the minutes of meetings (Peck 1995, Edwards and Cornforth 2003, Bieber 2003 and Freeman and Peck 2007). Peck (1995) studied an NHS Trust Board

soon after these were introduced and he was one of the first researchers to use this combination of methods in relation to research into meeting behaviour. Edwards and Cornforth (2003) examined four boards; two within the public sector, namely a school governing body and a college board, and two voluntary organisation boards, one functioning at a local level and the other a national level. Bieber (2003) researched the boards of three independent museums and also conducted a postal survey of a further 22 museums. Finally, Freeman and Peck (2007) conducted a study that is more closely related to the current research in that it involved a Joint Commissioning Partnership Board (JCPB), which is an interagency body. In addition to these, there are two further papers that raise a number of relevant issues. Farrell (2005) interviewed the governors of eight schools and Otto (2003) conducted questionnaires and interviews with chairs and directors/ chief executives of 43 boards, split almost equally between the public, third and private sectors. Findings from each of these six papers will be discussed below.

### ***The prescribed role of boards***

From the point at which NHS Trusts were first introduced in the 1980s, there was an understanding that their boards would be responsible for determining the Trust's strategic direction and for ensuring that strategic decisions were followed through (DH 1989). As Peck (1995) points out, this was consistent with the prescribed function of corporate boards. At about the same time, the management of individual schools was devolved to governing bodies, which are boards in all but name (Farrell 2005). Guidance on the function of these bodies indicated that they, too had a primarily strategic role, with operational decisions being the responsibility of the headteacher (DfEE 1998). This position was strengthened by guidance issued to school governing bodies in 2000, the aim of which was stated as being "to clarify that their role is mainly strategic" (DfEE 2000, p2). More recently, the government has made a proposal to strengthen the role of Children's Trust Boards, by giving them a legal duty to "set the strategic vision and direction for services for children in the local area" (DCSF 2008 a, p 8). Overall, then, there is general acceptance that public sector boards should have the primary function of setting and overseeing strategic development, as is the case for corporate boards.

### ***Function of boards and roles of board members***

Despite acceptance of the fact that boards are prescribed to have a primarily strategic function, it appears that not all boards fulfil this role. For example, Edwards and Cornforth (2003) identified that, of the four boards they studied, only two contributed

significantly to the strategic development of their organisations. Instead, it appears that much of the activity in board meetings relates to receiving information and ‘rubber stamping’ decisions made elsewhere. Peck’s analysis of the minutes of the NHS Trust board indicated that this board was in a passive, receiving mode for around 45 per cent of the agenda items, with the two primary activities being ‘receiving information’ and ‘approving proposals’, most of which related to operational management. This finding was backed up to some extent by his observations of the meetings, although it was apparent that the actual time spent in ‘receiving mode’ was even greater than had been gleaned from the minutes. However, the observations also indicated that some time was spent on challenging and debating and that the potential impact of such activity was significant in relation to the time spent on it (Peck 1995). Similarly, Bieber (2003) identified that the category of ‘engaging actively with the issues’ took up less than half the time in the museum board meetings and that more time was spent on ‘requesting and giving information’, with 49 per cent of the meetings being attributed to this mode. Finally, Freeman and Peck (2007) found that just 21 per cent of the JCPB board’s agenda items related to strategy and that, for most of those items, the focus was on receiving information rather than on challenging it.

Farrell (2005) discusses that fact that strategic involvement can be considered at a range of different levels. She proposes three levels, based on a model by McNulty and Pettigrew (1999). These are: ‘taking strategic decisions’, which involves the board agreeing decisions that have been made elsewhere; ‘shaping strategic decisions’, in which the board is consulted about strategic decisions, and, the highest level of involvement, ‘shaping the content, context and conduct of strategy’, in which board members are actively involved in setting the strategic direction of the organisation. Her interviews with school governors indicated that governing bodies were involved in strategy, but mostly at the lowest level of ‘taking strategic decisions’. If this model was taken into account in the studies described above, then, for example, Peck’s category of ‘rubber stamping’ would also count as involvement in strategy.

Another way of considering the function of boards is proposed by Freeman and Peck (2007). They consider the interplay between instrumental and symbolic factors in the governance of interagency partnerships. Instrumental factors relate to the official output of the board, such as the decisions that are recorded in the minutes. Symbolic factors, on the other hand, relate to social and implicit aspects of board meetings, such as the development of shared understanding between members. Freeman and Peck suggest that there is a complex relationship between these two factors, with symbolic

aspects of the board's functioning influencing the opportunity for instrumental aspects to be carried out. This analysis, therefore, makes it clear that it is overly restrictive to consider the actual function of a board purely in terms of the decisions that it makes.

Given these findings, it is hardly surprising that board members do not always perceive strategic development as being at the core of their function. In Peck's study (1995), board members were asked to indicate which of 15 functions the board had undertaken most successfully in the previous twelve months. Peck found that there was some variation in the options selected by different members. The most common selections related to 'making use of the skills and experiences of boards members', 'sharing in the vision of the trust' and 'enhancing external relationships'. Just two board members selected 'setting and reviewing strategy'. Similarly, Bieber (2003) asked how strongly museum board members agreed or disagreed with statements about governance issues and found significant variation both within and between boards. In light of this finding, he looked at whether the principles of governance were ever overtly discussed within meetings and found that they rarely were. These findings concur with those from *Advancing Agendas*: firstly, that meeting participants' perceptions of the function of meetings are based on a range of sources, of which information regarding the prescribed function is only one and, secondly, that participants in any one meeting may have differing perceptions of its intended function.

In *Advancing Agendas*, it was noted that there is interdependence between participants' perceptions of the function of meetings and their own roles within them and there is some evidence to support this within the existing literature, too. For example, some board members of the local voluntary organisation studied by Edwards and Cornforth (2003) were reported to view the board as a 'supporters club' (p84) and so viewed their responsibilities in a limited way. Similarly, members of several boards have been shown to assume a role of agreeing decisions, as this is their perception of the function of the meetings (Edwards and Cornforth 2003, Farrell 2005, Bieber 2003).

The existing literature has indicated that there can be variation in board members' perceptions of their role, even between members of the same board (Freeman and Peck 2007). Additionally, board members may be confused and uncertain about the expected nature of their roles (Farrell 2005, Otto 2003). Otto (2003) specifically investigated levels of role ambiguity and conflict amongst chairs and directors and found that at least one third of respondents across public, third and voluntary sector boards identified themselves as experiencing such uncertainty. Where there is role

confusion, board members may need to find or create a role for themselves and this was demonstrated by Otto (2003) and Freeman and Peck (2007). In the latter case, it was suggested that Joint Commissioning Partnership Board members from the NHS Primary Care Trust (PCT) initially found it difficult to know how to behave within the meetings and that they discovered appropriate roles by finding out how to make their contributions acceptable to board members from the county council. Again, these findings all concur with those of Advancing Agendas, which identified variation between participants perceptions of their roles and the possibility for some participants to experience 'role confusion'. Advancing Agendas also noted that participants who experience role confusion may solve this by 'finding' a role for themselves.

### ***Factors influencing variation in function and role perception***

Various suggestions have been made regarding factors that influence function and role perception. Firstly, there is some evidence that board members' broader roles are influential in this respect. Where the person in the 'board director' role has a professional status (for example a museum director or headteacher), other board members may decide that it is not their role to question the 'director's' opinion in relation to matters of a professional nature (Bieber 2003, Edwards and Cornforth 2003, Farrell 2005). Furthermore, the professionals may amplify this tendency by using phrases such as "my professional advice ..." (Bieber 2003). In practice, this means that the professional wields a significant degree of power and control in the decision making process, increasing the likelihood that the function of the board is one of agreeing, rather than setting strategy. In Advancing Agendas, virtually all the participants were in professional roles, so this did not emerge as an issue. However, it is a concept that should be considered in relation to extending the theory, to take account of other forms of interagency meeting.

A second source of variability is that of past experience and training. In some organisations, board members are selected for their ability to represent stakeholders, rather than for their strategic management experience (Bieber 2003, Edwards and Cornforth 2003). Additionally, training may focus on the statutory elements of the role, rather than the broader aspects of participation (Farrell 2005). A lack of relevant experience or training means that board members will rely on their broader experiences and social expectations in forming a perception of their role and this can be restrictive in cases where board members mostly fit into one demographic group, such as the 'white middle class male' (Bieber 2003). A lack of experience can also mean that members are unable to challenge the way in which meetings are run if, for

example, there is insufficient time being allowed for active debate (Bieber 2003). Freeman and Peck (2007) identified that board members from different organisations were particularly likely to have different perceptions of the function of the meeting and of their role within it, due to the nature of their experiences within their own organisations. This type of variability can cause tension within a meeting (Freeman and Peck 2007). Past experiences can, however, also be positive: where board members for a college were selected from industry, for example, it was felt that they displayed the necessary skills to fulfil a strategic role to a greater extent than did the less experienced members of a school governing body (Edwards and Cornforth 2003).

In *Advancing Agendas*, the concept of membership selection was linked to attendance, with the suggestion that participants can only attend if they have been invited to and that the choice of participants therefore has an effect on the balance of the meeting. However, the existing literature, as reviewed above, indicates that the process of selecting members has broader implications, in that members who are selected or elected for different reasons, are likely to bring different perceptions and skills to the meeting context. Membership selecting within the theory of *Advancing Agendas*, therefore, should have a link to the phase of agenda setting, with repercussions throughout the rest of the process.

Edwards and Cornforth (2003) suggest a model that provides a further way of viewing variability. They propose that variation in the function fulfilled by boards can be attributed to demands from the social and cultural context. In particular, they cite coercive pressures, such as government laws and regulations; normative pressures, such as social norms and values and, finally, mimetic pressures that arise from the desire to copy the practices of other organisations. Finally, a useful and interesting insight into variability is provided by Freeman and Peck (2007), who conducted a dramaturgical analysis. That is, an analysis that considers the scripting, setting, staging and performance of board meetings, based on a model proposed by Hajer (2004, 2005, cited in Freeman and Peck 2007). The concept of scripting addresses, firstly, who is and is not invited to be a member of the group and, secondly, the roles that are assumed for and/ or taken by, individual participants, for example, whether they will be active or passive participants. Many of the issues discussed above, such as ways in which members might be selected and the impact of past experiences, fit into the concept of 'scripting'. The other concepts within the dramaturgy, that is setting, staging and performance, will be discussed below.

***Nature of contributions within meetings***

Some researchers have attempted to categorise the types of contribution made in meetings. Peck (1995) identified nine such types, for example receiving, approving, choosing, setting and challenging. These categories were selected following the completion of the meeting observations, but it is not clear whether they were derived inductively or deductively. Similarly, Bieber (2003) attributed each contribution to one of eleven types of activity. These were pre-determined categories but he suggests that they “seemed to stand up well to the realities of busy meetings” (p 172). The categories that Bieber used were ‘agreeing’, ‘disagreeing’, ‘giving an opinion’, ‘challenging’, ‘criticising’, ‘suggesting action’, ‘procedural’, ‘giving information’, ‘questioning’, ‘summarising’ and ‘other’. These types of contribution are very similar to those identified within the properties of ‘contributing’ within Advancing Agendas and hence indicate that they may be properties that are relevant to a range of meetings.

***Factors influencing contribution***

It is evident from the board meeting literature that a number of factors influence board members’ ability to contribute within meetings. Firstly, the format of the meetings appears to have a significant impact. It has been noted that the agenda determines the tone of the meeting, with those who have responsibility for setting the agenda being able to decide which items are brought to the board and when (Bieber 2003). It has also been suggested that, when an agenda has a large number of items on it that are not prioritised, this can lead to board members spending too much time talking through the detail of current issues, restricting opportunities for broader discussion regarding the longer term perspective (Edwards and Cornforth 2003). The formal nature of a meeting with a set agenda can, in itself, restrict broader discussion and some researchers have identified that it can be helpful for boards to use a sub-committee system and/ or organise ‘away days’ to provide opportunities for more wide ranging debate regarding strategic issues (Edwards and Cornforth 2003, Farrell 2005). However, where the lead member of the board retains control of the discussion in these other settings, the advantage can be minimal (Farrell 2005).

