

University of South Wales



2059338



116 Cathays Terrace, Cardiff CF24 4HY
South Wales, U.K. Tel: (029) 2039 5882
www.bookbindersuk.com

Managing Change in the Department of Health

Ieuan Wynn Griffiths

University of Glamorgan/ Prifysgol Morgannwg
Guided Doctorate in Organisational Leadership and Change

October 2001

Contents	<u>Page</u>
1. Introduction	4
2. Literature Search	16
Learning, Reflection and Expertise	
The Learning Organisation	
Change and Leadership	
The DoH/NHS and the Public Sector	
3. Approach, Methodology and Method	85
Approach	
Methodology	
Methods Proposed and Actual	
4. Personal and Organisational Context	143
Key Biographical Details	
The Department of Health and NHS	
5. Management Practice Development	164
Feedback and insights into my own practice	
Common themes	
6. Organisational Changes	193
Workshops feedback	
Regular Staff Attitudinal Questionnaires (SAQs)	
RET working, interviews and internal reviews	
Common themes	
7. What Emerged From the Research	235
Development of Interim Findings	
The Public Sector and Learning Organisation Principles	
Methodology for Managerial Learning	
My Own Development	
8. Conclusions	284
The original research aims	
Contribution to knowledge	
Research output	

	<u>Page</u>
Bibliography	298
Appendices	308

Glossary

1. Research Planning – up to Transfer Paper
2. Chronology of Personal Events
3. Personality Profile Detail
4. Myers Briggs Details
5. Learning Organisation Profile

Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate the PhD to my father. I wish that he was still around to see this completed – he would have been proud and delighted.

I would also like to thank a number of friends for their support and assistance over the last four and a half years. Undertaking the research alongside my work at the NHS Executive / Department of Health, meant that I did not give them the time and attention they deserved.

I would like to apologise to Wendy for all the time I spent at my computer to the exclusion of family and friends. Now I may even get under her feet so much that she has to find me another “project”.

To the three “critical friends” at the SWRO – Pauline, John and Erica – I would like to extend a special vote of thanks. The time they spent reading, criticising, providing feedback and discussing the work as it progressed, as well as providing very practical data collection help, was very much appreciated.

I think my staff in the Finance Directorate and the external interviewees found the research interesting. I trust they also found it as developmental as they seemed to indicate, but thanks anyway.

Thanks to those who read the various drafts of the thesis and provided feedback, particularly Jennie, and further insights into my practice and the changes in the RO and wider Department – Gabriel, Lis, Jean, Melanie, Chris and Sylvia. Also to Jean and Jackie, our two SWRO librarians who did a sterling job of tracking down many of the literature sources I needed.

To those at the University – Paul, Chris and Norah – and my learning set – Alun, Mike, Ann and Bob (the hardy survivors) – thanks for the patience. The possibility of exploring emerging ideas and thoughts away from the immediate context was always helpful and often stimulating.

Finally, thanks to the Department of Health who funded the exercise as part of my development programme.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This introductory chapter sets the scene for the thesis, summarises the later Chapters and shows how these fit together. The literature and concepts introduced are referenced in the relevant chapters and are not introduced in this first chapter. The research aims have been framed within a non-positivist paradigm so that the context and preliminary assumptions are summarised here as well. The way in which the research objectives were refocused as a result of emerging findings and my own increasing awareness and theoretical grasp, together with the fact that my own practice was an explicit aspect of the research, entailed a fairly complex process of research cycling and resultant realignment. My role and responsibilities within the organisation being researched meant that time pressure was always present, but my position did also provide access to data, written material and staff feedback restricted only by decisions to use them or not.

Background

My academic background and professional experience prior to starting this research were firmly rooted within a positivist framework and training - a Cambridge mathematics degree, a Masters in Fluid Mechanics at the University of Bristol and then qualification as a Chartered Accountant. I then specialised in computer audit to take advantage of my computing background and this work provided a varied set of insights as to how information and organisational structures interact and developed, I believe, a thoroughly systemic approach to organisational problem solving.

Professional qualification and audit led into wider advisory work and for ten years I worked for Ernst & Young (E&Y) and then Coopers & Lybrand (C&L) in business and information systems strategy consulting. In many cases, in both the private and public sectors, the strategy assignments led into implementation projects which were essentially change management projects, usually with a technical objective or background. The work involved a large number and variety of organisations and management styles and built up a "portfolio" of personal empirical experience supplemented by discussions with colleagues and formal training, which was mainly geared towards specific detailed methodologies and tools for delivering the projects.

In 1994, I moved to become Director of Finance at the University Hospital of Wales. This role provided an opportunity to put into practice within an organisation the sort of advice and skills hitherto always provided from outside. This organisation of 6000 staff and £180m expenditure was involved in a huge change process – merging three previous organisations, becoming an independent organisation and closing a city centre hospital, all in a highly politicised environment. The Regional Director of Finance (RDF) post at the South & West Regional Health Authority (S&WRHA) based in Bristol followed in 1996. The S&WRHA embarked on a process of absorption into the Department of Health (DH) and recasting into its new guise as the S&W Regional Office (SWRO) of the NHS Executive, a part of the DH.

The SWRO was itself ‘managing’ changes within the NHS in terms of market reforms – a process that would continue, but be totally redirected as the Labour Party took over as the new administration in May 1997. The regional management team seemed dysfunctional and lacking a corporate sense of direction, at a time when the organisation itself was trying to cope with fundamental changes – internally and externally.

Thus, I had accumulated a great deal of practical experience, but was struggling to set it in a clear and coherent conceptual framework. During my first annual appraisal at the SWRO in early May 1996 to discuss personal development targets, it was agreed that mine should be to gain a greater framework of understanding of how organisations and management work. This improved conceptual framework would be enhanced by reflection upon my practical experience of many organisations gained through previous consultancy work. The Regional Director suggested that I explored ‘action learning’, with neither of us understanding the principles involved. The week following that appraisal a document arrived from the University of Glamorgan. This stated:

*“The University of Glamorgan Business School has designed a ‘guided doctorate’ for senior managers and professionals who wish to pursue action research in the field of **Organisational Leadership and Change**. The research programme is designed to be completed by participants working in small supportive ‘learning sets’ which will meet regularly, together with senior staff from the Business School, in order to plan, undertake and review the progress of individual research topics.*

The aim of the programme is to enable senior management professionals to gain a PhD through research into their practice of managing change in their own organisations.”

What seemed to me to be needed was a theoretical framework in which to be able to place my own – and others’ – experiences and the PhD seemed to provide that opportunity. The theory assimilated and the practical insights gained along the way should enable me to work more effectively in terms of managing change, which seemed to me to be by the critical aspect of the role I had just embarked upon at the SWRO. It was the ‘learning along the way’ that would be of importance. Fourteen of us started along the path in September 1996, split into 3 ‘learning sets’.

Phase 1: Initial research aims and approach

My initial ideas on research topics and aims were vague as, from a positivist perspective, it seemed difficult to isolate specific issues or areas from my organisation or personal practice and deal with these in a meaningful or objective fashion. At least it seemed to me, in order to gain the type of practical or ‘hands-on’ management improvement I hoped for in my own practice, that the research needed to be grounded in my practical work. After the first biographical assignment, which proved extremely difficult for me because of my reluctance to be ‘open’, and some of the initial directed reading – Schon (1987), McLaughlin & Thorpe (1993), Pettigrew & Whipp (1993), Kolb (1996) and Senge (1996) – a clearer understanding started to emerge of the potential approaches I could adopt and the nature of the research that might be possible.

An initial research aim was identified and the approach to achieving the aim was set out as follows:

"...to assess the way in which my management practices develop during the assimilation of the S&WRHA into the DH and to evaluate my impact on the way that my staff adapt during this process."

The means of achieving this aim would be:

"...Staff in the Finance and Information Directorate will be encouraged to adopt a reflective approach to their work and the Directorate consciously and collaboratively developed as a learning organisation. Reviews will be undertaken to compare, between my own Directorate and others in the RO, effectiveness of staff development (as seen by the staff) and staff perceptions of the organisation as it develops - both RO and DH. The way in which my management practices develop during this time and the way in which staff adapt, with a changing view of their own roles and the RO / DH will be reviewed as an integral part of these projects."

It was not apparent to me at the time how ambitious this aim was, particularly in terms of the assumptions which underpinned the approach. Two assumptions - the nature of the learning process and knowledge needed and also the applicability of the general Learning Organisation theories to the organisation - proved during the course of the research to need significant exploration. The realisation that the process was more complex than anticipated changed the direction and focus of the research as some of the initial assumptions were analysed and questioned.

Phase 2: Refocused aims and methodology

My PhD transfer paper submitted in September 1998 included some initial conclusions from the data collected to that point. However, it had become clear by then that, in addition to continuing to collect data and complete the existing research plan, the two specific areas of assumption noted above should be explored in greater detail. These were encapsulated in the following refocused research aims:

- *develop a methodology for management learning / research in a practical professional context, bringing the strands together using the theoretical base developed from the literature and from experience;*
- *highlight specific issues within the public sector which impact on the introduction of a learning organisation in framework or concept, contrasted with experiences documented in the literature based within the context of the private sector;*
- *collect further evidence to support and develop (or suggest a reappraisal may be needed of) the interim findings and track the changes in my own understanding and practice arising from this learning.*

This refocusing of research aims through reflection upon emergent themes seemed fully in line with the methodology embraced. The group (Directorate) activity, meanwhile, continued to make progress in the original direction, albeit receptive to the learning accumulated which was also used to support the personal development of all those involved.

Summary of the research itself

The methodology adopted was a synthesis of participatory action research (PAR) as proposed by Park (1999) and co-operative inquiry as proposed by Reason (1999), with the staff actively involved from the early stages both within my own Directorate and, to a lesser extent, the wider SWRO. The first stages of the data gathering and research (September 1996 to March 1999) were focused within the SWRO and, in particular, within the Finance and Information Directorate for which I was responsible. The Directorate comprised around 20 staff, mainly professionally qualified, out of a total 125 staff for the SWRO.

A number of methods were employed for organisational data gathering as the organisation changed and developed. These included a repeated staff questionnaire based survey of staff attitudes and organisational aspects; interviews (internal and external); workshops and detailed discussions with staff, critical friends and my learning set. Material was also gathered from various other internal initiatives such as Investors in People and a number of reviews within the wider DH as the eight Regional Offices became absorbed into the larger organisation.

In terms of gathering data on my own management practice, I employed a similar variety of approaches – personality questionnaires completed on me by staff, 360 degree feedback, interviews (internal and external), maintenance of a journal and input from the formal appraisal cycles. A majority of the methods themselves were familiar from ten years as a management consultant, although there was some difference of emphasis in application.

Some quantitative techniques were used to handle data gathered from the questionnaires and personality profiles, but the objective of these was to isolate areas of interest to inform and focus the detailed interviews and developmental work. The basic approach remained qualitative. In the main, the Glaser & Strauss (1979) Grounded Theory approach was used to develop and handle the data – frequently recycling the results into the next set of workshops and discussions. Many discussions took place with the three critical friends within the SWRO (these were drawn from outside my Directorate): two were researching for MAs and one for an MBA in related areas, so their input was all the more valuable. Validation of the findings in respect of the organisation, in particular, was undertaken through the in-depth interviews with external stakeholders and a comparison with other review findings (internal literature).

The whole range of specific developmental interventions with the staff included workshops, training courses, linkage with Personal Development Plans and appraisals – integrated into the Directorate business planning process. These actions were very much in line with the PAR approach in which the staff were willing and aware participants in the development work. Concepts of learning, ‘Learning Organisations’ and management were explored, with a balance struck between ‘programmed knowledge’ and ‘questioning insight’ development throughout the research period.

Research progress over time

	1996		1997				1998				1999				2000				
	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Start Research	■																		
<i>Initial SWRO data</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■					
Staff questionnaires	■		■				■				■								
External interviews			■								■								
“SOLVED” survey								■			■								
Personal profiles	■		■				■				■			■					
360* and MB				■	■														■
Write up transfer paper									■										
Personal Journal																			
Start national role												■							
<i>Wider data gathering</i>												■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
NHS Estates review													■	■					
HFEA review																■	■	■	■
National HR&P project														■	■	■	■	■	■

The period between September 1996 and March 1999 provided a reasonably stable staff group within which to pursue this work. However, the period included the complete internal restructuring of the SWRO on two occasions, generating much rich data. As the research was based around trying to develop a ‘Learning Organisation’ culture within the Directorate, the approach was supported by individual staff development and an analysis of my own management practices - and identification of changes perceived within the latter during the period. As time passed, difficulties emerged in terms of the organisational development aspects and the slow progress we were making.

The Directorate staff attempted to work around these difficulties as a group, but further questions emerged for me in terms of the applicability of Learning Organisation concepts, largely developed within the private sector, to public sector organisations similar to the SWRO. Questions also arose in terms of reflective learning and the translation of learning into practical management development at both individual and organisational levels. My staff raised these as issues, but the same issues were also critical to me personally as I balanced the group development with my own.

In September 1998, I drafted a number of initial conclusions as a part of my PhD transfer paper. These initial conclusions primarily identified a number of themes emerging directly from the data collection and interviews, but also set out the difficulties encountered and refocused research aims to be addressed in the second research phase.

My own role changed in April 1999 and provided an opportunity to explore the initial findings in a wider, although less structured setting. The data collection at the SWRO continued until December 1999, when my formal regional responsibilities and hence regular access to the staff there ceased. In my new national role, I led two major national development projects, but also undertook two in-depth quinquennial Agency reviews (NHS Estates Agency in Autumn 1999 and Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in the Spring and Summer of 2000) and was able to compare the management and cultural bases of these organisations with those of the SWRO.

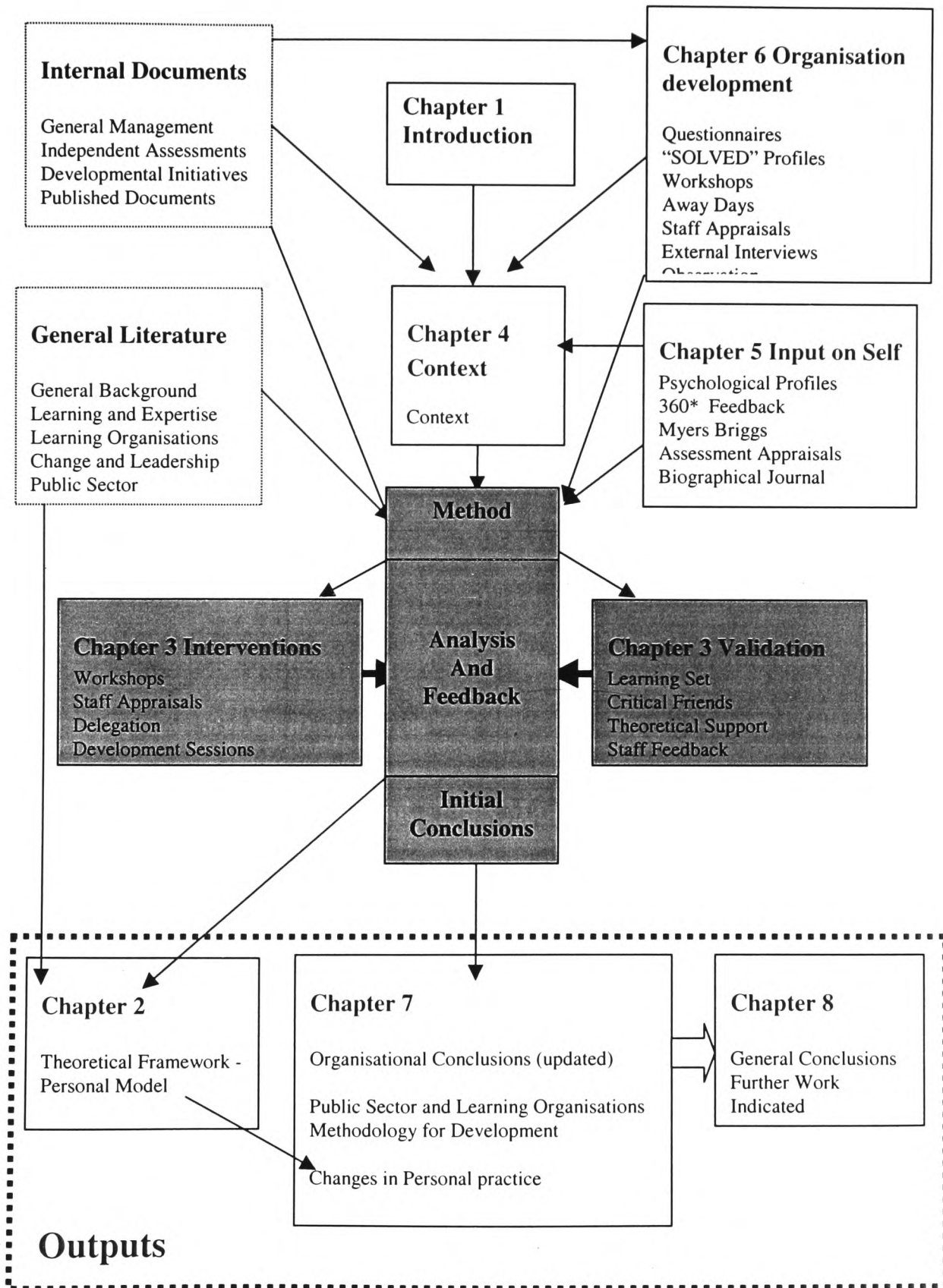
Both reviews involved access to documents, in-depth staff interviews and management / stakeholder discussions and so permitted further exploration and evaluation of the validity of the two themes being developed in the research initially based firmly within the SWRO. In addition the application of much of the research methodology to the actual reviews seemed to enhance the latter. The importance of these two reviews and the opportunity to work widely across various elements of the central NHS Executive, was that they allowed useful comparisons with SWRO attitudes and culture. They also allowed me to retest and subsequently endorse some of the tentative conclusions being drawn.

The difficulties that emerged with the initial assumptions reinforced the concept not only of the need for research cycles, but the need for frames of reference to change dynamically as learning occurred within each cycle – thus establishing a learning spiral of learning spirals. The opportunistic nature of management development and linkages with the research cycles also became apparent, with pre-set stage objectives often being rejected in favour of more advantageous learning and business opportunities. The alignment of research benefits with organisational business always appeared to be both possible and desirable in that a richer and improved quality ‘business result’ usually emerged. One of my initial objectives, which has become an intrinsic part of the management development issue, was to develop a personal theoretical framework that could become an intrinsic part of my professional practice. This framework was summarised in the literature review, forming a basis for the research and my management practice.

Thesis structure and content

The way in which the findings evolved and the number of different data sources, together with the interaction between personal development and Directorate activity, has resulted in a thesis in which the different chapters inter-relate in a complex way. The structure developed, however, is traditional - as is the presentation. The material could have been developed in a more narrative form during the early stages, but not only did this not feel comfortable at a personal level, but a more orthodox approach seemed appropriate in the context of the refocused research aims. The structure is summarised in Figure 1, with the links between the chapters highlighted.

Figure 1 - Research Input and Thesis Map



Chapter 2: Literature Review

Developing and setting out this chapter formed a key part of the personal theoretical framework I was seeking to establish at the start of the research. This framework is intended to be a dynamic frame of reference within which to reflect upon experiences and thereby to develop understanding. The structure and eclectic nature of the references represents a synthesis or combination of ideas as the literature itself comes from a number of academic fields which sometimes appear to have little co-ordination or cross reference within the literature itself. Ultimately the literature review became less of a traditional literature review than a conceptual framework – the conceptual lens through which I eventually evaluated and viewed both the organisation and my practice. As such it also provided a context within which the data analysis and interpretation itself was undertaken.

The nature of the research meant that literature from a number of academic fields was necessarily reviewed. A large number of direct quotations are included, as I believed that the original expression added a ‘feel’ to the summary and it was difficult to improve on the original words in the way they expressed the key ideas. The ideas in this context speak for themselves. The issues of change management depend on a number of factors – organisational context, change and leadership principles, medium of approach (in this context the learning organisation concepts) and personal development / learning concepts. Internally the chapter is split for practical purposes into four sections:

- *Learning, Reflection and Expertise;*
- *The Learning Organisation;*
- *Change and Leadership;* and
- *The Public Sector.*

Each of these areas has a significant volume of material, albeit a tiny proportion of the literature - but all seemed relevant to this research and the development of a personal integrated conceptual framework. Several emerging themes from the research, especially in the context of organisational behaviour, span the breadth of this material. There were two areas of difficulty in developing this chapter: the practical issues and development purpose.

In practical terms the reading time involved was significant, not made easier in the early research stages by some of the language used, and there were also difficulties of physical access to the literature given my work patterns and location. I found it difficult to get to the library at sensible times and resorted to the internet to purchase rather than borrow. The access problems were greatly reduced when I discovered that the SWRO librarians were happy to track down and procure, through inter-organisation loan, journal articles and books to provide themselves with ‘light relief’ – I had informally enrolled two research assistants!

In terms of development purpose, this was more unexpected. Initially, the literature review provided a backcloth of concepts and methodology, which enabled the definition and design of the research. It was directed at broad fields which I explored down 'routes of interest'. In its second phase, the research became more specifically directed at issues emerging from the initial research, and the literature review provided a means of theoretical validation. This usage is described in the methodology chapter. In the final phase after most of the data had been collected and themes were emerging from its analysis, the review provided a theoretical context in which to ground and potentially validate the findings. Thus it also became a key constituent of my own practical framework of reference and the context within which I interpreted the data collected.

Chapter 3: Approach, Methodology and Methods

This chapter records the development of the research methodology. The *approach* discusses the research paradigm, the inappropriateness of the positivist paradigm with which I started and charts the move to a *Constructivist* approach as outlined in Guba & Lincoln (1994). The approach was clearly qualitative, although it did use some quantitative tools to focus research attention and form the basis for further qualitative data gathering and analysis. It was also very much a subjective approach – most clearly so in terms of including a critical consideration of my own management practice as a part of the research. The *methodology* deals with the overall structure of the approach (staff involvement, research cycling, etc), the critical underpinning (evaluation, how impact was to be assessed, validity, etc) and the framework of actions (planning, action research interventions, analysis, etc).

The section dealing with the *methods* employed has been split between those initially proposed and what actually transpired. This documentation approach was taken to provide a greater insight into the impact of learning during the process on the methods adopted. Perhaps this also provides an insight into the flexibility in methodology needed for this type of participative research in a rapidly changing organisation and environment in which unexpected opportunities arose as the research progressed. In some ways this representation is awkward in that numbers and dates are not included in the proposed methods, but they are documented later in the corresponding text in what actually happened. I do not pretend that the whole of what emerged was foreseen at the outset, but I set out the reasoning behind the initial approach adopted and detailed activities resulting. The methodology adopted supported this developmental approach.

These two sections set out the methods for data gathering on both my own practice and the changes evident in the organisation itself. These include:

- self-assessment, psychological profiling through staff feedback, formal appraisal cycles, 360 degree assessment and reflective biographical journal;

- data gathered from the staff through assessment interviews, staff feedback, questionnaires undertaken periodically during the research period, external interviews with stakeholders, staff workshops, personal observation, internal documents and *literature review*); and
- data analysis, some formal directly through the collected data but much through “critical friend” analysis and discussions with colleagues in terms of perceptions and organisational understanding.

Chapter 4: Personal and Organisational Context

Given the nature of the research, grounding the analysis of the data thoroughly in the context is clearly essential and providing a summary of the environment is important in understanding the context. The personal and organisational aspects are closely intertwined but, for convenience, the contents are split into:

- *Key Biographical Details*;
- *The Department of Health and the NHS*; and
- *The NHS as an Example of the Public Sector*.

The environment within which the research was undertaken is one of fundamental and all-embracing change and understanding the scope of the change is fundamental for interpreting the research context. The identification of the NHS as an example of the public sector is important in the emerging findings and also the interpretation of how the research results may be generalised, though the conclusions are clearly indicative. Developing for myself a greater understanding of the context and workings of the organisation within which I operated and the structural layers / layers of influence was an important aspect of developing my own knowledge. Hence, as with the literature review, these sections were developed to provide a broad overall framework not only for the research, but for my own use in practice. This duality of purpose, together with the development of a personal framework, were important elements of the thesis and its importance is explored in Chapter 7 in terms of what the research provided to both the development of my own practice and to a more generally applicable contribution to knowledge.

Chapter 5: Management Practice Development

Chapter 5 sets out the data gathered on my own practice and the ways in which my practice has changed. The data was clearly interpretative and subjective, although my interpretations and perceptions were validated through sharing the findings with my staff, the critical friends and colleagues. Two of my colleagues with whom I shared the drafts of this thesis found it “too introspective overall”, but at the same time acknowledged their positivist perspective and also that the approach taken would make the exercise more useful to me personally. This observation can be analysed into separate strands, most interestingly perhaps in terms of the nature of the knowledge produced, as there seem to be few personal case studies of management learning available. This linkage between personal knowledge and the wider contribution to knowledge based in the field is dealt with in Chapter 8.

The results provided me with a number of personal insights and a far greater awareness of the way I interact with those around me. Moderating my behaviour patterns as a result seems, I believe, further advanced in some areas than others but this is only to be expected as it is easier to change some behaviours than others. In addition, the feedback from others and my reflection provided me with an opportunity to reappraise some of my underlying values and assumptions. The major aspects of the chapter deal with changes in my practice arising from Argyris (1977) loop 1 / 2 learning. Occasionally the learning seemed to work at the Bateson (1971) / Hawkins (1991) loop 3 level, although I have problems with some of the language and analogies that they use to describe their concepts.

Chapter 6: Organisational Changes

This Chapter sets out the organisational data gathered, both from my own Directorate as the focus of the original research and also from the wider SWRO and DH. The majority of data gathered within my own Directorate was accumulated between September 1996 and March 1999, though continuing in some respects until December 1999. The wider data gathering from the DH continued through the HFEA review until September 2000 and through the HR & Payroll project until December 2000. In terms of the personal framework development and management practice the learning was clearly an ongoing process, especially with ongoing reading of literature and reflection on experience throughout the period. The analysis and interpretation of the data was a major task and although this largely took place at a basic level as it was collected, there was a major exercise as the thesis was written up.

Chapter 7: What Emerged from the Research

This chapter provides the setting for the findings that were developed and is presented in four sections:

- *Development of Interim Findings* where the early research conclusions are further examined;
- *The Public Sector and Learning Organisation Principles* in which the features of the private and public sector are explored. Conclusions are drawn both from the results of the research and the literature review in terms of how appropriate the direct application of these concepts is to public sector organisations;
- *Methodology for Management Learning* in which there is some generalisation of the process of research and the opportunities I encountered for learning; and
- *My Own Development*, which examines the impact on my own practice.

The Chapter 5 and 6 data analyses and interpretation lead directly into the development of the interim findings. Largely these are unexceptional, but the research provides further confirmation of a number of concepts and ideas set out already in the literature search – such as the importance of leadership to organisations and benefits of a reflective approach to practice.

However, the analysis also provides some grounded evidence (derived through the Glaser and Strauss (1979) approach) for developing aspects of the literature review into some broader concepts – specifically the applicability of Learning Organisation principles to the public sector and some practical considerations for management practice development. The key issue was to return repeatedly to the question “*how do I know that?*”. The close relationship between current personal observation (of participants and the organisation) and the previous ten years working with a large number of organisations in a professional / consultancy capacity sometimes made this a difficult question to answer. The way in which ongoing observation is absorbed into a personal view revolves around the cumulative nature of knowledge and expertise (as in the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) model) and concepts introduced in the Gummesson (2000) theory of “*pre-understanding*” or Russell’s definition of “*knowledge by acquaintance*”.

The Chapter 5 analysis provided the primary input to understanding my own development as the final aspect of the research aims. However, the literature review (Chapter 2) and the increasing understanding of context within which the research and my practice were based (Chapter 4) also provide important input. Finally, the proposition emerged that this sort of research activity should form an integral part of normal working practice and it was clear that the approach and methodology (Chapter 3) elements had an impact on my own learning and practice development.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This chapter provides a summary of what happened and an evaluation of whether the research met the aims proposed. The research findings are set out in detail in chapter 7, but this final chapter provides a brief evaluation of the impact or contribution of the research in terms of the originality and nature of knowledge produced. Finally there is an analysis of the positive aspects and the challenges encountered during the research to set out some research learning for the future, together with a summary of some of the questions raised by the research which could be pursued to some benefit at a later date through further studies and research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter sets out the research background against which the work on this project has been undertaken. The literature covering the methodological issues and change within the NHS and Regional Office are dealt with separately in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. This Chapter is split into four sections and covers the:

- concepts of individual learning, reflection and the nature of expertise;
- developing literature on Learning Organisations;
- nature of leadership and change in organisations; and
- factors which differentiate the public sector from the private sector, using the Department of Health and NHS as examples of the public sector.

My initial reading was general and involved a number of popular texts and authors – Handy (1990a, 1990b), Harvey-Jones (1994), Peters & Waterman (1982), Adair (1983), Landsberg (1996), Kennedy (1991) etc. – in order to develop a feel for the field and nature of the literature. These acted as triggers for reflection and examples grounded in real-life practical experience as well as introducing the concepts.

My motivation for reading shifted a couple of times during my research. After the initial broad reading and work on the methodological issues, for a period the literature review was then driven by my reflection on issues raised by the data gathered and its analysis. The reading provided an external validation as a theoretical basis for my practical experiences and reflection. I sought corroboration or alternative views on the ideas generated. As the volume of theory and experiential data accumulated sufficiently for the next phase to start, I began to refine the research aims and construct a theoretical framework - but needed to read further to put this into a coherent structure that I could handle in practice. The final phase of the literature review was an attempt to fill in the gaps and look at current developments. The breadth and interacting nature of the fields of literature addressed mean this should be regarded as an ongoing process.

Hence, the literature review developed as a reflection of a framework that I can interact with during my work – this is the main reason this Chapter is set out in the detail and the way it is. In it I attempt to draw from a number of different strands of academic research. The process of setting this out, frequently following the time series of logical development, attempts to draw the strands together and develop a coherent whole. Documenting this, as opposed to only doing the reading itself, became an important part of developing my personal framework. Adopting this format and approach also provided a record of how my thinking developed and the influences which impacted my own conceptual understanding – especially as the different drafts of the Chapter evolved. In this way, the chapter is less of a ‘traditional’ literature review than a conceptual framework that indicates the context within which I analysed and interpreted the data and approached the research in its entirety.

Learning, reflection and expertise

Background

Intrinsic to the motivation that prompted the start of this personal development journey was the possibility of becoming a 'better' manager. I hoped to be able to read and accumulate a good deal of theory and build the sort of framework of understanding that I was seeking to make sense of my own empirical observations - but would this then translate into personal expertise and a change in my own practice? I had developed a number of ideas over the years from personal experience as to what technical expertise was required for a finance professional, but what did expertise mean in terms of a professional manager? Would this exploration on a personal level provide any clues as to why academic management theory seems to have had relatively little real penetration into real life practice, except through some sort of pre-packaged consultancy bundling?

The Pocket Oxford Dictionary does not even list expertise, but cites expert as :

"I (iksper't), adj. Practised, skilful, (at,in). 2 (ek'spert),n. Person e. in subject"

This immediately suggests two things: a) that any learning needs to be put effectively into practice to demonstrate expertise and that becoming skilful at anything (including learning) is likely to be less than immediate, and b) a larger dictionary and more academic sources might be needed to put the flesh on these particular bones.

The idea of developmental learning and the need to be able to change in response to changes in a contextual environment is clearly not new. Machiavelli (1521) observed in January 1521 that:

"... And certainly anybody wise enough to understand the times and the type of affairs and to adapt himself to them would always have good fortune, or he would protect himself from the bad, and it would come to be true that the wise man would rule the stars and the fates. but because there are never such wise men, since men are in the first place short sighted, and in the second cannot command their natures, it follows that Fortune varies and commands men and holds them under her yoke".

Some ideas dealing with reflective learning and learning cycles may go back even further, with Aristotle's discussions in his *Ethics* and Plotinius noting two millennia ago that:

" All things are filled full of signs, and it is a wise man who can learn about one thing from another".

The relationships between experience, learning and expertise ('targeted wisdom'?) seemed to me to be particularly of interest. The balance between theoretical or programmed knowledge and knowledge accumulated through practical experience in terms of overall learning was itself interesting - but how would both then manifest themselves in changed behaviour through 'expertise'?

Experiential learning

Some of the more effective exponents I have worked with during my professional life appear to access practical knowledge more through immediate recall of past experiences rather than through theoretically based reading. It appears to be more intuitive than calculated. Often the idea of academic research theory would be denigrated by some of these 'hands-on' expert practitioners as being too removed from real life. From previous observation and discussion, they seem to have worked out their own *modus operandi* through observing others and their own 'trial and error'.

This model of learning is intuitively appealing as it seems to run parallel to one's experience of watching young children at play. Having learned how to do something one way children often appear intentionally to try it a different way to see if that also works, then repeat the successful strategy to reconfirm the 'right' way. In addition, a concrete demonstration of learning is often manifest through the application of a new idea to solve a different problem in another situation or context – this transferability would seem to demonstrate a deeper understanding rather than mere replication.

I was, then, receptive to the concept of experiential learning when I first started reading a number of management texts and found that it is dealt with in the works of a number of researchers dating back to Dewey in the 1930s and Lewin in the 1940s. Dewey (1938) articulated what had previously been intuitively recognised in that there are two main methods of learning – 'trial and error' and a reflective activity that draws lessons, relationships and (causal) connections between elements of an experience. He writes (p9) of the trigger as:

"a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity."

This description of the learning trigger seems so well to summarise my own feelings that it provides an immediate resonance. Lewin (1946), indeed, took these learning ideas into the research arena to introduce the first elements of "action research". The ideas developed recognise research as a specific form of learning, but one that happens in a stylised and rigorous way. It is perhaps interesting that this is generally regarded as the source of experiential learning concepts but occurred in a group situation. Adelman (1993) fixes the development of these ideas within a specific social and political context and charts the progress of the concepts. He observes that (p8):

"Action research gives credence to the development of powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people participating in collective research on 'private troubles' "

Bateson (1968) takes the ideas of what is involved in learning a step further in his paper which suggests that learning only occurs when it leads to some form of change. He categorises three levels of learning:

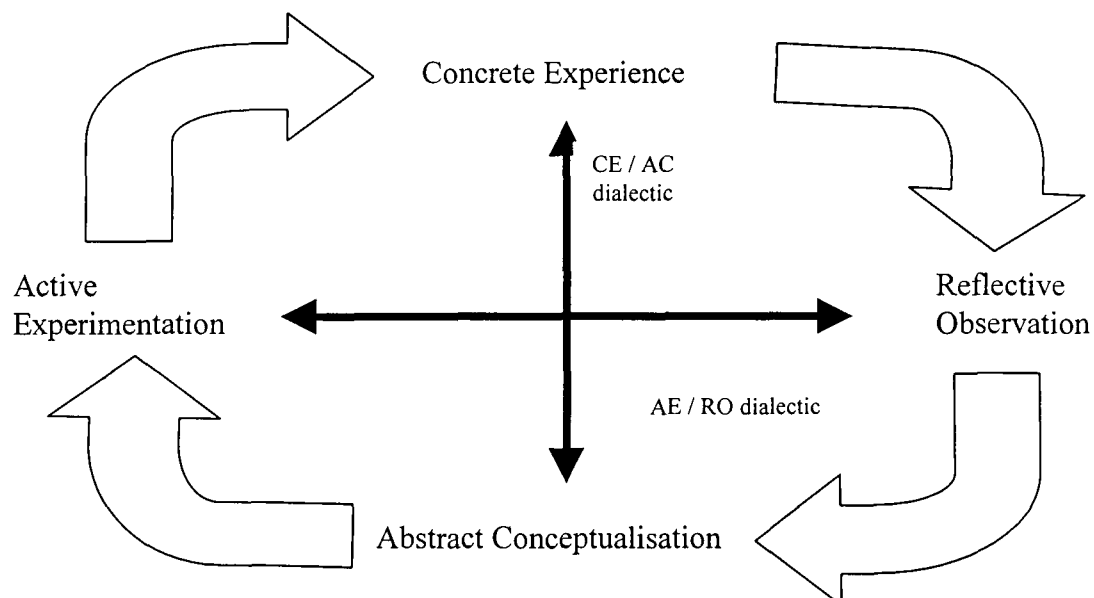
- “Zero” really the receipt of information and may lead on to deeper learning and change but may not;
- “One” specific skills learning, where choices are made within simple sets of alternatives;
- “Two” where the learning moves to choosing which sets of level “one” learning actually take place.

This change need not lead to a change in behaviour but should at least result in some change in outlook or perceptions. The question as to whether behavioural change results is further bound up in individual choice, the perceived benefits or otherwise. A more subtle change may be in an increased receptivity to further learning.

Action research in the Lewin context spans both individual and group learning. However, Kolb et al. (1971), Kolb and Fry (1975) and Kolb (1976) in the early 1970’s developed Lewin’s work in respect of individual learning. This also built on much research in social and cognitive psychology in the 1950’s and 1960’s – such as the work of Flavell (1963), Bruner (1966) and Kagan et al. (1964).

The latter two sets of work set out the two dialectic tensions identified by Kolb in his learning cycle. Bruner explores the contrast between the processes of concrete experience and abstract conceptualisation, whilst Kagan et al. found that very active orientation towards experimentation compromised reflective actions and thereby stifled the development of new concepts from data already gathered.

Figure 2 - Kolb Learning Cycle



The simplest model to exemplify the learning cycle was described by Kolb (1984) as a move from concrete experience (CE) through reflective observation (RO) into abstract conceptualisation (AC) of the issues and onwards to active experimentation (AE) in terms of the implementation of new knowledge.

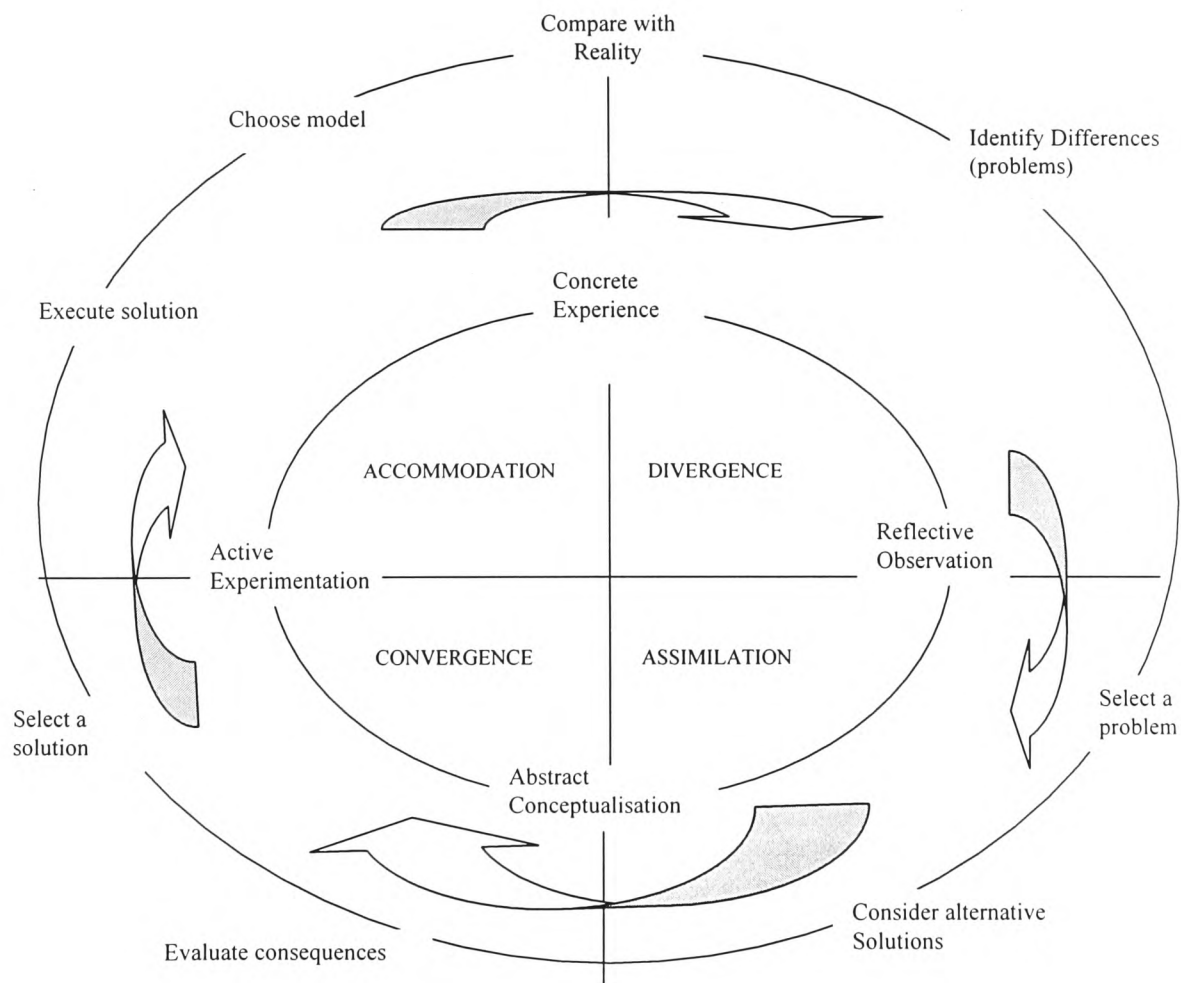
Kolb (1996, p271) remarks in relation to his model that:

“ A closer examination of the four-stage learning model reveals that learning requires abilities that are polar opposites (the two dialectics) and that the learner, as a result, must continually choose which set of learning abilities to bring to bear in any particular learning situation.”

This experiential learning model can usefully be superimposed with extracted common problem solving methodologies to demonstrate how the learning process and management problem solving can be viewed as similar processes. The model that draws the two aspects together is more complex and the stages through which the individual moves are described as divergence, assimilation, convergence and accommodation.

The model as a whole is represented by Kolb (1996) in the following diagrammatic way.

Figure 3 - Enhanced Kolb learning cycle



Citing Dewey (1938), Kolb considers experience to be a transaction between the person (internal and subjective) and the environment (external and objective) but the learning dealt with here is placed primarily in the classroom rather than in everyday experience. A series of separations are introduced which make the processes artificial and removed from the complexity of experience and learning in natural situations. Kolb with his Learning Styles Inventory takes this further by investigating individual learning styles in managers and professionals and also discussing the difficulties in communication introduced. He speculates on the communication difficulties between different professional groupings and the connections between personality types and professional preferences. His results are illuminating and he states in Kolb (1996, p 277), drawing on Kolb et al. (1971):

" managers on the whole are distinguished by very strong active experimentation skills and are very weak on reflective observation skills. Business school faculty members have the reverse profile. Improvement will come through the integration of the scholarly and practical learning styles. My approach to achieving this integration has been to apply directly the experiential learning model in the classroom. There are two goals in the experiential learning process. One is to learn the specifics of a particular subject. The other goal is...learning how to learn from experience."

However, other categorisations of learning styles also seem valid in terms of describing personality types and their aptitude with different aspects of Kolb's learning cycle elements. For example Ward (1983) provides an intuitively valid model by presenting four profiles: idealistic, pragmatic, realistic and existentialist. Stephen (1987) describes these different personality types in his comparison of learning styles as follows (paraphrased from p49):

The idealistic learner is an independent reasoner who is usually put off by learning environments or strategies that are highly controlled or structured, preferring exploration and experimentation. The pragmatic learner prefers heavy doses of hands-on experience, believing that learning is relevant only when it takes place in a situation where it can be applied. The realistic learner responds best to efficient get-to-the-point learning strategies and is turned off by intellectualisation. The existentialist learning style is based on the premise that there is no single right answer and there are many ways through to the objective.

Clearly, individuals move between modes, although they will have a predominant mode in which they feel most comfortable – possibly a combination of modes. This means that a 'one fits all' approach is certainly not applicable in terms of introducing learning into organisations.

In terms of what is learned, or to be more specific the way in which things are learned and the depth of learning, Argyris (1977) and Argyris & Schon (1974, 1978) introduced new concepts to refine the learning model: the new model of "single loop" and "double loop" learning cycles (analogous to Bateson's Level 1 and 2 learning for organisations). Single loop learning involves feedback from the consequence of previous experience to inform subsequent actions in the same area of operations – a simple absorption of immediate feedback. Double loop learning, on the other hand, not only addresses the immediate issues but also questions the underlying assumptions and values involved so that far 'deeper' learning occurs - effectively the individual (or 'system') learns to learn.

In developing this further Schon (1987) introduced the concept of reflection-in-action to deal with the way in which skilled practitioners learn and adapt their practice in real life situations in an interactive way. This supplements the reflection-on-action that can take place in separation and in a more contemplative setting. He describes a skilled practitioner acting in a way which combines previous experience, technical knowledge and the salient elements of the current situation in rapid interaction representing a “reflection-in-action”. This constructs a “knowledge-in-action” – this cannot be articulated at the time because of the integrated way in which it occurs and is used, but is implicit in the action itself. This may be reconstructed and described later through a process of reflection-on-action Schon (1991), although it is clearly then subjected to conscious interpretations and filters.

Schon’s construction of reflection-on-action forms an important element of Kolb’s learning cycle for professionals, whilst reflection-in-action forms an intrinsic element of their practice. This has a major impact on thinking about management learning. In the very first paragraph of “*Educating the Reflective Practitioner*”, Schon (1987, p3) puts forward the following argument:

“ In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, management problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of the situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern.”

Schon (1987) explores this as a contrast between technical rationality (as a positivist epistemology of practice built into research practice) and professional knowledge developed through experiential learning, particularly through individual reflection. He places the current management education processes in a hierarchy of basic science, applied science and technical skills of day-to-day practice and asserts that “*General, theoretical, propositional knowledge enjoys a privileged position.*” There is perhaps an echo here in the Civil Service where policy construction and implementation are assumed to be separated and hierarchically driven, but more of that later. Schon argues that real practitioner learning has to be based in experience to be effective in the real world.

The Kolb and Schon work emphasises the importance of reflection within learning and, within the definitions of reflective learning, this would seem to encompass both reflective observation and conceptual abstraction. However, the other elements of experimentation and concrete experience in the Kolb cycle also need to be present and effective for the whole cycle to work effectively. Paradoxically perhaps, the academic interest in the ‘higher function’ aspects of the cycle have shown through in exactly the propositional aspects Schon takes to task in his work. There seems to have been relatively little developmental work undertaken in the areas of experimentation and the nature of concrete experience in managerial practice. The issue of experimentation and the approach and supportive culture needed to facilitate this is clearly a critical element of the learning cycle as a whole.

One aspect not given much emphasis in the Kolb and Schon models is the way in which past experience or personal background interacts with the reflective process – and in particular the process of abstraction. Such individual experience clearly thoroughly colours the conclusions reached, as well as potentially fundamentally affecting the effectiveness of the process and analysis. Where technical problems are to the fore, this may not be so much of a problem. However, in any management situation which is bound to be value laden and highly interpretative, subjective and socially constructed meanings will be superimposed on objective and socially defined contexts.

It may be possible to separate reflection from experience as a part of the learning process occurring retrospectively, but the extent to which this is possible must be debatable. According to Jarvis (1987, p70) “*it is the subjective definition of the situation which creates the experience and potentially leads to learning*”. It is clearly implicit that meaning (subjective definition) needs to be attributed and this is then dependent on existing cognitive frameworks – learning from situations can then be distorted in many ways or indeed not happen at all. The gap between theoretical education and the real world demands is clearly a major factor here: the extent to which in practice separation and ‘objective rationality’ can be imposed. This is an issue upon which Revans (1982, p18) observes:

“..... My insistence that the first need of any science, namely, that one should continuously observe its field of action at first hand – that we should involve managers themselves in collecting and interpreting the data as necessary for successful decision making – has been dismissed as unscientific, as poor research, and as unlikely to lead to any understanding of management, either as set art or science. I cannot reply to these arguments, simply because I do not understand them”

Revans continued to develop his ideas as “Action Learning” in which facilitated groups of managers explore real life problems, with their colleagues providing a resource to test out ideas and develop feedback. Within the process, learning occurs not only in terms of the specific problems but also in terms of wider development. This represents a structured enhancement to individual reflection in which group members supplement the reflection process and act as a theoretical ‘test-bench’ for solutions before moving into the concrete experimentation stage in the Kolb cycle.

Whereas Schon deals with an individual approach, this approach of Revans is a group approach - but attempts to address many of the same issues in what can be interpreted as a parallel manner. Both, however, deal with the whole as a structured exercise. In contrast, one could extend the logic further to postulate that change in itself demonstrates learning unless it is purely randomly effective, and argue for a ‘living theory’ which involves less explicit or formalised structure but more ‘knowing through doing’. Whitehead (1989, p114) argues:

“In a living educational theory the logic of the propositional forms, whilst existing within the explanations given by the practitioners in making sense of their practice, does not characterise the explanation. Rather the explanation is characterised by the logic of question and answer used in the exploration of questions of the form, ‘How do I improve my practice?’ .”

This is set within the context of educational practice but the argument also seems relevant to management practice. The intention of his article is also to explore research paradigms, but again the comments seem applicable to 'learning' as well as 'research' - the difference between the two in this case perhaps being format or formality.

Whether in a group setting or on an individual basis, each of the above approaches stresses the importance of the reflective process for learning. This can be understood within the Kolb learning cycle (and Argyris double-loop) as the "Reflective Observation" stage but is identified as the critical element.

The concept of reflection itself is far from new and Dewey (1933, p9) provides the observation that reflective thought is:

"the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it leads it includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality."

The two *definitions* of reflective learning emerging from the texts are from Boyd & Fales (1983, p114) who suggest:

"Reflective learning is the process of internally examining an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective."

whilst Boud et al (1985, p19) suggest:

"Reflection in the context of learning is a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations."

They also comment (p28) that:

"Reflection does not have to be a solitary activity. It can occur in group settings as well as through individual writing and thinking".

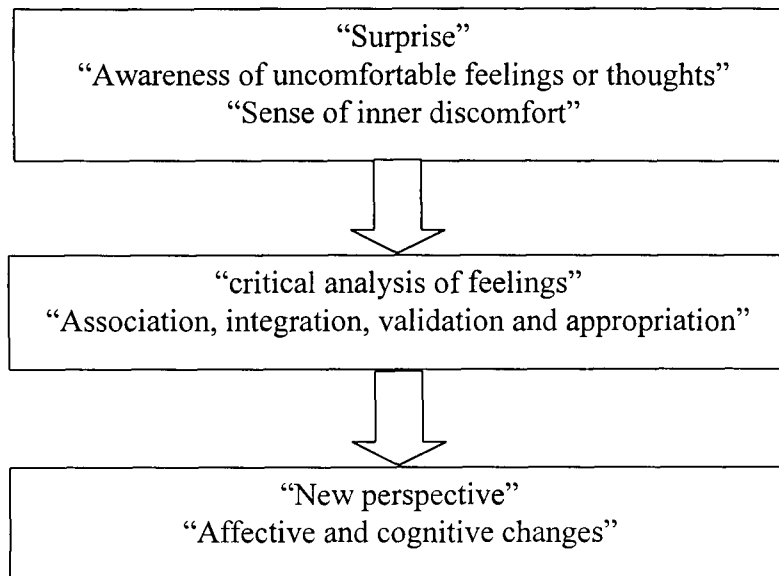
It is perhaps predictable, with the lack of precision that the word reflection is used (with probably the conflation of the meanings adding to its cogency) that it takes a non-British English speaker to seek greater precision, and to lament the even greater uncertainty in the Schon 'reflection-in-action' definition.

Bengtsson (1995, p31) (paraphrasing slightly and substituting 'management' for 'teaching') provides a view of three benefits for such reflection:

"Although the term 'self-reflection' corresponds with the original meaning of the word 'reflection', it is reflection as thinking which has been predominant. I would, therefore, recall to mind the important property of self-reflection to establish distance to ourselves and our practice. With its help it is possible to get self-knowledge which has at least three kinds of value: (1) learning about one's own management practice (2) positioning in terms of one's own practice and (3) ability to teach about one's own management."

A number of different analyses of reflective processes and hierarchies of thought have been noted above, but the model below summarises the key features.

Figure 4 - Reflective Model



It is interesting how the different presentation of models arises within the process of theorising. For example, if the above three stages are used to replace ‘reflective observation’ and ‘conceptual abstraction’ in the Kolb model and the cycle described as a spiral then the ALACT (Action, Looking, Awareness, Creation, Trial) model comes into being as described by Korthagen and Wubbels (1995). Whilst this does have an advantage of providing a more intuitive incremental picture than “running round the same circle” the analysis is very much the same.

Clearly there is an organisational context within which the individual is placed and which can fundamentally impact on his/her overall propensity to adopt a reflective learning approach. James (1995) observes that organisational cultures which stress collaboration, are organic and collegial in structure, are characterised by the use of empowering power, are process driven and likely to encourage reflective practice. Although establishing an environment that supports reflective practices is not sufficient in itself for learning to occur, it probably is necessary. Such an organisational context can be contrasted with organisations which are judgmental in culture, hierarchical or mechanistic in structure, are characterised by the use of controlling power and purely outcomes driven: these are more likely to inhibit or restrict reflective practice. The extreme examples of this sort may be the Weber-type bureaucracies, Taylor-type mechanistic organisations – or those organisations dominated by a single person either through ownership or internal status. One of the key aspects in terms of general applicability is the commonality of cultures for organisations, or more practically how the base concepts can / need to be adapted to different cultures.

Although the processes above have been widely analysed and nature of the activity set out, there seems to have been relatively little pulling together of the 'how to do it' or summary of the skills involved. Clearly, in addition to the needs for an overall willingness and interest on the part of the individual in making it all happen, each of the three stages above will need different sets of aptitudes.

Motivation, receptivity and opportunity

Reflective behaviour appears to occur naturally to some and not to others and certainly the aptitude for turning this into new ideas or behaviour varies enormously as explored in Kolb (1996). If reflection is an integral element of the learning process, then the issues of differential personal aptitude or access to this as a process is critical. Whilst some actively seek external stimuli and appear to have a high degree of curiosity, others do not – although there would seem to be few who do not respond to major personal issues by some reflective activity. Indeed, Boud et al. (1985, p19) postulate that:

"Probably, for adult learners, most events which precipitate reflection arise out of the normal occurrences of one's life. The impetus may arise from a loss of confidence in or disillusionment with one's existing situation."

Boyd and Fales (1983) refer to the motivation or triggering of reflection through continuing state or life event as due to an "inner discomfort". In some cases for practitioners, as dealt with by Schon, it is the very nature of the professional practice and the environment in which they operate which may be the motivating factor. The pace of change in organisational change and the complexity of regulatory or societal pressures, for example, may also be a major catalyst, as Smyth (1986) in the context of teaching observes (p32):

"Increasing uncertainty, lack of predictability, and perplexing value questions have meant that ways of knowing which have been very much taken for granted no longer suffice. In place of the limitations, the incompleteness and the weakness of so-called 'scientific' forms of knowledge, practitioners are becoming increasingly adept at building up knowledge about 'what works for them' that questions established norms."

However, there are clearly barriers to overcome and culture to establish to support an intrinsically reflective regime even when the initial motivation is present. For example, Argyris (1985) deals with the power of defensive routines to provide a blockage to learning and development. Indeed, Argyris (1991) points out in his work that "the smartest people find it hardest to learn" and in exploring this he states that (p103):

"...most theories in use rest on the same set of governing values. There seems to be a universal human tendency to design one's actions consistently according to four basic values:

- 1. to remain in unilateral control;*
- 2. to maximise 'winning' and minimise 'losing';*
- 3. to suppress negative feelings; and*
- 4. to be as rational as possible, by which people mean defining clear objectives and evaluating their behaviour in terms of whether or not they have achieved them.*

The purpose of all these values is to avoid embarrassment or threat, feeling vulnerable or incompetent. In this respect, the master program that most people use is profoundly defensive."

Argyris (1994) then takes this further by observing that the double-loop learning model is not often effective in practice for two reasons:

- (social) people do not like to put others on the spot and prefer to avoid the negative and
- (psychological) people reason defensively to avoid risk and vulnerability as noted above.

If this analysis is correct then overcoming this innate defensive behaviour is a major but critical step in developing the capacity for effective reflective behaviour. It also indicates a critical connection between the openness of an organisation's culture and the prevalence or encouragement of double-loop learning for individuals. Defensive behaviour, however, may stem not only from a response to external conditions but also internal discomfort. - Boud et al. (1985, p30) suggest:

"Negative feelings, particularly about oneself, can form major barriers towards learning. They can distort perceptions, lead to false impressions of events and can undermine the will to persist."

They continue to stress the importance of being open-minded and motivated. If the barriers can be lifted, i.e. the learned behaviours and beliefs that get in the way of further learning can be set aside, then 'innocent' absorption starts again. The learning and absorption observed in the young can reappear and Claxton (1992, p168) observes:

"Learning is an activity that is inseparable from life: it does not have to be created or tried for but simply allowed. Allowing it means not starving it of its raw material – awareness – and in particular feeding it with the experience of any disparity between what one expected or wanted or needed to happen, and what did happen. Openness to experience, noticing what's so, is all that is required."

However, even where there is motivation, willingness and openness there needs also to be opportunity for the process to be possible. For example, the openness described above is of little use unless time is made available to provide the capacity to reflect and Clark, James and Kelly (1996, p179) observe:

"Because 'acting' is such a different activity to 'reflecting-on-acting' (they are at opposite ends of the action-reflection dialectic) it is important that there is 'space' in the activities of the organisation for the individuals to reflect. While busy organisations can be energising places to work, frantic activity can block out 'space' essential for reflection and contemplation"

Practical organisations provide instances in which "learning" and "creativity" start to overlap significantly. Where learning is self-generated and extends the boundaries, new ideas begin to emerge which are innovative and potentially take the individual or organisation forward. It is therefore, of major organisational benefit to ensure that such opportunities are built into processes and formal procedures – not just for personal development but also for the benefit of the employing organisation. This analysis can be extended by considering not only time as an enabler but also the issues of motivation, reward and work allocation – possibly linked.

The linkage of motivation with structural opportunity is clear, although Amabile (1998, 77-87) draws a distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, with an emphasis on the intrinsic motivation in terms of heightened creativity and links this to process freedom (p82):

“Autonomy around process fosters creativity because giving people freedom in how they approach their work heightens their intrinsic motivation and sense of ownership. Freedom about process also allows people to approach problems in ways that make the most of their expertise and their creative-thinking skills. The task may be a stretch for them, but they can use their strengths to meet the challenge.”

It would not seem to stretch the principles discussed above too far to substitute the word ‘learning’ for ‘creativity’. Nor indeed, given the context to substitute ‘change’ for ‘work’.

By analysing the context within which the individuals operate we can attempt to draw together those factors that will impact on the effectiveness of practitioner development and Day (1993, p91) lists seven such factors:

- life histories which fashion attitudes, expectations and behaviours;
- the levels of reflection and confrontation undertaken
- scope of external interventions on the individual and organisation
- scope of provision of appropriate developmental opportunities
- in-house support and recognition, including time availability
- rewards on offer – professional, social and academic
- individual perceptions of the relevance, validity and practicality of opportunities.

Ability to describe experience

Providing that motivation and opportunity are present, individuals can and will work through a reflective process. However, the effectiveness of this process depends critically on the process adopted and the way in which actual events are translated and interpreted for evaluation and handling. The analysis of events, often emotionally charged and frequently involving complex factors of third party motivation and action is often not easy. However, Boud et al. (1985) point out that although an initial event / experience may be *“quite complex and is constituted of a number of particular experiences within it”* it forms basically the base data from which the analysis will be conducted. Later, Boud & Walker (1990) define such experiences in more dynamic terms, but still requiring description for reflection. This interpretation of an event into a description that can be worked with is clearly critical.

Indeed, the nature of managerial action suggests a high degree of analytical input is needed, although Bellezza (1986) finds that learning can occur without conscious thought and been found to be inaccessible through verbal reports. The nature of managerial practitioner learning, however, is likely to need articulation and deliberative rationality.

It would seem intuitively that the accessibility of a framework of concepts to help understand and describe experience is likely to make the descriptive process more meaningful and productive. One approach is to develop a collaboration with others – deriving benefit from their experience and input - to help describe and define issues. This approach represents an intrinsic practical consequence of Revans' Action Learning concepts.

Another approach is to improve the practitioner's understanding of his own background and values in interpreting the experience and the relativity of his own interpretative standpoint. This is likely to make the description of events and issues more meaningful as a subjective assessment, also. There is a wealth of literature dealing with this aspect, essentially as tools (journals and so on) to help explore the description of experience and events – both as an element of the reflective element of the learning cycle and as a direct learning experience through self-awareness.

Hedlund et al. (1989, p105) observe that "*The act of 'talking to oneself' is an important component of learning, and of seeking balance, direction, and meaning of life*". They draw distinctions between diaries, journals and logs as a decreasing series of feelings and increasing objectivity, quoting the Hettich (1976, p 60) definition of a journal as "*a topical autobiography, a short discontinuous personal document that represents the excerpting from an individual's life of a special class of events*". They believe that the very act of writing (in a journal) moves from the passive to the active and profoundly affects memory and learning. They observe (p27) that in the model of Anderson (1985):

" Encoding new information involves incorporating it into propositional networks that store our knowledge in organised ways. Propositions already in memory are activated and new knowledge is connected to them when learners acquire new knowledge. Moreover, as new information is encoded, this encoding may stimulate the generation of new propositions, which then connect the incoming information to other areas of a person's existing network of ideas. This generative process is called elaboration. The more completely any new information is elaborated, the more easily that new information will be remembered, retrieved and used."

They connect this process to journal keeping by quoting Hettich (1976, p61):

"... students [practitioners] enhance their understanding of many abstract psychological [managerial] concepts and forge their thoughts on wider issues, using their own words and experiences as tools. Thus psychological [managerial] concepts become anchored to the student's [practitioner's] cognitive framework, not just to examples provided by the textbook [academic management research]....."

Hence the process of writing becomes one not only of reflection, but used as an exploration actually enhances learning through establishing links with personal knowledge already in place, adding value to both the previous knowledge and incoming experiential data. The second aspect is that of the improved facility of retrieval and usage – essential if this is to become knowledge-in-practice. Indeed, the writing can itself become a further tool when it is revisited and conclusions reviewed as personal experiences move on and understanding changes: in this way it can become a cyclical process. However, there are clearly a number of other complementary reasons for maintaining written records on an individual basis.

Green and Gibbons (1991) and Walker (1985) suggest a number of reasons why they should be maintained to enhance learning:

- as a discipline on a regular basis to ensure learning is given a priority;
- as a record to develop a sense of change and development – to enhance motivation;
- as a means of data capture to facilitate future reflection-on-action;
- as a help for those who suffer from being at the wrong end of the AE/RO dialectic.

Finally, they both mention its benefit as a therapy – as a cleanser of thoughts, frustrations and anxieties through ‘dumping’ onto paper. Certainly this is intuitively appealing and empirically reasonable from a personal perspective: I, like many others, keep pencil and paper on the bedside table to ‘dump’ thoughts onto paper to make sleep easier.

As in any other element of the process, the effectiveness of the journal keeping process will vary widely. The greater the understanding of the process, the more fruitful it is likely to become. The impact of individual personality and the ability to describe in words will also vary significantly. James and Calderhead (1993, p11-12) note that such effectiveness depends fundamentally on:

- predisposition to reflection in terms of learning style;
- understanding of the nature and value / place of reflection within learning;
- understanding the wider context of practitioner learning as more than technical;
- the appropriateness of writing styles and willingness to expose self;
- external pressure [from tutors in the study] to continue past the initial stages.

Walker (1985, p54-56) extends this by providing a 16 step practical set of suggestions for making progress and observes that the appreciation of the journal itself opens up wider horizons and insights (p58):

“It enabled the participants to keep track of what was happening in their development and gave them ongoing access to it. It actually helped them appreciate life and learning as a journey.”

Finally, Walker (1985, p68) provides a caution which very much coincides with my thoughts in terms of approach:

“Some lighthearted activity [cartoons are mentioned earlier] can successfully impart the important principles and foster interest in the portfolio [journal]. I think the use of the portfolio is marred by an excessive seriousness. I have found that people who take it too seriously are often the ones who become too introspective in its use.”

One further question in this context, perhaps, is how to set about documenting the journal stylistically – or ‘how to write?’. The effectiveness of description and its usefulness in exploring events and feelings is clearly linked with how the expression takes place. It is possible that the nature of the style itself impacts on the insights achieved. Richardson (1994, p525-526) advocates the use of experimental styles of writing to free up thinking and expression:

"For some it may mean rethinking what we have been taught about objectivity, science and the ethnographic project. What works for me is to give different labels to different content: ... observation notes ... methodological notes ... theoretical notes ... personal notes. Writing personal notes is a way for me to know myself better, a way of using writing as a method of inquiry into the self."

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) develop the idea of narrative as phenomenon and method, and in (1991, p259) describe this idea of writing as inquiry as follows:

"If we accept that one of the basic human forms of experience of the world is as story...and we take the view that the storied quality of experience is both unconsciously re-storied in life and consciously re-storied, retold and relived through processes of reflection, then the rudiments of method are born in the phenomenon of narrative."

Butt (1990, p283) states:

"Self-education through experiential learning over time is an autobiographic conception of education. Awakening the autobiographical impulse to facilitate the explicit description, interpretation and reflexive analysis of experience serves to heighten the previously unconscious, sub-conscious or preconscious process of self-education. This view of reflective thought and action and the acting out of one's own story can be construed as autobiographical praxis."

Some of this literature seems remote to me from a practical perspective and perhaps belongs in the personal self-development category rather than as a tool for management research in Schon's swampy ground. Not that it is irrelevant, as it certainly contains concepts of approach to learning and a number of specific tools which are applicable in practice, but some does appear to me to be esoteric rather than practically applicable. It belongs at the emancipatory end of the spectrum rather than with practical practice improvement. Experimenting with different styles can be enlightening, but this seems to me to be an exercise and the key would seem to be to explore the ideas in a comfortable style that is accessible and, given the time constraints encountered, efficient.

Ability to logically analyse and construct alternatives

The ability to deconstruct the description and compare with previous experiences and programmed knowledge would seem to be a key element in analysis. It involves an element of open-mindedness again, if self-critical analyses are not to be rejected defensively. This is an incremental skill that progressively builds upon previous experiences and practice in construction. Burnard (1989) suggests that this involves identifying components of a situation, identifying existing knowledge, challenging assumptions and imagining and exploring alternatives. Kemmis (1985) deconstructs the notion of reflection into 3 types of analytical behaviour:

- *technical* in which the social context is taken for granted – this aims at solving (with criteria for judging solutions defined at the outset) specific problems for the benefit of those beset by the problems;

- *practical* in which the rightness of action is judged in the social context and is undertaken in a value laden framework, with the solution criteria examined as well as the actions; and
- *critical* in which not only is the applicability of the criteria for defining solutions examined, but the historical evolution of the criteria (social, political and organisational) is also examined with a view to removing 'distortions'.

The logical analysis of events is clearly relative to the frames of reference in use: previous experience, current values and political 'world view'. Carr and Kemmis (1986, p32) effectively address the need for 'critical' reflection in their work. Although this is written in the context of professional development (as learning) and educational practice and teachers, it also seems valid across a far wider canvass as they claim:

"Professional development is a matter of teachers becoming more enlightened about the ways in which their own self-understandings may prevent them being properly aware of the social and political mechanisms which operate to distort or limit the proper conduct of education in society. Professional competence, therefore, requires a capacity for continuous deliberation and critical discussion by the profession as a whole of the way in which political and social structures relate to and influence educational aims and practice."

Effective reflection, thus, encompasses the Argyris double-loop, but also the questioning of both subjective perceptions and the wider context. The research aims of validation and placement of relative position become just as important for personal learning if this is to be effective rather than partly rationalisation.

A great deal of psychology research suggests that the insight that constructs the alternatives does not necessarily occur in a linear or incremental logic fashion. Rather it occurs in a step change – the flash of inspiration or new perspective on familiar ground, possibly enabled through "lateral thinking" or similar techniques. Sometimes this is possible through analogy with other fields of knowledge with which parallels can be drawn, a rational reason that cross-disciplinary work is frequently effective. Some key ideas in this development are explained by Smith (1977):

"Kohler concluded that the problem of learning is secondary to the problem of perception, for the key to learning is the discovery of the right response, which is dependent on the 'structuring of the field' or Gestalt formation. When one has created the Gestalt, one experiences sudden 'Einsicht' or insight, one's awareness is elevated to a new level, one understands. That sudden moment of insight may come like a flash, with a sense of 'aha'."

Ability to evaluate constructs and assimilation into overall model

The ability to synthesise and evaluate together are clearly essential for the development of a new personal model. Mezirow (1981, 1990, 1994) explores this in detail and defines learning as (1994, p 222-223): *"the social process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to action"*. This is clearly not purely an exercise in logic.

The constructs being developed are clearly personal, although there may be elements that can be generalised. The interaction between individual values, life experiences and one's existing perspectives presumes a high level of self-awareness for this process to be effective.

A different approach in contextual analysis to this same issue is provided by Morgan (1983) who adopts a cybernetic approach to changes in organisations, but this is also applicable as a model to individuals. He argues that entities (organisms, organisations or indeed views / beliefs) do not engage in practice in goal-oriented strategic reshaping but are acted upon by morphogenic or morphostatic forces through feedback loops. Essentially small changes are generated which are either positive or negative: the benefits or dis-benefits interact with the organisation to reinforce or dampen the mechanisms of change. He argues that Darwinian apologists who emphasise the "change for survival" route for organisations are using an analogy for comparison that is without underlying rational justification.

In this context the process definitely does become incremental rather than immediately radical – personal paradigm shifts are likely, after all, to require either a 'cataclysmic' personal event or multiple dialectical difficulties in much the same way as paradigm shifts in academia, for many of the same reasons. Morgan's model is probably also useful as a tool for explaining the impact of growing confidence with successful learning experiences and the way in which cumulative experience can encourage experimentation and further learning. This is potentially far reaching as a strategy to reinforce learning and willingness / confidence to experiment - the focus of many coaching techniques. Burgoyne & Hodgson (1983) echo this when they note the gradual change in attitude that occurs with experience.

Difficulties with the learning constructs developed

Instinctively, there must be contributions from both personal experiment and absorption of the ideas of others, the latter often achieved through formal teaching or training. Revans (1982, p16) formalises this in proposing that learning comprises two elements: programmed knowledge (P) and questioning insight (Q):

"P is the concern of the traditional academy; Q is the field of action learning. ...Programmed knowledge must not only be expanded: it must be supplemented by questioning insight, the capacity to identify useful and fresh lines of enquiry. This we may denote by Q, so that learning means not only supplementing P but developing Q as well".

One difficulty emerging from the Revans approach which potentially cause difficulties, similarly applicable to the Schon model – and possibly even more so to the Whitehead extension if taken to extremes – is the ability of the individual to know what he needs to know and what there is to know.

McLaughlin and Thorpe (1993, p25) identify four issues:

- self-development assumes that the learner is able to define accurately his/her own learning needs;
- the idea of self-development contains an inherent assumption that all self-development is good;

- there is within action learning a desire to move on the higher plains ...At the level of our own experience, managers undertaking action learning programmes can come to know themselves and their organisations much better. Such an understanding provides no guarantee for action;
- it is one thing to assess critically cognitive knowledge; it is another thing to dismiss it altogether.

The first three of these refer to why the process is undertaken or initiated. They should normally be individually addressed in each given situation providing there is an awareness of the drivers and context within which the questions are posed. The last of these issues returns to the balance required between the action learning and/or practitioner reflection and the need for theoretical underpinning. The balance needed and the danger (possibly in reaction to existing 'training' based learning) of moving too far towards purely experimental or experiential learning is nicely summed up by Sutton (1990, p9):

"Action learning's emphasis on Q type learning has obscured the need for continual growth in P material both as knowledge in its own right and also the base from which future Q learning can take place".

and (p12)

"Most projects produce P material or potential P material which, however ill-informed and ill-defined, could be the starting point for the next project. Any overemphasis on Q which brushes P aside may have the effect of throwing the baby out with the bath water".

The basic concepts within the Kolb learning cycle are clear and intuitively appealing. Similarly, the emphasis on reflective practice (with a balance of programme learning to provide structure) strikes a resonance with Schon's observations on the complexity of practice and how things really work in the 'messy real world'. Whilst academically and theoretically (i.e. through logical synthesis) sound, the development of this has become increasingly complex. Powell (1989, p831) observes as a result of her study on reflection-in action within a nursing context that for nurses:

"The complexity of learning theories and the need to develop a full range from the behavioural to the personal construct theories of learning is evident. This might be difficult, although rewarding, given that nurse teachers are nurses who have been educated mainly in a mixture of traditional and hierarchical conformity and a belief that technical rationality is the way forward for nursing."

The importance of the emotional and non-rational aspects of organisations would appear to be a basic issue for focus in terms of managerial practice in both business and the public sector. Arguably, this could potentially be further extrapolated for the Civil Service and its culture which embraces hierarchical structures, analytical rationality and avowed politico-neutral objectivity (see later in this chapter).

Interaction of Management learning and research

Given the nature of the learning cycle, the importance that reflection plays in learning and the nature of professional practice as expounded by Schon (1987), learning whilst in practice should generate practical knowledge of personal benefit. If this learning is to be of wider and shareable value then the discipline of research approach needs to be added – then there is potentially much extra value to be achieved.

The role of practising managers and the part they could potentially play as active researchers rather than researched is a matter of some discussion. This set of issues interacts significantly with discussions of methodology in the next Chapter. Tranfield and Starkey (1998) take a position which balances the academic and practical aspects whilst proposing a new set of protocols for management research. They argue that its defining characteristic should be its applied nature and key goal to improve the relationship between theory and practice. In a similar vein, Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1992) postulate in their work that it may only be by changing the nature of management research into a practice based collection of knowledge that real impact on management practice will be achieved. Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1992, p195) quote Behrman and Levin (1984, p141) as stating:

“For the most part, given the thousands of faculty members doing it, the research in business administration during the last 20 years would fail any reasonable test of applicability or relevance to consequential management problems or policy issues concerning the role of business nationally or internationally.”

Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1994, p341) return to this topic and observe that:

- accumulating knowledge is essential for managerial decision-making;
- the body of knowledge produced by management research should be relevant to management practice;
- a profound body of knowledge about management exists; and
- left-brain processes of scientific research are appropriate for management practitioners.

They make a number of fairly dramatic statements about the nature of management knowledge and expertise. As a part of their justification, they quote Armstrong (1985, 1990) and Dawes et al. (1989) who claim that greater knowledge does not improve managerial ability to make forecasts and judgements and, in some cases, the effect is actually negative. They attribute this to (p347):

“the human inability to combine and process the knowledge of experts. This inability suggests that all doctoral programmes should include material on the subjective nature of knowledge and how it can be assembled in the minds of individuals. One reason for the finding in the above section – that ever more knowledge is not better – is that most research-based knowledge in management is irrelevant to management practice.”

This view seems to suggest that knowledge needs to be grounded and interpreted on an individual basis to make sense and that unless this is meaningfully possible then it is probably irrelevant in practical terms.

Spender (1994, p 393) outlines what types of knowledge are needed for managerial competence, with an implication that a balance of all four are needed to ensure effectiveness:

- **scientific** or objective about the world in which they operate;
- **social** about the social, economic and cultural environment for their organisation;
- **local** about the people, structures, processes and culture within which they operate;
- **self-awareness** about their own values, attitudes, motives, history and behaviour.

Spender (1994, p394) then outlines ideas put forward by James, Ryle and Polanyi as follows:

“They all argue that reasoned action, as opposed to abstract thought, requires abstract knowledge to be supplemented with other forms of knowledge which are attached to rather than separated from the action context. These other types of knowledge combine thought and action, and go some way to overcoming the dichotomy of process and content.”

The extension of individual experiential learning into management research would, thus, be worthwhile in a practical sense if knowledge is improved in these areas and if this improves practice. That is, if the methods and outcomes provide beneficial changes in practice for the participating individual and translatable knowledge (satisfying research criteria) is produced that clarifies rather than overloads the function of management. McTaggart (1997, p192) discusses the research methodologies that could be applicable to make this possible and help turn individual learning into viable research and remarks within the conclusions that for management:

“...there simply is not time to do research for which others must do the work of implementation. The science of management change is part of the research act.the research they will do will most typically be research within and for the companies, industries and organisations which employ them. Managers are the only people who can do this research and, generally speaking, this is the only type of research they will have the opportunity to do.”

The individual learning processes possible and their relationship to research in a programme to take such management research by practitioners forward could be based on Schon’s ideas of professional practice and Kolb’s learning cycle model, as in the programme described by James et al. (1997, p7-8):

“ The participants are continually researching and learning about and, importantly, through change in others and themselves. The process of learning from experience becomes the concrete experience. For participants in the programme, the experience of their development – changing their practice to improve it – becomes the concrete experience. The change within them and within others becomes the substrate for learning. The process of reflection on their learning and on the change processes is guided and validated by others so that new and more appropriate theories are created. The process of abstract conceptualisation results in new learning theories and concepts. These may open up more helpful routes to reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. They take the practitioner to knowledge about their practice and the influences on it rather than simply practice itself.”

The benefits, thus, are a set of growing insights into theory and practice, but which are firmly grounded in practice itself so that it remains applicable and relevant. The theoretical and practice need to grow together – each reinforcing the other so that the practice is better understood on a conscious level, enabling interpretation and transfer to new situations. This analysis makes a number of assumptions in terms of motivation and organisational culture - and is predicated in terms of its practical application on a much wider organisational acceptance of the qualitative research methodologies advocated (which underpin this research work). Without a wider acceptance such confluence of management and academic research effort is probably not possible as the supportive environment needed will be lacking. The other immediate obstacles are, clearly, catching up with the P learning to match the experiential and empirical Q insights available - and a re-assessment of validity of some of the P knowledge in place.