A second factor that influences contribution is that of the meeting environment. In Freeman and Peck’s (2007) dramaturgical analysis, they discuss the concept of ‘setting’, which relates to both the physical environment and the ‘props’ that are used, such as agendas and reports. They suggest that setting has an impact on the interaction within meetings and go on to describe the way in which the use of a very long, council style table for the JCPB meetings contributed to the adversarial style of



the meetings, especially as members from different organisations were seated opposite each other and needed to use a microphone to ensure that everyone could hear what was said. This style of meeting was familiar to the council members and so they were able to interact well within its constraints, whereas members from the PCT found it intimidating and restrictive, hence hindering their ability to contribute effectively.

Thirdly, the way that some members contribute affects the opportunities available to others. Bieber (2003) identified that, on average, the chairs and directors of the museum boards spoke for over half the time and that they appeared to “be crowding out the other trustees” (p 179). Additionally, Freeman and Peck (2007) consider the third of the concepts within their dramaturgy, namely ‘staging’. This refers to the use of convention and symbols to “organise the interaction between participants ... the unwritten rules of engagement” (p 912). In their study of the JCPB, they noted that differing expectations regarding ways of approaching the work of the board made some members appear unable to discharge their duties in the eyes of others. They also identified that aggressive non-verbal communication used by some members had a further impact on contribution.

The way in which lead members prepare for meetings also has an impact on contribution. For example, Edwards and Cornforth (2003) noted that the level of preparation that was put into the organisation of school governing board meetings had an impact on the type of contribution that members were able to make. In the board that they studied, information provided to members was said to be incomplete and to be presented in a manner that did not support members in engaging with making strategic choices.

It is interesting to note that each of the factors influencing contribution, as discussed above, emerged within the ‘adapting and reacting’ concept of Advancing Agendas. In adapting and reacting, it was noted that meeting participants’ intention to engage could be influenced by personal pressures, the engagement of others, the format of the meeting and the meeting environment. Although reference to the impact of personal pressures has not been found explicitly within the board meeting literature, there is discussion of each of the other factors. This supports the fit and relevance of these concepts. Specifically, support has been found for the suggestions that: the agenda determines the tone of the meeting; the formal nature of a meeting can, in itself, restrict participation; the physical environment is important and the verbal and non verbal behaviour of participants can restrict others’ opportunities, as can the degree to which

the meeting has been organised and prepared for. However, Freeman and Peck's (2007) concept of staging does contain one property that was not identified within *Advancing Agendas*: that is, the idea of 'unwritten rules of engagement'. This concept will be discussed further within Chapter Seven, as something that would be worth considering within further research.

### ***Change in engagement over time***

The final concept within Freeman and Peck's (2007) dramaturgy is that of 'performance'. This relates to the way in which the interaction in any one meeting, or series of meetings, shapes future interactions. In relation to this, they discuss the fact that, when some JCPB members were initially unable to contribute effectively, they sought different ways of working that overcame the difficulties that they experienced. In particular, they presented their proposals in a manner that fitted the expectations of others and took advantage of unidisciplinary pre-meetings to prepare their arguments. This action correlates to the evaluating stage of *Advancing Agendas* and indicates a process of board members adapting their strategy and style of engagement, in order to be able to achieve their desired outcomes. In a similar vein, Otto (2003), discusses a theme that arose from her research; namely that chairs and directors in each of the public, third and private sectors needed to review the ways in which they worked together over time. Otto suggests that it was necessary for them to "re-frame expectations with changing circumstances and personalities" in order to maintain positive working relationships.

### ***Summary***

Many of the concepts that emerged from the current data have been identified within the existing literature on board meetings. There is a particular focus on issues relating to function and role perception, style of engagement and adapting and reacting, with some evidence that relates to aspects of evaluating. However, there is little reference to the concepts of value judging, obligation judging or committing/ distancing. In the next section, the existing literature that relates to partnership working will be reviewed and the concept of value judging, at least, will receive greater emphasis there.

## **5.3 Partnership working research**

In this section, the literature relating to partnership working at a strategic level will be presented. The first part will examine the use of some of the concepts that arose within *Advancing Agendas* within the partnership literature and this will be followed by a

specific section on culture in partnerships. There is a large body of literature that relates to partnership working at an operational level but this was not included in this review. Although some issues are common to both strategic and operational level joint working, other issues differ between the two, making it inappropriate to make direct comparisons. However, it is interesting to note that there has been an increase in the amount of literature that relates to strategic-level partnership working over the past decade, presumably in response to the changing socio-political context.

### ***Value associated with partnership working***

The basic calculation for value judging, that is, that value equals benefits minus costs, receives acknowledgement in several places within the partnership working literature (for example, Klijn and Teisman 2003, Lester et al 2008, Lindsay, McQuaid and Dutton 2008, Lowndes and Skelcher 1998, Walshe, Caress, Chew-Graham and Todd 2007). Within these and other studies, a number of different potential benefits and costs are identified, with some recurring themes. As was discovered within Advancing Agendas, the benefits may be personal, professional, organisational or altruistic and the costs are very often associated with time, although some other types of cost have also been identified. Some of these identified benefits and costs will be discussed below.

Dhillon (2009) in her study of a partnership that was set up to widen participation in post-16 education in an area of the Midlands in the UK, identified that different participants had differing motivations for engaging in the partnership, as they each perceived different benefits. For example, some participants engaged because of perceived benefits to their professional development, such as opportunities for joint curriculum development and the sharing of expertise; other participants engaged for benefits to their organisation, such as opportunities for involvement in joint bidding for externally funded projects and, finally, many participants identified less tangible benefits, such as those associated with a commitment to collaborative working or a desire to build networks that were based on trust and shared values. Indeed, Dhillon proposed that it was this sense of shared values that provided the “glue” that maintained the partnership over time. Summarising all of these benefits, Dhillon suggests that there are benefits associated with working in a partnership that cannot be achieved alone, the concept of there being ‘added value’.

Klijn and Teisman (2003), who examined three Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) that were concerned with urban regeneration in the Netherlands, also noted the ‘added value’ associated with partnership working, in comparison to working alone. As was

the case with the Dhillon (2009) study, these researchers noted variation amongst participants in relation to perceived benefits, including, for example, financial reward and knowledge development. However, Klijn and Teisman (2003) also identify some additional concepts relating to benefit in partnership working. Firstly, they define PPP using terms that include the concept of being able to share benefits and costs between organisations. Then secondly, they conceptualise inter-linked partnerships as teams who are playing games, where several games can be played at one time in different 'games arenas' and where not all players will be involved in all the games, or in all the arenas. Linked to this, they propose that players, or participants, might ask "in which arenas can I participate and what compensation does this bring in return for the time it costs me" (p142). This concept of interlinked partnerships, with linked benefits and costs is not something that emerged from the data for the current research. However, it is an interesting concept as it adds a new dimension and complexity to the environment that surrounds the meetings. As such, it is an area that could be examined further in future research and this will be taken up in Chapter Seven. Finally, it is worth noting that Klijn and Teisman (2003) conclude that it is the interdependence between organisations that both creates and maintains partnerships and that this interdependence drives the formation of social relationships. This is the opposite of Dhillon's conclusion, which, as stated, was that the social aspects, including shared values was the factor that maintains partnerships.

One way of understanding this difference in perspective regarding the motivation for sustaining partnerships comes from work by Lowndes and Skelcher (1998), who identified four distinct phases within the life-time of partnerships, with different motivations occurring at different stages. These phases are: pre-partnership collaboration, partnership creation and consolidation, partnership programme delivery and, finally, partnership termination and succession. In summary, they suggest that a sense of trust and shared purpose is an initial motivator for partnership working but, as the partnership develops, there is a greater sense of the need to demonstrate added value through specific outcomes, such as formal contracts. This model has also been examined and supported by more recent research (Bristow, Entwistle, Hines and Martin 2009, Lester et al 2008). Although *Advancing Agendas* does take account of change over time, this concept did not specifically arise from the current data. It may be, however, that it would have been more relevant if a partnership group had been studied over a longer period of time.

Lindsay, McQuaid and Dutton (2008) review the literature relating to the benefits of partnership working and develop a categorisation of these benefits, namely: flexible and responsive policy solutions, facilitating innovation, sharing knowledge and expertise, pooling of resources, building capacity in organisations and communities and, finally, tapping local knowledge, legitimizing policy and mobilising support.

As already stated, most of the costs that have been identified relate, ultimately, to the time spent engaging. However, Klijn and Teisman (2003), in their study of PPPs, go further than this. They consider costs to the organisation as well, for example the cost associated with the need for organisational adaptation and dependence on others. They suggest that, although part of the initial motivation for partnership working might be the value of interdependency, this may also be associated with risk and cost. Organisational and shared costs are additional to the properties of the concept of cost, as identified within Advancing Agendas.

### ***Roles within partnership working***

Other aspects of the concept of agenda setting, such as role perception, can also be identified in the literature. For example, Derkzen and Boch (2009) examined participants' perceptions of representation and participation within three partnerships in Wales. They found that some participants were aware that they were representing others but were unclear about how to fulfil this role, as there were no guidelines for it. Additionally, they identified that participants from different sectors viewed representation differently. Those from the third sector tended to perceive representation as being a key part of their role and focused particularly on the need to take information back to their colleagues, whereas those from the local authority, who perceived themselves as having an electoral mandate, tended to act more as individuals. The issue of representation was identified within Advancing Agendas but it was not explored in detail and these findings add a new perspective to it. Derkzen and Boch also identified that there were elements of role conflict for some participants, in terms of finding a balance between self interest and making a contribution to the goals of the partnership.

Klijn and Teisman (2003) also discuss role perception, suggesting that clear demarcation between roles can help to regulate interactions but that this can also act as a barrier if participants perceive themselves to have a specific role and then do not want to cross over the boundary of it. A similar point was made in Advancing Agendas, that is, the fact that too close a focus on role definition can constrain wider

participation. Kleijn and Teisman's research indicated, however, that it is not easy to change role perceptions and demarcations and link this to differences in organisational culture, a concept that will be considered further in section 5.3.1.

### ***Strategy in partnerships***

There is some discussion of strategy within the partnership literature. Klijn and Teisman (2003) note the fact that each participant creates their own strategy for participation and recognise that this creates a 'strategic complexity' in the group as a whole. They also note the fact that members of any one organisation within a broader partnership may have a shared strategy, in order to maximise their organisational benefits. Klijn and Teisman go on to comment on the fact that factors such as past history of collaboration between organisations can be an influencing factor in the way that strategies are devised. Derkzen and Boch (2009) link differing role perceptions to strategies for fulfilling these roles, with those expecting to be a representative tending to be more passive in their engagement, as opposed to those who perceive themselves as having a greater role in participation and are therefore more active contributors.

### ***Types of engager***

There do not appear to be any existing studies that identify a full typology of engagers, as has been done within Advancing Agendas (see section 4.4.5). However, it has been acknowledged that there are different types of engager. For example, a report on the evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships within the UK (ODPM 2005), suggests that there are three levels of organisational engagement, labelled within that report as: defensive participation, opportunistic participation and active participation. Interestingly, their definitions of 'opportunistic participation' and 'active participation' are, respectively, very similar to the Opportunist Engager and the Full Engager that were identified within Advancing Agendas. The ODPM report's definitions are somewhat briefer than those within the current research and they relate to whole organisations rather than individual participants but otherwise, the underlying concept is the same. The definition of 'defensive participation' within the ODPM report is that of an organisation that is new to partnership working, that is unsure of its role and concerned about the costs of engagement but that does not want to lose out by not being present. There is no direct match to this type of engagement within Advancing Agendas but there are elements of both the Passive Engager and the Try-and-See Engager within the stated definition. It was suggested within Advancing Agendas that participants could display elements of more than one type and it seems as though the ODPM report has identified such a mix.

### 5.3.1 Role of culture in partnership working

Culture can be defined as “the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge which constitute the shared bases of human action” (McLeod 1982).

Schein (1985), in his seminal work on organisational culture, identifies three layers of culture: firstly, the observable artefacts, such as the language, processes and rituals that are used within the organisation; secondly the espoused values, such as those on which decisions about ‘how to do things’ are made and, thirdly, the underlying assumptions, which are the unspoken beliefs that are shared by individuals and which form a basis for the espoused values.

Peck and Crawford (2004), discuss the role of culture in the development of partnerships within health and social care organisations. They note that the concept of culture recurs more frequently than any other within discussions of partnership working and they cite the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM 1999) as concluding that, culture is the most difficult element of the system of local government to change. Peck and Crawford base their discussion on what they state as being three, commonly perceived models of organisational culture. That is: an integration model, where it is assumed that culture is something possessed by an organisation as a whole, such as the NHS or social care services; a difference model, where culture is conceptualised as being something that varies between sub-groups of an organisation, such as different professional groups within the NHS, and, finally, an ambiguity model, in which culture is seen as being more fluid, constantly changing as it is “negotiated and re-negotiated” between members of a group. Peck et al (2001) identified each of these levels of culture in their study of partnership development in Somerset and found it to be a useful model on which to base their analysis.

It is interesting to consider the ways in which the concept of culture might fit into Advancing Agendas. It is true to say that it did not explicitly emerge from the data as one of its explanatory concepts. However, it seems likely that culture and cultural differences have an underlying effect on many of the concepts that did emerge. Taking account of Schein’s (1985) taxonomy and the three models of culture, as described by Peck and Crawford (2004), it is possible to identify ways in which culture may have influenced the process of Advancing Agendas and ideas about this are presented below. As has already been noted, these ideas did not emerge specifically from the data but are proposed here as being concepts that ‘make sense’ in light of the data, and which could form the basis of further theoretical sampling in future research. Firstly, the cultural assumptions, or underlying beliefs of participants, are likely to affect

their attitude to partnership working. This may be different for participants from different organisations, dependent on the degree to which they already rely on partnerships to conduct their work. A manager of a Sure Start service, for example, might view partnership as essential to the provision of services, whereas a GP may work more autonomously and view inter-agency partnership as an 'add on' to his work. These assumptions could, in turn, influence participants' perceptions of the function of the meetings and their role within them. They may also affect the intrinsic value that participants attach to engaging in partnership working.

Cultural values, or attitudes about 'the ways things are done', are built on cultural assumptions and are likely to affect the degree to which participants perceive an obligation to engage. For example, some may feel obliged to engage purely because it is 'what I should do in the current socio-political context'. Values may also influence the degree to which participants prepare for meetings and the ways that they behave within them. Indeed, one incident that did emerge from the current data was that some participants appeared to mirror the behaviour of longer-serving colleagues, in relation to issues such as arriving late and leaving early. Finally, cultural artefacts, such as shared language and rituals, could also influence participants' behaviour within meetings and the way that they make sense of others' behaviour. One of the properties of 'contributing' within Advancing Agendas was that some contributions support participation and others hinder it. The use of profession-specific terminology was identified as being one way in which contributions could be hindered and this is attributable to cultural artefacts.

As participants from different professional groups and different agencies begin to work together, there is an assumption that aspects of their respective cultures will be shared, leading to changes in culture. Within Advancing Agendas, there was recognition of the fact that participants' own agendas, strategies for advancing these agendas and ways of engaging in meetings changed over time, as participants evaluated the outcome of their actions. One factor that might be involved in these changes is shifts in cultural values and assumptions. For example, the effect of being involved in a productive collaborative partnership could lead to changes in perception regarding the value of this way of working. It does seem, then, that consideration of culture provides further support for some of the concepts that emerged within Advancing Agendas and also provides insights into possibilities for theoretical sampling within future research. This point will be discussed further within Chapter Seven.



## 5.4 Complexity theory and its relevance to Advancing Agendas

Hudson (2006) discusses the way in which public sector services have, for the past decade, been expected to work within a 'whole systems approach': that is, one that involves all stakeholders in active discussion regarding service change and development. Within this approach, subgroups within a system work jointly for the mutual benefit of the whole system, rather than for the benefit of individual services. However, as Hudson points out, it has been difficult for managers to put such an approach into practice without the support of an explanatory theoretical framework. He goes on to suggest that complexity theory and systems theory provide such a framework. Other researchers have also proposed that complexity theory, which originates in the field of biology, can provide a useful framework for understanding human social behaviour, especially that associated with public sector governance and partnership working (for example, Teisman and Klijn 2008, Bovaird 2008, Van der Gaag 2009). Teisman and Klijn (2008) describe four concepts that are important within complexity theory and consider their implications for public administration. These concepts are: self organisation of actors, dynamic systems, a 'fitness landscape' and, finally, adaptation and co-evolution. Each of these concepts will be discussed below and their relevance to Advancing Agendas will be considered. The fact that complexity theory is explained conceptually means that it is easy to make comparisons with GT concepts, such as those within Advancing Agendas.

### ***Self-organisation***

The first concept that is important in complexity theory is the notion that agents (that is, individuals, groups or organisations) are self-organising and do not only perform according to prescribed rules (Teisman and Klijn 2008). Agents within a system make their own sense of that system and act accordingly. Each agent is influenced by their different past experiences, cultures, contexts and intentions. They can change their course of action over time and set up new actions or interactions, with or without the influence of external pressures. Additionally, individuals within a system do not necessarily work towards common goals as each person may interpret them differently. The self-organising behaviour of agents in an inter-related group means that it is not possible to predict the direction of the group as a whole. It is also difficult to predict outcomes, as the interaction between agents is more important than the initial intention in this respect (Hudson 2006, Teisman 2008).

Within Advancing Agendas, the concept of self-organisation is evident in the way in which meeting participants set their own agendas, based on personal perceptions of

the context as well as on information that is given to them. These agendas can then change over time, as both internal and external factors result in changes in participants' perceptions. Decisions made by each participant affect the manner of others' engagement and this has an impact on the overall outcome of the meetings. Additionally, participants may form into sub-groups that have some shared understanding of the context and so there is interaction between sub-groups as well as between individuals.

Self organising behaviour contributes towards the second concept within complexity theory, that of dynamic systems, as discussed below:

### ***Dynamic systems***

In a dynamic system, processes evolve over time and developments are non-linear, being influenced by a variety of forces that may, themselves, change over time. A complexity theory, therefore, focuses on how processes develop in response to a variety of influences, rather than looking for static causal relationships between factors (Teisman and Klijn 2008). Another complexity concept that relates to dynamic systems is that of a system existing at 'the edge of chaos' (Stacey 1996). Stacey suggests that systems can exist in one of three zones, defined according to the level of agreement and certainty that there is amongst participants in the system. These are: a stable zone, where there is a high level of both agreement and certainty but in which change is unlikely; an unstable zone, where there are low levels of agreement and certainty and in which the system is likely to disintegrate and, finally, a zone labelled 'the edge of chaos', in which it is possible for there to be spontaneous self-organisation and innovation. The 'edge of chaos' is a good zone for partnerships to operate within, but staying in it can be difficult, as it necessitates maintaining a balance between factors promoting stability and those requiring change. There is need for both positive and negative feedback mechanisms but this can result in either deadlock or sudden disruption of the system, often because of the self-organising behaviour of the actors involved (Klijn 2008). Klijn (2008) describes how, within a process of urban renewal in Rotterdam during the 1980s and 1990s, a number of factors caused the process to evolve over time. At one point, there was a period of deadlock between the city housing department and the housing associations. This was initiated by changes in the rules regarding subsidies and was finally resolved by the agents developing new rules for the relationship between themselves, hence illustrating a dynamic system being influenced by self-organising behaviour.

The process of Advancing Agendas can be compared to a dynamic system. It is certainly a process that develops in a non-linear manner, with a number of influencing factors. For example, participants may not be able to realise their intentions to engage, as they have to 'adapt and react' to both internal and external pressures. Additionally, the final stage of the process, 'evaluating', acts as a feedback loop to all the previous stages, resulting in a continual state of change and development.

A relevant concept from chaos theory, which is one type of complexity theory, is that a small change to a dynamic system can have large and non-linear effects (Hudson 2006). Hudson suggests that managers will want to take advantage of this by identifying ways in which they can "direct action in order to achieve maximum payback in terms of their objectives" (p 11). This sentiment is closely related to the main concern of meeting participants, as identified within Advancing Agendas; namely to 'achieve maximum personal value from engagement with the meetings'.

### ***Fitness landscape***

The broader context, or 'fitness landscape', as it is called within complexity theory literature, is viewed as being something that is both influenced by and an influence for agents' actions. This means that the context constantly changes as a result of the choices that agents make and this, in turn, determines the extent to which their actions are effective (Teisman and Klijn 2008). The fitness landscape is highly unstable and so agents acting within the landscape may have an imperfect image of it (Teisman 2008). Teisman (2008) draws an analogy between a complex process and a journey through a geographical landscape. In this analogy, it is important for the travellers to read their maps regularly, renew them whenever the landscape changes significantly and change course in response to sudden changes, such as extreme weather conditions. Teisman (2008) also draws on his study of the upgrading of the West Coast Railway Line in the UK, in order to illustrate the impact of fitness landscapes. He describes how the changing political situation across consecutive governments led to privatisation, then nationalisation and then semi-privatisation of the relevant bodies, each affecting the stakeholders and the ensuing landscape. Additionally, other factors that were unpredictable, such as severe flooding further complicated the changing picture. He describes how these changes affected the speed and direction of the upgrade work and how the actions of the agents involved in it also fed back into changes in the landscape.

The context, or fitness landscape of interagency meetings, as portrayed in Advancing Agendas, can be viewed as one that is constantly changing and which is both influenced by and an influence for participants' actions. For example, the decisions that participants make about how to engage in meetings are influenced both by factors outside the meetings, such as the socio-political context, and by factors within the meetings, such as the format of the meeting and the engagement of other participants. The decisions that participants make in response to these factors then further alter the landscape, hence influencing the opportunities that are provided for others and resulting in a constantly changing environment.

### ***Adaptation and co-evolution***

The final concept within complexity theory is that of adaptation and co-evolution. This concept explains the way in which effectiveness is determined by the extent to which agents are able to adjust to external forces and changes (Teisman and Klijn 2008). It is closely related to the notion of evolution within biology, where species are required to adapt to their changing environment in order to survive. The term co-evolution is used to highlight the inter-connectedness of complex systems. As one agent adapts to a changing environment and develops new strategies, other agents also need to adapt to the new pressures that are created by this strategy (Klijn 2008).

As with the other three concepts from complexity theory, there is evidence of adaptation and co-evolution within the theory of Advancing Agendas. Participants plan to engage with meetings in a particular manner, in order to advance a particular agenda, but are very often prevented from carrying out their strategy by factors in the environment (or 'landscape' to use the complexity theory term). If they want to 'survive' and achieve their intended outcomes, then they need to be able to adapt to these factors. Those participants that are unable or unwilling to adapt may decide that engagement is not of value and withdraw from the process.

### ***Summary of the relevance of complexity theory to Advancing Agendas***

As each of the key concepts from complexity theory can be found within Advancing Agendas, it is reasonable to suggest that the process of participants engaging with interagency meetings constitutes a complex system. This indicates that it is also possible to consider the lessons that can be learned from complexity theory research and apply them to the context of interagency meetings, hence further informing and, where necessary, extending Advancing Agendas. Teisman (2008) makes a similar point by suggesting that, by taking account of the principles of complexity theory, it is

possible to gain a better understanding of both the ways in which outcomes are achieved within partnership working and the reasons for the final outcome being different from the initial intention. This issue will be discussed further within Chapter Seven.

## **5.5 Summary**

This review of the existing literature has achieved the aims associated with using the literature within GT research. That is, it has enabled the researcher to examine ways in which the concepts that have arisen within the GT are used in the context of other research and to make constant comparisons, conducted in the same way as in the data analysis. A review of the literature that relates to board meetings and partnership working has supported the relevance of many of the concepts that emerged within Advancing Agendas. It has also identified some possible extensions of the concepts within Advancing agendas and to the links between them. Some of these ideas will be taken up in Chapter Seven, in relation to suggestions for further research.

## 6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

This chapter will:

- Discuss the implications of Advancing Agendas for chairpersons and people participating in meetings.
- Make specific recommendations about ways in which the outcomes of the research can be used to inform professional practice.
- Make suggestions regarding the provision of continuing professional development with respect to engagement with meetings.
- Discuss the broader implications of Advancing Agendas.