The Nature of Expertise

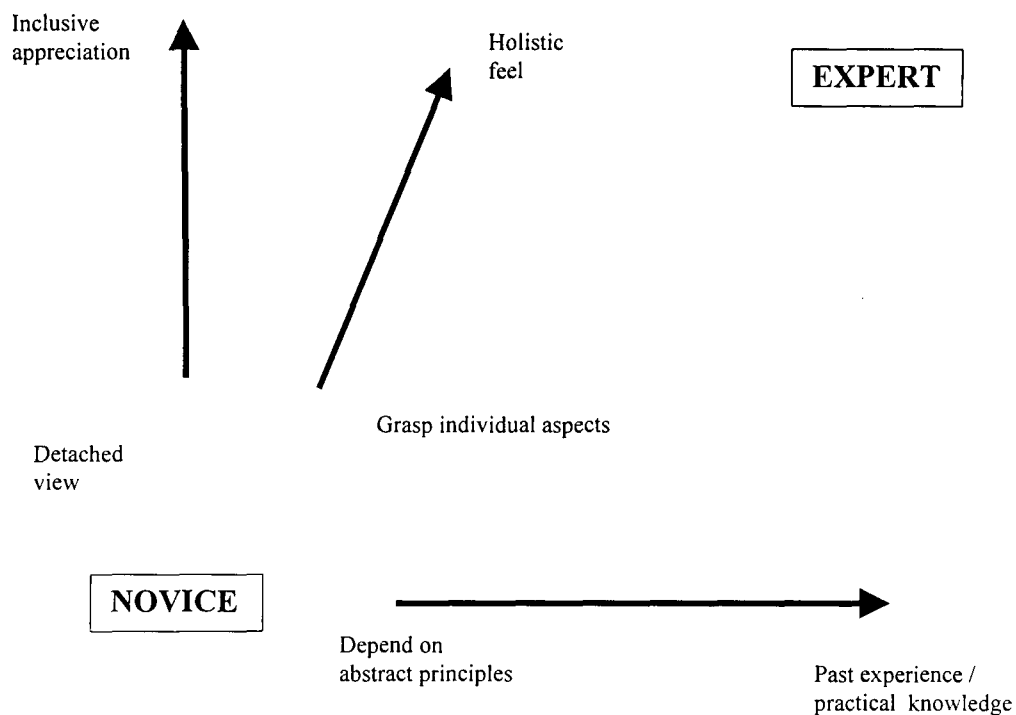
The emphasis above has been on learning and the accumulation of knowledge. This is of little use in practical management if not translated in a day to day manner in terms of actions and professional practice. This reflects what seems to be the difference between theoretical familiarity and practical expertise. Glaser (1987, p33) suggests that expertise is characterised by “*rapid access to an organised body of conceptual and procedural knowledge*”. This definition accords with my own wish to organise my own experience through the development of a structured conceptual framework. It does not, however, explain fully the performance of some practitioners I have seen in action in the past unless the organisation of knowledge is of their own peculiar brand. The practical application seems to need more than just the concepts – it also needs the grounding into past experience, either to provide precedent or the confidence to address yet another new situation with incomplete information.

Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1980) postulate a model of expertise with five levels of competence in approaching decisions:

1. *Novice*: uses context free rules which are principle-based and theoretical, concerning the objective attributes of the situation;
2. *Advanced beginner*: recognises meaningful recurring elements, and operates within general guidelines although needing assistance with priorities, complex situations and aspect recognition;
3. *Competent*: can plan and prioritise, with an ability to “see the whole picture” but still dealing with individual aspects, although lacking in flexibility and speed;
4. *Proficient*: perceives the whole rather than individual aspects through ‘pattern recognition’ from experience, considers fewer options through recognising the salient aspects, although still makes decisions with reliance on learned principle and objective reasoning;
5. *Expert*: links whole situation to appropriate action through pattern recognition based on extensive experience, with instinctive focus on salient features and prioritisation of interventions.

This analysis argues that expertise develops along three axes – the inclusion of the individual within the situation rather than as an observer, the grasp of the situation as a whole rather than as separate issues and the extent to which the analysis is grounded in previous experience. This is diagrammatically summarised below.

Figure 5 - Development of Expertise



These ideas were further explored in Benner (1984) and Dreyfus (1982) who both emphasise that the labels above are descriptors of performance not of individuals. It is postulated that performance levels increase through the acquisition of a ‘store’ of experience of different situations and that quantum leaps are achieved rather than incremental progression once experience and confidence coincide.

This model would seem to complement the Schon view of expert practitioners and the intuitive nature of expert practitioners – also the difference in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (or reflection as per Van Manen (1991) prior to action in terms of planning). The reflective process would appear to strengthen the link between the new experience and the existing concepts, or indeed highlight mismatches which need further consideration and a potential change in mental model. The more explicit this becomes as a process, the more likely it is to become effective and embedded in personal approach.

The Learning Organisation

In the 1980s, a clearer linkage started to emerge between company competitiveness in a changing environment and the effectiveness of organisational development - including the development of individuals and training. Individuals became recognised, at least theoretically, as “the greatest asset” of organisations. Too often, however, the rhetoric is not supported by either organisational behaviour or that of individuals working within the accepted culture.

The Kolb-derived models of learning appear to be applicable to an extent to organisations as well as individuals, although an appropriate accommodation needs to take place to allow for the more complex context. Whilst it seems a preliminary necessity to have individual learning to develop organisational learning, this is not sufficient as much relies on the interaction and relationship between organisation members – and also the fact that the organisation may compose of a very different set of members at different stages. Concepts such as ‘organisational memory’ and learning culture then emerge as parallels to, but not direct transpositions of, the individual personal versions.

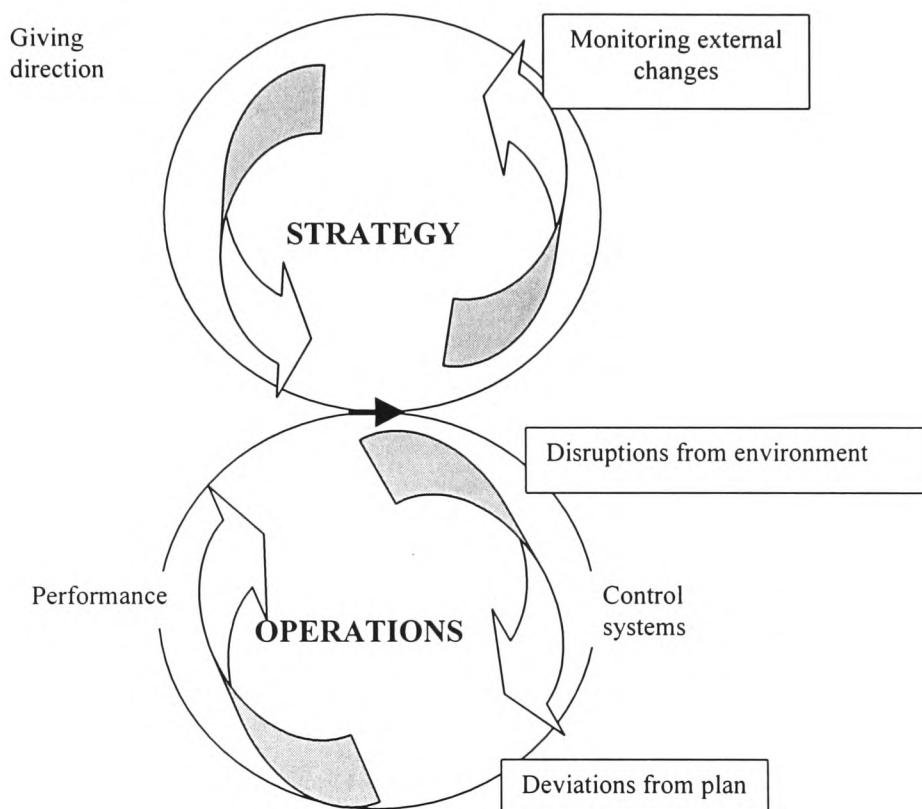
Team working, internal collaboration, better communication and understanding of the environment have long been seen as key to company performance. Argyris (1977) extended his ideas of double-loop learning from individuals to organisations as an example of the above analysis. The ideas summarised by de Geus (1988) involving his experiences at Shell were introduced as “Planning as Learning” - the concern being to accelerate institutional learning and bring together the mental models held by senior management.

Pettigrew (1975, 1985) provided a number of views on organisational culture, the role of internal ‘consultants’, strategies for change and the way in which organisations could better address the changes needed. He argued that existing formalised methods for environmental scanning and planning techniques used by management were no longer appropriate and that mechanisms that mobilise collective learning are essential for organisations to appropriately understand and respond to their environments. The late 1980’s also saw the introduction of the phrase the “Learning Organisation” (LO) by Garratt (1987). Garratt developed the Argyris double-loop learning cycle into a modified model that reflects the learning process for organisations (Figure 7) and suggested 10 characteristics which should be exhibited by Directors or senior management as prerequisites for learning organisations:

- focus not on specialist functions but on links between functions;
- adopt an integrated view of the performance of the whole organisation;
- delegate and coach;
- provide staff with support when they need it;
- be less political within the organisation but more aware outside it;
- learn to be competent in the real Director role;

- balance achieving and nurturing;
- consider the community as a genuine stakeholder in the organisation;
- learn to design the future rather than be purely reactive;
- be seen to have time to think.

Figure 7 - Garratt Learning Model



Different nomenclature was used by various researchers for similar concepts - “Learning Organisation” by Hayes, Wheelwright and Clark (1988) in the USA, “Learning Company” by Pedler, Boydell and Burgoyne (1988) in the UK and “Organisational Learning” by Stata (1989) who described his work with Forrester, Senge and de Geus. However, the direction of travel for each set of work was broadly comparable.

Hawkins (1991) observed that, in analogy to Bateson’s 1968 inclusion of a third level of learning for individuals, a treble-loop learning might be needed for organisations, describing this as the “spiritual dimension” which gives purpose to the lower two levels. He quotes Argyris as being “surprised and frustrated” by the lack of evidence of double-loop learning in organisations and postulates that in the same way as needing double-loop learning to understand the mechanisms and need for single loop learning, this third loop in the cycle is needed to understand the strategic dimension – essentially the “Why?”. In the Torbert (1999) analysis of this same phenomenon, he comments on the small proportion of people who engage effectively with it.

It may be arguable that this is merely one specific aspect of Argyris' second loop, although learning how to learn and the linkage to why could be separated. Rather than there being a single representation, the usefulness of these models is to explore the concepts rather than seek a total consensus on format and specific meaning.

Interestingly, Morgan's arguments in respect of a cybernetic approach to change, are capable of refinement if Pettigrew's structures on understanding the environment are implemented in a sensitive enough way to deliver feedback in a short enough timescale. Avoiding Morgan's "noxious" (threats to survival) then becomes an issue of sensitivity and short feedback loops to affect organisational direction – developing 'learning structures'.

The early 1990's saw an explosion in the research, work and publications dealing with learning organisation concepts. Key ideas and texts were developed by Senge (1990a, 1990b, 1994), Garratt (1990), Pascale (1990), Easterby-Smith (1990), Argyris (1990), Lessem (1991), Pettigrew & Whipp (1991), Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell (1992), Schein (1992, 1993). Jones & Hendry (1992) provides a literature review and Denton (1998) includes a comprehensive review of the more recent literature and an assessment of 5 case studies in which he attempts to assess the impact of organisational learning. **This work was focused almost exclusively within the private sector.**

More recently there has been some deliberation of its applicability to the public sector - Pearn, Rodderick & Mulrooney (1995) and Cook, Staniforth & Stewart (1997). These texts include a number of case studies based in individual organisations but little real analysis of the difference in context between private and public sectors. The case studies produced are anecdotal, with few common features or approaches. They also vary significantly in the persuasiveness of their claims to be in any way organisationally learning rather than more concerned about staff and individual learning. There has been much written about 'Public Management', 'Public Administration', 'Public Sector Management' but little about the learning organisation aspect of management in the public sector.

Three strands seem to be brought together in the general literature:

- how to approach individual learning and development within organisations in a way which provides a collaborative and synergetic symmetry with organisational benefits;
- how to ensure that organisations react responsively in an increasingly turbulent and rapidly changing external environment in order to survive;
- the nature of leadership and its role in developing an organisational culture which makes organisational learning effective.

Intuitively, this is clearly appealing: it provides resonance with concern for the individual, recognises the increasingly chaotic environmental context for many organisations and provides a potential solution to the complexity felt by many managers in that solutions may be co-operatively generated because the whole is too difficult for individuals. It fits with the feeling of the times, with an emphasis on the individual and anti-discriminatory culture becoming prevalent, at least as an espoused theory. This may perhaps be encapsulated within Streeck's (1987) view of an organisational environment in which it is necessary to:

“ find ways of managing an unprecedented degree of economic uncertainty deriving from a need for continuous rapid adjustment to a market environment that seems to have become permanently more turbulent than in the past”

If the observation of pervasive change was true in 1987, it seems increasingly the case as time passes for the global economic and financial marketplaces in which technology accelerates the pace of change to an uncontrollable level. Technology changes, including the effects of the internet, have transformed the cost profiles of organisational transactions (internal and external) to the point that systems structures need to be rethought as well as responding to external stimuli. There seems to be a feeling that organisational learning provides a competitive edge and is essential for organisational survival - perhaps is best encapsulated by Revans (1982) view that *“an organisation's rate of learning must be equal to or greater than the rate of change in its external environment”* for survival.

These concepts of learning have been further extrapolated in terms of approach into “lifelong learning” and a “learning society”. The ideas have been espoused by politicians as meeting the “spirit of the age”, national position in terms of international competitiveness and a focus on the individual as whole industrial sectors restructure and workforce needs as a whole are changing. The emphasis on competitiveness was explored by the Royal Society of Arts in Britain's context with a report entitled *Profitable Learning* (Ball, 1992) setting out a 10 point plan to help create a “learning society”. This report asserts that *“those nations that invest in learning gain economic, social and personal benefits for their citizens: those that fail to do so suffer decline”*.

The definition of what is meant by a learning organisation and, indeed, concrete examples of achievement remain elusive. The fundamental benefits claimed for approaching / achieving such a “learning organisation” state, together with the intuitive appeal are quite compelling. A number of the early key definitions suggest that a learning organisation:

“ is an organisation which facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself” (Pedler, Boydell & Burgoyne, 1988, p3)

“ builds and continually renews its competitiveness in all functions” (Hayes, Wheelwright and Clark, 1988, p5)

“ facilitates participative (horizontal) and innovative (vertical) development within and between people and institutions, commercially, technologically and socially. It thereby transcends not only the business enterprise but also the hierarchical institution”
(Lessem, 1990, p67)

“ emphasises adaptability (which is) the first stage in moving toward learning organisations. This is why leading corporations are focusing on generative learning, which is about creating, as well as adaptive learning, which is about coping”
(Senge, 1990, p14)

“ is an organisation skilled at creating, acquiring and transforming knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights” (Garvin, 1993, p79)

“ exists only as a set of complex relationships which link the organisation’s vision, mission, values and behaviour to desired outcomes and results.....An understanding that sustained continuous learning and adaptation within the enterprise are critical.....should be at the heart of the enterprise’s mission and vision. It should be a key determinant of the organisation’s culture, which manifests itself in the values and in the types of behaviour which are encouraged and reinforced as means of achieving desired outcomes” (Pearn, Rodderick and Mulrooney, 1995, p21)

The sum of individual learning and development and organisational learning is not the same - it is not just an issue of scope or of ensuring that all individuals participate, but is a more fundamental organisational culture issue. Stata (1989, p64) explains the difference between the personal and organisational contexts as follows:

“ organisational learning...differs from individual learning in several respects. First, organisational learning occurs through shared insights, knowledge and mental models. Thus organisations can learn only as fast as the slowest link learns. Change is blocked unless all the major decision makers learn together, come to share beliefs and goals, and are committed to take the actions necessary for change. Second, learning builds on past knowledge and experience – that is on memory. Organisational memory depends on institutional mechanics (e.g. policies, strategies and explicit models) used to retain knowledge.”

It is clear from the above that some pre-conditions need to be in place for an organisation to enable effective organisational learning – or at the very least a rapid development of these conditions early within the process:

- management commitment, manifested at least in development of an appropriate organisational culture (supportive, open, receptive etc.);
- the development of a common set of organisational values which enables the fundamentals of mission and organisational objectives to be set;
- a flexibility of organisation and direction capable of building on the results of learning and enabling a changed organisational response (structural, objectives or positional);
- placement of individual personal development and development of organisational knowledge as an integrated and central element of each individual's work (nurturing, motivational);
- sufficient understanding of the process and softer handling skills to enthuse individuals and provide the means for the learning to occur.

At least one of the definitions in the previous page states or implies the acquisition and transformation of knowledge as a part of learning. This opens up the issue of how organisations as a whole manage to adapt to learning as a key objective. Organisations frequently work internally as teams of a whole range of sorts: for example stable functional teams, project teams, evolving teams and even virtual teams. Temporary teams present special problems in terms of reflective or feedback learning, except on an individual basis – and even here the temporary nature provides problems. Clutterbuck (1999, p14) makes the observations that learning in stable teams should be easier, but:

“learning in stable teams typically happens as a result of a stimulus from outside or from a serious failure. To make significant learning happen within the routine requires vigilance and constant re-motivation.Where managers have an effect on learning within the team is to redefine their role as facilitators of learning. Instead of trying to coach everyone themselves, leaders of effective learning teams try to harness all the talent in the team in pursuit of learning goals.”

It may well be that models of action research and double loop learning on the participative models are the most effective (the only effective?) way of approaching this sort of learning process, which places a premium on a ‘research approach’ by management in developing a knowledge base available to the organisation about itself and its environment. There is a clear emphasis on a ‘right’ culture to enable the other elements to work properly. This is an organisation wide issue, is critical for success but is a difficult concept to pin down, define and operationalise.

What seems to be required is that the culture change required works at the double-loop learning level: in this case the members of an organisation can ‘step outside’ and look at the organisation with fresh eyes, developing a new mind-set for approaching the organisation. The only problem with this (restricted) approach is that the external environment is now continually changing and mind-set obsolescence is a real problem. The real requirement, then is not for the ‘pre-packaged’ consultancy panaceas but for a leadership which provides a dynamic re-evaluation at the double-loop level on an ongoing basis.

Whilst this is conceptually appealing, this does not fit well with what we actually know about real management behaviour in practice – the Herzberg et al. (1959) and Mintzberg (1973) findings on how managers actually spend time and prioritise their efforts are probably as valid now as they were when published. The pace of change and technology driven interventions (such as ‘e-mail overload’) mean that senior managers are continually drawn into detailed agendas to make decisions which enable organisational goals to be met at an administrative level. This, in all probability, results in an even greater squeezing of strategic consideration and culture ‘maintenance’ – with a reconsideration of whether it is all worthwhile and the extra effort should be expended.

Schein (1992) identifies a number of overt phenomena associated with understanding group culture: observed behavioural regularities, ‘group norms’ (values and standards), espoused values, formal philosophy, rules of the game, climate, embedded skills, mental models and linguistic paradigms, shared meaning and “root metaphors” or integrating symbols.

Whilst these are observable, the underlying elements are those of structural stability of the group and patterning / integration within the group. This leads to a formal definition of culture as follows (p12):

“ a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems”.

This is fundamental to the way in which organisations work, their individuals interact - and how learning occurs. Hayes, Wheelwright and Clark (1988, p271) observe that:

“...traditional measurement and control systems tend to discourage the kind of experimentation that leads to learning. Too rigid an emphasis on standards, budgets and...reports encourages a steady-state mentality, a by-the-book approach to management that avoids making changes that entail risks and strives to meet short-term performance goals, whatever the cost”,

It follows that most organisations probably need a culture shift to enable them to take on the challenge. Responding to the situation means a fundamental shift in mindsets within the organisation and including, most importantly, that of the leader. Indeed, the interaction between leadership, culture formation (and transformation) and organisational learning appears to be a key factor. Senge terms this shift in mindsets within the organisation as “metanoia” and links this with deeper learning. Senge (1996, p292) explores this further in his “*The Leader’s New Work*”:

“ In a learning organisation, the critical roles of leadership – designer, teacher and steward – have antecedents in the ways leaders have contributed to building organisations in the past. But each role takes on new meaning in the learning organisation.”

This concept of leadership is very different from many of the ideas and analyses of the past. Indeed, although there may be a conceptual shift widely shared in academic circles, it seems to me that this new model has yet to gain much widespread acceptance in practice in the management community. Indeed, even where there is a commitment to the changing role, Critchley (1993, p8) observes that:

“ It takes managers courage to explicitly undertake to work with the dynamics of their culture and allow changes to emerge from what they find, rather than impose apparently desired changes on what they do not fully and deeply understand.”

This prescription represents a demanding mix of requirements. There is a leap of faith required to buy into the overall vision of a learning organisation, which is still without real examples to be provided as beacons. There is also a good deal of understanding required of the theoretical underpinnings and meaning embedded within organisations. Further, there is a shift in approach required for top management, exactly the group that Argyris (1991) cites as being less well equipped to learn in this fashion, in order to provide the cultural environment for it to flourish. There is courage required to start a process that has an ill-defined if potentially extremely positive goal. There may well, also, be requirements for new skills and expertise to be imported into the organisation.

A good deal of literature has been published in terms of identifying the factors and criteria that can be observed in learning organisations but one of the key descriptors of this is Senge’s (1990) “five disciplines”. He defines as his critical “five disciplines”: systemic thinking; personal mastery; mental models; building shared vision and team learning.

Senge’s 1990 work was supplemented in 1994, by the “Fifth Discipline Fieldbook” produced by Senge and 57 other contributors. This not only takes the analysis above further but also includes exercises that can be undertaken, and “Arenas of Practice” in which a variety of issues and organisational types are explored in which the disciplines can be seen to have had an effect. This goes beyond the fundamental themes and starts to package the product into a ‘deliverable’.

A similar analysis of features was developed by Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1991). This provided a set of 11 features that they believed characterise the essentials of any Learning Organisation. These are broadly equivalent to those of Senge and I loosely link these in the table below to Senge’s 5 disciplines to outline how they address the same concepts, although clearly the nomenclature and level of detail differ. Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell took this further in subsequent publications by developing their 11 features into a five cluster model, then into a fishbone model, then into a “fountain tree” and finally into a model of 4 interlocking loops which represented the energy flows they believed characterised the processes. A comparison of the Senge and the Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell models is provided below.

	Senge Categories	Systemic Thinking	Personal mastery	Mental models	Shared vision	Team learning
	Features of Learning Organisations - Pedler et al. (1991)					
1	Learning approach to strategy	√			√	
2	Participative policy making				√	
3	Informating		√			
4	Formative accounting and control	√				
5	Internal exchange					√
6	Reward flexibility		√		√	
7	Enabling structures		√			√
8	Boundary workers as environmental scanners			√		√
9	Inter-company learning			√	√	√
10	Learning climate		√			√
11	Self development for all		√			

This extensive analysis and development of prescription seems somewhat paradoxical, bearing in mind the emphasis on individual culture formation. Many of the underlying ideas behind the learning organisation come from concepts of experiential learning, particularly of reflective learning, practical knowledge and relate to concepts of action learning / research. These processes promote the need for concepts to be derived from experience, with internalised understanding developed - to be shared within groups, developing shared values and knowledge in the process as a key objective for learning organisations. These concepts clearly need to be communicated and if different models help to do this then this is positive, but providing pre-packaged solutions is probably self-defeating. On the other hand, Pedler and Aspinwall (1998) do provide a self-analysis assessment and handbook as a guide and initial starter which provides some background and introduction to the concepts and perhaps represents the balance required.

The concept of the learning organisation continues to develop and unfold. However, the closest thing to having all the answers would seem to be, in parallel with the individual model, for each organisation to work through its own change triggers, its needs and its capacity to re-examine its own shared values, belief and vision. It is apparent that individual organisations will come to this experiment at very different states of readiness so that a flexibility of approach will be both necessary and desirable. That the approach be internally driven by the individuals and organisation itself is also presumably desirable in terms of ownership of process.

A model that remains helpful in assessing the drivers within any specific organisation, perhaps to assess the risks, capability and possibly even applicability is provided by Pfeiffer and Jones (1978). This extracts some 15 factors that affect organisations' ability to manage change which are slightly restated as follows:

1. Size and internal complexity
2. Growth / contraction rate
3. Change trigger / motivation
4. External boundaries – interventions and environment
5. History of previous interventions (credibility)
6. Cultural readiness
7. Time constraints
8. Resources available
9. Access to people (time)
10. Labour contract constraints
11. Structural flexibility
12. “Soft” personal skills
13. Management capacity and leadership
14. Management receptiveness
15. Adequacy of internal change agents

Whilst these are general factors which can be helpful in assessing organisational readiness to handle any sort of change, they would certainly appear to be still relevant in assessing organisational readiness to manage the specific sorts of changes needed to move towards becoming a Learning Organisation.

Learning Organisations and Knowledge Management

Most recently, there have been an increasing number of publications on knowledge management – particularly the differences made to knowledge management and sharing of knowledge within organisations. Many of these, for example Dixon (2000), Lucas (2000) and Harrison and Leitch (2000), focus on information / knowledge sharing within organisations as a route to success – overcoming the individual blockages around the “knowledge is power” issues and aligning corporate culture and reward systems to enable that.

Argyris (2000) contrasts the styles of “command and control”, which he maintains is the natural state for most managers with the needed “Model II” template in which managers create environments in which ambiguities, feelings and knowledge can be shared. He maintains that only in this way can the right cultural and hence behavioural environment be constructed for organisational learning and flexibility to be effective. Shapiro (2000) endorses this fundamental proposition, but disagrees with some of Argyris’ reasoning whilst highlighting the impact of e-business, spectacular growth in some sectors and the fundamental business impact on timing an management being wrought by changes in access to information and speed of transactions.

It seems to me that these represent particular and specific examples of exactly the cultural and organisational issues that learning organisations address in a wider sense. However, in most articles the wider concept or “Learning Organisation” as terminology is not mentioned and it is dealt with as a discrete set of issues.

Change and Leadership

Change

It seems almost a cliché, but there seems to be nothing as constant as change. In fact, even constant would be the wrong description as events now seem to accelerate as time progresses. Advances in technology – specifically communications technology and computer systems as applied to the internet and most recently e-business – continue to catalyse changes in working practices, structures, relationships and competition. There has been so much written about the impact of change that it is easy to forget that change, although perhaps not of the same rapidity or pervasive nature, has always been a factor in human experience. For example, as long ago as 450B.C., Sun Tzu (1993, p56) recognised the fact that a single solution was never enough and that one had to adapt to changing circumstances to remain successful:

“Now an army may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army should avoid strength and seek weakness. And as water shapes its flow in accordance with the ground, so an army manages its victory in accordance with the situation of the enemy. As water has no constant form, there are in warfare no constant conditions. Thus, one able to win victory by modifying his tactics in accordance with the situation may be called supreme.”

A new version of the same idea, of which many forms seem constantly to be restated, is provided by Hout (1999, p163) 2500 years later, albeit in very different language – though perhaps not in as different a context as might at first seem likely:

“Managers are being cut adrift from many of their traditional moorings. The heightened pace of change is forcing them to rely more on instinct and intuition. And with organisation and strategy being increasingly set by people on the ground managers’ roles are changing. But the three concepts of current change – non-linearity, self-organisation and emergent strategy – have important limitations that show the continued primacy of good management”

Put simply, change is intrinsic to life and thus to management. One needs to adapt to cope with it – adapt one’s approach and probably oneself. But if one can adapt appropriately, nowadays seemingly a necessity, this can provide both control over personal circumstances and indeed help direct or manage the change.

The difficulties involved

Managing a change process in any organisation is difficult. Even when there is a consensus for change in an organisation (perhaps an external stimulus is the only occasion this becomes unanimous), the internal stakeholders have different agendas and perspectives, so that any change becomes difficult. Schofield (2000) warns of the dangers of Boards becoming out of touch with the remainder of the organisation and seeing restructuring as “macho management” and perceiving this as an external expectation whose effectiveness is never monitored, measured or otherwise followed up.

It should be no surprise then that so many change projects run into difficulties and the more fundamental this is, the more likely failure becomes. According to Hare (1999, p2), two thirds of major change projects fail to achieve their potential, with the most common pitfalls being:

- Quick fixing instead of setting up processes for permanent and long-term change
- Failure to modify resource allocation and HR frameworks to support the changes
- Failure to acknowledge changes will be adopted at a number of different paces
- Inadequate planning
- Reluctance to commit the necessary resources
- Lack of clear vision – why things must change and what to concentrate on
- Lack of real understanding of current culture – or refusal to acknowledge the current situation and why people behave the way they do
- Reluctance to confront resistance, especially when apparent from senior people
- Lip service by senior managers whilst fighting own agendas
- Lack of commitment, especially when faced with short-term set-backs
- Failure to develop people and support them through the difficult times
- Complacency and lack of honesty about real performance
- Failure to communicate (in any number of ways)
- Failure to measure progress and communicate it

These seem to be fairly consistent factors across a number of different types of change projects – reflected in a whole series of Public Accounts Committee reports in the public sector for example. Perhaps many information systems projects fall into the trap of regarding the issues as technology based rather than as organisational change agendas – possibly a public sector weakness. A recent Treasury Taskforce has added clarity of leadership and accountability, plus an “uninformed over-optimistic approach” to the above list, but little else. For organisational mergers as a specific type of change process, Thoubboron (1998) quotes a number of surveys of organisational mergers as estimating that 70% fail to deliver the required benefits and, further, that 10% reductions in productivity are not infrequent. Holbeche and Hirsch (1999, p42) quote similar success/failure rates and deal particularly with the staff issues:

“Bungling the handling of a merger can result in losing people – who often comprise the value sought in the merger in the first place. People are a vulnerable asset – and the benefit of this asset can be destroyed if senior managers don’t anticipate and prepare for the emotional responses of employees at the outset.”

“Five areas of critical contribution are:

- *Conscious change management and sustained communication*
- *Keeping the best people*
- *Managing individuals with dignity*
- *Working together at local level*
- *Keeping the top in touch with the bottom”*

A number of commentators take a particularly pessimistic view on the information and computer systems aspects of change processes – especially mergers – believing that these implications are seldom understood or adequately considered during any change planning because of lack of management awareness and organisational hierarchies. As a result, political considerations always seem to outweigh the practical and, as Vail (1999, p54) comments:

“It is difficult enough to manage culture clashes after the event, but the real secret of mergers is to stay away from organisations that are radically different – even if the opportunity looks appealing.”

“No CE wants to hear that IT may not work in a newly-merged company but if it does not work the IT Director will get the blame. Invariably the decision comes down to one system or the other and is made on political grounds.”

Models for delivering change

Given the all pervasive nature of change within and between today’s organisations, together with the difficulties involved (and failure rate), it could be expected that management of change would be at the top of management agenda and that change processes would be the subject of intense management / academic scrutiny. It is certainly at the top of most consultancy firm agendas - suggesting that management have yet to prioritise it internally. In fact many of the management quoted models for handling such change go back nearly 50 years. Dawson (1994, p12), observes that the prevailing change and organisational form models in the past are now dated but can be summarised:

“.. a rational [contingency] model of change has prevailed – the basic theoretical tenet is that, whilst there is no one best way of organising, it is possible to identify the most appropriate organisational form to fit the context in which the organisation has to operate.”

Two major models of change have thus been used under this sort of hypothesis. The earlier model advocates a normative approach in which a “best method” of coping with change is prescribed – the more recent proposes a more organisationally holistic approach which is far more dependent on context and with very little prescription.

Lewin (1951) advocated a three step approach – unfreeze, change (with his ‘force-field’ analysis) and refreeze. It has the major advantage of simplicity as a model but suffers significantly in the current business environment from its assumption of underlying stability rather than a dynamic context. It implies that the whole process can be controlled rather than influenced, that it can be planned rather than be emergent. A parallel can perhaps be drawn here with Mintzberg (1994) and his emergent strategy approach in place of the previously advocated formalised and heavily structured strategic planning exercises.

General OD models of approach are planned and based on a human relations perspective stressing the importance of collaborative management. This tends to adopt a normative framework assuming there is a 'best way' of change management that will ensure organisational effectiveness and employee well-being. Aldag and Stearns (1991, 724-8) list six major steps in an OD programme concerned with managing organisational change:

“identifying a need for change; selecting an intervention technique; gaining top management support; planning the change process; overcoming resistance to change; and evaluating the change process.”

This analysis is appealing, if not novel, in the structure of its approach because of its simplicity and logical nature. There are developments that can be made to this model in complex organisations that have very different starting cultures – possibly in large sub-units (potentially in different industry sectors or countries). A differential approach could be taken which takes account of these differences and which would lead to enduring differences and change rates. Given the variation from the more prescriptive unified approach of the “pure” version of the standardised OD program, this could indeed be categorised as a separate approach. Dawson (1994, p12) quotes Wood (1979, 337-8) as stating in relation to either approach:

“despite its applied orientation, contingency theory remains abstract and scholastic and, in effect, view organisation change as essentially an intellectual and technocratic exercise. Within given situations an important degree of choice is available between different modes of organisation, without serious diseconomies being incurred..”

Dawson finally draws the conclusion on the contingency approach that (p21):

“the two major weaknesses of this contingency approach are: first, that the model does not tackle the political dimensions of change and, secondly, no attempt is made to provide a typology of change strategies and conditions for their use during the actual process of organisational change.”

The alternative can be described as a contextualist approach, which involves relating the content of change critically to its context and process. This approach treats the organisation in a more holistic way and recognises the dynamic nature of the environment and the organisation itself. It regards each organisation not as existing only in its current form but as a product of its history, its operating environment and the key members that comprise it. The concept results in a more complex approach in that it entails a deeper understanding of the organisation and its environment – and far more flexible skills and techniques. One size will not fit all as Dawson (1994, p 25) notes:

“However, one of the weaknesses of the contextualist approach stems from the richness and complexity of multi-level analysis. For example, whilst the research findings adequately convey the complexity of organisational change, they have also tended to mask, mystify and create barriers of interpretation to the non-academic practitioner who seeks practical tools for guidance.”

From a very different perspective, Flower (1996a, 41-44) also advocates a holistic or “systemic” approach to handling or managing change. The sources of his thinking are eclectic and the references include those from fields of chaos and complexity theory, complex adaptive systems theory and organisational development. The synthesis produced is similar to the contextualist approach, in particular the understanding needed of whole systems (p42):

“ Rather than analysing the pieces of the whole, systems thinking focuses on the interaction between the pieces, in terms of control, communication and feedback. An understanding of systems thinking has turned out to be fundamental to any study of change.”

The Expert Practitioner, Flexibility and Managing Paradox

Meyerson and Martin (1987, 167-191) take the three sets of approaches (standardised and differentiated contingency approaches and contextual approach) and advocate a mixed approach. Intuitively, this is appealing. No “right” answers – and a flexibility of approach which allows each to be judged according to the needs of the specific circumstances. In terms of the methodologies adopted by the major consulting firms (specifically Ernst & Young and PricewaterhouseCoopers), this is very much the adaptive approach taken in which the individual organisation key staff personalities and existing organisational culture are taken into full consideration. This approaches Schon’s “expert practitioner” perspective in the “swampy ground” of real life. In their words (p168):

“Because the three views of culture and cultural change are so different we will refer to them as paradigms. An awareness of all three paradigms simultaneously would avoid the usual blind spots associated with any single perspective. However, a paradigm comprises a set of assumptions about culture and, thus, about organisation. It determines the cultural ‘reality’ that members and researchers socially construct. As such, holding all three paradigms simultaneously – enacting multiple realities – is extremely difficult. Yet to develop a better understanding of how organisations change, we must consider the complex dynamics of culture as well as those inter-related change processes from such a multi-paradigm approach.”

In his later paper, Flower (1996b, 36-38) again draws a number of analogies in terms of managing the processes of change to highlight some specific skills. In particular, he notes the importance of the timing of interventions (“rhythm”), acting in uncertainty based on experience (“expertise”) and preparedness to let issues run until the time is right for resolution (“toleration of paradox”). The principles are those of longer term focus and flexibility of approach to take advantage of opportunities as they arise to influence the course of change. He states that (p37):

“Confronted with two opposite ideas, tradition and training push us to resolving the paradox immediately. We feel we can’t go any further without deciding which idea will be the guide. However, the ability to live with paradox frequently allows us to find solutions which are ‘outside the box’..... You never have sufficient information. That’s part of the nature of being an executive. Yet often, you must make a decision with imperfect information or you risk losing the objective – or the moment. The skill element allows you to move when the moment is right, even when the information is cloudy and incomplete.”

The same argument in terms of uncertainty and toleration of paradox as a very positive aspect of change management has been presented from an academic rather than executive perspective, for example by Dawson (1992, p222):

“Acknowledging and living with paradox creates difficulties because there is no consistent paradigm. The appropriateness of many of our tools which are based in one paradigm are called into question. Paradoxes occur both in terms of strategy and process. The message is that by accepting tension and developing both sides of the paradox, by not seeking to bury / ignore one side, people in organisations grow to understand their positions much better and are able to act more effectively.”

“A major skill in initiating change is to anticipate its ramifications by predicting its outcomes – both beneficial and adverse – of any decisions. Once again, these will be manifest through complex interactions between the six aspects of people, strategy, technology, structure, culture and environment. Implementation will be much affected by who controls relevant resources, their attitudes to change and their relative positions in terms of power, conflict and consensus.”

Kanter suggests that for successful change a number of actions need to be initiated, similar in emphasis to the expert input suggested above. These focus on the empowerment of internal “expert practitioners” and of creating a cultural and structural environment within which they can be fully effective. This is a classic consultancy approach to Business Process Re-engineering, for example. Kanter (1985, p361-2) provides 5 specific steps.

- Encouragement of a culture of pride and letting experienced innovators serve as “consultants”;
- Enlarged access to “power tools” for innovative problem solving – provision of structures and vehicles for change, especially across boundaries;
- Improvement of lateral communication – especially where the same change should impact across boundaries;
- Reduction of unnecessary layers of hierarchy – particularly in respect of access to resources and decisions to facilitate change;
- Increased – and earlier – information about organisational plans, to allow changes to both influence and be influenced by high level plans.

Rationalisation of Change

There is always a difficulty of unearthing post-event what actually happened during organisational change. Records hardly ever tell the full story, not only because many of the interpersonal relationships are not paper based, but there is always likely to be a filtering or ‘sanitising’ of records in the knowledge that 20:20 hindsight is always a penetrating perspective and that this may not be favourable. In addition, the perspectives of different stakeholders will vary, not just in terms of how they are affected by the change, but also by how much control they have over their own destiny and events. Not only are the personal perspectives predictably going to be individual and self-centric, but in Kanter’s words (1985, p287):

“Organisational change consists in part of emerging constructions of reality, including revision of the past, to correspond to the requisites of new players and new demands. Organisational history does have to be rewritten to permit events to move on.”

This fits well with the common observation that “history is written by the victors”, but goes further in that it suggests that this is necessary to allow the organisation to make progress within its new context. Pascale (1990, 261) also warns against relying on retro-fitted accounts of change to try to generalise or replicate them:

“Serendipity has been a third factor in the transformation of these two companies [General Electric and Ford]. Neither Petersen nor Welch had a master plan. Only in hindsight can we string unconnected events into a coherent form. The danger of a rational, after-the-fact account, however, is that it tempts us to over-engineer a process that is to a significant degree unpredictable.”

To an extent the post-event justification is a rationalisation process as described by Carter (1998), frequent in management journal writing that seeks heroes to laud. Laskow (1997, 32-35) also explores this rewriting of history, but in terms of psychological need for ‘rightness’ and not just justification. He postulates that the ready acceptance of change is not a norm and there is a need for each person to adapt to a new “programme” of context. In this scenario he proposes that the critical element of change management really revolves around minimising automatic and expected reaction and resistance (p34):

“ Understand that the reactions of the providers [staff] will in all likelihood not make logical sense since they are in support of a survival maintenance mechanismthe resistance is merely a function of the Ego, even though it may not be logical. Most often this resistance is ignored or worse yet countered through organisational edicts.”

What is proposed as a solution is to bear the psychology firmly in mind and adopt change strategies that allow those involved to rewrite their own realities. The process is often described as “transfer of ownership” but in any event includes active involvement of a genuine rather than token nature. Recognition of the importance of this transfer of ownership is key in any large or complex change project. As the number of stakeholders increases, communication and transfer becomes more difficult (in terms of number and remoteness) as observed by Axler et al. (1997, p37):

“It became clear that attempting to build support from identifiable stakeholder groups or to realise change management goals through stakeholder involvement was not a realistic goal. In part, this is because the dynamics of stakeholder opinion develop over time and identifying representative stakeholder opinion is not really possible.....Effective change management is not a by-product of stakeholder consultation but is an activity in itself that requires intensive planning and resources.”

Axler et al. proceed to set out a number of suggestions for effective consultation of stakeholders and a realism about what can be achieved when large numbers of stakeholders with conflicting interests are involved. They highlight the importance of candour and honesty about consultation, its impact, its influence, its process and its feedback.

The fact that staff often seem extraordinarily well equipped with ‘bullshit-detectors’ makes gaps between espoused theory and theory in action especially damaging during organisational changes, when establishing trust to transfer ownership is critical. Change management efforts during acquisitions are particularly vulnerable in this respect as staff in the acquired organisation have little prior contact or experience of the new management, with this often obtained as competitor or predator.

Ashkenas et al. (1998, p165-178) deal with acquisition integration as a topic – but the principles would seem to hold good for any other sort of change in that they deal specifically with stakeholders, in particular with staff. They make a number of points that have to do with transparency and honesty.

(p172) *“Even when the news is bad, the one thing that the staff...appreciates most is the truth. That includes being able to say ‘we don't know’ about some areas or ‘we haven't yet decided about others’. It also includes sharing information about when and by what process a decision may be reached. The truth also means acknowledging some of the stress and other emotions.”*

(p173) *“Their message was this: if change is inevitable, let's get on with it rather than allow anxiety and speculation diffuse energy and focus.”*

Pascale (1990, p247) makes a similar point:

“ There is abundant evidence that employees can handle bad news, face harsh business realities and accept necessary sacrifices. But employees are intolerant of organisations that don't walk the way they talk. They are quick to spot dual standards, inequities and managers that lack the courage to address the real problems their companies face.”

Change Process

The nature of the process of engendering change and stimulating the process – to complement overall leadership responsibilities for visioning and establishing the appropriate culture to support it – is one of considerable debate. As the pace of change has accelerated in the wider environment, programmes of organisational change and development have proliferated, often apparently with little or only temporary effect. Activity by external consultants and internal change agents has mushroomed. The process of change itself, however, is usually extremely difficult to study objectively as there are usually a whole host of interacting factors. Leadership and change are closely linked in much of the literature, but of the management of the process itself there is much less written.

Hardy (1996) observes that models to transform strategic plans into action are extremely limited – the change process critical to actually making things happen is poorly researched and understood, with only an estimated 10% actually reaching implementation. She notes that between January 1989 and May 1993, of the ABI abstracts scanned, there were over 27,000 on strategic planning and 110 on strategic change. Hardy categorises the popular understanding of transition models, fairly sceptically it must be said, broadly into three:

- *The grand plan* – plan as far as possible and work the plans down through the usual management channels;
- *The great man* – rely on a charismatic leadership figure to envision the organisation and galvanize the changes needed;
- *The quick fix* – rely on a specific set of management tools to deliver the change in process or culture needed.

Hardy proceeds to quote TQM, BPR and “empowerment” as examples of the third model above, but a far greater number of other ‘management fads’ could perhaps just as easily be added. She does not, unfortunately, consider at length any underlying principles to the fads or cultural changes needed to support the principles – but merely dismisses them. She may be statistically right to do so in the form considered – for example, Pascale (1990) quotes figures that suggest that 75% of Quality Circles initiated in 1982 had already been discontinued as ineffective only 4 years later. What this does suggest is the categorisation of internal power structures into three: resources, process and meaning. The principle is that whilst the first two are routinely used, the real objectives of change are secured through use of the third.

The development of this perspective is different, but the underlying principles are similar to those of Smircich and Morgan (1982) in terms of managing meaning or of Lyth (1989), from a psychoanalytical perspective, in terms of organisational culture and changes needed. The process of change can, thus, be closely bound up with the legitimisation of the changes themselves and the construction of a climate within which change is made far easier. The change process can in such a way become self-stimulating and self-supporting. Whipp (1991, p175) summarises this as:

“The process of linking strategic and operational change has both an intentional and emergent character. Intentions are implemented and transformed over time. The cumulative effect of separate acts of implementation may be immensely powerful... ..How insights from such “learning-by-doing” are captured can be critical. Strategies often amount to the after-the-event labelling of such unpredictable sequences of ‘successful’ operational acts of judgement.”

The concept of initially unplanned but constructive actions taken in an intuitive fashion seems to tie together several of the strands already discussed. The concept emerging has echoes of emergent strategy (Mintzberg), organisational learning, cultural management and post event interpretation (Kanter). The process thus often seems less structured than often represented and may be characterised as acquiring a “life of its own” in the situations in which it becomes rooted. Typically, changes occur as a sort of diffusion process – with the rate of diffusion relating to “transfer of ownership” from a central lead to the wider stakeholders. Rogers (1995) typifies this by classification of those who become involved as “innovators”, “early adopters” and “laggards” – where the gradual spread of the change or innovation is gradually adopted. This fits easily with every-day experience of virtually all socially based changes.

A logical analysis of the spread of change – or diffusion of innovation – is seductive. The rational adoption of change proven to be effective, the business case approach of resource / benefits analysis, the logical conclusion and planning for change benefits. And yet practical experience suggests a different set of drivers: desire to ‘look good’, peer pressure, emulation of larger / more successful rivals / competitors – or colleagues (really just internal rivals?). Cockerill and Barnsley (1997, p37) suggest that:

“In many instances, adoption and diffusion behaviour is better accounted for by ‘mimetic forces and normative pressures’ and ‘fads and fashions.’”

In practice, both sets of forces are likely to be present – both logical and ‘bandwagon’. In guiding such changes, the ability to be able to swap between the two is often essential. The ‘early wins’ to present at least a neutral to positive scenario may often be sufficient to catalyse some bandwagon effect upon which to build a larger logical justification. In either event, the ‘transfer of ownership’ is essential. In both events, the emotional ‘need to change’ must be established for them to take effect. Establishment of the emotional context seems to be a critical element of transformational leadership, but within the organisation can be attributed to ‘persuasion’. Conger (1998, p86) describes the importance of persuasion thus:

“Effective persuasion becomes a negotiating and learning process through which a persuader leads colleagues to a problem’s shared solution. Persuasion does indeed involve moving people to a position they don’t currently hold, but not by begging or cajoling. Instead, it involves careful preparation, the careful framing of arguments, the presentation of vivid supporting evidence and the effort to find the correct emotional match with your audience.”

The process of persuasion is, as dealt with by Exley (1999), initially an emotional appeal. A strictly logical approach may work (depending on audience), but one that does not strike at the right values, culture congruence, personal agendas and aspirations almost certainly will not. This is not about rational elegance, it is about ‘hot buttons’ to produce the results in the staff. The rational arguments to support the change can, and usually must, come later.

Indeed, Conger goes further to suggest a four-step approach: establish credibility, frame for common ground, provide evidence and connect emotionally. These elements of the change process are not a ‘one time hit’, but have to be gradual. Attempting to rush the steps can raise barriers and objections, feel like dis-empowerment and risk an escalation into political defensive behaviour. This process can take time and resource – especially if the organisation or scale of persuasion / emotional connection process is large. Connecting initially with just the innovators among the staff then change tack to a ‘bandwagon approach’ may work – providing the barriers have not been raised.

One solution often used is to cascade the change process using internal change agents, ‘champions’ and early implementers - or use external consultants as facilitators. Since the change process inherently involves the management of meaning and culture, there are advantages with handling this internally if the requisite skills are in place since the internal staff are already aware of the internal culture – though they are more effective if they can explicitly identify it. The use of internal agents in this way very much aligns with the Kanter (1985) proposals.

In some ways, introducing learning organisation concepts into any organisation can perhaps be thought of as developing an environment in which barriers to change are decreased through a culture shift. In this way the specific skills and expertise of ‘change management’ become less needed or important as the internal processes can be run and developed with far less defensive interference or hurdles.

Stirling & Lisle (1999) propose an approach based on an analysis of the behaviour of a large number of NHS managers (in both successful and failed change exercises) and suggest that change leaders should plan under the following headings:

- Pacing for the longer term rather than expecting short timescales
- Sense making of the change for staff – the leadership responsibility of simplification again
- Managerial impasse through personal circumstances being interwoven with work
- Tuning into staff and ensuring real two-way communication is effective.

Four broad goals are identified: seamless integration through taking the best from both organisations, demonstration of improved performance, quick reconfiguration and opening new channels and motivating an optimistic workforce. The difficulties they report from people's experiences are remarkably similar to those noted in Hare (1999). The issue of sense making for staff seems to be particularly crucial, especially in terms of transferring ownership and making motivation a positive aspect in those staff who are actually going to have to make the changes happen and work. Franchini (1999) picks this theme up as "why-stories". In essence this is just a way of looking at the need to communicate, make sense of events, supplant the rumour machine (which always seems to be in excellent working order) and provide new 'organisation legends' and direction. It picks up the specific issue of management "speaking with one voice", chimes with the way people think and provides an accessible medium for communication.

An interesting issue in this context is to what extent the creation of a change climate in terms of the process itself starts along the path to a learning organisation. It probably depends on the way in which this is handled. Hartley et al. (1997, p70) provide an interesting account of change agents in a public sector setting (a local authority setting where they used an action research approach – a "learning laboratory") :

"This leaves change agents with something of a paradox. The very complexity of public service goals and the range of values attached to achieving those goals means that corporate level change, especially where it involves a change in values or culture, is a long term organisational development task. Yet it must take place also within the short-term horizons and perspectives of political office."

The approach taken in the above context of sharing experiences across organisations and functions, addressing and sharing practical problems was undoubtedly of benefit. The change agents were drawn from a number of different organisations but the 'power' in the relationship stayed with the researchers and the extent of deeper understanding among those participating must have remained limited. Whilst disappointing from a participatory or emancipatory view – especially perhaps in ability to cascade the approach down – the process described probably does represent a realistic and pragmatic reflection of the 'cascade' approach adopted within many change processes. Many change processes, however, inevitably demonstrate a merger between the pure process and engagement aspects and the management of the process itself. The description of the processes then moves into the definition of areas and methodologies of strategic change and project management, with some basic rules as stated by Obeng (1999).

It is not the intention to elaborate on these aspects in this review, except to note that the different methodologies vary hugely in the extent to which they address the pure process aspects in addition to the technical tasks of planning and monitoring the activities involved. The most widely used project management methodology in the public sector (PRINCE II), for example, purely addresses the structure and task issues rather than the tools, skills or organisational issues. Heifetz (1994) and Heifetz & Laurie (1997) point out that the difference between the underlying organisational and psychological needs and the series of activities or tasks proposed, however, may well be significant and many exercises fail because adaptive needs are not recognised as such and are dealt with as technical problems.

Leadership

Nature of Leadership

Leadership would appear to be one of those topics that has exercised commentators from all sectors, fields and subjects for centuries. There is much anecdotal material quoted and the issue of “leadership” is one on which few will fail to have an opinion in whatever field – management, sport, politics or war to name but a few. Even the Bible (Matt 15:14) provides a view on the subject:

“If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch”

Born or made? Charismatic or nurturing? Autocratic or democratic? Task or process orientated? Transient or enduring? Defined by the leader or by the led? Bass and Stogdill (1983) list some 7,500 bibliography references in their Handbook on Leadership. A literature review of this aspect has, therefore, to take a focused approach and be extremely selective in examining the relevant aspects.

As the emphasis in organisations has moved from stewardship within a relatively stable environment to a promotion of change to meet accelerating challenges, so the emphasis on leadership style has changed to a more nurturing, democratic, process driven and participative model. A transactional model emerged which meant the leader clarifying the role and task requirements for the led, whilst recognising at the same time their needs and wants – and how these should be satisfied if performance delivered is as expected. To an extent this concept of transactional leadership is a logical implementation of the ideas of Herzberg (1959), McGregor (1960), Likert (1961, 1976) and Maslow (1970).

Herzberg dealt with ideas of what makes workers feel good, looking at positive factors of “motivation” and at negative factors of “hygiene”, which he developed into concepts of “job-enrichment”. McGregor developed the ideas of a number of others into a formulation of “Theory X”, which dealt with authoritarian management, and “Theory Y”, dealing with participative management. Likert takes a similar standpoint to McGregor and identifies a progressive four stage analysis of the development of management styles – exploitative authoritarian, benevolent authoritarian, consultative and participative.

Likert then goes further with his development analysis as he identifies a progression from the “mechanistic” concepts of Fayol / Taylor towards a far more productive style in which the organisation’s objectives become important to all who work in it. Maslow’s ideas were influenced by Herzberg, McGregor and Likert in his development of the concept of the “hierarchy of needs” in human motivation. This seems to be regularly ‘rediscovered’ in practice with apparent surprise within almost all organisations.

Drucker (1974) pointed out that the above analysis is not simple, needing care:

“...a want changes in the act of being satisfied. In Herzberg’s words, economic rewards cease to be ‘incentives’ and become ‘hygiene factors’. If not properly taken care of – that is if there is dissatisfaction with the economic rewards – they become deterrents.”

Other difficulties with these theories lie in the paradox that, for people in general, structure and direction seem to provide a sense of security – and the fact that whilst people may well be motivated, their direction of motivation and priorities may not necessarily align with that of their employing organisation. It is, therefore, a balance that must be struck almost on an individual basis – which makes macro-level management as much of an art as a science. Harvey-Jones (1994, p18) picks up the same theme:

“...we must shift the whole basis of leadership, motivation and administration towards the encouragement of the individual and away from the bureaucratic treatment of groups. Treating people as groups is almost entirely for the benefit of the administration. people react to stimuli quite randomly. One has only to take a moment to examine one’s own reactions to external events to see how much they are coloured by emotional and other considerations that dominate our lives and thinking.”

Transactional leadership, however balanced and apparently effective, tends to focus on incremental or marginal improvements and changes – the maintenance and nurturing of an organisation. As the nature of business and organisational innovation and flexibility continues to change, this in turn appears to be lacking in meeting the challenges posed. Bigger challenges, especially where time is of the essence, require more radical or ‘heroic’ responses. What seems to be needed is a shift from the custodial paradigm to an inspirational one – without losing the benefits of the transactional approach if possible.

The inspirational aspect appears to require a number of qualities (Bass, 1985): clarification and simplification of context, vision, encouragement, support – finally enlisting the led in a “mission”. It should be noted that, as examined in more detail later, the inspirational is not equated to the charismatic. To be sustainable in the longer term, the inspirational approach probably needs to be underpinned by a transactional process to avoid the difficulties identified by Drucker in terms of disincentives – both in terms of changing expectations as circumstances change and also in order to ensure that delivery matches the promises made. This combination of approaches is variously arrived at and defined, but generally fits under the label of “transformational leadership”.

Bass (1985, p8) in a survey of senior executives, having defined his concept of transformational leadership, provides the following summary of responses:

“ Many respondents indicated that the transformational leader they could identify in their own careers was like a benevolent father who remained friendly and treated the respondent as an equal despite the leader’s greater knowledge and experience. The leader provided a model of integrity and fairness and also set clear and high standards of performance. He encouraged followers with advice, help, support, recognition and openness. He gave followers a sense of confidence in his intellect, yet was a good listener. He gave followers autonomy and encouraged their self-development.... Most respondents, however, were inclined to see the transforming leader as informal and accessible. Such a leader could be counted on to stand up for his subordinates. Along with the heightened and changed motivation and awareness, frequent reactions of followers to the transforming leader included trust, strong liking, admiration, loyalty and respect.”

This so tallied with the writing in my own initial ‘biographical exercise’ at the start of this research of those who influenced me that it provides an extremely strong resonance for me personally. The contrast from my own experience with others who were representative of a transactional extreme further strengthened the appeal for me personally. The inclusive nature of the relationships and informality of approach which invite participation are clearly important and address the issue raised by Campbell-Evans (1993, p100):

“A transaction mode of operation attaches primary importance to management skills. The leader ‘manages’ and individuals ‘do their job’. This creates a separation between leaders and followers in that the work relationship is based on doing a ‘fair day’s work’. This separation reinforces a traditional ‘us-them’ relationship....In a transformation mode of operation, however, staff do a ‘fair day’s work’, but not solely as an obligation of a work contract but because they feel a commitment to, and gain satisfaction from, their involvement.”

Similar issues are explored in Bass and Avolio (1994) and Alimo-Metcalfe (1998), the latter expressing doubts as to the direct translation of US findings to the UK because of cultural differences. The issues of cultural differences – geographic and organisational sector in terms of assumptions – clearly need to be carefully handled. However, a reasonable assumption might be that “leadership” would be identifiable enough to list a set of attributes, traits or qualities – and that taking the analysis forward might indicate norms or commonalities. It is not that simple, as might be surmised from the Bass & Stogdill 7,500 references – otherwise there would be a great deal of duplication. John Adair (1988) gives a couple of amusing anecdotal references as illustration. The first involves a survey by Fortune of 75 top American Executives who listed 15 qualities of leadership, but the sting lies in the tail:

“ nearly a third of the executives declared they believed all 15 qualities indispensable. However, the replies showed that the personal qualities have no generally accepted meaning... the definitions of dependability included 147 different concepts (some executives even gave as many as 8 or 9).”

A second Adair example, in noting that some 17,000 words can be used for describing personality traits, is:

“ A study of...20 experimental investigations into leadership found that only 5% of the traits appear in three or more of the lists”

Adair then redresses the balance slightly with two comments based on a number of studies and surveys:

“It would be wrong, however, to dismiss the qualities approach altogether. It has been the custom to do so among academic social scientists studying leadership for two broad reasons. First, they could not invent the necessary instruments for scientifically identifying such intangibles.....Secondly, value judgements or hidden assumptions crept into the story.....They dislike any idea that a person may have an ‘inbred superiority’ over another and are apt to discountenance the whole notion of leadership exercised by one person.”

“The qualities, characteristics and skills required in a leader are determined to a large extent by the demands of the situation in which he is to function as a leader.”

After this echo of Machiavelli in 1521, Adair firmly takes the view that leaders can be made rather than being bred – on the other hand, not much point in trying to sell books to those who have the leadership silver spoon and know it. Bennis (1989, p39-42), however, lists as basic ingredients of leadership:

- Guiding vision (professionally and personally)
- Passion (for life in general and for the work involved)
- Integrity (derived from self-knowledge, candour and maturity)
- Trust (earned from others)
- Curiosity (which is wide ranging and non-specific)
- Daring (a willingness to experiment and try new things).

The above analysis contradicts Adair’s view in that it has some immediate implications – some ingredients can be learned or developed, but some are intrinsic and fundamental to the individual. The truth, as usual, probably lies not with ‘born’ or ‘learned’ but somewhere in the middle ground. Perhaps the apocryphal quote “he is not yet a born leader” is nearer the mark.

In highlighting how leaders develop, Rajan and van Eupen (1997) stress the importance of formative experiences (pre-work), reflective development of emotional intelligence, varied workplace experience and a predisposition to take opportunities as they arose. Boyett and Boyett (1998), in addressing the same issue, highlight childhood experiences and innate personality, broad educational background, range of practical experience and specific interpersonal training (such as in communication) – and opportunism. A reasonable degree of fit emerges in these analyses – but the conclusions are also consistent with the Bennis framework above.

Where does charisma fit with this? Charismatic leadership (depending clearly on definition) often appears to be rich in clarification and vision but variable in the other elements: where the need is urgent and pressing this may not matter in addressing the challenge in hand – but the shortcomings seem to tell eventually in the longer term. Historical precedents abound for such personalities – Churchill, Wellington, Patton, Montgomery, Thatcher and Maxwell (whilst many other leaders regarded as charismatic did not last long enough for us to find out – Alexander, Hitler and Kennedy for example). Perhaps those charismatic leaders who make the transition from dire exigency to a developmental context have a wider and more participative view – Ghandi, Sloan, or Iacocca for example.

Charisma may well inspire, but may be neither a necessary nor certainly a sufficient factor in the whole requirement. Drucker (1993, p1), indeed, goes further in his assessment of the lack of importance of “charisma”:

“Leadership personality’, ‘leadership style’ and ‘leadership traits’ do not exist.....The one and only trait the effective ones I have encountered did have in common was something they did not have: they had little or no ‘charisma’ and little use either for the term or what it signifies.”

Kotter (1990, p37), clearly agrees with Drucker on this point as he states:

“Leadership isn’t mystical and mysterious. It has nothing to do with having ‘charisma’ or other exotic personality trait. It is not the province of a chosen few. Nor is leadership necessarily better than management or a replacement for it.

Management is about coping with complexity. Its practices and procedures are largely a response to the emergence of large, complex organisations in the twentieth century. Leadership, by contrast, is about coping with change. Part of the reason it has become so important in recent years is that the [business] world has become more competitive and more volatile. More change always demands more leadership.”

Boyett and Boyett (1998, p17) in their review of “management gurus” as opposed to academic texts conclude:

“ we can understand leadership better if we focus less on the traits of leaders and more on the relationships between leaders and followers.....The gurus ask for a different relationship between leaders and employees, customers and stakeholders.....They outline at least three fundamental shifts in the leader’s duties and responsibilities: (1) from strategist to visionary, (2) from commander to storyteller and (3) from systems architect to change agent and servant.”

Leadership, Direction and Planning

Perhaps the extent of change required in today’s organisational environment is such that linear rational strategies and planning exercises are insufficient. A different and more meaningful approach appears to be needed to engage the proactive support of staff needed to make the necessary ongoing changes work. Mintzberg’s (1973, 1975) classic studies about what planning really comprises suggests that its impact could be extremely misleading. Kotter, (1999, p23) goes far further and suggests that networking and opportunistic intervention is really an effective way of managing: the old adage of ‘the important meetings occur in corridors’ may be far closer to reality than expected:

“The formal planning systems which many GMs operate probably hinder effective performance. A good planning system should help a general manager create an intelligent network. It should encourage the GM to think strategically, to consider both the long and the short term. Furthermore, it should be a flexible tool so that, depending on what sort of environment among subordinates is desired, he or she can use the planning system to help achieve the goals.

Unfortunately, many of the planning systems used by organisations do nothing of the sort. Indeed, some systems seem to do nothing but generate paper, often a lot of it, and distract executives from doing those things that are really important.”

Campbell (1999) continues in the same vein:

“Every Organisation has an action plan. Yet for most managers, the processes used to create those plans don’t work. In an attitude survey about such processes ¾ of the respondents said their organisation’s processes were unsatisfactory. (p41)

Although good processes are individualised, they share common features. All good planning processes are clear about the value they are trying to create – they have well defined objectives built around the insights and skills of their senior managers. They also have mechanisms for winning buy-in from their organisations. (p48)

If the principles of good planning are so straightforward, why don’t more organisations follow them? One answer may be that many CEOs don’t have a clear vision on which to build their processes. Such executives may be better off with no planning process at all rather than a planning bureaucracy.” (p50)

A very different way of approaching planning results. The biggest problem is to understand dynamic processes, but with the analysis needed for most planning processes (based on historic data) several cycles are needed before they become effective. However, if as according to Pascale US companies reorganise every 4 to 5 years on average but spend nearly 2 years planning and almost as long implementing – they are almost entirely in flux. Much of the NHS in the UK would recognise this scenario. From an analytical perspective, therefore, analysed causality in many important management processes is both unknown and unknowable. If this ‘top-down’ analytical approach is abandoned, the key element shifts to the achievement of a level of emotional engagement, as outlined by Adair (1999) and transfer of ownership of a common purpose throughout the system to make the processes more dynamic and responsive. The process entails redefining the contextual and organisational reality for all together so that a congruence of ‘world-view’ can happen – or the planning aims and timescales start to become incompatible.

Smircich and Morgan (1982, p261) express a very similar line of thought as follows:

“A focus on the way meaning in organised settings is created, sustained and changed provides a powerful means of understanding leadership as a social process..... The actions and utterances of leaders frame and shape the context of action in such a way that the members of that context are able to use the meaning thus created as a point of reference for their own action and understanding of the situation.”

Clearly, with so much discussion, the number of different dimensions of argument and lack of consensus, any focused selection and development of personal framework in this area is bound to be extremely value laden and will fit in with individual preference, past experience and personal character. In fact, without travelling too far from home, Connolly, Connolly and James (1999, p5) summarise the general position as I see it (albeit the paper is targeted fairly narrowly) succinctly as:

“In the literature there is stress on the notion of a transformational leader, able to communicate credible visions and persuade others to follow. Despite this, there is precious little consensus on precisely what leadership is, how or whether it can be installed into individuals, or even how important it is. In recent times a different perspective on leadership has emerged which is has been sceptical of the voluntarist and heroic nature of much of the literature on strategy, reform change and leadership (and) seeks to categorise the role and influence of leaders not in terms of their individual personas but their interaction with the context, inner as well as outer.”

John Browne of BP, in his interview with Steven Prokesh (1997, p14) provides a viewpoint – shared by Harvey-Jones (1994) - that seems to be attracting increasing support from a significant number of leading academic and business based writers:

“The top management team must stimulate the organisation, not control it. Its role is to provide strategic objectives, to encourage learning and to make sure there are mechanisms for transferring the lessons. The role of leaders at all levels is to demonstrate to people that they can achieve more than they think they can achieve and that they should not be satisfied with where they are now.”

The issue of stimulation rather than control extends into the management of conflict and tensions rather than its suppression as dealt with by Eisenhardt et al. (1997). One of the key elements in this stimulation rather than control – but towards a desired objective - is the provision of ‘strategic objectives’. Mintzberg (1994) stresses that providing strategic objectives is a precursor to planning and not a result of it and seems essentially to be about ‘sense-making’ - or reducing the understanding of a complex environment to its essentials and then providing a direction. The process of simplification seems to be an absolutely key process and one that provides both emotional engagement and rational justification through its ‘fit’ with the context. As Antoine de St Exupery observes:

“Have you ever thought, not only about the aeroplane but about whatever man builds, that all of man’s (industrial) efforts, all his computations and calculations, all the nights spent over drafts and blueprints, invariably culminate in the production of a thing whose sole and guiding principle is the ultimate principle of simplicity.”

Indeed in mathematics, elegance (intrinsic simplicity) of solution is taken seriously as an indicator of “truth”. The ability to reduce complexity to its essentials would, besides aspects such as flamboyance and projected confidence, seem to be a common attribute in those leaders considered charismatic – the ability to communicate in simple terms that people can identify with and find grounded in their own experience. Senge (1990a, 1990b, 1996) deals with this communication process by a far more explicit linkage of leadership and learning – and stressing the link between the leadership support required to move beyond adaptive to generative learning. Senge (1990a, p290) articulates his views on leadership in organisations as follows:

“Leadership in learning organisations centres on subtler and ultimately more important work. In a learning organisation, leaders’ roles differ dramatically from that of the charismatic decision maker. Leaders are designers, teachers and stewards. These roles require new skills: the ability to build shared vision, to bring to the surface and challenge prevailing mental models, and to foster more systemic patterns of thinking. In short, leaders in learning organisations are responsible for building organisations where people are continually expanding their capabilities to shape their future – that is, leaders are responsible for learning.”

Schein (1992, p15) seems to frame leadership in a different way because of his perspective:

“ Once cultures exist, they determine the criteria for leadership and thus determine who will or will not be a leader. But if cultures become dysfunctional, it is the unique function of leadership to perceive the functional and dysfunctional elements of the existing culture and to manage cultural evolution and change in such a way that the group can survive in a changing environment”.

This echoes the Smircich-Morgan ideas about leadership as the development of meaning and the Senge organisation building concept. This depends, of course on the precise definition of 'culture' and linkage between culture and how it is changed – but the congruence of the ideas seems remarkably close. Hand in hand with the ideas of learning and enabling culture go the concepts of empowerment – to facilitate everything from re-engineering to self-managed teams to fully learning organisations. And yet Argyris (1998, p59) observes:

“Human resource professionals devise impressive theories of internal motivation. Experts teach change management. Executives themselves launch any number of programmes from re-engineering to continuous improvement to TQM. But little of it works. Few executives would deny that there has been little growth in empowerment over the last 30 years. But why that is so remains a riddle. The answer is complex. The change programmes and practices we employ are full of inner contradictions that cripple innovation, motivation and drive.”

The answer seems to lie in the nature of the commitment many change programmes generate – or fail to. Argyris contrasts external commitment (effectively this amounts to a transactional compliance) and internal commitment (which is personal, participatory and based on a congruence of goals). The participation that internal commitment requires is close to the views of empowerment promulgated and probably requires a transformational setting rather than a transactional one. Even where progress is made with this scenario, the rate of take up and acceptance of the empowerment – homogeneity of culture change in different terms or a different vocabulary – will be variable, probably extremely so across different staff groups, locations, status groups within hierarchies and specialisms. This brings us back to Drucker's comments on the work of Maslow. Not everyone wants or feels comfortable with empowerment and individual notions of comfort in terms of the extent of empowerment and commitment to the organisation that this would entail will also vary. This may be even more of an issue for organisations that are not homogeneous – perhaps geographically spread or involving different sorts of staff in various locations or sub-divisions – in that a whole range of approaches and strategies may need to be adopted.

Herein lies a paradox. Any radical change, especially in organisational culture, required will only work with the development of internal commitment. Yet the take up by definition will be non-homogeneous and staggered in time. If the change is to be effective, it must reach a critical mass of the individuals – but to try to force the issue is to risk alienating those involved and reducing the empowerment objective. During this balancing act, the danger of generating mixed messages is very clear unless actions and motives are very clearly spelled out – and is undertaken from a position of trust and credibility.

The DoH / NHS and the Public Sector

General public sector

The work and literature explored on learning organisations was found to focus largely on the private sector, with competitive advantage often used as a key justification for the need to improve management. The public sector seems to me to have a number of specific and different characteristics to be addressed in dealing with management approaches and drivers for introducing the learning organisation concepts. From my own observation and through integrating a number of literature sources, there appear to be seven areas of difference between the private and public sectors, either in degree or in impact. These areas include and are explored in more detail later in this section:

- *political imperatives* drive the existence and structure of public sector organisations and these often do not significantly depend on internal effectiveness or efficacy. There are periodic changes, some fundamental, as political outlooks change;
- *public accountability and democracy* requirements mean that public sector organisations operate in a complex environment in which public accountability represents an (often) uninformed but powerful judgement and this can significantly distort management decisions;
- *the political / managerial balance* in decision making mean that decision criteria are often framed according to a balance of current politically determined policy, genuine management criteria (operational and financial) and local political acceptability (geographical or interest group);
- *the pace of change* tends to be slow, partly because of the scale of some of the organisations but often because of local political considerations - but when changes are driven by policy then the management criteria of efficiency and effectiveness can be compromised;
- *management, planning and decision* making within the organisations can be defensive because policy can change, but also in some cases in the civil service because of the 'generalist' nature of the officials and lack of specific expertise – then 20/20 hindsight, public accountability and short memory in terms of previous political drivers can be fickle;
- *management of professionals by generalists* in a hierarchical culture and set of accountability structures that provides difficulties in handling the management issues effectively (this is not unusual in itself, but the interaction with the culture does differentiate the public sector);

- *success criteria* can be difficult to determine or very long term in nature (for example in Public Health): performance indicators are often cosmetic rather than fundamental or core to organisational effectiveness. Management can be responsible for implementing policy changes with which they do not agree, nor believe to be either effective or implementable. Management accountability can be diffuse or difficult to enforce.

The factors above probably impact significantly on the culture and leadership styles found in the public sector – with an immediate potential impact on the capacity to implement Learning Organisation concepts. Clearly, however, there are also many common features between the public and private sectors - specifically the need to be able to handle change and to be able to develop staff. These needs are, however, perhaps driven by different requirements and may have to be handled in very different ways to be either acceptable or effective. Indeed the specific aspects involved in public management, referred back to the health service is dealt with by Flannagan and Spurgeon(1996), Hackett and Spurgeon (1996, 1998), Dawson & Dargie (1999) and Kickert (1999). It is clear that, although the culture, structures and organisational objectives can differ significantly between the two sectors, there are significant needs in both public and private sectors for:

- communication, upwards to strategists and key decision makers (Ministers for DH as well as senior civil servants), across organisations and within the organisations themselves – also externally to be effective;
- personal adaptation to changes in structure and organisational response to changes in the external environment (though not normally at the ministerial / political interface for the DH);
- information gathering, absorption from the “field” and its internal analysis, contextualisation, interpretation and dissemination.

The Seven Characteristic Factors in More Detail

In terms of ability to manage change, each of the seven factors identified above that characterise the public sector will have an impact – either directly in terms of constraining flexibility or indirectly through an influence on culture. These are dealt with in more detail below with examples and references drawn primarily from the Department of Health (DH) and NHS as these form the context within which the research is based. Whilst these factors may well be applied to large elements of the public sector, their applicability may vary by degree and the health focus is intended to provide specific examples and even these vary between NHS, DH and its Agencies.

Generalisation is clearly difficult, due to the great variation in public sector organisations. However, the central Whitehall Departments can perhaps be regarded as at one end of the public sector spectrum and Trading Funds (or equivalent) at the other end of the spectrum as they demonstrate many similarities with the private sector. The detailed analysis below suggests that a comparative analysis will not be a straightforward exercise and different types of organisations will be spread across a continuum. Their placement depends, amongst other factors, on proximity to Government (including whether they are part of the Civil Service or not), funding regime, role, function and size.

1. Political imperatives - and reality

A potential source of friction between the politicians and the managers of the system is the way in which politically acceptable messages are presented which do not entirely accord with the harder analyses or the everyday experience of the managers responsible for delivering the services and changes.

For example, both *A Service With Ambitions* (DoH, 1996b) and *The New NHS* (DoH, 1997a) supported the argument that existing resource levels could sustain the NHS without further significant injection of resources. They argued that demographic effects were overstated by scare-mongers, health inequalities could be addressed within existing resources, technological advances were neutral in resource impact – in effect that nature was being subdued and that more efficiency could be generated from the system to contain the consumer demand. However, a DoH (1997b) report undertaken jointly by the NHS Executive, the BMA, the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts concluded that:

“Even if effectiveness and efficiency are radically improved and even if additional resources for the NHS grow in real terms, difficult choices regarding priorities will still have to be made.....The Working Party is committed to the idea that priority setting may only be seen as a valid and ethical activity if all parties - purchasers, providers, the public and the Government - accept the gap between the availability of resources and the requirements of health services. The need to make choices in health care should now be made explicit. Recognition should be given to the fact that it is neither possible, or reasonable, for all the possible demands on health care to be met.”

As far back as 1980, Sir Douglas Black (1982) produced a report linking health status unequivocally to socio-economic status - but this did not accord with the political climate of the times. More recently Sir Donald Acheson (1998) undertook a review on similar lines - which did fit with the current politically correct view and was judged acceptable. Both suggested that a realignment of priorities and resources was needed or the current spiral of inequality would continue – in itself undoubtedly requiring a massive funding injection to address. In the meantime, illness appears to be ‘fighting back’ and posing new problems, especially as the UK links ever closer with third world countries through travel. This is dealt with in a number of official reports, such as those from the DoH (1998j) and House of Lords Select Committee (1998).

The perspectives taken by these reports are outlined fairly succinctly in the New Scientist (1994) which quotes a 1992 report by the US Institute of Medicine:

“HIV may have been transformed from a sporadic infection to an epidemic by urbanisation and especially by increased migration in Africa. Increases in the size, density and distribution of human populations can facilitate the spread of infectious agents and bring people into contact with new pathogenic organisms or their vectors.”

“antibiotic-resistant strains of numerous diseases are now spreading rapidly around the globe. This includes tuberculosis, which is also exacerbated by crowding, and is expected to increase 36% by 2000.”

Political rhetoric frequently does not reflect underlying events. For example, guidance published by the NHS Executive in 1994, *The Operation of the NHS Internal Market - Local Freedoms, National Responsibilities*, makes explicit the need to “manage” the market, continuing to discourage collusion between purchasers and providers, but at the same time encouraging greater collaboration. The discouragement of collusion was intended to allow the HAs to drive strategy and reconfiguration of services and not result in maintenance of status quo in all cases by providers.

Real competition, along the lines of the original Thatcher thinking, with inefficient suppliers being driven out of business, never occurred – indeed, given the nature of services and the geographical way in which they are delivered this is probably currently unthinkable. Health authorities tended to stick with the same local service providers and only GPFHs played the market and then only at the margins, although even this could be destabilising. The extent of real productivity gains produced during this period were concluded to be “unproven” in an internal restricted DH review provided by Smee during the internal NHS Executive preparation of “The *New NHS*” White Paper (op. cit.).

Maynard (1998) was dismissive of the political gloss and lack of evidence base of the political direction taken in terms of policies when the two diverge:

“The rhetoric of a primary-care led NHS is not based on evidence of cost-effectiveness but a mixture of fad and religion. The White Paper is remarkable in that it focuses intently on improvements in hospital practice, but studiously ignores the issue of the efficiency of primary care”.

The political stance at the time suggested that if all the costs of negotiating and contracting that had built up around the internal market (the cost of “administering competition” as it describes it) were eliminated then substantial savings would be released. This was by no means certain as Maynard (1998) further pointed out:

“The issue of management costs is one about which the authors of the White Paper are ambitious: they intend to save £1 billion by ‘abolishing’ the Tories’ ‘infernal’ market. This is a bold and unsupported assertion which, even if achieved, will be washed away entirely or in part by the White Paper reforms.”

In July 1999, the Secretary of State and Minister for Health announced that the management savings targets imposed immediately after the 1997 election had been met and that there was no intention to set new management numbers targets. This claim was probably not provable either way as the relevant data was either not fully available or not able to be consolidated in any meaningful way. For example, any objective assessment to assess extra costs for Primary Care Groups might find that increased costs, but the NHS Executive did/does not collect data for this analysis. Managers can, thus, be left managing ambiguity in a situation in which public statements and presentation does not accord with their experience. Decisions have to be justified in this context as a set of artificial constructs that can seem like playing a game according to an arcane set of rules. Ken Jarrold (1995), the NHS Executive HR Director observed:

“Everywhere I go, the senior people tell me of progress, of better working methods and value for money, objectives achieved and changes delivered. I also glimpse another world inhabited apparently by everyone else – a world of daily crisis and concern, of staff under pressure and services struggling to deliver. Both worlds are real in the minds of those that inhabit them. Both worlds are supported by objective evidence. Both views are held sincerely.”

The underlying levers of many decisions in these situations are political and the justifications made possible by the frameworks constructed and definition of criteria for approval. Senior management have become adept at post-justification of service arguments and ‘back-filling’ funding to justify expenditures which fit political presentation. Given the overall and general nature of funding allocations to Health Authorities the idea of tracing specific funds to effects within an overall prioritisation is curious.

2. Public Accountability and Democracy

Managers in the public sector remain more open to the public gaze than their private sector counterparts, through a whole range of regular reviews, audit access, parliamentary scrutiny and duties to undertake public consultations and abide by set down processes (judicial review of process is possible where this is disputed). This is despite the fact that public services in the UK continue to be relatively secretive with no Freedom of Information Act enacted and with the White Paper (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1997) still under discussion in 2001. This scrutiny is justified because of custodianship of public resources and a requirement that probity must be seen to be delivered within the public services. This scrutiny is largely focused on operational and management tasks. Indeed, the draft provisions for the Freedom of Information Bill contain significant exemptions, possibly most significantly those that block access to all information relating to the development of Government policy.

Whilst it can be argued that shareholders can hold private sector management to account, the access to information and political accountability enshrined through the NAO and PAC are of quite a different order and nature – besides the provisions for judicial review of procedure which can be invoked. The extent of external scrutiny and greater public involvement through consultation and devolved political arrangements, even within the current restrictions, introduces quite specific pressures and Hoggett (1992, p33) comments:

"The problem is that, in a country where we have had so little experience of democracy beyond the routinised form of the ballot box, when you begin to democratise undemocratic institutions, when you encourage people to give voice to experiences which have been suppressed for so long, then the task of public management becomes far more complex."

"Democracy means conflict – between managers and staff, between staff, service users and surrounding communities; and between the different groups of service users and communities themselves. A democratic institution is one which has the capacity to contain this diversity and conflict without resorting to suppression, scapegoats or paranoia."

Ham (1999, p32) develops this as an idea:

"Engaging the public is likely to pose particular challenges. Although the commitment to public participation is not new, the NHS has some way to go to demonstrate a genuine involvement by local people in decisions about the future of health and health services."

The public statements made indicate that this Labour administration emerging from 1997 is, in policy terms, supportive of democratisation through openness. However, the implementation of a Freedom of Information Act still seems some way away at the time of writing and the culture of remaining 'closed' to the outside world appears deep seated. There is movement towards open government, but hugely centralised control over access to information is exercised by the Prime Minister's office. All contacts with press and media (through a protocol introduced in June 1997) had to be registered by civil servants - but policy leaks 'with spin' increased and most were not attributed to the officials. Ryan (1999, p13) observes:

"Freedom of Information, even in the limited form proposed, is bound to thrust public servants further into the spotlight as the public gains more information to challenge their decisions. With ministers increasingly reluctant to take responsibility for the details of policy implementation, the idea of some sort of direct accountability for officials is gaining ground.... There is growing frustration in parliaments as traditional routes of accountability are bypassed and political and executive responsibility melts into the air."

Klein and New (1998) deal with the subject of balancing local and central democratic control in some depth, commenting on the maturity of approach needed for any central political system to allow local decision making which may well be in conflict with its own overall assessment. This, too, has significant impacts on the equality of care and prioritisation accorded to different treatments – and hence social groups – for an organisation such as the NHS which espouses access for all and is national in its scope.

There also appeared to be an increasing blame culture in evidence in the dealings between ministers and officials at the DH during the years to 2000. Perhaps there is a similar sensitivity within any new government or perhaps a reflection of the public mood and a realisation that the NHS is very far from homogeneous in standards, provision or resources. Either way, the strong reactions engendered do not bode well for the managers who have to cope with conflicts inevitably arising around and within more open and democratised organisations. The NAO, for example, advocated in 2000 a joint responsibility between ministers and lead public servants within departments – not only for probity but also for value for money which is frequently dependent on the policy framework in place and objectives to be achieved.

This is potentially worrying for officials who are being encouraged to adopt more private sector practices – the “Egan Principles” and Public Private Partnerships (PPP) for example – but with the same accountabilities and within the same restrictive Treasury guidelines which have not been relaxed. Private sector methods are being adopted but without the flexibility and freedoms enjoyed by the private sector to take quick remedial action when things go awry – and frequently subject to public consultation and judicial review. The processes of rationalisation of decisions that will necessarily go with more flexible practices may slow up the processes even further if risks (personal for individual managers within the system and political) are to be avoided.

The recent direction – specifically gathering momentum since the 1997 Labour administration – has been one of centralisation of strategic control but decentralisation of operational decision making. This has run, hand in hand, with moves aimed at democratisation at the local level – open meetings (especially for Quangos in the Cabinet Office (1998) paper), public consultations and more responsiveness to the public in terms of services and complaints. The challenge of providing services of better quality within a more democratic environment when many messages are not generally palatable is enormous. Isaac-Henry (1997, p57) provides further insight as follows:

“Consumerism can appear in a very different light at the organisational sharp end. The need to paper over cracks because of inadequate resourcing engenders not only staff frustration and dashed expectations but also high stress situations and even client aggression. Indeed, whereas strategic managers see many opportunities arising from change, those further down may perceive the consequences as pushing the system into crisis, virtual chaos and almost terminal decline as staff struggle to keep afloat with too few people and too little money”

This insight echoes the Jarrold comments made earlier, with the issues of more open processes becoming particularly painful when the reality and political imperatives start to drift apart. As Preston et al. (1996) point out, there is a particular problem when public perceptions drift from reality as expectation gaps arise which are difficult to reconcile. Particularly at issue in many cases is the cost of change – where the drivers are political and the benefits justification is qualitative – with an aversion to providing extra resources for ‘administrative purposes’.

3. The Political / Managerial balance

The key element of political (ministerial) interaction with Departments is rarely one of management of the organisation or its operation, but of external perceptions. Michael Hesseltine (1999, p30) comments:

“Ministers preside over government departments; they rarely manage them. Few have managerial experience. The culture of British politics encourages the distinction between political responsibility on the one hand, to lay down policy, and the official responsibility, on the other, to execute it. There are few prizes for effective administration. There are no yardsticks to compare the administration of one department with another.”

This ministerial involvement in government departments is an extreme example of the public sector, but probably mirrored on a local level by Local Authorities. However, any management in the public sector has to constantly recognise the political strands which permeate the activities involve. Ranson and Stewart (1994, p27) observe that:

“Public administration is intrinsically political in its nature, driven by multiple values and the need to reconcile the priorities of diverse politics.”

The extent to which direct political involvement, as opposed to political considerations, reaches though the management systems of the public sector varies between different areas. For the NHS, most actions which are externally visible are subject to ministerial interest. This direct involvement can be counterproductive.

For example, the NHS had been preparing its technology for the Y2K date change since early 1998 and used a red / amber / green ‘traffic light’ system of internal assessment to identify which organisations were making the expected progress and which needed assistance. In May 1999, the consolidated results were published for the March 1999 individual organisational progress summaries. Around 30 organisations were categorised as “red” and the Chair of each organisation received a phone call from the relevant (regional) Minister. Miraculously - or so it seemed - at the June 1999 publication of the May 1999 results, there were no “reds”. Either real progress and the process of performance management was easier than previously thought by the Regional Offices or, more likely according to informal discussions, the NHS stopped telling the ROs the truth. The intervention left the ROs in their management role with a much more difficult problem - akin to riding two horses. Either the ROs worked closely *with the NHS* and agreed to filter the messages returned centrally (in order to be able to monitor the real situation and ensure that the desired results are delivered in practice) or worked closely *with ministers* and risked not knowing what the real position was.

This reflects a system in which detailed control is attempted at a distance, without the resources, experience or skills to make the processes fully effective. Argyris (1994) comments on the potential results of such a system of management and monitoring:

“...it is possible to achieve quite respectable productivity with middling commitment and morale....In such a system, superficial answers to critical questions produce adequate results, and no one demands more.”

Similar tensions were evident in many areas – the monitoring of waiting lists, the redefinition of financial performance, the imposition of development targets and more prescriptive service planning – as the direct political input increased (from August 1999 there were six Health Ministers – two more than before). The extent of the media management (more colloquially referred to as ‘spinning’) preoccupation also seemed to be increasing on the part of the ministers and the danger arose of the presentation over-riding the actual until specific high profile problems emerged. The management process was not only intrinsically political, but political input increased directly and overtly as note by Rowden (2000a, 2000b) and Baume (1999).

The editorial in the HSJ (1999, p15) commented:

“The direct-line relationship which now exists between the health secretary and every manager in the health service was laid bare, if anyone still doubted its existence, in the report of the inquiry into Ashworth Hospital last month which stated: ‘the polite fiction that regional chairs and officials are merely advisers and agents of the secretary of state is just that – a fiction. The reality is that no sensible chief executive would treat their regional director as anything other than a line manager in all but name.’”

For example, in 1998, a determination was made on the five-year health strategy for a Health Authority contested by the local population. The local management insisted that the health service in the locality had substantial resource difficulties:

- it was very short of money as it had run large deficits over recent years, with its infrastructure costs thus unaffordable on a recurring basis at its funding levels: it would have to borrow cash against future allocations to balance its books for the next 3 years (then reduce services afterwards to pay it back);
- it had more community hospitals per capita than most- community hospitals are expensive to run and many are not as effective as they should be - or indeed may not be in some cases clinically safe because of resources. It would be sensible to rationalise their services and close some of the smaller hospitals which provide extremely dubious quality medical care and many of which have under-utilised and unneeded capacity.

However, the political perspective was very different:

- the local people (and media) were clinging passionately and noisily to their community hospitals;
- the whole area in 1997 had returned MPs who had made public statements about the local health services and their belief in strong community services. Opposition MPs always give the Government a difficult time if they restrict local services - usually presented as overbearing centralist tendencies pitted against the hard-done-by local people.

This made for some extremely fraught and difficult decision making. To compound the difficulties policy-wise, *The New NHS* (DoH, 1997a) had made the importance of community hospitals clear:

“Too often in the past community hospitals have been sidelined. Their potential contribution to managing the pressures of rising emergency admissions has often been ignored. Patients will be able to use local community hospitals to the full rather than having to travel to more distant acute hospitals. This will be particularly significant in rural areas.”

The political stance taken would effectively rule out the only route for the Health Authority to live within its statutory duties. The remaining option (avoiding immediate cost restrictions that would have cut local services) was for the centre to engineer a solution to avoid a decision by introducing extra cash into the situation, which is exactly what happened (again). However, this approach was already becoming increasingly more difficult within the new transparent funding framework, the new rules on transferring capital to revenue - and the number of instances in which the centre was already intervening.

4. The Pace of Change – and decision making

A very frustrating feature for the public – and frequently public service managers - is the slow pace at which decisions seem to be taken and change implemented. Decision systems appear to be organised so that political expediency will virtually always hold sway. Politicians will always do first what it makes political sense to do, rather than what managers sometimes perceive to be in the ultimate best interests of customers in the longer term. When there is tension between the two, often the processes of implementation can work extremely slowly.

The most common example of this slow working for the NHS, perhaps, lies in the area of hospital closures where politics and managerial decisions become inter-twined. These are unpopular electoral decisions, even when clinical effectiveness and the quality of services can be demonstrably improved. Perhaps it is a lack of credibility of the persuaders or ineptness of presentation that is at fault, but the result is a set of procedures which rely on process to deflect criticism and allow the decision to be taken back away from the political arena. For this to work the procedures are often slow, detailed, complex and potentially litigious.

The second element that impacts on the pace at which change can occur in the public sector is that the sector itself is just so big - together with the scale of changes. For example in the NHS, between 1997 and 1999, there were new national strategies for Public Health, Human Resources, Information Systems, Quality, Corporate and Clinical Governance, Fraud Prevention, Communications - and National Standards Frameworks for disease management. During development and then implementation of these strategies, which give rise to no less than 68 'priorities', it is likely that half the organisations in the NHS will change as Primary Care Trusts emerge, Health Authorities merge and acute NHS Trusts join together for service rationalisation. The sheer scale of the 510 independent NHS organisations with over 1m staff makes the scale of the structural changes introduced and managed through the RO network staggering. The sector is also complex, with significant interdependencies between organisations (many of which rely on informal pragmatic arrangements at the base level which have never been planned or legislated for – and thus not planned for at the top level next time round). Pettigrew, McKee and Ferlie (1988, p300) deal with this:

“Having ‘correct’ policies for change is not sufficient: an organisational capacity for change is also necessary.The managerial skills needed to effect such shifts do not readily fit with simplistic conceptions of rational process and top down directives. Thus theoretically sound and practically useful research should involve the continuous interplay between ideas about the context of change, the process of change and the content of change together with skill in regulating all three.”

They further define the contextual elements into 'inner' and 'outer'. This is clearly a complex set of change mechanisms to handle, especially with the service risks involved and frequently multidisciplinary ownership to be achieved in order to make this work. In some ways, it is a wonder that change occurs as fast as it does, given the imperative of keeping the services continuous.

Gunn (1989, 18) makes this point for the NHS:

“Managing change is a political process and has a power dimension. Organisational development tends to overlook this. Moreover, there are very few agencies which can be changed in isolation. What needs to be changed is the agency in its network of other agencies and environmental factors. This is altogether a more skilled and time consuming exercise.”

Pattison (1996, 252-8) provides a similar analysis in which he highlights the sectional interests in the NHS, but also goes further in terms of legitimisation of change (p255):

“Much of the change management literature assumes the right of managers to instigate change and then to ensure that by all means this occurs. This kind of top down approach ignores the politics of decision making, possibly to the detriment of interested members of the organisation and others (for example patients). ... The power structures of organisations like the NHS decide whose voices, purposes and aims are privileged, who determines the nature of change and who benefits from it..... The onus is, therefore, on managers to demonstrate the need for change, to create the environment and structure in which it is possible and to ensure that change is not harmful to the plurality of public interests.”

5. Management, planning and decision making

The political aspects of decision making are explored above. The civil service itself displays another curious feature, more prevalent than in other organisations as far as I am aware – an emphasis on policy development rather than management delivery as the route to career progression. Also important in the decision making processes is the lack of specialist professionals in senior positions (see also next factor) – with the exceptions of the MoD and DH who have service personnel and Medically qualified staff at the highest levels. Flynn and Strehl (1996, p64) comment:

“Moves from one job to another are frequent: 60% of people in the top three Grades in 1993 had been in their current posts for two years or less and 80% for three years or less. This movement is intended to give people experience of different departments but it also has the effect of accentuating the generalist nature of policy work rather than specialism in a policy area. Given that ministers also change their portfolios quite frequently, it can mean that the “senior management” in charge of departments do not have long experience of them.”

The DH has a wide politically sensitive agenda whilst at the same time the “external” pressures - of demographic trends, social change and new medical / technological discoveries - keep marching forward, so the processes of DH and NHSE planning and decision making now needs major overhaul. Choo (1998) discusses organisation decision making models and the lack of top-level experience at the DH in turning policy into strategy and into action suggests that his *Political Model* and *Anarchic Model* are both applicable. Ranade (1994, p70) observes:

“The scale of social change and uncertainty has made planning in the old sense of linear programmed progress along a predetermined route obsolete. It must give way to continual social learning and experiment, and planning as an emergent flexible process. Creativity and lateral thinking, the ability to reframe old problems and synthesise apparent contradictions, is as important as reason and logic.”

There is a distinct resonance between this and Mintzberg's (1994) views on emergent strategies – but these are very different from the constructs currently in use: huge amounts of analysis, public consultations, long lead times and huge volumes of paper. Some of the issues, perhaps, can be attributed to the real meaning of strategic planning – and identifying the resource implications of addressing the real issues emerging.

Bryson (1995), in his book on strategic planning, opens up with (p1) {the emphases are his own}:

*“The environments of public and non-profit organisations have become not only increasingly uncertain over recent years but also more interconnected; thus, changes anywhere reverberate unpredictably – and often chaotically and dangerously – throughout the society. First organisations must **think strategically** as never before. Second, they **must translate their insights into effective strategies** to cope with their changed circumstances. Third, they must develop the rationales necessary to **lay the groundwork for adopting and implementing their strategies**.”*

These ideas echo Mintzberg's views and advocate not a return to vastly formalised processes, but with a different way of thinking and involving the public in handling a moving and dynamic environment. Sir Alan Langlands (1996, p3), until August 2000 the NHS Executive CE, summed up the NHS task as:

“the resolution of a pattern of interwoven problems - the impact of science and technology, the economic environment, relationships with staff, the need to listen to the public. Managing in the NHS is not about tackling single great issues. It is much more difficult than that.

The need is not always for boldness and decisiveness, although these things help in certain circumstances, but for a combination of careful planning, opportunism and the adroit timing of interventions. The rate and pace of change in the NHS is usually determined by a subtle interplay between context (the environment in which we are operating), content (the substance of what we want to do) and the process of change (how we set about it).”

These factors make managing in the public sector – particularly healthcare – fascinating and difficult. It also makes the handling of the interface between management and politics quite different, with the political imperatives often supplanting what would in other sectors be management decisions and actions. The constraints of “acting in the shoes of the Secretary of State” similarly change the reactions and decisions taken individually by Civil Servants.

6. Management of professionals by generalists

The issue of management of professionals by general managers is a common difficulty, in both private and public sectors, see Raelin (1991). For the civil service with its pervasive generalist culture this is particularly acute. It is indicative, perhaps, in terms of “Job Evaluation” (JESP scores) that of the four main competencies, three are scored on a 1-10 scale but Professional Competency (the fourth) is scored on a 1-4 scale. The NHS has, in addition to the above, one further feature that sets it apart from many other sectors – the influence and power of the clinical professions. It is not by chance that the BMA is known as the most powerful trade union. Strong unionisation is, clearly, a factor in many sectors – but in the NHS it is the medical profession that both holds the knowledge base and commits the resources and this makes a substantive difference. Handling the clinician lobby and interests is an important part of the NHS Executive work, whilst still making progress with the change agenda.

Implementing many of the policy changes since 1990 has been difficult, with various staff interest groups taking up fixed, often hostile, positions in relation to the reforms. Medical resistance, in particular in the late 80s, has been fierce and highly organised under the British Medical Association (BMA) - from the manager's perspective a "medical mafia" reluctance to relinquish power. Even the requirement in *Working for Patients* that every doctor had to participate in medical audit had to be tempered before the 1990 Act was finalised to render it acceptable to the profession. As the DH (1989c) finally stated:

"The Government's approach is based firmly on the principle that the quality of medical work can only be reviewed by a doctor's peers . . . The system should be medically led, with a local medical audit advisory committee chaired by a senior clinician."

As Pollitt (1992, p3) argued, doctors' leaders had so organised the process for themselves that it had become "a non-threatening activity carried out only by doctors and rigorously protected from the public gaze". As a result, ten years after the reforms were introduced, patients - who have the strongest vested interest of all - still had almost nothing by which to judge the standard of a doctor's performance. The lack of transparency is markedly different from the situation in some other countries, notably the information available in the USA. The position has been made less clear by the lack of clarity over whether this is a principled stance of objection or merely a negotiating stance to improve the lot of its members. Marnoch (1996, p108) comments on the resistance to change evident in the medical profession:

"In the UK, conservatism is written into the professions constitution in the form of the primary-secondary care division.The creation of the NHS in 1948 actually built on the division, enshrining the GP-Specialist relationship in the administrative separation of primary and secondary care and through the referral system."

This factor of life is recognised clearly at the clinical end of management. It is pertinent to observe that probably more Trust Chief Executives have lost their posts because of clinician action (through votes of no confidence) than have been removed as a result of NHSE monitoring actions. Indeed Baume (199, p269) makes this very point:

"We have found in case after case in the NHS in England and Wales that votes of no confidence have often been preceded by difficult organisational changes - being opposed by the doctors - or a CEO getting close to questioning clinical quality.In a small number of cases NHS managers have survived such votes of no confidence but this is the exception rather than the rule. This state of affairs is nothing short of a scandal."

7. Success Criteria – the Lack of appropriate measurements of performance

It is difficult to define or collect information consistently within the Public Sector as a complex system of many parts with each set of services having its own drivers - which have to be balanced within overall resource constraints.

Defining the important and controllable factors and how they affect other elements is also problematic. How they impact on the necessarily extremely high level objectives overall appears well nigh impossible. Indeed, in an organisation such as the NHS where ethical decisions often outweigh financial or even (in cases) political decisions, the measures adopted are often debatable, as Mintzberg (1996, p71) states:

“Next consider the myth of measurement, an ideology embraced with almost religious fervour by the Management movement. What is its effect in Government? Things have to be measured, to be sure, especially costs. But how many of the real benefits of government activities lend themselves to such measurement?many activities are in the public sector precisely because of measurement problems”.

“The fact is that assessment of many of the most common activities in government requires soft judgement – something that hard measurement cannot provide. So when Management is allowed to take over, it drives everyone crazy. And no-one more so than the “customer” who ends up getting the worst of it.”

Indeed, since the very act of instigating changes in an institution of the like of the NHS is inherently political, it cannot be risked to be perceived as failing. Morton-Cooper (1997, p235) observes simply:

“Because no independent non-governmental system was established to monitor or evaluate the (1990) reforms, the production of any kind of reliable balance sheet as to their successes is problematic, especially if set alongside the new contract for GPs, Health of the Nation targets and Patient’s Charter.”

It is probably naïve to think this would ever be otherwise. Gladstone and Goldsmith (1995), in fact, observe that because of the unintended and unforeseen ramifications as the NHS reforms unfolded, there were many effects never intended nor envisaged which significantly complicated their implementation. Indeed, an internal DoH review was undertaken at the time of White Paper development in 1997 (Smee, 1997) on an objective (apolitical) basis to extract the elements of the market for retention. The result of this was inconclusive – some elements clearly worked whilst others introduced avoidable problems. In the event, some aspects which did seem to work in practice were abandoned for less effective mechanisms for political reasons – whilst others which were not effective were retained as a result of compromise with stakeholders with different agendas.

Attempts to address the difficult issues within healthcare (e.g. the model of Quality Adjusted Life Years to compare outcome benefits – for which in practice most of the data is unavailable, inadequately defined or inaccurate) by introducing qualitative assessments have not met with success. Certainly they have not achieved consensus acceptability or currency. (Hamblin, 1997, p29) suggests that the *wrong* measures can be chosen, because of a lack of political understanding of how the whole system fits together and to provide an over-simplistic public message:

“The government’s manifesto pledge was unequivocal: waiting lists would be reduced by treating 100,000 more patients.....This is the wrong target. What matters is how long patients wait.....The government’s pledge is based on the misconception that waiting lists are a backlog of unperformed work, rather than a measurement of part of a dynamic system at a point in time.”

In fact, not only was waiting list numbers the wrong target, but the wrong lever. A number of research findings, including Hamblin et al. (1998), Edwards (1997) and Hunter (2000), questioned whether this objective was actually achievable even in the longer term without redefining the process and measurement. In order to address the problem of waiting list numbers, there were three options potentially to be considered:

- a permanent multi-billion pound increase for NHS funding to address the numbers problem properly;
- a temporary funding increase to deliver the election promises but with a massive pent up surge thereafter;
- to restrict the numbers entering the system – either bringing forward an uncomfortable rationing debate or preventing patients receiving care.

Pursuing the letter of the pledge would probably have resulted in exactly the opposite of what was intended when the pledge was made in that the rationing threshold would move but with little clinical benefit and much increased costs. The result brought into the open the dilemma already highlighted through a number of internal papers already circulated within the NHS Executive. Even if the right measures were to be chosen, the interpretation would remain a problem and Appleby (1997, p32) observed that:

“Even if we are sure we are collecting the right measures, possibly insurmountable problems can arise in our ability to understand what they mean and/or what are the factors producing variations”.

The Health Service Journal (Editorial, 1998) went further in some respect and questioned what effect comparative information would actually have on performance, even the right measures were chosen and interpreted appropriately – an argument rehearsed in other public sector areas, notably perhaps education:

“No one could quibble that the NHS must be accountable and its activity transparent. But do the panoply of indicators and league tables, together with the ritual of public scrutiny and humiliation for the laggards, actually improve performance? Where is the evidence?”

In practice, the development of a new Performance Management Framework was initiated in 1999. This, possibly as expected, proved to be a complex and difficult exercise which resulted in a whole range of indicators, but without much pulling together or consolidation in terms of overall success criteria (or critical success factors). In the meantime, Treasury proved to be extremely loathe to let the Efficiency Index slide into oblivion, although discredited within the DH and NHS, as it provided them with levers to reduce expenditure. There are two other factors to consider in respect of NHS performance indicators besides interpretation difficulties:

- a) the extremely poor level of data systems and information availability or accuracy upon which all the indicators and success criteria must be based; and
- b) the plethora of indicators introduced – often without prioritisation.

The first factor represents a level of information availability that would probably be unacceptable in most private sector organisations, but there are many reasons contributing to the current situation within which the NHS finds itself. The second is more insidious as it results in a lack of accountability and can lead to a culture in which targets become irrelevant. The NHS had 64 “priorities” defined in its internal *Priorities and Planning Guidance 1999/2000* – all with indicators and targets. Many, because of poor information availability/accuracy, could not in practice be monitored effectively in any event. But the sheer number of “priorities” also presents a problem. NHS management cannot concentrate on all – in fact it is doubtful whether any individual manager could list all and probably this is also the case within the NHS Executive.

Research over many years, for example Miller (1956), suggest that only between 5 and 9 elements of information can be meaningfully remembered and processed – certainly prioritised. Simons and Davila (1998) address this similar issue by defining a “Return on Management” as the ratio between productive organisational energy released and the management time invested. In other terms this is management “value added” or leverage / effectiveness. Since management time is a scarce and valuable resource the essential aspect is to align the time invested with organisational priorities. They highlight a number of key elements that decrease the impact of management:

- overly broad or vague mission statement
- politically correct performance measures instituted
- obscurity as to responsibility through a plethora of measurements
- planning systems develop a life of their own
- staff have little awareness of senior management priorities.

According to the previous pages, the DH and NHS fail on all counts and this results in a huge amount of management time and effort, but far less effectiveness than should be the case.

Synopsis

The key research objectives involve the exploration of the interaction between concepts of Learning Organisations and the Public Sector – together with the individual Learning acquired at a personal level as the research progressed.

From the literature, it is quite clear that individual learning and corporate learning are closely linked and many of the concepts have clear strands in common. It is also clear (for example from the work of Senge, Argyris and others) that development of organisational learning is very closely linked to appropriate cultural development – and that this is a key responsibility and role of organisation leaders, shaping the role and definition of leadership itself (Bass, Schein and others). The change management needed to turn leadership vision into cultural reality is, therefore, a key leadership role and one that differs very significantly from the old transactional leadership models in both respects. The different strands, some of which emerge from different academic streams or research backgrounds appear to converge and provide complementary views which contribute to an overall approach to management.

The public sector literature provides a picture of organisations which differs in terms of culture and, to an extent, organisational drivers from the private sector context in which much of the organisational learning research has been undertaken. Whilst the individual learning may well be reasonably common as a model for both sectors, there would appear to be features that may provide a differentiation between the public sector and wider environment. The interaction between the learning concepts, leadership styles (and change management) and existing organisational culture and any ongoing constraints that represents is this likely to be fundamental to LO concepts for the public sector.

The literature review to an extent provides some initial indications that the nature of leadership possible within parts of the public sector may be significantly at variance from the concepts noted above – and that by implication this difference may impact on the introduction of Learning Organisation concepts into the public sector. This is a theme returned to later in Chapters 6 and 7.

The work undertaken at the SW Regional Office of the NHS Executive (DH) as a part of this research project attempts to develop the learning organisation concepts, but at the same time highlighting any difficulties encountered and analysing these to establish whether they provide any further light on the difference in context. At the same time, the personal involvement is explored in respect of learning model, leadership and change management. The literature reviewed in the next chapter in respect of Participative Action Research and research methodology is also relevant to this aspect – this is addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Approach, Methodology and Method

Introduction

The first section of this chapter discusses the ontology and epistemology relevant to this research – the appropriate approach. There is still a great deal of discussion as to the appropriateness of a subjective and qualitative approach in formal academic research - as opposed to the objective and quantitative paradigms that have dominated Western scientific method over the last three centuries. The arguments certainly go back originally to the Greek philosophers and have exercised researchers and philosophers ever since, especially over the last century as rigour in method has been sought to a greater extent outside the core scientific subjects of mathematics, physics and chemistry. It would seem presumptuous in such a scenario to expect to put forward an argument that has pretensions to conclude this discussion one way or the other. In line with much post-modernist thinking, there is no attempt to use or provide a single grand theory and so a pragmatic scope is addressed with a number of different approaches and ideas brought together which provide a diversity of interest and perspective. As an approach, thus, it seems appropriate to recognise that, like almost everything else in life, science and (relative) knowledge, there are no definitive answers and it becomes more a question of the appropriateness and fitness for purpose of the models adopted.

The second section of this chapter describes the methodology adopted. The key issues in validating the adoption of subjective / qualitative approaches are, however, just the same as the more “traditional” approach developed in Western science - how to make the research rigorous, how to reach justifiable conclusions and document them adequately. This becomes a question of methodology and adopting / constructing an adequate research framework. Any such framework has to support investigation in an environment that is constantly changing and in which the isolation of the research area from other change factors is both impossible and highly undesirable from an organisational viewpoint. Indeed, without adopting such an approach it would not seem possible to gain data and provide any knowledge or analysis of most behaviours and interactions within the major elements of our relationships with each other. The application of the principles and framework to a specific research area and exploration of theoretical hypotheses then becomes a question of specific method - an iterative set of cycles of planning and action.

The final section of this chapter traces the methods adopted – the thought processes behind the research actions initially planned and then those actually undertaken to support this project and place them within the constructs above. Whilst a fair amount of initial planning and scoping was undertaken, the personal and organisational development nature of the project necessarily meant that many opportunistic actions were taken, although still within the overall framework. This is recognised and is an integral part of the research cycling methodology adopted overall. This also recognises and includes a number of deliberate interventions to shape and direct the development that occurred – both necessary to include the staff as fully aware participants and to move towards the organisational development goals initially set.

Approach

The personal nature of the research interest

There is much literature and theoretical discourse on the way in which organisations change and the way in which individuals learn – some reviewed and summarised in Chapter 2. The nature of organisations in periods of rapid change is intensely political. Often, for all concerned, this change process can be fearful, inward looking and the subject of large numbers of interacting impacting factors. Changes in organisations are also usually an intensely individual experience for those concerned and reactions of individuals may differ significantly depending on their personality, previous experience and current situation. Much has been written on the development of “learning organisations” and the ability of such organisations to adapt to changing stimuli - both internal and external.

When I started on the PhD programme, I could see little possibility of exploring the extremely complex but fascinating set of circumstances of change affecting the Regional Health Authority (RHA) / Regional Office (RO) in which I found myself in the research approaches I had previously encountered. I could not see how the approaches to research I had previously known could help shed light on the overall situation rather than artificially isolated parts of it – which would be of far less practical application to myself or others. Perhaps my key motivation at this time was not the quest for a research framework but greater understanding of management concepts around which to gather my own practical experiences and make sense of them so that I could be more effective.

The initial texts I read (see Chapter 2) provided me with some ideas for the conceptual framework of management theory I was seeking. However, it was a familiarisation with some of the Action Learning ideas outlined in McLaughlin and Thorpe (1993) introducing the subjective and qualitative research techniques of the social sciences which gave me some first ideas in respect of technique. The Pettigrew and Whipp (1993) contextual analysis suggested an approach with which to address and scope my research topic “*Managing Change in the Department of Health*”. The Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1992, 1994) view of research for managers helped provide the ideas of how this could fit with my own work and make the whole exercise feasible.

I wished to explore the significant and ongoing changes that the RO staff in my own organisation were undergoing – as participants in internal change and as contributing externally to managing changes in the NHS. I was particularly interested in finding out whether an open and supportive management style would provide a perceptible difference in their performance. I believed this should be examined by attempting to develop my Directorate along “learning organisation” lines and exploring whether they would be perceived as more effective than other directorate staff who were not.

In addition, I proposed to monitor changes in my own professional practice as a manager as a result of both my management learning through the PhD related work, the adoption of reflective practices and through my role in supporting the Directorate development itself. It seemed to me that this would prove an extremely subjective micro-environment in which to position research – and one which also needed to take on the personal nature of the subject fully into account.

The number of staff closely involved within the research as active participants would only number between 15 and 25, varying as the RO structures changed. The relatively small number involved meant that subjective relationships would play a part as well as the intended interventions to catalyse change. With such a small number, staff turnover and structural re-organisations within the RO would be bound to have some major impacts. There was, therefore, an intentional and inevitable high degree of intervention on my part with the primed and willing subjects of the research - the observations would be interactive and many of the reactions observed would actually be the result of actions intended to develop those involved.

Further, the research and its method would be discussed with the staff at the outset, so that a second order set of intervention effects would be evident as I tried to influence their working style. The anticipated impact of discussing my objectives in advance proved to be especially the case with the staff who had “traditional research” based doctorates and who became curious about the rationale and methodology. A great deal of my own intervention input was to attempt to create a “culture” within our Directorate to support the sort of environment to foster individual learning and improved relationships / team-working.

Finally, the research was undertaken at the same time as a number of formal initiatives aimed at integrating the RHA staff into the Department of Health (DH) as a RO and developing the organisation itself. This would include work undertaken to achieve accreditation for the Investors in People (IiP) standard. I was very actively involved in these initiatives and the opportunities that arose were harnessed as the work progressed, with both the RO Training Manager and Communications Manager participating in the research effort as ‘critical friends’. This complex scenario would clearly be difficult to analyse, with the separation into individual causes and effects problematical - if not impossible - in any definitive way. At the same time the whole evolving situation offered, potentially, a high level of rich data on both organisational and personal development - hopefully with indicators in a real world case of whether some of the underlying theories look likely to prove valid.

It seemed clear that some quantitative techniques and tools could be used to address some aspects of the situation, but there seemed little prospect that an effective positivist approach could be taken to answering the research questions posed. The very fact that I would be intimately involved as line manager with the group of staff particularly under observation would unavoidably compromise the independence of observation and there seem to be many elements, such as staff motivation, initiative and attitude to change which would be difficult to quantify. Isolation of factors in a controlled way would be almost impossible.

Research into management

Social science academic knowledge and research is rich in models of behaviour and metaphor. Many of the models developed seem to me to be complementary, with different views taken based on the political and value judgements from which they stem. Translating from one to another can provide additional insights into the underlying issues. The proposition emerges that none is 'true' but each can be useful in terms of conferring understanding or providing a tool to approach any specific situation. However, there are difficulties encountered in the application of general principles translated into particular practical situations and professional practice.

The difficulties seem to lie largely in the fast changing, value laden and complex nature of many of the professional and organisational issues facing management at present. The development and use of such an approach seems to me to be quite different from the models produced through a reductionist approach in which a controlled environment is created or isolated and in which theoretical constructs are commonly framed. The determination of an acceptable framework of developing knowledge is clearly critical to the acceptability of research and this in turn depends crucially on the paradigm in which one operates. However, it seems easy to become a willing victim of Valerie Janesick's (1994) "methodolatry" where preoccupation with approach undermines understanding – especially if acceptance of the research depends upon it.

Knowledge about management

There is still a great deal of discussion as to the appropriateness and admissibility of various subjective and qualitative approaches as described by Denzin & Lincoln (1994) in developing knowledge - as opposed to the objective and quantitative methodologies which have dominated Western scientific method over the last three centuries. The arguments certainly go back originally to the Greek philosophers, outlined by Santillana (1961), such as Protagoras, Socrates and Plato (c357BC) in *The Republic*. They have exercised researchers and philosophers such as Descartes (1637), for example, ever since. The arguments have intensified over the last century as rigour in method has been sought to a greater extent outside the core traditional sciences of mathematics, physics and chemistry, specifically in Social Research as outlined by Hughes (1990) and Easterby-Smith et al. (1991).

It certainly seems presumptuous in such a scenario to expect to put forward an argument that has pretensions to conclude this discussion finally one way or the other. However, it does seem to me appropriate to recognise that, in many aspects of life and science, there are few fully determinate answers and it becomes more a question of appropriateness of model and dealing with uncertainty.

One useful way of categorising the knowledge generated through management research is by reference to the three Aristotelian classifications of knowledge:

Theoretical: where theoretical models of management and management practice are constructed for their own sake - the process is basically a philosophical exercise in providing general theories which gain acceptance of their practical application by measuring prediction to outcome in specific circumstances;

Productive: where management is viewed as a technical exercise - there is a basic assumption that alternative means exist to reach given ends and the role of the researcher is to evaluate which works best (i.e. which options are more efficient or effective);

Practical: where management is viewed as a process that occurs in a socio-political context which is too complex and fluid to control - the process cannot be considered as a means/end system but one in which decisions are made according to a stable underlying set of values.

For practical purposes, it is clearly helpful to be able to move from one view to another - taking guidance and pointers from whichever seems to be most applicable or useful at a point in time. They are, clearly, not exclusive but merely contribute different views.

The “scientific” approach - Positivism

Historically, the natural sciences have pursued an approach in their enquiry that assumes a theoretical knowledge base underpinning the events it focuses upon. The more abstract the knowledge, from mathematics to physics to chemistry, the more applicable this theoretical modelling and quantification has been. As one moves past the biological sciences, which provide a mixture of theoretical constructs and ‘imprecise’ observational strands, towards the social sciences then this precision, formulaic relationship and predictability progressively weakens.

Even in reasonably deterministic physical systems, predictability may not be all that it seems. It is not necessarily the underlying theory that is lacking, although the goal of an underlying field theory still seems years away, but the layers of complexity and aggregation built upon it to model the realities of the world observed. ‘Different’ sets of laws appear to become relevant at an aggregated level, such as Newton’s Laws for example and their development into relativistic theories - although statistically relevant across the ‘normal’ range of physical parameters the Newtonian models break down as the extremes of their statistical validity are encountered – very big / small; very fast / slow; very dense / vacuous. However, the empirical search or verification (possibly by lack of falsification) of underlying laws and theories has been the main activity of science for at least two centuries.

At the core of the nature of the theoretical knowledge sought in these endeavours is the assertion that an objective reality exists, subject to invariable laws that can be used deterministically to predict outcome. Research then becomes a question of constructing hypothetical models of (bits of) the world, subjecting the models to empirical testing and comparing measured results with theoretical predictions made by using the models. The above approach has been commonly described as *positivism* and in terms of its structure can be deconstructed as follows:

- *Ontology*: an objective reality exists which can be fully understood and reduced to how things really are and how they work (naïve realism). This clearly has a number of immediate consequences:

if there is such an external reality then it is possible for a number of observers to view the reality and reach the same conclusions - the existence of invariable laws will then lead to the achievement of the same results on all occasions where the initial conditions are the same (this will rarely be the case in social science) so that the relationships are *causal*;

if the knowledge produced is observer independent and the models produced generally applicable then the knowledge must necessarily be *free of personal values*;

if the reality is subject to consistent laws and behaviour then the knowledge can be *generalised* and is not constrained to the individual system observed.

- *Epistemology*: the relationship between observer and the knowledge is basically determined by the ontology. If there is an objective reality, free of personal values and events causally determined, then:

the only 'true' knowledge which can be validated is *totally independent of the observer* : the observer must be capable of studying the phenomena without interfering with it in any way or, in turn, being affected by it;

empirical evidence which can be replicated is 'true', with the corollary that the knowledge becomes *predictive*.

- *Methodology*: the way in which knowledge can be gained and enhanced is essentially theoretical:

the real world is complex, so that phenomena are best understood by excluding the least relevant factors and by simplifying the problems as far as possible - *reduction* of the problem to a solvable state;

the reduced problem is then turned into *hypothetical* constructs or models proposed to explain relationships: these can then be subjected to empirical observations designed to demonstrate whether they are true or false;

the empirical testing needs to be designed in a way which provides objective measurements - i.e. the models and testing need to be *quantifiable* in nature.

In the words of Burrell and Morgan (1979), when applied to social science research this can be described as the realist-positivist-determinist-nomothetic approach.

Changes in natural sciences outlook

However, there has been a significant development in outlook of the natural sciences, even in the more theoretical areas such as physics as understanding has developed and the old simple models have been discarded in favour of a more sophisticated analysis. Indeterminacy has become a basic feature and has resulted in a revisiting of the pure positivist approach - a significant change in the nature of knowledge 'owned' by the natural sciences and mathematics.

The most obvious example of this is perhaps in the construction of models of physical behaviour. Einstein's work at both ends of the spectrum - quantum theory and relativity presaged a revolution in the way in which nature is perceived. The Heisenberg (1927) uncertainty principle and the Bohr (1928) wave / particle duality of matter are specific examples of the way in which these changes are manifest. *Statistically*, whole systems may be reasonably predictable if the starting position is totally and accurately known (hardly ever possible), but not otherwise. It has become clear that mathematical models of physical reality work reasonably well within the "normal spectrum", i.e. the physical scale for our normal living experiences, but break down at both ends of the spectrum - apparently for very different reasons:

macro: the number of factors which impinge on the model increases to the point where determination of initial conditions and the interaction of large numbers of minor variables have an impact on the predictive value of solutions. Models become increasingly complex. The more points at which data is collected to provide a baseline, the more accurate the solution is likely to be, but with time will always break down because smaller order variables will always provide an increasingly disruptive influence. Perhaps weather forecasting is the easiest example in this respect;

micro: at the very lowest levels of observation, the physical systems really do interact with the observer: at the extreme, matter itself becomes not a fact but its presence only a series of probability distributions. The statistically determined behaviour or position of groups of particles can be ascertained or predicted - but that of individual particles cannot.

Research into theoretical models has become either abstract at the micro level or has had to adopt different techniques at the macro level, for example evolving new concepts such as Chaos Theory - this deals with very large scale systems and now seems also to have met with conceptual problems. It is interesting that in particle physics one of the approaches to explaining individual particle behaviour is to ascribe a form of 'memory' to account for observed results – this effectively tries to deal with the indeterminacy of initial conditions by ascribing a historical impact on future prediction. The analogy between these micro / macro issues and the difficulties that social sciences face in the individual / group / societal linkages and vagaries of human behaviour which can be attributed to past events and perceptions brought to any situation seem to be both direct and cogent.

The scientific research method emerging from the above, however, is still effectively phenomenological so that the quality of knowledge is still only ascribed to that founded in reality as understood by the senses and clearly continues to exclude anything which cannot be empirically based - such as value judgements. The exclusion of consideration of the impact of individual values, although then naturally the subject of interpretative analysis based on the related value frame of the observer, from behavioural consideration seems to be a constraint on research in the social sciences which is largely based on human interactions.

Positivism revisited

Since the start of this century as the natural sciences traditional research approach has evolved, the absolute stance taken by those who advocate a positivist approach within social sciences has been somewhat mediated and 'softened' into post-positivism. This change is essentially a recognition that human effort and recognition is flawed and that many phenomena are exceedingly complex to the point of defying effective model construction - hence we can get close to understanding the reality of what is happening but this understanding will always be imperfect.

The key effect on the *epistemology* is that the emphasis becomes one of disproving theories (rather than proving them) and that replicated results are probably true but should still be critically scrutinised. The total independence of the observer is acknowledged as being a theoretical ideal pursued as far as possible, with objectivity being pursued through a mixture of procedural rigour and critical examination.

The application of this approach to more complex and value based areas of human activity means that a *methodology* is indicated which can be adapted to a range of problems, with qualitative techniques supplementing the purely quantitative approach in a way tailored to each specific research context. This flexibility of approach is especially valuable in addressing problems in the biological and social sciences. Thus it becomes possible to undertake research in more natural / native situations where more complex factors can be observed in action - including those of values and behaviour.

Indeed, this approach was of particular relevance to the social sciences - following encouragement by John Stuart Mill to emulate the natural sciences - both to gain acceptance and to claim a better validated knowledge base. The use of a pure positivist approach was extremely difficult to achieve in the social sciences in terms of almost all of the points noted above.

Development of management research

The emphasis and thrust of management research has seen a gradual evolution over the last century as successive sets of concepts have found favour. A changing view of organisations has resulted as the underlying perceptions have changed and the models adopted have represented organisations as:

- *mechanistic*: for example in the work of Weber (1947), Fayol (1916) and Taylor (1947);
- *comprising groups of employees*: for example Mayo (1949) cites the Hawthorne interview programme starting in 1929;
- *a composition of individuals*: for example with McGregor (1960) and Herzberg (1966) where individual motivation becomes the real issue to be examined.

The progression or development of ideas and models can be regarded as analogous to the shifts in understanding in the physical sciences as behaviour was gradually better understood through deconstructing the whole. During this period, the nature of the knowledge frames in use has shifted gradually through the Aristotelian frames from the theoretical, through productive and is now commonly framed at the practical level.

The changes in organisational models perhaps also parallel the wider changes of perceptions and understanding in society where emphasis on organisation, groups and conformity has given way in large measure to the “cult of the individual”. The common call is now for the rights of the individual, individual tailoring of service provision, individual choice and the recognition of societies as large collections of individuals rather than as groups with norms. In such a model, an organisation becomes a network – with individuals at each node and interpersonal relationships forming the pathways. The end result is clearly a dynamic model defined by individuals, their positional structures and inter-personal relationships, each of which varies over time.

As the understanding of organisations and research has centred on the individual, the nature of the human condition - free will, value construction, emotion, past experiences, genetic and environmental predisposition - has become central to the behaviour to be observed and taken into consideration. Determinism, at least on an individual basis, is virtually impossible - certainly not in any generalised way. This is not to say that predictions cannot be made about statistically expected behaviour in an analogous way to statistical models of particle physics approximation.

The other implication of following this course of argument is that in relationships between individuals (which is basically what management seems to me to be about in the current models) there can be no such thing as an objective reality. The organisations and interactions between the individuals involved are only given meaning by the relationships and social constructs that underpin the circumstances observed.

There is a corollary impact of this analysis in that data in respect of both individuals and relationships is highly value laden, context-rich and subjective in interpretation —especially in extracting an understanding of transactions and environment. The perspective of the researcher can throw a completely different light on the understanding generated. It is, therefore, important to gain an insight into the background and values of the researcher as well as the context within which the research is taking place. Documenting this in order to understand the conceptual lens through which the research data is viewed and the value base applied to its interpretation then seems essential.

Parallels between natural sciences and management research

Management research at the individual or small group level is now being actively pursued and exhibits both sets of phenomena - macro and micro - which have given rise to difficulties in Natural Science research. Individual behaviour is inherently unpredictable and the number of influences and interactions which can affect any specific outcome multiply with the number of individuals involved - until the group becomes large enough for individual effects to be diluted or statistically randomised.

“The group” or “society” as a whole are useful concepts and a certain level of predictability of behaviour can be analysed, partly because of these statistical effects. For example, Lukes (1973) deals at some length with Durkheim’s work on suicide that addressed the subject in a very positivist manner. However, in order to do that, Durkheim had to postulate society as a moral phenomenon and that collective ways of thinking constitute a collective moral consciousness: society as a reality in its own right. The reification involved in the construct is necessary to develop the causality, law development and objective assessment by researchers that he was seeking to achieve:

“Society is not a mere sum of individuals.....the system formed by their association represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics”

The interpretation introduces the paradox that both groups and society (as a whole) can only be observed through the behaviour of individuals that comprise them and no direct measurement is possible: this questions their ontological status. Clearly both can display collective characteristics or behaviours, but suggests these arise rather from the relationships between members and correlation of individual characteristics than from any intrinsic group property.

The underlying behavioural 'norms' according to which individuals act can only be defined by detailing a value set derived from lifetime experience - an extremely complex, diverse and unpredictable affair. The interaction of these values, prejudices and personal biases with the apparently infinite possible combination of socio-political contexts and specific practical circumstances becomes unpredictable. The resulting model provides the same sort of difficulties displayed by models of the macro physical regime discussed previously - too many interacting variables with the initially second order variables eventually affecting outcomes through time. There is also an analogy with the micro-level physical models in that it is never possible to know exactly what the initial conditions are in any objective sense in practice. Recognition of the complexity and impossibility of complete or accurate deconstruction is the reality endorsed by many current researchers in the Social Science context. In Schon's (1987, p14) words:

“professional knowledge is mismatched to the changing character of the situations of practice - the complexity uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflicts which are increasingly seen as central to the world of professional practice.”

While acknowledging that there are areas of professional practice which are amenable to a positivist approach (the “high ground”) his contention (p3) is that much of professional practice, for the reasons above, is a “swampy lowland where situations are confusing messes incapable of technical solution.”

If these analogies provide a sustainable model of approach, it is not surprising that a positivist view and research approach would not be appropriate for this current research project where the concentration is on a small group as individuals and 'the self'. The question posed then must surely be whether the project be abandoned because it is 'too difficult' for the positivist research paradigm or whether a different methodology can be defined within a different knowledge / research paradigm. Such an approach may provide a valid contribution to knowledge, albeit potentially of a different nature.

Summary in respect of (post-) positivism

In the social science context, and in particular the scenario envisaged for the current research, an approach which recognises the richness of data and individual unpredictability of value based human behaviour appears to be far more apposite than any positivist model. Indeed, it is only in such a paradigm that we could consider developing an understanding of a situation such as presents itself in practice. Such a paradigm can be summarised as follows:

- *Ontology*: value and meaning represents an integral part of human behaviour and there is no objective reality to be understood: it is not only all apprehended imperfectly, but also within and totally dependent on the cultural, socio-political and value schema of the observer. This clearly has the consequence that the basis on which any theory is constructed will itself reflect a whole set of values and contexts.

Hence any “facts” which are observed to verify or falsify the theories will themselves need to be framed within the same set of values and contexts. This means that the facts will themselves be inextricably linked with the theory itself and the facts established are also dependent on a set of observer values;

- *Epistemology*: If there is no such thing as an objective reality, but all situations are observed in the context of the personal values of the observer, then:
 - the independence of the observer is compromised - not only because of the observation frame but also because of the interaction with the observed - the nature of the knowledge and the relationship between knowledge and researcher (i.e. the ontology and epistemology) become entwined;
 - the frame of reference for observation is always relative, with significant difficulties introduced for any attempts at generalisation or deterministic prediction;
 - empirical evidence is extremely unlikely to be exactly replicated so that any theory validation will need to be framed as failure to falsify - research will provide support rather than positive ‘proof’.
- *Methodology*: knowledge can be gained and enhanced in a partly theoretical but largely practical way:
 - the real world is so complex that the reduction of any research problem to a simpler state by stripping out secondary factors (second order or non-linear variables) may mean that the result becomes irrelevant in practical terms or, at least, of very limited practical application. Qualitative observation can be used to supplement purely quantitative methods and cope with the complexity and richness of data involved to provide a better understanding;
 - a lack of ability to generalise needs to be accommodated through concentration on individual cases - and a qualitative approach may prove valuable as quantitative measurements will break down;
 - any differences in personal values and background – including those of political or societal views and perceptions - between the observer and observed need to be addressed and accommodated otherwise false conclusions are likely to be drawn from data gathered. Much of the observation will be interpretative and care needs to be taken over this in terms of both data gathering and analysis;
 - to the extent that the research is aimed at knowledge that is practical in addition to theoretical, the methodology needs to be flexible enough to accommodate new paths of enquiry as the opportunities arise in addition to being robust enough to stand up to critical examination. This will be so both in terms of accommodating a growing understanding on the part of the researcher and non-controllable events that occur during the course of the research.

Again, returning to Burrell and Morgan (1979), this is quite a way along the spectrum they postulate towards the nominalist - anti-positivist – voluntarist – ideographic approach. In fact, although it certainly does not appear to reach the extreme position they associate with the German Idealism school of thought, the approach it represents certainly is significantly distinguishable from ‘traditional scientific research’ methods in its implications.

Working approach for this research

The literature reviewed is full of ‘ists’ and ‘isms’ to describe various mixtures and extents of the above analysis, many of whose definitions depend significantly on the author, while some seem mutually exclusive. It does seem that the most appropriate approach is encapsulated broadly by what Guba and Lincoln (1994) articulate as the *constructivist* approach. The underlying proposition is that there is a real world with its many “objective facts” established by consensus definitions. However, the majority of our knowledge is based on our own constructs - concepts, models and schema - which are continually being reconsidered and updated.

The above definition of knowledge provides some difficulties: the notion that it should be shared, transmitted and agreed to be so considered. Was Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity *knowledge* at the stage when nobody else understood it – or the Copernican system *knowledge* at the time that its validity was denied by the Church as society’s self-appointed arbiter? If not, at what stage did these theories become knowledge and were they then perceived to be knowledge then at the time proposed? Perhaps it is the extent to which the underlying personal perspective needs to be shared first that presents the difficulty in sharing and transmission.

The usefulness of the ideas generated would seem to depend on their correspondence to the real world and the nature of them depends on what elements of the real world to which they relate. It seems to me that *defining* a reality by consensus may be satisfying from a social/political perspective but it also seems to deny the transactional nature of interaction with reality - rather like the old conundrum of a tree falling in a forest. It also strikes at the notion of experiential learning being at the heart of managerial practice.

Heron and Reason (1997) start with the constructivist model and extend this into a Participatory Worldview paradigm. The interpretation of the world that emerges from this paradigm formalises the participative nature of experience and ‘knowing’ and sets a more meaningful framework for understanding what is still a socially constructed reality – and a methodology for research through participative inquiry. The approach could be seen as an epistemological rather than a methodological issue (Reason (1997)) because of the value frame brought to bear – regarding what one could think of as validity congruence instead of being a ‘oneness’ between the players and the reality.

Reason (1988, p11) comments in his earlier work, drawing on Skolimowski's observations that wholeness requires participation:

"The emphasis on wholeness also means we are not interested in either fragmented knowing or theoretical knowing that is separated from practice and from experience. We seek a knowing-in-action which encompasses as much of our experience as possible. This means that aspects of a phenomenon are understood deeply because we know them in the context of our participation in the whole system, not as the isolated dependent variables of experimental science."

This echoes the work of Schon (op cit.) on the "artistry" of professional practice and the work of Dreyfus (1982) on the nature of expertise. Heron (1987 p93) quotes a specific example given by Brody in respect of Inuit hunters:

"The decisions of hunters are close to the certainties of artists. By denying a reduction to a limited set of variables, the fullness of both culture and consciousness come to bear on each day's activities. The mobile and flexible behaviour of hunters is inseparable from this state of consciousness, this form of decision making."

This concentrates on "reflection-in-action" rather than the "reflection-on-action" and represents one aspect of learning and decision making rather than both. In some ways this represents 'tactics not strategy'. It also strips away from management practice the more detached decision making from the interactive action. However, the methodological implications of these two views seem similar in practice and the emphasis on participation to share the reality sits easily with intuitive values of co-operative enquiry. Guba & Lincoln (op cit.) suggest that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents – it is the extent of proactive involvement that is differentiating.

In Reason's work cited above, he also provides a useful model for categorising the kinds of knowledge which can be created through participative inquiry and linking these together: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical. Park (1999), alternatively categorises knowledge into representational, relational and reflective. The Reason categorisation clearly has direct parallels with the Kolb (1984) learning cycle again – experience, observation (in terms of personal representation through reflection in whatever form), conceptualisation (in abstract form through ideas or personal theories) and experimentation (or a knowing "in-action" or "on-action" depending on the context). Reason & Heron (1997, p3) makes an important point that:

"..... knowing will be more valid – richer, deeper, more true to life and more useful – if these four ways of knowing are congruent with each other....."

Schwandt (1994, p127), however, discusses radical constructivism in terms of von Glasersfeld's (1991, p16) proposition that knowledge is not an independent property but rather a process or activity:

"The validity of a knowledge claim is not to be found in the relationship of reference or correspondence to an independently existing world; rather, a claim is thought to be valid if it provides functional fit, that is, if it works to achieve a goal".

Vince (1995, p57) sets out a set of general principles that seem remarkably resonant with this approach and states:

- *Research is a developmental process, a learning process which engages both researcher and researched in the process of change;*
- *Research is a personal process motivated by individual desire and willingness to expand personal knowledge and understanding. Therefore it contributes towards personal learning and change.*
- *Research is experiential; the lived experience of both researcher and researched has both value and impact. This experience is constructed socially, politically and inter-personally.*
- *Research is a reflexive process; it acknowledges the continuous relationship between theory and practice as it creates individual and organisational knowledge, behaviour, structure and systems.*

In summary then, this research is based in a paradigm as follows:

Ontology / Epistemology: knowledge is relative and the “realities” value laden - with observer and phenomena (the observed plus the context) linked and interactive.

Methodology: largely subjective and qualitative - but critically examined, with significant levels of interaction between researcher, observed and independent observers to expand and refine understanding of what is ‘really happening’. This approach allowed opportunistic actions to be followed and the development of a qualitative description of the phenomena and findings. I as ‘the researcher’ worked co-operatively with ‘the researched’, although not to the full extent envisaged by Reason. On the other hand I attempted to co-operate and fully involve myself through increased self-awareness in that part of the research effort which concentrated on my development.

Methodology

Methodology has variously been defined as: “the study of the epistemological assumptions implicit in specific methods”, “ a way of looking at phenomena that specifies how a ‘method’ captures the ‘object’ of study” and the “application of a specific method”. A methodology, then, needs to provide:

- an overall structure of approach for the research in its entirety;
- a critical underpinning to improve robustness and validity;
- a framework of actions supported by various techniques and tools.

Overall structure of approach

The methodology adopted for this research project was a synthesis between participative action research (PAR) and co-operative inquiry. Eden and Huxham (1995, p5) propose fifteen characteristics of action research, the first of which is almost a definition:

“ Action research demands an integral involvement by the researcher in an intent to change the organisation. This intent may not succeed – no change may take place as a result of the intervention – and the change may not be as intended.”

Winter (1989, p11) observes that:

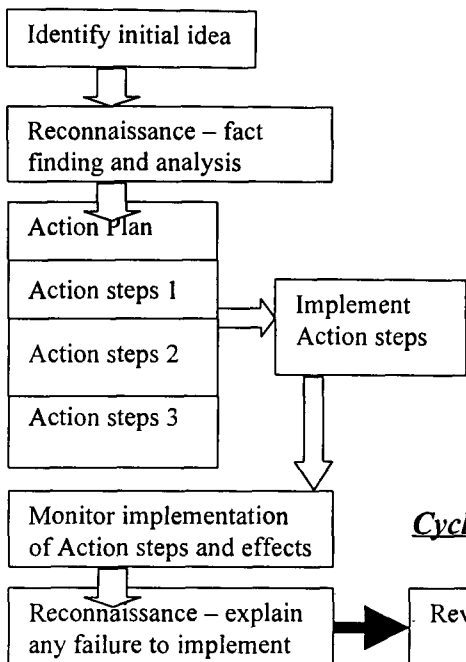
“The (other) way in which action research seeks to unite its two central concerns – improvement in practice and increased knowledge and understanding – is by linking them into an integrated cycle of activities, in which each phase learns from the previous one and shapes the next”.

For this research, a set of learning cycles (see Chapter 2) was originally envisaged in line with the experiential learning model and the works of a number of researchers in Action Research such as the early work by Lewin (1946) and more recently Carr and Kemmis (1986). The emphasis in this research was on reflective learning as dealt with by Schon (1987), Eraut (1985), Day (1993), Kemmis (1985), Bengtsson (1995), Smyth (1986) and Boud et al. (1985) - both for individuals, including myself, and as a group. Raelin (1999) proposes a number of comparative criteria against which different approaches can be compared: philosophic basis, purpose, time frame of change, depth of change, epistemology, nature of discourse, ideology, methodology, facilitator role, level of inference, personal risk, organisational risk, assessment and learning level. These are then used to compare:

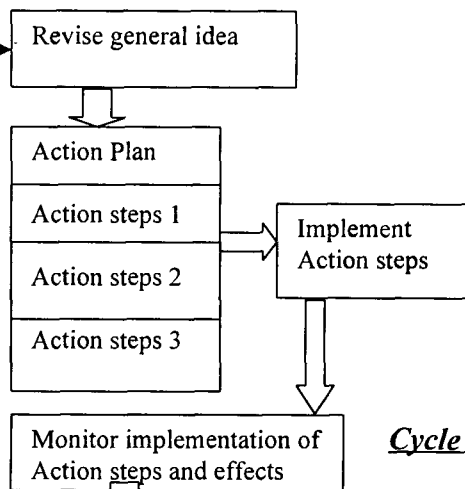
- action research: Cunningham (1993), Dickens & Watkins (1999)
- participatory research: Whyte (1991), Park (1999)
- action learning: Mumford (1994), Marsick & O’Neil (1999)
- action science: Argyris et al. (1985), Putnam (1999)
- developmental action inquiry: Torbert (1999)
- co-operative inquiry: Reason (1997, 1999)

Figure 8 - Elliot action research cycle

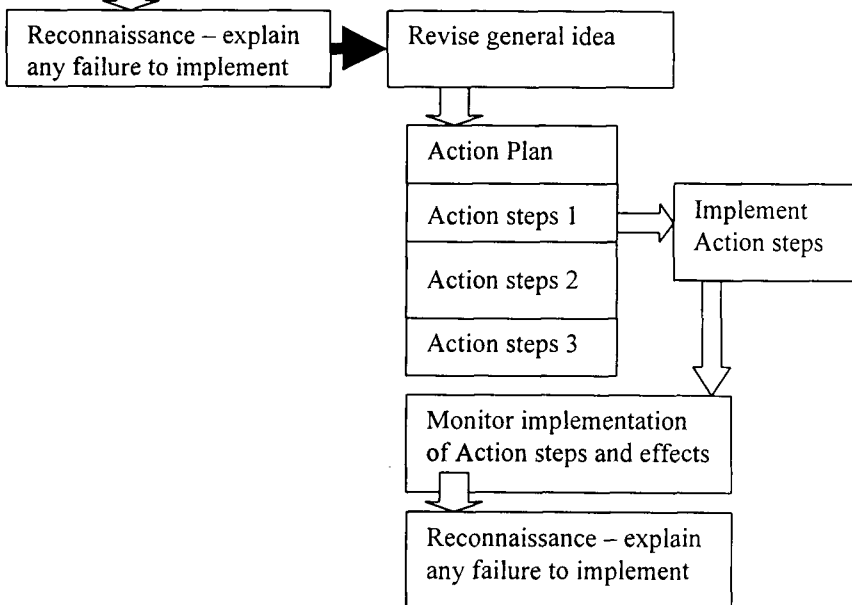
Cycle 1



Cycle 2



Cycle 3



This research followed the same learning pattern as for traditional action research, albeit with regular “fixing of reference” or validation from outside the group. The approach adopted in this research project is entirely collaborative with the staff involved, albeit they did not have the same theoretical understanding of the research methodology. Hence, the research elements remained in my domain, although staff were encouraged to increasingly suggest and initiate developments to take the whole exercise forward in terms of developing LO concepts within the Directorate. The emphasis in this research was on developing reflective learning both for individuals, including myself, and for the group - with the research following the same learning pattern involving regular external feedback.

Various approaches and models have been suggested under the “Action Strategies” or “Action Research” banners for these learning cycles in a research environment. Kemmis & McTaggart (1982) in “The Action Research Planner” suggest a formal cycle and argue that research practitioners need to be more aware of the cycle and its application than the individuals affected. Elliot (1981) refined this by providing a fairly standard “feedback loop” to ensure responsiveness (See Figure 8 above). Ebbutt (1983) further generalised this by allowing for this feedback to occur between cycles. McNiff (1988) proposed a more flexible model yet in order to accommodate the treatment of several problems in parallel. A number of examples of practical examples of research projects have been published of varying complexity, for example Wood (1988), which provide encouragement to action researchers to work through the cycles in practice rather than attempt to concentrate on the detail of a theoretical cycle before starting.

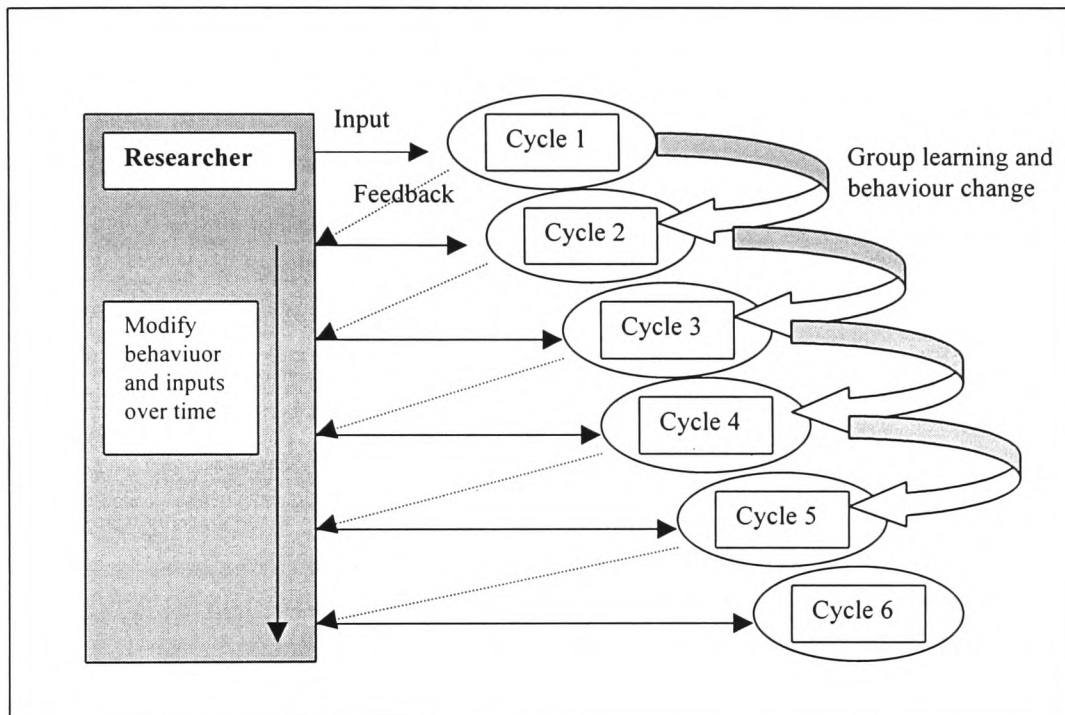
Various models have been suggested under the Action Research banner for these learning cycles in a research environment. Each suggests a formal cycle and argues that research practitioners need to be more aware of the cycle and its application than the individuals affected. The feedback loops need to continue throughout the research and the researcher is the common element that allows these to impact between cycles and iterations of the same cycle. The fact that several problems can be dealt with is critical as this is a necessity rather than a desirable feature - many changes are externally driven rather than being under the researcher’s control. Any model must cater for changes that are bound to happen to the researcher during the course of events as they unfold. Whether or not the intention is to promote positive change in the researcher, changes must necessarily occur if the researcher is effective:

- he must accumulate data and understand the issues better;
- he will, in any social sciences (especially PAR research) context, come to understand the individuals in the group better;
- he will develop both as a person and a researcher if he takes any learning away from the reflective processes necessary as the research moves between cycles.

The definition of ‘cycle’ also needs to be expanded if the context is to be made intrinsically dynamic. The term cycle would tend to suggest a fixed set of actions, varied slightly to respond to events or changes in situation. In practice, if the research is to interact with the management in any significant way, opportunities emerging from the research – or from the operational management – will present themselves on an almost continuous basis.

The representation emerging becomes far more similar to the McNiff model of ‘spirals’ in terms of research cycling. However, the McNiff model does not capture the true benefits of positively grasping opportunities as they arise – both to improve the management and operations of the organisation and at the same time open up new learning opportunities. Perhaps this is a function of the flexibility available to the researcher to redefine the context within which he (or she) is working – but in the context of this research the greater flexibility is essential.

Figure 9 - Interactive research feedback model



In this model, the researcher initiates a cycle within the research – potentially through an intervention of some kind. This intervention could be a learning experience - either personally or for the staff (type “P” or “Q”). Where the line manager is also the researcher, the nature of this intervention can become blurred between work and research. As events unfold and the researcher gains feedback from the staff, the output, the changing context and the validating external sources, the researcher’s own knowledge base and behaviour all change. Changes in researcher behaviour provide a new set of inputs to the research – although the response system will also have changed as the group involved will also have developed as a result of the first cycle. The group changes will be manifest in both individual personal development and in terms of group dynamics – relationships and different interactions between group members. The process thus becomes thoroughly dynamic and potentially opportunistic, with some ‘cycles’ being initiated before others are completed. In this way, whilst the *themes* of research follow a specific strand, the individual interventions and results become blurred – which reflects the real-life context that has many other external stimuli running as well.

The major difference in concept between this and the Elliot model (summarised in Figure 8) is the extent to which learning changes the researcher - and the fundamental impact of this learning both for the 'researched system' and the researcher's perceptions of the group responses. These interactions recur throughout the research. However, there are two further sets of stimuli that any feedback or assessment process on the part of the researcher may need to take into account in maintaining direction:

- the other parallel external inputs occurring : other change initiatives, specific individual developments (learning, circumstances, life experiences) occurring outside the research area but impinging back in on the system under review;
- the filters through which the feedback is interpreted in terms of the group and relationships with its individual members.

Critical Underpinning

The need to build in evaluation

Lewin (1946, 1948) argued that action research involves planning, executing and evaluation. The above sections deal predominantly with the planning and executing aspects, but the evaluation side is also key. Guba & Lincoln (1989, 1994) argue that evaluation techniques have developed progressively through a number of levels of sophistication: starting with measurements, moving to descriptions and 'judgements' – but have now moved into a "fourth generation evaluation" ("FGE") stage, becoming more responsive as the 'judgements' are negotiated with the stakeholders. This is an interesting observation in that consultancy work, as a specific form of 'research' in the commercial sphere, has always been thus in my experience.

The management of the research elements and analysis of the data gathered remained in my domain, although the emerging results were shared with the staff – who were actively encouraged to suggest and initiate developments to take the whole exercise forward. This represented an integrated participative action research approach which was fundamentally qualitative, but which also used a number of quantitative tools and methods to stimulate further qualitative feedback and data. The interpretation of the qualitative data was played back to both the staff (the researched group) and critical friends at each stage with the final recording thus effectively 'negotiated'.

Impact assessment – the organisation

There are, clearly, great difficulties in defining – or more difficult again assessing – what the meaning of 'better' is in terms of performance of the RO or the group of staff I manage within it, supposing I could identify any performance changes with certainty. The attribution of any changes identified to specific interventions or actions amongst a whole set of potentially interactive influences also poses difficulties.

For example, the NHS itself actually delivers healthcare services whilst the ROs work by monitoring, influence and by development of standards or working with NHS managers to develop implementation plans for policies. This behaviour represents management of others' management. Not only are most direct measurements one step removed but timescales for any specific impacts are frequently protracted.

The changing fortunes of companies and senior managements – some held up as exemplars such as those highlighted by Peters and Waterman (1982) but more recently failing – is only too obvious. It is interesting to speculate whether this is due to the vicissitudes of the market or the intrinsic failure of underlying analysis in attempting to find a single 'best' way of management. The preoccupation of many management magazines with 'hard' short-term success measures and the most recent management 'magic solution' assumes fad proportions and seems more akin to gossip than evaluation. Gill and Whittle (1992) ascribe this fairly robustly to lucrative consultancy driven packaged solutions with a predictable in-built redundancy as they develop – mentioning specifically the movements of Total Quality Management (TQM), Management by Objectives (MBO) and Organisation Development (OD). There is some resonance when one compares such management 'fads' with Freud's (1921) reflections on the power of the word within a group (bound up with acceptance, herd instinct or social image):

"Reason and arguments are incapable of combating certain words and formulas. They are uttered in solemnity in the presence of groups, and as soon as they have been pronounced an expression of respect is visible on every countenance, and all heads are bowed".

Richard Pascale (1990, p18) more recently comments that:

"It might even be argued that an indicator of management panic is the consumption rate and shelf life of business fads.....companies apply them in a piecemeal fashion and shift from one to another too frequently. What is lacking is a grasp of the larger context....."

Even widely accepted and less 'faddish' or apparently fundamental tools such as the Strategic Planning concepts developed by Mintzberg (1994) and the TQM concepts (see Schneiderman, 1998) seem susceptible to the same ebb and flow. A survey by Deloitte published in the Economist (18 Feb 1989) concluded there was no correlation between establishing corporate planning functions and success, though the reasons for this may be complex. The ephemeral nature of 'fads' is in addition to the gradual evolution of theoretical management thinking seen within management literature since the start of this century – apparent in the collection of articles edited by Pugh (1990).

Hence, the approach adopted of assessing improved effectiveness has been to attempt to gauge to what extent the staff feel they better understand their own practice and development needs. If staff can dynamically recognise what is effective in their actions within their environment as it changes and be flexible enough to respond, then this might almost intrinsically represent 'better' even if we are not too sure what 'good' is. A significant element of the RO work is concerned with managing change, together with handling change in our own environment – increased flexibility and confidence of approach is thus one indicator of improved practice.

Impact assessment - my own approach and practice

Townley (1994) discusses the difference between self-knowledge and self-awareness: the difference seems really in the use of the revelations. Drucker (1999) discusses the importance of self-awareness, then sets out three questions:

- What are my strengths?
- How do I perform? (Am I a reader or a listener? / how do I learn?)
- What are my values?

Drucker (1999, p70) then observes:

"Knowing the answer to these questions enables a person to say to an opportunity, an offer or an assignment 'Yes, I will do that. But this is the way I should be doing it. This is the way it should be structured. This is the way relationships should be. These are the kind of results you should expect from me, and in this time frame, because this is the way I am."

This observation provides an interesting parallel between managing oneself and managing others. It points out the criticality of understanding one's impact on others and working to one's strengths, the failure that arises from mistaking one's style and strengths and the weaknesses inherent in not being aware of the results.

I produced a biographical review early on in the process and shared this with the members of my research learning set. This exercise explored some of the ideas of Claxton (1992), both to initiate the reflective process more formally and provide some sort of "baseline" understanding of the environmental and contextual influences on my character and practice. My personal journal, maintained along lines proposed by Richardson (1994) and Walker (1994) during the research, was intended to provide a chronological record of my motivations, thoughts and learning points in respect of my management practice during the course of my involvement in the programme.

Internal validity

Heron (1997) discusses the issues of validity within participative inquiry at some length and contrasts the assessment of validity between positivist and constructivist / participative inquiry paradigms - an issue of importance for any qualitative approach and a key consideration given the nature of this research topic and findings. In simple terms:

- since the researcher is an integral part of the system being observed - and indeed has taken a stance that the intervention planned is likely to improve the workings of the group observed - how closely will or can the account really be taken as reflecting the 'reality' of the system ?

-
- given that each of those involved is likely to perceive the situation in a different way, depending on their own circumstances, outlook and background, how possible is it to establish a consensus of perception or coincidence of 'realities' - and prevent unintentional projections of meaning or perceptions?
 - given that the researcher (me) is also the line manager in this case, to what extent can the staff responses be disentangled from the line relationship - and how can this be best achieved, potentially especially in maintaining the efforts involved and their participation ?
 - how well could the proposed planning stand up to exceptional time pressures and the need to balance interventions and reflection?
 - there are a large number of different influences at play in the situation under exploration, so to what extent can cause and effect be disentangled in order to support any generalised theory ?
 - observations on my own practice are clearly reflective in nature, but to what extent are they self-fulfilling or based on post-justification ? Are others' observations of me, themselves subjective accounts based on less complete or analysed information likely to be more accurate ? Or are external perceptions the same as 'reality' if they are commonly held ?

One approach might be to look at the performance of the group who have been participating in the action research and evaluate its performance - and mine. If there are to be benefits achieved, then would it not be reasonable to expect the group, and the individuals comprising it, to perform better ?

In the long term and given a whole range of different environments, the answer to this latter expectation would presumably be positive. However, in particular sets of circumstances other approaches and management styles could just as easily provide 'better results' - it clearly depends on definitions of 'better' and 'results' as well as other environmental events. Very few performance indicators set up would identify other than very crude or direct output measures e.g. financial. It is, rather, the development of staff through understanding their own strengths, weaknesses and needs - together with providing a suitable management environment - which should better equip them to tackle a range of different situations, most particularly to be continuing working effectively in a changing environment.

The attribution of success between an individual's attributes / skills and serendipitous circumstances within the environment in which the individual operates is rarely undertaken, at least not by those who are deemed successful. It is the results and not the means that get recounted, though it is probably the means that might ensure continuing success in the longer term. The measurement systems available, however, are not really conducive to helping measure the impact of the current interventions in any meaningful way.

A different approach has, therefore, to be taken in which subjective assessments seem unavoidable. Hence, a process needs to be developed to try to ensure that the conclusions emerging reasonably interpret what has transpired, that the account is complete in its critical elements. Any lessons that can be drawn from the events initiated and observed should then be logically and reasonably extracted from the events. Within the research a three phase set of validation cycles was proposed to address these requirements and the issues raised above.

1. The staff themselves would be 'polled' with the findings as a part of the update questionnaires, within the developmental workshops and the one-to-one meetings;
2. The critical friends from outside the Directorate would be provided with the written material as produced - for feedback on perceptions and validity of conclusions. Since these worked within the Ro but outside the directorate and main project areas, they were familiar enough with the staff and organisation to provide insights and informed criticism;
3. My learning set would be provided with the written materials, but also a discussion of approach as it developed, to provide criticism of the techniques employed and views on my own development - the research supervisors, hopefully, would also be able to contribute to this last feedback process.

This set of cycles should provide both a measure of validation, supplemented in the case of my own development by both the formal developmental reviews and periodic reworking of the profiles completed by both staff and family / friends. The feedback processes in themselves would perhaps provide a further intervention (in the case of staff feedback) within the research process. In terms of my own development, the personality profiling provides some quantifiable measures, although undoubtedly crude. There would also be issues of whether any personal changes were really the result of the management learning processes or wider life experiences not directly related to the research and reflective processes. The feedback processes proposed would provide, however, a way in to discuss with some of my 'validators' what happened within some sort of framework.

The external validation processes would be particularly needed to address the 'self-censorship' or 'self-delusion' effects in terms of assessing changes in my own practice and development. As RD Laing (1970, p31) puts it:

"Narcissus fell in love with his image, taking it to be another.

Jill is a distorting mirror to herself.

Jill has to distort herself to appear undistorted to herself.

To undistort herself, she finds Jack to distort her distorted image in his distorting mirror. She hopes that his distortion of her distortion may undistort her image without her having to distort herself."

As far as my personal development was concerned, the idea was not to play with the perceptions themselves but to change behaviour in a way consistent with my own fundamental personal values and objectives. This behaviour change, achieved through reflection on/in action and better understanding of the framework, should result in improved management (professional) practice - this should be reflected (however distorted) through others' perceptions. The similarities in the reflections should provide a common understanding of behavioural changes.

Framework of Actions

Planning

Some initial data collections were instigated in September 1996 in anticipation of the broad outline of the research topic as it was already becoming clear that the research would revolve around a concept of development and obtaining an early view or benchmark of the initial situation might become valuable. These included some initial 'benchmarking' of staff perceptions of the organisation and myself to coincide with the production of the original biographical assignment. A research plan was then drafted in December 1996 to try to adopt a more formal approach to the exercise and monitor the learning cycles. This was virtually continuously under amendment as the outlines of the research topic became clearer and external events impacted on the RO work and the research group.

Full staff involvement started in April 1997 with a number of workshops. Discussions had already been held with some of the staff on an individual basis about reflective learning as a part of their Personal Development Programmes (PDPs). With two of the staff this was already an ongoing part of the one-to-one process by the start of April 1977, but time had not permitted following the majority up. The Business Plans of the Directorate were built 'bottom up' during February /March 1997 as a part of the exercise. Responsibilities and duties were re-framed and both training and PDP agreed to support the new structures - taken into account in the research planning.

Planned interventions within the action research

Virtually all the data gathering undertaken or planned represents an intervention of one sort or another - especially the attempts to change the learning practices of the staff in the group. Since communication is a critical handling feature of any change management process, this in itself should promote a more focused response and positive attitude from the staff to the changes in train. The key interventions planned were intended to produce three effects:

- *Reflective learning*

This reflective learning was to be effective for each individual and it was thought that this would be more effective if each staff member were to be conscious and aware of the framework and process. Guidance through feedback and greater communication would be provided to the staff as a part of the regular supervision / appraisal contacts in terms of areas of focus. The emphasis for each individual would be on mapping their own path through the Schon (1987) swamp without getting eaten by the alligators. The staff were encouraged to reflect on their actions, performance and development. The personal reflective processes were reinforced through informal feedback, formal sessions built into the Directorate away days and by insisting on written accounts of learning points within the formal development sessions and appraisals to undertake a reflective approach to their work. The idea of learning logs was introduced at an early stage but not built into the formal cycles until later when their use had become accepted. {In practice, the use of learning logs was never to be fully effective – see later}.

- *Action learning*

This “action learning” was to be shared between team members as far as parallel responsibilities could work - a sharing of problems and learning. In many ways this was to be about sharing answers to problems - or at least alternative methods of solution. The individual one-to-one staff meetings already in place to manage ongoing work and projects were extended to provide feedback – and were expanded into two’s or three’s of staff so that common problems could be discussed with myself acting as facilitator (sometimes contributor) rather than appraiser. This approach was built very much around the ideas of Newbold (1982, p2) and Revans (1982, p633).