### 6.1 Introduction

This research has resulted in the development of a theoretical framework that explains the way in which participants engage with interagency meetings. It comes at a time when public sector managers have become increasingly involved in such meetings, in response to the current political agenda of integrated children's services, as described in Chapter One. In relation to speech and language therapy (SLT) service managers, it has been recommended that each local authority area should have an SLT professional lead for children, who should be a member of key strategic, multi-agency groups (Gascoigne 2006) and that Children's Trust Boards should appoint a senior member to lead on speech, language and communication (DCSF 2008 b). This research is, therefore, timely and it is anticipated that the outcomes could be used to support professional practice, by indicating ways in which managers can get the most out of meetings. This chapter will discuss the ways in which the outcomes of this research could be used, making specific recommendations for those people chairing or participating in meetings and making suggestions regarding the provision of continuing professional development in relation to engagement with meetings. The final section of the chapter will consider the broader implications of this research, both theoretical implications and those relating to other types of meeting or other forms of engagement.

### 6.2 Implications for chairpersons

There are a number of ways in which Advancing Agendas can be used to inform the practice of professionals who have responsibility for running strategic, interagency meetings. In this section, the person with such responsibility will be referred to as the chairperson, although it is acknowledged that people other than the chair sometimes

have responsibility for planning and organising meetings. Overall, it is assumed that the aim of the chairperson is to gain maximum engagement from all those participating in the meetings and this will be the focus of the following suggestions.

### **6.2.1 Supporting relevant and realistic agenda setting**

The process of Advancing Agendas begins with participants setting personal agendas. These agendas are based on participants' perceptions of the function of the meetings and of their role within them, and also on their judgement of the overall value of their engagement. This research has demonstrated that these three properties of 'agenda setting', namely function perception, role perception and value judging, are highly interdependent, such that it is difficult to judge the value of engagement without accurate function and role perception. However, it is important that participants are able to judge the value of their engagement, as this will have a significant effect on their behaviour in and around the meetings. It has also been suggested that participants' perceptions are likely to be highly variable, as they are based on personal experience and expectations, as well as on information that is given to them. This suggestion has been backed up by the existing literature, as discussed in Chapter Five (for example: Bieber 2003, Freeman and Peck 2007, Edwards and Cornforth 2003). Finally, there is some evidence that a too closely defined perception of role can restrict broader participation: this suggestion arose from the data for this research and has also been noted within the existing literature (Bieber 2003).

The situation, as described above, presents a challenge for chairpersons, who will want to ensure that participants base their agenda setting on accurate information; that personal experience and expectation are used to enhance rather than oppose the information that they are given, and that participants do not form too restricted a view of their expected role. Participants do not always begin the process of agenda setting by considering the function of meetings, especially if their perception is unclear or overly restricted. However, an agenda based on an accurate understanding of the intended outcomes of the meetings is likely to be more realistic, resulting in the participant feeling more satisfied with their engagement. It is also likely to reduce the occurrence of participants creating a role for themselves that is based on an assumed, inaccurate 'pseudo-function' (see section 4.2.4).

Overall, then, it seems that it is important for chairpersons to provide clear and specific information about the function of meetings at the outset, in, for example, the terms of reference, or similar. It also seems likely that it would be worthwhile discussing the

terms of reference at the start of the first meeting and, for long term partnerships or those with a changing membership, at other key times throughout the life time of the collaboration. A discussion such as this would enable participants to actively consider the prescribed function of the meetings, in light of their own expectations and past experiences. Where differences in interpretation occur, these could then be addressed openly and in a productive manner. Bieber (2003) suggests that this type of discussion rarely occurs in board meetings. As well as discussing the prescribed functions, it may also be worthwhile considering symbolic functions, such as social and implicit aspects, as discussed by Freeman and Peck (2007) (see section 5.2.2). These symbolic functions are rarely recorded explicitly but they play an important part in creating opportunities for the prescribed functions to be fully realised (Freeman and Peck 2007). They may also play a part in creating a shared culture amongst participants, with a potential impact on commitment, as discussed in section 5.3.1.

Having had an opportunity to consider the intended function of the meetings in the manner described above, it may also be useful for participants to be given a specific opportunity to reflect on, or even discuss, what they each think they can bring to the meeting, in terms of skills and knowledge. This would support their ability to form a perception of their own role within the meetings, without this being overly prescribed by others. Some participants go through a process of 'role finding' by discussing their potential role with others (see section 4.2.2) and so an opportunity to discuss this as part of the whole group could lead to a broader understanding of the range of potential roles.

Assuming that the recommendations made above support accurate and realistic function and role perception, they will also support participants in making an accurate judgement regarding the potential value of their engagement. However, this final step of agenda setting could be further supported, by ensuring that participants are aware of the range of possible benefits, such as opportunities to influence broader strategy, to develop awareness of the views of others, to make use of information in the development of their own service, to network and other such benefits. It is not suggested that these should be stated explicitly by the chairperson as this would seem unnatural in relation to typical meeting behaviour. However, if the chairperson is aware of the range of benefits that others might perceive, then it should be possible to acknowledge them implicitly, within broader actions and discussions.



### **6.2.2 Supporting engagement and contribution within meetings**

Within Advancing Agendas, it was suggested that the opportunities that participants have to engage with meetings are affected by: personal pressures, the format of the meeting, the meeting environment and the contributions of other participants (see section 4.4.4). Chairpersons are generally recognised as having ultimate responsibility for the way that meetings are run, meaning that they are in a position to control the impact of some, although not all, of these factors.

In terms of personal pressures, chairpersons cannot, of course, change participants' health status or the nature of their other commitments. They can, however, support participants in managing their time, by setting and publicising the dates and times of meetings well in advance, and by ensuring that the minutes and any other documentation are circulated in a timely manner. These measures would have a knock-on effect of supporting participants in preparing to attend and contribute to meetings.

In relation to the format of meetings, Advancing Agendas highlighted the fact that the agenda can determine the tone of a meeting, and that the nature of each agenda item can influence the degree to which participants contribute. This was also supported by the existing literature (Bieber 2003, Edwards and Cornforth 2003, Farrell 2005). It therefore seems appropriate to recommend that, when setting the agenda for a meeting, chairpersons should consider the order of agenda items and the extent to which different items are likely to engage participants. Items in which there is likely to be a significant amount of information giving, rather than active debate, should not be placed together on the agenda and, where possible, any information should be circulated in advance, to enable participants to read it and come prepared to discuss its implications. This reduces the degree to which participants are forced into a passive, listening mode, something that is recognised as happening for a significant percentage of the time in board meetings (Edwards and Cornforth 2003, Peck 1995). If participants are placed in a passive mode for too long, it can be difficult to move them on to more active participation for later agenda items (see section 4.4.4) and so avoiding this situation can have positive consequences across the whole of the meeting. Additionally, chairpersons could be advised to avoid putting agenda items that are only going to be relevant to a subgroup of participants, next to each other on the agenda, for much the same reasons.

Most meetings at a strategic level are formal affairs, with the expectation that participants follow a certain protocol. It was noted, both within Advancing Agendas and the existing literature (Edwards and Cornforth 2003), that this can constrain participation for some participants and this effect can be heightened when the tone of the meeting is overtly adversarial (Freeman and Peck 2007). Although formality is something that is required within most meetings, chairpersons can take measures to ensure that all participants are made to feel at ease, especially those who may be unused to such settings, such as service user representatives. They can do this by welcoming and encouraging contributions and by actively involving each participant in the discussion in a supportive and non-threatening manner. Additionally, where appropriate, chairpersons can arrange for participants to meet in less formal environments between meetings, to enable even wider participation (see section 4.4.4).

Moving on to consideration of the meeting environment, there are relatively simple measures that a chairperson can take to ensure that this is conducive to full participation. For example, it is possible to ensure that the meeting room is an adequate size for there to be a comfortable seating arrangement. It is also possible to provide water or other refreshments, and to attempt to maintain the room at a reasonable temperature by adjusting heating and providing adequate ventilation. Although these suggestions are somewhat obvious, it has been noted that they are not always taken account of (see section 4.4.4 and Freeman and Peck 2007). It is also sensible for the chairperson to consider the neutrality of the setting, so as not to unduly disadvantage one or other subgroup of participants (Freeman and Peck 2007).

Finally, in relation to the ways in which the contributions from some participants affect the opportunities for others to engage, there are a number of both positive and negative factors that were identified within Advancing Agendas (see section 4.4.4) and in the broader literature (for example, Bieber 2003, Freeman and Peck 2007). Whilst not being able to take total control of these factors, chairpersons can take steps to encourage behaviour that supports participants' contribution and to discourage behaviour that hinders it. For example, behaviour that supports contribution includes giving participants an opportunity to introduce themselves and inviting contributions from participants (without putting people 'on the spot'). Both of these are actions that can be taken by the chairperson. Other supportive behaviour includes active listening and demonstrating appreciation for all contributions. It is possible for the chairperson to model such behaviour, but s/he is not, of course, able to ensure that this model is followed by other participants.

Where other participants do not actively support contribution, the chairperson can take some action to minimise the effect that unsupportive behaviours have on others. For example, it is possible to stop any one participant from speaking for too long, by purposefully inviting others to join in the discussion and, if necessary, explicitly asking verbal participants to allow others to say more. It is also possible to ask participants not to make comments that belittle or undermine others, although probably not during the meeting itself, as this would be somewhat ironic! Finally, it is possible for the chairperson to listen out for the use of discipline or agency specific terminology and to ask participants to explain what any ambiguous terms mean. Of course, the other way in which chairpersons can prevent contributions that hinder others' input is to avoid making such contributions themselves. Bieber (2003) identified that, in his study, chairs and directors took up the majority of the speaking time and tended to crowd out other participants.

Overall, then, it is recommended that chairpersons become familiar with all the factors that may support or hinder engagement and contributions within meetings. They would then be in a position to take active steps to support contribution in these ways themselves and to encourage other participants to do the same. Where participants are being prevented from engaging or contributing, chairpersons can, again, act to minimise the impact of any pressures.

### **6.2.3 Identifying and enabling different types of engager**

Eleven types of engager were identified within Advancing Agendas, namely: Full Engager, Restricted Engager, Absent Engager, Passive Engager, Opportunist Engager, Altruistic Engager, Distanced Engager, Try-and-See Engager, Occasional Engager, Minimal Engager and Non Engager (see section 4.4.5). Each of these engagers has a different type of agenda and/ or a different strategy for advancing it, resulting in differing styles of engagement. Awareness of this typology could support a chairperson in understanding what it is that motivates different participants within a particular meeting and this, in turn, could be used to maximise the likelihood of each participant engaging to the greatest possible extent. In practice, this would mean observing participants' behaviour in order to identify types of engager. Some types can be difficult to distinguish purely by observation, for example the Passive Engager and the Restricted Engager, and so some further information gathering or logical deduction may also be necessary.

Having identified engager types, the chairperson could act in a number of ways. In some cases, no action is required as the participant is already fully engaged, for example the Full Engager and the Altruistic Engager. Some types of engager, however, would benefit from additional information, particularly the Try-and-See Engager and the Minimal Engager, each of whom may be unclear about their expected role. Other engagers would benefit from being helped to engage. The Restricted Engager is within this category and he may be helped by the use of some of the methods already described for supporting contribution and engagement (see section 6.2.2). Similarly, the Absent Engager may need help to engage, although this would be in the form of opportunities to contribute away from the meetings. It may be that this is more realistic than an expectation that she will start to attend. Thirdly, some engagers would benefit from being made aware of additional benefits, or from such benefits being created, where possible, if they do not already exist. These are the engagers who have a low level of commitment because of a perceived lack of value afforded by their engagement, such as the Distanced Engager, the Occasional Engager and the Minimal Engager. Finally, for some types of engager, for example the Passive Engager and the Opportunist Engager, it may be best for the chairperson to accept their level of engagement and maximise the value of it, unless this is problematic in some way.