“In action learning real managers share ideas and tackle real problems with their counterparts, which effect change in the real world by helping each other.” (Newbold)

“The development of the self by the mutual support of equals: even if we cannot describe it as a communion of saints , it is at least a conspiracy of innocents.” (Revans)

- *Accumulation of cognitive knowledge*

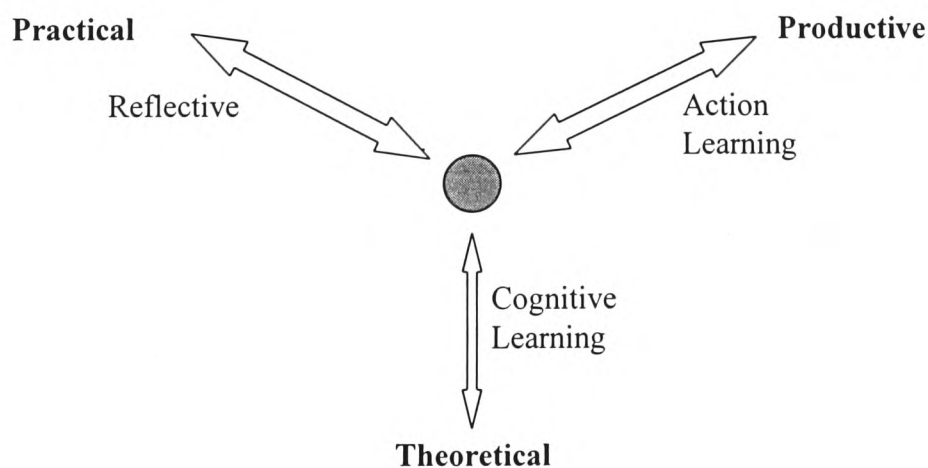
This development of cognitive knowledge for each staff member was to be based very much on individual need although it would be supported by a structured and organised set of activities for all who expressed interest as a group. There seems to be a clear parallel need to provide a theoretical basis in areas where that is particularly applicable - specifically in terms of specific skills, techniques and management tools - quite apart from professional technical knowledge. The initial theoretical exposures were initially thought to be best focused on specific management topics of general applicability to staff, very much in line with the approach taken to date within the traditional development path. These were dealt with through a mixture of internal (see below) and external courses / seminars run by consultants (mainly these dealt with specific management skills).

The Directorate internal workshops (see later) would build on ideas I had used previously when I organised regular sessions for my staff in my previous employment organisations. A single staff member would be given the task of presenting a topic – with the use of case studies supplied from various courses I had attended. The learning in these previous developmental sessions had always seemed to be more personal to those concerned - at the same time providing real opportunities for them to practise specific skills: presentation, managing meetings and so on. Each of these sessions would conclude with a discussion of the process and the personal skills after the subject of the presentation and case studies had been completed. For the staff to become proactive in their own development and better understand the development framework, some initial concepts to be handled would be the nature of learning, learning cycles and an introduction to ideas on reflection, professional practice, management learning and learning organisations.

To reinforce the importance attached to these as an approach to the staff internally, a seminar would be arranged for all the Directors of Finance in the NHS in the Region (60 in number) to introduce and promulgate these ideas and approaches. My staff internally would be involved in specifying and helping put the presentations together. The RO training manager and communications manager would be fully involved with this process, both for this research and their own research projects. This was perhaps significantly easier than it might have been because of the fact that the former had recently handled these ideas in his MA whilst the latter wished to build these into her MBA learning.

The three learning effects – action learning in a shared way, personal reflective learning and formal theoretical learning - were seen very much as being complementary. In nature they seem to mirror the three Aristotelian classifications of knowledge introduced earlier: practical, productive and theoretical. In just the same way that the types of knowledge are not mutually exclusive, neither are the ways of acquiring them on a personal level. An important consideration is how one can reinforce the other and open up avenues of exploration in each case.

Figure 10 - Learning effects



Schon (1987) comments upon effective learning as a balance between technical and practice knowledge so staff have been encouraged to undertake the first two processes themselves – individually and in natural sub-groups - but have been supported in a more formal and structured way for the third.

Revans (1982) (expanded in analysis by Sutton (1990)) proposes this explicitly in his statements on programmed knowledge (P) and questioning insight (Q) type learning. One personal objective of starting my research project was to find out more about other people's Ps, to formalise the Qs I had learned intuitively over the last years and watch how my Ps and Qs fitted together. Development workshops would be run to take this forward for key topic areas, specifically to prepare the ground for the first two effects.

The first three workshops would be based on specific topics intended to support both general learning and the Action Research concepts, with further workshops run as needs became apparent and confirmed by the staff. The first three sets of topics covered would, therefore, be:

- reflective learning and learning cycles – based on the ideas of Schon (1987) and Kolb (1996);
- leadership concepts – drawing on material from Kanter (1996) and Senge (1996);
- teamworking – based on the ideas of Critchley and Casey (1996).

Later workshops would deal with organisational culture, motivation theory and the concepts of learning organisations. In addition staff had already identified a number of more direct skills training needed in an initial 'away-day' soon after I had taken up post – for negotiation and influencing styles – and these would be added to the programme. Staff would also be provided with a number of contemporary management research articles and journals – also a number of key books purchased for the library.

Methods - Proposed and Actual

Methods Proposed

A research plan was produced in September / October 1996 and shared with my learning set and supervisor. This was to be reviewed and updated as a part of the transfer process from MPhil to PhD registration at the two year stage, especially building on the learning to date. It was specifically expected at that stage to refocus on the emerging findings and redefine objectives for the second phase of the external issues, whilst continuing with the same regime of collecting data on my own practice. Note that details on numbers of interviews, questionnaires and relevant dates and timings are included in the **Methods Actual** part of this section.

Data gathering on my own practice

Self assessment

Providing anything like an accurate assessment of one's own state and development was anticipated to be by far the most difficult aspect of the research for me. In many ways, this would be the ultimate 'data rich' source - unlimited numbers of in-depth 'interviews' and opportunities to gain feedback at every stage of the process in terms of every type of interaction. However, there would potentially be a major problem of validation and accuracy in terms of assessing changes in my own practice and developing a description or understanding of self that would be common and recognisable to those with whom I worked and interacted. This accuracy of assessment and analysis would be of critical importance to both the development effort and validity of research findings:

- how accurate and honest could I be in terms of self and my understanding of self: how much would be self-delusion and how much change would be consciously recognised or sub-consciously acknowledged ?
- how much of a gap would there be between what I believed I was and how others saw me - and would this vary appreciably between the different settings within which I lived - especially how much difference would there be between work and outside work ?
- how much difference would there be between my perception of self and others perception of me - particularly would there be the same degree of difference in those areas which potentially could be more objectively measured and those 'softer' areas of relationships and interactions ?
- does it matter what I *am* in terms of my management effectiveness - or only how others *perceive me* ?

If I had ambition to understand my own development, then a better understanding of what I was and how others saw me would clearly be important, especially if this were to change over time. Some sort of set of tools to approach this difficult task would clearly be needed to help provide both a mechanism for accessing others' views of me and to introduce an element of objectivity into my own view of self. Once such a process becomes interpretative, then it clearly becomes subjective, but this may be moderated by an element of validation - through gaining feedback from my learning set, from discussions with my 'co-opted' researchers or critical friends within work and finally through talking about the issues with friends and at home.

Some interesting ways of considering behaviour and awareness can be pursued by reflection along the lines of different models, such as proposed by Mosak (1970) (lifestyles) and Torbert & Fisher (1992) (development parallels). In the research there would clearly be a difficult balance to strike in terms of feedback from others. Providing and receiving feedback engages some of the deepest instincts of self-protection, as observed by Nicholson (1998). Some, especially colleagues and staff working for me, might be more frank and objective if they were able to provide feedback anonymously. However, although anonymous feedback could be very useful, it would preclude immediate exploration of any data provided that was not immediately obvious in its impact or which was not consistent with what was expected.

Any feedback, and indeed probably all, would obviously be enmeshed with the agendas, prejudices and background of the contributors. This bias might be especially the case in some particular cases, as I would deliberately include some individuals in my quest for feedback where there could be an element of friction or difference in views between us. This would be partly to develop a balanced view and partly from a practical management desire to open up a route to help resolve conflict. In these cases, the extent of differences in perceptions of me could actually be quite wide. It would also be interesting to assess how this could manifest itself in wider differences in the assessment of others between the 'harder' and 'softer' aspects of my behaviour.

Psychological profiling

"Lifestyles Inventory". (See Appendix 3). I undertook this particular assessment for the first time in 1993 when I completed the questionnaire and went through the results with one of the personnel development staff at Coopers & Lybrand (C&L). I completed the forms again in September 1996 to see whether there was any appreciable change. The intention was to repeat this each September to try to track any changes. A time elapse of just 12 months between reappraisal might be too small to pick up changes, but over the next three to four years could yield evidence of change that became identifiable.

One of the interpretation issues arising would clearly be whether changes in the numbers were due to me understanding myself better or due to real changes in personality characteristics – or indeed more random inconsistencies in assessment due to interpretation or mood swings. I intended to address this particular set of issues by exploring changes when and if they arose. I also wished to attempt to correlate any changes apparent in my own perceptions with any observable differences in the perceptions of others. Therefore, in parallel, a number of others (colleagues, staff and non-work friends) would be asked to complete the same questionnaires based on their perceptions of me. Their responses would be analysed between home and work perspectives. There could be difficulty in moderating the responses and, in repeating the exercise periodically with the same people, separating out their developing understanding of me from real changes.

With both my results and the feedback from others, the main objective and indicator would be to explore through discussion any changes noted rather than place a great deal of emphasis on the numerical value of the scores themselves. The absolute values of the scores would not be, in themselves, particularly useful, but any consistent drift in mean scores of particular aspects of behaviour could provide an indication of real change which would then need to be explored through focused discussion and feedback.

Any differences between responses from those at work and those outside could be interesting and would warrant explanation if significant. Any differences in assessment would have to be followed up to explore if they arose from real differences in my behaviour or the different expectations from the relationships. This analysis could be helped by including one or two ‘cross-overs’ – long standing friends with whom I used to work previously and therefore might be expected to combine both perspectives.

Whilst there could be a benefit anticipated in increasing the numbers of those involved in this profile feedback exercise, those who really know me well enough to respond “accurately” would be relatively small in number. On the other hand, since “perception is truth”, feedback from those who did not know me particularly well - and most work contacts inevitably fall into this category – might also prove valuable. Exploring any changes over time for this category of participants would be far more difficult to achieve, although any changes in feedback from those who move from this category to knowing me would be both more feasible and interesting to follow up.

“Myers Briggs” (MB)

The MB test is a profiling tool that all my staff had completed during previous courses and initiatives. By chance, I had not previously used this myself, so I would complete this early in the research process in order to use the results later on in the research. However, this would again be specifically used as a medium to generate more feedback from staff rather than from the specific results provided. If the exercise worked well then it might be repeated to provide an indication of any changes and to spark further discussions around what these might be.

Formal Appraisal Cycles

The six monthly normal appraisal cycle (each April and September) itself would provide me with feedback from the Regional Director (RD) and this would be approached with a specific intent to feed into this research process. The process itself is focused on a set of self-appraisal forms supported by detailed commentary from the RD. In practice this would be supplemented by monthly 'update' sessions dealing largely with specific work issues but increasingly (hopefully) as time progressed with developmental issues as well. These would be reflected also in the journal.

Formal 360 degree assessment

I had helped introduce formal 360 degree assessments when I was with C&L - but this was with staff with whom I had already by then established a fair degree of trust and rapport. I hoped to be able to incorporate this approach into the formal assessment and development reviews with my staff during the course of the research – in addition to the more informal approach already proposed.

Biographical Journal

An initial autobiographical assignment was completed as the first element of the Guided Doctorate programme in September 1996, dealing with the development of my values and management practice. This was discussed with family, friends and learning set, providing a number of insights and discussions I had not expected. I found this difficult to write, although the benefits proved significant in opening up both an approach and providing specific insights. Some of the issues are incorporated into chapter 4.

The biographical journal was intended to provide a 'baseline' in terms of understanding my perspectives at the time and perhaps then being able to track my subsequent development. In practice this had already helped me significantly in understanding myself and my development. Whilst undoubtedly I had been selective in the areas of my experience that I had explored, revisiting events in my past and looking at them in a different way certainly helped me understand myself and the influences on me better.

A formal reflective journal was started in September 1996, to carry on from the assignment, although the initial weeks proved to be more a diary chronicle than a reflective journal. I expected the quality of the thought and analysis to improve as my own understanding and ideas became clearer. It was intended that this journal should be continued throughout the project and would be a personal record rather than being shared with colleagues or even my learning set – although feedback would be sought on the issues that were arising from the writing.

Data gathering in respect of the Finance Directorate and RO

Formal and semi-formal interviews

A range of formal and semi-formal interviews along the lines described in Cohen & Manion (1994) were planned to gain the views of staff, internal colleagues and some of the external “stakeholders” with whom my Directorate in the Regional Office had the greatest contact.

Staff

The ongoing one-to-one meetings were arranged on a regular basis with each of my eight directly reporting staff, normally lasting around an hour each in my office at the SWRO. These meetings had already been in place on a monthly basis since I started in post in February 1996 and originally intended purely to cover specific work issues as part of the supervisory and work planning arrangements. However, as a result of discussions with the staff they would always henceforth, from October 1996, include a learning / reflective content (essentially a monthly unstructured interview) – as would the formal appraisal cycle and annual assessments, though more formal and structured. The meeting notes were taken at the time – to form a record of what needed to be done in terms of business activity and to record impressions and development issues in respect of research objectives. The intention was to provide both an intervention to encourage a reflective learning approach for each of the staff and to collect data on their / the Directorate development.

“Externals”

The individuals identified for interviews and feedback, chosen for specific reasons, as noted below were:

- Colin Reeves and Ken Jarrold (NHS Directors of Finance & Performance and HR respectively)
- Ian Carruthers, Pam Charlwood and Kate Barnard (Chief Executives of Health Authorities)
- Ian Tipney, Rhona McDonald, Jackie Meekings (Finance Directors of Health Authorities)

Colin was my national functional manager (and from April 1999 my line manager), previously RDF in the London Region. Ken was formerly Regional General Manager of the Wessex Region (half the merger into the S&WRHA) and responsible nationally for RO integration into the DH (now CE of Durham HA), whilst Pam was his counterpart in the SWRHA (the other half of the S&WRHA) and is now CE of Avon HA. Ian acted as temporary RD of the newly merged S&WRHA until he returned to Dorset HA after 18 months. Kate had been in charge of personnel development in the Wessex Region, became a HA CE and is now managing Organisational Development for the NHS Executive. Jackie was my predecessor in post (ex Wessex RHA), became FD of a HA but is now leading the Specialist Commissioning for the Region and Rhona her pre-merger counterpart (ex SW RHA) became FD of a HA and is now in Avon HA. Ian Tipney was my most regular contact in the NHS and had been FD for Ian Carruthers for a number of years.

Hence, virtually all had a good working knowledge of the Regional tier, all had a continuing stakeholder interest and ongoing contacts with the RO – and most knew the majority of the Directors at the RO. These eight between them would be able to provide a good set of external assessments and some validation – though personal perspectives would clearly abound. The different perspectives, however, should help provide a better understanding, although there would clearly be sensitivities about confidentiality – especially about their views on myself and my colleagues.

The interviews would be undertaken between March 1997 and May 1997 then repeated between March 1999 and May 1999 to provide a two-year comparison. A high level of flexibility would be given to the interviewees to develop different areas to different levels in order not to restrict feedback or miss unexpected insights. However, they would all be intended to address the same basic issues noted below:

- perceptions of the RO (role, effectiveness, leadership, cohesion);
- perceptions of the RO management team and their individual interactions, myself included (specifically);
- perceptions of the Finance and IM&T Directorate and the interviewees dealings with the staff;
- perceptions of the culture of the RO and Finance and IM&T Directorate and whether they saw the organisation as a homogeneous whole (or what significant differences they perceive), what changes they perceived over time and how they believed the RO fitted into the NHS Executive and wider Department.

All the interviews would be undertaken within a strict understanding of confidentiality. In some cases this might, understandably, need discussion of why the interviews were being requested and the purpose for which the information was being gathered. However, it was anticipated that all those approached would be both interested and curious about the process and my motivation for doing the research (only Colin was already aware of this at the outset) – all were expected to be positive and helpful.

The interviews were all planned to be formal in their setting as I believed this would introduce an element of objectivity which would be helpful. I already knew a number of those involved quite well and there was a good degree of trust already in place that would help with the openness of the feedback anticipated. A semi-structured approach was planned to the content of the interviews. I wished to raise a number of specific issues within each of the four major topics above (depending on the individual being interviewed), but wished to allow each as much latitude as possible to deal with their impressions and thoughts. Each of the interviews would be tape recorded and later transcribed for analysis (see later in this chapter for what actually happened and chapters 5 and 6 for an analysis of the data resulting).

Staff Attitudinal Questionnaires (SAQs)

Regular “Staff Attitudinal Questionnaires” (See Chapter 6) would be used to assess staff attitudes, perceptions and concerns. The whole office had already been circulated with questionnaires to assess readiness for Investors in People purposes in November 95. Whilst these were not totally suitable for my purposes, they did contain a number of very helpful questions and the responses included a host of useful narrative descriptions and comments. The concept was to take these as a benchmark and develop a more appropriate set of questions - but keep some core relevant questions to track changes in organisational attitudes and development over a period of three or four years.

The staff in my Directorate were circulated immediately in September 1996 to take this forward as a part of the initial benchmarking, with the intention of repeating this across the wider office and using a broader set of questions in April 1997. This could start to provide an indication of change over time and a comparative set of measures between different parts of the organisation. The intention was then to maintain this as an annual cycle. Although retaining some of the core questions to attempt to measure changes taking place, the questionnaire would increasingly be focused on RO culture change and developmental issues.

Whilst the questionnaire feedback would be partly quantitative, staff would be encouraged to provide as much in the way of comments as possible. The wider questionnaires would be completed anonymously, although my Directorate staff would be encouraged to put their names on theirs. The quantitative analysis would be simple and intended to provide merely a focus on areas of change or significant / extreme perceptions. The scoring system devised was intentionally coarse so that, given a natural tendency to gravitate to the middle ground for such questionnaires, any overall extreme results would be a natural trigger for exploratory discussions. These were intended both for groups and, for my staff, potentially on an individual basis.

Workshops

Development sessions for the Directorate as a whole would be used to discuss the output from the questionnaires and explore apparent anomalies. These would also be used to explore the feelings and perceptions of the group as a whole. The intention was to use workshops within each of our three-monthly Directorate ‘away-days’ where we spent whole days at various locations away from the RO to provide a focused environment (see Appendix 2 for dates) to provide discussion fora – these would be linked to specific topic management development. These away-days would be split into “business” and “development” with the development sessions taking the majority of the time. It was envisaged that a number of “special issue” developmental away-days could be added to this cycle.

Observation

I would undertake ongoing observations of staff – and my colleagues - and the way in which we as a regional management team handled the management and change issues as they arose. A large number of changes were anticipated as the RHA moved into “RO mode” – whatever that turned out to be. These observations would be recorded within the journal, some discussed with colleagues to establish a better understanding. Some of the obvious areas to observe right from the beginning were:

- “Single Centre” changes – how the relationships, responsibilities, accountability and work allocation between the ROs and the “centre” evolved over time and as problems arose;
- inter-directorate workings – how the different Directorates managed to work together internally and how this affected potential internal restructuring;
- the redefinition of responsibilities between the RO and NHS organisations as the RO moved away from the RHA direct management role - especially through ‘new government’ exercises if the government did change in 1997 (as did indeed happen) – possibly changes in relationships between ROs and NHS and NHS structures again (as also happened more than once);
- how the culture of the RO evolved as it worked closer with the ‘centre’ and in particular the Department of Health – especially their procedures and processes were adopted.

The issue of documenting the data emerging from ongoing observations was considered to be a potential problem. Since much of this would inevitably be gained from my management activities, the overlap and integration of management role and research activities would become very blurred. Individual observations would thus need to be reflected upon and documented in this way rather than as directly transcribed or documented events and perceptions.

Internal Initiatives and Documents

Further material would also be gathered from a number of major initiatives underway within the DH and other ROs that would impact on the research area. The data thus collected should provide background, context and data from which to gauge the impact of other initiatives underway. Examples of this would include, for example, the Department-wide Investors in People (IiP) accreditation pursued, Regional Agenda for People (RAP), various staff dissertations in pursuit of MA and MBA qualifications, RO integration programme, a number of other RO reviews, a series of internal management seminars and workshops planned and the Senior Civil Service initiatives in wider Departments.

Literature review

There were three major categories of literature that seemed to be relevant:

-
- texts dealing with research paradigms / methodologies / methods: this was relevant in order to explore what was “doable” and how it could be “done”. The options open to me were constrained by what I wanted to know - the questions I wanted to answer were the driving factor rather than selecting a topic suitable for research. This may have been ambitious, but meant dealing with the working environment rather than any controlled review;
 - academic texts and research topics directed at the area of specific research interest: learning, reflection and expertise; the learning organisation; change and leadership; and the Public Sector;
 - academic texts and ‘management guru’ literature dealing with wider management topics and development to provide a wider theoretical basis for providing frameworks for the reflective learning.

Selecting a starting point would be a difficult decision. Without work on the first, it would be impossible to frame a methodology, although I had a reasonable familiarity and grasp (though not formalised) of data collection and methods through consultancy work. Without a wider and deeper familiarity with some of the basic management concepts and texts, the context might be overlooked the data collection pitched inappropriately.

An intuitive compromise emerged – start reading up the methodology, but start the data collection (such as the initial questionnaires) anyway: any irrelevant collection could be discarded and the analysis would be undertaken later when a better understanding had been achieved. A start on the wider ‘guru texts’ and academic texts that offered fundamental insights would also be made. The specific research area texts would be looked at in the second phase – those circulated as core as a part of the guided doctorate programme were read immediately – and treated as a ‘validity test’ on the findings that were emerging in the first phase.

Validity

The validity of my interpretation of events, data gathered and conclusions drawn from the analysis was a key area to be considered. The basic technique to be used throughout the research would be to subject all the feedback and material produced (within confidentiality constraints) to the scrutiny of others – my staff, the external interviewees, the critical friends, friends externally and colleagues in the learning Set. Wherever possible, a sort of ‘triangulation’ technique would be used where interpreted data would always be replayed to another set of observers who knew enough about the situation to critically assess the material developed – both in terms of confirmation and challenge. The literature reviewed would provide a different sort of validity check in that the outcomes would be reviewed against what would be expected elsewhere from established theory and research – in particular any findings or conclusions that provided apparent contradiction or that could be of potentially wider relevance.

Data analysis

A wide variety of data capture was proposed from a variety of sources to try to capture the complexity of the organisation and behaviours and this needs a battery of different analysis techniques to be employed, also. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative researchers as bricoleurs and this seems to capture this process. While some data would be analysed in 'batches' – such as Staff Attitudinal Questionnaire returns – most data captured would be fed immediately into the 'system' for interpretation and discussion. This would clearly change the group context accordingly and provide another intervention into the research – the methodology summarised in Figure 9. Coffey & Atkinson (1998) advocate exactly such a diversity of techniques, in order to provide a number of different perspectives which more completely help to expose and explore the situations being reviewed.

The interviews would use some of the Cohen & Mannion (1994) techniques but none of the structured coding and analysis described, for example by Coffey & Atkinson in their analysis (see page 137 for actual analysis activity). Much of the probing in the formal interviews would be done at the time and interviewees encouraged to build their own constructs. In the informal interviews, much of the 'screening' would be subjective and filtered and tested against emerging findings as an internal cycling process. Whilst some of the profiles and questionnaires data would be numerical, simple techniques would be used to highlight extremes or trends, with exploration then qualitative. Analysis, validity checking and the further collection of data and composition would be closely meshed and cycled.

The drawing out of conclusions or theoretical constructs would be based on the Glaser & Strauss (1979) Grounded Theory approach. However, and in retrospect, Gummesson (2000) and Partington (2000) bring together the issues of grounded theory, pre-knowledge and research practice and draw some simplification into practical situations, which in fact represent very much the intended process. Indeed Partington (2000, p95) quotes Bryman (1988) in support of his contention that "*in published management research there is little evidence of the successful application of any precisely delineated, prescribed approach*". He proceeds to advocate the application of Grounded Theory principles, but applied in an individual research context provided that methodological considerations are taken fully into account. This was the approach adopted, as can be seen in the next section.

Methods Actual

Scope

The question of whether to involve all the staff in my Directorate or not, in what capacity and to what extent, was an early issue. The 25 staff split fairly naturally into three (later four) categories:

- professional finance staff (eight qualified accountants - six of whom are senior members of staff - and a training manager);
- professional Information Management & Technology staff (seven members - all senior members engaged in managing projects throughout the S&W Region);
- (later after the first reorganisation in Autumn 1997) professional Estates Management staff (six members – Quantity Surveyors, Engineers and project managers)
- support staff (business manager and three secretaries).

Two of the accountants hold PhDs - one in biochemistry and the other in mediaeval history, whilst four of the others hold postgraduate qualifications so that interest in the nature of the research was sparked at an early stage. The support staff, on the other hand, came from a different academic background and the approach and theoretical basis proved to be more of a challenge. The decision was to fully involve all 25 staff in the learning, interventions and processes. To do otherwise would have been divisive as part of the intention was to build a team approach, mutual feedback and support. The reflective learning model seems to be just as relevant to the support staff as to the others and we had individual discussions to this effect following the first workshop that dealt with the whole issue in April 1997. It seemed critical that all were involved in the Learning Organisation development as the ways of working and culture development needed to embrace all – and equality in treatment and openness was an element of this.

Interventions

Virtually all of the data gathering represented an intervention of one sort or another - especially the attempts to change the learning practices of the staff in the group. The mere fact that the time spent in developing and enabling the staff is greater than it would otherwise have been indicates both a change in my own practice (not purely ascribable to the research) and provides an impact on theirs. Since communication is a critical handling feature of any change management process, this in itself would promote a better response and attitude to the changes in train !

The idea had initially been to intervene without explaining the underlying reasoning, to try to eliminate some of the impacts from the Group development. However, between September 1996 and February 1997 it became clear that a much fuller involvement could be the only way of making this fully effective. There were two reasons for this -

- time constraints were such that the staff had to own the process and take the initiative as it was impossible for me as the researcher to provide the impetus and energy on my own;
- the staff development itself demanded a better understanding of the framework so as to take more responsibility for their own development.

The anticipated research methods documented in the previous section would provide a wide range of different data from a variety of sources – both in terms of my development and the workings of the organisation. The data analysis and summaries are provided in the next two chapters, whilst the process of capture is related in this section. The data sources are summarised below and then expanded in the following pages, although full details and statistics are presented in Chapter 5 for my development and Chapter 6 for the organisational findings.

Figure 11 - Summary of data sources (and usage)

Data Source	Chapter 5	Chapter 6	Validation
Psychological profiling			
Lifestyles inventory (App 3)	√		
Myers Briggs (App4)	√		
Formal Appraisal cycles			
RO performance and PDP	√		
360 degree feedback	√		
Biographical Journal	√		
Staff – Directorate			
Workshops / away days	√	√	
Formal appraisal cycles	√	√	
One-to-one meetings re performance	√	√	
Staff – Directorate and RO			
Workshops		√	
Staff Attitudinal Questionnaires (p 186)		√	
Learning Organisation Profile (App 5)		√	
Internal initiatives		√	
RET away days		√	
RET meetings		√	
External Interviews	√	√	
Observation and experimentation			
Directorate and RO work	√	√	
Reviews of Agencies	√	√	
Central projects	√	√	
Scrutiny of Documents (page 117)			
Internal RO documents		√	
Internal DH documents		√	
Journal articles / reviews		√	
Critical friends	√	√	√
Colleagues / friends externally		√	√
Learning set			√
Previous personal experience			√

Data gathering on my own practice

Psychological profiling

Lifestyles Inventory or "LSI" (See Appendix 3)

The LSI profile was very helpful. Some changes were noted, probably statistically significant in terms of trend, but these have been explored largely in a qualitative way through discussions. The subjectivity of interpretation of the terms used makes the exercise volatile, although the consistency of the overall picture developed is fairly striking. What was, as anticipated, more valuable was the opportunity generated to explore views and changes with staff, with the numbers acting as a lever and focus for discussion. The process provided a path into a "why" discussion rather than a "what" discussion which made the whole exercise more valuable. As a result, the cycle of feedback was maintained throughout the period from September 1996 through to the end of December 1999. This eventually resulted in 50 profiles being completed for me. The same format was used throughout and the nature of the discussions and feedback based on the profile results improved as all involved became more relaxed about the issues and process.

Myers Briggs (MB)

This was completed and a discussion with staff held at the Directorate away day in August 1997. They staff had all completed their MB tests September 1995. This provided feedback on style, the way we interacted – and the way we might interact. To an extent, we used this to redefine the ways of working together, not relying solely on the tests but using this as a lever to agree changes. It had been anticipated that this might be revisited at intervals, but after the first round of discussions the nature of feedback generated was less rich than for the LSI profiles. Hence the findings were noted but the exercise not revisited until the very end of the research period when the results were confirmatory in nature and provided a new angle of analysis and understanding of the process undergone.

Formal appraisal cycle

RO performance and PDP

This was of only very limited use in relation to this research. The process was always formalised and focused on the completion of the assessment forms. It was also usually heavily centred on work outputs rather than process and frequently involved updates and progress reports. These meetings were, thus, far more activity than style / process based and it seemed difficult to get away from this – although I must accept some of the responsibility for the process, the meetings and feedback always seemed to be 'painful' and stilted. The Regional Director (RD) stuck very closely to the Civil Service guidelines.

I would fill in the self assessment part of the standard form before the meeting and would be asked to justify my view of my performance in terms of the set out core competencies and achievement of task objectives. The RD would then separately complete his assessment based on my written form. He would then propose an assessment / performance grading in writing. We would then meet to discuss this formally and, inevitably, this emphasised the written document on which the salary award was based, with usually around five minutes at the end about development (not needed for the performance appraisal). This was totally different from the process and nature of the exercise I agreed with my staff that I should use with them. The only real common feature was that both of us ended up with completed forms to sign, though my staff completed their entire forms for me based on our extended discussions.

360 degree Feedback

The formalisation of 360 degree feedback met resistance – not from the staff who were happy to continue on an informal basis - but from the RD who was unhappy about deviation from departmental (and SCS) protocols.

However, there was an opportunity raised by the Training Manager for myself and one of the other Directors to issue a questionnaire (April 1997) to a selection of recipients, chosen by myself but agreed with the Training Manager, who would provide a balanced set of perspectives. The results would be analysed anonymously by an independent consultant. The recipients were to be ten in number and to include the range of work perspectives and used as a pilot exercise. My selection of recipients was made and the questionnaire was duly sent for completion to: three of my RO colleague directors, three staff from my own directorate, two other colleagues from the RO (the Training Manager – a “critical friend” - and Finance Manager in PPM), and two externals with whom I had a high level of contact (one HA DoF and the Deputy DoF for NHS). The questionnaire was based around the competency framework produced for the Senior Civil Service. The responses were anonymised and a consolidated report produced.

The process did provide some useful feedback, but prompted more questions than it answered. The range of scores from the respondents was remarkably wide on issues that I would have not expected such variation and the anonymity gave no scope for exploring the reasons. Several of the respondents offered unprompted and separately to discuss their feedback and this was useful in a way the formal exercise was not. The use of specific examples, face-to-face contact and opportunity to explore meaning proved far more meaningful and creative. The other director who acted as a pilot felt similarly and the process was not repeated. The informal exercise with staff – and group feedback with Directorate on away-days (but on specific aspects) was continued and enhanced.

Biographical journal

Completion of a journal proceeded well for about two and a half years from September 1996 through until March 1999, with longer, more insightful and more discursive entries to the journal as my familiarity with this increased – also more revisiting back to prior reflections. Then the time taken on keeping the journal entries up seemed to intersect with an enormous growth in my workload when I moved into a national role and far more travelling was involved. The time pressure encountered meant that the journal spluttered, then stopped.

The exercise was extremely valuable, so it was unfortunate that this ground to a halt as the reflective learning was made a real and ongoing part of working and research through this exercise. The exercise became particularly valuable when previous elements of the journal were revisited in the light of new experience and new insights gained – also some thinking around why the previous situations had been handled and reflected upon the way they were – some double loop learning. The journal was re-analysed in the process of reviewing my own development towards the end of developing this thesis and it was helpful as a part of that exercise to set the work elements alongside the diary of events that were not work related. The interaction between work and ‘life events’ and the extent of introspection perhaps should not be unexpected but was quite marked.

The analysis undertaken was again reflective in the final stages. As the journal was read and re-read after a period when my understanding had shifted then the interpretation of some of the events moved, some trends emerged and some better understanding of my own behaviour emerged. No structured analysis methods were used (e.g. word coding) as I believed the material to be too subjective and interpretative already to make that a meaningful exercise.

Data gathering in respect of the Finance Directorate and RO

Staff – both Finance Directorate and wider RO

Workshops

The workshops were of particular use during the restructuring process (August and September 1997), when extra sessions were organised. For the Directorate, they were normally run as a part of each quarterly ‘away-day’ - normally in the boardroom of the Audit Commission offices next door or conference centre, both intended to provide distance from the RO. The Directorate workshop sessions were split into developmental interventions as planned – but also into group discussion sessions based around the staff questionnaire results, personal psychological profiles and the ‘SOLVED’ assessment of Learning Organisation fit (see Appendix 5).

The meeting contents were linked directly with the business planning process and progress monitoring. A collective view and approach was thus developed to managing the Directorate – although I held a ‘golden share’ vote in reserve in case I really didn’t agree with the consensus (public sector probity and accountability could have been a potential issue here), there was no need to use it formally in two years. The reason for doing this was essentially the upwards management line and expectations – also the nature of civil service responsibility in terms of policy and ministerial representation (See Chapter 2). This made full staff empowerment difficult, although mitigated by the fact that the staff understood the position and the rules.

Eight sessions were also undertaken between September 1997 and March 1999 with various teams from across the RO supporting the internal initiatives (IiP) and Regional Agenda for People (RAP)) – and with other Directorates for developmental reasons. These were used to support data gathering from my perspective such as discussion of the RO-wide questionnaires and ‘SOLVED’ exercises - as well as to provide developmental opportunities for the staff.

Formal Appraisal Cycles and One-to-one Meetings

The issues were first discussed at an away day during the summer of 1996 and an agreement reached with staff that the assessments would be structured to gain most for both parties. In practice, these were undertaken with the eight staff reporting directly to me on a formal six monthly cycle and more frequently as a part of the regular (usually monthly) one-to-one set of meetings. These were incorporated into this research between October 1996 and May 1999. Each six-monthly appraisal process comprised:

- a written self assessment of achievement of objectives on the DH format required
- a written self assessment of what they had learned over the last 6 months, why and how it was changing how they worked (two pages A4, free form);
- a two hour discussion of how the two fitted together where a reflective approach was taken, with direct and specific feedback from myself from my own perspective;
- a write up by the staff member on the DH format of the outcome of our discussion analysed according to the DH competency framework;
- an hour worth of discussion on personal development needs and how these should be met – usually a mixture of reflective action, on the job experience and formal training;
- an hours debrief on the process, signing off of the forms and feedback on my own performance.

The process and cycle continued through until May 1999. The process differs significantly from the cycle defined by the DH but the staff believed that it provided a far more interactive and helpful development process – together with producing the necessary bits of signed paper at the end. These were semi-structured interviews of a highly interactive nature. Over the years they became significantly more open in both directions and were perceived to be valuable by both myself and the staff.

No notes were taken during the meetings themselves, but the staff wrote up their understanding – with my subsequent amendment for their review if they were adrift from my perspective. They were time consuming. The staff files themselves became the interview notes, with only short debriefing and feedback notes from them on me retained additionally. The final discussions frequently developed into more general discussions on learning, reflection and development. The parallel process of structured learning through away days was intended to supplement these.

Each of the interviews, after the first year, also dealt specifically with feedback on my performance and management. These sessions were stimulated, in the majority of cases by the personal profile the staff had themselves filled in for me. In some cases, where this had not been done, I used a composite of those that had been completed for me to spark discussion on the basis of what the other staff thought. The interviews were thus both data gathering – in terms of myself and the organisation - and intervention. In themselves, they were an integral part of the staff development. The formality of their reflective processes was gradually increased to the stage from the second year onwards when it became a formal (i.e. written) part of appraisal – although not a part of the Civil Service paperwork. As the staff became more comfortable with the ideas and process, it became increasingly valuable – and continues informally with one or two even though my role has now changed.

In the final set of interviews in May 1999, we also worked through an extra hour of review of the Directorate's own performance and development – in addition to the strictly personal assessments, by mutual agreement. The insights gained in this specific set of interviews were valuable. By this stage the staff appraised properly understood what was underway, had a grasp of the theory and an openness of feedback. The main issue in each case was why we had fallen short of the LO objectives set initially.

For the staff working directly with me on specific projects, there were far more informal feedback opportunities and debriefing sessions – more akin to a coaching and mentoring approach.

Staff Attitudinal Questionnaires

The use of the "Staff Attitudinal Questionnaires" - see pages 214 – 216 for questions - worked out much as anticipated, eventually being undertaken at five dates (see page 207) between September 1995 and March 1999 and resulting in 269 completed questionnaires in total, each eventually of 60 questions each. The use of response data in discussions – both in groups (for example at away-days) and individual discussions with staff was extremely helpful in exploring issues and focusing feedback. As the time progressed, staff proved more comfortable in providing comments – critical comments became far more common than positive ones, but that would fit with an inherent bias of concerns.

One of the benefits in discussion was to move away from the purely anecdotal approach to one where staff were sometimes presented with a group or consensus response that they did not themselves agree with. The mismatches often triggered a far more analytical and perceptive approach to the position and their opinions.

Internal initiatives and documents

The extent of the work undertaken on development initiatives both within the RO and nationally was considerable throughout the period of my research. Many of the issues being addressed were to do with Organisational Development, culture and change. The change management was concerned with issues both internal and external. I took the opportunity to become actively involved in this type of work as far as I could, both for research purposes and in order to help take the initiatives forwards.

Internal Initiatives

The two key RO based initiatives during this period were the Investors in People (IiP) effort and certification and the Regional Agenda for People (RAP) intended to bring staff fully into the management of the RO. Key documents are listed later in this section, but both initiatives gave rise to numerous staff groups, discussions, development exercises and Directorate based responses. Each of these provided opportunities for data collection – informally or formally – and the documents listed are only those provided formally to the Regional Executive Team (RET) as key papers.

RET away days and meetings

There was a major benefit in sitting on the inside as the changes in structure and processes were discussed, the purpose and culture of the RO and DH were argued through – or in fact not through. The National Executive Board papers were also available through the period of merger, absorption and planning. The tensions between the two very different cultures are plain to see in the processes and papers.

External Interviews

The *external interviews* (as planned earlier) were semi-structured and formal. Each started with a recap of what I was trying to achieve, together with the topics I wished to cover at high level. The first of eight interviews set in 1997 were scheduled to last around an hour each, but virtually all ran on for nearly two hours. In March 1997 the conduct of the interviews went more or less as proposed. Each was tape-recorded and the contents transcribed directly from the tapes by my secretary, who was used to dealing with confidential data and information. Because of the nature of the tape contents, I then had a significant effort in terms of correcting the original transcription and filling in the gaps – all in all an extremely time consuming exercise. It was startling how disjointed the transcripts seemed and how different the spoken delivery is to any written summary.

On the repeat leg in 1999, these were all scheduled for two hours and the outcomes in terms of process were as planned. In March 1999 the same interviewees were revisited, with the exception of Ken Jarrold who had moved on. The interviews were not tape-recorded this time. I made copious, but sometimes cryptic, notes instead of using the tape. These were then written up as a fuller account in order to keep sense within the record rather than have to later consult the brief and cryptic notes made. Some of the themes emerging from their individual interviews two years previously were re-played to the interviewees compare and contrast with the responses they were providing the second time around.

These interview sessions all worked well. The approach in all cases was frank – in some cases probably indiscreet – so that full confidentiality has been maintained in terms of quotes, although the analysis has been included.

Observation and experimentation

One of the key methods of evaluating my own practice and assessing change was actually to consciously experiment. Often this became possible through taking opportunities as they arose. My change in role from regional base to a more national function represented both trauma and opportunity (See Chapter 4 for personal context) – a move from a fairly well defined role, though one which changed fairly consistently, to one which was pretty well undefined at the start and which was far more project based. Given the developmental nature of much of the RO work and the scale of change arising from the development and then retreat from the internal market, opportunities to experiment were abundant. Once the basic professional credibility had been established in the first year and the lesson that personal risk could be managed had sunk in (also it has to be said the lack of effective measurement and accountability in the RO activities) this became stimulating and enjoyable.

Three major opportunities arose in 1999 as my role changed which provided for very different sets of learning opportunities – these enabled me to work through and test my own development and understanding of change. These were both an exciting work challenge and also a ready-made laboratory to try out a whole set of new ideas as part of my own learning cycle. As things turned out in practice, they also provided some excellent opportunities to observe different areas of the DH and its attendant bodies to provide an insight as to how general some of my emerging findings were in the RO.

Directorate and RO work

The directorate and RO work was clearly ongoing, with much of the data captured through the biographical journal and some through the context understanding. As noted above, the freedom provided in terms of my own scope for action was very valuable in working through the experimental part of the Kolb cycle for learning.

Reviews of Agencies

(NHS Estates and Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority - HFEA)

These were the five yearly review of the functions and status of the NHS Estates Agency and HFEA as Agencies of the DH. These reviews start with the assumption that potentially none of the structures and functions may be necessary and end with the provision of a report to the Secretary of State published in parliament on the recommendations.

The NHS Estates Agency review provided an opportunity to revisit the data gathering and analysis learning achieved through the research to date. Forty face-to-face interviews, including Group sessions, 60 detailed questionnaires covering qualitative and quantitative aspects (out of 110 circulated to HA and NHS Trust Chief Executives), 68 free text responses to a general NHS letter and about a shelf-yard of internal reports and documents. A debriefing with Cabinet Office about process/ learning to include into their new procedural review guidance and debriefing papers (reflective learning) internally. The exercise also provided a real opportunity to observe and explore the cultural interface between the NHS Executive and an agency which has developed several attributes of a Learning Organisation over the last three years. The boundary difficulties arising between these two bodies – also between the NHSE and two other agencies, both of which have retained a more “central” culture – provided extremely valuable data for the research.

The HFEA review provided a real opportunity to explore the interface between Ministers and the policy making functions of the Department – a key element of the cultural issues explored in the Public sector aspects of the issues emerging. Through the HFE Act (1990), this small Agency also has a licensing and monitoring function as a real management activity. Similar sets of interviews, questionnaires, analysis and organisational review were employed as for NHS Estates.

Central work - Payroll & Human Resources Project

I directed this project which has the objective of procuring and implementing a single common integrated payroll and HR system for the whole NHS from its inception in August 1999. The project was breaking new ground in terms of culture, risk and relationships between the NHS Executive and NHS bodies. There were no existing mechanisms in place to manage and arrive at decisions in such a project so these were built as the project proceeded. The process opened up many aspects of cultural differences – particularly in terms of approach to risk, organisation flexibility and hierarchical decision making. The time imperatives of the project and the ministerial support apparent (probably arising from the potential £150m savings estimated - £80m each year once implemented) made addressing these issues rather than succumbing to the organisation culture a possibility which proved frustrating but intriguing.

In terms of change management, the project was/is extremely large. Since it involves “self-service” for staff data upkeep and the functional modules include recruitment, training and rostering the impact will be felt throughout all 500 NHS organisations and most of the million NHS staff fairly directly. It will also probably involve changing the structural support from a devolved model at all 500 organisations to a *Shared Services* model based in nine or ten major centres.

Scrutiny of documents

A number of documents were helpful in illuminating staff attitudes to the changes in train – within the RO, across the Senior CS within the Department and indeed across the whole Department. The majority of the documents listed below, which in fact form only a part of the output during the period, are internal papers - with the majority of the papers dealing with NHS change restricted in circulation for policy reasons.

Internal RO documents

As a whole, the document sets form an important element of triangulation in terms of staff perceptions within the RO and some of the personal observations I made during the period. As such they form a useful element of the data collection, although virtually none is published and many are restricted as policy development documents. The RET development sessions are confidential for individual personal reasons.

South (&) West Regional Office related

- My understanding of the Field of Management (PS: MBA Submission, 1 May 1996)
- Investors in People (PS: MBA Submission, 12 April 1998)
- Regional Agenda for People Mail – Investors in People (PS: 13 Feb 1997)
- Regional Agenda for People Evaluation (SG and AC: 21 July 1997)
- Feedback from IiP Assessor (JB: 1 Dec 1997)
- Feedback Report Following IiP Assessment and Recognition (Vic Bodsworth: DH Associates, Jan 1998)
- Focus Group on Business Planning (HC: 18 Oct 1996)
- Focus Group on Business Planning – Strategic Vision and Style (MB: 3 Nov 1996)
- Focus Group on Strategic Issues (RD/NY 29 Oct 1996)
- Focus Group on Internal Communications (PS: 26 Oct 1996)
- Focus Group on Human Resources (NY: 28 Oct 1996)
- Focus Group on Single Centre Working – Action Points (RH: 26 Oct 1996)
- Focus Group on Single Centre Working – RO responsibilities (NY: 1 Nov 1996)
- Final Report from the SCW Focus Group (PS: 15 Nov 1996)
- Report on Single Centre Working (IWG: 23 April 1997)
- Single Centre Working (RD and GW: NHS EB Paper 6 Feb 1997)
- Organisation Development Group Terms of Reference (MB: 19 Dec 1997)
- Questionnaire Response Summary for Organisation Change - Finance (SG: 1 Aug 1997)
- Strategic Vision – Purpose, Role, Leadership (PS: Aug 1997)
- RO Structures – All ROs (RET – from Executive Board: Sep 1997)
- S&W Regional review 96/97 (AL: 9 Sep 97)
- S&W Regional review 97/98 (AL: 28 Sep 98)
- S&W Regional review 98/99 (AL: 15 Sep 99)
- Review of RO Structures (RD: 1 Sep 1997)

- Reorganisation – Performance Management Tasks (SF: 17 Sep 1997)
- Managing Change with the Minimum Disruption (RD: 25 Sep 1997)
- Review of RO Structure (97): Complete papers (RET: July to Dec 1997)
- Proposals for Change to the S&WRO – Consultation Document (RD: 11 Sep 1997)
- Review of RO Structure (98): Complete papers (RET: Aug to Dec 1998)
- Proposals for Change to the SWRO – Consultation Document (RD: 4 Dec 1998)
- Appraisals for 97/98 – Staff Feedback: Finance Composite (RET Papers: June 98)
- Organisational Behaviour and the RO (ER: MBA dissertation Feb 1999)
- Quality and Professionalism and the RO (ER: MBA dissertation Feb 1998)
- Communication and Interpersonal Skills and the RO (ER: Oct 1998)

Executive Team Development

- Dec 95 Away (3) days – What are we About? (Dearden Management: Jan 96)
- May 96 Away (2) days – Developing the RO role (Dearden Management: May 96)
- July 96 Away day – Current Aspects of RO OD (Dearden Management: Jul 96)
- July 96 Away day – The Role of the RO in Development (J Cambell: 15 Jul 1996)
- Jan 98 Away day – What were we doing? (Riley: 18 Jan 1998) + all papers
- July 98 Away Day – Have we managed to take it forward? (Riley: July 1998)
- RO Business Plan 96/97
- RO Business Plan 97/98
- RO Business Plan 98/99
- RO Business Plan 99/00

Internal Department of Health Documents

The working papers for the policy projects form a fascinating view of the way in which opinions are formed in the DH, the Departmental dynamics and information on the ways of working in the DH. The interaction at the policy level through the political boundary is also illuminating. The tracking of changes through the policy development, the consultation processes, ministerial involvement and working practices provides an insight into values and culture.

Departmental and other RO

- A Guide to Managing Performance in the DH (DH: 1998 Edition)
- Tracer Study of Changes in Role of the Regional Tier of the NHS (Stewart, R., Dopson S. & Locock, L Nov 1996) (unpub.)
- Training and Development in the SCS: A “Route Map” (CO: March 1998)
- Planning, OD and general Management in the DH (Kelly C. and Langlands A. 9 Feb 1999)
- Creating the new Regions: Project Team Report to EB (HA CE Group: 8 Feb 1999)
- Reshaping the NHS Executive HQ (AL: 13 Feb 1997)
- Structural Changes at HQ (Stocking, B.: 18 Feb 1997)
- Aims & Medium Term Objectives: 97/98 and Beyond (DH: Jan 1997)
- SCS Performance Review (Perkins, A.: 19 March 1997)
- NHS Executive : Out-turn Report 97/98 (NHS Executive: July 1998)
- SCS Day in Islington: Joined up Thinking (Adam, S.: 14 Oct 1998)
- OD Priorities: COD minutes May 98 Functioning of the Executive Board (Liddell, A. EB Paper Jul 1998)
- Development Priorities and Approaches: Lessons from ROs (Barnard, K.: April 1999)
- Developing the DH’s Capacity: Away Day (Perkins, A.: 15 Feb 1999)
- SCS Workshop: Working Across Boundaries (Furr, M.: 20 May 1998)

- CS Workshop: People Performance and Results (Insight Management Consulting: Ginnings,P and Cave,A. 11 Nov 1997)
- RO OD Priorities (Barnard, K.: 12 May 1998)
- Transition from RHA to RO: Complete Papers (RET/NHS Executive/DH)
- A New Understanding (Perkins, A.: Feb 1999)
- New Understanding / Valuing Diversity – Staff Survey 1999 (MORI: 17 Feb 2000)

External (i.e. NHS) Change

- The Future of the NHS (PS: March 1998)
- Market Management Steering Group: Complete Papers June 96 to July 97
- White Paper Working Group: Complete Papers June 97 to Dec 97
- HA Finance Development Group: Complete Papers May 97 to Feb 98
- PCG / PCT: Accountability and Resources Group: Complete Papers Dec 97 to Jun 98
- Resource Accounting and Budgeting Steering Group: Complete Papers Jan 98 to Oct 99
- NHS Economic and Monetary Union Project Board: Complete Papers Sep 98 to Jun 2000
- 5 Yearly functional and organisational review – NHS Estates: Complete Papers Aug 99 to Jan 2000
- 5 Yearly functional and organisational review – HFEA: Complete Papers Mar 2000 to Jun 2000
- New Health Authority Role: A Discussion Paper (S Thames CE Group: Nov 1998)
- OD: Supporting HA Development (Born, C. and Barnard, K.:11 Dec 1998)
- Community Services: A New Framework (Tulley ,I.: May 1998)
- Community Services: A New Framework (Newchurch & Company: May 1998)
- PC Development: Review of the Current Position/ Emerging Agenda (Lawless, M 14 Feb 1999)
- The Old NHS: The New NHS and the transition (Liddell, A.: EB Paper Feb 1999)

Journal Articles and books

Access to texts at the University was a major problem that increased as my work became increasingly centred away from Bristol. As it moved increasingly towards London, I resorted more to Amazon.com for the books and, extremely fortunately, to the librarian function in the RO to extract photocopies of articles for me from the British Library – also the odd book on loan where these were out of print. The huge volume of internal papers and NHS Executive documents were (kindly) copied for me by my secretary (in her own time!). Freeing the time to read all these, with the volume of paper generated by the NHS and from DoH/NHS Executive itself proved difficult. The literature review in Chapter 2 deals with the decisions that emerged and the different uses made of the literature.

Critical Friends

The Communications Manager and Training (later OD) Manager - were established early on as “critical friends” and around half way through the research period, the Corporate Services manager was added to these. Each of the three had a number of desirable characteristics from a research perspective – they were based outside my Directorate and thus more independent of the interventions and my line management, they were each leading / involved in the wider RO initiatives, they were each involved in research of their own (the first an MBA and the other two MAs), they were each at senior level. Perhaps most importantly, I trusted the three.

Their involvement took on four main elements initially – essentially a third party validation of findings and interpretations:

- reviewing my summaries and conclusions of questionnaires / staff views;
- providing feedback on my views on the context through dialogue (this was the first set of writing I developed);
- feedback on my first biographical assignment, then on parts of my journal and psychological profile interpretations (they also each completed profiles on me themselves);
- feedback on each draft of the chapters produced (from the early first thoughts to the final versions).

Because of their pivotal roles in the RO in terms of development and internal processes, they also provided extra input on the RO and its changes from their perspectives which provided far more than pure validation of my own thoughts. In addition, each shared with me their own research work, which dealt with specific aspects of the RO and provided further insights on the changes and perceptions internally.

Colleagues / friends externally

As the drafts of the chapters became more coherent, I began to share both individual chapters and the whole draft document with a small number of colleagues – one of my fellow RO Directors, the OD manager for the DH, my co-reviewer for the NHS Estates Agency (who had previously worked at senior level in DH and Treasury) – and friends outside the work context. I was specifically seeking feedback on the NHS, DH and Public Sector context elements – and on my own behaviour. The feedback was extremely valuable and provided insights both into my behaviour and that of others – including views of the wider organisation culture. Friends who had worked with me in previous posts were frank and the nature of some of the data opened the possibilities of in depth discussions.

Learning Set

The input and feedback sought from the Learning Set (including supervisors) was quite different and comprised challenge on logic, internal consistency and justification of methodology and methods. There was little feedback expected in terms of context – although input on personal style might be expected. This became more valuable during the period when the data was being analysed and issues emerging developed.

Supervisors

The research supervisors provided challenge to research methodology and methods, also some of the interpretative analysis. Their input triggered a far more rigorous approach and ensured that all ‘findings’ were justified. The routine involvement was fairly limited, although feedback was provided at study days, ‘residential’ and informal contacts. However, their input and challenge as part of the writing process for the thesis production was a critical element – in both senses of the word.

Previous personal experience

I had worked extensively within the public sector in my consultancy role – probably 60% of my time in many organisations over 10 to 12 years, including 18 months in a Government Department, together with a further two years at a large NHS Teaching Hospital Trust in the middle of change. This previous experience provided a great deal of insight and ‘feel’ to the interpretation of data and context but kept giving rise to the question of justification – “how do you know that – from the current research observation or from previous experiences?”. This does pose a number of questions about claims to knowledge and the nature of experience, but in this research the previous experience has been used to guide or validate interpretation rather than provide base data in its own right. This issue is discussed by Gummesson (2000, Chapter 3) where the value of critically questioned pre-understanding is stressed as a part of the development of understanding as part of a hermeneutic circle / spiral.

Data Analysis

The main emphasis within data analysis was on drawing together strands pulled out from qualitative data – structured feedback, interviews, observation, internal documents – and testing the validity of the ideas developed with staff and critical friends. The cycle of development involved two specific sets of second validation aspects (see also below)

- for management ideas or views, these were also compared with the conceptual framework being built up around the literature review (which in itself guided further reading and exploration), and
- for organisation (context) understanding, these were “bounced off” colleagues and critical friends.

The subjective nature of the data collected and my undoubtedly subjective interpretation and filtering did not reasonably lend itself to structured vocabulary scanning or other technologically supported analysis tools. Rather, it involved returning to the notes and data on a recurring basis, particularly as my own ideas and framework developed and moved. This reflective cycle frequently brought better understanding and fresh insights. Working through the data and issues arising with critical friends and learning sets also provided access to their insights and perspectives.

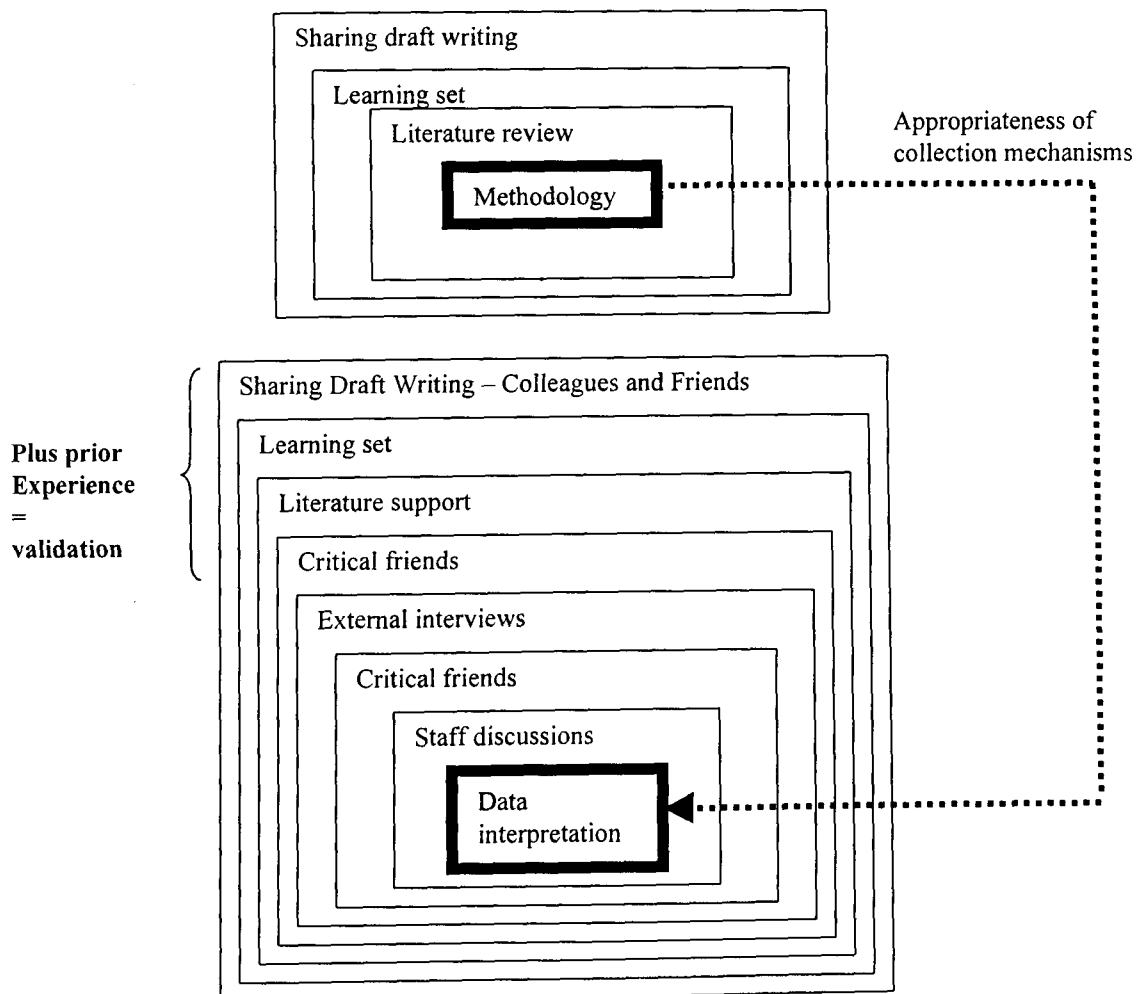
In the final analysis of the data, a more qualitative approach to some of the volume data was also taken. The data had, for the time of the main research collection been handled very much in a qualitative fashion. It was used as a tool to access further ideas and views from the staff and interviewees – to provide focus and specifics to discuss and explore. Only the most basic graphical representation of data took place even in the final stages and it came as some surprise that some additional learning emerged from this final process. However, the changes highlighted were again treated to provide more qualitative feedback rather than attempt a more statistical analysis – the initial sampling had not been constructed with this as an objective.

Validity

Approach

The methods of data collection were basically qualitative – even where quantitative data was collected through the profiles or questionnaires they were meant to trigger qualitative discussions and responses. The data collection also ran alongside an intentional set of interventions intended to change the working style and culture of my Directorate. For the data collections within my Directorate – both written and oral, individual and in group sessions – my staff were essentially dealing with their line manager and in some cases friend. The potential for bias in response, for a number of reasons was significant. Secondly, the huge mass of data (including all the other surveys, initiatives and papers included in the review material) needed a great deal of sifting and interpretation. The scope of much of this data was wide and many views conflicted: the context was also changing quickly so that contextual interpretation was also tricky and multi-factoral. The key to ensuring that the results presented actually represent a valid view and interpretation was based on a number of triangulation attempts, represented below.

Figure 12 - Validation model



The precise methodology and, more particularly, methods evolved during the period of the research as a greater understanding of what was effective in this situation developed. The interactive feedback loop (see Figure 9 on page 103) summarises not only the change in ideas but also of process. As the staff in the Directorate changed their perceptions and I changed my approach, so relationships changed and the nature of the interventions and effective data gathering changed.

In terms of the methods, I brought with me a great deal of quantitative data analysis experience but also from my audit and consultancy background a number of concepts about verification, peer review, data gathering techniques (e.g. interviews, workshops and questionnaires) and standards of proof.

In terms of the methodology / methods to be used, I went initially to the academic literature to develop a working model for the research and supplemented this with discussions with my supervisors. As this progressed, I shared my thoughts in a number of sessions with my learning set – my research group. Again this was a cyclical and iterative process and not linear. As things progressed further, I shared various drafts of my writing with the learning set and supervisors. These drafts were also shared with the critical friends in the RO, both to get feedback and to increase their understanding of what I was trying to do so that they could comment better on the data we were discussing.

I believed that if the methods were sound and appropriate, the data collection and then interpretation were more likely to be valid also, so I regarded this as an integral part of the validation process. In terms of the data collection, some of this becomes a part of the validation process itself – through a triangulation of data collection and perspectives – but also in many cases this too provides fresh data to be included into the overall cycle as well as being a validation resource. This was especially true of the input from the critical friends, which occurred informally throughout the process – hence more than one occurrence in Figure 12.

The base data collection could thus be defined as (see Figure 11 on page 124):

- personal: LSI personality profiles, autobiographical journal, opportunities to practice
- organisational: staff attitudinal questionnaires, workshops, interviews, observation of events

The ‘first phase’ validation process – also data collection and often of a far richer kind – comprised:

- personal: discussions of profiles, 360* feedback, external interviews, critical friends, learning set
- organisational: discussions arising from questionnaires and SOLVED, external interviews, other initiative documents

The 'second phase' validation processes worked not on the immediate data collection and consistency but on the interpretation. In this case the cycle became one between the literature, the learning set in terms of my interpretation of this literature and application to the data. Finally the critical friends were again consulted as to the application of the conclusions drawn to the context as they understood it themselves – the wider context data validation.

The process described above appears very formal and structured but, in practice, the implementation did not seem intrusive. Many of the encounters were opportunistic and the soundings / feedback piecemeal. The informality was an immediate result of incorporating the research into the daily routine – itself extremely unstructured and event driven. Indeed, some of the 'feedback in passing' itself sparked off fresh interventions and process cycles to take advantage of opportunities that arose or new ideas. The process itself sounds very much like a fairly typical management set of interventions – corridor meetings, pulling together different strands of work and opportunity, providing fresh challenges and trying to pull agendas together. This is very much how it felt. Indeed, this integration of activity is one learning issue that arose from the research and one that fits well with the methodology model illustrated in Figure 3. In terms of data validity and handling of interpretation a number of intrinsic factors also impinge as detailed below.

Sample sizes

The Regional Office has approximately 125 staff, including the RET. In terms of the Finance Directorate it comprised, at various stages, between 18 and 25 staff, with 8 staff reporting to me as line manager. In terms of qualitative data, the number of interviews and interactions was high. Over the whole period of the research, even the total of questionnaires and profiles accumulated to reasonable numbers – 269 questionnaires and 50 personality profiles. However, the sampling protocols were never intended to provide for robust quantitative data: only simple techniques – averaging and simple trend analysis - have been used for that reason.

Length of period

The first set of data used originates from September 1995, before the research itself began. However, the initiation started itself in September 1996 and data / records were maintained from then until March 1999 when my role shifted to national work. However, I retained responsibility for the Information Systems aspects of the Region until December 1999 and some of the data collection and feedback activities continued until that date. Organisationally, the data spans a four year period that started whilst still an independent RHA rooted in the NHS and ending with a RO that had been re-organised twice and increasingly working as an integral part of the NHS Executive rooted in the DH / Civil service. The personal data spans just over three years, whilst the detailed records encompassing both aspects cover two and a half years.

Impact not just of interventions but also relationships

In Chapter 7, the issue of an organisation comprising a network of relationships is explored. Certainly in this research, many of the interventions in working style, personal development for staff and changes in the Finance structures and responsibilities to support these also involved relationship changes. The structural changes to accommodate staff development and expansions in role were certainly not done to take the research forward – but the way of working I was trying to achieve and the research attempting to measure was both facilitated and enabled the flexibility in responsibilities and duties achieved.

It would be difficult to completely divorce the behavioural responses from staff – especially in my Directorate – from both the line manager and personal relationships formed with me as an individual. It is, however, essential to try to recognise their perspective in the data collected from them. Hence, the research has not been trying to invoke a complete separation, but rather to recognise the personal and contextual impact on the organisation and the way in which it worked. Since, through my interventions, I was trying to change the way that both I and my staff worked, this close coupling was to be expected.

Lack of “control group” and extent of change and turmoil in the organisation

I initially intended that I should compare the progress of my own Directorate as I and my staff changed with that of other Directorates. Whilst some very clear differences in style and culture emerged between the Directorates, the extent of the restructuring involved in the RO and the almost continuous turmoil this (and the dynamic political / NHS context) caused meant that any comparison became hideously complex. There were just too many parameters and change agents to factor in to provide a ‘control setting’, though the research paradigm and methodology do not require this. Indeed, not only is it difficult to envisage the existence of a control group being maintained devoid of external influences, but ethically it is probably not even desirable. As a parallel, the classical medical construct of “double-blind” trials has been under review for some time in that it intentionally deprives some of what is considered to be “best treatment”

Richness of data

Over the period and through a large number of interventions / interactions, a huge pool of data was accumulated. This was manifested not just on paper but in terms of feedback on perceptions, common experiences, verbal briefings and ‘meaning of life discussions’ with staff. These included, through the restructuring processes, a number of counselling interviews, exit interviews and a number of recruitment processes. Through discussions with other Directors, critical friends and external observers feedback was also obtained in social circumstances.

The real task in fact is to attach meaning to this data, which does not strip it of the personalities and contexts that gave rise to it. The same words from a single individual, depending upon their own circumstances, values and motives can themselves vary in meaning through time and context – let alone from different people. During our day to day lives we constantly filter for this underlying meaning. For example, this need for contextual meaning for verbal communication is one reason why e-mail can be difficult to handle: it is an informal medium that lies between the oral and written traditional media. However, it is a message that carries no meaning other than the words themselves if the author and recipient have not already established a relationship.

Bare data on a page (such as questionnaire comments or written appraisals) can pose similar problems. My interpretation of the words presented could vary enormously depending on whether or not I knew who the respondent was. Knowing the respondent, however, did not necessarily involve greater accuracy as any interpretation involved making assumptions in terms of their perspective at the precise time feedback was given – for at least one of the personality profiles completed for me, my interpretation was entirely wrong part because I was unaware of other factors in play.

Chapter 4

Personal and Organisational Context

Introduction

The nature of the research undertaken was clearly both participative and qualitative. A description of the environment in which it was grounded is critical to frame an understanding of the context and drivers within which the research took place. For this presentation to be effective, the description of the research needs not only a statement of structure but an indication of derivation and the historical shaping factors – both personally and for the organisation. Rather than providing a ‘snapshot’ in time, it is important to regard both personal and organisational realities as part of a dynamic continuum in which values, experience, memory and decisions are the result of the past as well as representing the ‘here and now’.

When the Prime Minister, in July 1999, described the public sector as reluctant to change he included in his analysis the Department of Health and NHS, which have been the subjects of an almost continuous stream of structural changes, initiatives and policy priorities over recent years. Whilst seemingly a paradox, virtually all these changes have been externally imposed in terms of organisation structures through the political process - with the internal approach, practices and culture remaining relatively stable.

For example, over the period between 1994 and 1999 the Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) were first merged in pairs with each other, abolished as independent entities, assimilated into the Civil Service (CS) as Regional Offices (ROs) of the Department of Health (DH) - then reorganised, first structurally and then in terms of boundaries. The overall changes have been complemented by separate internal restructuring within each RO on almost an annual basis to reflect the NHS structural changes. During the same period, the ROs were expected to pursue the internal NHS market, then dismantle it and reform the NHS in a different structural guise as the managerial contact between Ministers and the NHS itself changed significantly since 1997. In the meantime, RO staff had to manage internal and influence external change – and also come to terms with personal changes over which they sometimes had little control.

Understanding this environment in order to interpret the organisational culture, the staff development and interplay of the many initiatives underway is critical - from both a research perspective and in terms of my own management at a practical level. It was difficult to assess how best to approach this context element. The extent of my personal change was significant during this period, including those of responsibilities and hence relationships with the staff involved and it is tempting to focus on what seem to be the key aspects and potentially to deal with a sort of chronological time line. However, it may be more appropriate to try to build up a picture through a ‘layered approach’: some facts, then some key influences and finally my perception of my own values and personality.

This chapter also explores the organisational contexts of the two organisations on which the research is focused - the DH and NHS - and consider specifically their use as an example of the public sector.

Key Biographical Details

Some Basic facts

I was born on 25th July 1954 in Cardiff. Both parents came from west Wales, were teachers (Biology and Geology respectively) and both were Welsh speaking. We lived in Penarth, outside Cardiff, until August 1966 and then moved to Llanelli – mainly to be closer to my ageing grandparents. In Llanelli I attended the Boys Grammar School, where my father taught. In school I took mainly science subjects – plus French, English and Latin at ‘O’ level. The main interests, otherwise were sport - rugby, cricket and athletics - and music (I played the violin in the Schools’ orchestra when they could persuade me off the rugby field). I then returned to spend a third year in 6th form to try the Cambridge Scholarship exams, learn Russian and play for the Welsh Schools in cricket and rugby.

I then spent three years in Queens’ College Cambridge reading Mathematics and playing sport, then a year and a half at the University of Bristol completing an MSc in Fluid Mechanics. I enjoyed my time in Bristol, so joined the local office of Grant Thornton to do my Chartered Accountancy training and qualification (1980) as a means of gaining a business qualification that might keep my options open. Having worked with computers since I was 16 and continued to do so at Cambridge and Bristol, specialisation in computer audit and then into consultancy seemed the obvious next steps.

Wendy and I married on 5th May 1984 and settled in Cardiff, where my work was increasingly based and she worked as a pharmacist. In the following year, I moved to Ernst & Young (E&Y) to manage their local public sector consultancy and on 1 July 1985 we bought the Lakeside Pharmacy with the bank’s money. Three years later, came a move to Coopers & Lybrand (C&L) which had a much larger local presence to manage the local public sector consultancy work and computer audit group. In 1994, came a change in direction with a move to the University Hospital of Wales as their Director of Finance and Information. In February 1996, I moved to the S&W RHA, based in Bristol, as their Regional Director of Finance (RDF). Latterly in April 1999 my role became nationally focused and my title changed to Assistant National Director of Finance and I continued in this post until January 2001, at the end of the research process. This was a more project and management based responsibility than the regional post, which more resembled a regulatory function.

In terms of the purely personal, the period from 1996 to 2000 was particularly eventful to coincide with the research – and provide triggers for reflection outside the workplace. My wife’s parents moved to Cardiff, my father died of cancer after a long illness, my mother-in-law had a hip replacement and father-in-law a quadruple by-pass – then my mother also moved to Cardiff. My sister and wife’s sister also by now, by chance, lived locally so that this provided both a close family network to support the older generation and an extended family with which to contend.

Key influences

I have some very clear memories of childhood. I started school speaking Welsh, with no English – but being the only Welsh speaking child in my primary school in Penarth must have provided some integration problems at first. I think that I spent more time with my parents and less mixing with other children early on as a result.

Not much television in those days for me and my sister – only ‘worthy’ programmes. A very strong and restrictive Welsh chapel background on my father’s side, with my mother’s family having football and cricket as their main religion. I remember the tensions when I first started playing cricket for the Llanelli team, when I was 17, and the Sunday all-day matches led to guerrilla warfare from each Friday until Monday. I remember reading a lot, not being terribly sociable in terms of going to the parties that the others did and girls arriving a bit late on the scene.

The education and influences were all rational and logical in their impact. Favourite composers: Bach and Mozart and few artistic tendencies that I would admit to. Both parents were more interested in chapel meetings (or sport) than social events, drama or socialising - theatricality was very much frowned upon. Whilst I am now quite comfortable speaking in public, I believe I would still be extremely awkward and embarrassed if I was asked to act or sing (or similar) in public. I vividly remember huge arguments around the ages of ten and twelve about standing up and reciting verses in Sunday School: I used to hate it.

I think the result was a rather self-conscious, serious lad who lacked social confidence but was reasonably independent and had a strong sense of right and wrong. There was always a repression of emotions, a fear of ostentation and a marked lack of openness, especially about feelings – a very low tolerance of conflict and a natural tendency to bridge differences through reasoning. But I think I developed a pretty good ability to listen and receptivity to others’ points of view - and virtually a complete lack of prejudice.

My time at University saw me “thaw” out a bit – but not much. I was still serious and absorbed in the subject and sport. In sport I always enjoyed the competition but I was not sufficiently competitive: I enjoyed the game too much for its own sake. The maths and computing I did, followed by the accountancy, provided a whole set of mental and intellectual disciplines – but provided quite the wrong balance in terms of dealing with people, none of whom in the last analysis is either rational or logical.

My time spent with the accountancy firms saw an increase in confidence – but still within the limited sphere of technical competence. I was happy talking from expertise and became confident in my abilities – becoming animated and assertive within the technical sphere but still quiet and withdrawn in wider social contexts. The consultancy did, however, give me the opportunity to watch and explore the workings of an awful lot of private and public sector organisations for the best part of ten years. And with the work involved – information systems consultancy – this was hugely bound up with change, systemic thinking and structural development. All of which seemed, at the start, to be very logical and rational objective driven.

But it did seem that people and politics always seemed to “get in the way”. It took some time to realise that this was what it was all about, even though there had been a lot of instinctive bridge building through listening to people in the meantime. There was a great deal of training with the accountancy firms, but very little management framework setting. Mostly it was technical or particular skills based – for example, negotiating, communication or project management. There were, however, some role models around – both good and bad. Some of the good ones were exceptional, but one or two of the bad ones were truly appalling – transactional managers rather than leaders with little ‘emotional intelligence’ or empathy for staff, engendering some fairly extreme ‘blame cultures’ and ‘management by fear’.

My Research Motivation

The multi-disciplinary nature major of the consultancy firm work teams means a hugely technically output for the clients, but it does mean that the individual consultants are often not subjected to “life in the round”. Besides the internal politics, that is. However, the internal politics had never really interested me as I preferred to “get on with it” and was lucky enough to be able to make progress career-wise whilst always chasing those things I enjoyed doing most. The consultancy work, therefore, provided a great deal of experience but much less in terms of underlying managerial concepts or hands-on expertise. My lack of unified framework or ‘thought through’ understanding of organisations became apparent to me as I moved into a line management position at the hospital.

At the hospital, I was immediately faced with the responsibility for merging four previous organisations that each had its own separate departments of finance, contracting and information. I also had a large element of the corporate responsibility to merge the organisations, achieve NHS Trust status and move towards closing the old city centre hospital that had been presented with a fire closure notice, significant clinical risks and was financially disastrous. The situation represented a change management exercise on a large scale – the organisation had over 6,000 staff and a budget in excess of £170m. And whilst my previous practical experience proved valuable, I was very aware that I had no developed idea as to my own overall style and ‘glue’ to hold the experiences together. This probably resulted in less confidence internally than I projected externally. The structural and systems issues were quite clear – the people management and handling far less so.

The move to the RHA / RO provided a new set of challenges. Here, other than in managing the small number of internal staff, the management challenge was not hands-on, but was in terms of responsibility for influencing the course of events in a large number of fairly autonomous individual organisations – 60 NHS Trusts and Health Authorities. The whole was more process driven, but with an overlay of civil service culture as the integration with the NHS Executive progressed, though the two were never effectively aligned nor in many ways acknowledged as being different. The process of absorption of the Regional Health Authorities into the NHS Executive as regional Offices was dealt with as a series of changes in Terms and Conditions without any specific addressing of cultural aspects – ways of working, expectations, external relationships, differences in experience or expertise.

The nature of the SWRO as an individual organisation was also reflected in its internal culture, with key members of the Regional Executive Team (RET) at variance – in background, experience, style and values. This was so amply demonstrated at the two-day RET workshop I attended just before taking up post that I seriously doubted that it could function effectively. This was an organisation that was itself going to be changing rapidly and would affect me personally as it changed.

I was still approaching organisation problems too much in terms of technical analysis and felt I needed a better conceptual and theoretical framework with which to make sense of my experiences. I was still relatively inhibited in my behaviour and, to an extent, lacked confidence - but was ready to learn and experiment with some different ways of approaching things. The research motivation was, thus focused on my need to better understand the organisation and environment in which I worked and to develop some sort of structured framework of understanding for myself. The research route seemed to provide a structured, supported and resourced way of approaching this.

The Department of Health and NHS

Background

The history of NHS change goes back throughout its existence from inception in 1948. For example, wide ranging changes in the organisation of the health service were introduced as part of the 1974 reorganisation. But, for the most part, this multi-billion pound organisation and largest employer in Europe was still being run by so-called “administrators” in the mid 80s. In 1983, Margaret Thatcher brought in Sir Roy Griffiths to review managerial arrangements and his review coincided with what seemed like a new era in management thinking, both in the private and public sectors. Griffiths’ diagnosis of the problems of the NHS was set down in a 23-page letter to the Secretary of State for Health. He believed that the management of the NHS was in essence not much different from the management of any other large organisation – public or private sector. The difference was that it was difficult to see who was running it or how it was actually performing:

“If Florence Nightingale were carrying her lamp through the corridors of the NHS today she would almost certainly be searching for the people in charge.”

“Rarely are precise management objectives set: there is little measurement of health output; clinical evaluation of particular practices is by no means common and economic evaluation of those practices extremely rare.”

Griffiths (1983) recommended two main courses of action to deal with these failings. The **first** was to create a performance management framework for the NHS by forming a Health Services Supervisory Board, chaired by the Secretary of State, to provide a clear policy direction, with a new Management Board to implement policy. This Management Board was to be the forerunner of the NHS Executive (NHSE). This separation of policy from management was reinforced by relocating the NHSE headquarters to Leeds, away from its political masters in London.

Sir Duncan Nichol, first Chief Executive of the new NHSE, saw it as a chance to put (quoted by Bryan (1993, p42)) *“200 miles of clear water between the political and managerial governance of the NHS.”*

The **second** recommendation was to introduce “general management” to the health service and a changing role for doctors, by which Griffiths (1983) meant:

“general management.....the responsibility drawn together in one person, at different levels of the organisation, for planning, implementation and control of performance.”

“Doctors’ decisions largely dictate the use of all resources and they must accept the management responsibility which goes with clinical freedom. This implies active involvement in securing the most effective use and management of all resources.”

Holliday (1995, p2) argues that this was the critical stage, without which later reforms could not have taken place:

“this dramatic change could not have happened if the reforms of the 1980’s had not taken place. The NHS used to be a collegiate institution run, to caricature only slightly, by doctors. Its predominant managerial mode was consensus decision making by professionals. The general management reforms of 1984 generated a paradigm shift in NHS internal operations. Out went consensus management by professionals. In came management hierarchies.”

A wave of businesslike “managerialism” slowly started to become evident in the NHS, as in the public sector at large. It tends to be characterised by more open competition, an emphasis on value for money, user choice and the replacement of the old bureaucratic mould (with a new one?). The staff were expected to think more commercially, acquire new skills in business planning and contracting – and try to reframe relationships with their medical ‘colleagues’. However, in most cases they were the same staff with little experience outside the organisations in which they continued to work and found the transition difficult, with little guidance or support upon which to draw.

There were difficulties introducing some of these private sector concepts into the NHS, chief among them perhaps being the greater variety of stakeholders and accountability evident for public bodies. The NHS, for instance, has to satisfy its main stakeholders as an increasingly vociferous general public and media, a whole range of clinical professional and employee groups over which it has varying degrees of control - as well as its political masters.

Indeed, the concept of ‘customer’ for the NHS is virtually all-embracing, but also somewhat confusing for NHS Trusts as they seek to satisfy patients, Health Authorities, General Practitioners, Primary Care Groups / Trusts amongst others. Also, its ‘product range’ is extraordinarily broad and constantly changing whilst the comprehensive public customer base is organised into often highly demanding interest groups. ‘Shroud waving’ continues to be a regular and effective technique for exerting political pressure and short-circuiting resource decisions. It is relatively regularly used by the medical profession to over-ride management decisions on resource priorities, undermining the contracting and planning decisions – though in a more sophisticated setting these issues might have been taken more into account in setting realistic plans.

However, by the late 1980s, there was broad acceptance within the NHS that the key 'new management' features should be:

- the setting of clear goals and objectives against which managers' performance could be monitored and some relationship between payment and reward on the one hand and results on the other;
- the measurement of performance through performance indicators;
- a new perspective on service users, seeing them increasingly as "customers" with choice.

Major Milestones

The years 1987 to 1990

Radical reforms were then proposed in 1987 - a year in which the condition of the NHS became unstable. A combination of rigorous cash constraints in the early to mid 1980s, increasing demands arising from demographic changes and some high profile service failures gave rise to a public perception that it was in crisis. The White Paper that followed in 1989, *Working for Patients (DoH, 1989c)*, introduced some fundamental new concepts. Included was the division of the health service between the management and planning of it and the provision of services - known as the "Purchaser / Provider split". This gave rise to the concepts of a 'pseudo-market' with more formal accountability allocated to the two sides of the purchaser (i.e. Health Authorities and GP Fundholders) and service providers (NHS Trusts) and formal contracting mechanisms instituted for the exchange of funding and service provision.

Since then the rate of change, restructuring, reprioritising and response to external stimuli has accumulated and continued unabated as the political profile and media attention has continued to increase. Holliday (1995), Walsh (1995), Marnoch (1996), Morton Cooper (1997) and Spurgeon (1998) deal with the principles of policy and the changes, with 1997 representing another watershed as the change in government administration took place.

In 1988 *Caring for People* (DoH, 1988) was aimed primarily at providing services that would enable elderly and other more dependent people to stay in their own homes as long as possible. "*Caring for People*" was the first real attempt to deal with demographic changes, the trend of increasing demand for health and social care and the diminishing pool of "free" carers resulting from the changing role of women and the breakdown of the traditional family structure.

In 1989 the two White Papers heralding the market reforms proper were published. *Working for Patients* (DoH, 1989c) was designed to extend patient choice, devolve responsibility either to lower levels of management or to hive it off into trading agencies; and to achieve better value for money. The primary care focused White Paper, *Promoting Better Health* (DoH, 1989b), sought to give higher priority to the prevention of illness and the promotion of good health.

Working for Patients led to setting up the internal market for health. Its main cornerstones were that:

- money would follow the patient. The patient (or rather, Health Authorities and GP Fundholders acting as the patient's agent) would choose where to buy a service or treatment and the money would follow;
- the health service would be split between those who bought secondary healthcare services for people and those who provided them (the so-called "purchaser / provider split"). Hospitals and community units would be converted into self-governing NHS Trusts, still part of the NHS but autonomous;
- medical audit was to be introduced immediately to all hospitals and similar systems were to be introduced into general practice within three years (this element was less than successful).

In 1990 the *NHS and Community Care Act* (DoH, 1990) was enacted. This Act represented the start of the biggest overhaul of the structure of the National Health Service since the first 1946 Act and presented the newly emerging NHS "general managers" with a management challenge of considerable proportions. A great deal was at stake, not least the service's ability to continue to provide proper treatment for patients whilst going through the process of turning the NHS upside down. Most of the public did not understand what the reforms were all about - and probably still didn't when they were reversed in 1998. There was a pervasive air of public anxiety that all this had something to do with the "privatisation" of the health service and it was all a ploy to save money - so many of the public consultation processes which had to accompany the changes were tense and fraught.

The NHS had been poor at collecting and organising information, with relatively low investment in IT compared to any other sector. Indeed, not until 1988 was it to have in place the first outline of a technology strategy. Now, it became clear that the availability of accurate and detailed information was crucial to the new structures - also how little was available and what poor quality this had. Dealing with this information deficit was left to managers who were ill-equipped in terms of skills or experience to deal with an extraordinarily complex set of issues. The new hurdles of the Private Finance Initiative, EC Directives on procurement and an unpredictable organisational change agenda were superimposed with little support or training and increased the challenges significantly.

The political message is unchanging but still in 1998, the SoS (Frank Dobson) stated in parliament:

"We hope that, over a period of time, the National Health Service will get all the resources that it needs to do its job properly, including resources for information technology. The present state of information technology in the NHS is deplorable and it will take a long time and a lot of money to put it right."

Yet still the new Information Management & Technology strategy was postponed several times in its publication until September 1998 as Treasury repeatedly questioned the investment into the infrastructure needed to take the strategy forward and asked for reworked business cases which needed to deal with virtually unquantifiable benefits.

The years 1991 to (May) 1997

In 1991 *The Patients Charter* (DoH, 1991) was published which set out expectations and targets for the NHS to meet. This was updated in 1995 (DoH, 1995a) and a Summary done in respect of the wider *Citizen's Charter* also (PM Office, 1996).

In 1994 the regional tier of management was reorganised, with the whole of England grouped into eight regions instead of the previous fourteen. This meant, for example, a merger between the previous Wessex RHA and the old South West RHA to form the new South & West RHA – the new organisation would be based in Bristol.

In 1995, the enactment of the *Health Authorities Act 1995* (DoH, 1995b) completed the legal framework of the reforms and delivered two things:

- it abolished the RHAs as from 31st March 1996, to be replaced by a regional tier in the form of the eight ROs of the NHS Executive. The NHS Executive (part of the DH) would be a single organisation with a headquarters in Leeds, offices in London and represented by the ROs in the eight regions (including two based in London).
- it required District Health Authorities to merge with Family Health Services Authorities (FHSAs) - the bodies formerly responsible for managing primary care services. There were 100 integrated Health Authorities created in England responsible for purchasing all secondary healthcare and managing primary care.

In 1996, the *Primary Care Act* (DoH, 1996a) provided the opportunity to change the way in which general medical and dental services are contracted for and provided. It also makes provision for PCA practices to be contracted to commission services as well as their own GMS / GDS services. It allows a range of organisations to do this in addition to existing GP practices and takes the concept of fundholding much further. Interestingly, this has been relatively little in the public eye and the change of Government has had little impact as yet on its roll-out.

The final Conservative Government White Paper *A Service with Ambitions* (DoH, 1996b) was also published with no mention of markets or competition and concentrating on long-term co-operation and elimination of variations in healthcare. This presaged much of the direction to be followed by the new Labour Government.

The period between 1991 and 1997 thus witnessed the introduction of a whole new organisational structure to the NHS, also changing the way in which clinicians (mainly GPs through fundholding) had an influence in the decisions made within the NHS. The development of contracting and market concepts in such a closed environment where organisational 'failure' in terms of service cessation was inconceivable was halting and sometimes confusing. For the managers responsible, with relatively little background in the tools and relationships needed, this was a difficult time.

The years (May) 1997 to 2000

May 1997 saw the election of a Labour administration which had been vociferously opposed to many of the structural changes introduced and with a stated intent to abolish the internal market and its perceived bureaucratic administration. GP Fundholding was at the top of the list for dismantling.

In 1997 the White Paper *The New NHS* (DoH, 1997a) was published which proposed four new initiatives:

- the abolition of GPFH and the introduction of Primary Care Groups (from 1 April 1998) and Primary Care Trusts (in the future) – with a more strategic role signalled for (fewer) Health Authorities in future;
- the abolition of the Extra Contractual Referral processes and change in contracting thrust;
- three new independently based clinical sets of bodies to address quality;
- a small number of very specific steps such as the 24 hour help-line.

In addition there was new impetus provided to existing initiatives involving:

- quality and clinical governance;
- collaborative working, specialist purchasing and long term agreements;
- connectivity of information infrastructure;
- merging of funding streams and reshaping of financial regimes.

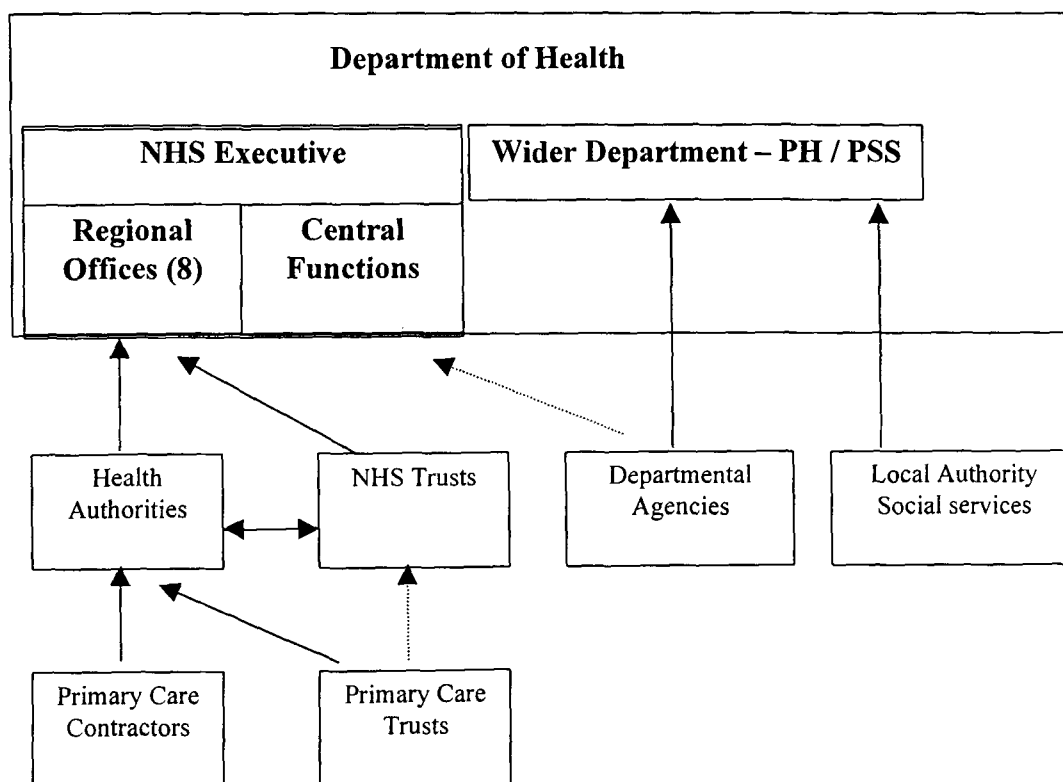
In 1998 the pace of change accelerated again with the Public Health Green Paper *Our Healthier Nation* (DoH, 1998a) was also published and set out the Government's health philosophy. This was supplemented by a white paper to deal with Smoking (DoH, 1998b). However, the socio-economic circumstances in which people find themselves impacts health fundamentally (Acheson, 1998) which echoed much of the Black (1982) report, but found a more receptive political climate. This links closely with the Social Services white paper *Modernising Social Services* (DoH, 1998c) which promotes links with the NHS. New Strategies were also published for Information (DoH, 1998d), Quality (DoH, 1998e), Human Resources (DoH, 1998f), Mental Health (DoH, 1998g), the Elderly (DSS, 1998), Carers (DoH, 1998h), Fraud Prevention (DoH, 1998i) and Clinical and Corporate Governance.

In 1999, the legislation to abolish GP Fundholding and set up Primary Care Groups, with later Primary Care Trusts was enacted (Health Bill, 1999a). New Institutes were set up for Clinical Excellence (NICE) and Health Improvement (CHI). Significant initiatives were set in place for joint working between health and social services, health and prison services and health and defence services. Internally, the DoH (hence NHS Executive) prepared to move as a result of a Government decision (HMTreasury, 1995) from a cash based system of accounting to a resource basis. This change was significant after Government Departments had spent centuries being funded on a cash basis – but potentially this would expose the 'overtrading' undertaken by the NHS in the 'late market' period and pose extra difficulties when resources were already stretched to meet patient demand and the structure changes.

The DH and the Regional Offices

From 1991 to 2000, the DH comprised the NHS Executive (responsible for the workings of the NHS and headed by a Chief Executive supported by an Executive Board), the “wider Department” (headed by a Permanent Secretary (PS) and covering Personal Social Services, Public Health and the internal management of the whole Departmental organisation) and a number of separate agencies. This changed in Autumn 2000 when the NHS Executive was abolished as a separate entity and the whole became a single DH organisation under a single line of command that incorporated both PS and CE roles as the new Permanent Secretary.

Figure 13 - Departmental Structures (to Autumn 2000)



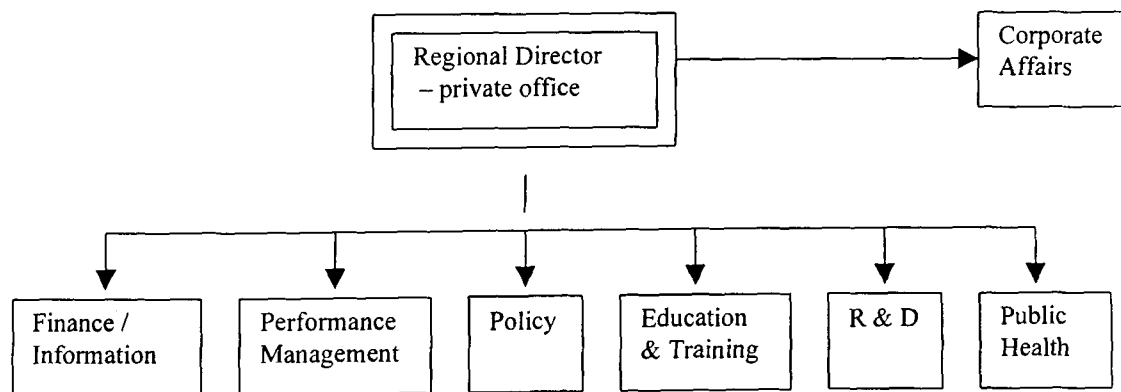
The DH/NHS Executive had for years been a cultural hybrid. It was a mixture of mainstream Civil Service, scientific, academic and NHS management cultures and backgrounds, mixing sometimes uneasily and with ways of working that varied significantly depending on the numbers of staff involved from the different sub-cultures. The dominating factor emerging became the Civil Service element, particularly as this manifested itself through the structures, hierarchy and experience of staff at the higher levels. However, even at these levels, the different experience and expectations of staff gave rise not infrequently to friction and frustration. The “Wider Department”, i.e. the parts of the DH excluding the NHS Executive, was seen as the ‘senior’ partner, headed by the Permanent Secretary – especially by the staff with employment history in the CS .

By contrast, the RHAs had their roots in the NHS culture: there were some direct entries at regional level, but most of the senior staff had experience working within hospitals or health authorities. The change from RHA to RO concentrated this ex-service experience as most of the staff shed or out-placed related to the support functions and these were exactly those more likely to have entered directly in to the regional level. The functions of the ROs and the way in which they interface with the NHS also means a high ratio of senior staff – far richer in mix than the wider DH and this has been the source of friction.

Within the NHS Executive, it is the Regional Offices that are charged with local implementation of the structural and organisational changes. The ROs work with the HAs and Trusts in interpreting the changes and translating them into practical plans for change. In some areas, such as Y2K problem resolution and introduction of “Calman Cancer Centres”, there is a direct reporting line and RO project management – in other areas there is monitoring and authorisation only.

In terms of the staffing, referred to above, the SW RO is fairly typical. It is an organisation of around 120 staff headed by the Regional Director, the equivalent of a CS Grade 2, supported by five Directors (Public Health, Finance, Performance Management, Policy and R&D) equivalent to CS Grade 3 and a further 11 staff at CS Grade 5 level – unusual for the CS. The professional mix is also unusual for the CS, with 10 medical staff of consultant status (2 professorial) and 19 qualified accountants. In contrast, the Central NHS Executive and Wider Department employ only 5 qualified accountants out of a total of over 3700 staff. This has consequences for staff in terms of development, interaction with other areas and the way in which decisions are made.

Figure 14 - The SW RO Structure



Each directorate was led by a director. In terms of the directors’ backgrounds – Education & Training, R&D and Public Health were medically qualified, Performance Management was (by chance) an accountant, Policy had been a Chief Executive of an NHS Trust. The Regional Director was a career civil servant who had latterly worked in the Benefits Agency and was the only one of the team not to have any experience of the NHS.

Efforts were directed at bringing the ROs and the Leeds based elements of the NHS Executive together in a way of working described as “Single Centre” working. Key issues emerging were how policy was influenced or developed, how communication with the NHS and with Ministers should be undertaken, how technical and professional issues should be handled, how staffing and progression were recast. Generalist v specialist; centralist v devolutionist; established structures v changing participation; consistency v autonomy of approach were all issues that needed to be addressed. Large numbers of administrative issues arose during this period also. The CS saw job specific recruitment and interviews introduced instead of the old “promotion boards”, a move away from the old Senior Civil Service Grades to Job Evaluation Seniority Points “JESP” scoring for all individual senior posts within the SCS. The RHA staff, similarly, left all their staffing structures (SMP/DGM grades), terms and conditions – notably items such as Crown cars, accommodation allowances. Staff numbers also changed significantly:

	<u>92/93</u>	<u>94/95</u>	<u>96/97</u>
DH/NHSE + agencies	5,176	4,971	3,755
RHA then RO	5,200	1,500	1,000
Total staff numbers	10,176	6,471	4,755

In April 1999, the eight RO boundaries underwent further significant change, with redeployment of staff between ROs. This was to cater for the formation of a purely London Region (previously two regions – North Thames and South Thames) which will fit with the new London Authority. Anglia & Oxford and South & West will be significantly altered as a result. The effects on the staff of the London based regions has already been traumatic, with the project manager describing the changes at the middle management level as taking a “calamitous toll on the staff”. The four ROs developed very different structures and sets of responsibilities, based on the preferences of the individual RDs and on the personalities, skills and experience of the senior staff available in the ROs.

The Future of the ROs to 2005?

The DH / NHS Executive was reorganised in January 2000, with the posts of NHS Executive Chief Executive and DH Permanent Secretary being merged. The ministerial interface with the DH seemed set to change as targets setting became more centralised with the release of the new *National Plan* (DoH, 2000). Together with increasing Treasury input centrally, an impetus for Shared Services for support services and the continuing closer working of Public Health with agencies outside the NHS, it was already difficult to predict the future for the ROs by the summer of 2000. For example, it was likely that by 2005, the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) divisions within the DH would function much closer with the Public Health functions and could be incorporated into the ROs also. The ROs would then become Regional Offices of the DH rather than the (ex-)NHS Executive – though the central unification had already made this academic. The more strategic role trailed for the likely merged HAs would also clearly play a part. Indeed, in spring 2001 the announcement was made that the ROs would be disbanded, with PH functions moving to the Regional Government Offices and performance roles undertaken by more strategic sized HAs.

In the NHS, the period will see the number of HAs reduced to 30 (from 99) as PCGs and PCTs take up a greater proportion of the commissioning load, with the HAs performing a more strategic planning role and incorporating the performance management functions of the ROs in an as yet undefined way. The numbers of NHS Trusts are likely to reduce, also, with some regions already seeing a great deal of activity in these areas as PCTs emerge and take on more of the community services. In Wales this is already evident with the number of Trusts reducing from 28 to 16 by April 1999, following the reorganisation in 97/98 that saw the HAs reduced in number from eight to five. Most recently, in January 2000, the abolition of the five Welsh HAs was announced with absorption into the Welsh Assembly. Most recently in summer 2001, there is talk that the newly merged joint acute/community Trusts are too large (no PCT status in Wales) and there could be demergers in prospect. This structural 'churn' is clearly distracting and expensive.

There is far greater joint working envisaged with Local Authorities, not only with the new HAZ introduction, but more practically with far greater joint commissioning between the NHS and social services. It is proposed that some joint budgeting arrangements be put in place in the near future. A model for this, eventually, may be that of Northern Ireland where Social Services and Health Boards run as single entities – the SSI devolution to ROs may presage this organisationally. However, for the moment the financial and statutory framework will not allow many of the initiatives in the early stages of exploration and these will need to be reviewed and amended. Whatever the exact shape of the future, it is quite clear that healthcare will continue to be a high profile aspect of political activity and hence, if for no other reason, continuing change can be anticipated.

The impact of changes on the NHS

The changes noted in the previous section have been far reaching, perhaps starting to move the NHS away from its public sector ways of working, but definitely changing the environment in which it works and the relationships between the stakeholders. Gordon Best (1997, p46) observes that:

“The NHS reforms have brought in their wake incentives that encourage greater efficiency and effectiveness. They have led to greater local autonomy, variety and innovation, and to greater emphasis on patients' convenience and well-being at the expense of provider convenience.

“They have also brought an increase in administrative bureaucracy and a paper chase. They have led to the destruction of public service values by encouraging competitiveness, to greater emphasis on short-term gain, and to a tacit acceptance of 'two-tierism'. And they have accelerated the privatisation of some services while encouraging growth in private medicine.”

The New NHS addresses some of these issues through introducing three more new initiatives:

- A system of evidence-based national service frameworks (NSFs) which will set out the patterns and levels of service which should be provided for patients with certain conditions. The object is to achieve greater consistency in the availability and quality of services right across the NHS: development of these will be the responsibility of the various Royal Colleges but implementation monitored by the NHS Executive;

- A new National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) which will promote clinical- and cost-effectiveness by producing clinical guidelines and audits for dissemination throughout the NHS. This will include the thorny issues of which drugs are really clinically effective and should be available and which should not;
- A new Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) will oversee the quality of clinical services. The 1997 White Paper points out that past performance in the NHS in terms of clinical quality has been variable, with the Health Service sometimes slow to detect - and act decisively on - serious lapses in quality such as the recent spate of screening blunders. The new "arms length" Commission is intended to address this, offering an independent guarantee that local systems to monitor, assure and improve clinical quality are in place, with back up powers to take action if they fail.

The emphasis on evidence based medicine and clinical governance to change working practices is important and more gains in both quality and resources can probably be made if these are pursued actively than through any other route. The introduction of new independent agencies may well provide a focus for development, but they will also keep the Government one step removed from individual specific problems.

In terms of the way the physical estate of the NHS is configured, there would probably be agreement that with the exception of the closing of most of the old dysfunctional psychiatric hospitals, there has not been much change since the reforms. This is partly to do with the much-publicised difficulties of making the Private Finance Initiative work in health, but more because of public resistance to change, supported by the media and oppositional politics in which quality issues are subjugated to electoral advantage.

However, the impact of the physical estate is pervasive on the services provided and their efficiency, so that in combination, this together with sluggish change in working practice has slowed down progress in 'modernising' the health service and responding to changes in technology and practice. Simon Caulkin (1997) put it quite succinctly:

"The sorest issue is the state of hospitals, which is a paradox within a paradox. Hospitals have surprisingly little effect on overall health which depends much more on lifestyle than on medical technology. But while they treat 2% of ill-health 'episodes', they absorb 70% of NHS costs and 99% of public attention."

Peter Drucker in 1992, took a more robust line:

"The world-wide escalation of health care costs is the result, in large measure, of the hospital's having become an economic monstrosity." (1992a)

"We must be able to close a hospital altogether when changes in medical knowledge, technology and practice make a hospital with fewer than 200 beds both uneconomical and incapable of giving first-rate care. For a hospital - or a school or any other community organisation - to discharge its social function we must be able to close it down, now matter how deeply rooted in the local community it is and how much beloved, if changes in demographics, technology or knowledge, set new pre-requisites for performance." (1992b)

The Editorial in the Economist (1997) comments in respect of the process:

“Concentrating resources in specialist hospitals is essential if health care is to be rationalised and savings made, according to the King’s Fund, an independent research organisation. The closure of even small, antiquated hospitals is deeply unpopular with local residents. But a new government with a majority of 180 should have the confidence to do this in the interests of everybody.”

This is not new as Messer (1948, p13) observed in terms of a system of strategic decisions which:

“...decide the use to which the hospitals will be put and for this purpose will group hospitals together. The co-ordination and close link-up of hospitals will enable the maximum use to be made of existing accommodation and will, to a large extent, prevent the uneconomic use of small units.each hospital group will become a single unit for administrative purposes.”

This observation was made on 9th July 1948. Ham (1999) explained the importance of this aspect of health service provision again in an open letter to the new Prime Minister in May 1997, nearly 50 years later:

“Let’s be clear about this: what matters in the NHS is not bricks and mortar but the standard of medical care. With the resources that are available, there are too many hospitals trying to provide too many services. Patients will benefit if clinical expertise is concentrated in a smaller number of hospitals.”

The continuing dominance of acute (hospital) medicine prolongs a model of service delivery that defines the NHS as an ‘illness’ rather than a ‘health’ service. Some of this is about the extraordinarily enduring power of the hospital consultant; some about the public’s romantic notion of the health service that still positions the local hospital at the heart of the NHS. However, much of it is result of the sheer amount of energy needed to deal with innumerable day-to-day crises, leaving little time or resource for developing new ways of providing healthcare. This very issue lies at the intractability of some of the management decisions which have to be addressed by the NHS and the change management supported through the ROs. Coote and Hunter (1996) provide a sense of just how much *organisational structural change* as opposed to *service delivery change* itself that has occurred since the 1989 White Paper:

“Ten years is a long time in health politics. A decade ago there was no purchaser-provider split, no internal market, no hospital or community trusts. There were no GP fundholders, total fundholders, multifunds, locality commissioning consortia, nor any explicit attempts to establish a primary care-led service. There was no private finance initiative, no Patient’s Charter, no waiting list restrictions, no league tables, no Local Voices initiatives. Computerised information systems were primitive. Day surgery was rare. Genetic testing was a novelty, and gene therapy little more than science fiction.”

It is clear that politicians find it irresistible to change the organisational structures, but apparently lack the understanding, wherewithal or political imperative to tackle the real issues of service delivery. The clinical inefficiencies and priorities appear to be placed in the ‘too difficult’ category (by all parties) and left to NHS managers as an operational issue – although all such decisions in the late 1990s had to be authorised personally by the Secretary of State. The 1997 White Paper appears little different in this respect, although it could be argued that by placing more power (resources) in the hands of primary care it does indeed facilitate the necessary changes. Unfortunately, the indications to date are that the GPs are just too close to local pressures and will not take difficult decisions, but in many cases actively pursue only local interests.

Leadership and Culture

Much of the structural change seems a short term or tactical response caused by a lack of systemic thinking from the leadership level in the NHS – or more accurately ministers who interact so closely with senior levels of the NHS Executive. It is a brave politician who ignores short term media reactions or easy-to-explain ‘fixes’ and sets out to address the more complex underlying problems. Senge (1990b) observes that our traditional view of leaders is:

“as special people who set the direction, make the key decisions, and energise the troops - are deeply rooted in an individualistic and non-systemic worldview.”

“So long as such myths prevail, they reinforce a focus on short-term events and charismatic heroes rather than on systemic forces and collective learning. At its heart, the traditional view of leadership is based on assumptions of people’s powerlessness, their lack of personal vision and inability to master the forces of change, deficits which can be remedied only by a few great leaders.”

Short-term events and charismatic ‘heroes’ are to be found all over the NHS. Not only is the political view short term but the lifespan of organisation existence is (as can be seen from the chronology) almost equally short. In far too many cases, therefore, the over-riding issue for many managers is to produce a ‘quick fix’ before they either they move on from the organisation – or the organisation moves on from them. This transience really does not encourage a systemic view or organisations or longer term planning of major infrastructure work in information systems for example, which involve short term risks of major proportions in respect of failure – all too apparent and high profile in public sector organisations like the NHS. This context clearly has a major impact on the nature of decision taking and change management in an environment that is changing rapidly as Caines (1998) observes:

“one challenge for NHS management as a whole is to maintain momentum and morale in an environment where, alongside intense financial and service pressures, the NHS is in a state of perpetual revolution.”

Talking of revolution, what many managers were critical of was the radical switch from one health care model to a very different one, with no piloting or experimentation. The price paid by those who had to make the new system work, particularly under a constant public and media scrutiny in which mistakes are seized upon and punished, was considerable in terms of increased stress and, to an extent, their alienation.

Another aspect of criticism is political focus on ‘acceptable targets’, with resource implications left out of the main debate and the decisions left in ‘no-man’s-land’. The NHS at the end of its 1998/99 financial year had an external net liability of some £700m – far higher than its previous highest level and not including a further predicted overspend of £195m for 1999/2000 or much of the estimated £4.5bn exposure to clinical negligence. This is a symptom of over-trading to provide activity and meet targets – effectively the NHS had ‘borrowed’ from its creditors to bring in cash that the Government did not include in its parliamentary votes on funding. The NHS often walks a tightrope between the public perception of what is happening, moulded by the media, the cut and thrust of political attack and individual experience of the health service.

The cervical and breast screening 'blunders' emerging in 1998 were perhaps good examples. It is quite apparent that screening produces benefits, but clinically it is far from infallible – both in its testing results and inaccurate people interventions. Everyone knows that some screening programmes in some parts of the country have been less than satisfactory and, sadly, have failed to the detriment of a number of women. Everyone knows that we need a free and inquisitive press to scrutinise public services and expose deficiencies and misdemeanours. What is arguable is the balance between the real clinical effectiveness of this screening, questioned by a number of research programmes, and the political impact of decisions. If this was not an existing programme and it was not 'politically correct' it might quite possibly not now be initiated: a decision was taken in 1998 not to initiate a Prostate Cancer screening programme, although in practice the screening success is greater and the cancer kills more people!

Undoubtedly one of the major obstacles to presenting the reality of what is happening in the NHS, as opposed to what appears to be going on, is the size, scale and complexity of the enterprise. The challenge for the NHS manager is to find a way of rising above this often hostile environment, whilst at the same time handling a number of new pressures which will influence the direction of travel for the health service.

Politics and Change

The Patient's Charter introduced in 1991 set out national and local targets for the health service, guaranteeing for the first time a range of rights and standards that each health authority would expect their providers to deliver. Among the standards specified was that 90% of patients must be treated within 12 months and no-one should have to wait longer than 18 months for hospital treatment. On the face of it, this did, indeed, have the effect of driving down the length of time people waited. By the end of 1995, the number of people waiting more than 12 months for hospital treatment had fallen from 200,000 in 1990 to just 20,000, despite a rise in the overall number of patients. However, a potential problem with the target was its focus on quantity not quality - which cynics might say had more to do with political expediency than patient care. There was also the difficulty that with definitions notoriously complex in this area, anecdotal evidence suggested that numbers were massaged on a widespread basis to avoid criticism.

Prior to the 1997 election, the Blair Government set great store by promising to do away with the internal market and reversing the perceived trend towards privatisation. This judgement caught the mood of the electorate about right, though there were no policy frameworks proposed as an alternative – nor indeed any conclusive objective evidence to suggest that this was needed. It would appear from internal surveys that, on the whole, doctors and nurses didn't like the internal market because it seemed to run counter to a public sector ethos - and the public did not understand it anyway so were unlikely to miss it. On balance, the Government would satisfy its most vociferous stakeholders by abolishing it. However, the pressure to make the substitute system work and at least for the electorate to feel as though it is working before the next General Election in 2001, was clearly going to be enormous.

In the winters of 1997/98 and 1998/99, the NHS coped with the pressures involved. However, increases in the overall size of hospital waiting lists and the length of time some people had to wait for operations were already making the Government nervous. The NHS was then set the task of managing these pressures whilst at the same time achieving a smooth transition from one management structure to another. This was not an easy task in an organisation the size and character of the NHS together with managing the potential Millennium problem across the winter of 1999/2000 – however this was again achieved, albeit with a significant injection of additional financial resources.

A further difficulty is that during the process of major change in 1990/91 the Government recognised that handling and managing change requires additional resources for producing the same output and pumped in an average of 4.7% real terms growth over the three years surrounding the changes. No extra resources were made available for change this time in the Comprehensive Spending Review settlement (i.e. the additional elements introduced as the “Modernisation Fund” were all allocated). Even these levels of growth including the Modernisation Fund fell behind the uplifts introduced around 1990/91 – indeed in some NHS Regions there was a real term decrease in funding in 1998/99 compared to NHS sector inflation. This is understandable in that the Government wished to be able to demonstrate real changes and attribute this to both the system changes and the increased cash funding. However, this sort of decision places even greater strains on already highly pressured management agendas.

The long term nature of the new agenda set might also in itself prove to be a problem. The programme set out in the 1997 White Paper was intended to span a ten-year period and, by definition, the Green Paper agenda must be even longer term and involve significant double running costs before improvements in general health translate into reduced demand for intervention services. If the benefits take too long to become apparent and the electorate lose faith and their confidence in the NHS ability to deliver, further structural changes may be politically attractive. The difficulty is, thus, over the translation of the theory into practical outcomes. Experience repeatedly demonstrates that systems are only as good as the people running them and the people running them are only as good as the investment made in them – specifically in terms of support, training and reward to encourage good performance.

The White Paper acknowledged some of these issues and a new HR strategy was flagged. However, organisations frequently start with the people perspective at the top of the agenda (“*Our Staff are our most important Asset*”) but somehow, with the passage of time and as practical obstacles emerge, it manages to start sliding down the priority list. The 12 months after the preparation of the WP saw huge periods of time spent on framing and defining the structural changes, but the HR strategy had still not been unveiled. The practical use to which the HR Strategy could be put when it did emerge was debatable as it contained general statements of principle, which were virtually universally acceptable but little detail as to priorities or resources. In common with many government ‘strategies’ this was more a series of policy statements than a provision of an implementable way forward. More detail of targets became apparent in the new *National Plan*, but still relatively little detail on method of achievement emerged – more objectives but no ‘route map’.

It is interesting to observe, having been involved in its production, that much of *The New NHS* is about *responding to*, as opposed to *managing*, change. Or in some areas, giving the impression of change without entering into the disruptive areas of attempting to see it through against opposition. The terms “responding to change” and “managing change” are often quite loosely interchanged - yet the two seem to me to be at opposite ends of the spectrum of management. A frustrating feature for public service managers is that the above distinction often makes little difference. Decision systems are so organised that political expediency will generally hold sway. Politicians will almost always do first what makes political sense and deal with perceptions, rather than what managers believe may address the causes of problems. There seems to be little systemic thinking apparent when it comes to much policy formulation that takes place.

Without question, the NHS faces more challenging years ahead. On the political front, the Government's health programme assumes more than one term of office - but this is a feat that has yet to be accomplished as a full term by the Labour Party since it was formed. Will it keep its nerve short-term whilst its plans are increasingly buffeted by financial or funding crises, rising waiting lists, failures in clinical standards, disenchanted patients and embattled doctors? Does it have the nerve to restructure the way the NHS works rather than the way in which the management structures are organised? Can it stay in power long enough to show evidence that it can deliver on its health programme? These are the backdrop questions against which the managers in the NHS have to frame decisions. As Civil Servants and “speaking in the shoes of the Minister” the NHS Executive management efforts are clearly also circumscribed but from a different perspective.

Effects on organisation culture

These factors noted in Chapter 2 in respect of the NHS within the public sector change some of the learning organisation impacts and motivations quite considerably, though the extent of changes evident and change management needed provides ample motivation from another perspective. Olins (1999, p10), in publishing a recent survey on employee attitudes made the following comment:

“Morale is lowest in the public sector and large organisations. On almost every question respondents from small organisations were more positive than large ones. Trust and morale were significantly higher and staff feel they get more respect. In large organisations nearly 40% of people say they don't believe bosses take their suggestions for new ways of working seriously.”

Another recent survey across all sectors of activity (IoM/UMIST, 1998) which drew responses from over 5000 managers suggested that 60% had been affected by some form of organisational change in the previous year. The survey assessed the impact of change on loyalty to the organisation, their morale, motivation and job-security. The overwhelming conclusion was that the massive restructuring taking place in UK organisations each year has had a highly negative impact which is especially profound in the lower levels of the organisations.

Matrix responsibilities are continually being built into large organisations as they cope with more complex agendas – and the tensions increased by managers who demand attention through controlling behaviour. The net result of increased tension can also be expected to reflect in compromised motivation and behaviour in terms of human socialisation and in-built behavioural patterns. Nicholson (1998, p144) observes:

“Of course many organisations today employ more than 150 people. And many of these businesses struggle with the tendency of people to break off into cliques, functions, departments or even teams to come into conflict with each other. Many companies have tried to deal with this complexity through matrix management. Yet it has proved to be one of the most difficult and least successful organisational forms. Evolutionary psychologists contend that matrix forms are inherently unstable due to the conflicting pulls towards too many centres of gravity. People are instinctively drawn to one community at a time – dual loyalties required by matrix management are difficult to sustain.”

A truly disturbing research programme in the NHS undertaken by Pattison, Manning and Malby (1999) portrayed the results of such a culture as typified by:

- attitudes resulting from the de-personalisation of relationships;
- mismatched expectations between service users and professionals in the areas of communication, understanding and appreciation;
- disparity and inequality of care;
- abuses of the system by those with status;
- abuse of power – a culture of hierarchy, blame and fear (*“There were many tales of bullying throughout the hierarchy. There was a strong feeling of people being rebuked for things they were doing in good faith to make the situation better. There was a culture of blame and risk aversion rather than risk management”*);
- not being valued (*“The most prominent theme that emerged was that of people, particularly staff, not being listened to, recognised and appreciated by colleagues – and especially by superiors.”*)

This represents a real divergence of theory-in-action from espoused theory. The way that staff cope with and relate to organisational culture, especially in times of change, clearly significantly impacts on the way they operate. In the terms of the Schon (1989) analogy, perhaps the NHS ground is even more swampy than usual – or perhaps it is the number of crocodiles that is higher. In general, there seems to be a lack of movement towards the more transformational models of leadership and a transactional management culture that is rooted back in ‘administration’ – with little in the way of role models at the very head of the organisation where the interface with the political context perhaps precludes its development. There is, then, some literature that deals with the public sector that highlights issues and differences in exactly the areas in which Learning Organisation concepts need to be grounded and supported, although largely not dealing with the LO concepts themselves. These aspects are dealt with further through the research data and analysis as a part of this research.

Chapter 5

Management Practice Development

Introduction

The key questions posed for this aspect of the research were:

“How have I changed my practice as a result of the research?”

“What is my claim to know that this change has occurred and on what basis can I make that claim?”

Data to explore the answers to these two questions was collected in a number of ways, as described in Chapter 3, and a summary of the findings is presented in this Chapter. In some ways, the material presented in Chapter 2 (which summarises my developing personal conceptual framework) and Chapter 4 (which provides a contextual understanding) itself represents an output of improved understanding – but not necessarily a change in behaviour.

Whilst essentially a qualitative analysis, some simple graphical analyses of the numerical outputs from the profiles fed back to me from staff provided a useful medium within which to raise some interesting discussion points with staff and these are reproduced here. The conclusions reached suggest that a number of real changes in my practice were perceived by my staff – also critical friends - and these were in line with intentional changes arising from feedback as the research proceeded. Their feedback also indicated some changes in my personal reactions to the organisational context that I had not expected.

The presentation of the results as an analysed whole can be perceived to provide an overall view that may be misleading. The period represented very much a journey of learning and development. During the period, I constructed a personal conceptual framework and reached a much better understanding of my own practice and its impacts on others – its strengths and shortcomings. No real direction was given to this as a start, other than by exploring a methodology to make progress, and the documentation and analysis of this emerged as one of the two key strands during the course of the research. As I developed my ideas and understood my own behaviour better, I was able to undertake more experimentation and to explore my own preferences in terms of approach and behaviour – working actively and consciously to develop the weaker areas in terms of development.

Finally, I emerged from the research period with a far higher level of self-awareness than I had started – together with a better appreciation of how I interacted with my staff and the organisation. This is in itself likely to lead to further changes in practice in the future as part of a continuing process. The conceptual framework developed may not be perfect but it does provide me with both a tool to understand and interpret situations, behaviours and events and a structure that can be adapted to accommodate further ideas as they are encountered or generated.

Feedback and Insights into my own Practice

It seemed important from the beginning of the research to develop a more accurate picture of my own practice, to understand the way I interacted with others, the way I was perceived by them and their view of my behaviour. This more accurate self-assessment seemed to be needed in order to be able to ground my own reflective processes more realistically and draw more appropriate conclusions. Otherwise I believed that the R D Laing 'distorting mirror' would be all too apparent and any conclusions drawn would be bound to be hopelessly flawed.

The first step in this was the biographical writing assignment right at the start of the guided doctorate process. The initial exercise was continued through the medium of the personal reflective journal maintained, although the biographical assignment itself was not updated to reflect the later insights. The issue of understanding my own behaviour and the way that this made my approach and practice effective – or not – seemed to me very early on to be an essential element of my own management development. Accordingly, in September 1996, I started to think about how I could collect and interpret qualitative feedback from others and use the data to monitor my own development and analyse my own managerial practice. I considered a number of different approaches to this. The main options, I believed, were to adopt an approach that was informal (for example to ask staff to concentrate on specific issues, tasks or events in which I had played a part and discuss these) or to use a more formal route, such as staff completing some form of document as a preparation and building up a discussion around the output.

Previous experience with pilot 360 degree appraisal work, whilst at Coopers & Lybrand (C&L), suggested that the outcomes of an informal approach could be very variable. These previous results seemed to depend crucially on the relationships with individual staff and the degree of subjectivity involved with issues raised was very difficult to assess given the manager / staff relationship – no matter how good the personal side. Tools seemed to be needed that did not deal directly with personal behaviour but that developed a picture from a large number of questions for which there were no clear "right" or "wrong" answers. This approach would reduce any threat perceived by the staff.

A number of tools would be used to open up qualitative discussions that would be more productive and easier for staff to handle: in fact all three tools proposed in Chapter 3 were used. The first tool considered was a psychological profile questionnaire (the LSI Profile) stemmed from my experiences with Ernst & Young and C&L in working with staff on 360 degree feedback. The objective of using the profiles, indeed, was not initially to develop any absolute – or even relative – quantitative results but to open up discussion with staff members to explore overall perceptions. The specific focus was to discuss any changes in these perceptions over time – and by introducing a series of dimensions to the discussions in a neutral way this could be done without threat. The second tool used a similar concept – the Myers Briggs test. The final tool was a formal but anonymous 360 degree feedback tool.

The nature of some of the tools, since they use numerical assessments, is intrinsically quantitative although what is assessed is very subjective and depends significantly on the interpersonal relationships and the staff members' own history, values, expectations and perspective. It was not thought that the numerical aspects would be used to develop any specific trend information in themselves, but surprisingly a small number of specific issues did emerge from some fairly simple handling of this data which proved to be fertile ground for exploratory discussions.

Biographical Assignment and Journal

The initial biographical assignment was descriptive and anecdotal rather than analytical, though in its various drafts it did evolve into a more reflective piece. The Journal concentrated initially on events and reflection, though again as this progressed it dealt more with thoughts and context as well as what was happening. The initial analysis of my original biography and journal focused on four emerging themes that have manifested themselves as recurring strands in the analyses and profiles undertaken subsequently.

- *Communication* is a key issue in both upbringing and training. The emphasis has always been on restraining feelings and emotions and not sharing these. There is also a reluctance on my part to play a role to fulfil expectations.
- *Rationality* in terms of training – mathematics and accountancy. The whole emphasis in my past has been on building rational and logical arguments whereas management is about people, emotions, politics, historical baggage, uncertainty and ambiguity. This entails a whole redirection in outlook and inclination.

These first two themes are also linked to an avoidance of conflict and preference for compromise – a marked emphasis on the rational rather than the emotional and a preference for intellectual argument rather than emotional engagement. I would withdraw from conflict rather than opening up the issues to achieve a more constructive resolution. There was a strong message in terms of developed preferences and a lack of social confidence, though not of technical confidence. One of the results of this was a lack of engagement with others and a marked 'closed' rather than 'open' style of management, although being personally always receptive to different ideas.

- *Curiosity* for the way things work. The impulse has always to follow my interest rather than to plan a career. This personal curiosity is linked with game playing (though not with people) and a need to link the concepts always with the practical. However, this is a powerful motivation for learning – and as the risk aversion has abated on the personal exposure then the inclination to experiment has been given more freedom. The lowering of risk aversion may be something to do with increasing confidence in the underlying understanding.

- *Influence* in outcome. The drive for me to influence events appears not to be for status or power but to influence to 'get things right'. This seems to be a pretty fundamental value set – it emerges in the people recognised as my role models, my insistence on working towards fair solutions and not immediately politically expedient ones, the notion that only fairness for both sides ultimately results in a stable solution. The obverse is a clear frustration with colleagues who want to play the system rather than make decisions to provide solutions.

These two themes are linked through a marked preference for problem solving as contrasted to 'running according to procedures'. The logical and rational side, together with an evident strong practical or technical approach, seem to lend themselves to a systemic thinking approach. This fits with the RD's comments in my annual appraisal that I am "*particularly strong in addressing and unravelling complex problems and have the inclination to simplify them and take them to satisfactory conclusion*".

The RD's analysis provides some insights, together with a whole range of specific examples contained within the assignment and journal. The interplay of work / home events is evident, together with the personal importance of intellectual challenge and results drive of the work side. In many ways, however, the real value of the journal became the provision of a formal method and process for reflection – it was more the process than the results written down in the end. The individual lessons *really* learned are those carried as changed perceptions and as actions resulting – experimentation or seeking dialogue for feedback and confirmation (or otherwise). Otherwise it can result in an 'academic' (?) and potentially self indulgent exercise – playing around with circular hypotheses, embroidering interpretations.

On a totally different aspect, I found that writing the Journal was 'therapeutic' and helped to deal with some of the events, especially some of the personal events during the period - it helped put the work issues into perspective. I suppose in some way that this was externalising the issue and breaking into the cycle where things would 'just go around in your head'. Not the main objective of maintaining the Journal, but helpful.

In most work events dealt with earlier on in the Journal, the aspect that struck me after about a year in reflecting on the events chronicled was the lack of data on the motivation, agenda, real objectives or background of the others involved. Most of the interactions with colleagues revolve around personalities and are firmly rooted in an organisational culture context. This suggests that understanding the local factors – colleagues, the organisation and the environment – provides the other half of the equation (if the awareness of self and perceptions thereof is the first). Since none of the variables can be fully known, then predictability is always limited: the surprising thing emerging as a part of reflection in the journal is how little I actually knew about the real local context much of the time. It is clear from the journal that, recognising this, I did try to network more and did start talking far more to three of my fellow directors as a result. However, work patterns and time meant that I hardly saw the other two and (more critically) the RD between RET meetings at all. As far as I can tell, this disconnection was a problem shared by others so that the RET meetings continued to frustrate me to the extent that Monday mornings became a real challenge. My national role was more amenable in that I did not have to attend the SWRO management meetings!

One of the striking features of the journal was the increasing confidence that became evident as time progressed in experimenting with different styles or approaches, and the noting of the reactions of the others involved. Several initiatives represented conscious decisions to try a different approach to see what would happen – more open styles of handling meetings or staff, more challenging or assertive approaches to colleagues or issues, more concentration on the ‘softer’ issues. Some worked, some didn’t – but some of those that didn’t gave rise to modified subsequent attempts. The process became more fun whilst also giving rise to whole new sets of feedback and interactions. The process was often opportunistic rather than planned, possibly in itself an experiment with a less structured approach.

There were a number of specific event catalysts during the process – a mixture of home and work developments that provided deeper questioning as well as event reflection. These included feedback from staff during restructuring, my father’s illness and death and my father-in-law’s operations soon afterwards. More “Why?” questions than “How?”.

Psychological Profiles of Self - LSI Profile

I had first completed the *Life Styles Inventory* (LSI) profile, developed by Lafferty (1973) as a profile of myself in September 1991 whilst working for C&L. This exercise was a part of their personal development programme and undertaken by their in-house consulting/training arm. I had also completed the *Strength Deployment Inventory* developed by Porter & Maloney (1983), providing similar feedback. The LSI was appealing for this purpose because:

- it was simple to undertake as a questionnaire completion exercise (the interpretation and underlying issues were not simple, but the staff’s part in the process would be);
- the questions were non-judgemental and neutral, thus reducing any staff reticence in completing them frankly;
- the output developed was along 12 dimensions which could be discussed with some purpose.

There was also data available on percentile distributions of respondents profiled by Lafferty (see below) that could also be used within the staff discussions to provide a ‘normal’ context. The statistical validity of treatment in terms of sample size was not considered as important as catalysing comment and discussion in a reasonably focused manner - rather than develop a formal quantitative hypothesis test approach, the profile questionnaire was used immediately.

Some 50 profiles were eventually completed at five points in time during the research – six by myself, 26 by staff and 18 by friends outside work. Those completed by the staff were used to provide the basis for 360 degree feedback on myself during their routine formal appraisals. The output is numerical and can be compared with a spread of similar population to provide a measurement against percentile spread. A number of issues were explored within this overall set of results, arising from the profile data. The extent of homogeneity of feedback data was reasonable and tied in fairly closely with both my own perceptions of myself and perceptions of the staff through interview processes.

LSI Process

The feedback (i.e. the discussion arising largely from staff completing the LSI profile questionnaire on my behalf) was to become an additional 360 degree element of the appraisal process for staff. This would be additional to the formal and documented organisational requirement. Accordingly, I discussed this with the staff in advance to ensure that they were prepared and content for this to occur.

For the first cycle in September 1996 – to see if the approach worked and to provide some greater confidence in the process for the wider staff – I restricted the scope. I undertook the exercise with the three staff who knew me best: my Deputy (male), my Business Manager (female) and the staff member I had worked closest with over the previous months (female). The implications of the gender breakdown becomes apparent later. Subsequently this was widened, so that over the three subsequent years I received 24 completed profiles from both my staff and the three ‘critical friends’ as the work component. A briefing was given individually to each of the participants about the purpose of the questionnaire and how the results would be used within the context of the 360 degree feedback session which would follow. There was no compulsion and the unanimous response was one of curiosity and interest. I would not chase up responses so as to allow for ‘graceful exit’ but in practice only one individual did not respond: in that specific case it was not one of my staff but a colleague and the reason would seem to have been time pressure.

The following instructions were then given individually:

- *There are no “right” answers so it is important to score as frankly as possible.*
- *In the subsequent discussion, there will be NO replay of individual questions but only consolidated high level themes emerging so even the neutrality of individual answers will not be an issue.*
- *It is important to score against all words.*
- *Do not spend too much time on each individual answer – it is the overall shape that will matter.*
- *Consider each (of the 240) words and score simply against them as follows:*
 - *if you think it applies to me all or most of the time: score 2*
 - *if you think it applies to me some but not most of the time: score 1*
 - *if you think it does not apply to me or only infrequently: score 0.*
- *Think of situations in or out of work where they might apply and score the way you would expect me to react.*

The staff completed the profiles (i.e. scored against each of the word associations) before their appraisal meetings – hence the timing of the profiles at September and March. The emphasis in terms of scoring the words was that there were no ‘right’ answers and this was communicated clearly to staff – it was also emphasised that only genuine perceptions would provide the sort of ‘uncontaminated’ feedback that I needed. These were discussed with the staff at the final appraisal session of their cyclical review (twice yearly – two meetings at the ½ yearly, three at the annual).

I intentionally did not pay heed to the responses to the individual words, but only the category totals, for two reasons:

1. Addressing the responses to individual word associations would have led to a more personal discussion than I felt the staff would be comfortable with and lead to justification rather than exploration;
2. the intention was to obtain feedback on my behaviour – and how this was manifested in my management practice – so the higher level felt right in terms of linkages between characteristics and behaviour.

LSI Structure and outcomes

The LSI profile questionnaire comprises 240 words or behaviours {see Appendix 3 for the details} against which the respondent needs to score 0/1/2 as indicated above. The 240 behaviours are then accumulated into 12 characteristic categories each using 20 of the behaviours. This means that each characteristic is scored between 0 and 40. For reporting purposes, I have normalised these raw scores to score between 0 and 100 for ease of understanding – and in most cases within the commentary then include comparison with percentile scores of LSI respondents as the scales are most definitely non-linear.

The LSI Profile tests have been used since 1973 and the 1989 edition provides an analysis of percentile points as a comparison: this represents a large sample of 9,200 individuals from organisational management settings. The results are non-linear in terms of spread, so the percentile figures are included in the results to provide a greater understanding of a comparative context.

Over the three years, the profile was completed by 14 members of staff (26 profiles), my wife and 10 friends (18 profiles). I had completed the profile in 1991 and did so again on five more occasions during the research. Hence a total of 50 profiles were completed by the end of the research data collection phase. A number of staff and (to a lesser extent) friends completed the profile on more than one occasion to help with the feedback discussions which were the main objective. My deputy, business manager and communications manager (one of the 'critical friends') completed the profile on four occasions each.

Although merely intended to stimulate discussion originally, the accumulated data was re-appraised when the data collection was complete to see if there were lessons that could be drawn. Again, the major emphasis is on movement – changes in results from analysis – so that the key is the relative / comparative nature of the data on myself, rather than in respect of the wider population. The handling is then interpretative rather than strictly quantitative. This raises issues of validity and reliability – but these are of a different nature to those that would be raised if this were treated as an extension of the original work.

The profile and its practical application is dealt with by Cooke & Rousseau (1983a, 1983b), Cooke, Lafferty & Rousseau (1987) and Perry & Ware (1987).

LSI Profile analysis

In terms of the questionnaire format, the words / behaviours are distributed within the lists so that little overall shape is immediately apparent to the respondent. This is helpful in that there is less 'second-guessing' of the analysis. A specific approach was prescribed for the staff in filling these the profiles in – no long deliberation over individual words, emphasis on the whole rather than individual responses, no "right or wrong" answers possible in terms of 'good behaviour'. Together with the lack of apparent shape, the approach should help provide a neutral view in completion and a more accurate reflection.

In addition, the importance of providing frank feedback was always emphasised in terms of fulfilling the objectives of this particular exercise. My relationships with the staff, in addition, were open and an atmosphere of direct feedback always encouraged as a part of the Directorate development. Finally, in terms of the process, although the 360 degree feedback element was added to the appraisal process, the performance assessment was always completed prior to this exercise so as to decouple as far as possible any idea that performance appraisal and hence salary was linked to the exercise. Indeed, the 360 degree feedback was actually 'attached' to the staff personal development session element which always followed the assessment (usually as a separate meeting) so that it became a session for mutual feedback.

The results of their own scoring was provided to the staff at the level of the 12 characteristics and not the individual responses. The previous results were included in the data shared – as sometimes were anonymised data sets from other respondents to explore others' perceptions with staff to widen the discussion. Some of the themes explored in the feedback were the causes of change: me, you, the relationship, the organisation, your getting to know me better – or perhaps just discrete events at work or at home which influenced perceptions / mood and which were totally unrelated to our interaction but affective of the assessment. The sessions encouraged a more open relationship during the general pattern of work that in itself provided a more enjoyable and positive atmosphere.

A final set of meetings with staff was held to explore the analysed data, since some of the wider themes had not become apparent earlier and provided some extremely interesting feedback – opening up several new avenues of exploration. These particular findings were interesting for both the staff and myself. Indeed, in the final discussions with staff, critical friends and colleagues, when the whole Chapter was discussed in current draft, a huge amount of interest and comment was provoked. The final sessions provided a good deal of confidence that my interpretation of the data was close to their perceptions, but also provided a set of further insights into the organisational changes and some of the specific factors – particularly the gender differences in perceptions – which were informative.

The LSI process takes the initial analysis process further by grouping the 'styles' together into 3 style categories. At this level, value attribution starts to become important, but there is also benefit in terms of understanding behaviour.

Constructive styles: encouraging, affiliative, achievement and self-actualising, which reflect
“self enhancing thinking and behaviour that contribute to one’s level of satisfaction, ability to develop healthy relationships and work effectively with people, and proficiency at accomplishing tasks”

Passive / defensive styles: approval, conventional, dependent and avoidance, which reflect:
“self-protecting thinking and behaviour that promote the fulfilment of security needs through interaction with people.”

Aggressive / defensive styles: oppositional, power, competitive and perfectionistic, which reflect:
“self-promoting thinking and behaviour used to maintain status/position and fulfil security needs through task-related activities.”

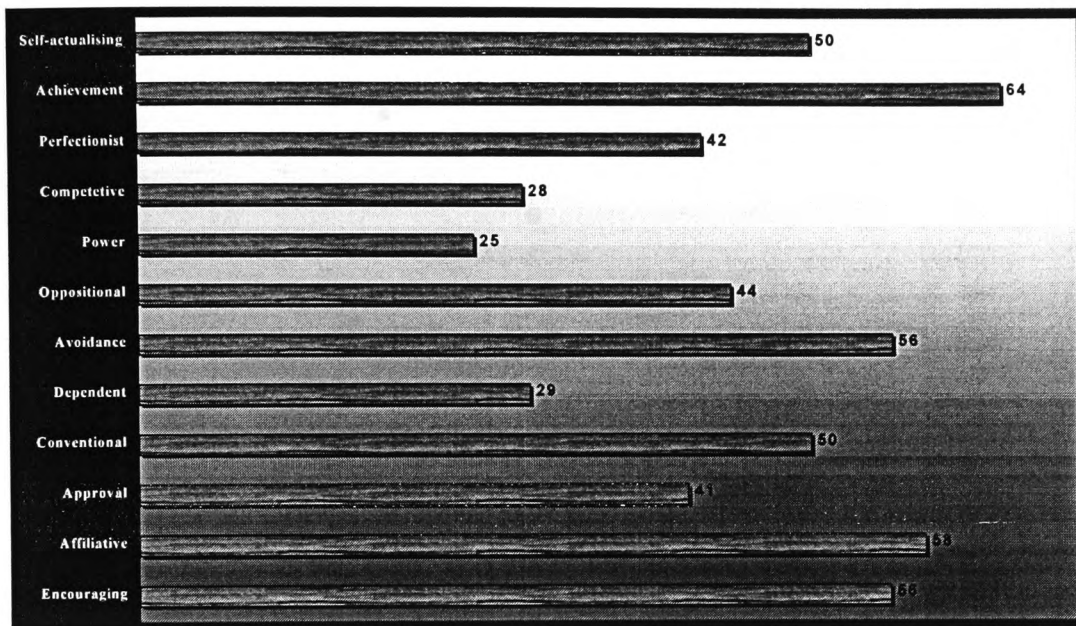
My overall profile

In terms of the **overall averages** scored over all 50 of the profiles completed, compared with the percentile data available, the analysis produces a set of results presented below. The overall average represents a ‘consensus’ view shared between work, friends and self – spread over an extended time period of three years. Fifty sets of results is probably at the lower level of meaningful interpretation in a quantitative sense but there are some indicators that emerge. Also, from a qualitative viewpoint, the inconsistencies that arose were probably more interesting and stimulating in terms of discussion generated with the staff members than consistency in external perceptions – unlikely in any event for a whole host of reasons.

Overall Profile	Percentile points (Similar population)					Response average
	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	
	Encouraging	22	26	30	34	
Affiliative	16	24	30	35	37	32
Approval	6	9	13	17	23	12
Conventional	8	11	14	18	22	14
Dependent	8	11	15	19	23	12
Avoidance	1	2	5	10	16	6
Oppositional	2	4	7	11	16	6
Power	2	3	8	11	19	3
Competitive	6	9	12	17	22	9
Perfectionist	13	16	20	24	28	19
Achievement	18	25	31	35	38	33
Self-actualising	15	22	28	33	36	28

These results provide an interesting confirmation of the initial analysis of the Biographical Assignment and Journal, with similar characteristics highlighted. The really useful application, however, proved to be as a discussion focus on an individual basis with staff in terms of ‘deviation’ from ‘norm’ in perceptions and the changes at different time points in individual perceptions. This proved to be a major catalyst, also, on my side in terms of ‘opening up’ with staff and could be regarded as a specific tool to help this as a process.

Figure 15 – Graphical Overall Profile



As an overall ‘consensus’ profile, this represents a remarkably ‘average’ profile within the context of the management population presented by Lafferty. In 8 out of the 12 categories, my profile varies from the mean by less than 10 percentile points (i.e. I am placed between the 40 and 60 percentile positions). There are no real extremes. In terms of the 4 categories in which I am outside the 40 to 60 percentile range the numbers emerging in terms of percentile positions are:

- Achievement* - 64th percentile
- Dependent* - 29th percentile
- Competitive* - 25th percentile
- Power* - 25th percentile

Although in the initial stages I did not ‘second guess’ the connection between the words and the analysis, later on this became more difficult but I did attempt to answer honestly – this was purely for my benefit. There were no great surprises in applying the above analysis to my prior self-perceptions. Although there are gaps between where I am in some categories and where, perhaps, I would like to be – there are no major inconsistencies.

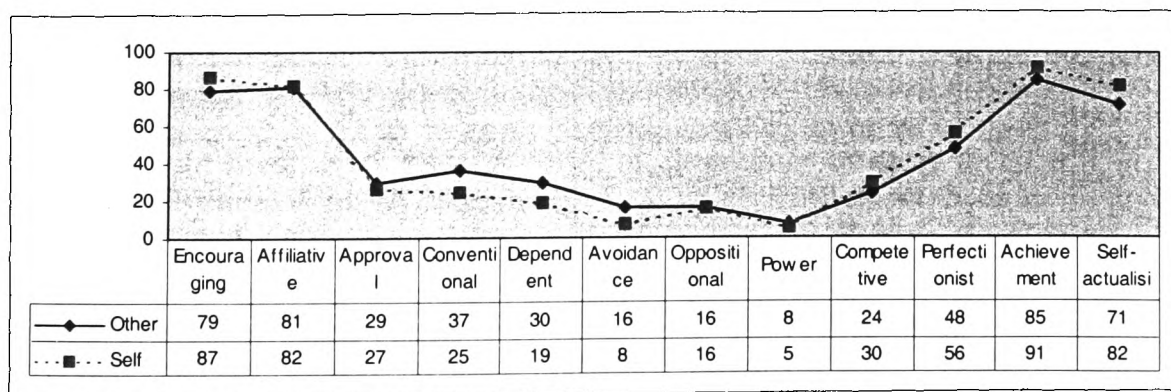
The profile responses naturally give rise to a number of perception and interpretative questions. Later sections of this analysis explore the differences that become apparent within this overall context between:

- self-perception and that of others
- the initial perceptions and later views (- the “change” ?)
- work and social contexts
- male and female respondents
- individual responses and deviation from the consensus.

While the graphical presentation of the changes in my practice over time is set out in Figure 17, the qualitative discussions with staff and critical friends (also the learning set) were already highlighting some areas of changed practice. These changes were mainly in the areas of inclusive management, a more open style and a ‘rounder focus’ in terms of both people / political aspects and technical analysis.

From a personal perspective there was a much clearer view emerging through the development of the personal conceptual framework of what I wanted to do and how this could be achieved. The increasing understanding now being made explicit provided both confidence and impetus to experiment and develop further. I really did start to see this as a moving target, with the research need to document the literature review (for example) as a helpful discipline in making this explicit and the thinking tighter. The approach sat comfortably with the methodology outlined in Figure 9 which expects movement in both researcher and researched and builds the model around this dynamic position. The following sets of data and presentation try to provide an insight into the differences and changes perceived, together with a brief set of descriptions of the ‘snapshot’ conclusions possible. The data and outcomes were the subject of considerable detailed discussions with a number of my staff and critical friends in terms of the conclusions reached.

Figure 16 - Self-appraisal Compared to External View



The **normalised scores** in the comparison between my own view of myself and the perceptions of others provide a reasonable indication of the nature of fit of the scores, with 5 differences of more than 10. In the raw scoring system this would, for example, represent only 4 points in each category where I thought “sometimes” and the staff thought “never” or “most times” out of 20 attributes / behaviours.

The major differences that emerge are that others see me as being less encouraging, perfectionist and self-actualised than I see myself. However, they see me as more conventional and dependent than I see myself. The difference apparent in the *Encouraging* score probably represents the difference between what I would like to have been able to do with the staff and what was actually possible with the time I was physically in Bristol. The results also span two periods of fundamental internal restructuring, which is picked up in the discussion section below.

The *Perfectionist* gap may well be an intentional modification of behaviour on my part as I balance the practical necessities against my own preferences in work – the balance of diminishing returns on getting things as right as I would like them to be. This may be a learned behaviour with the consultancy firms in balancing time and money.

The *Self-actualised* difference is more complex – those I work with closer or should know me better respond with scores closer to my own. It may also be that some of the concepts in this one are more internal and less demonstrated by external actions and tasks. In terms of personal values, my responses for this particular set of words may also be one where there is some self-delusion incorporated in terms of desired attributes.

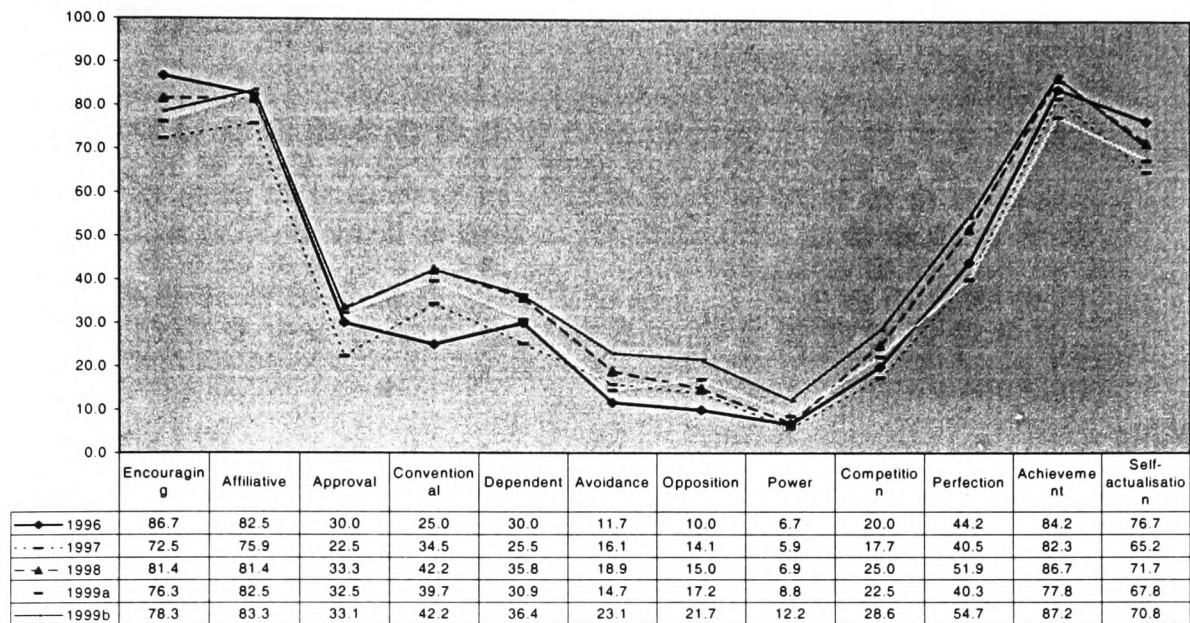
The differences in the *Conventional* and *Dependence* scores in a work setting may well come down to conformity – or attempting to fit into a civil service way of working to actually get results with those I work with in the department. This may not fit with my past style or preference but may well represent an attempt to accommodate the overall culture to influence or make things happen, whilst trying to establish a more supportive “micro-culture” locally. The civil service culture in this respect is a source of great frustration to me – an accommodation without acceptance.

Whilst this is an overall reading, the individual variations which emerged and were discussed were far more relevant in applicability to my practice in action. The key aspect of the above is the closeness (relatively) of fit and reasonable explanations (later agreed as such by discussions) so that it gives more confidence in the interpretations of the changes in profiles that follow – and the other differences emerging.

How did things change during the period?

At the very beginning of the research in September 1996, when three of my staff completed the profile for the first time (as a pilot) and I completed it for the second time (I had done so in 1991), I thought that it might be possible to identify some changes in behaviour through changes in perceptions of the staff. This would be a bonus to add to its use as a tool to stimulate discussion and might help answer the initial questions of changes in practice. Six months later, I decided this would not be practical but that its value to stimulate discussion was actually being demonstrated.

Figure 17 - Trend Behaviour

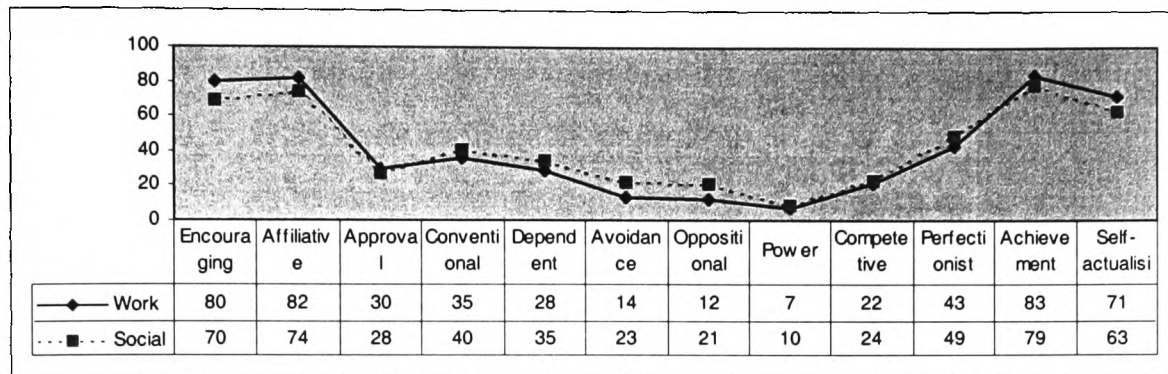


There are a relatively small number of respondents involved – 26 responses spread over five sampling cycles over the three years. This means that a fully robust statistical inference may not be possible but, much to my surprise, after these five cycles there does seem to be a trend movement clearly discernible in some of the styles. The sampling structure, hypothesis testing structure / scale and sampling consistency were not considered initially because the objective was to highlight changes for focused discussion rather than any statistical treatment. The qualitative question arises however – given an apparent shift in the data, are there reasons why this could / should have occurred?

The main difference seems to be an increasing set of scores in the *Aggressive / Defensive* styles. These are all still well below the 50% quartile, but there seem to be consistent increases in the figures. I have attributed these increases (see other sections of this thesis dealing with RO culture) to my reaction to the behaviour of colleagues within the Regional Office and the culture that operates within it, where such styles would be seen to be the “norm”. The reaction is not what I had expected to see in terms of my behaviour. A sort of Gestalt in terms of my own behaviour! The other style that has increased is the “*Conventional*”. I attribute the change to ‘learning how to get things done within the system’ where the system is extremely rigid and the lack of flexibility means that one has to play the rules to get results. This has some important consequences for the discussion on learning organisations and the way in which the work within the Directorate had to interact with that of other Directorates and parts of the NHS Executive.

Reviewing the time sequence, the “*Constructive Styles*” dipped during 1997, when the profile completion took place right in the middle of an unsettling (for all) restructuring of the Regional Office. The feedback emerged in detail in the discussions which resulted from the profiles in the September appraisals.

Figure 18 - Work / Social profiles



The comparison between friends' perceptions and those of work colleagues was not an exercise that I had originally thought to undertake, but in the first round of discussions with staff, the issue arose of home and work in terms of the staff feedback. The issue of how staff actually build up their perceptions, especially in the initial stages and how this tallies with their proximity and relationship to one provoked a number of questions. The issue of self-perception and image projection – and how the image projected (one tries to project?) depends on the other party in terms of reception seemed to me to be important. It seemed quite possible that the projection to different audiences would be different so that the comparison might provide some interesting data.

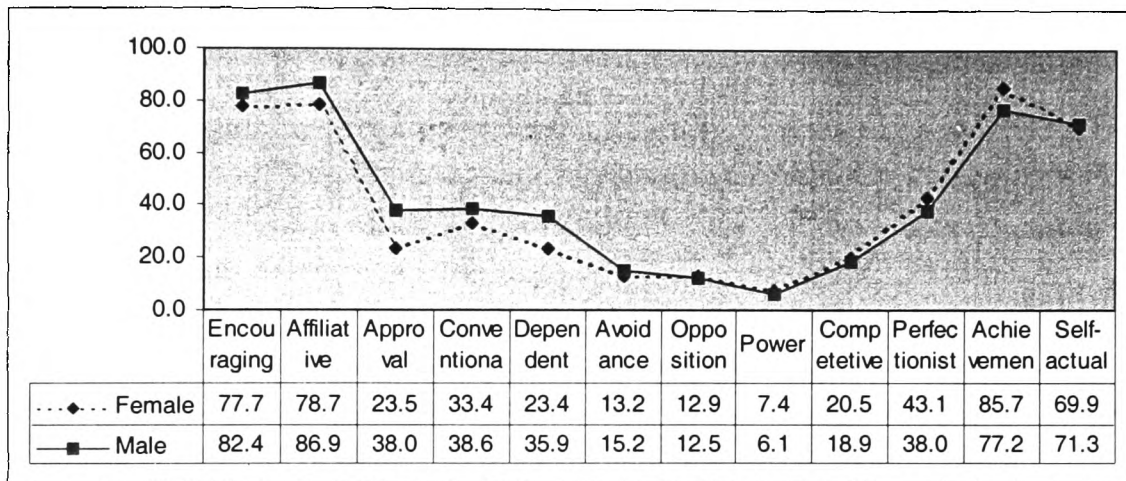
If credibility as a manager and the receptivity of staff depend on their assessment of truthfulness and trust – hence impacts on the interpretation of communication that takes place - then understanding the gaps should help significantly with getting the message right. This almost returns to the Drucker (1999) issue of managing yourself before managing others.

Given the difference in context, the fit of profiles is in fact remarkably close. The major difference seems to be in the *Encouraging* style, which friends score lower (in fact the difference between the 60% and 45% percentile points). I believe this may be because in the work setting I have a level of experience and expertise with which I try to support and develop my staff. Outside work, I am not at all judgmental – nor do I feel the need to convert others to my opinions or ideas. In terms of a more detailed analysis, the difference is almost entirely attributed to three friends who I perceive as very self sufficient and independent. Perhaps I am reading their needs incorrectly!

In terms of closeness of individual responses to the average calculated, I undertook a variance analysis that provided quite a surprising finding. Of all those who completed the profiles, the two with least deviation from the average perceptions and with virtually no 'rogue' style responses were the two 19 year old sons of our friends whom we have known since they were born. This could be a fruitful area for speculation and further work.

Conversely and perhaps intriguingly, the response that showed greatest movement between two profiles was that of one of our friends (a consultant psychiatrist) whom I have known for 20 years – perhaps the fact I shared a flat on a skiing holiday with the family in the interim played a part - though not with the son’s perceptions (see above). This understanding of how one is seen by others is a tricky business, but critical to the way in which messages are received and understood and hence would seem to be important for effective management.

Figure 19 - Gender based profiles



The comparison of responses split between male and female respondents was another analysis not initially planned. I have always maintained that I do not treat male and female staff differently – certainly not in terms of appraisal, delegation and work handling. I am, however, careful of relationships and the discussions with staff resulting from the analysis, feedback in the learning set and a fair bit of reflection on my behaviour brings me to the conclusion that whilst I am still of the opinion that the equality of work response is there, my social treatment of them is in fact different. The difference could be as simple as playing squash or going out for a drink with my male colleagues but not the female colleagues. Might this not give rise also to difference in perception?

The other dimension to this was that the reception of the same messages might be different because of different gender expectations, values or ‘conditioning’ (quite apart from individual variances). This was an explanation favoured unanimously by the female staff and critical friends with whom I discussed this with in detail: they were not surprised by other than the fact I had not expected the discrepancy.

The work sample is small, because some staff have completed the profiles several times. However, there were eight men and seven women included (those who completed multiple profiles had their averages entered).

The results of the analysis are interesting. The major difference was the female responses scored significantly lower profile values for me on the *Passive / Defensive* styles than did the male staff (other than my deputy). The differences are considerable for *Affiliative*, *Approval* and *Dependence* in particular: the differences in percentile points respectively are: 55% - 75%; 25% - 60% and 15% - 50%.

The differential responses may be the result of a real difference in my interactions with the genders or perhaps it stems from differences in their expectations - as the female staff believe. Anticipating the section which deals with the feedback, there seems also to be a gender difference in the way in which communication is expected – and more importantly appreciated – with female staff requesting more individual communication and discussion.

Individual analysis

The aggregation of profile results in each of the above comparisons hides a huge range of variation. The differences in the responses are far greater than potentially expected which raises some fascinating questions. Some of this variation is undoubtedly due to differences in interpretation by staff of the words actually used to describe the behaviours in the questions. This interpretation effect should be relatively small, especially in the repeat completion after we would have discussed meaning in any previous feedback session (the staff had their own copies of the fully completed questionnaires with them – I took only the summarised / analysis results). The table below sets out some of the staff responses.

	f1	f2	m1	f3	f4	m2	m3	f5	m4	m5	m6	m7	m8	f6	f7
Encouraging	34	30	31	36	29	37	32	26	36	20	35	40	33	23	40
Affiliative	33	29	30	34	33	40	38	31	37	21	37	40	35	28	33
Approval	14	15	8	13	5	17	8	4	24	14	15	22	14	5	10
Conventional	14	17	10	16	13	16	9	13	17	20	17	21	14	13	9
Dependent	13	14	8	9	6	15	9	9	19	12	21	15	16	5	10
Avoidance	5	8	4	7	3	3	5	5	9	15	4	5	4	5	5
Oppositional	5	6	3	7	6	1	0	0	9	13	5	4	5	8	6
Power	3	2	3	2	6	3	2	0	0	8	2	1	1	5	3
Competitive	10	7	9	10	11	8	4	4	11	8	7	4	10	10	5
Perfectionist	20	17	19	19	17	14	12	12	10	17	12	16	22	18	18
Achievement	38	34	32	37	32	36	29	31	28	22	30	34	36	35	34
Self-actualising	34	24	26	30	27	36	30	23	25	21	25	35	30	28	31

This demonstrates a far greater variation would be explicable by the immediate context within which the profile questions were answered – their most recent interactions with me or ‘good day’ / ‘bad day’ issues. The questions are clearly subjective and interpretative so that the perception issues raised in the previous sections are clearly influential. However, the extent of the variation of the responses is still striking.

The results really do highlight the concept of organisations being composed of individuals with a network of relationships and it is this that defines the organisation itself in terms of the way it works rather than formal structures. For work responses, with multiple responses being averaged for the individuals the following summary illustrates the extent of the variations in the responses using the raw scores rather than any normalised results. This provides the best comparison and a better feel for the variations encountered - each characteristic style could potentially be scored in a range from 0 to 40.

Do the above results reflect one person being assessed (i.e. me) or are there several people involved? For example, for:

Encouraging, the range is 20 to 40: the 10% and 90% points are at 22 and 37

Approval, the range is 4 to 24: the 10% and 90% points are at 6 and 23.

Indeed, on close review, virtually every style varies with at least one respondent from almost the 10% percentile to the 90% quartile - and often outside those. The variation occurs differently for different respondents, although there are clearly one or two who have a very different perception of me and my behaviour. Does such a range invalidate the previous analysis? What sense can one make of the differences? What implication has this for research that does not consider such variation - e.g. any research that looks only at quantitative averages on a statistical basis as a proxy for organisational behaviour?