### **6.3 Implications for meeting participants**

There are also valuable lessons that can be taken from Advancing Agendas to support the professional practice of meeting participants. Some of the recommendations for chairpersons have some relevance for other participants but there are also a few specific recommendations that can be made for them. These will be considered within this section.

#### **6.3.1 Being aware of own personal agenda**

Although it seems that all meeting participants have a personal agenda, they are not necessarily consciously aware of this (section 4.2.4). Explicit awareness of their agendas would support participants in ensuring that these were relevant and realistic, with benefits as describe above (see section 6.2.1). It would also support them in evaluating whether decisions regarding engagement are both justified and appropriate. Forming such an awareness would involve participants asking themselves about the function of the meetings, their role within them, the value of their engagement, their level of obligation and their level of commitment.

### **6.3.2 Identifying ways of advancing an agenda**

As well as not being consciously aware of their agenda, participants may not be aware of having a strategy for advancing this (section 4.3.2). Whilst this is not necessarily problematic, if the participant finds that they are not achieving what they want to, then an explicit awareness of strategy could be beneficial. Such an awareness could be used to support the participant in deciding whether it is possible to change anything in order to better achieve the intended outcomes.

### **6.3.3 Considering other participants and the overall meeting outcomes**

The full Engager and the Altruistic Engager (see section 4.4.5) will automatically consider whether or not their actions are supporting other participants and the overall meeting outcomes, but not all participants will take account of this. However, the process of engagement with meetings is highly interactive, with the actions of each person influencing those of others (sections 4.4.4 and 4.5 and also Freeman and Peck 2007, Teisman and Klijn 2008) and so it is likely to be the case that each participant benefits indirectly from there being a benefit for others. At its most extreme, a lack of benefit for some participants could cause the partnership to fail, with evident implications for all involved. In view of this, it would seem sensible to recommend that all participants consider the way in which their engagement might be affecting that of others.

## **6.4 Suggestions for continuing professional development**

Recent policy and guidance documents relating to the provision of services to children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) (Gascoigne 2006, DCSF 2008 b) have identified the fact that senior managers are being required to develop new skills in response to the changing context of children's services. These are reported to include business and entrepreneurial skills and also excellent communication and negotiation skills (Gascoigne 2006). This researcher would like to add 'advanced skills in managing meetings' to this list, in light of the outcomes of this research. It is anticipated that many speech and language therapy (SLT) managers will be organising or participating in sub-board level strategic, interagency meetings, such as the steering group from which data were collected for this research. Additionally, an increasing number of senior managers are likely to become involved in board level meetings, as representatives for SLCN in the locality.

The research reported in this thesis was presented at the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) conference in March 2009 and members of the audience, including the Chief Executive Officer of RCSLT, commented on the fact that it presented a significant opportunity for the development of much needed continuing professional development (CPD) training materials. A CPD course could be developed that supports managers in understanding the ways in which meeting participants advance their agendas in order to achieve the maximum personal value from engagement with meetings, by making use of the theoretical framework of Advancing Agendas. Such a course could also be used to highlight the recommendations that have been discussed above, in sections 6.2 and 6.3. A possible provider for such a course has already been identified, as the researcher has been approached by the CPD unit of the Division of Psychology and Language Sciences at University College London and asked to devise and run such a course. This also marks a significant opportunity for the continuing dissemination of this research.

## **6.5 Broader implications**

### **6.5.1 Theoretical implications**

Chapter Five of this thesis brings together literature from a range of disciplines, which can be used to inform practice in interagency working within children's services. Some of this literature would not be immediately accessible to professionals in this area. For example, it was found that there was much to learn from research in the fields of both urban renewal (for example, Klijn and Teisman 2003) and regional governance (for example Bristow et al 2009). It has been acknowledged within the existing literature that the design and management of partnerships has, so far, been little informed by theory (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998) and that a better understanding of the complexity of partnerships could lead to better outcomes (Lester et al 2009). Advancing Agendas goes some way towards improving this situation, in that it adds to our theoretical understanding of the complexity of one aspect of partnership working. For example, by better understanding how partnership members' set their personal agendas for meetings, it becomes easier to facilitate a shared agenda. This is an aim that has been highlighted as being important if partnerships are to be successful (Lester et al 2009).

Additionally, it is hoped that a better understanding of meeting behaviour can be used to support the development of leadership skills amongst speech and language therapy and other public sector managers, something that was identified as being necessary within Chapter One of this thesis, in light of the current socio-political agenda.

### 6.5.2 Implications for other contexts

Glaser (1998) discusses the fact that a good grounded theory always has ‘grab’, that is, it is instantly meaningful to people who have experienced the relevant situation. By talking about Advancing Agendas with friends and colleagues during the later stages of writing, and by presenting it at a conference, the author has discovered that this *is* a GT with grab. Most people have been in meetings at some point in their lives and some of them have been in strategic, interagency meetings. However, whoever hears about Advancing Agendas seems to recognise some of the concepts. In particular, the typology of engagers appears to resonate with many people. One friend from a business background commented:

*“that’s meeting behaviour, that happens in all meetings, doesn’t it?”*

It is therefore possible that, with only minor modification, Advancing Agendas could be relevant to a broader range of meetings, not just public sector, strategic, interagency meetings. This point will be discussed further in Chapter Seven, in relation to future research but the key message to convey here is that there is potential for Advancing Agendas to be modified to explain meeting behaviour in general. This notion would certainly fit with findings from the existing literature, in which it has been suggested that there are many similarities in behaviour amongst participants of board meetings across the public, private and third sectors (Otto 2003, Peck 1995).

It is also possible that there could be emergent fit for some of the concepts from Advancing Agendas to other substantive areas. For example, it seems likely that there are a number of situations in which people set personal agendas based on their perceptions of a situation and their judgement of its value. Making a career move is one such situation that immediately comes to mind. It is also the case that there are a number of situations in which people are expected to engage with something, and, again, some of the concepts from Advancing Agendas could fit a theoretical framework that explains their behaviour. Of course, it is not possible to state this without further research but, again, the key message is that Advancing Agendas, or some of the concepts from it, could have broader implications.

## 6.6 Summary

This chapter has presented a number of implications arising from this research. In particular, it has identified that there are several ways in which chairpersons can

ensure that they obtain maximum engagement from meeting participants, namely by: supporting relevant and realistic agenda setting, supporting engagement and contribution within meetings and identifying and enabling the different types of engager. Additionally, recommendations have been made for managers who are attending meetings, and these are: being aware of their own personal agenda and strategy for advancing it; identifying ways of advancing an agenda and, finally, considering other participants and the overall meeting outcomes. It has been suggested that these recommendations could form the basis of much needed CPD in this area and a possible way of achieving that has been identified.

This chapter has also proposed that Advancing Agendas could be used to further our theoretical understanding of partnership working, resulting in improved leadership skills amongst managers and the potential for better outcomes of partnerships. Finally, it has been suggested that there may be implications of Advancing Agendas for other contexts, such as other types of meeting and other forms of agenda setting and engagement, although these suggestions would need to be the subject of further research.



## 7.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will:

- Set out the ways in which this thesis contributes to the literature.
- Critically evaluate this research and suggest ways in which it could have been improved.
- Explore possible future directions for research in this area.
- Set out the conclusions.

### 7.1 What this thesis adds to the existing literature

This thesis has presented a grounded theory that explains the way in which public sector managers engage with strategic, interagency meetings. The literature review conducted for this research, as reported in Chapter Five, indicates that the research conducted for it is novel in two important ways. Firstly, there does not appear to be any other research that has investigated the way in which public sector managers engage with interagency meetings. There is a body of literature that relates to meetings, specifically board meetings and this includes research into the perceptions and behaviour of board members (for example, Peck 1995, Edwards and Cornforth 2003, Bieber 2003, Freeman and Peck 2007, Farrell 2005, Otto 2003). There is also a body of literature that relates to partnership working in general and, again, there is much within this that is relevant to Advancing Agendas (for example, Lester 2008, Lowndes and Skelcher 1998, Klijn and Teisman 2003, Derkzen and Bock 2009, Dhillon 2009, Walshe, Caress, Chew-Graham and Todd 2007, Lindsay, McQuaid and Dutton 2008). Many of the concepts that emerged within the current research have also been identified within the board meeting and partnership working literature, as has been acknowledged in Chapter Five. However, none of the existing research specifically examines the engagement of meeting participants. Additionally, and, perhaps most importantly, none of it results in a theoretical framework that explains the links between the emerging concepts, in particular one that explains why and how participants choose to engage with meetings. This has been achieved within this thesis. In addition to this, the theory of Advancing Agendas has been compared to complexity theory and it has been proposed that the process of engagement with strategic, interagency meetings constitutes a complex system. As such, there are lessons that can be taken from complexity theory that will further support our understanding of this process of engagement.

The second way in which the current research is novel in this substantive area, is that it has used an inductive methodology that enables concepts to emerge from the data. There are a few studies of meeting behaviour in which data have been collected via both observation and interview. However, in most of these cases, a set of categories has been devised in advance and the observed participant behaviours have then been attributed to these categories (Peck 1995, Bieber 2003, Freeman and Peck 2007). Dhillon (2005) did use inductive methods when analysing interviews and observations of meeting behaviour but her analysis does not relate specifically to the participants' engagement in meetings. The fact that the concepts identified within the current research are grounded in the data, has meant that the research has been able to formulate, rather than verify theory, one of the original aims of the methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967). It also means that the concepts fit the data and work to both explain and predict the behaviour of meeting participants.

Peck (1995) places research that relates to governance issues in the context of corporate failure and scandal. In doing this, he asks if boards are capable of fulfilling their responsibilities, as prescribed for them; suggests that a "thorough reappraisal of the form and function of boards may be necessary" (p 155) and proposes that rich data is needed in order to do this. Of course, since that time, there have also been some high profile cases of failure and scandal relating to public and mixed-sector partnerships, such as the cases of Victoria Climbié and 'Baby P'. This further supports the need for research that can advance our understanding of the form and function of partnerships and this research goes some way towards responding to that need.

Another important aspect of this research is that it involves the accurate use of GT methodology, as devised by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and developed by Glaser (1978, 1998), within the discipline of speech and language therapy (SLT). As was noted in section 2.7, GT is frequently misquoted and misrepresented and this has also been the case within SLT research. The dissemination of this thesis represents an opportunity to further educate colleagues within the profession regarding the nature of GT research, as intended by its originators. Additionally, the outcomes of this research have indicated that GT methodology could usefully be added to the range of methodologies that are regularly used within SLT research. This would support the call of Roulstone and Pickstone (2007) who state that there is a need for SLTs to develop the use of and apply, a range of research methods, as appropriate to the complex needs of the profession and in response to the increasing desire for evidence based practice.

## 7.2 Critical evaluation of the research

This section will consider the principles and methods of GT methodology, as set out in Chapters Two and Three and discuss the extent to which they were followed within this research. In order to set this in context, this section will begin by providing an overview of the decisions that were made at different stages of the research, in light of the researcher's developing understanding of the methodology.

As has already been stated (see section 2.7), the researcher began this research with a limited understanding of the principles and methods of GT methodology. This was because her understanding had been influenced by literature that misquotes the use of GT methodology (see section 2.8). The researcher's understanding of GT at that time was simply that it was an inductive process of obtaining codes from the data. She was aware of the principle of simultaneous data collection and analysis but did not understand the method of theoretical sampling and was not explicitly aware of the difference between description and conceptualisation in this context. Data collection began in April 2004 but it was not until October 2006 that the researcher began to develop a more accurate understanding of the methods of GT, by which time a significant amount of data had been collected and analysed in a descriptive manner or, at best, in the manner of conceptual description. In April 2007, the researcher attended her first GT seminar with Dr. Glaser and was sufficiently enthused by the method to make the decision to take some backwards steps that included re-analysis of the data that had been collected so far. From this point onwards, the researcher followed the principles and methods of GT as closely as she was able to and attended two further GT seminars, in order to support her developing understanding. However, her early misconceptions did have an impact on the process of the research, even after the errors were realised. Where relevant, this issue will be discussed further, within later parts of this section.