Yet, the overall averages correlate reasonably well - both in terms of my own perceptions and over time. The work averages also correspond reasonably well with the responses from the social side. It is interesting to note from that perspective that the greatest variation over time with multiple profiles from a single respondent is from a friend of 20 years standing (a consultant psychiatrist) whilst one of the two closest responses to the mean, with remarkably little variation, was from her son.

The extent of the variation of perceptions raises a number of fundamental management questions. For example, how can one pitch communication to a group of staff when such diversity exists in their perception of the communicator. Individual staff will undoubtedly interpret messages through their perceptions of the context of the communicator - his credibility, perceived behaviour and value patterns - as well as their own personal experience and history. It cannot be otherwise. No wonder then that people come away from meetings or communication sessions with such different understandings of what actually occurred or disagree so radically in terms of recollection of events. At its extreme, the implications for legal witnesses must be worrying. But understanding the extent of the potential perception differences may in practice help - at least in terms of understanding the impact of one's own assumptions in terms of others reading of personal motivations. More speculatively, similar extrapolations can presumably be drawn where staff, or more extremely unconnected business contacts, know very little of one's background or character and will have made assumptions drawn from previous post-holders / 'similar' professionals - the generalisations always made as a 'first cut'. Some of Kolb's work, Kolb (1996), in terms of characteristics of predisposition in specific occupations would seem to bear out the appropriateness of *some* of these generalisations but even this may make the mismatch more serious.

The way in which people develop their perceptions of others, often based on generalisations and previous experience, has important implications early on in any relationship – work or social. “*You didn’t turn out as I’d expected from first impressions*” is feedback I have received a number of times from consultancy clients – but difficult to know how much of this was due to their assumptions (ex generalisation) or ‘role play’ on my part to meet their early expectations. Either way, the reception of messages put out needs careful consideration until the context is fully established and understood by both parties – more difficult in group situations.

Going back to the model of an organisation comprising a collection of individuals - and group responses representing a smoothed average – how can one change one’s practice to take this sort of diversity into account other than being aware of it as a major issue? When one resorts to a review of the individual questions making up the style accumulations, the responses become confusing. There seems to be an almost universal view that I am thoughtful, supportive, co-operative, modest, stubborn, not vengeful, not mean, not egotistical and not aggressive – but very little else seems to be consistent to any degree.

Discussions arising from profile completion

Some of the response variations noted above became clear at a reasonably early stage and were included in the staff discussions with those for whom they were most marked. Others have only become apparent as the data collection has accumulated and been analysed towards completion. The real benefits in terms of practice change and exploration during the research itself came from the opportunity to explore the differences during the appraisal processes or discussions specially organised to deal with them. In several cases, these discussions led to a change in approach between myself and individual staff members as we both appreciated better the position and values involved. One example is for one of the staff when raw scores were received with a 12 month gap as follows:

	<u>Sep-96</u>	<u>Sep-97</u>
Encouraging	36	23
Affiliative	34	23
Approval	13	17
Conventional	12	21
Dependent	11	16
Avoidance	4	12
Oppositional	7	4
Power	1	3
Competitive	10	4
Perfectionist	22	12
Achievement	37	30
Self-actualising	32	15

The first major restructuring within the RO went through its critical period during the months of July to October 1997. This staff member was being transferred from my Directorate to another one – as became apparent during August 1997, immediately prior to the second set of responses. I knew (but could not impart at the time because it would have been unfair to other staff) that she would be moving to a post which she would appreciate and which suited her. The larger part of her work would transfer with her as part of the functional split – but my agreement with the other director was that she would retain other elements of her work (in which she had specific experience which the other staff did not have) and continue to report to me on these. This agreement was outside the consultation process and the extremely rigid procedures laid down by the unions and management side for the restructuring.

Before our meeting I gave her a copy of the two profiles – '96 and '97 – and was presented with a six page handwritten assessment of why they were different when we met. She was extremely helpful and open about the whole process and set of issues. This openness and time taken over her response was probably at one end of the spectrum but by no means unique as a response. Her perception was that she was being cast adrift. Because of the specialist areas she worked in, I had probably interacted with her and provided her with greater support than many of the other staff. During this period of restructuring, with both my time commitment elsewhere (the White Paper) and the internal preoccupations (my own position and the place of the restructured directorate within the Regional Office), she felt neglected and excluded. Not in terms of absolute perceptions as these in many areas were still in the general range – but certainly in comparison to some of the high previous ratings. None of this came out during the usual appraisal processes, nor routine contact. But the change in relationship, leading to the change in perceptions was abundantly clear from the profiling. The issues of individual communication, the routine assumptions that all make without clear signals to the contrary, the need for rationale for change and the critical nature of time for contact / communication were all clear in the discussions that ensued.

Myers Briggs

Again, the main objective of undertaking this exercise was to initiate discussion with staff. Part of the Myers Briggs process can be to compare characteristics with others in the team through the same testing process and identify how team members might work together and recognise differences in personality, style and behaviour. My results were the subject of one of the Directorate workshops, in comparison with the profiles the staff already had available. Having worked this through, with interesting and positive results (providing feedback for the whole team), it was decided that as this was undertaken half way through the process the results were unlikely to vary significantly and we would not re-run the exercise. I did, however, repeat the exercise for myself in October 2000. In terms of scoring, the initial results worked out as INTJ – introverted, creative, logical and structured. This is exactly the same as my predecessor in post, coincidentally (or perhaps this predominates with accountants with science degrees). The assessment of characteristics seemed to me to be uncannily close (Appendix 4), taken from Rogers (1997), given the coarseness of the analysis and fairly close scoring for two attributes, as is the ten point action plan for effectiveness summarised below.

Both are curiously accurate and tie in with staff feedback, biographical journal and psychological profile:

- praise more and provide greater feedback
- postpone making some decisions and go with the flow
- accept how much detailed work needs to happen before plans become reality
- consider the risk / benefit of continually trying to raise standards
- genuinely involve and consult others whom decisions will affect
- tell people close in about feelings
- learn to control impatience with detail or delegate
- ask for help before volume and pressure become too great
- get work into perspective and get enough exercise
- smile more and frown less.

In Briggs (1998) some of the observations really do strike home, for example (p74):

“They often do not directly express their most valued and valuable part: their creative insights. Instead they translate them into logical decisions, opinions and plans, which they often express clearly. Because of this others sometimes experience INTJs as intractable, much to the surprise of the INTJ who is willing to change an opinion when new evidence emerges”.

In the workshop, the staff had no problem endorsing each of those, though they thought I played enough squash to provide the exercise needed. The process of sharing this MB analysis and the discussion that followed helped to provide a more open basis for future feedback and discussion. In the repeated test in October 2000, the profile worked out as ENTJ. The “N” and “T” scores in both exercises were really pretty definite, but the “P”/“J” scores were close to the border. The initial “I” score, too, was fairly close to the border – but by the second test had moved across to register as “E”. In discussion with critical friends, the close nature of the analysis was not found to be unexpected.

The issue of self-awareness is much the same as many others – multiple feedback eventually produces a convincing set of evidence and develops a grounding with personal experience and perceptions. The use of tools to supplement the reflection would seem to be a parallel to seeking cognitive knowledge to supplement experiential. Having reinforced some of the baseline perceptions, the issue of change and development would be evaluated through feedback (assisted by the profiles as a discussion catalyst).

The Myers-Briggs scoring goes further than the above initial analysis, in that it also describes a set of “type dynamics” – or preferences – in terms of processes used. In the INTJ case, the preferences are thought to be: seeing possibilities, applying logic, applying personal values to data and (as the inferior preference) taking in data. The ENTJ preferences in contrast are applying logic, seeing possibilities, taking in data and (as the inferior preference) applying personal values. The implications of reactions under stress and the importance of understanding how these relate to types is also explored. Whilst providing insight, the main motivation for using the tool was to stimulate discussion and free up feedback with and from staff – perhaps in retrospect a limited objective.

In this respect, the MB theories stress the continuing development, albeit in different ways and through different stress, throughout life. Whilst basic type is not thought to change radically, the facility and development of preferences is thought to change and be an area of conscious development. Myers (1998, p28) suggests:

".....optimum use of the four typologies is to be obtained not through equality but rather through selective development of each function in proportion both to its relative importance to the individual and to its useful relationship to the other processes....."

The concept of my development as a 'journey' fits well with this view of primary and secondary preferences, with development of the areas 'underdeveloped' to date. The areas focused upon through the Biographical Assignment and Journal, supplemented by the LSI analysis and changes identified, together with the experimental actions taken in line with the Kolb cycle approach are very much reflected in the MB approach and underpinnings.

RO Performance Reviews and PDP cycles

I thought, from my previous experience in the accountancy firms (nothing of the sort existed or was envisaged at the University Hospital), that the appraisal reviews would be extremely helpful. In practice, the way in which they were run – very formally and with the main focus and objective being to complete the DH appraisal forms – was not at all helpful. The time allocated was normally restricted and work updates intruded also into the sessions, partly because there were so few other one-to-one meetings. In several of the appraisals, the feedback became so stilted and uncomfortable that it was almost a relief to return to the neutral haven of work issues. In the event, most of my Personal Development Plan over the period revolved around this research and the experimentation arising from it so that it was less of a problem than it might have been. This was fine in that it was a long running developmental approach, but this was not really emphasised or picked up as any sort of 'checkpointing' process as this progressed.

The whole emphasis of the formal appraisal process was on the written commentary. I would complete a written self-assessment focused (according to the rules) around specified Senior Civil Service competencies and work objectives (based on Directorate business plan). The professional input element was never agreed and was the source of major friction and a major disagreement as I saw the delivery of 'professional excellence' as a key part of my role – a notion not shared. My written submission would be handed in two weeks prior to the meeting. The Regional Director evaluation and performance grading would then be written on the form and the purpose of the meeting was to discuss it. The signed form together with grading and salary recommendation then went to the meeting of eight Regional Directors where in plenary session they would decide on salary uplifts. No minutes, no process notes and no appeal.

The purpose of these appraisals became very defensive and, since any move within the CS involves forwarding the previous two appraisal reports, the written content that results is really quite important. The process could probably not be set up in a worse way to encourage open feedback and discussion.

One issue raised each year in my appraisal was that of presentations. The issue raised by the RD was not one of content or technique but that they were not authoritative enough. I always tried to ensure a good deal of audience participation and the intention was always to prompt questions and engage participation and debate – as a result they often resulted in heated debate on operational issues emerging, particularly with the HA chief executives. The real issue for me was that we never did know the whole answer – we knew the direction we wanted, but the CEs knew far more about the potential implementation than we did, although I could then easily put the finance rules around that. A cultural mismatch in terms of outlook.

Formal 360 Degree Feedback

The externally facilitated 360 degree feedback was not particularly useful. The thinking behind this was that the feedback to a series of questions should be provided anonymously then correlated and additional feedback included.

In practice the anonymous nature was unhelpful – the analysis posed more questions than it answered and there was no way of exploring the subjective reasons underneath. The only *real* consensus was that I could manage my time better (which I already know and was not terribly insightful anyway). The only additional written comment included dealt with one of the respondent's confusion over one of the questions rather than his perception of me.

The lesson learned from this exercise was probably that there is no substitute for direct feedback – preferably face to face, even if there is some pre-working of material in preparation. The building of relationships (or culture even) capable of supporting such openness and feedback is probably an essential part of an effective management process needed to support such a process.

The scale provided for response in the questionnaire to be completed was, for each question, 0 to 4 - i.e. from 0 (bad) to 4 (excellent), with 2 being scored as moderate. The only scoring where my response was more than 1 adrift from the averaged respondents' aggregation was to the question "*Builds and supports a high performance team*". Potentially a serious comment on the building of the Directorate on LO lines. However, there are two issues emerging here:

- *The relativity of scoring.* I had scored this as a 4 (excellent) as I believe I have consistently met this (i.e. in my last five organisations I had developed good team working and developed my staff – in the three consultancy firms one of the measures was easy: generated profit) and the average response was 2.5 (with a range of 0.5 from moderate to good), so my response was fairly bullish;
- *The criteria used for scoring.* I am not sure whether this was a comment on my performance and efforts or the quality of the team output – or their perceptions of it from a professional / non-professional view (Finance / IT / Estates) or from which stakeholder view this emerged from.

The reasons for the differences in the scores could be said to be unimportant – if the perceptions amount to the reality of the situation then it must be the communication of achievement that is adrift. However, this reduces the importance of learning from or action to respond to any such survey. The difficulties do, however, provide a useful example of the formality / anonymity of the process getting in the way of clarifying understanding and being able to explore the extremes of response. This conclusion was discussed with the OD manager (a “critical friend”) and a second RO Director, who also piloted this and formed similar views. We agreed that the pilot should not be widened in scope and that different mechanisms be explored - mine already included staff feedback, but largely lacked the RO peer input.

Staff: 1-to-1s and Formal Appraisals

The biggest issue to emerge consistently within the staff formal and informal sessions was that of communication. Two major areas were specifically of importance to the staff:

- feedback on their own performance and what I really thought about them – linked both to personal development / learning (as coach) and to progression (as line manager). The more immediate and direct the better, the more specific the better;
- information on the reasons why things are happening – effectively this is providing them on an individual level with local context or organisational knowledge: the semi-official version of gossip and a slightly more formal set of facts and interpretations on what is going on behind the decisions made. The feedback needed is a sort of sense-making of organisational behaviour and decisions. However, since staff all have different personal circumstances, views and perspectives the more individual this communication became in terms of discussion then the better the sense they made of it with the fit to their own situation.

The staff response to the inclusion of reflection sessions within both formal and informal appraisals was very positive. The sessions were, therefore structured to fit in with the rest of the appraisal approach we adopted within the Directorate, although complying with the written formal output. The formal six-monthly sessions (i.e. annual appraisal and mid-year update) were split into three separate one-hour (or more) meetings. The first session was used to discuss work progress against objectives, the second to discuss experience gained and the write up of the first session, the third to discuss Personal Development Plans and the write up of the second session. These were included into the research process from September 1996 through to April 2000 – eight sets of formal interview / appraisal meetings for each directly reporting staff member (six). In terms of research objectives, these were to monitor their perceptions of me and initial 360 degree feedback. Their perceptions were also followed up later when the pattern of feedback had become apparent, their own development and feedback on the LO concepts had developed and how their own development needs fitted with the concepts had become apparent.

Prior to attending the first session, the staff had to provide the self-assessment part of the documentation completed, together with a two page summary of what they had learned that was not of a professional or technical nature. The staff then wrote into the forms themselves the results of the discussions, including my appraisal of them, which we then agreed at the next stage. This was repeated at the third meeting. The only physical input that I had into the forms was my final signature and confirmation of the grade marking (which affected salary). The quality of the process improved with each iteration. The 360 degree feedback also increased as the nature of the dialogue became more open and relaxed. The whole perception became one of a developmental character that happened to provide the formal documentation to feed the salary appraisal rather than the other way round.

Three of the staff did start to maintain their own biographical journals after discussions during annual appraisals – I provided some suitable journal article for some ideas but did not follow this up further. Each found the process time consuming and the exercise lapsed – the initial exercise in formalising the reflective process seemed to provide more of a structure to their following efforts (this was their perspective).

The staff expressed satisfaction in interviews and feedback (for example through the staff attitudinal questionnaires) on the greater emphasis on delegation and coaching: they saw this as an increased opportunity to gain professional experience in new areas, but in a safe environment in which they could always access support. They drew a very positive comparison in this respect between the Finance Directorate and the other areas of the RO. The feedback was echoed and endorsed by the critical friends who worked across the RO with various staff groups. The only rule enforced was that if work output went to the RD or externally to the NHS (as this is regarded as providing official policy) then I or my deputy had to provide a quality assurance check. Most of the feedback dealt with above is positive. There was, of course, negative feedback on my own practice, including:

- I was perceived to ‘withdraw’ into national work (White Paper development) at a time when the second restructuring was taking place. The staff saw this as avoiding confrontation and potentially not fighting their corner for them. In fact my participation was a personal opportunity to become involved in policy work that I had never previously been involved in. However, there was clearly a communication issue here – picked up specifically, too, through the psychological profiles they were completing for me.
- I was seen to be too open with some of my colleague directors who were not perceived by the staff to play by the same rules – basically they believed I was not ‘political’ enough in terms of my understanding and playing of the local context and culture. This was probably true: I did not want to play it that way, but ignoring the culture and power structures without changing them doesn’t work organisationally either.
- Some feedback in terms of gender handling, prompted by the psychological profiling results provided back to them at the end. However, the individual discussions did tend to centre more on gender expectations than on differential behaviour. Virtually all the female but none of the male staff seemed to have read “*Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*” - there seemed to be quite a difference in awareness here that may also be linked to expectations and perceptions.

Observation and Experimentation

Within the Directorate and RO

I was able to expand the scope of my delegation to staff by giving them lead responsibility for a range of new initiatives as we set them up, but set specific individual learning objectives with the work delivery objectives.

The additional responsibilities were linked to both longer term staff PDPs and for individual larger projects, which together with specific feedback was positively received as an approach. In many cases the learning objectives set were in terms of co-working with other staff, both within and outside the Directorate.

I was also able to work with the staff and deal with issues in a way in which my own views and feelings were more open. This change in approach in practice provided a number of difficulties in terms of personal views and corporacy with the RET. At least two of the other directors had little inhibitions about sharing their views exactly with the staff - this may have been open in style but it did provide a much greater division between staff groups and a wider negative view of processes. I used the Directorate workshops to practice a whole set of ideas on presentations and involved the staff in forming both policy and the direction of the Directorate as a whole.

Agency Reviews

The first Agency Review took a far more collaborative approach to discussing and developing the review thoughts and contents with my co-reviewer than I would normally. This meant a far more sharing and open approach, the developing of ideas together rather than taking ideas away, developing them and then seeing how they went down. The whole review, in fact, was undertaken in a way that involved a whole series of stakeholders in a challenging set of interviews and robust approach. In several of these I took a far more confrontational role than I would normally to see how I and the interviewees would respond. This did not feel anywhere near as awkward as I thought it would! The nature of the review process meant that many of the research techniques could be used and practised with also. The second review, given the nature of the Authority and the extremely strongly held views of "Pro-life" groups and the scientific community, needed no role play for confrontation and it was sometimes a question of diffusing tensions rather than building them up.

Central project – Human Resources and Payroll Procurement for the NHS as a whole

The HR project provided a significant challenge for all that I have learned about the theory of change management – and all my previous practical experience. This was an opportunity to instigate and manage change (at high level) for over 500 independent statutory organisations involving over a million staff – almost all of whom will be affected by some aspect or other of the new systems, especially the rostering systems that are intended as the second phase.

Added to the implementation challenge was the fact that this was the first time that the NHS would have directed all organisations to use specific systems and impose a specific timescale (other than for NHSNet as an infrastructure which was a technical exercise rather than a change management process). There are no existing agreed structures for consultation, project management, legal contracting or funding for such a project so these had to be negotiated separately and centrally with HR and Finance colleagues in the NHS Executive. In addition, as a “novel” and complex approach to use the Private Public Partnership approach under the new Treasury Task Force guidelines, similar negotiations had to take place with the Treasury, Office of Government Commerce, Cabinet Office and the e-Envoy’s Office. Each of these organisations is normally exceedingly risk-averse, but even more so currently because of the Passport Office, Home Office (asylum systems) and a number of other recent high-profile IT project difficulties. They involved the Office of Government Commerce into the loop as another group who had to be included, influenced and convinced – with specific ‘gateway’ processes to be observed.

There was a central team building exercise to undertake, the engagement and transfer of ownership of responsibility to local level for actual detailed implementation, structures to implement to monitor benefits realisation, education, training and communications strategies to develop and implement. The issues of introducing e-Learning opportunities through the systems infrastructure and providing much greater and distributed access would potentially provide a huge impetus for self-development responsibility and the opportunity to rethink linkages between training and development for NHS staff. There was, in brief, no shortage of management and people handling experimentation opportunities and the practical application of the change management model I had constructed for myself was already being subjected to a very thorough testing.

I started to build some feedback loops with three colleagues – two members of the Steering Group and the NHS Deputy Director of Finance (who was leading a parallel project) and, more informally, with the suppliers although this had some potential difficulties. The two potential consortia included (separately) PricewaterhouseCoopers and KPMG, both of whom regarded the implementation process as the largest current change management project proposed in the UK – largely around the impact on staffing and work practices for the 700,000 clinical staff of changing training and rostering management. The result was a thoroughly exciting and challenging project that provided a whole series of insights into organisational behaviour, defensive and avoidance routines, motivation and challenges of inspiration.

External interviews

The balance of these interviews (see pages 117 and 130) was very much directed at the organisational development issues, but the end of each was given over to my own profile and performance. In analysing the responses a number of common themes emerged – these gained in strength between the first interviews and the second as the interpretations and reflections of the first round of interviews were fed back into the second round for comment.

From the Directors of Finance I received the following feedback:

- I had achieved high professional credibility in technical ability and judgement– but still didn't do enough about projecting this 'upfront'**
- I went out of my way to provide fair solutions and addressed arguments and disputes in an objective way which meant that the decisions stuck
- I managed to achieve a high level of involvement from all the HA DoFs in the region, together with some key NHS Trust DoFs
- I provided a high level of professional and personal support when needed
- I was initially very 'stiff' but had become more relaxed and comfortable with the position, together with becoming more open about my own feelings and position
- The role itself had changed significantly between 1996 and 1999 so that it was becoming unclear as to how it would develop professionally or in terms of content: the RDF role was suffering as the centre drove more of the decisions

From the Chief Executives, similar messages were received, but in addition they believed that:

- I provided good finance delivery and support in a fair way
- The RDF role had changed over the (two and) four years and the accountabilities were becoming unclear
- There was little RO direction or corporate "feel" apparent - I seemed from outside to be bouncing round within this in a role which wasn't tied in with the others' to make use of each of our individual strengths
- I needed to exert greater influence on the RD, though I am not alone in this: the point was made that my other colleagues need to as well
- I was clearly not so interested in the routine side of my work but put most effort into the change agenda that interested me

A number of specific events / issues were recounted and no punches pulled – the discussion in many cases spilled over to comments (positive and negative) about individual staff. Virtually all interviewees sought my views on their practice and performance in return. In the majority of interviews, the point was made that the whole had been extremely useful and we should do this more often.

** two of the comments in respect of this came from my predecessors (RDFS in Wessex and SW) as follows:

"much of management is acting and perhaps you should put yourself out a bit more in adopting different roles depending on the audience."

"The profile you project needs developing. There is no problem with ability – and perceptions of you change positively with exposure – but you're not as forceful as others, particularly perhaps Chief executives, would expect you to be in your position: perhaps it's about bullshit."

Analysis and Common Themes

An enormous volume of data has been sifted and analysed, with only the common issues and themes explored in this Chapter. The concept of data in this respect is also difficult and involves a number of cycles:

- raw feedback from my own reflection, from staff and critical friends
- my own reactions to this data and the experimental actions taken
- the analysis of this data as a 'first fit' into a model – the Journal, development document drafts (i.e. bits of writing to explore ideas, some of which has eventually ended up in the Thesis Chapters)
- feedback from staff and critical friends on the development writings
- my reactions in terms of adjusting the management model and shaping the framework (my theoretical knowledge and knowledge of organisational context)
- discussions with colleagues, learning set and supervisors that helped shape the new models developed
- actual changes to my practice and behaviour – resulting either from intent or indeed from adjustment, especially to contextual knowledge
- data on these changes from the perspective of myself and my staff

The subjectivity of much of the feedback and its interpretation by me as the subject of the comment and feedback clearly presented difficulties. The response to these difficulties was to build the validation steps presented in Figure 12 into the process above. However, the small number of conclusions set out below can be drawn and these are explored further in Chapter 7:

- I believe that some significant changes in approach and practice have become evident;
- I have established for myself a framework upon which I can now build my experience and make sense of new events and reflection;
- one of the key issues for me was the translation back to actual experience at each stage of the theory constructed to make sure it 'made sense';
- I have come to understand the context within which I work far better – partly through the theoretical constructs and partly through much richer and open dialogue with colleagues and staff;
- the formalisation of reflection and a mixture of formal and informal learning has been effective in my case in understanding my practice and context far better;
- being open with staff and colleagues does not necessarily entail more personal risk – it can lead to just the opposite (unless reckless) – and can be a more satisfying way to work;
- understanding better *how* one wants to work – building up an explicit model of leadership, for example, that one is comfortable with – actually helps organise and act in a more coherent and confident way;
- the congruence between some of the psychological profiling (for example the Appendix 4 profile) and the reflective / intellectual preferences is quite striking and, if I listen seriously to this, would have some significant implications for what sort of organisations I should seek to work in or (perhaps far more ambitious) attempt to change the DH into.

Conclusion on Personal Development

The four years spent on the research project provided a whole set of opportunities to build up a set of experiences and enabled me to:

- develop a personal conceptual framework, which has in itself been evolutionary and has at each stage been grounded with personal experience: both with existing pre-knowledge and with developing ideas and experimentation results through the research project;
- identify and work on those elements of my personal approach preferences and styles that were relatively underdeveloped;
- work through and develop a process for myself and identify the aspects that have been particularly helpful or important in my own experience.

It has, thus, been a journey without an eventual destination – but one that has provided a whole series of experiences along the way. The approach is now genuinely that all situations and events can be and should be learning experiences: it only depends on approach and perception. Treating work as such is not only more fun but highly developmental. The distillation of some of these experiences into a more general model is presented in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6

Organisational Changes

Introduction

This chapter looks in some detail at the data collection undertaken and draws out some of the emergent themes. As indicated in Chapter 3 (see specifically Figure 11), the sources and nature of data collected were varied and include the following.

Staff Feedback and Workshops

- Cultural differences and Learning Organisation feedback received at a series of Directorate/ Wider RO workshops.
- Formal individual staff assessment interviews of my eight directly reporting staff on a six monthly basis between September 1996 and March 1999 as a part of the regular appraisal cycle.
- Regular Staff Attitudinal Questionnaires (SAQs) with a common content and format completed by staff, which were then supplemented by discussion – both group and individual.
- Feedback and notes taken during a series of Regional Executive Team (RET) away days.

External Interviews

- Extended interviews held with external stakeholders – initially undertaken in 1997, then repeated in 1999.

Observation and Experimentation

- My own observations and reflections of organisational changes.

Internal Document Review

- Material produced during two development initiatives within the RO: IiP and RAP.
- Material produced by staff undertaking MAs and MBAs within the Regional Office.
- Externally commissioned research on other ROs.
- DH wide OD initiatives with members of the SCS.
- DH wide questionnaire research to evaluate staff attitudes, undertaken by MORI.
- Development output from the Executive Board.

Critical Friends

- A series of discussions with and feedback from the three “critical friends” within the RO.

This chapter draws on the above data and provides an analysis of the organisational changes resulting, specifically concentrating on those elements in the research scope. Finally, some conclusions are drawn on the change handling in the Department and the environment within which this project was situated.

Context

Understanding the organisational context within which one operates is clearly critical for any manager to be effective. In most cases the 'rules' in respect of the organisation are intuitively absorbed and becomes a part of the 'cultural awareness' or 'way of working' within the organisation. The rules will become blurred during periods of change, particularly when organisations merge or leadership changes and the culture goes through transition as a result. In such a changing situation more explicit exposition of the organisation and its environmental context may help with understanding of the dynamics involved, especially including a number of external views and perceptions to give objectivity and distance. The nature of this research means that not only does the organisation need to be understood, but tracking the way in which it developed, especially the Finance Directorate, is a core part of the research effort.

As with any organisation, the DH and its Regional Offices cannot be purely understood by defining its position at a single point in time, as though the culture and direction could be captured through a 'snapshot'. The organisation is clearly the product of its history as well as its current management and staff. Chapter 4 sets out the environment of change within which the Department of Health and particularly the NHS Executive operated during the period of data collection for research, including specifically for the SWRO:

- the bedding in of the absorption of the SWRHA into the NHS Executive as a Regional Office from April 1996;
- five of the original eight directors of the SWRHA (at April 1996) moving on from the SWRO by April 2000 (in addition 3 more had arrived and departed during the period);
- the change of Government in May 1997 after a long period of single party administration;
- the White Paper (DoH, 1997a) development in the autumn of 1997 and dismantling of the NHS internal market;
- the significant external change agenda supported within the NHS to reflect the new funding, planning and contracting regimes – also a whole raft of new policy initiatives and legislation;
- three significant internal restructurings of the SWRO during the period (each of which involved staff moving and being relocated physically within the single location at Westward House), together with the realignment of the regional boundaries which saw four of the 12 Health Authorities pass across to the newly formed SERO;
- two sets of location moves – absorbing the R&D directorate into Westward House, plus absorbing then ejecting the "Enabling People" group of IMG (which became the NHS Information Authority)
- a whole series of internal initiatives and management restructuring within and between the NHS Executive and wider Department of Health.

Gaining a better understanding of the implications of these changes for the work programme, methods and practice was an essential development element for me personally – both as a line manager and as a researcher.

The programme of development for the Finance Directorate progressed along the lines planned. However, during the period the Directorate grew to incorporate Information Management & Technology and Estates - then after it was agreed that I would undertake a national role, the Directorate functions were distributed between the Performance and Policy Directorates (the latter later to be dissolved in January 2001). The research interventions and data collection were closely related through the workshops, staff appraisals / feedback and linkage with other internal initiatives. Originally, the intention was to develop the Finance Directorate with a culture incorporating Learning Organisation concepts and behaviour patterns – whilst linking the Directorate development with individual staff learning through developing reflective practice. As a better understanding of the context and issues of application – both practical and contextual – of Learning Organisation concepts developed then the research work focused on some of the emerging issues.

Staff Feedback from the Workshops

Regional Offices and the NHS Executive

It was apparent very early on that the culture and approach of staff in the Department and the Regional Health Authorities were very different. Initially, there were the usual sorts of practical merger teething problems – Terms and Conditions (especially cars, mobile phones, expenses, flexibility of working and holidays), procedures, budgeting (back from ‘proper accounting’ to cash), recruitment and assessment. However, there was also a ‘coming together’ of two sets of staff who appeared to have very different outlooks on work and process. In its simplest manifestation, NHS Executive staff regarded themselves as working for ministers whilst RHA staff thought of themselves as working for the NHS - or even managing it on a good day. The issue was a particularly moot point within the Regional Executive Team as we could never agree a single “mission statement” within the group.

In some of the earliest workshops in 1996 (see Appendix 2 for dates, Chapter 3 for purpose) with the Directorate staff, we agreed to explore these issues as a first step towards looking to see what we were doing. The intention was to promote a reflective practice way of working for the staff, whilst also helping to understand the organisational environment better and working out how to approach the issues they raised during the process. The whole concept of “single centre working” was being explored – but the meaning of the concept was never clarified either in terms of organisational vision ‘up-front’ nor as a set of operational protocols in practice. (See internal papers in Chapter 3).

A detailed analysis of the differences in approach and culture between the DH/Central NHSE prompted a huge number of questions. Rather than rationalising the issue of what exactly comprises culture and the issues of merging that arose at that stage it is more appropriate to give an indication of RO staff responses to the questions “what are *you* like?” and “what are *they* like?” that were raised during the workshops. The changes in relationships as time passed was charted through these workshops.

The RO staff initially characterised themselves (in the first workshop on 25th September 1996) by descriptions such as:

- “focused on resolving practical problems to make the NHS work”
- “here to get decisions made and action taken”
- “providing professional leadership”
- “providing professional advice and support by being good at what we do”
- “working with the service”
- “carrying forward NHS values”
- “part of a team”
- “a buffer between the NHS and policy makers”
- “a cut-out between ministers and NHS management”

At the same time they characterised the DH/Central NHS Executive staff by descriptions such as:

- “removed from the NHS and not understanding the practicalities”
- “deciding what should happen without understanding the implications”
- “trying to protect their hold on policy formation and not letting us in”
- “generalists who don’t understand the problems in the field”
- “intelligent, bright and impractical”
- “hierarchical and formal in their workings”
- “defensive and unwilling to take chances or make decisions”
- “unwilling to confront the issues”

These descriptions clearly exemplified the different facing aspects of the two previous organisations. They also highlighted two major experience differences – the extent of professional (medical, nursing, accounting, estates, IT) experience in the RO and the overwhelming provenance of NHS staff within the RO as opposed to civil service staff. These two differences, at the point when ROs had been a part of the NHS Executive for over four years, were beginning to erode as turnover of original staff increased and it was more difficult to attract staff into the ROs from the NHS.

It became clear, however, towards the end of the first year after merger, that the RO staff began to better understand the ministerial interface. They also commented that as the Centre staff had been more exposed to the NHS (although still indirectly in most cases), they were starting to understand where the RO ‘came from’ and what the RO problems were. I encouraged my staff to get their counterparts down from Leeds and to take them out to meetings and events in the SW, realising that the travel time and distance between Bristol and Leeds was part of the understanding process. Working together was starting to build personal relationships and this seemed to be a practical way to build trust and establish a greater openness. There remained, however, a great deal of suspicion in terms of appraisal and progression criteria and to an extent the barriers were maintained both by operational and geographical separation.

The relationships became strained again during the preparation (and subsequently the definition of implementation details) of the White Paper : “*The New NHS*” (DoH, 1997a). However, strained relationships seemed not only to be the case between ROs and Centre but also between elements of the Centre (Primary Care and Finance / Public Health). Relationships were reasonable where shared experience promoted understanding and shared concerns – for example where both staff groups had similar professional or managerial experience - but were poor across functional lines and most particularly where these coincided with location separation. The communication difficulties produced much frustration on the part of RO staff when they repeatedly gave advice from professional / NHS experience perspectives which they believed were ignored in terms of practical implications. The RO staff were aware that the practical interpretation and problem resolution would remain within their RO responsibility – but with what they believed was an impractical policy framework in many respects. Recognition of the problem gave rise to a number of internal initiatives along the lines of “Single Centre” working, but this remained a widespread issue of dispute throughout the period.

There were significant strains becoming apparent during the translation of the 1997 White paper into detailed legislation with the great reduction in staff numbers within the Leeds part of the NHS Executive. The resource contrast with the previous significant changes implemented after the 1990 Act was quite marked, with a 30% decrease in staff numbers since that date to handle the work (see Chapter 4). This reduction in capacity was further emphasised by ministers’ insistence on extensive consultation that was both resource and time consuming. The policy work fell significantly behind schedule and RO staff increasingly played a part in the development of details – although on a less than structured basis in some areas and without influence on wider policy – as a pure expedient to achieve results. The frustration continued for regional policy leads, however, as the final decisions continued to be taken at a distance.

The day to day management issues were still being handled, but the NHS Executive development capacity had been very significantly reduced so that many issues which should have been better thought through and planned were guillotined for decision before full exploration and understanding. Examples particularly raised by staff included the statutory frameworks for PCTs and their management, the abolition of Extra Contractual Referrals, the handling of specialist services and the development of benchmarking and performance targets – including waiting lists. The development of policy but with lack of detail in some areas (e.g. HA merger and Primary Care Group / Trust establishment and scope) has created uncertainty in HA and Trust management. These amount to fundamental changes in roles for individual organisations and will entail forced changes over the next two to three years, which the RO staff will be in the front line in performance managing. They were unhappy with the problems the issues were going to cause them personally when they believed that better solutions were possible to support the same policy objectives.

Internally, each of the eight ROs restructured on different bases to take account of the White Paper initiatives – most particularly to reflect the change in emphasis of the market and prepare support for several of the major policy initiatives. This set of changes was particularly unsettling and time consuming for all staff in the ROs so soon after the initial RHA/NHS Executive merger changes.

The restructuring exercise which occurred some ten months into this research provided a great deal of research material and insight into processes and dealt with in the workshops. It suggested that there cannot be a single “best way” of structuring any organisation – although some of the ROs seemed to be more effective and motivated than others. The more complex the objectives of an organisation, the more this becomes apparent. The structures chosen seemed to be more to do with the internal relationships between the constituent organisational elements, the balance needed between control and initiative, the key personalities involved (especially RDs and their personal experience) and the interfaces needed externally.

Certainly, the eight ROs in the NHS Executive came out of a set of independent and parallel processes with eight different structural answers. These have already provided some interesting times in terms of communication between each of the ROs themselves and between the ROs and the Centre - the problem of inconsistency will no doubt continue as processes are increasingly centralised but with different sets of RO responsibilities and structures to tie up to. The latest set of central restructuring in December 2000, where the NHS Executive and “wider DoH” support functions are being aligned is bringing some rationalisation to the centre, but this is merely emphasising the different trends being adopted by the individual ROs.

Learning Organisation development and progress

The Directorate workshops continued with discussions about joint working, business planning, work allocation and with the formal developmental sessions. However, I wanted to spark discussion about our own development as a Directorate and sought a medium to focus on the issues that seem to me to be most significant. I, therefore, developed a survey document (the “SOLVED” *Learning Organisation Profile* summarised in Appendix 5) which specifically dealt with aspects that appear key to a learning organisation approach. I took this route because of the good data emerging from the staff attitudinal questionnaires and intended to use this mechanism also across the wider RO.

These SOLVED survey documents were completed at away days during the final sessions: the rest of the days were spent exploring what was meant by learning and why it was organisationally important as well as personally critical. The staff responses were processed through the use of automated Excel spreadsheets (embedded into Powerpoint) and the implications discussed with the staff at the workshop there and then. The format of the survey documents owes much to the approach of Pearne et al (1995) in that it is analysed along six similar axes and groups the common themes in the Learning Organisation literature. It did not address the issues of “organisational memory”, however – nor indeed some of the personal relationship issues that can inhibit group learning although individual learning is encouraged.

The exercise was undertaken twice with the Finance Directorate (May and December 1998 - involving 22 and 19 staff respectively) and several times with groups of members of the staff development team (totalling 20 from the other five Directorates). There were longer preliminary discussions with the ‘other RO groups’ than with the Finance staff as the implications of the concepts had not already been explored.

A scale of 0 to 10 was adopted for the staff to complete for each category, with guidance notes (see Appendix 5) or the staff to consider for numerical ranges in coding their responses. The responses were consolidated then results normalised to a percentage basis. Responses were required for the individual's own Directorate, the RO and whole NHS Executive to see how the relative organisational fit and culture was perceived. The categorisation of learning organisation features as identified from the literature review were as follows (the acronym of "SOLVED" was used rather tongue in cheek).

Supportive Management

The extent to which staff perceive that senior management genuinely believe that encouraging and sustaining development results in improved performance by those who are much closer to the work actually done and the Service. Senior managers and managers are perceived as enabling and coaching rather than control and monitoring.

Organisational Flexibility

The extent to which the organisation has been designed and operates to make transfer of ideas and development easy between different areas and staff levels – and allows for change and adaptation. Managers encourage and reward innovation, learning and development.

Learning Environment

The extent to which the organisation has set structures and processes in place to encourage development and learning.

Vision for the Future

The extent to which there is a shared vision between Senior Managers and staff that includes the organisation's ability to adapt to changes in the future. Part of this vision recognises the need to develop at both organisation and individual level to respond to changes in role and function in a time of continuing change.

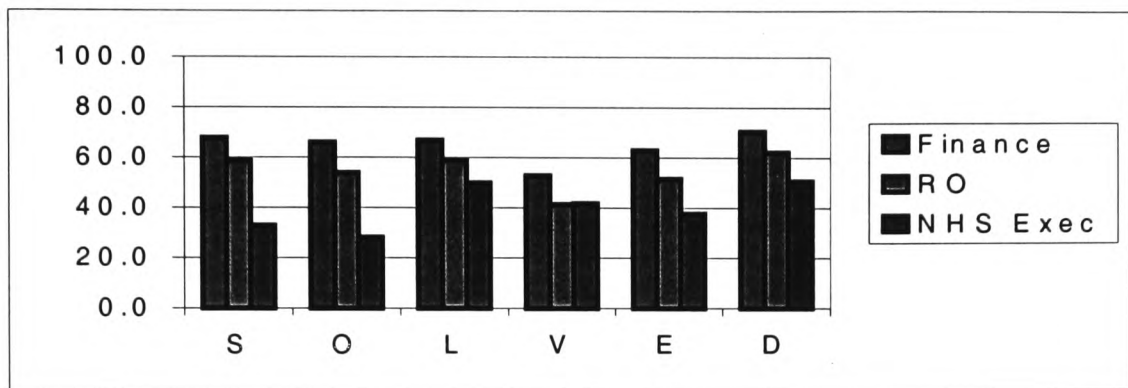
Encouragement to Experiment

The extent to which staff are encouraged to challenge the *status quo*, develop new ways of working and question the assumptions behind the current ways of doing things. Experimenting, learning from mistakes and openness to debate on options and alternatives are accepted and encouraged as ways of addressing the objectives.

Development Motivation

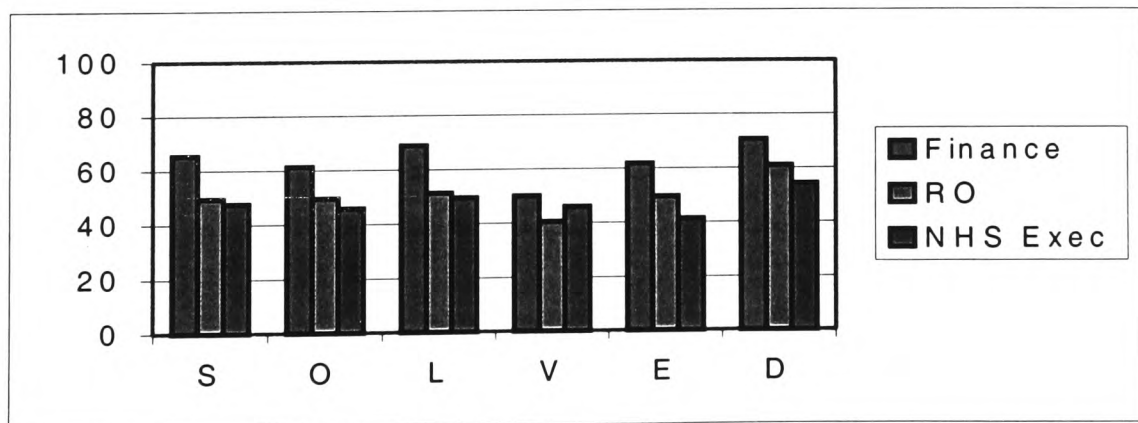
The extent to which the staff as a whole is motivated to learn and develop – the extent to which they are individually encouraged and committed to self-development and learning from experience.

Figure 21 - Finance Directorate Staff in May 1998



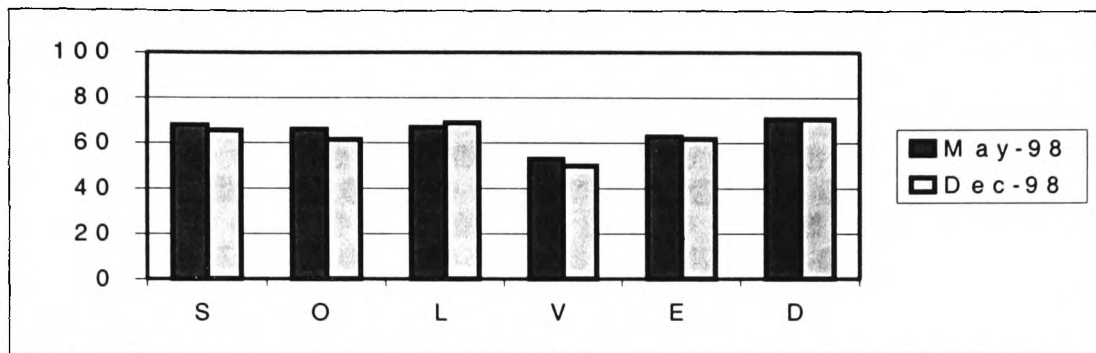
The basic pattern is that the Finance staff scored the Directorate itself higher than the overall RO, which in turn was accorded higher scores than the wider Department. The key questions are clearly: are the staff just responding to the part of the organisation they are more familiar with and what would a similar exercise with staff from other areas provide? It could be that familiarity provides a better informed response, or that the staff locally genuinely do not know the actual wider situation. In absolute terms the scores on all but vision are between around 65% and 75%. The scores returned indicate that in some areas the organisation works very well, but in others it is less well developed or does not have a priority as perceived by the staff. Clearly there may be a bias here, since the exercise was also seen as an opportunity to allow the staff to have an input into the developing Directorate culture and to start to set right what they currently saw as inappropriate or inadequate. The issue of staff motivation and perceptions of each of the organisational elements was explored through later workshops in the away days – particularly that on the 26th March 1999 when the wider RO SOLVED workshop results were also available (see below).

Figure 22 - Finance Directorate Staff in December 1998



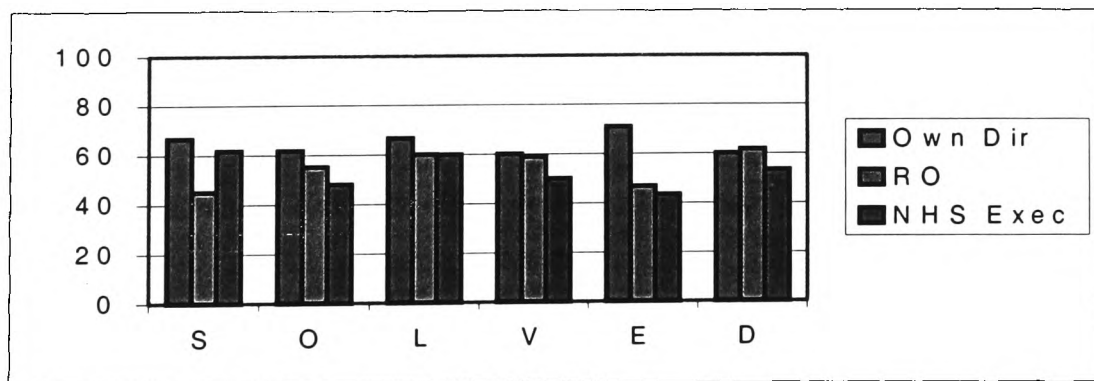
The same basic pattern can be seen, although perceptions of the Department as a whole have started to move closer to that of the RO. In one specific area, (V – vision), the Department as a whole is now felt to be more coherent than the RO, tying in with feedback from the staff attitudinal questionnaires (see pages 216/7).

Figure 23 - Comparison between Finance Directorate Staff views between May and December 1998



SWRO reorganisation during the period between the two exercises meant structural change. However, the same pattern of results holds as for the previous feedback, with only small variations emerging. Although the similarity of results might be expected (the two exercises were only eight months apart) the consistency of feedback, coinciding with an improvement in staff understanding of the concepts and implications is encouraging. A major change in response would have been worrying but the interplay between individual development and organisational change was complex. Changes in individual responses were not tracked although most staff signed their responses. Discussion encompassed individual outlier scores on the detailed schedules, although anonymised to avoid staff embarrassment, as the workshops were by then open enough to do so. In absolute terms the 75% figures achieved for learning environment and development motivation through the significant structural changes was also heartening in terms of culture direction.

Figure 24 - The Regional Office as a whole March 1999



The overall RO results require some interpretation and several aspects of the analysis drawn were discussed with the groups immediately on completing the numerical analysis (the process only takes a minute or so for each individual because of the automated spreadsheet model set up). Firstly, the pattern of 'distance' repeats itself – though far less clearly in this overall set of responses. 'Own directorate' consistently scores higher, except interestingly for Development Motivation. However, the margins of the differences are far less than for Finance.

My close involvement in development, but also through the research may provide a sort of “Hawthorne” effect. But on the other hand, as staff in my own Directorate discussed the issues of development and worked on our plans together they did also become more aware of the possibilities of what could happen and became more critical as a result. Certainly there is an issue of shifting expectations and greater criticality that will compensate, at least partially, for the interest shown.

The real issues emerging are that although staff see their own immediate management as supportive, the view of RO senior management is well down – and indeed is significantly exceeded by that for the Department as a whole, which is contrary to the potential “distance” effect. The poor showing of the RO tier of organisation performance suggests:

- lack of engagement in terms of corporate identity and purpose so that the ‘own organisation’ identification with management did not occur;
- the perception that RO management was not effective corporately, but only as individuals working through their own staff lines (the interpretation suggested by the SAQ feedback – see later).

Both above interpretations were voiced by the staff themselves. The RO staff overall were more positive about the “vision” aspects than the Finance Directorate – although the SAQs suggested a consistently poor response. Here, the response difference seemed to lay partly in understanding with, as suggested above, Finance being more critical because they had worked through the issues in more detail in their workshops. When the actual meaning of “Vision” and “Strategy” were explored in the feedback sessions from the wider RO staff, the qualitative feedback changed to be less positive – virtually none could articulate the RO aims or goals. They were also not involved in framing their own work and priorities as the Finance Directorate were – or trying to relate their work to the formally articulated vision.

Again, although the figures are of intrinsic interest and provide useful comparisons between the perceptions of the Finance Directorate and the wider RO, the graphs produced were primarily used to stimulate discussion. In order to take this further forward again, a normalised set of Pearne et al (1995) figures were recalculated to provide a view of different industry sectors and graphically superimposed onto the aggregated RO figures as they developed. The different profiles were used to spark comparisons about why the RO/NHS Executive should be different in these respects from other sectors - these included NHS Trusts, of which most of the staff already had good experience.

Emerging themes

From the SAQ responses from the individual staff, workshop feedback, ‘away-day’ discussions of overall RO results and appraisal interviews, it is clear that a different culture was beginning to emerge in the Directorate. This separation of development was confirmed through a number of lines – from other RO development initiatives and feedback from the critical friends based outside the Directorate. However, the Directorate development was constrained and slow.

The staff opinions on why the development was not what we hoped seemed to fall into four categories:

- (i) it was difficult to deal with staff from the other Directorates on the same footing, especially in terms of delegated initiative and encouragement to experiment – the other directors seemed reluctant to provide the same devolved decision making to their staff;
- (ii) the underlying RO (or perhaps developing civil service) culture and administrative backdrop against which they operated did not easily support the direction of change – the RO culture was becoming more hierarchical whilst the Directorate staff were becoming more open and flexible;
- (iii) the staff themselves were under time and resource pressure that precluded the creation of enough ‘space’ to change the way of working and move into a more reflective mode: even though the staff seemed clear that the improvement in quality and performance that should result would be beneficial;
- (iv) the internal restructuring that occurred twice in the period made them wary of not behaving protectively / defensively outside the Directorate boundaries in case they lost out personally - because they believed the other Senior Managers ‘were not playing the same game’ or ‘by the same rules’.

There are a large number of echoes here from the learning, Learning Organisation and Change literature explored in Chapter 2. Following the earlier concept based workshop sessions, the staff drew out the conclusions for themselves.

Developing the Directorate

The feedback from the Directorate away-days and the ongoing staff one-to-ones consistently suggested that the staff perceived a difference between the way in which they were encouraged to work in the Directorate and the way in which their friends and colleagues in the other SWRO Directorates were working. There was a great deal of appreciation of the increased participation in establishing direction, framing and agreeing work responsibilities and delegated responsibility for initiatives. However, the increased Directorate staff understanding (both ‘P’ and ‘Q’ knowledge) gave rise to some frustration and a more critical assessment of the Directorate and the wider SWRO. The reasons for the increase in dissatisfaction were discussed by several of the staff in their one-to-ones, in which they spoke about their increased organisational awareness. These staff would previously have provided far more critical responses to the SAQs at each stage, had they at the time the understanding they developed during the research period.

The initial intention had been to develop the Directorate along the LO concept lines as far as possible, then to assess how it and the other Directorates compared. This was naïve and the exercise did not work out as originally anticipated, although the difficulties in comparison became clear quite early on. In terms of reaching a better understanding and exploration of the organisation and concepts, the lack of comparability probably did not matter greatly and good initial development progress was made within the Directorate.

Learning Points from Workshops

The workshops provided a number of learning points – about the organisation and the workshop or developmental processes themselves. The ways in which the Directorate did develop included:

- the ways of working within the Directorate certainly became more open, positive and flexible;
- individual development opportunities were greatly increased - seen very positively by the staff;
- the increase in openness provided me with the opportunity to change and receive a great deal of feedback.

In terms of what did not work for the Directorate:

- the interactions with parts of the organisation outside the Directorate were always problematic in terms of hierarchical working – the flexibility of structures and responsibility encouraged was not mirrored externally;
- the development of cultural change internally was difficult to maintain as the staff changed and the SWRO was reorganised several times (fundamentally three times) during the period – new initiation and training each time;
- the personnel policies were rigid and prevented the more fluid changes in role and job content the staff wanted;
- the lack of strategic direction and the policy / management interplay (together with the lack of clarity of the ROs purpose) resulted in a circular set of discussions that the staff found unsettling.

The issues raised by what did not work prompted two sets of speculation. “What could we do locally to make it work better?” (giving rise to further experimentation by the group) and “Are the difficulties encountered in some way endemic?” (was this specific to SWRO or general for the Public Sector?). These themes are returned to in Chapter 7.

The allocation of time during the away-days specifically for developmental purposes was very positively received. Initially, there was a fair degree of cynicism and some would just go through the motions. However, as time progressed and we took specific procedural and internal structural steps from the sessions – building these into the one-to-ones and appraisal session – the process was seen to work. Those previously on the edges began to become engaged and the sessions became far more open. The sessions were also used to make group decisions pretty democratically and this provided more ownership and motivation for participation.

In general, the internal changes were far more successfully initiated than those across directorate boundaries, although even these showed promise from time to time. The major inhibitor in that respect seemed to revolve around organisational uncertainty and mixed messages within the organisation as a whole.

Regular Staff Attitudinal Questionnaires (SAQs)

Purpose and construction

It needs to be stressed that the primary use of the SAQs was to provide a vehicle for focusing discussion with staff in terms of their perception of the RO, and their roles in it. The key feedback is thus the qualitative comments included and the discussions directed at particular areas of interest which followed with staff at the workshops and individual one-to-one sessions as part of the routine appraisal / supervision cycle. These discussions were used to:

- (i) gather further data from staff;
- (ii) provide a reflective platform for the staff in terms of their own perceptions of their practice and the organisation – hence a direct intervention in terms of action research;
- (iii) engender specific actions in terms of the Directorate management itself – a second type of intervention, but aimed at operational targets primarily rather than research (though very clearly the two are closely linked);
- (iv) develop a participative culture – a third type of intervention crossing operational and research boundaries.

The very original version of the SAQ was prepared by a HR Consultancy firm to cover the IiP base conditions. I subsequently redeveloped the original version by almost doubling the number of questions, specifically exploring the cultural aspects in more detail and ‘piloted’ the resulting amended questionnaires on a couple of ‘guinea pig’ staff for each new version used. The staff involved were encouraged to and did suggest further questions to be included: these were incorporated. At the same time a number of the original questions dealing purely with IiP process issues were dropped as they became less relevant.

The majority of the original questions were retained in order to provide a comparison over time, although the wording of individual questions was updated and refined to eliminate original ambiguities and to increase clarity. This approach was taken in order to try to track changes over time and in order to monitor organisational developments and staff perceptions through change events. In this respect, it is interesting to observe some trends emerging as the same questions have been used at five sampling dates (see below) over a period between 1995 and 1999 (for Finance and staff across the whole RO), resulting in a total of 269 completed SAQs. **The final questions used in 1999 are reproduced in pages 214-216.**

Answers to questions within the SAQs

For each of the questions, a number based answer system was not adopted and there were only three possible answers – no / partly / yes - although a “don’t know” category was included to provide an easier analysis of the responses in terms of conclusions drawn. The use of the “don’t know” category by staff reduced as the process progressed, almost in the same proportion as the number of text comments increased.

In principle, given a normal approach to questionnaire completion and a general reluctance to provide absolute answers to subjective and qualitative assessments, the responses should lead to a grouping around the mean (50), i.e. a statistical concentration in the middle third of the spread. Significant deviations should be unlikely unless staff perceptions were fairly well polarised. Accordingly, individual question scores above 65% on average would be very positive, whilst the further below 35%, the more worrying the response (the questions were framed to give score increases for positive organisational characteristics).

In other words, this format provided the following characteristics, besides concentrating on the additional comments because of the speed of completion:

- there would be a natural tendency to centre the responses, so that values returned at the extremes really do represent very positive or negative views;
- because of the coarseness of scoring possibilities and tendency to centre, movements of any size are likely to represent significant shifts in perceptions;
- the concentration in the middle ground is intended to provoke an explanation of the “partly” response in terms of additional comments.

Scoring system

The scoring system adopted was intentionally coarse in its construction, with just four possible responses – 1 (don't know), 2 (no, not at all), 3 (partly or to some extent), 4 (yes or almost completely). In order to help with interpretation and presentation, the raw scores were normalised, after discarding the “1s”, to provide a 0 – 100 scale. To do this a simple algorithm was used for each score: **Normalised Score = ((Raw score – 2) / 2) * 100.**

Each individual question response was normalised, then accumulated (by Directorate and in total), then divided by the number of computable responses for that particular question (i.e. 2s, 3s and 4s). This calculation gave a mean score, intuitively associated with a percentage response. The positive way the questions are framed in the SAQ meant that the higher the score, the more ‘positive’ could be assessed the staff perception of management culture.

For example: a processed overall response of 66% could be interpreted as two-thirds of people saying “yes” and one third saying “no” – or two-thirds saying “partly” and one third saying “yes”. Either way it provides an intuitive feel that percentage-wise, the result is actually quite positive. The converse interpretation would work for a 33% processed response.

Although calculation of standard deviations would have provided more about the spread of results, since the main purpose was to provide a basis for qualitative discussion, the intuitive feel was more important than statistical validity. Hence, all the questions which elicited average perceptions outside the range 33% - 66% were followed up by detailed discussions at away days. Some of the key questions are highlighted later in this section.

Numerical Results obtained

Date of Questionnaire	No. of respondents who replied	No. of questions in the SAQ	<u>Overall Mean Scores achieved across all questions</u>		
			All Staff	Finance Directorate	5 "Other" Directorates range in score from
September 1995	90	40	37%	not split	not split
September 1996	13	40	-	59%	only finance circulated
March 1997	98	50	50%	71%	40% to 57%
March 1998	13	55	-	67%	only finance circulated
March 1999	55	60	54%	59%	46% to 56%

The SAQ was circulated on five occasions: three to the whole RO and twice to just the Finance Directorate. On the first occasion for the RO, no reminder mechanism was employed, the questionnaires were anonymous and no Directorate analysis was possible. In later RO surveys, different colour paper was used for the questionnaires for each directorate to enable directorate comparisons, but otherwise they were still anonymous. In September 1995 there were 165 staff remaining in the RHA (prior to RO status) but by March 1999 this number had reduced to around 120. In the final circulation, there were only 55 completed questionnaires returned - just less than a 50% response rate but no "chasing" was undertaken as many of the staff were out of the RO for extended periods and the returns not identifiable. The number of 'extra' questions gradually increased to gain feedback on specific emerging issues and issues of change.

If the averages for March 1998 and March 1999 are adjusted to reflect only the 50 common questions that were consistently included from the March 1997 SAQ, the averages for the finance directorate become 70% and 63% respectively. In this case the assessment scores for the Finance Directorate improve steadily up to March 1998, with Finance consistently providing higher scoring feedback than the other five Directorates. The additional questions introduced to explore the organisational culture issues in the later questionnaires depressed the feedback scores because they became more selectively focused on where the problems were perceived to exist. The feedback from staff in the other five RO directorates run fairly consistently at around 7% lower than the Finance Directorate figures for the Directorate specific questions. This higher figure represents a relatively small but positive overall difference although including a number of differences in both directions.

Attempts to change the Directorate culture appeared to have positive effects, although the measures in this SAQ were less direct in their interpretation than in the Learning Organisation Profile discussed earlier. Some areas that the Finance staff rated particularly highly were:

"Are you aware of what is expected of you in your current job and how you fit into the RO?" (96% in March 1998)

"Are you happy with the way in which you are expected to help frame your own job and role description?"
(consistently around 90% across the whole period)

"Is the environment in your Directorate sufficiently "safe" to experiment with the boundaries of your role and develop your skills?" (consistently over 80% across the whole period).

"Are staff in your Directorate given encouragement to exercise initiative and develop their own skills and expertise?" (95% in March 1997 and March 1998 although disappointingly down to 74% in March 1999, though the reasons that emerged through discussions were interesting and revolved around the increasing joint working as I prepared to 'hand over' their management to the Director of Performance in preparation for my new role).

"Have you been helped to identify your own development needs?" (consistently around 90%, although with a dip to 74% with the assimilation of Estates in 1998 who had previously worked under a different regime).

The period covered by these surveys saw two major internal RO restructurings RO, with continuing change in external context. These figures represent reasonable progress made in developing a positive developmental culture - especially given the overall growing CS context in which the four responses above are provided. Discussions of the anomalies and their causation / action needed to address them has in particular been of benefit at the Directorate away days.

There were similarly positive quotes provided by the IiP assessor after undertaking a week's worth of interviews with 20 staff chosen from the RO at random by the assessor, for example:

"I've not felt I've been expected to work within tight boundaries and that's what makes the work so developmental in itself. Basically I'm given objectives with timescales, but how I achieve them is down to me."

".....(Director)is one of the best managers I have ever worked for. He's not rigid – we don't have to follow a set of rules for the sake of it and he's always encouraging us to look for new ideas."

"I do feel that I'm listened to and that my contributions, however small, are listened to. If I come up with a suggestion for reorganising the way we do something, we'll try it out. If it works then that's great – but if it doesn't, then well it's not a problem."

The above responses present quite a positive view of what is perceived to be a supportive environment and certainly not in line with general perceptions of the civil service. There were boundaries to what could be achieved in flexibility and support, however, because of the different approaches adopted in other parts of the RO and NHS Executive. Particularly disturbing for the organisation as a whole were the answers to the following questions in the SAQ:

“Do you believe that the RO has adequately defined its purpose, vision and goals within its new role in the “single centre” NHSE ?” , and.....“Can you articulate the broad aims and vision of the RO ?”

The time-series overall staff responses for these two questions have been: 44%, 42%, 21%, 40%, 42% and 46%, 50%, 55%, 55%, 37% respectively. Given the amount of time and resource channelled into business planning as a formal exercise, this is disturbing in terms of staff having direction within the RO and an ability to take forward a shared direction through their own initiatives. These responses question the validity of the planning processes used and the basic starting point. The second (qualitative) aspect of these two questions is that most of those who did believe they could articulate the RO vision and aims and wrote them down did not produce anything recognisably akin to either the written down versions or my own understanding. Hence, even though their perception was that they were in step, in reality the business process was even weaker than the numbers suggest in raising this understanding. It also perhaps shows a bias in answers towards what might be expected – behaviour that needs to be carefully considered.

We had not worked through the development of a shared vision as a management team. The planning documents, as with many other documents, seemed to get submerged under the volume emerging from other ROs and the Centre – on developments, policy, guidance and priorities. The volume seemed to preclude strategic and developmental discussion - indeed, the actual White Paper strategy and its impact on the RO was not discussed as a whole at any RET meeting during either preparation or after publication. Specific items were discussed but not its overall shape or impact for the RO or NHS Regionally. Within the staff at large, there seems to be fairly consistent set of messages developed, but what was lacking – and staff seem to identify this clearly in their SAQ responses – was a consistent corporate view or vision. The aspect of leadership is one that the staff continually returned to in their SAQ comments, away day discussions and feedback. The staff comments in terms of lack of organisational vision, identity development and direction were reinforced by very explicit feedback from the external interviewees.

A Templeton College report in 1997 (unpublished – see internal documents reviewed in Chapter 3) which looked at the Anglia & Oxford RO and the South Thames RO indicated that this is not a difficulty confined to the S&WRO. Based on the work on the two ROs, the report speculates on the differences observed at the two organisations:

“We did not start this research thinking about the importance of leadership for our study. However, it has been noteworthy how important a leadership role the Regional Directors played in both ROs.It may be that an organisation with intangible outputs has a stronger need for leadership to give its members a sense of purpose than one where the output is tangible.”

“A Region with a strong identity is likely to carry out its own goals better. The identity of a new or transformed organisation is likely to be strongly influenced by the personality of the Regional Director, by how clear his/her vision is of the region’s role – and by how good he/she is at getting staff to commit to it.....”

The same reasons appear to be identified, although a difference between the “better performing” RO and the “weaker” was attributed to difference in strengths of the Regional Directors. Further relevant in this respect are the answers to the two questions below. In terms of interpretation of the last responses in March 1999 these represent 50% of staff answering “no” and the other 50% answering “partly”.

“Do you believe the RO is now ready and capable of working flexibly between Directorates?”, (responses March 1998: 31% and March 1999: 23%) and

“Do you believe the Executive Team is providing the support and direction you need?”, (responses March 1998: 40% and March 1999: 26%).

Not unexpectedly, the comments provided in the questionnaires to go with these particular responses are acerbic in their view of the Executive Team and its direction of the RO. The responses link strongly in these comments with the lack of overall vision or purpose. For example, some of the comments made in March 1999 are included below and provide a fairly unflattering picture.

Do you believe the RO is now ready and capable of working flexibly between Directorates?

More communication needed

We now effectively have an RO with one massive Directorate and others fighting to influence – how does that fit with balance or governance?

Needs more than restructuring – this is more of an underlying cultural issue rather than formal structures (like treating a symptom only).

We still don't talk to each other well, even within directorates.

Some directorates are more open than others to collaborative working.

One or two directorates are very inward looking and preoccupied with their own importance.

For some directorates information and contacts are power not to be shared.

There seems to be a lack of recognition of the contribution of some directorates.

The proof of the pudding.....

Good rhetoric about joint/integrated working BUT the reality is different. The accommodation does not help but directorate territorialism is evident.

Bars to effective working at director level.

Do you believe the Executive Team is providing the support and direction you need?

For your next joke?

If it is, it isn't being communicated effectively.

Individually but not as a whole.

I cannot recall one occasion in the last 6 months when I was advised of any decision taken by the Exec Team. Would it make a difference if the Exec Team were discontinued?.

What do the Executive Team do?

When do they communicate with staff?

Do the RET meet and what is their role?

What "team" are we talking about here?

The main support we could do with is leadership and that isn't apparent.

The comments above deal with the very set of themes that were dealt with, or at least discussed, during the RET's own away days but were not really resolved. It is extremely clear that the staff's view of the RET's failings in this respect reflect RET perceptions and that the staff are able to draw good organisational conclusions from their "external" view.

In analysing the responses, it is also quite clear that the views and responses are actually spread throughout the levels of seniority of the organisation. It is certainly not the case that the more "junior" members have a more "naïve" view of organisational behaviour, although their terms of description may be different from those "more senior". Neither is it the case that those "more senior" act as apologists for the RET in this sort of opinions exercise.

The results from just the last two questionnaires are presented below as examples, although the time series extends from 1995. In all cases in the Finance Directorate away days after the responses were returned, the questions that scored over 80% or less than 35% in each of the sets of returns were discussed in detail and at length. Staff were also asked to comment on anomalies between the scores of different years or between Finance and the other Directorates to get staff views on why the differences arose. In terms of interpretation of the tables set out below, there are a number of specific issues of change and context to bear in mind.

1. The RO moved from being a part of the NHS in April 1996 and was gradually assimilated into the NHS Executive / Department of Health. There was a very significant structural re-organisation at this time, which had been continuing for some time: two years previously the RHA had comprised 650 staff: by September 1996 it comprised only 135. For example IT joined Finance in April 1996. The staffing was relatively stable for the three years from September 1996 to September 1999, with many changes and new appointments in the six to nine months leading up to April 1996 (including myself), but turn-over has now started to accelerate.
2. There was a major restructuring in September 1997, after the elections and White Paper direction that saw the Purchaser Directorate and Provider Directorate re-organised into Policy and Performance Management. Finance provided some finance staff into the Performance Management Directorate but received the Estates Management staff from the Performance Management Directorate.

3. The next major restructuring was precipitated by the knock-on effects of introducing a London Region (to fit with new London Authority) which meant the SW Region decreasing by around 28%, together locally with my move to a national role in March 1999. The changes entailed represented a very unhappy time for many of my staff as this threw them into competition with their previous colleagues from Finance (who had moved out to Performance Management in the previous restructuring at the time that Estates moved in) for redefined posts in the new Directorates. However, it was also very unsettling for the other Directorate staff who were also competing against each other for newly defined jobs in a totally new structure. The new structures were very much more layered and hierarchical than previously which also caused friction and upset with staff as they retained their grades but reported through more layers. Since these were in the main professional staff, this partial limiting of their decision making and increased supervision was not a welcome feature.

It is not surprising that the following figures and statistics emerge:

Do you believe the reasons for the recent exercise has been adequately communicated to staff?

Do you believe the restructuring will change the way you will work with the NHS organisations in the Region?

Responses: **25%** and **16%** respectively. Comments elicited:

If communication includes persuasiveness then "no" – however we must now try to make it work Very confusing. There must be a hidden agenda here

The whole thing seemed to come about because we were losing a performance management patch through boundary change – but then we ended up increasing performance management!

Some directors gave this more attention than others.

The 1998 restructuring was led by the Regional Director, whereas in 1997 he had gone on a months leave in the summer and told the other Directors to get on with it – no parameters provided. This proved to be an interesting experience after the first week in which everyone stalked around the others. Our first decision was to appoint a project manager who would report through to us as a group and provide an independent view: she was in fact a very experienced project manager who was shortly leaving to join another Regional Office – each of the Directors provided real support to the project manager in terms of process and resources. In the 1998 restructuring, the Directors were not on board with the process or rationale for some of the changes put through and the eventual structures were criticised for being complex, hierarchical and bureaucratic in terms of the ways they were to interact sideways.

The organisational learning was conspicuous by its absence. The lack of reflective learning or even predisposition was in fact really quite disappointing. This observation is highlighted by the staff observations (both from "away-days" and in written questionnaire comments) where they do highlight the lack of learning from experience. The staff responses and comments provide some interesting insight to the difference in approach adopted, as illustrated by the following.

Do you believe the latest RO restructuring was handled as well as (or better than) that of last year ?

Response: **19% overall RO - for Finance 9%. Comments elicited:**

The outcome lacked rigour – we need better project management

Seemed to be less genuine consultation or two way communication

This last one compared very badly because no one managed it until late on.

Last one was much better managed – this one was very messy.

I could see the point last time – I didn't and still don't this time.

This time it felt as though the answer had been decided before the "consultation" started

Worse because of the lack of notice taken of staff opinions

Sarah did a good job and sorted out the functional links properly because she took trouble to understand them.

Last year's lessons do not appear to have been learned.

It was much better last time when it was properly managed by someone who had a clue.

So many staff were unhappy with the speed and lack of information available for posts which needed to be filled.

Project manager appointed too late - very poorly managed.

The picture emerges overall of the RO as an organisation

- with fairly strong functional direction but with little cohesion or corporate behaviour;
- with limited vision or agreement as to its purpose / objectives and no definition of any success criteria;
- with little leadership or decision making, either internally or externally and a growing aversion to risk;
- strong in terms of formal communication and process, but growing inflexibility of behaviour and accommodation;
- with huge effort put into the detailing of individual job purpose, definition and deliverables (tied into a business planning process focused on actions) but little overall prioritisation or overall vision;
- with a high level of commitment to individual rights and personal development through structured training / courses but much less individual support for experiential learning.

A mismatch with much of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 in terms of Change and Leadership is evident – not only in terms of providing vision, explaining direction and simplifying context, providing a supportive environment and living out the values espoused, but also in terms of handling virtually all the change issues identified in the literature. The difficulties recognised by the staff in pursuing the developmental agenda, together with the above observations provided some strong indications of the potential difficulties in developing a genuine LO culture within such an environment. The difficulties prompted an exploration of how applicable the LO concepts were directly to the SWRO and of how typical was the SWRO of the public sector - could any generalised learning be drawn? Presenting the above analysis to two of the SWRO Directors, four of the Finance staff and the three critical friends provided a very strong and unanimous confirmation of the conclusions drawn.

The most recent feedback towards the end of 2000 suggests a real frustration with the feeling that things could be so much better, but they are not – with the feeling of lack of personal control over events and development implicit in the culture. The organisation appears to be in a loop from which it not emerging – the latest restructuring (Autumn 2000) is again organised around personalities with no rationale or participation for staff.

The SAQ questions are set out in the following table, with scores for 1998 and 1999 included only as an indication of the results achieved, although the key points are extracted and dealt with separately.

Qn	Question text	1998	1999	1999
		Fin Dir. %	Fin Dir. %	All RO staff %
1	Do you think the RO directors are committed to developing their staff ?	77	67	60
2	If the answer to Qn 1. is yes / partly, do you believe that their commitment has been clearly communicated to all staff ?	55	56	66
3	Do you believe that the RO has adequately defined its purpose, vision and goals within its new role in the "single centre" NHS Executive ?	40	44	45
4	Can you articulate your understanding of the vision and aims of the RO ?	55	26	44
5	Do you know what the objectives and work programme are for your Directorate ?	75	63	78
6	Are you aware of what is expected of you in your current job and how you fit into the work of the Directorate overall ?	96	84	94
7	Do you believe that you have had an opportunity to contribute to the success and effectiveness of the RO ?	75	76	67
8	Are you clear what the success criteria are for your own contribution ?	50	81	74
9	Do you regularly receive feedback on your performance so that you know how you are doing ?	64	63	64
10	Do you have a clear view of what help you need in order to improve in areas of weakness or under-performance ?	75	66	62
11	Do you know what is in the RO plan which sets out business/work goals and priorities for us as a whole ?	Not asked	34	38
12	Do you believe the staff involvement in the planning process has influenced the contents of the RO plan ?	Not asked	50	32
13	Do you believe the RO plan reflects the reality of the work and priorities needed to deliver our role ?	Not asked	38	43
14	Do you believe the RO will soon be structured in a way best capable of delivering its objectives ?	Not asked	27	36
15	Do you believe the Directorate development plan has tied in with the PDP discussed in your appraisal?	75	54	54
16	Are your training and development needs reviewed (formally or informally) when business objectives change and new skills or knowledge are needed ?	85	66	53
17	Do you regularly reconsider what development needs you have and how you have developed over recent months ?	70	63	58
18	Do you believe that the RO has clearly identified who is responsible for developing people ?	95	72	61
19	Do you believe your line manager has the knowledge and skills they need to develop the people who work to them ?	59	82	61
20	Do you believe your line manager tries to develop you as a way	Not	82	61

	of helping develop the RO ?	asked		
21	Where standards exist (CPE, NVQs, etc), are you aware of individual training targets linked to them ?	25	44	23
22	Do you believe new staff now introduced effectively to the organisation (DoH as well as RO) ?	44	28	34
23	Do you believe that staff in new jobs are given the training and development they need to do their jobs properly ?	55	53	43
24	Do you believe staff skills are adequately developed to help achieve the RO / Directorate business objectives ?	68	56	50
25	Have you been made aware of development opportunities which could help you personally ?	75	61	51
26	Have you been encouraged to help identify your own development needs ?	75	90	76
27	Is your PDP being implemented effectively as far as you are concerned personally?	75	63	66
28	Does your manager help you to meet your training and development needs ?	83	76	64
29	Do you help yourself to ensure your own development needs are met ?	83	74	75
30	Do you actively think back and reflect on your performance and assess where feedback and external development could help?	73	63	55
31	Do you think the outcomes of training and development activities at individual, group and organisational level should be evaluated by the RO?	91	90	76
32	Do you believe the Executive Team understands how best to invest in staff ?	64	29	30
33	Do you believe the current attitudes of your line manager demonstrate a continuing commitment to developing staff ?	75	82	69
34	Are you regularly and accurately informed about key changes that affect staff regionally and nationally ?	46	64	57
35	Do the RO processes and lines of communication let staff adequately express their views on regional changes ?	50	41	41
36	Do you believe that, when staff contribute views or concerns, this really makes a difference ?	64	42	39
37	Are you given opportunities within your Directorate to talk about priorities and the distribution of work ?	59	79	60
38	Are staff roles and ways of working discussed within your Directorate to improve your effectiveness ?	54	61	57
39	Do you believe that there are opportunities for staff at all levels within your Directorate to contribute to decisions about how work is done ?	69	61	57
40	If you are unhappy about how things are working within your Directorate, do you feel able to raise your concerns ?	75	84	67
41	Are staff in your Directorate given encouragement to exercise initiative and develop their own skills and expertise?	95	74	74
42	Is the environment in your Directorate sufficiently "safe" to experiment with the boundaries of your role and develop your skills?	82	81	55
43	Is there sufficient opportunity to develop your <i>professional</i> skills and expertise ?	82	71	59
44	Is there sufficient opportunity to develop your <i>management</i> skills and expertise ?	61	66	50
45	Is there sufficient feedback to provide you with the opportunity to develop your own skills on individual issues or in terms of general progress ?	72	63	58
46	Are you happy with the way you are expected to help frame your own role and job description ?	88	90	71
47	.Do you believe the way you are expected to take responsibility	80	80	72

	for your development is the best way?			
48	Are you given sufficient support to define your own training needs and development path ?	95	75	69
49	Are you given sufficient support to develop through <i>informal "coaching" and reflection on your own actions and performance?</i>	65	58	44
50	Do you believe the RO appraisal processes a good way to assess performance and ensure your personal development is catered for ? Please comment on how fair you think they are?	60	50	33
51	Do you think the most recent RO restructuring processes were handled well or sensitively?	61	9	18
52	Do you believe the latest RO restructuring was handled as well as (or better than) that of last year ?	36	11	28
53	Do you believe that the RO is now ready and capable of working flexibly between Directorates ?	31	27	20
54	Are you now working closer with colleagues in Leeds and other ROs in a more collaborative manner ?	44	47	52
55	Do you believe that the Executive Team is providing the direction and support you need ?	40	21	21
56	Do you think that the final result of the RO restructuring is appropriate and fits the RO for its tasks over the next 24 months?	Not Asked	44	40
57	Do you believe the reasons for the recent exercise has been adequately communicated to staff ?	Not Asked	19	29
58	Do you believe the current restructuring will impact significantly on the way in which you work ?	Not Asked	44	32
59	Do you believe the restructuring will change the way in which your section will work across the RO ?	Not Asked	47	39
60	Do you believe the restructuring will change the way in which you will work with the NHS organisations in the Region ?	Not Asked	16	16

Qualitative feedback

It took quite some time to analyse the fairly extensive feedback in terms of comments received on the questionnaires themselves - together with discussions (both away days and group feedback). For example, in terms of the two questions highlighted on page 209, there has been a great deal of comment (much of it conflicting and contradictory):

"Do you believe that the RO has adequately defined its purpose, vision and goals within its new role in the "single centre" NHSE ?"

"This is evident only through top level objectives which have been published throughout the organisation."

"This is not widely communicated."

"Lots of papers on single centre working – but how goals are defined is not visible, no vision."

"No longer term vision, what we are part of and what does it mean – what does it mean to be a civil servant and not NHS?"

"Everyone has a business plan but does it reflect real purpose, and does everyone see that? Can see purpose of own job but not RO."

"Don't know goals and neither do others – need to grade what it means to staff levels and provide what people need to know – a snappy answer for the neighbours."