### 7.2.1 Evaluation in relation to the principles of grounded theory

#### ***Conceptualisation of data***

The main principles of grounded theory research, as set out in Chapter Two, are conceptualisation of data, avoidance of preconceptions and acceptance of the fact that 'all is data' (see section 2.1). In relation to the first of these, conceptualisation of data; the researcher followed the constant comparison method by identifying patterns in the data and labelling these patterns with a conceptual code. The concepts were then formed into a hierarchy around a core concept, via the process of theoretical coding. It

is apparent that this process was conducted successfully, as the resulting theoretical framework is fully integrated around the core concept, which is one that occurs frequently in the data and explains most of the variation in the behaviour of participants. Furthermore, the concepts that emerged from the data are abstract of time, place and person as they relate to patterns of behaviour and not to specific incidents. In this respect, the researcher has avoided the potential error of identifying concepts and then describing them; a process that would have resulted in description rather than an integrated theoretical framework.

One of the implications of the principle of conceptualisation is the fact that the researcher should not be concerned with 'full coverage'. This means that she should not worry about identifying and analysing every incident that indicates a particular concept: as long as there are sufficient incidents to indicate a pattern, it does not matter if some of them are missed. In the early stages of this research, however, the researcher was concerned with full coverage. All the meetings were video recorded and the initial interviews were audio recorded, so that the researcher could transcribe them before conducting the analysis. Although these transcriptions were discarded at a later date (see section 3.2.3), concerns over full coverage had persisted for some time and the initial data analysis was slow, dense and descriptive because of the focus on detail. However, once this problem was overcome, the researcher was able to move more quickly through the data, with a focus on identifying patterns rather than individual incidents.

### ***Avoiding preconception***

In order to ensure that concepts are grounded in the data, a GT researcher has to avoid being influenced by preconceived ideas, such as professional concerns, a priori hypotheses or pre-existing concepts or frameworks. The researcher did begin this research with an open mind. As prescribed, she avoided pre-reading of the literature in the substantive area, other than to obtain a general overview of the context of integrated children's services. Additionally, she was not knowingly influenced by any professional concerns or pre-existing concepts or categories. However, it is acknowledged that, because of the researcher's initial misconceptions regarding the nature of the methodology, much of the data were analysed twice, initially in a thematic, descriptive manner and then in a conceptual manner. The researcher noted that much the same 'issues' emerged each time and a GT purist could criticise this way of conducting the research, on the basis that the initial data collection and analysis created preconceptions that then influenced the re-analysis. In response to this, it

could be argued that these were the key concepts and that they would emerge from any type of inductive analysis. The researcher was also aware that this process could be problematic, and so made a significant effort to avoid any influence from the initial analysis, by constantly asking the three questions that Glaser recommends are used to guide open coding, for example, 'what category does this incident indicate?' and 'what is the participants' main concern?' (Glaser 1998, p 140).

### ***Acceptance that 'all is data'***

In GT, it is acceptable to collect data that arises from any source, such as interviews, observations and documentation, and also data that are presented from any perspective (see section 2.1.4). The researcher did use data from both interviews and observation. However, she also collected some documentation from the meetings, such as the agendas and minutes and then decided not to make use of it. Although the maxim 'all is data' would indicate that the documentary evidence could also have been useful, the researcher felt that it only provided evidence of the content of meetings, rather than the process and this did not relate to the core category. A similar point has been made by another researcher within the existing board meeting literature (Bieber 2003). In relation to the other meaning of 'all is data'; when collecting interview data, the researcher kept in mind the fact that each account was being given from a particular perspective and she was careful to look beyond this, for patterns occurring in the data that could be conceptualised. She did not attempt to construct meaning from what was being said.

### **7.2.2 Evaluation in relation to the methods of grounded theory**

The methods that should be used to collect and analyse data in GT research are: open coding, memoing, selective coding, theoretical sampling, theoretical coding, sorting and writing, as described in Chapter Three. Each of these methods was used in this research and, as described in section 3.4, the author did not use each one sequentially but rather as a series of "double back steps" (Glaser 1978 p16), as is Glaser's intention.

From a positive perspective, several of the methods were conducted appropriately, including open coding, memoing, theoretical coding, sorting and writing. The exact ways in which each of these methods was used has already been described in sections 3.4.1 to 3.4.8 and that information does not, therefore, need to be repeated here. In relation to aspects of the method that could have been improved, there are three main areas to consider. The first criticism that could be levied at this research, is that the

interviews with the steering group members were too closely controlled by specific questions. Within GT, it is appropriate to move from fully open to semi-structured interviews once the theoretical framework is beginning to emerge. However, in this case, where the initial framework was based on observation, it may have been beneficial to have taken a more open approach to the interviews. This is because they represented a different form of data and it may have been that new concepts would have emerged from them, had that been enabled by more open questioning.

Secondly, the researcher could have made better use of theoretical sampling. The initial, descriptive style of analysis meant that progress with this was slow and, therefore, data were not always analysed fully before the next period of data collection. Consequently, initial decisions about where to go next for data collection were pre-decided, rather than being controlled by the process of theoretical sampling. More positively, however, the interviews that were conducted with the steering group members were informed by the issues that had arisen from the data to that point in time, despite the fact that they had not been considered in a conceptual manner. Furthermore, the decision to conduct later interviews with speech and language therapy (SLT) service managers was also made in accordance with the principles of theoretical sampling.

Finally, it is evident that some parts of Advancing Agendas are more fully saturated than others. In particular, there was only a relatively small amount of data that related to the final stage, 'evaluating'. With greater resources, it would have been ideal to continue with further theoretical sampling, as suggested above, in order to fully saturate this concept. However, this was a difficult substantive area within which to collect data, due to the sensitive and 'closed' nature of many strategic meetings. Additionally, the researcher's initial inexperience with the methodology resulted in time consuming errors. Glaser (1998) does acknowledge that a GT just has to be good enough to explain the pattern of behavior amongst the participants, that it is important to know when to stop rather than to keep on extending the theory indefinitely. This issue has also been acknowledged by other experienced GT researchers (Andrews 2005, Martin 2007) and it is valuable and encouraging advice.

### **7.2.3 Evaluation of the use of CAQDAS**

As described in section 3.5, the researcher used the CAQDAS software, Atlas.ti to support data analysis within this research, despite the fact that GT researchers are traditionally discouraged from using computers in this way. However, as has already

been noted (see section 2.2.1), Glaser has discussed the fact that this advice is at odds with the modern expectation for computers to be used in research and he has written: (2003, p43)

*“the resolution ... is logically in the hands of youth who are unbelievably computer fluent, who are not formed in competing QDA methods and who do GT as I have laid it out, often enough to experience its procedures sufficiently to weave them into computer software with minimal to no eroding.”*

This researcher may not be very youthful (!), but she is computer fluent and has not been trained in competing QDA methods. She developed her understanding of both the functions of Atlas.ti and GT at the same time and hence she was able to ensure that the software was always slave to the method and not vice versa. Glaser's quote implies that it is acceptable to use computer software for analysis, as long as it does not detract from the principles of the methodology and the researcher asserts that this was the case in this instance. Particular arguments that can be made to support this assertion are as follows.

Firstly, the researcher did not allow the structure of the program to constrain her analysis in any way. Field notes were 'assigned' to it in the same way as they might be saved as Word files on a computer and these were then coded within a margin, again, just as they might be within a Word document. Codes were developed freely and only in response to patterns arising from the data. There were no pre-existing lists of codes and the auto-code function, which searches for and codes any instance of a particular word or phrase, was not used. In contrast to some other CAQDAS software, Atlas.ti does allow the researcher to change the names of codes as one moves from open to selective coding, or where new patterns are spotted within the data. Memos were written freely but could also be attached to sections of data if so desired. Most GT researchers would use computers to type their memos, even if the initial thought is scribbled on a piece of paper at the time it first occurs (which may not be when a computer is switched on). The use of CAQDAS does not, therefore, make any difference in this respect. Finally, there is sometimes a concern that “computers force a superficial organisation of the data, hence blocking an evolving maturity in memos and pre-determining the process of theoretical coding” (quoted from section 2.2.1). As the researcher did not use the theory building functions of Atlas.ti, this was not an issue for this research.

Atlas.ti did, however, enable the researcher to keep her data, codes and memos neatly stored in a highly accessible manner. It was possible to use the functions of the software to aid the process of constant comparison, by 'clicking through' excerpts of data according to the codes that they had been assigned, and to do this across all the data, not just one field note at a time. It was also possible to easily retrieve memos that related to specific concepts when it came to the time for sorting them. Overall, then, it is suggested that the use of this software had many advantages and no disadvantages within this research.

#### **7.2.4 Quality of the resulting theory**

Within GT, the concept of quality is measured in terms of its 'fit', 'work', 'relevance' and 'modifiability', as described in section 2.6. The researcher believes that Advancing Agendas achieves each of these criteria. It can be shown to 'fit' the data because the concepts have been allowed to emerge from it and have not been forced. They also adequately express the patterns that are evident in the data. The fact that similar concepts have been found in the existing literature, as discussed in Chapter Five, further supports their fit. It is also the case that Advancing Agendas 'works' in terms of explaining the behaviour of participants in interagency meetings. Again, the fact that the theory could be used to predict many of the findings from the existing literature further supports this assertion. Thirdly, Advancing Agendas can be said to be relevant. It has already been noted that the framework and its constituent concepts are instantly recognisable to a large number of people who have attended meetings (see section 6.5) and this is a sign of the theory's relevance. Finally, in relation to modifiability; the conceptual nature of the theory means that it is easy to make comparisons between it and data arising from other research and this was evident during the process of comparing the theory to the existing literature. This ease of comparison indicates the fact that, if new, relevant data were to arise, or if it were to be specifically collected, it would be possible to modify the existing theory to take account of the new data. Some suggestions for directions this could be taken have already been made in section 7.2.

#### **7.2.5 Summary of the critical evaluation**

Overall, it has been asserted that this research has made appropriate use of many of the principles and methods of GT methodology. This has resulted in a good quality, fully integrated, conceptual grounded theory, with evident implications for professional practice. A few suggestions have been made in relation to ways that the research could have been further improved and these relate to more open data collection, further theoretical sampling and further saturation of some concepts.



### 7.3 Future directions for research in this area

This research has resulted in a grounded theory with professionally relevant implications that can be implemented straight away. In this respect, it constitutes a completed piece of research. However, some suggestions have already been made regarding aspects of the theory that could be extended and this would be possible via further research. There is a precedent for this practice: Martin (2007), for example, presents a theory of 'Purposive Attending' that, she explains, contains elements that had been further saturated since it was first written up for her PhD thesis. In the case of Advancing Agendas, it would be interesting to further saturate the concept of evaluating, by conducting additional interviews that ask managers about the ways in which their attitudes to specific meetings change over time and the factors that influence this. Additionally, there are a number of potentially relevant concepts that arose from the comparison of Advancing Agendas with the existing literature and it would also be possible to follow these up through further theoretical sampling. In doing this, it would be important to remember that, although theoretical sampling constitutes a deductive element to the method of GT, this is deduction driven by concepts that have arisen from the data, not those from pre-existing theories. For this reason, it would be important to ensure that any extension of the theory that was conducted in this manner, only addressed concepts that had already been shown to be relevant, not just any concepts arising in the broader, related literature. Some of the areas that could be explored in this way are: the concept of 'unwritten rules of engagement' (Freeman and Peck 2007), which could be another property of 'reacting and adapting'; consideration of interlinked partnerships and, therefore, the broader context in which evaluating occurs (Klijn and Teisman 2003), the concept of culture as a factor that influences each stage of the process of Advancing Agendas and, finally, the concepts that arise within complexity theory, which appear to have emergent fit with those of Advancing Agendas.

Another way in which Advancing Agendas could be extended, is to consider whether or not it is applicable to a broader range of meetings than those that were the focus of the current research. This is something that seems possible, considering responses that the researcher has had when talking about this research (see section 6.5).

### 7.4 Conclusions

This research has resulted in the grounded theory of Advancing Agendas, which can be used to both explain and predict the way in which participants ensure that they

achieve maximum personal value from their engagement with strategic, interagency meetings. Advancing Agendas is a social strategic process in which participants set personal agendas, plan strategies for advancing these agendas, engage with the meetings and evaluate the outcomes of their actions. The process is complex and highly interdependent, with the actions of each participant influencing those of others, creating an ever changing environment. This theory was set out in Chapter Four and it constitutes the main contribution to the literature from this research.