“Can you articulate your understanding of the vision and aims of the RO ?”*“Am still a little confused.”**“Sometimes there seems to be a broad shift in position.”**“Via business plan – could do with more simplified ways of communicating this.”**“We have worked hard to develop an approach to performance management in the context of a hazy vision.”*

It is particularly interesting to compare the three comments provided by Directors (their questionnaires were separately collected although anonymous and kept separately pooled) in response to this specific question:

*“Yes, as an organisation it knows what it is doing – two way moderation of policy and operations”**“Health of the population → Health Strategy → quality of purchasers and providers”**“Yes, but the RO role is dependent on how Health Authorities emerge in their new guise and the NHSE devolves responsibilities”*

It was not until I revisited these comments as part of the data analysis that the match with the comments on cultural differences and value sets became obvious. The questionnaires were anonymously completed and comments accumulated and transcribed by question, by date, into computer documents so attribution to individuals is not possible. It is quite clear to me, however, that in all probability the comments can be attributed to the Regional Director, Director of Public Health and Director of Performance Management respectively. No wonder the staff find it difficult to construct a coherent message. Tracking back the comments through the time series provided some interesting insights and these were discussed at the Directorate Workshops – as were the analyses produced of both numerical responses and comments. All were shared with the Directorate staff in advance.

DoH exercise

In the autumn of 1999, the DoH itself undertook a big questionnaire-led consultation exercise (repeated in 2000 but with the results not yet communicated). They outsourced the survey to MORI to try to assure staff of confidentiality and to ensure a high response rate by formalising the exercise, though in doing so indicating a lack of confidence in its culture and expectations. The survey closely mirrored to the SWRO SAQ when it asked the following question:

Do you understand: - the Department’s overall objectives? Response: 76%
 - how your own work objectives fit into those of the Department? Response: 76%

However, as noted earlier when the numerical responses for a similar question posed to RO staff was evaluated, MORI did not follow up with the obvious question – “and what do you think they are?”. It might be interesting to further examine some of the areas where positive (also negative, although the inherent personal bias may not work in the same way) results within the DoH could be verifiable in this way.

The last Directorate away day to consider the results of SAQ responses took place in July 1998. The Directorate was no longer working in the same structure by April 1999 to discuss the responses emerging from the March 1999 questionnaires, although this was picked up with staff in their annual appraisals (which I completed) and with the 'critical friends'. The July 1998 workshop considered specifically the four issues below.

Do you believe that the Executive Team is providing the direction and support you need ?
--

Do you believe that the RO is now ready and capable of working flexibly between Directorates in the manner envisaged?

Is there sufficient opportunity and training to develop your <i>management</i> skills and expertise ?

Is there sufficient feedback to provide you with the opportunity to develop your own skills on individual issues or in terms of general progress ?
--

These had received scores of **40%: 31%: 61%: 72% saying yes**. The first two were, thus, a cause for concern whilst the other two were specifically chosen because of the Learning Organisation discussion scheduled to follow. The response values from Finance were not as good as I had hoped – or as good as responses to related questions – so I wanted to explore these particularly. The management skills issues seem to arise because of a greater staff desire to experiment. The Finance structure was already very “flat” internally – so this allowed the establishment of a new set of project working groups to take forward specific White Paper implementation issues with individual staff delegated to manage the NHS finance representatives selected. The ‘opportunity to develop skills’ seemed to have a similar root so opportunities to develop individual skills were provided through the same project mechanisms and through amending individual Personal Development Plans and revising specific action plans for the staff. There was a great deal of enthusiasm for developing the Directorate in this way, but a great deal of disillusionment about the organisation’s capacity to move in a direction of flexibility. The same messages came across in terms of Director commitment as was evident in *the Regional Agenda for People (RAP)* feedback documents.

RAP initiative feedback

The RAP initiative in the RO was used as a vehicle to set up Business Planning Focus Groups. The middle level managers who ran this initiative for a number of months, provided a consolidated report to the RD in October 1996 which was circulated to all staff. The first page was a SWOT analysis for the RO accumulated through a whole series of internal workshops (including one of the Finance days) and set out the strengths and weaknesses as follows.

Strengths:

- Knowledge of the organisations for the RO services*
- IiP, PDPs and formal staff training regimes*
- Executive Board (in Leeds) works well*
- RO holds a key “bridge” position in the organisation chain*

Weaknesses:

- No track record and those outside do not understand our remit*
- Lack of clarity and purpose for the RO*
- Not clear whether we should be serving Ministers or the NHS*
- Lack of cohesion in RET is a problem for the rest of the RO*
- Directorates don't work well together*
- RET does not represent RO views up to Executive Board and Department*
- Lack of clarity – functions, responsibilities, role, means of exerting power*
- Too much “navel gazing” – too long – don't move on*
- Disparate organisation with no common purpose*

Key messages:

- Clarity of role and function needed*
- Provide evidence of commitment and leadership from RET*
- Strengthen strategic overviews – leading to action*
- Improve internal / external communications – learn to listen*
- Regular review / appraisal – staff participation and top down*

The messages from the staff at all levels are very clear – and consistently so through all the feedback channels and mechanisms (both in this research and other initiatives ongoing). The same messages are almost exactly echoed in both October 1996 and then again in September 1999 by the external interviewees. The staff themselves, then have a coherent framing of the issues, but apparently little leeway in which to address the difficulties perceived – through internal process or personal initiative.

The staff displayed an enormous amount of motivation and commitment throughout this initiative, with much of the work undertaken in their own time – lunchtimes or on either side of the working day. The reports were largely written up at home. There was a huge investment of personal energy in an exercise that was perceived as being genuinely consultative. The project team made a presentation to the RET, then very little happened to take the key messages forward. Subsequently this was perceived, according to the staff involved, as another listening exercise that did not ‘hear the messages’.

Summary of key SAQ points

The SAQ worked well in bringing out both the main issues of concern for the staff and then providing a focus in away days for discussing the organisational issues. The feedback obtained matched well in terms of consistency with the other mechanisms in place. A number of trends were evident in both the directorate and wider SWRO responses but no significant actions resulted – nor did any wider learning occur at RET, although some of the directors did take individual issues back to their own directorates.

There was a good deal of motivation evident, with some pride in achieving the IiP accreditation, even though staff were not convinced that the exercise was not merely a ‘tick in the box’.

The key messages to extract in terms of feedback from the staff themselves are possibly:

- the expressed need for an overall sense of direction and a vision to make sense of their efforts;
- a wish for leadership with which they could identify;
- the clarity with which many of them perceived the problems facing the SWRO;
- the extent of the goodwill available and wish to 'do a good job';
- dissatisfaction with some of the CS mechanisms that depersonalised some of the recognition and reward processes;
- dissatisfaction with the lack of genuine involvement in the SWRO changes that affected the staff themselves – bearing in mind that jobs and salaries were not in the main at risk but the work content was, the feelings were strong;
- the desire to be treated as individuals rather than as 'postholders'.

Regional Executive Team (RET) Working

The RET went through a number of major "away day" sessions – four sets during the three years of this research itself, together with a long development session soon after I had been appointed (before the research itself had begun). The first of these lasted three days and all were facilitated by consultants from outside the RET. The first three sets of away days were facilitated by an external company and the last two by a new OD consultant who was joining the Regional Office as a part-time "development manager" but working within the regional NHS but based at the RO. The last two away-days were supplemented by five half-day development sessions facilitated on a rota basis by the Directors themselves between the fourth and fifth away days.

In one session the RET Group identified a number of behaviours which hindered effectiveness:

"Resistance to examining entrails or resolving the issues

Time pressure makes it hard to contribute and time priorities are allocated elsewhere

Giving up because it's not working

No joint vision of group's purpose and no agreement about the ROs role

No sense of shared values

Categorise each other rather than listen to the messages

Avoiding really important issues and our different perspectives because we can't resolve differences

The agenda is awful and doesn't address the important things

Poor timekeeping because of poor chairing and tactical talking"

The RD role as chair was explored as to how that hindered the RET functioning and hence the RO effectiveness:

*“[RD] doesn't see it as a decision making group – he fails to clarify purpose and rules
[RD] avoids conflict in meetings and allows loose conclusions to generate conflict outside
Meetings badly organised and chaired –[RD] is blind to body language
[RD] participates but does not chair - prolongs search for clarity, mainly for himself
[RD] fails to provide 'glue' for team since we come from different perspectives.”*

These and other “self-diagnosed” issues were taken forward over the subsequent series of RET meetings, but this was a painful and fitful process. The five RET development half-days were devoted almost entirely to the need for each Director (possibly most importantly the Regional Director) to understand better what the other parts of the RO actually did – the intermediate action agreed at the penultimate away day. The series of presentations that resulted and a meetings approach that concentrated more on the processes involved did start to open up discussion, though all the Directors were never “on board”. Advice from two of the facilitating consultants was, indeed, that a true corporate working was not possible with the individuals and lack of corporacy in place and that it was more pragmatic to work outside the main group on an issue by issue basis to address the every day issues – though this of course would do little for vision or prioritisation.

The differences in approach between Directors were very apparent in the adoption and support for the Investors in People (IiP) programme. The Communications Manager was made project manager for the project within the RO (the Training Manager had yet to be appointed). In her MBA final report dealing with the project, she reflected:

“One of the earliest and biggest obstacles I encountered in the RO was the Executive Team. Although their resistance to IIP would decrease as it went on, nevertheless it remained a problem throughout, particularly in relation to the attitude of one or two of the “die-hard” on the team.....

They were led by a Regional Director who had just taken up post a few months earlier and it was his first experience of working in the NHS. They were not a naturally congruent group and it was clear to most that they were having difficulty meshing together as a team and difficulty in agreeing their purpose and key objectives.”

The RET have been seen by the staff and outsiders as ineffective in pulling together the RO in a common direction. The external interviews (see Chapter 3 for details of interviewees etc) were consistent in a highlighting a number of commonly perceived issues. The two key issues were as follows.

- The fact that as individuals, the RET in the SWRO were, they believed, probably more able individually than individuals in other ROs, both in terms of experience and in terms of personal approach / delivery with the NHS itself. However, it was clear that there was no internal agreement on priorities, corporate culture or common approach to cross-cutting problems.
- The perceived vacuum of leadership, felt particularly keenly by the NHS CEs interviewed who were struggling with a plethora of priorities (several apparently conflicting) and wanted an overall direction to take. Where they had disagreements between organisations they actually wanted to be directed with a solution, even if it ran against them, in order to clear the position to get on with the rest of the agenda. The lack of overall direction and boundary setting for decisions was particularly an issue with the two HA CEs who had previously held the equivalent to the RD role when the organisation was still a RHA.

The lack of leadership or internal agreed direction were two recurring themes in all the external interviews. The lack of decision making, confidence in direction and lack of guidance in uncertainty were also commonly flagged. The responses received through feedback from really very senior NHS managers (including two of the largest HAs in England) was reminiscent of a parent / child set of relationships. In fact, these CEs have a great deal of responsibility (though can shelter behind some confused and rarely enforced accountability lines) but operate in an environment where the priorities and direction can be changed in mid-stream for political reasons and where ROs and part of that chain of change. In some ways this is a request to make the rules of the game clear.

The echo between internal staff and external management perceptions, however, is striking. The findings and problems emerging really were providing echoes of the issues raised in the Change and Leadership section of the literature review. The contrast was that much more striking, as two of the CEs interviewed do provide very much more of a transformational approach to leadership and have a successful leadership record in complex change environments.

A comparison between the responses of the staff and those of the Directors suggests that the Directors in the RO are less receptive to the ideas of cultural change and different ways of working than the staff who report to them. In turn, the directors may be less receptive in taking forward a Learning Organisation framework that involves changes in their own individual practice rather than in developing their staff - as an exercise external to themselves. Of course, the problem could be more related to the way in which I approached the development topics than intrinsically with the senior team itself. However, there are a few reasons why this might be the case for my colleagues on the RET:

- status and image may restrict their participation in situations where they are more open to challenge by staff, leave aside their power invoked by position, need to be more receptive on issues where they normally lead by default;

- there may be no perception of need, either because of their management history (e.g. previous organisations) or because they do not see an organisational need;
- they may have a more significant investment in the past of the organisation with a tendency to extrapolate the past and less inclination to embrace a change in approach;
- time is a practical constraint: whereas they insist upon staff setting aside time for development they may not place the same priority on their own personal development;
- there may be a lack of theoretical appreciation in a wider sense, possibly because of a lack of penetration of academic theory / research or a lack of inclination because of past success in organisational seniority;
- there may be a lack of introduction of ideas in the right way: the didactic approach is rarely successful but there may also be no take up / ownership engendered through lack of “champions” and informal guidance.

Clearly, developing a flexible and developing organisation (the learning organisation is probably just a specific representation of this) is not only about changing behaviour, it is about changing structures and systems to enable the development of an open and receptive culture. An insistence, a priori, that all lines of management and responsibility are clarified in exhaustive detail, with buttressed demarcations between organisational divisions is not conducive to such development. It does seem to be ingrained, as an observation, in the Civil Service context into which the RHA became absorbed.

The RO is currently half way between the two ends of this spectrum – the RD tries to impose as much formality in the internal structures as he can but four of the six directors are keen to keep structures as open and fluid as practical. The lack of consensus then results in a whole series of tensions and is made more complex by the nature of the directors and decisions faced. One of the key functions of the RO is for the individual Directors to act as the “Head of Profession” for the region – particularly for Public Health (chief clinician and effective regional deputy for the CMO), Nursing (similar to PH), R&D (for clinical research – primarily for the medical schools) and Finance. The professional roles are thus enhanced and stressed outside the organisation.

Raelin (1991) provides a number of insights into this sort of situation where managers manage professionals – a situation replicated throughout the NHS. This is also a common situation within the Civil service, and one with few accommodations. None of the convergent behaviour noted by Raelin is apparent in the SWRO. The situation in other ROs, with RDs who are either from one of the four professional strands noted above or from the NHS and used to managing professionals, is noticeably different.

External Interviews

The feedback through the formal external interviews was surprisingly but refreshingly blunt and frank. It had originally been conceived more as a validation exercise to try to validate the issues and interpretation emerging from the other data collection, but in fact it proved to be very positive. The feedback and analysis also led on to a number of less formal discussions in the interim period between the two sets of formal interviews that were just as frank and helpful – building on the initial interviews. It seemed as though once the issues were in the open and confidentiality respected then the ongoing feedback was primed.

Interviews in 1997

The picture emerging for the SWRO from the Health Authorities in 1997 was of an organisation that lacked confidence in itself and was unsure of its purpose – also one which added little value from the perspective of the external interviewees, except in some specific areas. The common themes (there were no consistencies or polarisation of disagreement) in the early interviews were as follows.

- The RO had started with no clear view of what it wanted to be or do after merger into the NHS Executive. It was perceived to have lost some of its previous responsibilities but, paradoxically, could actually work direct with others and be more forceful as then the Trusts too reported through the RO, which as the RHA they had not done.
- In the early stages (April 1996) the RO had “abandoned” the HAs to manage all the processes themselves with no direction or management. The point was made independently (without prompting – but raising the issue perhaps about how much discussion goes on within the NHS circles on this topic) by five out of the eight interviewees that the RD was a career civil servant. He had no experience of the Health Service, whilst two of the other three key performance related directors had no experience of HAs or Trusts and a fourth had “gone walkabout” (in fact he concentrated on the Primary Care aspects and neglected the others). Hence the approach of management by default was not seen as intent but a lack of experience and knowledge which was different to the situation in other ROs.
- Comments on ‘the centre’ were even more disparaging in terms of being unworldly and unrealistic - ‘creating policy in a vacuum’ and ‘fantasy island’ were two views. As the HAs increasingly had more direct encounters with individual policy leads (previously under the RHA regime, the RHA provided a completely separate layer of management that provided a ‘cut-out’ between NHS Executive and HAs) this view gained ground.
- All events were seen by those interviewed to be dealt with ‘in isolation’ and the main emphasis seemed to be to ‘keep the noise down’ or ‘keep the stopper in the bottle’ rather than providing the impetus, guidance or direction for improvement and change. Relationship building was not perceived as a priority and there was thought to be too little consistency in the messages relayed.

- The CEs at the HAs had not coped well with the far looser management arrangements and the previously tightly integrated systems had disintegrated. There appeared to be no vision or perceived will at the RO to pull this back together, to provide any strategic decisions on services or policies nor indeed to grasp specific performance issues.
- The individual directors with functional responsibilities were perceived to be talented but did not act like a team.
- The CEs in the system were looking for five specifics (in addition to some of the comments above):
 - evaluative feedback and positive guidance on improvement (including acting as a clearing house for evaluated better performance with reference to others);
 - positive practical input into central policy development to minimise the problems on implementation of changes where the details are too specific to ignore and too vague to be consistently applied (or not thought through properly);
 - wider view of issues, such as specialist services, overall prioritisation of resources, the integration of different funding streams and interaction between local organisations;
 - handling the political aspects of some of the resulting changes rather than leaving them purely to local management (which was a recipe for no change or extremely slow change);
 - some sensible cross-organisation “succession planning” – the current ‘abdication’ by the RO from this scene was wasteful and inefficient as the only spanning organisation which should be fulfilling a ‘professional lead’.

In their view the RO was not providing any of these. In some of the other ROs, a far more proactive role seemed to be adopted.

- The staff at the RO were thought not to understand enough about the “real world” to be able to challenge behaviour and results effectively. The lack of expertise was seen as very much a mixed blessing by those on the “receiving end” as some felt isolated and felt they needed to be challenged.

There were not a great number of positives, except for the individual contributions of a number of directors and their staff. There was widespread positive feedback on professionalism and helpfulness on specific issues, especially technical ones. However, the positive feedback saw the RO more as a source of reference and interpretation rather than in terms of shaping direction and agenda. The general feeling seemed to reflect a great deal of frustration on the part of the interviewees.

Interviews in 1999

When the interviewees were revisited, three of the eight had moved on. However, they were interviewed again as their new posts provided interesting further insights and each of the three had continuing contacts with the SWRO albeit different.

The key observations were very similar: although some of the newer relationships with the abolition of the internal market were more constructive, there remained the issues of overall strategy and direction. The lack of direction and decision was almost unanimously attributed to a deficit in leadership from the RO and lack of definition of its real role and what it was intended to contribute. The lack of corporate identity was again commented upon, with national and functional “pipes” or “silos” still adversely commented upon, with the addition that the team locally did not pull these together either. The local “policy” role was widely questioned, except in terms of strictly practical support.

The RO was still seen to be ‘lightweight’ and the external perceptions were that this was likely to deteriorate as staff turnover led to loss of experience – also loss of contact as those more experienced in the NHS were out of its operations for longer and longer. Each of the external interviewees expressed serious concerns that the RO was no longer perceived to be the stepping stone for senior staff that the RHA had been and recruitment would be increasingly difficult. For different reasons, since they were seen to be peripheral from the perspective of the NHS Executive and DH (also other Central Departments), the ROs would also find it difficult to attract good quality recruits from the Civil Service. Because the role of the ROs had not been spelled out centrally and the external perception in the SW was one of ineffectiveness, then it was not seen as attractive in terms of development and a step away from “real management”. The responsibilities of ROs were again questioned – the Service itself had increasingly failed to meet targets (financial breakeven, waiting lists, clinical governance, change targets) but the accountability or responsibility did not seem to be clear. The RO did not seem to enforce this and it did not itself appear to be sanctioned for not doing so.

Two sets of observations were made that the previous RHA relationships had been parental: that whilst the CEs delighted in the shaking off of the ‘shackles’ it meant that they were now adrift, without reference points and with so many ‘priorities’ that they were all just pursuing their own agendas. However, they were feeling very isolated and unsupported in doing so – and the RO was not listening to the support they needed, but insisted on playing its own game of reinventing policies locally. No real relationships or parameters had been set up to replace those lost. Finally, there was no real consensus about the future and role of the ROs. Given changes in HA responsibilities and changes in support services being mooted, the centralisation of decision making in one direction and greater move to local autonomy on the other produced tensions which the interviewees were unable to read or manage effectively.

The interviews of 1999 were very consistent in their feedback when compared to the more varied feedback received in 1997. However, there was a development of themes, although no great change in overall feeling. It was clear that some of the topics had been discussed at some length between the interviewees themselves – though for reasons totally unconnected with this study. These overall findings are observations based on an analysis of each of the responses from specific individuals as well as the overall common themes. The major difference that emerged from a detailed review of the responses provided through the interviews was probably that the comments were sharper in 1999: the element of the “jury is out” had been replaced since 1997 by a more clear cut set of observations.

The SWRO was not seen to have made progress in defining its position or role and was largely seen as an irrelevance, with some specific individuals again being excepted from this analysis in terms of positive input. However, the ROs were seen as organisations with which the 'game' had to be played to stay on the right side of ministers and the NHS Executive nationally.

Observation and Experimentation

Much of my personal observation was crystallised through reflection and recorded within the biographical journal, dealing with developing thoughts and reflections about the organisation and my own practise. However, the journal also represents an ongoing and continuous development of my perceptions about local context – fed by interactions with colleagues, business processes, 'joint ventures' and project development. As such it provided a useful tool with which to explore the self-awareness and environmental context essential to complement the development of the theoretical framework and link the theory into a specific context.

Opportunities for observation of the way the wider Department worked in particular were very valuable in comparing the RO environment with that of the wider Department – and I was fortunate in this respect to spend the time between April 1999 and December 2000 working in Richmond House and Quarry House (the two HQ buildings of the DH). The opportunities included involvement with the set-up of action learning sets centrally in the Department, although time constraints meant I was subsequently unable to join these as a participant. There were also independent (quinquennial) reviews of two DH Agencies, the lead on a preparation review for the NHS for Monetary Union and, possibly most valuable, leading the project to procure/implement new HR and Payroll systems for the NHS as a whole.

Experimentation in terms of personal practice and staffing responsibilities / structures has been possible because of the latitude given to me to specify my own method, scope and structures for each of the reviews and HR project. Indeed, it was often surprising to find how much latitude one could actually take advantage of, providing one played by the rules and was prepared to take responsibility for making decisions. Because in some ways, the cross-functional working and the taking of decisions not necessarily in a consensus manner was outside much of the usual culture, it was as though the informal systems were not always prepared to cope and provide counterbalance – providing there was no outright opposition (covered at senior level by keeping the project sponsors on board) then the projects could work through their own momentum.

The key conclusion emerging, however, was that any momentum generated was very much down to the individuals concerned as otherwise the need for consensus so often required for initiatives not ministerially driven would probably have slowed the projects to an extent that the windows of opportunity could well have been missed. These sets of work took me into areas of the DH which have provided valuable comparison opportunities with the RO setting – important for my research findings.

Agency reviews and National Projects (see Chapter 3 for details)

One of the key emerging issues from the research above was the extent to which the nature of the RO constrained the cultural development (and personal development within that) required to move towards LO concepts and practices. One of the major issues in generalising the issues emerging was the extent to which the views developed of the civil service were actually representative and whether the RO / DH interfaces were also typical. My gradually widening national role from April 1999 led into some unexpected opportunities to review two other bodies in some depth, as well as working across the range of the Department in two major cross-disciplinary projects. The two Agency reviews, in particular, allowed a good deal more exploratory work in terms of organisational culture and interfaces between both the Agencies and the DH – and with their NHS / clinical stakeholders. In both cases, there were similarities in terms of cultural differences between the Agencies and the DH and those initially between the RO and DH.

Agency reviews

The key issues for the Agency reviews are the Prior Options Review and Performance Review:

- the first assessing the fundamentals of whether the Agency objectives are both needed and valid for the future, together with consideration of the best organisational means of delivering them,
- the second assessing performance against objectives which comprises essentially a review of organisational management.

Both Agency Reviews (The NHS Estates Agency and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority – HFEA) provided the opportunity for whole sets of internal and external interviews that assessed the nature of management and effectiveness for the two organisations – together with the way things were done internally and staff/organisational development managed. They also assessed the nature and effectiveness of relationship with the DH.

From a research perspective, several of the themes explored were common with those already emerging for the RO, so that the results provide some generalisation in areas or confirmation that the characteristics perceived as common for the RO ‘public sector model’ were likely to hold water. In terms of scope and output, both reviews took around four months in duration, with a similar timescale to finalise the lengthy reports with all stakeholders and place the reports in the parliamentary library.

As an example, both Agencies provided perceptions of the DH that were similar to those held by the SWRO. Both these Agencies are unusual as Agencies as both have important policy development responsibilities in addition to their operational management duties. There is, therefore, a sometimes uneasy tension between the DH sponsors and the organisations in terms of relative responsibilities for policy issues. In both cases, the smaller organisations have a degree of focus and motivation to deliver flexibly and quickly to tie in with an operational drive that is absent from the DH.

In both cases, therefore, there are significant tensions and 'turf wars' apparent with custom and practice sometimes at variance with set out responsibilities. An uncomfortable position as both are in high profile areas (NHS Estates for Private Finance Initiative schemes and HFEA for ethics and reproductive issues).

The other common aspect worthy of comment, because of the policy development roles noted above, was the nature of interaction with ministers. The issue of Agency scope and responsibilities / accountability was particularly an issue with the HFEA as the Members frequently did not agree with the DH policy lead interaction – nor with ministers in some cases - or the way in which some of the policy was developed or framed. Again, the informality of management and interaction was clearly helpful in some ways, but clearly detrimental in others.

This interface between Ministers and senior civil servants had been changing with the increased use of Special Advisors and increasing use of separate bodies to monitor and lead initiatives. The increasing interest shown in the detailed aspects of management, identification of allocations of specific monies to a very low level – direct bidding from Trusts for small initiatives – centralisation of monetary and monitoring control were all changing the dynamics of this interface.

The changes introduced created pressures that came to a head in May 2000 when the NHS Executive Chief Executive departed, closely followed by the Director of Planning – further compounded by that of the Permanent Secretary and his Deputy. Although a new joint PS/CE postholder (Nigel Crisp) was appointed in November 2000, the Director of Finance & Performance, his Deputy and the Principal Finance Officer also left early in 2001 with the HR Director changing role so that further changes were expected. The lack of corporacy at the top of the DH, previously evident through hearsay but becoming more obvious during these changes, had a significant impact on the projects I led. Even NHS Plan initiatives were not provided with real cross-functional support and a sense of direction and team working were urgently needed.

National Projects

The Human Resources (HR) /Payroll project provided enormous personal change management opportunities (see previous section) but also an opportunity to explore inter-Divisional boundaries within the NHS Executive. The project represented the first time that the NHS Executive has mandated an approach throughout the NHS (other than IT communications infrastructure) and there were no established lines of process, decision or consultation for this to be effected.

The differences found between the HR divisions and Finance divisions in the NHS Executive in terms of approach and dynamics were surprising, though for this research it is the interplay between the two different professional backgrounds and the Civil Service culture into which they are embedded which provides the interest. Managing a project straddling the two functions meant developing a much better understanding of both – and the individuals involved – to avoid mismatches of approach and expectations.

The whole way of working of the DH was at issue here as was the relationship with Ministers and decision making – also similar interactions with Treasury. The research inputs are primarily through observation and discussion rather than with formal research methods (these were just not appropriate or practical), both with colleagues and Agency co-reviewers – both retired but very senior ex-civil servants from other Departments – who become critical friends (also providing feedback on the thesis).

Internal Development Papers and Insights

The number of Organisational Development initiatives within the NHS Executive / RHA merger period and subsequently was large - perhaps the most pervasive for the RO being the IiP process. The early Departmental initiatives were focused on information about Terms & Conditions, Civil Service structures (changing from the 'old' CS Grade system), assessment processes (post evaluation – the JESP processes), recruitment (Job Specific Selection – a new departure for the DH). The IiP processes were the first to address culture, but were approached more in terms of achieving certification than changing attitudes by management. Comments from IiP and RAP are already quoted above.

The initiatives on Communications, “Single Centre” working, Business Planning, Regional Agenda for People (RAP), OD and the DH all started with a fanfare, absorbed much staff energy through focus groups and consultation about what to do and then petered out. They did leave behind enormous amounts of paper and analysis that has been very helpful to this research in understanding the organisation and its culture. Most recently two new documents / initiatives: *A New Understanding* and *Valuing Diversity* have been promoted in the DH. The biggest obstacles these have to overcome are not adverse staff opinion but cynicism about content, staff “initiative fatigue” and a widespread opinion that senior management is playing at these and is not demonstrating its commitment to the underlying values through behaviour.

MORI survey

The MORI survey of the DH staff covered a fairly wide range of issues, but was fairly light in content in respect of cultural issues. The survey elicited 3,021 responses, around 65% of the total staff, after a number of reminders and e-mail circulation. The responses were generally positive about the formal communication processes, the appreciation of the need for change, the Department’s objectives (76% replied they understood them, though the understanding was not tested) and the way in which line managers treat staff fairly, openly and honestly.

Job factors rated far less positively – less than half replied that they had the opportunity to use their skills or abilities properly, or had opportunities for personal development. In terms of career progression only a quarter were satisfied, with 44% actively dissatisfied. Only 34% said that senior management provided active support for equal opportunities. Workload featured badly with 57% normally having to work significant extra hours and 75% stating that workload had increased noticeably in the last 12 months.

However, particularly interesting in terms of consistency with the RO internal questionnaire results already dealt with above were the results on leadership. Only 38% believed that senior management had a clear vision of where the Department was going (22% actively believed that management did not know) and only 26% had confidence in them (35% actively expressed “no confidence”). It may not be totally clear exactly how this squared with staff claiming to understand the objectives, but the objectives are very short-term oriented and were not in any way prioritised – they therefore lacked an overall shape, vision or direction to provide a framework.

Common Themes

There appear to be a number of consistent themes in terms of responses and feedback from the start of the period right through to the end of the ‘data collection period’. For the SWRO the data collection period extended from August 1996 to December 1999, but for the national initiatives extended from March 1999 right through to December 2000. The same feedback was received from the external interviews, from staff internally, and also from Directors (Chief Executives and Directors of Finance) from the NHS in other regions who remarked about the differences in approach between regions. Some issues became recurring themes in the RET away days but were never drawn to any conclusions or resulted in different approaches. It is clear, also, from discussions with a number of the most senior staff in the NHS Executive that similar conclusions were drawn there also. The common themes were as follows.

- The cultural issues resulting from merging two very different sets of organisations were never proactively addressed, which led to a great deal of confusion over working practices, overall role and future RO purpose.
- The culture became more homogeneous over a four year period, but only as staff moved on, and although working relationships improved for some individuals the effectiveness of working across boundaries – function or geographical remained far from effective with staff still predominantly drawn from (and continuing to operate in) different areas of experience and skills.
- The S&W RO had been and still was seen to be weak in terms of leadership and this weakness was perceived externally as resulting in reduced accountability and less positive encouragement or support for change in the NHS.
- The SWRO RET had never functioned effectively in any corporate sense and was not perceived to have achieved any joint view on vision and purpose – and indeed internally any appreciation of the impact that the different value sets held by the individual directors had for the RET as a whole. The dysfunctional behaviour in meetings and cross-functional working remained, notwithstanding the level of turnover experienced at RET in the meantime.
- Internal SWRO structural changes were on the whole been managed badly, but the lack of learning from feedback and the extent of staff willingness through motivation to improve things was perhaps even more disappointing.

- Within relatively small organisations, different cultures can co-exist in sub-units, but the interaction and interdependence makes significant differences in behaviour difficult to sustain in terms of change and development.
- Working through and supporting individual learning is not easy – but encouraging changes in culture which support sharing of learning and knowledge, whilst also enabling change, needs yet more commitment and resource. Such a group activity also needs more stability and trust for individuals, and between individuals and the organisation.
- The problems discussed within the RET were certainly appreciated outside the team, often with greater clarity, not only by staff within the SWRO but also by those working with the RO from outside. As a result, the use of ‘spin’ to downplay internal differences or lack of candid analysis only enhanced existing perceptions and created doubt over genuine values held.
- The staff provided a great deal of goodwill and motivation in terms of better working and cross-organisational relationships: in many cases they regarded the Directors as the obstructions to overcome rather than the enabling resources they perhaps should have been. The Directors seemed to be not as flexible and were certainly more politically orientated than the staff, especially in this respect.
- There was a huge degree of staff goodwill and motivation evident throughout the period. Anecdotally, this would now appear to be decreasing as staff turnover is rising and the next internal restructuring begins in January 2001.

During the latter period of the research, the wider DH context also changed in a number of ways – influenced both by new structures and personnel changes. The changing ‘climate’ and mood were evident through internal documents, but was that much more apparent from observation (and feedback discussion) arising from the national projects, which were largely cross-disciplinary and hence reached right across the DH. There had, clearly, been friction for some considerable time between the political and senior civil servant layers of the DH – exactly the interface highlighted between Ministers and senior management that contributes to differentiating this part of the Public Sector.

The mixture of civil service and NHS cultures at the top management table, which never really merged, and the quite open disparagement between the two groups, has not really been addressed. The culture issues of what was in effect a major merger between DH/NHS Executive and the RHAs/ROs have not been addressed in that way, with no real internal leadership evident in establishing a new culture.

At the SWRO, this was evident through the staff comments, surveys and workshops – a similar picture emerges from the DH surveys and senior management workshops (see document lists). However, although the lack of leadership in this issue was more immediate and obvious within the RO, the issue was in fact a far wider one with no real engagement at senior levels. Potentially, the split of the CE and PS responsibilities, with the two individuals themselves having very different backgrounds and experience, meant that the leadership focus would probably never be resolved effectively with a single outcome. In the event, the outcome was an organisation of great structural complexity and lines of accountability that were frequently split or unclear.

There was also little clarity of overall direction (strategy?) – compounded by friction across the minister / civil service divide – with no leadership in terms of culture establishment resulting in little corporacy at senior levels with a cascade which stifled a development environment. At the SWRO, this national picture was re-enacted in smaller scale, with a Regional Director who saw no need for the SWRO to have its own understanding or organisational culture development – nor any explicit definition or agreed set of values for the organisation.

In the same way that staff locally draw some very clear conclusions, the external interviewees were expressing views about both the SWRO and NHS Executive nationally that comment on the lack of overall coherence, increasing fragmentation of response, differences in performance management approaches between ROs – at exactly the time when more detail is dictated at Ministerial level. The future for the ROs is not clear to the staff, nor to the external stakeholders.

Some Final Thoughts on Organisation Development

The Regional Office changed significantly in its role and internal structures over the four years of the research project, although little consistent change has been effected in its working approach or practices.

The work with the Finance Directorate did show promise in terms of Learning Organisation culture and concepts, but it was far from an unbridled success. In terms of the research this posed a number of questions which were difficult to answer, especially in terms of the extent to which the difficulties were intrinsic or whether the limited progress was due to a failure of implementation. **The interpretation and conclusions drawn from these difficulties is the major topic revisited in the Chapter 7 handling of public / private sector differences and impact on culture.**

Conclusions from the work within the Regional Office were compared with observations and data collection from the Agency Reviews and national projects for consistency and general applicability. As a first order comparison, the data gathered whilst I worked in my national role tended to confirm the data analysis collected in the initially planned research work. Similarly, the observations made as a result of the later work provides some confirmation of the initial analysis and conclusions made, especially in respect of the private / public sector differential for Learning Organisation concept adoption.

It became clear to me from review of the away-day papers, external interviews and reflecting on the one-to-one interviews and feedback that, within the RO, there were a small number of critical individuals who could determine the way in which the organisation functioned and the culture that operated. This seemed to work through both influence on and credibility with the rest of the staff. Although to an extent this was a positional factor, the nature of the personality of the staff members was also a key element. From reflection on the wider work and contact with previous organisations, this (rather unsurprising) conclusion would seem to be of wider applicability. Whilst unsurprising, it does have a significant effect on the way in which changes take root – and should therefore be approached: with due regard to the “opinion-formers” .

Another aspect of the same issue manifests itself in the importance of alignment of reward (including progression) with individual characteristics, the ways of working, the extent and nature of support and delegation – where all are often determined by a small number of key individuals. The environment thus developed encompasses the leadership aspect. It would seem to me to be difficult within traditional management research strategies and reporting to adequately capture this element, in particular as a set of individual characteristics and behaviours.

The impulse is to objectivise the treatment, sanitise the interpersonal relationships (potentially to avoid offence or even litigious action) and downplay the often vigorous interplay between the main ‘players’. The interplay between personal strengths and shortcomings tend to be subsumed within the analysis, although in practice they may often stand-alone. In the model of an organisation comprising a matrix of individuals and relationships as two dimensions of a whole, the character interplay at senior level can be significant in determining or reinforcing the organisational behaviour.

Certainly, the NHS organisations observed from outside within the region would seem to strongly reflect the personalities of the executives involved. And the interpersonal relationships (‘personality clashes’, differences in values or ‘mind sets’ – even sexual tensions) play a major impact in both organisation performance and interaction with other organisations that cut across the management concepts that work underneath / above. I found this dependency on key individuals (often the CE) to be evident at each of the University Hospital, Regional Office and central NHS Executive managements I have experienced. One practical challenge is to integrate these aspects with the wider and more generalised management models.

Chapter 7

What Emerged from the Research

Introduction

This research started with an intention to establish the SWRO Finance Directorate as a small Learning Organisation embedded in the RO. A comparison with the other areas of the SWRO could then provide an indication as to whether the culture established would enable the staff to cope with the internal and external changes they faced “better”. The exercise would itself give rise to a number of learning opportunities, potentially leading to an improvement in my practice as a result. As indicated in earlier chapters, events did not turn out exactly as anticipated, although this was already becoming clear by the time the transfer paper from MPhil to PhD was written in September 1998 and a number of interim findings were summarised. In addition, at that stage, three separate strands of emerging importance were identified that should be developed in the research and these are summarised below. This chapter, therefore, sets out:

- a summary of the interim findings together with an update resulting from the continuing research – partly to provide an indication of the continuing development of my own management thinking as part of the “journey” and documentation of the research and my development as a “case study” ;
- a proposed approach for the introduction of Learning Organisation principles into the public sector and an organisational Learning Model, bearing in mind the LO principles outlined in Chapter 2, public sector / organisational factors identified in Chapters 2 and 4 and the results of the organisational development research set out in Chapter 6;
- a methodology for managerial learning / research in a practical professional context, bringing the strands together from the literature review in Chapter 2, the methodology developed in Chapter 3 and the findings in my own development set out in Chapter 5.

Given the qualitative nature of much of this work, it is important to understand the back-cloth against which the research findings are interpreted and the conclusions synthesised in terms of what emerged. It is for this reason, as stated in the introduction to the Chapter 2 literature review, that the literature review is set out in the way it is – representing to a great extent the framework of my own understanding and reflecting my personal values. It also represents an iteration cycle that incorporates the learning achieved in pulling the above strands together. Similarly, the Chapter 4 context-setting provides a sketch of the environment within which the results emerged and the interpretation drawn. Within the process outlined above, the literature review (in the way in which it is set out) and the final methodology (as it emerged to take account of the dynamic research cycles developed) also represent elements that emerged from the research.

Towards the end of the chapter, the issues of personal theories of development and action are explored. The interpretation of data within the preceding two chapters and the implications drawn out in this chapter are brought together in terms of developing a meaning for my own motivation and management practice.

Development of Interim Findings

The Transfer Paper produced in September 1998 dealt with ten interim findings. These are re-appraised and updated below in the light of further reflection, data collected (especially personal observation) and literature reviewed. The data collected, especially in respect of the staff, arose from the group sessions, individual appraisal interviews, SAQ (questionnaire) responses and the formal / informal discussions ensuing – and reflection through observation in my own journal. In the main these provide further support for well established ideas and concepts, although the process of identification and linkage to real events and feedback during the research help to ground these within my own experience and explore them as a part of my own management practice.

Interim Conclusion 1: The Value of Reflection

Reflection works for me as a learning process. The balance of increasing my exposure to the theoretical frameworks expounded for management and reflection on my own practice and circumstances makes it far more productive than my previous musings. A formal framework helps this process significantly, especially the discipline of committing my thoughts and analysis to paper through maintaining a journal. The formality of the process forces the crystallisation of thoughts.

It has been striking for me how much intuitive learning and development of one's own informal models replicates in crude form the more refined theory explored in the literature search.

"Reflecting on practice" is fine – but starting to achieve a quicker response loop that enables one to read one's behaviour and practice within a situation and alter behaviour or practice within a situation to affect its outcome is real progress. This enables personal management style to be modified according to the circumstances and to become more effective.

The feedback from members of staff, too, was positive in this respect – both in terms of their own practice and the changes they perceived in my own management style, identified through the psychological profiling and explored through follow-up discussions. Indeed, they regarded the concepts of reflective learning very much as “common sense”. They responded well to formalisation of the reflection within the appraisal processes as forcing them into doing something they should be doing anyway. The linkage with individual feedback on behaviour and performance – an increase in my feedback to them both on a one-to-one basis and through some of the group sessions - was very much seen as contributing to an overall reflective approach. Further staff feedback as the process continued, was that they believed that the value and effectiveness of the processes increased as they understood the learning models and concepts better.

Whilst formalisation does make the process far more effective, it did also highlight the critical constraint in this study as not desirability or acceptance of the reflective processes to staff, but time availability. James (1995) and Clark, James and Kelly (1996) make exactly this point. The context within which the staff were working frequently saw them setting aside both personal development and formal training courses to meet “production” deadlines. There were frequently organisational reasons for doing so – and on occasions when there were no alternative resources I underwrote these decisions. However, for the majority of the staff this was becoming the “norm” - short term agendas were being delivered but personal and organisational development / capacity was being squeezed.

The observations above not only reflect the thinking of Argyris & Schon (1974, 1978), Schon (1987), Boud et al. (1985) – but also the importance of the Revans (1982) and Sutton (1990) comments on balancing between programmed knowledge and questioning insight.

The reflective processes worked not just on an individual level, but also in terms of groups and meetings – project debriefs, meeting post-analysis and process reviews – undertaken in the one-to-one sessions and the Directorate away-days. Indeed, the very process of inclusion engendered by these group reflections provided a strong team building process, more openness and better working practices. These processes introduced provided a practical route into the sort of Participative Action Research proposed by Reason (1997), without necessarily entailing a familiarity with all the details and underpinnings of this approach – although the principles were, in fact, discussed later in the research when the other concepts had been understood. The inclusive processes adopted became a major catalyst for a more opportunistic approach (which I had already started to adopt personally) to development for the directorate as a group. We acted on the reflective findings rather than my imposing pre-planned courses of action and were prepared to do so on their initiative as well as through my direction or planning. The willingness to change and experiment as the opportunities and ideas arose developed as our confidence in the process increased: I considered this as a sort of group “learning in action”.

Staff were actively encouraged to take the initiative on an individual basis and, from their own feedback, the encouragement to do so provided them with greater motivation (cf. Amabile, 1998). The nature of the work and Civil Service responsibility did place some constraints on this, but emphasised the need for a supportive and enabling leadership approach linked to effective feedback from the staff as events and communication developed. Their level of satisfaction with this was clearly evidenced through the staff attitudinal questionnaire responses. The actual management process also became more enjoyable for myself and the second tier managers and this enjoyment improved motivation and morale evident for the Directorate team as a whole.

The one casualty in terms of process during the research was the personal journal, with increasing time pressures eventually resulting in the journal being discontinued. This discontinuation was unfortunate, as the formalised process of documenting my own experiments with management style and interactions with staff and colleagues – then trying to reflect on what happened or how things changed - benefited greatly from being made explicit. Linking the experimentation to a formalised reflective process helped to sharpen the reflection further, as anticipated by Anderson (1985). The time pressure aspect meant that few of the staff experimented and persevered with a journal, though some of the female staff saw this far more as a ‘diary’ and seemed more receptive to the concept than their male colleagues - perhaps an example of gender difference in personality, though by no means exclusive?

The connection between reflection and the development of ‘personal models’ was explored with staff in the one-to-ones by posing the questions: “how do you understand this working?” and “how would you compare the way this works to other models?”.

It was striking that almost all had developed their own analogies that helped them think through issues. These were rooted either in “day-to-day” situations or models developed from their previous academic experience (a prime source of formalised models?). For example mine was and is based on mathematical models (see later). This development of analogy was for me – and also it seems for the staff – a key element of “sense-making”. The process is, clearly, not a new concept and has always been a part of morality storytelling (e.g. the New Testament parables) but seems to me to be an important part of the personal exploration of new concepts through already established parallels and then grounding the model back into personal experience.

Interim Conclusion 2: Learning, Motivation and Involvement

The staff in my Directorate enjoy being challenged to learn. They also value and are motivated by participation in the way things work – not just in carrying out their own roles. In most cases, they can see through the same fudges I can - and compromises are seen clearly for what they are.

I found very early on that I would not be able to impose change on my staff – I could only make them want to change themselves if they were convinced it was a good idea. I found that doing this meant I had to build the learning in to the way they worked - but that changing an environment or the methods of working is very time consuming.

I found that I could provide the background for the changes through presentations or teaching – but they needed to take the last lap themselves in terms of “buying in” to the process. However, with the frequency of change and staff movement that transfer of ownership for personal development through involvement would appear to be the only workable and sustainable solution in terms of resource.

I explored the above conclusion specifically and explicitly through the staff one-to-ones. The feedback and interviews continued to confirm their positive views about the process and their motivation. However, a number of constraints became apparent through the same sets of feedback in terms of the enabling mechanisms set out below.

- The context within which learning opportunities are framed is important. There may be positive personal drivers but the personal developmental effort for the work context is almost always a means to an end and there is always an opportunity cost. Family or external interests always need to be considered as a balance and any development methodology that does not take this into consideration will run into difficulties with motivation.
- Recognition of personal development and initiative needs to be built into appraisal processes – and reward structures. In theory the alignment of rewards was already the case for the RO, but in practice the processes on reward did not support this in the DH (and more widely in the Civil Service?). The failure in practice to do so came in for very critical treatment in the SAQ numerical responses, individual detailed comments within the SAQ responses and even more so in subsequent discussions when staff were not constrained by writing their feelings down.

- There are significant short term / long term issues at play here in terms of work pressures, which mean that development opportunities (including formal booked training courses) are frequently sacrificed for short term agendas (see also above).
- The risk of experimentation was minimised within the Directorate through active supervisory support and reflection on the part of staff was encouraged on the results of their experimentation (extension of responsibilities, changed way of working, specific initiatives, etc.). However, within the wider RO, the wider context was one of restructuring and less positive management support so that the instability and personal uncertainty produced meant that, for many, the personal emphasis was focused on short term delivery and individual profile. This provided a boundary difficulty for Directorate staff where their colleagues, frequently working on a cross-functional basis, were working to a different agenda – both personally and organisationally.

Feedback from the staff across the RO suggested a huge reservoir of goodwill, motivation and desire to provide good quality work. The general level of commitment evident was quite remarkable, given the distances travelled on a regular basis as the geography between Cornwall, Cheltenham, Basingstoke and the Isle of Wight encompassing 60 ‘client’ organisations could be quite daunting. There would very regularly be 30 or 40 cars still in the RO car park at 7.30 in the evening as staff finished off work having been out at Health Authorities or Trusts all day. Given the nature and relatively senior nature of the staff, there was also a significant level of intellectual curiosity at work.

Discussions with critical friends at the RO during the final stages of the production of this thesis suggest that the extent of the commitment is now much reduced. They attribute this to the repeated internal restructuring sapping internal team working organisational morale, the continuing lack of perceived linkage between achievement and reward, together with the undefined contribution made by the RO as “middleman”. The combination of the factors make the staff unsure of their own contribution or their value as perceived by the organisation. This uncertainty of organisational expectation perhaps reflects the Flanagan and Spurgeon (1996) ideas in terms of organisation contextual views of managerial effectiveness. The natural “time in post” element has also now started to take effect and less than 50% of those originally in post through the SWRHA to SWRO change (dealt with in Chapter 4) are still within the organisation, leading to less team identification as this is not actively being promoted.

All the staff feedback indicated a real ‘initiative fatigue’. Whilst they identified in principle with most of the workplace initiatives instigated, such as “*The New Understanding*”, there was a huge cynicism in terms of the probable impact and the effort they were being asked to invest in the process. This cynicism was increased by initiating external (why external?) surveys of progress with initiatives such as “*The New Understanding*” that to the staff seemed to demonstrate the gap that seemed to exist between the senior management responsible for the initiative and those on the receiving end – “Wasn’t it obvious?”. Yet further negative feelings were evoked by the presented results of the surveys, which were considered by the staff to be more “spin” than understanding.

The differences between “the talk” and “the walk” (or Argyris’ espoused theory and theory in action) were quoted consistently. The introduction of new initiatives and the lack of demonstrable change became a vicious circle – with apparently the only way to break into the cycle being real management demonstration that the espoused and enacted values could be the same. The demonstration was never perceived to materialise. The worst factor in this respect seemed to be the open disdain shown by some of the RO Directors for the documents and initiatives themselves.

The real downside of the failure to change behaviour, again reflected in both workshops and appraisals, was the feeling that the organisation was not committed to the staff – whatever was said – in terms of actions during restructuring and general staff handling. The result seemed to be a gradual disassociation of staff from the organisation, even though they could still be extremely motivated in personal performance, an issue reflected by Cooper et al. (2000). Perhaps one of the most demotivating procedures for the staff became the business planning processes, which should have been empowering, positive and critical to making the RO effective. Instead, as clear from the feedback (see pages 209, 212 and 213 for example), this became seen as a “sham” consultation exercise where little real impact was seen in terms of change. Perhaps echoes of Campbell (1999) here, where he highlights the impact of not “listening” to feedback, where views are sought more because of a set down process rather than from conviction that the results will be valuable and should be acted upon.

Interim Conclusion 3: The Value of Leadership

I now believe there is no substitute for leadership, though individual understandings of what leadership entails can be varied and I find a difference of opinion between the Regional Director and myself. This difference of opinion surfaced in each of my annual appraisals in terms of Directorate structure and work allocation. Even though I have a personal preference in terms of definition and an opinion on style (Senge’s “New Leader” concepts appear appropriate to me), it seems to me that in practice this must be either dictatorial or consensual, but not a fudge between the two. Without clarity in this respect there can be inconsistent behaviour and the “rules of the game” become confusing for staff.

Agreement of objectives is an extremely elusive goal without a mutual understanding of values and reasoning assumptions. Without leadership within a management group that is capable of “reading” the cultural impacts of conflicting mental models, it is extremely difficult for individual members of the group to tackle organisational direction or culture as an issue without being seen as challenging the leadership or hierarchy. The secondary, but no less important overall, task is then to ensure “buy in” from the staff.

A clarification to the initial conclusion needs to be made. From observation of changes in management in several NHS Trusts that encountered difficulties during my time at the University Hospital or as RDF, it would appear to me that a dictatorial (command and control - or “extreme transactional”) approach *can* probably work for an organisation in the short term, especially if it is in crisis and the main priority is to deliver specific objectives in terms of output. However, it must be at least debatable if in the longer term levels of motivation can be maintained and a more developmental approach would appear to be essential if a longer term vision and alignment of culture is to be achieved.

There are frequent examples of this in the appointment of crisis leaders who then leave after the immediate “slash and burn” is completed – to be followed by a more constructive approach leader. In fact one can almost read “transactional and transformational” for “dictatorial and consensual” – although clearly the latter two are at the ends of a continuum. As an observation, again reflecting the Flannagan and Spurgeon (1996) views on organisational context, neither the NHS nor DH have a clearly expressed view of what leadership actually comprises. It is noticeable, for example, in the eight page booklet published in 2000 setting out the “*NHS Leadership – Programme for Chief Executives*” that nowhere does it articulate what “leadership” is thought to be.

One issue consistently raised in feedback from staff, colleagues and external interviewees was that consultation (especially when token – see above) could be no substitute for clarity of direction and leadership through express vision. The problems arising from the lack of clear communicated direction show strongly through the staff attitudinal questionnaires, the “SOLVED” learning organisation assessment work and the detailed feedback sessions arising from the formal exercises.

Addressing the problems became a real personal conundrum. What could / should a management team do collectively to improve the leadership issue – and what should an individual’s role be within this when one’s own influence was limited in this respect? What steps could / can one take in an integral sub-division of an organisation (particularly a small one) to establish a distinct culture? These two practical questions were never taken to closure – although the subject of lengthy discussion with fellow RO directors and staff. When it was evident (the staff view was very clearly that this was noticeable by its absence), the nature of leadership at the SWRO was clearly transactional.

The civil service model with its competency structures and in-built culture of hierarchy and vision of “two way moderation of policy and operations” would not appear to encourage more. The emphasis on transformational leadership as exemplified by Bass (1985), Bass & Alvolio (1994), Campbell-Evans (1993), Boyett & Boyett (1998), in addition to the not dissimilar emphases of Senge (1990), Schein (1992), Drucker (1993) and Argyris (1998) from a number of different perspectives, was not at all in evidence. This became linked through my own reflections and staff feedback quite firmly with Conclusion 2.

There appears to be a clear link between the two types of leadership categorised in the above and the value that can be achieved through reflection and adaptation of behaviour resulting. Individual reflection can probably work within both models of leadership, although the freedom to change and adapt is clearly more constrained at the transactional end of the scale. The motivation for engaging in reflective processes to start with is also likely to be severely reduced at the transactional extreme where purely defensive routines are likely to predominate. Organisational reflection, however, in terms of flexibility and learning input is likely to be more radically reduced than the individual reflection, since it not only builds upon individual reflection but also relies on organisational openness and cross-functional communication. The importance of leadership within the development of culture and its critical impact on the development of learning organisation principles is dealt with also in the section dealing with LO principles in the public sector.

Interim Conclusion 4: Individualised Not Just General Communication is Important

Communication with staff on an individual basis during change seems to be extremely important to avoid unnecessary stress, conflict and defensive obstruction - especially if one normally has contact with staff on this basis.

All the group work, e-mails, update letters, formal consultation etc does help – but when it comes to the basics individuals think, act and worry as individuals often with very different concerns which are best dealt with individually. It is not always obvious which staff are most vulnerable in this way, but openness and communication can turn staff into positive change agents rather than blockages to change.

The redefinition of the Regional boundaries prompted by the establishment of the London Region meant that the next SWRO internal restructuring after my Transfer Paper was not long in arriving, so this conclusion was tested again practically and in the most personal of change settings. This restructuring exercise was more far reaching than the previous two for my staff because I had agreed a month or two previously with the National Director of Finance and Performance that my role should become more of a national one. As a result and through subsequent internal discussions with the RD, the Directorate would be split in either two or three directions (it turned out to be two).

During the process of the previous restructuring I had been heavily involved in the White Paper development, spending much time in Leeds and London. During this restructuring process, I made a far greater effort to discuss on an individual and personal basis with staff what was going on and to work through the issues with them. The feedback provided through the one-to-ones, the SAQ, my profile responses and the discussions arising from these during this period indicate that this input was indeed positively received. The direct and positive feedback reinforced my own behaviour and I put more conscious effort to work at the individual aspects of communication with staff and to relate / interpret the impacts to their personal circumstances.

The main concerns of the staff were particularly interesting. I had introduced a very flat hierarchy with, effectively, just two layers plus the administrative support and with a great deal of cross-working to support each other. The proposed structure of the new main Performance Management Directorate (comprising nearly a half of the RO in terms of staff numbers, though there remained six other Directorates) had five layers of hierarchy plus administrative support. Given the professional and relatively senior and experienced nature of the members of staff, their main concerns were focused on professional autonomy (as outlined by Raelin, 1991), quality of work (including flexibility / variety) and the opportunity to maintain their existing external contacts and responsibilities. Their concerns about external links, in particular, focused on externally perceived status in an environment that they believed was becoming more bureaucratic and hierarchical. The priority of staff concerns was, of course, framed in an environment in which redundancy and loss of salary were not particularly a threat for Departmental policy reasons - at least in the short or medium term.

Tackling the structure from the point of view of individual contribution rather than hierarchical structure seems to be proposed by Harvey-Jones (1994) and, indeed, in practice this is very clearly the approach determined by the other ROs. However, within the SWRO, an ostensibly impersonal “structure follows form” approach was taken in which revisions to titles and status were undertaken in a context that purported to follow an objective definition of job description and transaction support – quite unlike the approach proposed in Dawson (1994). In practice, according to the one-to-one and away-day feedback, the staff believed that the job descriptions were framed to deliver the personal results desired and confirmed their views of “gap” between enactment and espoused behaviour declared.

The restructuring approaches advocated by Holbeche and Hirsch (1999) and Hare (1999) as examples of change management, although generated within an organisational merger environment, were both ostensibly very relevant. However, the approach adopted was very different and – as staff saw clearly and commented adversely upon – proved both unsettling and demotivating for staff. The observations of Schofield (2000) seem very relevant in terms of Board detachment from the organisation and the way in which difference in impact and extent of control over events can provide a very different perspective and understanding of the organisation.

Interim Conclusion 5: Tackle Fears as Well as Facts

Letting people know how you feel about an issue and finding out how they feel about it on a personal basis seems to be as important to establishing agreement as communicating what you know about it in factual terms. The communication and emotional engagement potentially involved is a personal style issue which I haven't been comfortable with in the past but have made efforts with – reflected on and talked to staff about this as an issue. A gradual change is showing up in my personal profiling within the communication rating and confirmed through some of the discussion feedback. Personal openness, as a general issue, is also a theme consistently emerging in the discussions sparked by the profiles intended to explore the differences in profile scores.

Communication and engagement has been a major area of personal experimentation for me and one that is continuing to develop – going round the cycle of seeing what works and what does not. Whilst I think I have always been a keen observer of behaviour and individuals, I have not always been terribly keen to interact – and certainly not to share my own feelings. Staff feedback and psychological profiling results suggest that there is a perceptible change in this area of my practice, dealt with in Chapter 5.

For example, drawing on the Myers Briggs profiles, there has been a change apparent from INTJ to ENTJ although both results were fairly close to the boundary. I believe that this represents not a basic change of preferences (though it does seem to be getting easier and not nearly so personally threatening) but a recognition of the benefits and needs of others. There does, though, appear to be a genuine change in behaviour but this is consistent with my own values so I remain quite happy about it.

One specific practical set of actions I have consciously instituted to reinforce this behaviour has been to hold a process debrief at the end of all meetings I chair, together with a far more inclusive approach during meetings for critical items and an emphasis on the feelings of participants. I have also done this in staff one-to-ones and appraisal meetings.

Feedback from the participants suggests that a number of advantages accrue from this one simple process, including:

- The team building impact becomes more positive because of greater emotional engagement at an earlier stage.
- The exploration of personal “worries” or “concerns” can be used to avoid the awkwardness of direct challenge in large meetings – those on my part or that of others.
- The approach encourages a more open process and the introduction of a much wider set of considerations – especially in terms of people factors and external considerations.
- The approach more often gets at the real reasons for opposition or lack of commitment to issues – particularly important in the national projects where there are a large number of stakeholders, many of whom one does not know well but can provide all sorts of delays and difficulties unless “on-side”.
- It provides a less threatening, more engaging approach and allows for more humour to diffuse difficulties (if used carefully).

Interim Conclusion 6: Concentrate on the Important Issues and People Impact

It is the important things that matter and not the details in terms of engagement. Management is not only (perhaps even not so much) about the rational and logical as about the emotional and personal – including consideration of people's home circumstances and the way that interfaces into the work scenario. This emphasis represents quite a different approach to that often found in Finance and IT environments: in both of these unless you get the detail right it probably won't work and the concentration is often on the detail and an attempt to exclude the “soft influences”.

The most useful piece of advice I received from my previous Chairman was after I had provided a long and technically complete response to a query: his response was – “*If someone asks you the time, tell them the time and not how the bloody watch works!*”. Most people can retain and work with six or seven pieces of information at one time, but most decisions seem to be made with fewer. Most indeed, in my experience, revolve around risk, bottom line cost, people issues and fit with some overall direction, although the final decision often has to be rationalised in this environment (see Carter 1998). What I now try to do is to be more concise in involving people and to:

- separate the principles, which usually support the objectives, from the delivery mechanisms;
- try to highlight the fit with other key agendas;
- separate but highlight personal risk and organisational risk – they are often different.

The real organisational impacts of concentration on important issues arise through an explicit recognition of why things are important and how decisions are made. The NHS / Public sector aspects discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review highlight some specific issues which are readily observable within the NHS Executive and DH and include:

- the emphasis on the development of policy, but halting progress towards turning developing high level policies into coherent and implementable strategy;

- the lack of a strategy framework impacts on practical planning and decision making through a lack of prioritisation and decision criteria;
- the lack of practical experience in the field in which the decisions are being made that turns them into a purely analytical exercise lacking in “gut feel” or real contextual grounding;
- the lack of incentives to be creative or to take risks, which leads to self- protection and defensive mechanisms;
- the lack of performance indicators that enforce decision taking and alignment of personal and organisation objectives or real linkages to that effect in personal appraisals.

However, there is a more fundamental impact evident from concentrating on the important issues, since this starts to involve the sense making aspect of leadership – simplification and grounding along the lines advocated by Kotter (1990), Senge (1990) and Smircich and Morgan (1982) to bring out and emphasise the main features. The real progress would perhaps be an ability to provide simplification (rather than simplicity) of complex at a strategic level, whilst retaining the inherent links to the detailed level that makes the strategic level achievable.

Clearly, interim conclusions 5, and 6 have more to do with my own personal development than organisational change and in the fact that feedback on my change in emphasis is positive, is encouraging. It is not as though the theory was not already there and the courses on communication I attended whilst at the Consultancy firms certainly dealt with the principles. The theory also seemed reasonable and sensible. What was missing was the emotional engagement to exactly how important these aspects are – the “important and people” part of this interim conclusion should almost become “important which are people”. One of the things the PAR processes enforced on my practice was to take the issues seriously as part of my approach – and they have become a part of working with a far more relaxed and open style as a result.

Interim Conclusion 7: This Research Should be an Integral Part of management

Doing what's included in the research should be a part of my work anyway. The time is a problem but it essentially means understanding better the environment in which I work and how it ticks. If that means I can handle it better and reach both my personal and organisational objectives then that is what management should be about.

Those parts of the research work that involved gaining feedback on myself to improve my self-awareness and on the external perceptions of the organisation were both directly translatable into improvements in the quality of work and outputs delivered. By understanding the environment better and by listening to external stakeholder views and needs (Whipp, 1991), the support provided in terms of enabling staff and sense-making can be improved significantly. This seems so obvious that it barely needs stating (apologies to Whipp – he says a lot more than that). However, when one examines the practice, it is precisely one aspect of the “environmental scanning” or “boundary monitoring” that Whipp advocates that is involved when organisations mount initiatives into “customer focus” or “customer relationship management - CRM”: It comes down to listening and receptivity, with as little distortion of messages as possible, and then communicating the results internally.

It also comes down to ensuring the right culture and processes are in place to ensure that both external and internal work efficiently and accurately. Finally, for the whole process to be fully effective, there needs to be a mechanism for meshing these two aspects into the “organisational memory” – spreading the information, making sense of and interpreting it, and ensuring it is acted upon effectively. The mechanisms required for effectiveness in a “knowing organisation” are explored by Choo (1998), although largely from an information perspective. The engagement into active participation applies to both staff and external stakeholders – not only does it provide the information but it also changes the relationships, in turn providing more open feedback.

When organisational learning is viewed in the way set out above, it seems that what is needed is an integration of the sort of activities involved in this research methodology with the general run of management activities. What the more formal research bases or techniques provide are a more structured and methodical approaches to this “listening”. Some of the processes and outputs do not have to be replicated from academic practice to achieve practical working benefits, but the benefits are there and these outweigh the opportunity costs. Indeed, the opportunity costs can be low if integrated into work practices rather than added on as a separate or marginal activity.

Indeed, if the Mintzberg (1994) model of planning and decision making is correct in terms of the roles of analysis and intuition, then the better the contextual understanding and any planning or strategic decisions are likely to be. The embedding of research techniques into general activities to support organisational knowledge acquisition and to improve the quality of what are frequently intuitive processes surely must be beneficial. In some ways, at a personal rather than organisational level, it is the assumption of research into working practices and the incorporation of the resulting learning into changed behaviour and personal values seems to be largely what Whitehead (1989) and Reason (1999) are addressing when they discuss a “living theory”. The other lesson emerging from this is the importance of being alive to chance opportunities in learning in both a personal and research context. So many of the opportunities for myself and my staff were unplanned and came from matching a need to a supportable effort – as observed by Pascale (1990), Hout (1999) and Kotter (1999).

Interim Conclusion 8: It is More Difficult to Engage Senior Management Than Staff in Development

It seems far more difficult to engage Senior Management in the development of an opening and challenging environment than it is to do the same with staff. If this observation is true then it has significant implications for establishing a whole learning organisation and could restrict this development to the lower reaches of the organisation unless overcome.

The impact of seniority on receptivity to change and learning is an area ripe for speculation and may be attributable to a number of factors such as:

- comfort with existing personal style and circumstances – often built up over a longer period for senior staff than junior staff, especially in organisations where experience and seniority are closely correlated;
- personal risk and insecurity (Argyris (1985, 1991) comments on defensive behavioural routines and the potential to “decrease collective IQ” by putting intelligent people together)

- accepted (cultural) models of leadership, the need for control and the potential of recasting the rules for progression, by which senior staff have been successful by definition (except those who have entered from outside, which was more true of the junior staff)
- individual personalities: bias, comfort zones and personal security
- real engagement with the need for development and the awareness of alternative models or organisation or behaviour
- presence of appropriate skills to do so effectively – these may not have been needed during the progression process, especially if through a specific functional or professional group
- cynicism built up from other initiatives which were never seen through or adequately supported at the most senior level – and hence foundered.

Within the Directorate, those more senior were noticeably more lukewarm initially and needed more persuasion to be active. However, once engaged, their experience made them more effective through applying past experience to new concepts. With these staff the greatest issue seemed to be initial credibility of the process and their perception of my commitment to see it through. All the staff feedback – from staff attitudinal questionnaires, the ‘SOLVED’ workshops and individual appraisals – was that they thought much of the lack of development lay at the door of the RET, which was seen as playing games, rudderless and with individual members playing the system to retain influence. Developing a more open environment was seen by the staff as inconvenient for the players in this game. They also viewed the lack of leadership direction as contributing to a culture in which multiple agendas were tolerated and no consensus or shared vision generated. It is a disappointing observation that those who could contribute most to change – both from position and experience – often have the least inclination to pursue the changes for personal reasons.

Interim Conclusion 9: The Public and Private Sectors are Very Different Culturally

There appear to be some fundamental differences in the drivers in Public Sector organisations (especially those close to government) when compared with the Private Sector companies who form the vast majority of those examined and researched to date in terms of developing a learning organisation culture. It may be necessary to recast some of the thinking in porting this across into the public sector.

Interim Conclusion 10 : Developing a Personal Management Model Based on Firm Foundations is Key

What seems to be needed is an approach to management that allows for dynamic change in style rather than a rule book – certainly not a magic solution. Even the overall approach will probably be personally variable, depending on each individual’s capacity for taking forward various styles. The absence of “fixed points” also supports the conjecture that a purely quantitative approach is unlikely to provide much insight, except in broad areas or to identify changes in attitudes arising from events. Even approaches generally agreed to be “bad” may form a part of an overall solution in specific circumstances. However, although it may be in an individual’s self-interest to pursue such a course of action and may bring short-term benefits to the organisation, in the longer term “bad” probably means exactly that!

The two interim conclusions are dealt with as follows: Conclusion 9 in **The Public Sector and Learning Organisation Principles** (p 248) and Conclusion 10 in **Methodology for Management Learning** (p271).

The Public Sector and Learning Organisation Principles

Overall difficulties

Research into the development of Learning Organisation (LO) principles has been very firmly rooted in the private sector, much of it in the US (see Chapter 2). There has been some application and writing in respect of the public sector but the majority appears to me to lack conviction and persuasiveness – except for smaller organisations operating at the boundary of public / private sector, where differences in culture become blurred. Research on differences in interpretation between UK and US cultures (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998) is in progress and it seems to me public and private sectors differences also need to be explored.

Introduction of such LO principles into the Finance Directorate at the SWRO was only partially successful, even though significant effort was made and this ran alongside some apparently complementary OD efforts such as IIP accreditation that should have helped create a supportive environment. The question emerging at the interim stage, therefore, was whether this was a specific individual or organisational shortfall or whether there were wider conceptual issues involved for the public sector, with the SWRO exhibiting many common features with other public sector organisations. Are there general features of the public sector that provide particular or additional problems in establishing a learning organisation culture or concepts when compared with the private sector?

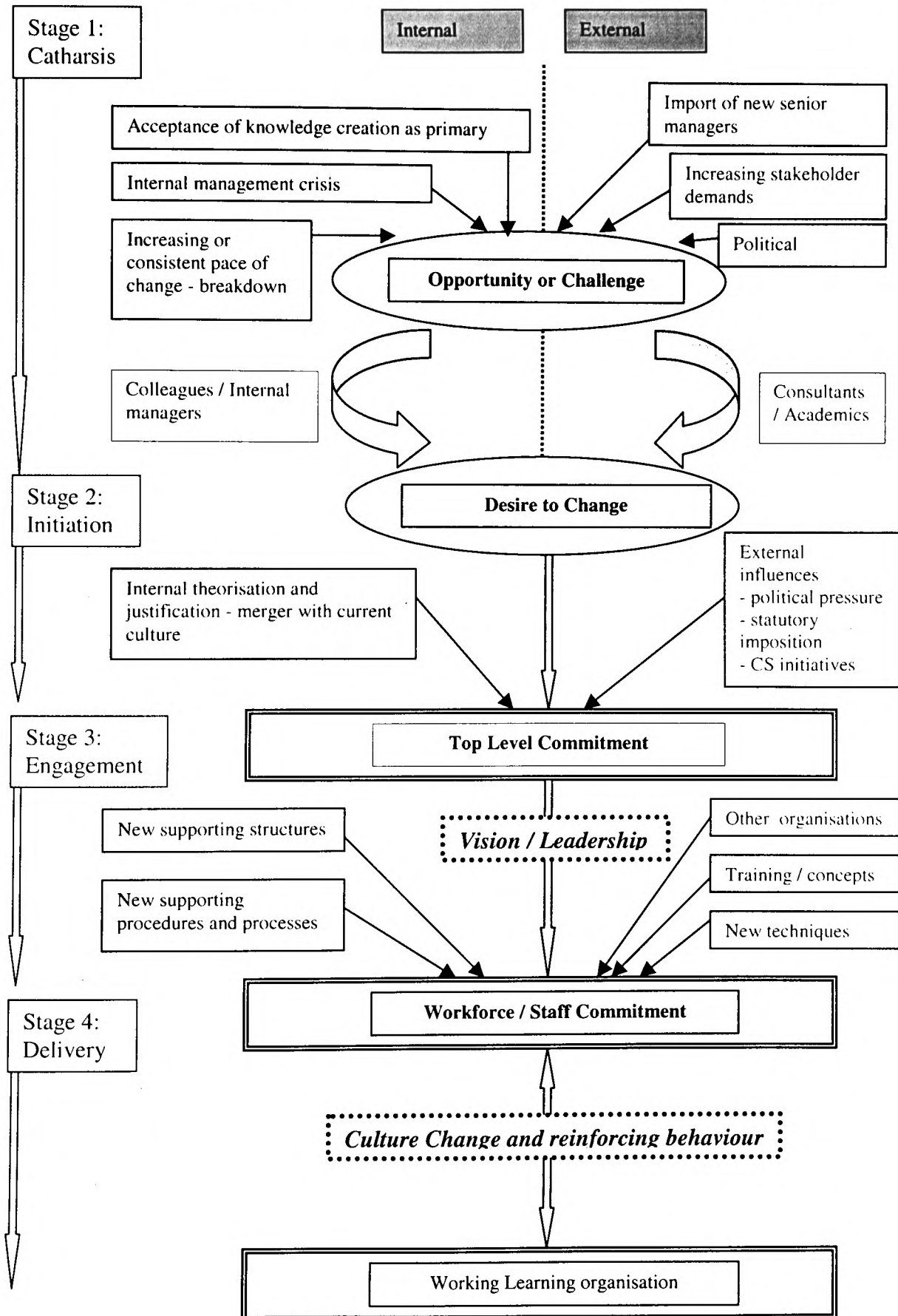
The scope of “the public sector” and lack of agreed definition of “learning organisation” makes this question imprecise and difficult to address. With the current growth in interest and awareness of LO ideas it is, however, an important question to try to resolve. The Chapter 2 analysis of the differentiating features of the public sector suggests that there may be particular issues to be considered in adopting principles of:

- internal generation of continual renewal, transformation or adaptation;
- reflection of individual values which are a key determinant of the culture;
- supportive leadership, both receptive and visionary in the generation of organisational objectives.

The key public sector characteristics that appear to introduce difficulties in these respects are the following:

- Political interface and policy direction from outside the organisation, which has most effect or influence on the civil service as an example of the public sector, although local authorities are also subject to these pressures.
- Potential value disparity inherent in the external objectives set, certainly in the organisational objectives. In the central civil service periodic changes in the values represented are often imposed through the political process.
- Staff structures and prevailing culture which are often monolithic and politically expedient. This appears at its extreme in the civil service, not only within Departments but with the concept of the CS/SCS as a “Whitehall-wide” cultural entity rather than with staff purely members of individual organisations. Common administrative elements such as the job evaluation for specific posts (JESP) criteria do not encourage organisational flexibility, adaptability or individual cultures.

Figure 25 - Development of Learning Organisation in the Public Sector



Denton (1998) proposed a four stage schema for developing a LO in the private sector. Adapting the basic structure, which appears sound, to make it applicable to the public sector and its specific context delivers a model as set out in Figure 25 on the previous page. The public sector characteristics highlighted in Chapters 2 and 4, with key elements extracted above, provide a specific context and the research work undertaken in the SWRO suggests and supports the detailed factors and actions included in the model.

Stage 1: *Catharsis - Emotional engagement.*

The acceptance that “something needs to change” for the organisation to deliver its agenda – or even survive. Within the public sector, acceptance may be focused around delivery of the political agenda and the need to change practices to achieve this. The catalyst may be potential loss of influence or enforced change in the shape of Agency creation, further introduction of special advisors or changed policy development mechanisms for central government departments. These are clearly external triggers. Otherwise, given the established cultures that have remained relatively stable over a long period and relative insularity of the sector, the internal triggers for this emotional acceptance would seem to be weak. Stage 1 is probably the single most critical stage in the introduction of the ideas inherent in the LO concepts and acceptance that these represent a potential route to addressing the challenges. In developing the model to better represent the public sector environment, three private sector stimuli are excluded:

- the increasing globalisation and internationalisation of the private sector marketplace with significant variations in cost structures – a huge increase in competition;
- the increasing importance of labour relative to capital in terms of value added;
- appreciation of the organisational knowledge base as a real commercial competitive advantage.

The significance of these three elements is difficult to overestimate in terms of private sector motivation. Much of the literature, directed towards the private sector, uses these three to underpin the core objectives for organisations embracing the LO concepts. The issues raised are around survival of organisations and - by implication on a personal level - their management. The risks of not changing are, therefore, extreme and this is clearly reflected in the rationalisation process in which the emotional “buy-in” is translated into real top level commitment.

There is a real risk in using the standard presentation of the LO to the public sector and then discounting these factors – the impact of taking out the most cogent arguments is doubly damaging, whereas in practice there are still significant reasons to pursue the concepts. In various parts of the public sector the impacts of the remaining (adapted) initial stimuli vary and are certainly not uniform. At the boundaries of the public sector, such as Trading Funds and Agencies of smaller size, the impacts will be different - as, too, will the motivations for individual schools, NHS Trusts, Universities and other smaller units that are more accountable for measurable results.

Emotional engagement in this respect is similar to the response to the question “Why” that acts as the motivation in the individual learning case (see later). It is just as key: there are some preconditions – awareness of the possibilities, some existing pain, a balance of internal and external impacts - that provide an emotional engagement to try to move to “something better”. It is clearly so much easier if this emanates from the very top of an organisation, but initially may be more often found lower in the organisation where the “pain” is more apparent – however, then there will be a need to “upwards” influence and greater difficulty in achieving a group mind model.

Some of the unfortunate aspects in this analysis, in which top level support is so critical, are the previous observations that leadership is so critical and that senior staff are often more resistant to change. The cultural context for the public sector seems to reinforce the difficulties that these two observations present. The external influences, then, are potentially that much more important – perhaps the influx of senior managers from outside (from the private sector) and direct political pressure for change (such as the Cabinet Office driven CS Reforms).

Stage 2: Initiation - Rationalisation of change.

The apparently logical justification of the change solution – the estimation of benefits and risks of both changing and not changing. The word “apparent” is used in this context as the logical nature of the conclusions is often intrinsically dependent on the value base applied to the initial assumptions and extent of the emotional engagement. For the public sector, the development and adoption of LO concepts represent a major shift in terms of flexibility and culture so that merger with current culture and expectations may represent a significant leap. Hence, the justification may be difficult in the absence of some of the more cogent catalysts present for the private sector that deliver the emotional engagement. As opposed to wholly independent organisations, however, the likelihood of externally imposed “justifications” is probably higher – cross Governmental initiatives or ministerial direction for example.

Shorter (1997) covers within his book a series of experiments which showed that people hardly ever admit to making arbitrary decisions. In one set of experiments a selection of stockings were laid out and a group of women asked to choose a particular pair – and explain why. All were able to provide sensible and reasonable explanations for their preference citing slight differences in texture, quality or colour. In fact all were identical. If one rationalises such decisions, how much more important is it to rationalise decisions that will be subjected to the scrutiny of others, sometimes working to a different agenda, and potentially negative to ones career prospects. Addressing this urge to rationalise decisions through analysis without resorting to individual expertise in her book “Mapping the Mind”, Carter (1998, 42) observes that:

“ The human species got where it is largely by forming complex social constructs – from the hunting party to the political party – and making them work. To work they require that we have confidence in them and to have confidence we need to believe that the actions of these organisations are based on sound rational judgements. At one level, of course, we know we are kidding ourselves we may see through it, but basically we like things this way – it makes us feel safe ”.

Thus, whilst this is regarded as a separate phase, it does really follow very closely on from the emotional engagement and there may well be an interaction between the two phases. There is, after all, quite some emotional engagement likely in being told that one has to do something or suffer the consequences – especially if the accountability is clear. There are very close parallels here with the “*Management Learning Methodology*” developed in the next section, where the grounding of learning back into personal experience is seen to be a critical part of changing practice. Not that organisational learning / emotional engagement is merely the sum of individual parts – but there is an issue of shared engagement and development of a shared view which can drive the change (cf. Stata, 1989).

Stage 3: *Engagement* - *Culture priming and awareness building.*

The development and communication of a new organisational vision – in terms of goals and different ways of working to achieve them. The engagement process necessarily includes a great deal of education and training of management and staff, together with the development of new ways of working. Again, there is a parallel with individual learning, where the balance of programmed knowledge and questioning insight is important. The questioning insight in this case relies on the start of development of a culture that encourages challenging existing ways of working and processes – opening up the defensive culture where personal influence and positional power are tightly linked.

In practical terms, there is likely to be a need for the introduction of both concepts and tools to turn them into reality. The use of other organisations, especially if there are examples of a similar type or who have already been through the process (preferably both) to provide examples or benchmarks can be extremely helpful. On the internal side, it is likely that flexibility in establishing new structures to support new and flexible processes are likely – also the establishment and embedding of new processes and procedures to ensure that the principles and activities needed are built into working practices as an intrinsic element.

Stage 4: *Delivery* - *Culture evolution and change reinforcement.*

The delivery stage is that at which the organisation begins to learn and steps need to be taken to reinforce the processes and ensure that the changes can be sustained. Management control in terms of organisational direction (not necessarily transactional control) is weakened at this stage as staff become empowered and the process becomes more unpredictable – potentially testing the management commitment. This is the point at which the cultural change can really change the power relationships within organisations, creating potential blockages and resistance to change and “guerrilla tactics” to retain individual positional and procedural influence (see Figure 26).