Within Chapter Five, Advancing Agendas was compared to research findings from the existing literature. It was noted that, whilst much of the existing literature supports its validity and relevance, there are also a number of ways in which the current work is novel. In particular, it appears to be the first occurrence of a theory that explains how and why participants chose to engage with meetings. Although the data were restricted to strategic level interagency meetings, it has been proposed that, with further research, the theory could potentially be extended to explain behaviour in other types of meeting, as well.

It has been noted that this research is timely, in that it is being presented within the context of an increasing requirement for public sector managers, including speech and language therapy managers, to attend strategic, interagency meetings. This requirement has arisen because of the current socio-political agenda of integrated children's services, which was explained within Chapter One. There is also significant motivation to review the processes of interagency working at the current time, in light of high profile scandals relating to safeguarding children. It has been proposed that this research can address some of the questions that exist in relation to effective interagency working and Chapter Six of this thesis presented a number of implications for professional practice that have arisen from it. The first set of recommendations relate to ways in which chairpersons of strategic, interagency meetings can ensure that they obtain maximum engagement from meeting participants. Recommendations for managers attending meetings have also been made and it is suggested that, in part, this research could be disseminated via a continuing professional development course in order to ensure that these recommendations can be shared with a wide audience.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Full version</b>
<b>AHP</b>	Allied Health Professionals
<b>CAF</b>	Common Assessment Framework
<b>CAQDAS</b>	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development
<b>CYPP</b>	Children and Young People's Plan
<b>DCSF</b>	Department for Children, Schools and Families
<b>DfEE</b>	Department for Education and Employment
<b>DfES</b>	Department for Education and Skills
<b>DH</b>	Department of Health
<b>ESRC</b>	Economic and Social Research Council
<b>GP</b>	General Practitioner
<b>GT</b>	Grounded Theory
<b>IJLCD</b>	International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders
<b>IRT</b>	Information, Referral and Tracking System
<b>JCPB</b>	Joint Commissioning Partnership Board
<b>NHS</b>	National Health Service
<b>ODPM</b>	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
<b>PCT</b>	Primary Care Trust
<b>PPP</b>	Public-Private Partnership
<b>QDA</b>	Qualitative Data Analysis
<b>RCSLT</b>	Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
<b>SLCN</b>	Speech, Language and Communication Needs
<b>SLT</b>	Speech and Language Therapy

## APPENDIX 1

### Published studies relating to SLT that state the use of GT methodology.

N.B. Colour coding indicates the extent of the use of GT (plum = full classic GT, pink = many elements but not a full GT, pale blue = elements of method only).

Author and Date	Research 'Product'	Use of GT
Mroz and Letts (2008)	Descriptive themes	Elements of GT method
Skeat and Perry (2008b)	Conceptual theory	Classic GT
Graves (2007)	Descriptive themes	Elements of GT method
King et al (2007)	Descriptive themes	Elements of GT method
Kummerer, Lopez-Reyna and Hughes (2007)	Descriptive themes	Elements of GT method
Marshall, Goldbart and Phillips (2007)	Partially conceptualised description	Elements of GT method
Newton, et al (2007)	Descriptive themes	Elements of GT method
Soklaridis, Oandasan and Kimpton (2007)	Descriptive themes	Elements of GT method
Bruce, Parker and Renfrew (2006)	Descriptive themes	Elements of GT method
Magnus and Turkington (2006)	Descriptive themes	Elements of GT method
Markham and Dean (2006)	Descriptive themes	Elements of GT method
Slingsby (2006)	Conceptual description	Many elements of Straussian GT but lacking a theoretical framework
Pilling and Slattery (2004)	Descriptive themes	Elements of GT method
Hersh (2003)	Conceptualisation, partially organised into a theoretical framework	Many elements of GT but appears to just fall short of a full theoretical framework
Trulsson and Klingberg (2003)	Conceptualisation, partially organised into a theoretical framework	Many elements of Straussian GT but lacking a full theoretical framework
Ukrainetz and Fresquez (2003)	Descriptive themes	Elements of GT method
David and Whitehouse (1998)	Conceptual description	Many elements of GT but appears to just fall short of a full theoretical framework
Nettleton and Reilly (1998)	Partially conceptualised description	Elements of GT method

## APPENDIX 2

### **Questions used as basis for interviews with steering group participants**

The following questions were developed to further explore concepts that had emerged from the observation of meetings. The researcher used the questions as a guide only and allowed the conversation to flow naturally. The questions were not asked in a specific order and participants were given the opportunity to talk about other relevant issues as and when they arose. Specific questions were missed out or added for some participants, as appropriate.

1. What is your overall feeling about the steering group meetings?
2. What do you think these meetings have been about?
3. Did you know what would be discussed before attending each meeting?
4. What has your role been in the meetings?
5. What have you contributed to the meetings?
6. What did you gain by attending the meetings?
7. What have you done with any paperwork from the meetings?
8. Was there any group that was under or over represented?

### **For participants who had been involved in selecting group members:**

9. How did you select group members?

### **For participants who were involved in setting the agenda:**

10. How did you develop the agendas for the meetings?

### **For participants who had not attended all three meetings:**

11. What influenced your attendance at the meetings?

## APPENDIX 3

### a) Example of coded data from observation of meeting 1

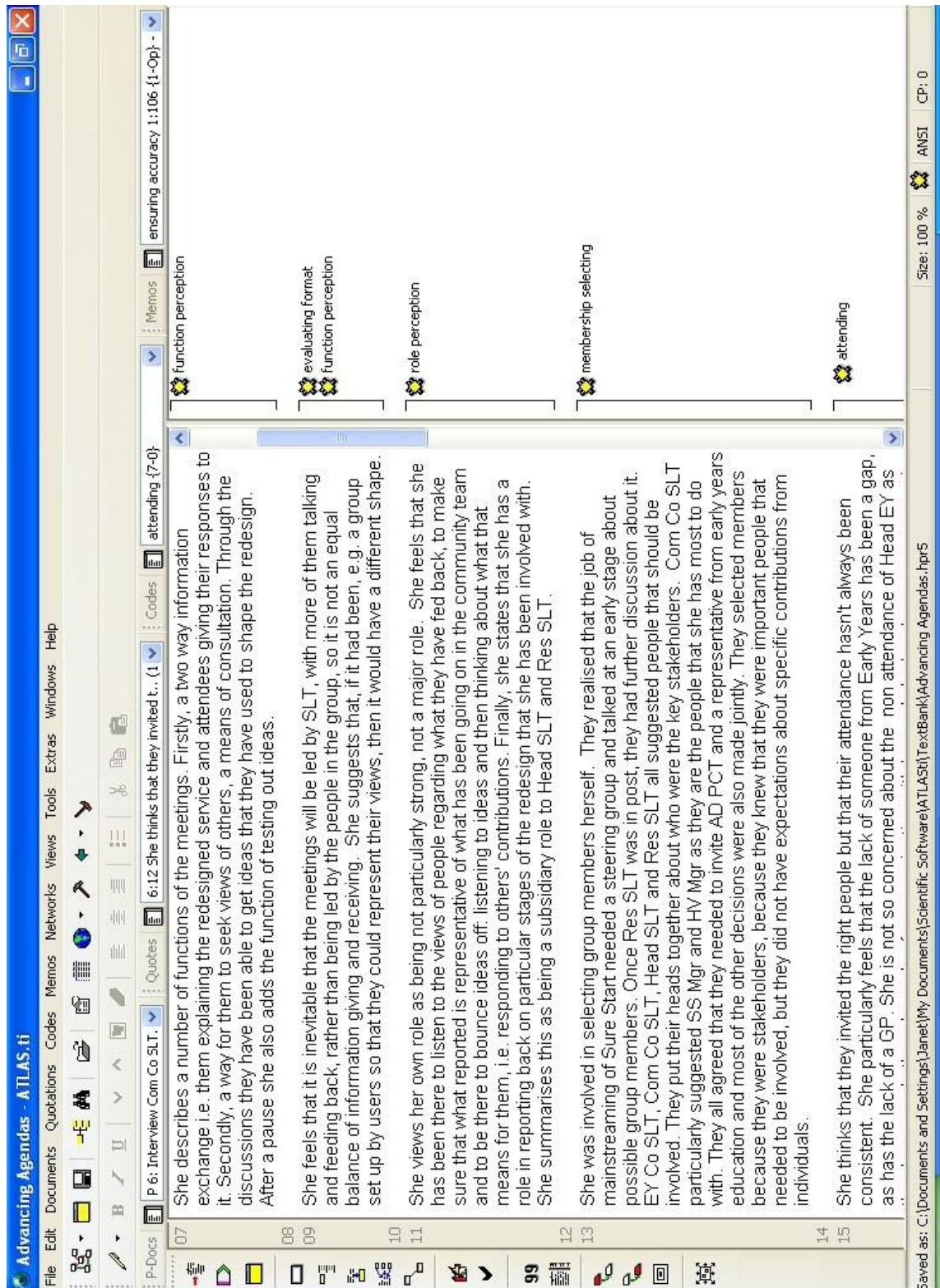
The screenshot displays the ATLAS.ti interface with a transcript of a meeting. The transcript is divided into segments, each with a time stamp and a code. The codes are represented by yellow starburst icons. The transcript text is as follows:

- 184 37:6:803 giving opinion
- 185 Chair suggests that it is helpful to think in terms of a normal time frame as there will always be instances when it might be speedier or else delayed. She adds that it would be useful to monitor that time, to gain evaluation data about the responsiveness or what it is that gets in the way, such as resources or even something incredibly simple.
- 186 37:40:655 sharing information
- 187 EYDCP Prac mentions a recent referral from her which was delayed by her going back to complete the form with the parent, it depended on when she could do a home visit to get it going.
- 188 37:57:203 agreeing
- 189 Chair acknowledges this, saying 'absolutely', that it is often systems processes that interrupt rather than anything else and that it is necessary to watch out for what these might be in particular areas. She suggests that in different centres there might be different resource or process implications and that it would be interesting to see what emerges and why.
- 190 38:21:798 giving opinion
- 191 Com Co SLT adds further information, that they have considered inviting health visitors and other referrers to the cluster meetings so that the referral can be instant. However, she states that they have not yet consulted on this.
- 192 38:47:318 suggesting action
- 193 EY Co SLT agrees that there are different implications for different models of service delivery.
- 194 She gives the example of a child in nursery where the service is bound by terms, that if a child is referred at the end of the Autumn term, it will be mid January before they are seen. She acknowledges that this could be monitored.
- 195 39:15:398 agreeing
- 196 Chair suggests that this could inform the timing of the cluster meetings, to avoid obvious problems.
- 197 39:33:459 giving opinion
- 201 Res SLT responds that it has been suggested that, in one cluster, the meetings will occur on a
- 202
- 203

The ATLAS.ti interface includes a menu bar (File, Edit, Documents, Quotations, Codes, Memos, Networks, Views, Tools, Extras, Windows, Help), a toolbar, and a status bar at the bottom showing the file path: P 1: Meeting 1 observation notes.rtf -> C:\Documents and Settings\Janet\My Documents\PHD transcripts\Meeting 1 observation note.



**b) Example of coded data from an interview with a steering group member**





## APPENDIX 4

### Examples of early open coding memos relating to the concept 'enabling participation'

(N.B. All names within these memos have been changed to X, Y or Z to preserve anonymity.)

---

HU: Advancing Agendas  
 File: [C:\Documents and Settings\Janet\My Documents\Scientific Software\ATLAsTi\Text...\Advancing Agendas.hpr5]  
 Edited by: Super

---

#### **MEMO: enabling participation 1:34 (1 Quotation)**

P 1: Meeting 1 observation notes.rtf:34-34  
 Type: Open code

Giving participants handouts helps them to follow, understand and remember what is being explained and therefore supports their participation.

---

#### **MEMO: enabling participation 1:40 (1 Quotation)**

P 1: Meeting 1 observation notes.rtf:40-40  
 Type: Open code

Here, X provides a direct opportunity for Y to participate, by specifically inviting her to add further comment. This is successful as Y does provide some clarification. In doing this, X is also ensuring that she has not left anything out of the information giving and is **ensuring accuracy**.

---

#### **MEMO: enabling participation 1:52 (1 Quotation)**

P 1: Meeting 1 observation notes.rtf:52-52  
 Type: Open code

This is another method of enabling participation: inviting questions from group members. On this occasion, the attempt to involve others is unsuccessful as nobody does ask a question. Could this link to the thoughts in memo 'sharing 1:49' i.e. the amount of information giving so far has set a certain tone for the meeting which has limited participation from others.

---

#### **MEMO: enabling participation 1:60 (1 Quotation)**

P 1: Meeting 1 observation notes.rtf:61-61  
 Type: Open code

X tries hard to encourage input from other group members. She makes several suggestions of how to do this (questions, points of clarification, observations) and persists even when there is no response. See previous memos on style of meeting and lack of broad contribution at the start. There might also be a link to **attending/ engaging** (see notes on core group discussion after the end of the meeting). They felt that the people most likely to contribute were not present.

---

**MEMO: enabling participation 1:64 (1 Quotation)**

P 1: Meeting 1 observation notes.rtf:64-64

Type: Open code

X invites input from Y by looking at her as she suggests the next item. Inviting input is one way of encouraging participation and this can be done non verbally (as here) or verbally (see other quotes).

There is a difference between encouraging participation from someone who is already a good contributor (as in this case) and someone who might not contribute unless encouraged. Perhaps I need a broader term than 'enabling' as examples such as this are more 'requesting' participation than 'enabling' it.

---

**MEMO: enabling participation 1:73 (1 Quotation)**

P 1: Meeting 1 observation notes.rtf:73-73

Type: Open code

This is the first example of a question being used as a means of enabling participation successfully: we are 21 minutes into the meeting and this is the first time that someone else speaks (apart from to introduce themselves) other than the core team. The question is closed, whereas previous attempts have been open, e.g. requests for questions. This could well have made it easier for someone to respond or else might just be a safer topic: most or all members will have heard about Children's Centers but few people know much about them yet. This makes it 'OK' to ask for clarification.

---

**MEMO: enabling participation 1:85 (1 Quotation)**

P 1: Meeting 1 observation notes.rtf:85-85

Type: Open code

X has been successfully included in the discussion but is then undermined by Y **ensuring accuracy** of her contribution. Here, Z defends X, which **supports** her in continuing to share her knowledge of the subject. Without this support, X may have been discouraged from continuing.

---

**MEMO: enabling participation 1:94 (1 Quotation)**

P 1: Meeting 1 observation notes.rtf:94-94

Type: Open code

X asks Y to share her knowledge, hence successfully including her in the discussion for the first time in the meeting. Up to this point, most (or possibly all) the instances of 'enabling participation' have come from the core team members. They started off giving a lot of information and now seem to be working hard to get others to share their knowledge and opinions. This helps to make it a more collaborative meeting but still gives them a level of control and **authority**, in that they decide who to invite to participate and when. There is, then a link between 'enabling participation' and 'showing authority'. It is not an exclusive link: it would be possible for those not in a position of authority to invite others to contribute: they just haven't done so, so far.

---

**MEMO: enabling participation 1:79 (1 Quotation)**

P 1: Meeting 1 observation notes.rtf:79-79

Type: Open code

X asks Y for a specific contribution, relating to knowledge that she suspects she may have (about the development of Children's Centers.). This brings Y into the discussion for the first time. In the conversation that follows, it appears that X knows at least as much as Y on this subject so there are two possible reasons for the initial request a) X thinks that Y knows more than she really does or b) she suspects that they each have a similar level of knowledge but she particularly wants to include Y in the discussion.

---

## APPENDIX 5

### Examples of mature memos

(N.B. All names within these memos have been changed to letters A to E, to preserve anonymity.)

#### **MEMO: Thoughts after interviews**

These thoughts are written after coding and memoing the interview with A. They identify a process by which participants decide whether to engage with the meeting process and, if so, how and to what extent.

Presumably, this is not a single process. Once participants have made a decision, they will reflect on and re-evaluate their decision after attending each meeting. So, there is some kind of causal loop involved. Examples of this come from a) B (who decided to attend and then decided that there was insufficient value after attending one meeting) b) C (as reported by D) who became more engaged as time went on.

#### **Role Perceiving**

When group members are invited to join the steering group, they make a judgment about the nature of their role: role perceiving. For some this is straightforward but for others there is a period of role confusion. In this time they will seek clarification from other sources (e.g. A asking E about her perception of the role). Some will still be unsure of their role at the start of the meeting process but will fall into a role (role finding).

Individual's perceptions of their role may be based on past experiences and/or information given to them about the function of the group. Not everyone will remember the information they are given and, given the same information, different people will come to different conclusions (perhaps because of expectations/ past experiences). There are different opinions about the worth of group members having a clear sense of role. Some may feel that it is important and that, if there is not clarity of role then that needs to be addressed. Others feel that it is best for members to find a role that they are comfortable with (see role finding above) rather than being given a role to fulfill. One argument is that too close a focus on role can restrict participation (see interview with D).

For some, their perception of their role will also be influenced by their perception of others' roles.

#### **Value Judging**

Group members all judge the value of participating in the group. This may include benefit judging (benefit to self or to others) and cost judging. Self benefit judging might include knowledge building, supporting own service development, networking, interest. All these were found in A interview so need to look for these and others within other interviews. Within value judging it is possible to identify each person's **personal agenda**. Benefit to others relates to contributing: what that person can bring to the group. Some may feel a need to be able to contribute in order to have positive value whereas others might be content with benefit to self alone. In judging the value of contributions, many will consider representing.

There are different views on how representative one person can or should be. Part of the value judging decision is also based on cost judging: time pressures, resource implications (see e.g. A and B). Also need to consider political reasons. B and core team discuss the external, political agenda.

For most, the value is judged before agreeing to attend. However, this may or may not be influential in deciding whether to engage. Requirement to engage might over-ride feelings about value judging. Value judging continues after the meetings have begun and this can lead someone to become more or less engaged.

### **Thoughts added after interview with B**

B had a clear perception of his role. He obtained this from the written information given to him but also from own views/ experience (as he decided that he was also there as a voice for the community, which had not been part of the written information). He felt that he had sufficient information to be able to fulfill his role. His perception of his role were closely related to his perception of the function of the meetings - i.e. to steer the process of the redesign. As such, he saw little potential gain to himself. He did acknowledge that networking and receiving information were potential gains but felt that neither of these were valid in his own case. Conversely, he listed numerous costs associated with attending the meetings. These all related to time away from clinical practice - both his own and others attending the meetings. He considered the costs in light of political and social policy. His personal agenda was limited: to ensure that he agreed with the views that were being expressed. He decided that this was happening him and so he opted not to participate after attending one meeting (judgment evaluation). B did discuss representing. He felt that one person could not necessarily be representative but didn't see any problem in this case. He applied these comments to E, not to himself.

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### **MEMO: value judging: summary**

Value judging divided into benefit judging and cost judging

#### **Benefit judging**

benefit can be to self, others or service (i.e. employer).

***self benefit*** may be:

personal interest: appears to be very important factor

personal enjoyment (e.g. of that style of working)

personal satisfaction

knowledge building (of facts) / gaining ideas

networking (can also be service benefit)

provide variety within job (doing something different)

personal professional development: can be via insight from others/ understanding others perspectives

***benefit to others*** may be:

having something to offer (related to role perception)/ being able to support the process, answer questions etc.

***benefit to service*** may be:

a) within meetings -->

supporting service development. This relates to past knowledge of the service i.e. if it is a good service, likely to be of greater benefit as likely to be good ideas.

intelligence gathering

b) outside meetings -->

sharing new knowledge/ ideas with colleagues

### **Cost judging**

costs can be to self or to service

***cost to self*** may be:

time away - from other duties/ from clients (i.e. actually ***cost to others***). relates to need to prioritise time.

lack of need for the information (NB also view that interesting even if not needed), also if already have the information

***cost to service*** may be

lack of useful contribution/ being redundant (as perceived, relates to role perception)

lack of relevance to role (e.g. GPS not involved in child dev)

resources: including time for prep, travel and actual meeting

### **Weighing up the value**

Is this a good use of my time?

Other factors to consider:

obligation to attend

wider issues e.g. political agenda

relative effectiveness: meetings v other consultation --> 'a legitimate cost'

Need to be transparent re relative costs/ benefits

For another section: communicating decisions based on value judging ? within strategy setting.

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**MEMO: what is strategy planning?**

Strategy planning is a mechanism for moving from agenda setting to engaging.

It has the properties of:

--> committing: committing to attend or committing to engage in other ways.

--> distancing: lack of engagement, may lead to withdrawing completely.

--> preparing/ planning (? which is the better name): this is preparation for the meeting, such as reading minutes, preparing questions etc.

Committing has both psychological and behavioural elements: psychological = deciding to engage and deciding to accept associated costs. Behavioural aspects = organising self to be able to engage, e.g. organising diary.

Distancing also has psychological and behavioural aspects. Distancing does not necessarily lead to withdrawal (but can do and withdrawal is therefore the extreme end of distancing - e.g. interview with GP). There may be an element of obligation that results in minimal engagement (= engagement in name alone, that is behavioural aspects without psychological aspects) When this occurs the engagement is tenuous and can easily be lost (e.g. participants that double booked meetings).

So ...

Committing/ distancing describes the degree to which a participant is willing to engage. Preparing explains the ways in which members get themselves ready to engage in the manner that they want to.

Committing/ distancing and preparing all have both behavioural and psychological aspects and it is possible for one participant to display elements of each e.g. behavioural aspects of committing but psychological aspects of distancing.

Does that mean that engagement is also both psychological and behavioural??

**Further thoughts**

Aha!!! better to conceptualise committing/ distancing as the psychological element of engagement and engaging as the behavioral aspect. That means that preparing is actually part of engaging, not strategy planning.

So: properties of strategy planning are just committing/ distancing and withdrawing. Properties of engaging are then preparing, attending and contributing. Participants can prepare to attend and/ or prepare to contribute.

Now need to think about obligation judging ... perhaps this is also part of strategy planning?

## APPENDIX 6

### The main concepts within the theory of Advancing Agendas

**Key**

**Core concept (black)**

**Sub core concepts (turquoise)**

**Concepts that are the main properties of sub-core concepts (plum)**

### Advancing Agendas

#### Agenda setting

Function perception

Role perception

Value judging

#### Strategy planning

Obligation judging

Committing/ distancing

Withdrawing

#### Engaging

Preparing

Attending

Contributing

Reacting and adapting

#### Evaluating

Progress checking

Reviewing

Revising

## APPENDIX 7

### Examples of theoretical coding families (taken from Glaser 1978, p74 - 82)

#### ***The six C's***

Causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariance's and conditions.

#### ***Process family***

Stages, staging, phases, phasings, progressions, passages, gradations, transitions, steps, ranks, careers, orderings, trajectories, chains, sequences, temporaling, shaping and cycling.

#### ***The degree family***

Limit, range, intensity, extent, amount, polarity, extreme, boundary, rank, grades, continuum, probability, possibility, level, cutting points, critical juncture, statistical average, deviation, standard deviation, exemplar, modicum, full, partial, almost, half.

#### ***The dimension family***

Dimensions, elements, division, piece of, properties of, facet, slice, sector, portion, segment, part, aspect, section.

#### ***The type family***

Type, form, kinds, styles, classes, genre.

#### ***The strategy family***

Strategies, tactics, mechanisms, managed, way, manipulation, manoeuvrings, dealing with, handling, techniques, ploys, means, goals, arrangements, dominating, positioning.

#### ***Interactive family***

Mutual effects, reciprocity, mutual trajectory, mutual dependency, interdependence, interaction of effects, covariance.

#### ***Cutting point family (a variation on the degree family)***

Boundary, critical juncture, cutting point, turning point, breaking point, benchmark, division, cleavage, scales, in-out, intra-extra, tolerance levels, dichotomy, trichotomy, polychotomy, deviance, point of no return.



# APPENDIX 8

## Components of Atlas.ti software