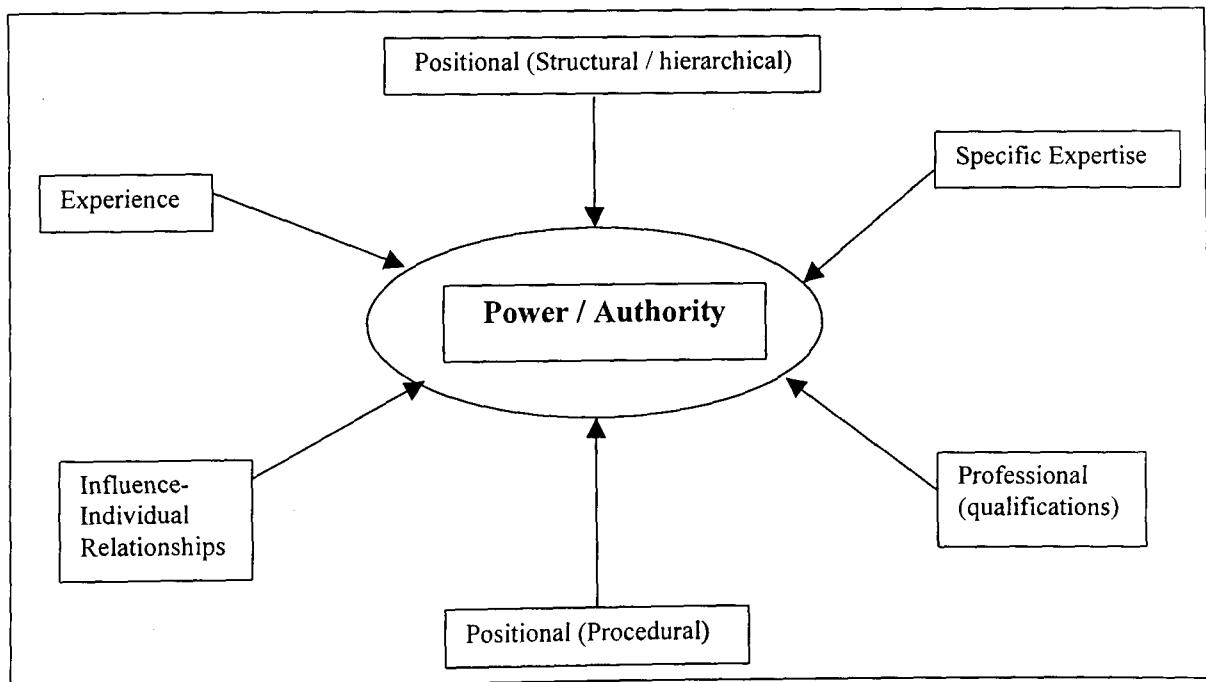
As noted in Chapter 2, one of the Public Sector differentiators tends to be that of hierarchy, structure and status. Changes in culture will impact on the relationships between organisational levels and this reflects through all four stages of engagement and commitment. In a thoroughly hierarchical organisation one becomes one’s status or position and changes to structures will usually be resisted as threatening.

The Central Government Departments, in particular, comprise a staffing of generalists where advancement depends upon influence and information and access to influence (including Ministers) represents power. Changing the rules, especially with regard to information and changing the power though procedures can be risky, especially where performance indicators to measure success are often lacking.

Culture, organisational politics and power

The distribution of management control and personal power or influence is clearly a critical factor in change for any organisation. The way in which such power is exercised is intrinsically a part of the organisational culture and can impact significantly on the likely success of any changes, depending on the commitment of senior management to the changes proposed. In positive terms, commitment at the top can use such power to take away hurdles and obstacles, but the converse can happen in which barriers or obstructive behaviour can dominate. During one of the Finance Directorate away days, in which authority structures and impact on learning and support were discussed, the staff developed the model below to explain the factors that determined the sources of power and authority within the SWRO and DH.

Figure 26 - Sources of Organisational Power Diagram



The context within which the model was developed was the imminent second restructuring of the SWRO and the way in which the changes in structures would mean changed procedures and decision making processes (see above). The discussions went on to try to work through to what the changes meant for the staff individually, why the difference in individual impacts was important and how they could influence the way they worked and the decisions taken. The impact of different structures and the way that these related to them were discussed, also their relationship with other parts of the NHS Executive and DH. The Single Centre initiatives and staff attitudinal questionnaires dealt with these issues at some length.

The CS has a generalist culture with an emphasis on policy development for progression and belief in the interchangeable staff in functional areas within a hierarchical bureaucracy structure. Although acknowledging the flexibility demonstrated within individual projects in terms of working, the SWRO staff believed that key levers in the model above were either positional, i.e. structural/hierarchical or due to specific procedural role, or related to influence within individual relationships that cut across hierarchy. Each of these sources of power has access to different types of information / knowledge, which is used as leverage and potentially a restriction of influence or initiative of others. The introduction of LO concepts in any self-sustaining way would appear to involve a change in the manner of leadership – also in the structure of power and the way in which the internal politics works. A number of the key academic exponents of the LO concepts acknowledge this. For example, Aryris & Schon (1983, p3) argue that:

“To focus on learning without taking into account the legitimate need for control is to embark on a romantic and usually fruitless exercise.”

Denton (1998, p172) draws on the work of Coopey (1996) to observe that:

“ Not only can the exercise of power and politics in an organisation limit organisational learning, but organisational learning itself can increase the importance of power and politics.....Clearly, there will be an inevitable tension between learning, involving as it does the relinquishing of power, and control, which involves the exercise of power.”

Denton’s observation is expanded by the Jones & Hendry (1994, p158) statement that organisations:

“...tend to engage only in acceptable learning which supports the organisations structure and how people should act within it.”

Lawton & Rose (1994) make the comment specifically in relation to the Civil Service (with reference also to the work of Livingstone & Wilkie, 1981), that:

“...the most effective barriers to change in the Civil Service were the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of senior management itself. The prevailing ethos is one of control of subordinates rather than allowing discretion. Paradoxically, attending courses at the Civil service College often led to more dissatisfaction when contrasted with the reality of civil service life.”

There were a number of “Organisation Development” projects currently underway in the DH during the period of the research but all are incremental and fully reflect the Jones & Hendry (1994) and Lawton & Rose (1994) discussions. For example, the intent and the words used are all completely politically correct – *Valuing Diversity* and *The New Understanding* – but the staff reactions as indicated through the staff attitudinal questionnaires and National DH surveys, do not see the words mirrored by practical shifts in behaviour. Similar responses were received during the Quinquennial reviews of the two DH Agencies in which the relationships with DH were explored, together with their own initiatives. Hence, staff appear to regard the DH as going through the motions – just the latest in a series of documents. The staff perception may be right or wrong – from the central communications there does seem to be some intention to change the behaviour, but either little idea of how to progress or little depth of commitment. From a personal perspective, it would appear to be both. There have been so many false starts with no overall co-ordinated direction that it will be very difficult now to initiate a *real* change.

There is a particular irony here, given the out-looking context and the increasing cynicism poses a practical problem in terms of gaining credibility. For example, the DVLA Board took a conscious decision to change its planning procedures and provide some real demonstration of staff consultation *before* releasing any statements outside the Board member circle – to both gain real input and demonstrate by action that it is serious about changing culture.

A parallel here could be the major thrust of policy for the clinical community in introducing “Evidence Based Medicine” – supported through a number of new agencies such as NICE, CHI and the significant R&D budgets in place. Clinical practice is to become more evidence based – implementation of evidential research and R&D findings rather than custom and practice or individual empirical experience (or “seat of the pants”, depending on personal perceptions of success rates). There is an echo of this sentiment in Pattison (1996, p253) in which he observes:

“If change management were a medical technique many questions might be asked of its known and proven efficacy and moral worth before it was implemented. Such moral doubts do not often seem to cause the steps of the managerial change masters to falter.”

However, the internal OD work undertaken by the DH allows barely a passing reference to academic or consultancy findings in the sphere of management. The comments of Perry and Zuber-Skerrett (1992, 1994) and Behrman and Levin (1984) still seem relevant in this context in terms of the lack of penetration to any degree of management research findings into managerial practice. It is not clear whether this lack of penetration is because of the generalist nature of the staff involved with the details, the fact that they do not have the background of experience or because of a resistance within senior levels to the changes needed. It is probably partly due to all three factors. The internal management initiatives rely on focus groups, facilitated a-theoretical workshops and consultative exercises but without the staff responsible being empowered to initiate any directly resulting actions indicated. The emphasis is on producing findings papers to be referred “upwards” for consideration, not on behavioural changes or cultural / procedural adaptation. However, Kanter (1989) observes in *“When Giants Learn to Dance”* that corporate survival depends on very different behaviour in future and that ‘winning’ will require:

“... faster action, more creative manoeuvring, more flexibility and closer partnerships with employees and customers than was typical in the traditional corporate bureaucracy. It requires more agile, limber management that pursues opportunity without being bogged down by cumbersome structures or weighty procedures that impede action.”

When organisation power and authority is largely rooted in structure or procedures (as observed above), then for management to change without some overwhelming potential risks perceived in the status quo would be unexpected. In many ways, these are precisely the strengths observed by the Civil Service on its own behalf – it protects ministers by working through slow processes, working on stakeholder consensus which result in compromise solutions trading off change and benefits for risk. From personal observation (and indeed the internal documentary evidence reviewed within the research work and listed in Chapter 4), it would appear that exactly the same mechanisms are used to reduce risks for individuals as defensive routines:

-
- the use of long circulation lists within documents to spread risk and ownership through involvement (in defence of this practice *if used positively*, it can also provide genuine consultation in cross-functional circumstances);
 - widening the issues and implications to involve as wide a consensus as possible and extend the consultation required;
 - raise risks to policy status (rather than interpret policy and take operational decisions) to involve the political process – hence shift the actual decision upwards;
 - introduce specific implementation difficulties at an early strategic stage to enable qualified support and minimise personal risk;
 - delegation of issues to junior levels and non-engagement at more senior levels. This approach represents an interesting defensive strategy, probably only workable where the lines of accountability are either not clear or where the implicit delegation works all the way to the top - so that the accountability is not enforced.

In this sort of environment, cross-cutting project management of change initiatives becomes a series of obstacle dismantling exercises. At each stage the obstacle provider reduces his own responsibility and minimises personal risk: there is every motivation to do so – not least that of avoiding retrospective review and censure. To an extent, the obstacle dismantler takes on some of the responsibility at each step and the larger and more significant the change, the greater the accumulated risk becomes. The acceptance of risk involved is not culturally that attractive.

These are exactly the sort of defensive routines observed by Argyris (1990), but often within the public sector the organisational need to conclude the process to gain a positive outcome is either diffuse or not time critical and hence there is little incentive to change. In many cases there is no measurement of outcome in place that will actually provide an indication of success and which can be enforced through a line of accountability. The introspection of the central Departments has the unfortunate by-product of providing successful role models of those who excel at many of the behaviours listed above, although many are exceptionally intellectually able.

In some ways this just makes their behavioural performance that much more effective and has a resonance with Argyris' argument of increasing individual IQ resulting in decreasing organisational performance! There are, indeed, some of the above behaviours and attributes that are actually extremely positive in a policy development role in support of politically astute ministers – and this has been the historical measure rather than in terms of management implementation objectives.

The culture generated by this modus operandi is both closed and reinforcing. The change issue becomes how to break into the cycle, introduce new ideas and gain commitment from those in positions to be able to influence others, but at the same time with little personal incentive to do so. In Denton (1998, p44), the statistics returned from his questionnaires reveal that of the 66 (UK private sector) senior executives responding, the way in which they gained knowledge of LO concepts could be analysed as below.

Private sector sources of LO ideas:

Colleagues (other senior managers)		19
Publications:	Harvard Business Review	8
	Senge's 5 th Discipline	7
	Other management journals	12
Consultants		5
Academics		<u>0</u>
		51
Not encountered the concepts		<u>15</u>
		<u>66</u>

Given:

- the relative insularity of the Civil Service (bearing in mind the extremely low numbers entering the civil service from outside at a senior level – virtually none in the DH other than doctors or academics into ROs into Public Health, R&D or Education & Training functions);
- the reluctance of the Civil Service to engage consultants except for major risk sharing projects (now reinforced practically and attitudinally by the need for ministerial approval for all consultancy contracts exceeding £20,000 and Secretary of State approval for projects in excess of £50,000);
- the lack of “competitive advantage” stimulus to threaten organisational survival (except possibly for Agencies through application of the quinquennial review mechanisms);
- the positional criticality of current power structures as perceived by the staff; and
- the analysis of the “normal” route in the private sector towards LO concepts;

then the first steps towards emotional engagement of top management are likely to prove very difficult.

It is, perhaps, this very reluctance to engage with new concepts that has led the Blair Government recently to move towards an initiative to encourage an increasing level of ‘imports’ at senior level into the Civil Service. In terms of the model described in Figure 25, the two external stimuli for the public sector are thus being increased – external shareholder pressure and inflow of staff from outside. Some of the benefits of introducing staff from the outside, of course, assume that they come equipped with the ‘radical’ concepts for organisational and cultural change required. The introduction of new staff from outside has had little impact on the DH so far, although the arrival of the appointee to the new joint post of Permanent Secretary / Chief Executive has recently been announced (in November 2000). However, the appointment of an internal DH candidate, the RD from the London RO which has not itself displayed one of the more positive RO cultures, may perhaps be an indication that the change of direction may not be as close as it might be.

In the meantime, senior Civil Servants are pursuing an agenda of evolutionary change within current cultural and structural parameters. In September 1999, the Cabinet Secretary (Sir Richard Wilson) convened a meeting of Permanent Secretaries in Sunningdale to develop a blueprint for delivering reform in the way the current Government perceive is necessary.

In this, they may be swimming against a tide by advancing current ideas and attempting to retain the current structures and culture. This problem was identified many years ago in Harrison (1985). In the words of Purnell (1999, p16):

“.....a much more fundamental cultural revolution is already quietly taking place. What ministers themselves are already doing could shape Whitehall’s future far more than the careful deliberations of Sir Richard’s working groups.....It seems increasingly likely that permanent secretaries will be stripped of much of their policy role, becoming in name and deed chief executives responsible for managing and delivering policies dreamed up by someone from outside the Whitehall career structure.”

The political drivers currently evident may suggest a structure much more similar to the American system, where policy making lies within the political sphere and the Civil Service becomes more of a pure delivery mechanism. Accountability could then be largely split from policy decisions – in a way not currently possible. The other immediate consequential impact is on the managerialism that will be required of top civil servants in a way not currently included in competency frameworks or their experience.

Some similarity with the apparently emerging experience (most of this is anecdotal from discussions with colleagues in the relevant Health Service Divisions) of the Welsh and Scottish Offices under devolution may be observed. The closeness through devolution of elected members to the practical impact of policy decisions seems to be leading to much more political involvement in the decisions themselves – with civil servants increasingly expected to assume a more managerial role. The immediate impact would seem to be far more questioning about the implementation details and output measures, which the policy orientated organisations are ill-equipped to provide.

This set of actions seems to be addressing exactly the reluctance to change the management paradigm that appears to be exactly the barrier to engaging with LO concepts above. It could be argued that the central Departments represent extreme examples of the problems postulated for the public sector as a whole. The representation of the Departments in this way is probably true in that they tend to exhibit the characteristics summarised below.

- They are closely aligned with the political process and (currently anyway) intimately involved with policy formulation – hence they have organisational objectives that are actually quite difficult to define or measure.
- They tend to be multi-functional with complex management and power structures focused only at Permanent Secretary level.
- They are frequently large and often geographically dispersed, especially if the Agencies are aggregated with the sponsoring Departments which they are for accountability purposes.
- They are linked into a single set of recruitment, appraisal and advancement procedures dictated by the Cabinet Office for civil service staff and over which they have relatively little discretion, especially at the senior levels.

For many Trading Funds, agencies and specific organisation types (such as NHS Trusts or Health Authorities) the situation would appear to be different and development of distinctive cultures possible, based on the two recent Agency reviews and a large number of NDPB and NHS consultancy engagements in previous years. They can be focused on specific management objectives, small to medium in size and relatively self-determinant in terms of culture – the real impact then on motivation is through accountability for measurable results. Through performance management and the quinquennial reviews prescribed for agencies, adequate delivery against objectives is also (at least in theory) a requisite for survival. To this extent, at least, it can be observed that some of the reasoning behind the 1990 initiatives behind Trading Fund status appear to be well founded.

The NHS Estates Agency, for example, is actively engaged with the Business Excellence Model with good results now emerging – with the staff attitudinal questionnaires / group interviews undertaken as part of the Agency Review revealing an extremely positive and open management approach. When these come near the flexibility and approach expected from a LO, then some interesting boundary conditions develop. For example, in the case of NHS Estates and the NHS Executive the debriefing memorandum to the Secretary of State that accompanied the final Quinquennial Review report stated:

“The culture developing in NHS Estates is starting to display many aspects of a Learning Organisation. As an organisation, it is becoming more receptive to its environment, it is responding faster to new opportunities and it is beginning to work better across its internal structures: left to itself it is beginning to take the initiative. This is partly attributable to the Chief Executive and her personality and partly due to the culture being encouraged for the organisation.

This manifests itself across the boundary with the NHS Executive (for example with PFU) as a perception of the agency being “aggressive”, “ambitious”, “non-conforming”. The agency sees the same behaviour as being “responsive and flexible”, “proactive in addressing issues”, “delivering for customers”. The review report addresses these issues in terms of a partnership approach, but the management of the boundary issues will eventually fall to the NHS Executive.”

Link and parallel with Participative Action Research (PAR)

It is significant that the route taken within this research in developing the Directorate into a learning organisation was effectively the initiation of what could be defined a PAR project. The emphasis throughout the research with the staff was on gaining a better understanding of what they were trying to achieve, the processes (and alternatives) by which they tried to do so and implementing an open and interactive learning process to support this. The emphasis throughout was on developing a reflective approach – both individually and in functional sub-groups. The participative and questioning approach finds echoes in some of the “quality groups” concepts but goes further in linking individual and group focus – and in the link back to Directorate level for many issues. This analysis suggests that a more in depth comparison of PAR (or participative inquiry) and the learning organisation principles may be fruitful, possibly using some of the methods developed within the PAR approach to facilitate the organisation changes needed. At first sight, it would appear that the learning element of the LO is very similar to an “informal” approach to the PAR methodology as set out by Reason (1998) – though without some of the structural rigour.

If this comparison between LO and “informal PAR” is accurate, then much of the methodology of the PAR projects and the individual management learning concepts could be brought together and made effective. Indeed, if one of the key functions of leadership is defined as enabling a supportive culture for personal and organisational learning to occur, then integrating “informal PAR” into general working may be an extremely effective way of achieving this.

What then is meant by “informal PAR”? The informality of the approach revolves around extracting the key benefits from the process whilst partially downgrading some of the academic rigour (for example the formalised structure, documentation, verification structures) in the process, at least initially. There are three key reasons for proposing this modification in approach: the time involvement, the depth of understanding needed by participants and the way in which management decisions are taken in practice. The emphasis in a practical managerial setting will be focused on the change in behaviour rather than in rigorously documenting its cause and manifestation.

Time involvement

This research project, in common with most practical management situations, required a great deal of prioritisation of effort and resources and time pressures were a continuing and core problem. Progressive budgetary cuts and the extent of the change agenda to manage externally by the RO mean that resources were very tightly stretched. Given the geography of the Region and the distances from London and Leeds, staff working weeks in excess of 50 hours were in the majority, with the exception of secretarial staff. Although there are benefits to be gained from changing procedures, processes or approaches, these are almost inevitably accompanied by a transitional periods of additional time commitment and effort that is difficult to ensure in these circumstances. The appeal in such circumstances needs to be personal and the involvement and participation made as easy as possible.

Depth of Understanding

Most of the benefits would appear to come from active involvement in the process, with an understanding of the theoretical background developing in parallel. An equivalent description based on the literature would be a concentration on the Argyris single loop learning in the initial stages of the process, with an awareness and experience of the double loop effects developing as the processes take root. A formal or rigorous PAR approach potentially requires far more familiarity with the paradigmatic underpinnings and theoretical structure from the beginning. It is clear from my research that staff developed their understanding in this respect, the full implications became clearer and the research improved in nature, with much better feedback and acceleration of the benefits. From a time and resource perspective, early delivery of initial benefits is a powerful spur and the quality of process and understanding can develop as part of the management development process.

Nature of management decisions

Many (most?) management decisions made in the SWRO are not subjected to an academic rigour of analysis. There is simply not the time nor inclination – nor indeed the necessity or even ability given the nature of the decisions taken and the complexity of some of the problems posed. The nature of the decisions in this framework, therefore, accords with the Choo (1998) “Empirical Model”. Usually a reasonable argument is made then a “draft” solution prepared which is “desk checked” (possibly through consultation) and then implemented – but with the knowledge that changes will be needed so that feedback is sought and monitored. Developing an understanding of this process and the inherent risks themselves is an essential part of environmental learning. However, the practical result is twofold – responding organisationally and increasing individual “practical” knowledge.

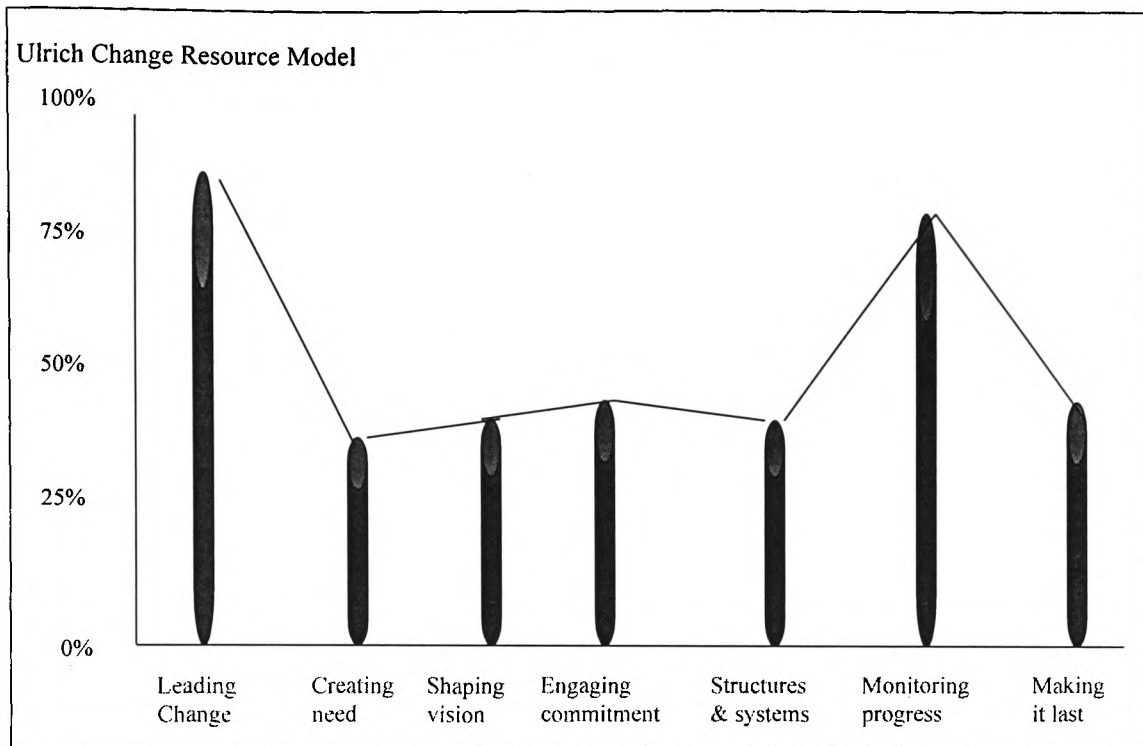
In the case of policy development, since it tends to be more analytical although less defined as a process, the actual decisions remain more value and perception based than analytically sound. In every case, since there must be many potential approaches which could deliver the desired results (themselves dependent on the value frame applied) there is a significant element of rationalisation of desired result. The value or policy rationalisation process is especially relevant when there have been public announcements made or political promises to deliver. I cannot believe, on the basis of 15 years consultancy experience across large numbers of organisations in the private and public sector, that this is particularly unusual. Hence, the way in which decisions are made and the experience brought to those decisions is highly individual, leading to a result in which personalities (and individual relationships) play a significant part in the actions resulting. There are echoes of Choo (1998) in this analysis, this time with his Anarchic Model of decision making.

Process - making it effective and making it last

A number of difficulties will inevitably be experienced in managing the organisational changes needed to introduce Action Research activities as an integral part of working and developing the full LO culture. Within this research, the difficult aspects in making progress with LO concepts in the Directorate revolved around the time needed to develop an understanding and staff engagement. These difficulties were then compounded by the need to repeat the process as staff changed, either through turnover or organisational restructuring, which would appear to be a common feature across organisations in the present environment. The education and continuing engagement process also involved setting up new ways of engagement – meetings, away-days, planning processes, appraisal and feedback: all requiring resources redirected from immediate operational tasks, though involving payback in better working.

Ulrich (1998) suggests that the profile shown in Figure 27 below represents the relative amounts of effort typically directed in practice by organisations at stimulating and sustaining change. The total effort is analysed into seven critical sets of activities and the balance of effort observed has clear implications for the likelihood for success at each stage. The seven Ulrich categories of activity are related below back to the four stages of the Learning Organisation stages as an illustration.

Figure 27 - Relative Effort Input During Change



Stage 1: Emotional engagement

Leading change – defining who is responsible and ensuring that there is real commitment to see the change through – a value-laden, needs-led, set of issues. In terms of introducing LO concepts, the process amounts to identifying with, at the most senior level, the need for change and the conclusion that there is a better way of working. Unless new management is introduced into the organisation to meet the concepts anew but are already predisposed (by existing values or organisational situation) to the concepts then the Ulrich emphasis on resource at this stage would appear to be fully warranted. Even where top management are committed, the nature of the exercise means that there is a significant effort needed to promulgate the same values and approach throughout the management levels.

Output: organisational ownership of the possibilities

Stage 2: Rationalisation of change

Creating a shared need – working through the issues of why the organisation should enter into a risky change process (all change processes are risky and culture changes on this scale are more risky than most in terms of success) to do it - to make this credible and “safe” for the organisation, the need should be recast into a logically justified framework.

The rationalisation involved changes the the status of the initiative from one of identification of possibility into an allocation of resource and the management commitment to a culture change. Once the emotional ownership is achieved, this can follow quickly, although in practice there may be a cyclical element.

Output: organisational ownership of the need and a commitment to change

Stage 3: Culture priming and awareness building

Shaping a vision – creating a joint mental model of what the organisation will look and feel like when the change processes have created a new environment and culture. The personal benefits in terms of development should be evident, but the personal risk side of changing relationships and culture need to be considered and handled.

Mobilising commitment – evaluating all stakeholders and deciding who needs to be involved, at what stages and to what extent commitment is required. In terms of the LO and overall culture, the project really does need to involve everyone in the organisation. Working down the existing management route to ensure that no conflicting messages emerge to create obstacles for the cultural change is important – it is essential to overcome cynicism and ‘initiative fatigue’ and also to ensure espoused values and values in action remain aligned.

Modifying systems and structures – enabling the change to take effect and deciding how to make the organisation work in future. The process is not easy in introducing LO concepts as in the extreme it should shape itself, rather than being a purely technical analysis effort that can be pre-planned. As a ‘low risk’ public sector approach, aspects such as communications, staff appraisal processes, hierarchical structure levels and corporate planning processes need to be revisited and re-framed as a minimum to enforce and reinforce the changes.

For the Finance Directorate in the SWRO, the planning process was the biggest element to revisit as the cascade from objectives right through to job descriptions and Individual Responsibility Plans (and PDPs) were linked and redefined.

Output: workforce and staff commitment and means to deliver

Stage 4: Culture evolution and change reinforcement

Monitoring progress – defining what positive change actually means and entails and developing systems to capture whether and to what extent the change is indeed occurring. In the SWRO Finance Directorate case, the activities to support the monitoring were linked to the research data capture – the SAQs, staff one-to-ones, away-day discussions and so on. Clearly, the processes are most effective if quantifiable measures are used and it is important to develop initial baseline figures for this comparison to be effective – and for these to relate directly to the objectives sought.

Making it last – putting in place structures, incentives, processes and the culture to ensure that the change becomes self-sustaining and reinforcing.

For the SWRO Finance Directorate, Stage 4 involved the greatest ongoing effort – certainly the research would agree with the Ulrich analysis in this respect. The effort profile for the Directorate would show the effort needed to make the changes last in an organisation of repeated staff structure change to be larger than any step other than the initial (also an ongoing effort in the definition above because of the SWRO restructuring).

Output: a sustainable change which delivers real organisational benefits

Figure 25 represents the whole process as a linear series. However, it is clear that there is a cyclical element as the whole process unfolds – in particular in the latter stages as modifying systems, monitoring progress and making it last work through a number of iterations of adaptation and improvement, towards the overall change objective.

Whilst agreeing with much of Ulrich's resource allocation analysis, it would seem to me from the research project in the SWRO, that he underestimates the continuing effort needed to make such a change last and the resources needed in continuing support in the context of LO principles engagement. The more cultural and value driven the organisational change envisaged, the more that ongoing resource input will be required – to continue to provide energy into what should by definition be a process of continuing improvement and change. The changes in working approach or culture are, therefore, quite different to more procedural changes as such changes can be reinforced by changed information and administrative structures to consolidate progress and enforce compliance.

However, even for the "softer" or more cultural / behavioural changes, providing these can be rooted in the administrative infrastructure (e.g. the assessment processes, project management procedures etc) they too can probably become self-sustaining. However, this was an issue of heated debate amongst the staff and with the critical friends in the SWRO. The problems of maintaining these changed processes through regular organisational restructuring when much of the original impetus was dependent on a small number of individuals (indeed primarily one at Director level!) were thought to be very difficult. The importance of high level support and leadership within discrete parts of an organisation that are relatively independent (say the whole RO or an Agency) to ensure an uptake that could be better maintained and taken forward was an important argument.

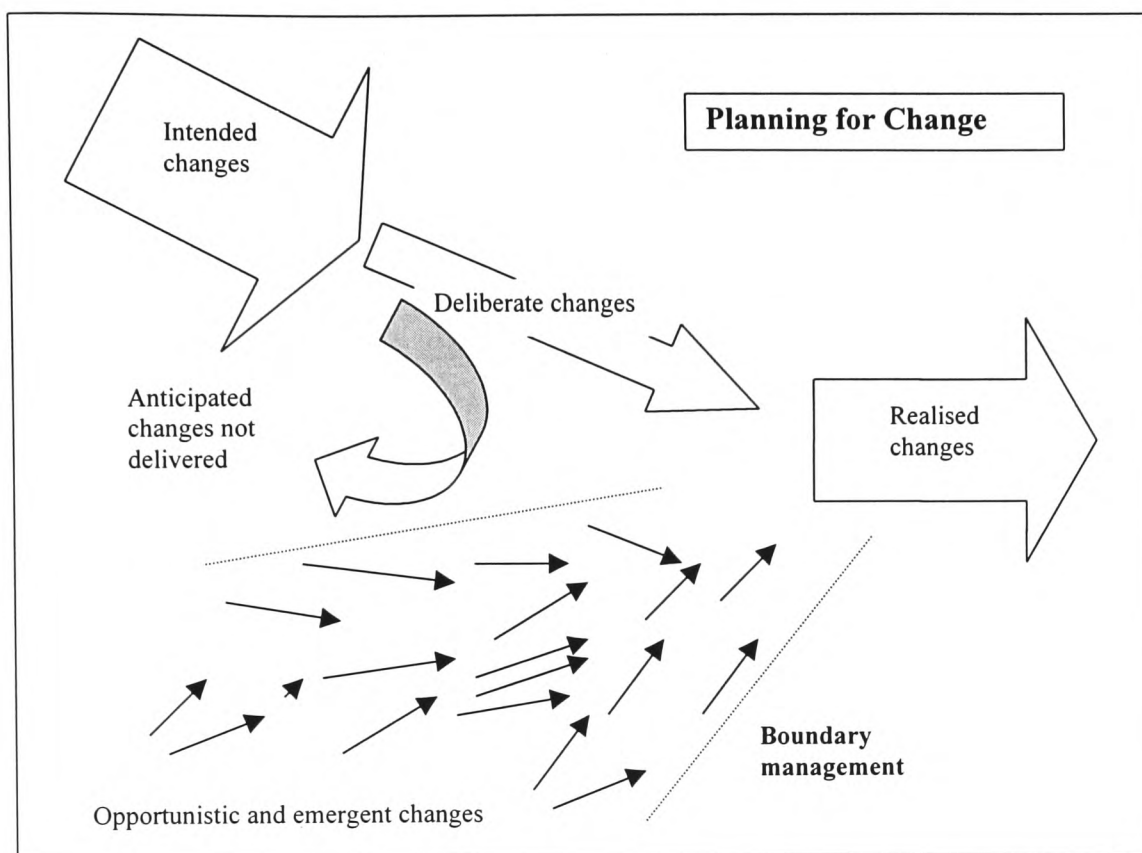
Certainly the issue of genuinely top level support may be explored in my new Finance Director post (from January 2001) at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). There is an element of independence from the DETR and also a developing level of commitment throughout the Board (led by the CE) to engage in an attempt to change the corporate culture in response to a number of strategic challenges. This may provide an opportunity to explore further some of the potential work highlighted in Chapter 8.

The NHS is just about to engage with the one of the largest change management projects currently planned in the UK. The project (or series of projects) will emerge from the introduction of a single common Human Resources and Payroll system, which will incorporate Training (including e-Learning), Recruitment (including e-Recruitment), Appraisal (including PDPs), Risk Management (including adverse incident reporting) – and a way of drawing each element together as they form an integrated system. Further, the systems will provide a platform upon which to base new rostering systems that will potentially provide the employment flexibility and work practice management to reach into all aspects of working practices. The impact of the Ulrich effort profile is only now being fully appreciated, but is being built into the Business Case in terms of both the initial change management stage and the extent of the ongoing maintenance and support resource needed.

The key impact, given the discussion in the earlier section about motivation and management development, is that the resources needed to support change be made an integral element of work so that impact of management of individuals is fully recognised. The difficulties of ingraining and then sustaining the changed culture and learning processes should not be underestimated. Organisational structural change, the length of tenure of any particular post and staff turnover are all probably of less time duration than that needed to embed the new culture and processes needed. Thus, there needs to be an active strategy for “handing over the baton”, for developing the organisational memory and making the process as independent of individuals as possible – especially since the culture in its initial stages will still be patchy rather than pervasive. Incoming staff will, especially for organisations like ROs and the DVLA where they come from other Civil Service areas where the penetration is low, probably have little knowledge (and possibly predisposition) to continue to take this forward.

The Participative Action Research approach can help address precisely the issues of process definition and cultural development within individual organisation areas because of the grass roots nature of the culture and ownership of change that it involves. However, it needs to be made accessible – simplified, de-jargonised and generalised, although not pre-packaged - so that the time element discussed earlier is contained.

Borrowing heavily on the Mintzberg (1994) discussion on the forms of strategy that exist, the cycles described for feedback within an overall vision for change can be presented in a very similar way, with change being substituted for strategy. The overall direction of change can be planned, but circumstances - internal and external - will certainly vary over time and the activities and advances will almost certainly be opportunistic to fit with other changes and catalysts not originally foreseen. The role of the change manager can be considered, thus, as a boundary manager – keeping the emerging changes roughly consistent with achievement of the overall objectives, but allowing sufficient freedom for those involved to take ownership, solve detailed problems, react to environmental stimuli and learn from each other. As with strategy, the key is to have a clear vision of the required end-point and to ensure that all the initiatives and resources are harnessed towards the end-point, even if the immediate objectives are limited or not ostensibly linked to the change.

Figure 28 - Managing the Direction of Change

These ideas interact well with the concepts of living with paradox through change, retaining flexibility, empowerment of staff and transformational leadership dealt with in the literature review. They are, perhaps, also particularly relevant in managing changes in professional environments where there are often tensions around autonomy, direction and the management / professional boundaries as discussed by Raelin (1991). These issues proliferate in the support service areas of organisations (accountancy, human resources, legal, engineers etc) but can really predominate in situations where the objectives are bound up predominantly with the delivery of professional services (such as for health services).

An approach for the Public Sector to LO principles introduction

Since the benefits of cultural change and LO principles do seem to offer such great potential benefits, is there a set of adaptations to the approaches discussed in the literature for the Private Sector that can be used within a Public Sector environment? Certainly, the culture and value focused elements that are internally controlled can be addressed by the following:

- management commitment to an open and supportive culture vis-à-vis staff and management style;
- placement of individual personal development and the development of organisational knowledge as a central theme for all staff;
- adequate understanding of process and handling skills to provide the means for learning (individual and organisational) to occur.

Perhaps, indeed, these characteristics represent the essence of a learning organisation – the other elements in the private sector environment relate instead to the possibilities of responding in specific ways to what is being learned (essentially outputs). The benefits of flexibility, adaptation to environmental changes / strategic shift are outputs emerging from the organisation working far more effectively and are not themselves core characteristics of a learning organisation. The focus on the essential elements is an important point since otherwise the means and ends become confused. What are the benefits, therefore, for the public sector from adopting a learning (individual and organisational) culture that are still achievable? These would seem to be in the areas of:

- *organisation effectiveness*: by better understanding the processes, the environment and individual impact the organisation can actually manage its external interfaces better – assist in better policy development with ministers, ensure better policy implementation externally, provide more appropriate services in better ways at the public interface;
- *organisation efficiency*: by working in a more internally flexible manner and reconstructing working practices and structures better within existing resources, not necessarily changing external objectives or priorities;
- *personal development*: by better understanding the environment and individual impact and providing a reinforcing focus on personal change of practice – resulting in greater staff adaptability and more portable skills to benefit the organisation.

It is striking that in my research as it evolved over the three years, these were the sorts of benefits starting to emerge from the Directorate – especially according to the analysis from Chapter 6. What is not included are “continuous transformation”, “organisational reinvention”, “increased competitiveness”, “environmental response” and “dynamic visioning”. In many ways these are the political decisions – and for the public sector to become *fully* responsive in the way envisaged for the private sector there would need to be a complete alignment between policy and management. This alignment would be extremely difficult within the current concepts and political framework where the public services are formed with the intention of being apolitical. At the level that learning happens within an organisation, this is at the “micro” level - although results are manifested and observed at the “macro” level.

Organisational model for LO within the Public Sector

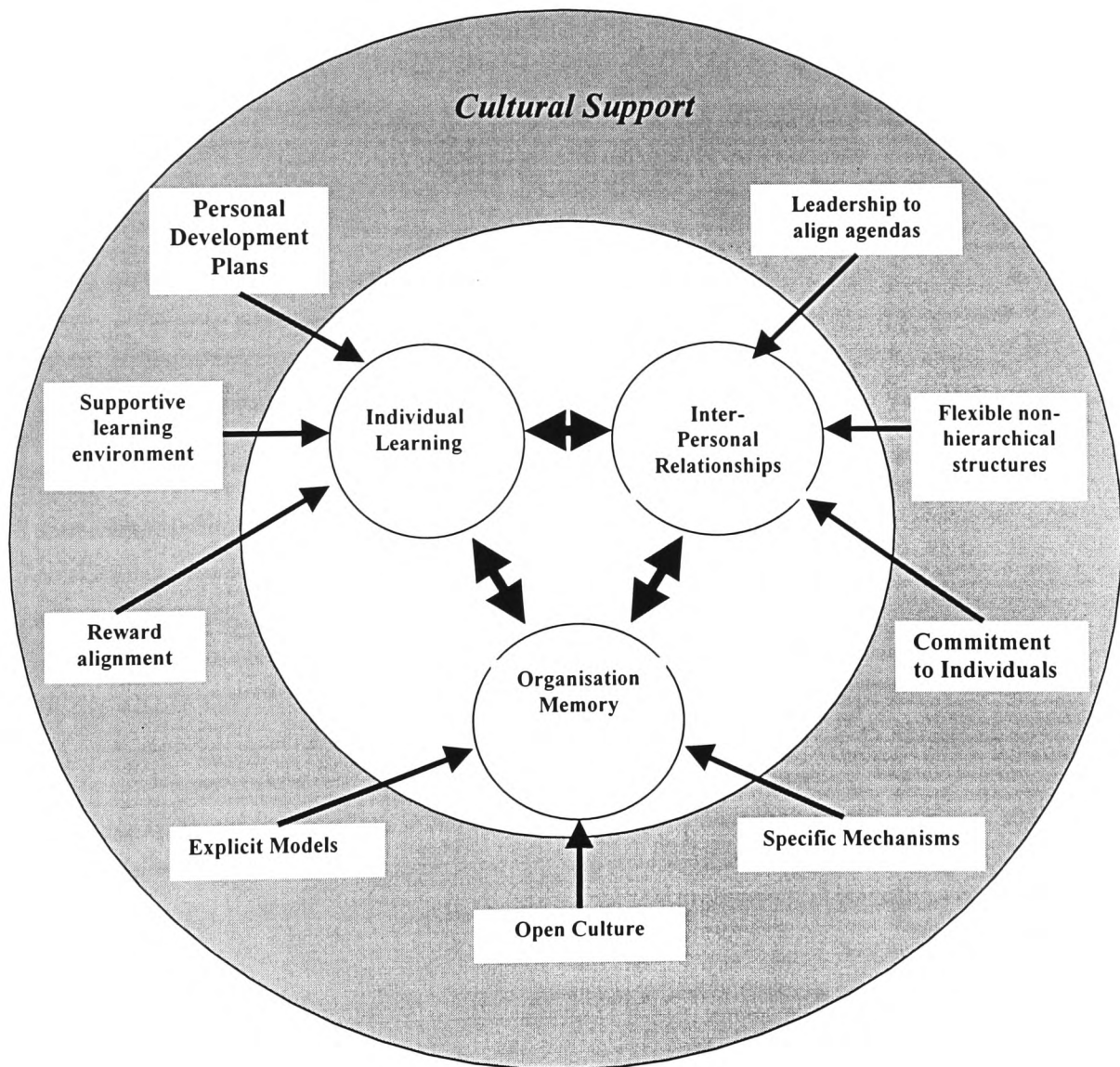
We can characterise any organisation (cf. Morgan, 1988), by

- (a) the set of individuals that comprise it at any point in time (which in itself makes for a dynamic definition);
- (b) the set of relationships between the individuals, partly shaped by organisational expectations but also the result of acutely individual preferences, interactions, personality clashes and attractions;
- (c) the formal structures and arrangements to preserve the organisation as opposed to the persons within it;
- (d) the culture and environment in which they interact – defined by the leadership, expectations set, historical and environmental context.

This representation, which seems to be fairly generic and which relates well to the current organisational models that stress the importance of the individual, is fully in compliance with the methodological model proposed for the research in Figure 9. A formal model can be developed that contains the essential aspects of a LO by taking this and developing the analysis in the previous pages.

The development proposed leads to the model representation of an organisation that is considered as the individuals comprising it and the interactions between them on a one-to-one basis – together with the specific responsibility and process structures that set the organisation apart as an independent entity and provide it with continuity. The culture defines how the three characteristics (a,b,c above) actually fit together and this is summarised in the model diagram below.

Figure 29: The Griffiths Organisational Learning Model



Management can influence the context, together with some of the relationships, through defining and potentially encouraging the values applied within the organisation - represented by the leadership responsibility for defining and developing organisational culture. This is depicted in the model by the surrounding 'culture support' that underpins the relationships and ways of working. Management can also work directly with the individuals, but the interaction needs to reflect the specific individual needs and values in each case – by recognising these it can work with initially non-receptive individuals (see Interim Conclusion 2).

There will always be some cases where a values mismatch occurs in such a way that a parting of the ways can be the only solution acceptable to the organisation. However, it is important that mismatches are recognised as such rather than as an intolerance of diversity. Mismatches can result in constructive tension provided they are recognised as such and managed. Similarly, relationships can be affected and influenced by culture. They can also be as much affected by change as they affect change. The public sector probably differs in general from the private sector in all four characteristics summarised above (individuals, relationships, structure and culture). Whilst there are, clearly, overlaps and commonalities in all four characteristics, it is clear from the analysis preceding in this chapter that the last three (relationships, structure and culture) are different.

The work done by Kolb (1996) relates personal characteristics and learning styles to the nature of occupations and organisations the individuals gravitate into. This conclusion is echoed by Raelin (1991) and by a number of other studies, most recently in respect of accountants by the American Psychology Society (2000), and suggests that the characteristics of individuals within the public sector probably self select - at least to an extent or as a generalisation. Hence this fourth aspect of individual preference, too, may be differentiable although less definitely.

Clearly, all organisations will be subtly different even though probably exhibiting a number of common characteristics within individual sectors. The inevitable differences in composition, current position and organisational history suggests that there will be little in the way of a completely standard approach that will fit all situations. Thus, the emphasis, should focus on the development of some generalised approaches and an emphasis of developing processes for processes. An understanding of the theory is needed to provide a framework for the development and to accommodate the areas that do not 'fit'.

The framework approach is very different to the ideas of "management by panacea" where a specific process or set of tools is applied to a wide range of organisations, differentiated only by the structures or individuals involved. There may well be some analytical 'toolkits' that can be used to help the process, but individual organisations will have to develop individual solutions that suit their own existing culture, future vision and environment. At the same time, there may be common themes – and for the public sector some of these are probably different to those of the private sector, at least in emphasis.

The approach is similar to the analogy of solving non-linear equations (see Methodology section and page 274). Broadly similar contexts may have similar solutions – the private sector and public sector may have different solutions in this ‘language’. However, each set of perturbations (or organisational differences) to apply the solution to each individual organisation will evolve a subtly different solution – both in terms of the approach needed and the detailed steps needed to deliver the changes.

There is an exact parallel, as might be expected here, with the Management Learning Methodology developed later in this Chapter. The approach and structure will be the same for Learning Organisations – but with the impact that having a three-dimensional (individuals, one-to-one interactions, organisation structure) model to map the framework onto.

Methodology for Managerial Learning

My own experience through this research – my own reflection and observation, discussions with others on the learning set and critical friends, staff interviews, profiles and feedback throughout the process and our work within the directorate – suggests a process of learning that can be effective, specifically for working managers. One way of representing this is to adapt the Kolb cycle once again, this time to highlight the key features in the management learning process emerging from my own experience / reflection.

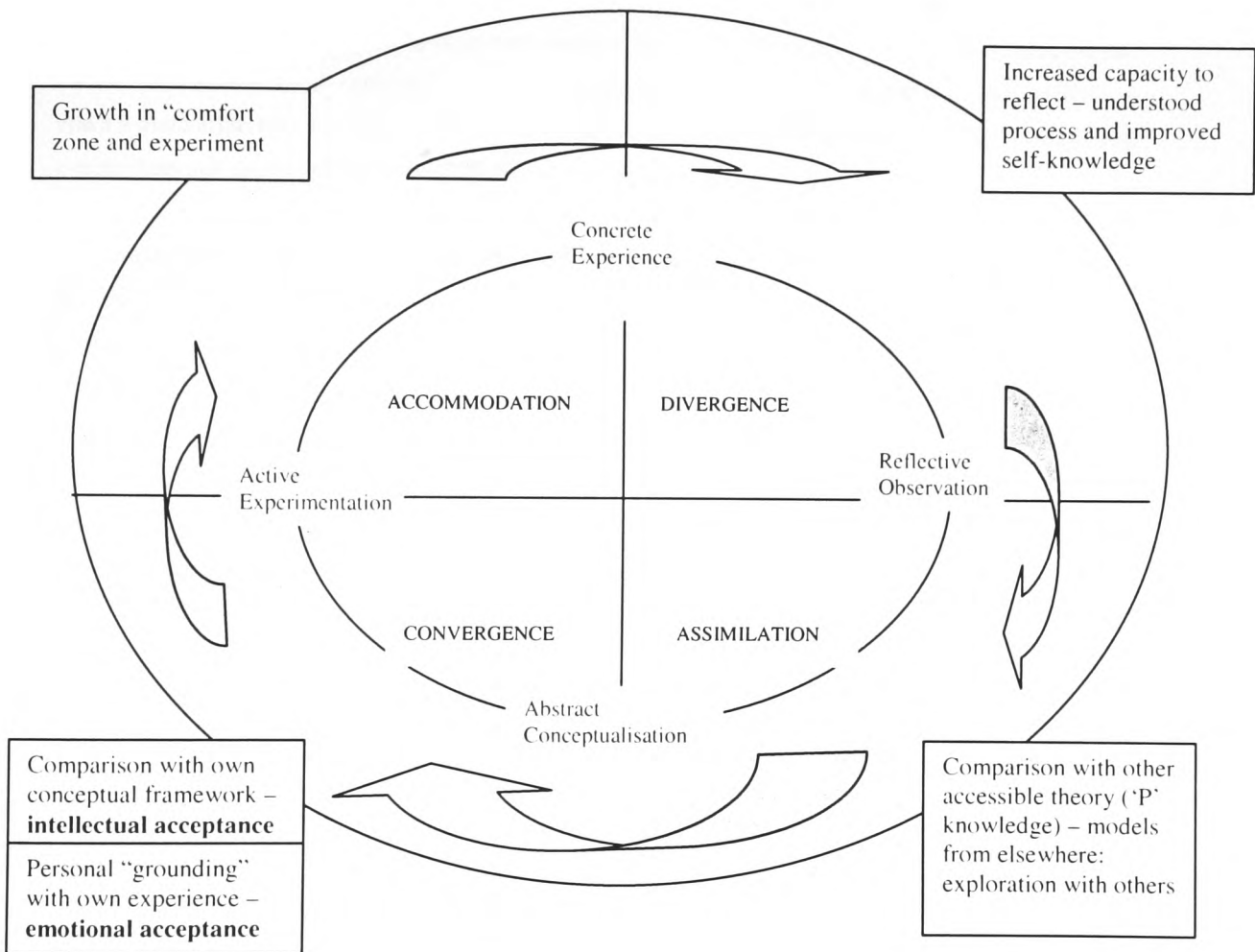
The Kolb learning cycle provides such a generic framework that the important aspects of the process developed can fit easily into the model. In common with the Figure 25 schematic of the LO stages of development, the first key stage is the emotional and intellectual acceptance (possibly in that order, but potentially this is a cyclical process) of the need and desirability of learning. The next stage, before active experimentation really starts, is to work around the cycle re-examining practice with better “tools” – then moving back into the full Kolb cycle principles where active experimentation provides more data and increasing change – probably moving more towards a spiral model than a circle.

However, the cycle can be expanded within the traditional analysis model to incorporate the learning issues emerging from the research and my own experience by stressing the enabling or supporting processes as follows:

- increasing the capacity and motivation to reflect (through more formal reflection processes or third party feedback) on events and thereby to generate new concepts through a framework of understanding – better self-awareness helps considerably to reduce distortion in reflection – **to enable reflective observation;**
- applying accessible theoretical models to assist with new concept generation - the power of analogy with existing frameworks is a factor in this sort of development process, often seen in cross-disciplinary teams where an existing concept or analysis pattern from a particular field can be used to extend or open up concepts in an unconnected field – increasing programmed knowledge **to enable abstract conceptualisation;**
- grounding back into current or previous experience so that *personal* validation can be applied from a practical reality back into the concept or framework i.e. the new ideas are ***emotionally accepted*** as a part of the “way of doing things”. A practical example of this is the emergence of the Interim Conclusions. These were then developed these further, with a rooting back into theory to provide ***intellectual acceptance***. This two step process provides the sort of confidence and inclination to **enable active experimentation.**
- provision of the motivation, “space” and safety to explore these new concepts and apply to new areas is a key issue for the motivation to be maintained through the cycle – hence the opportunity and support (i.e. culture) for experiments to be seen through and ***turned into concrete experience;***

In many ways, the detailed composition of the resulting personal model shown below is of less relevance than its potential use in understanding the issue. The intention is that it produces results that match with those emerging from other models – but this is one that has worked for me on a personal basis.

Figure 30 - Managerial Learning and the Kolb Cycle



Where conceptual frameworks already exist and have been developed to some sophistication, then growing a different set of ideas by using similar conceptual constructs by analogy seems a very logical way of improving understanding. Indeed, since the frameworks I have developed as models have partly emerged from other areas of academic study, it may well be that on closer inspection there could be found a close morphological similarity of theory right across a whole range of academic fields. These similar concepts would represent a whole family of theories, possibly dealing with different subject areas, but essentially similar in their structure because of underlying principles – perhaps, for example, of change, uncertainty, indeterminacy but all with some element of feedback loops – physical or psychological. The structural similarity certainly seems to be very much the case with models for individual and organisational learning – not surprisingly as the two concepts appear closely related.

The model proposed above is all the more powerful if at each stage the framework being developed can be “reality-tested” against the current situation or previous actual experience. The process of relating theory back to personal experience develops confidence in the framework being constructed and reduces the chance that any experimental actions will be inappropriately risky.

The assured relationship between the developed concept and organisational reality is essentially what the action learning process seems to me to seek to achieve – the provision of a safer environment in which to test new constructs, or an environment in which proposed actions can be discussed before moving to a live environment. What the action research process seeks to do is work through the same sorts of ideas but in the live environment itself – and potentially with a better understanding of the research process itself to make it more effective. The improved understanding relates to both an awareness of personal changes and a more thorough appreciation of the environment in which one operates.

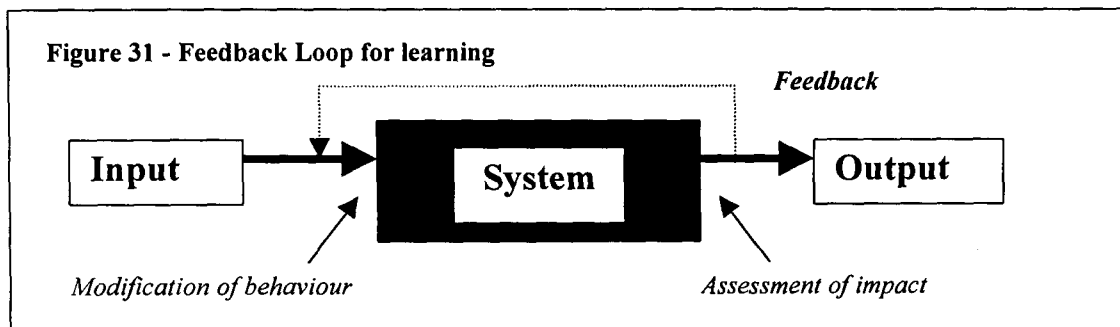
A desirable outcome may thus be the development of a personal model that can be helpful in practical situations in helping make decisions and frame actions within professional practice itself. It is not a merely a set of tools and most certainly not just a set of “best answers” reached directly from theory. This process seems to be just how we work in practice:

- we construct a personal understanding of the way in which our organisation works and we interact with it, built from a history of previous interactions and organisational history – thoroughly impregnated (or perhaps inherent in) its “culture”;
- we interact with others in the organisation, potentially to pursue a specific goal;
- we are attuned to feedback in terms of seeing what effect we have on individuals and the organisation (perhaps understanding intuitively or explicitly who the critical individuals are in any specific context) and repeat our actions (modified if the first output was not what was desired) to produce further effects.

My background often picks up a mathematical model of behaviour as an easily understandable way of making sense of issues and events. In the case of management behaviour and its changing application to specific organisational situations, the first to occur to me was the simplest sort of feedback loop. The skill and expertise in developing an appropriate mathematical model lies in deciding which variables are important and which can be considered to be of “second order” in any particular context. It seems to me that exactly the same process is involved in management understanding – this is Schon’s artistry, which arrives as a result of “gut feel” and a great deal of practical experience. The management skill is in understanding the system (organisation specific and the people contexts) and predicting approximate behaviour to come up with a reasonable input. The predictive skill development then needs to be followed up by having sufficient awareness and sensitivity over the output monitoring (i.e. identifying and interpreting the result in the organisation) to modify the next actions appropriately to get a better output. The model emerging is similar to Mintzberg’s development of an “emergent strategy” theory in changing environments.

The Griffiths Personal Model

The personal model I have developed for my own use is derived from that used for many real physical systems. These are always very much more complex than the deconstructed models that give rise to general linear equations, which form the basis of our understanding of the physical world. The standard way of arriving at better approximations of real events is to take the linear model derived from ignoring other “second order” variables (usually under fairly constrained physical assumptions) and to reintroduce them as perturbations to the linear results.



This model follows the simple input/process/output with a simple feedback loop modifying input and varying output accordingly. In a practical management context, the contents of the “systems black box” can be enormously complex. For example, the “contents” often represent a whole set of organisation staff, their roles, inter-relationships, personal motivations, management structures, environment and culture. The output emerging from any management action in terms of input can rarely be wholly predictable – even the “same” input at different times is likely to have different outputs as the “systems black box” changes.

Management practice (or research) appears to be similar in that it tries to approximate organisational behaviour in a small number of dimensions, sometimes by introducing artificial constraints, and trying to isolate the effects of individual variables. Since real-life situations involve dynamic, multivariate and non-linear responses, this may work in situations where the excluded variables may really not be important – but few general conclusions result. In large groups of individuals setting, prediction may improve. However, this should not be considered to be anything other than a statistical smoothing of non-linear perturbations in situations where these are intrinsically stable. For unstable situations, even with large numbers in a group, the statistical smoothing effect may be ineffective as subgroups emerge with different agendas and perceptions. In constructing the initial input, understanding the complexity within the “systems black box” is essential. All organisations are different – and each will vary with time. Understanding the active system variables and their interactions will improve the output prediction but has two elements – a theoretical /conceptual/ academic understanding of the variables and a practical real world understanding of how these variables fit within specific systems (i.e. organisation and personal knowledge). Just as real physical situations are modelled by approximation in such a way as to make them solvable, management situations themselves are rarely fully predictable over any extended time period. Indeed, only a very small proportion of non-linear equations have exact solutions at all. In the analogy, there is never a “single best way” – not even if all the variables are identified, because it is just as impossible to determine exact initial conditions.

The feedback structures discussed above represents a standard systems model, but a model I find personally useful. Structured slightly differently, the model is just the “Kolb Cycle” in yet another guise. However, the mathematical models used as my analogy have been around in its formalised state for a long time – far longer than the Kolb cycle articulation. The development of such models seems, both from the staff feedback referred to earlier and my own reflective processes, to be an essential element of the learning process. I include below an summary of the personal model I have developed for myself – merely as an example or indication of the type of model discussed. Given my mathematical background this model fits the way that I think and it is shared as an example on that basis.

The use of personal models

The approach of developing personal models based on experience and analogy proposes a view of management knowledge very much on the Aristotelian *practical* basis. As set out in Chapter 3 in respect of research methodology, a post-positivist methodology is appropriate for this research. It thus seems entirely appropriate and consistent to advocate management learning on very much the same principles (equating learning and research in this context): the way in which knowledge can be gained and enhanced may be partly theoretical but largely practical. Understanding what the key variables are in any situation, how each is likely to work independently, then approximating how they will interact is helpful. The interaction is perhaps more evident through personal understanding and social conditioning (“feel”, intuition) than by explicit reasoning.

Sharing this personal knowledge, through formulating this into substantive and then potentially formal theories (after Glaser and Strauss, 1979) is a useful contribution to the development of others and to a general audience as a means of furthering knowledge. How should we then frame a learning methodology for practical managers? Two key sets of developmental actions emerge from the preceding analysis:

1. development of an understanding of the context – the self, the organisation and the role occupied within the organisation (also intrinsically the set of relationships linking to other “selves” and “personalised” roles within and without the organisation) ;
2. an understanding of the process which leads to better handling of the learning loop – both to improve real feedback and to become better at interpreting the data / information arising from ongoing interactions with the other elements (all of which are dynamically changing). This handling of feedback can perhaps be immediately decomposed into:
 - becoming better at assessing the feedback emerging directly from the other elements – in terms of personal awareness, receptivity, etc – the issues of emotional intelligence as well as a systemic approach are relevant here;
 - applying analysis to one’s own models to understand the significance of the output / feedback
 - modifying ones own behaviour and input to the other elements to achieve both better output from the process but also to provide more coherent learning information.

Within above analysis, then the issue of developing a methodology becomes a question of “What?” and “How?”. It may also be relevant, to provide a context for answering these two questions, to first approach the question “Why?”. Whilst this may at first sight seem to be a fairly trivial question, the Interim Conclusions suggest that motivation is a key factor in not only the effort that staff are likely to input, but also their initial receptivity.

Why bother with management learning?

A simple answer to the question of motivation could be: “*to become a better manager*”. Whilst this may fit with McGregor (1960) Theory X/Y motivation and humanistic view of management for many and may be sufficient intrinsic motivation for some, life is hardly ever that simple – even if we gloss over for now what is really meant by “better” or “manager” and adopt a naïve interpretation.

The immediately obvious supplementary is: “*Why is that important?*”. “*To do a better job*” hardly takes us forward, even still ignoring “better”. It could be important because by “becoming a better manager” could mean:

- facing fewer organisational difficulties (better outputs) - and thus less personal stress;
- achieving organisational goals more effectively (better outputs) - and hence improved personal security;
- recognition of personal expertise / excellence by others – hence improved personal satisfaction and self-esteem;
- explicit reward (possibly a result of the above) in terms of improved financial standing or status level – hence all three benefits above again.

Here there are some difficulties. First, the real practical impact of “good management” (“good” provides enough difficulties before we get to “better”) is generally extremely difficult to disentangle from chance. Especially if we consider chance in this respect to comprise starting position (organisation history, other staff – ‘no man is an island’ for example, existing culture, structure, and so on), external influences, market / customer unpredictability or fads, right place right time issues and sheer random events.

Second, do any of the advantages proposed materialise in an organisation that is performing badly (though of course it might have been worse) for reasons outside its current management control or even influence? Or in an organisation which does not recognise good management? This question is extremely relevant on the basis that if “it takes one to know one”, recognition by an appropriately adept practitioner is a second factor even if the issue of what is “good” management can be partially resolved. Does this inference mean that it is only an advantage to be a good manager in a successful organisation that is also well managed? The issues of existing culture, especially in terms of “similarity selection” by existing management for promotion and succession makes this a vicious cycle difficulty to break and may occur only as a result of an external intervention of some sort.

The conditions identified above seem to provide a pretty restrictive set of criteria on which to assess how much personal investment one is going to input to a chancy enterprise. Not to say socially undesirable, since it would presumably be to the overall benefit if more organisations were better managed and the whole thereby more effective and efficient. On the basis of staff feedback in workgroups and appraisals, the answer would seem to be a mixture of “McGregor X factor”, intellectual curiosity and a vague general optimism. This mixture of reasons seems to be true of the majority of my staff – with the third factor linked to ambition.

Why ask why?

The reasons “why?” are obviously important in proposing a development methodology as motivation is critical. The two reasons it seems to me why theoretical management has had so little impact on management practice seem to me to be the lack of attention to the “Why?” question and the issue of accessibility which, again from my own and staff feedback through this exercise relates largely to time, presentation and the language used. This logical argument clearly also loops back around to motivation – it needs to be made more accessible - and the question “Why?”.

Given the importance of motivation and access, a major step forward may be achieved by lowering the hurdles faced – by providing practical organisation and resources to make it easier and establishing a culture that supports the development and rewards negotiation of the hurdles through changed practice. This clearly links with the other research strand – the LO concepts and extent of direct applicability into the SWRO (and potentially wider public sector) context.

Within the personal model developed, one emerging principle seemed to be helpful throughout the staff discussions - the simpler the concepts could be made, the easier it would be to link back to strands within personal experience and fit within an existing framework. This grounding provides acceptability and confidence in application: it then “feels” right. However, as the abstraction becomes greater to cope with the complexity of real situations (adding more crocodiles to Schon’s swamp) the thought and effort involved in practical grounding becomes greater. It requires more systematic deconstruction of past events and a greater self-awareness and intellectual honesty to reveal the parts that fit.

When this connection *is* made effectively, the effect needs to be “*that’s just common sense*” or “*I sort of knew that already*”. A lack of “wow-factor”, but that’s how it should be. However, it is difficult to sell that as a commodity which people appreciate. And that can be the name of the game, where for consultants the benefits are financial and for academics, prestige. So academics wonder why the practising management community are not receptive to understanding the variables in the “systems black box” theoretically and the practising managers wonder how the theory made inaccessible by jargon and complexity relates to their practical experience and practice.

Little wonder that the popular management writers such as Peters and Waterman (1982) can be panned for lack of academic rigour (probably quite rightly given the fad lifecycle) but grabbed eagerly by the practising management tribe who are actually seeking understanding and can make connection with the accessible contents. Without (generally) the theoretical framework or training (the lack of framework or training is what employing consultants provides a shortcut to address) the pre-packaged solution provides an apparently attractive way out of this. However, all such approaches have in-built limitations – even TQM as an example that has been successful for a long period has critics and represents a specific construction from general theory. Any methodology for management learning needs to cross this “practicality gap” to be successful and provide for:

- accessibility;
- practical translation;
- a response to the motivation;
- flexibility to cope with the inevitable changes and pressures.

The approach needs to make the best use of existing experience and personal frameworks of practising managers by recognising they are there. It needs to recognise the difference in values, culture and different practical difficulties between the two communities of management – academic and practising. This process all needs to work within a recognition that practising managers are a very heterogeneous group – indeed not a group at all, since virtually all elements of organisations need to manage in some form or another. All strands of managers need access to improved practice if they are to perform better with improved opportunities to scale the management ladders.

Spender (1994, p393) suggests that common types of knowledge or competencies needed although on a personal level preferred learning styles will differ significantly – as will the environment within which they are working – so that the ways of acquiring these needs to be flexible. In terms of learning styles, Knowles (1998) observes that there needs to be:

- *emphasis on experiential techniques*: use must be made of experience already gained in order both to provide a richer learning environment and to provide a real grounding back into practical situations for those involved.
- *emphasis on practical application*: this is not just pulling experience from the past but extending into the future to provide practice in thinking through application of the learning and preparing for self-extension into experimental situations.
- *unfreezing and learning to learn from experience*: this involves a more critical approach and practice in questioning preconceptions in order to be more receptive to new interpretations and feedback – which can be turned into learning.

Just as there aren't any “right answers” in any practical situation, there is no single “best approach” to such a development methodology. There are, however, a number of elements which I feel have to be in place:

Internal

- theoretical management learning in terms of general principles and concept frameworks;
- specific management skills – the basic day to day “toolkit” that has to be developed;
- basic understanding of learning principles, both in respect of practical learning and “research” skills;
- an approach to self-awareness in terms of understanding one’s day to day impact on the system (and also a values implication of involving others);

Organisational

- a guiding “hand”, whatever label or model is put in place (mentoring, coaching, on-the-job training, action learning, personal development plans through appraisal) – but one that really understands the issues;
- an environment (live or artificial if live is impossible) in which experimentation can be used to bridge the theory/practice gap and ground the understanding.

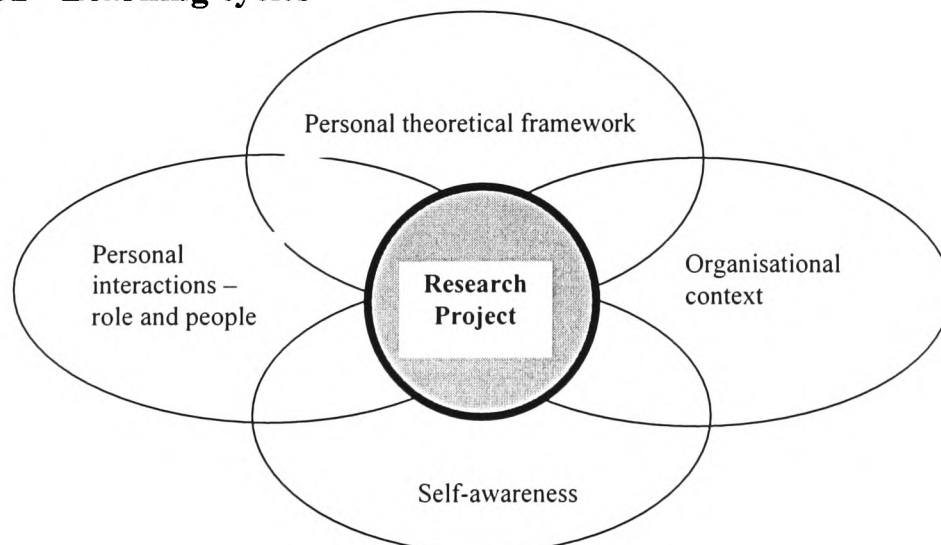
Given adequate motivation, each of these factors is potentially within reach of the individual manager. What is “adequate” or a threshold level is significantly influenced by the organisation as observed above. The *organisational* elements are clearly less immediately influenced by the individual, although critical friends can be established outside and experimentation need not initially be attempted in the workplace if the culture or risks perceived are really that antipathetic. It does, of course, put many more difficulties in the path but, in turn, also places a greater responsibility (partly moral and ethical in this case) on individual managers to enable their staff to develop within difficult organisations. This approach comes full circle to the concept of convergence between management practice and Participatory Action Research techniques – harking right back to the emancipatory roots with Lewin (1946 and 1948) and developing into the socially grounded exercise advocated by Reason (1997, 1999) and Reason and Torbert (1999).

The Personal Development Journey

Assessing the extent of my own personal change or development – and expressing it openly – was always going to be a difficult aspect of this research. However, this research does really reflect a number of loops of learning all of which spin around each other.

- The development of my own theoretical framework, derived from others and adapted for myself – rooted in the literature review and grounded with my own experience, with input and results from the research project. This framework was very slow to develop at the start but is now reasonably well formed – Chapter 2 and Chapter 7 provide insights into this, although not the way in which it developed which was incremental and iterative but full of ‘stops and starts’. However, the framework is something that seems set to evolve and be refined.
- Changes in my self-awareness and perceptions of how my behaviour and personal signals affects others – and therefore my impact and effectiveness - particularly in respect of the Chapter 5 findings which produced some surprises and increasing insight.
- Increasing my understanding of the interactions firstly with my team through the PAR and the changes in relationships resulting and secondly my interaction with the others on the PhD programme and awareness of their learning – especially the significant differences in direction and nature of our projects and writing.
- Changing my own perceptions and understanding of my working context and environment – the organisation, its drivers and levers, its culture and the implications of that culture.
- The combination of each of the above through a specific research project and, at a second level, my engagement as a (willing) participant within a research programme in management learning and development – with a research aim of researching our research and impact on development.

Figure 32 - Learning cycles



The above may perhaps be summarised as “learning about learning about learning”.

The difficulty with this is that one can, indeed, play intellectual games of supposition and theorising which can be stimulating and interesting, but which spins away from the practical knowing. It is also, probably, a danger to become too introspective in that this too diverges from the practical knowing-in-action and one potentially develops unreal or distorted “realities”. This line of argument returns to some of the models included in Laing’s psychological “Knots”.

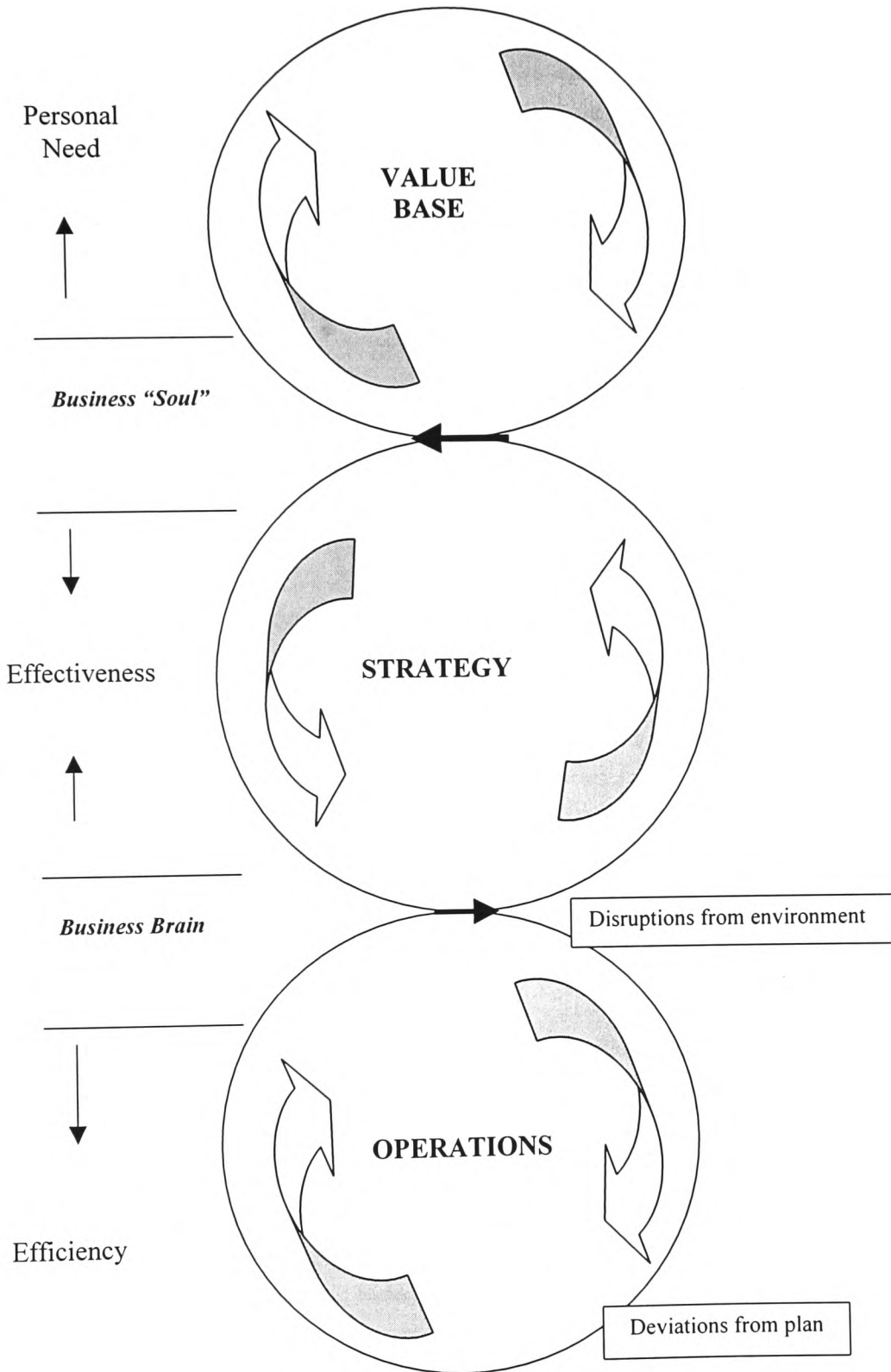
The difficulty with the presentation of the research results in Chapters 5 and 6 is that to present them in a way that makes sense with the overall framework developed means formatting them as overall results. Similarly with the two previous sections around Management Learning and LO/Public Sector issues. In practice the ideas formed and were re-formed through a whole series of events, catalysts, discussions with staff, critical friends, learning set and through the literature. The whole occurred through an uneven, irregular and sometimes derailed journey that is now in a siding but which will hopefully resume soon.

The interactions between my own development and that of the Directorate frequently became difficult to untangle, and were in any case linked as I was learning from them and the developments as we progressed. In this respect the methodology model in Figure 9, which represented a dynamic interaction between the players – and the fact that each new interaction / cycle would start with the players at a new (enhanced?) position – actually proved to be fairly close to events in practice.

Indeed, the Figure 9 model of research cycling proved to be robust and conceptually sound. The development of a research model that is responsive to both changes in understanding of the researcher, interactions with the researched, dynamic changes in the processes and understanding of the research – and fully reflects the opportunistic nature of the data gathering / learning opportunities presented - would seem to be important to the development of a practise based management research. The linkage of such an approach with a cyclical validation model as in Figure 12 was also essential because of the subjectivity of so much of the data gathered. The integration of the research with the “day job” meant that much of the customary formality of interviews and opportunistic discussions had to be dispensed with and a second iteration of confirmation frequently adopted in order to ensure that interpretation and recording was at least corroborated.

During the course of the research, there were also personal events that triggered not only reflection on immediate impacts but also of personal values and aims. These quite often set off different thought trains and in particular the way in which we interact on a social and work level. The other critical impact was one of time, perhaps the most recurrent theme in my research. The tension within my role between operational aspects and the developmental side was reflected in research both personally and for the Directorate and staff. The tensions felt and observed were also mirrored in the tension between work and home life, both the other things I wanted to do and family commitments - at times the tensions meant that the research work had to be put on hold. The reflection continued, but the active data collection, literature reading and writing all stopped for periods. Without recognising this, no management learning methodology can succeed.

Figure 33 – Bateson Treble Loop Learning



The representation of how this fits together can perhaps be represented in interaction on the Bateson model. At an operational level the Kolb cycle provides the base – learning through reflection, conceptualisation, experimentation and further experience. This analysis certainly appears to hold true in much of the research work undertaken. At the second level there is increased awareness of the process of learning, a direction of what to learn and how, a choice made in terms of underlying value sets and a deliberate construction of how the learning takes place. At the third level, I depart from the Hawkins / Bateson vocabulary and discussion, though I agree that there is a more fundamental level of questioning and learning involved. The vocabulary they use becomes metaphysical and its usefulness to me as a tool for understanding disappears as it becomes subjective and extremely personal value driven. What I can grasp a little better is his suggestion of the question substitution from level 2 to level 3: from “*What can we best achieve?*” to “*How can we best aligned to and in most service of the evolutionary need?*”

Even so, for me this needs a whole set of linguistic and verbal definitions. If by this he means a reappraisal of base values prompted by learning and the objective is not effectiveness (how?) but personal need (why?) then I believe that the experience is not as great a rarity as Hawkins and Torbert believe – even though this will only be a transient passage through Loop 3 for most. And the interesting aspect for me is that the couple of occasions when I have returned to my own value base through this process to question what I really need and how this fits with the way I behave have been triggered by a mix of work and personal events. Perhaps I have this Bateson third loop wrongly understood – if so I will define the above for my own use as it does seem to me to be more than an intellectual exercise and impacts on what I really am (paraphrasing Sartre rather badly).

At the end of Chapter 5, some key conclusions or common themes were drawn about the data collected and its interpretation. Some of these were worked through to the development of the “interim emerging themes” (or conclusions at the start of this Chapter). In terms of practical changes the main differences would seem to me to be threefold:

1. an increase in confidence through access to established constructs, models and others’ experience that I can use in novel situations;
2. a structured approach to change management through an understanding of context / environment;
3. a more coherent leadership style: more open, more emotionally aware and more rounded through a more explicit cognitive model.

There has, of course, been a parallel set of ‘real life’ experience gathered through the ‘day job’, although this has interacted through the methodology with the research findings. This has involved a whole series of greater responsibilities, new working contexts, greater scope projects and reviews. Undoubtedly these have contributed to the three differences noted above – but through a much more structured way given the Management Development Model outlined earlier. This model has been adopted as an approach as far as possible within both my work with staff and with my wider role so that the two became closely interactive. The process emerging closely follows the methodology depicted in Figure 9.

Chapter 8 Conclusions

Introduction

This Chapter sets out a number of reflections on the research, what emerged from the process and what else remains to be done, together with the potential scope for development of some of the ideas in terms of further research topics. Since these have been set out at the end of the process and the thesis these represent, almost as a definition, the conclusions. The content, therefore, addresses the original research aims and attempts to assess the extent to which results have been achieved and also whether the issues emerging from some of the difficulties encountered have themselves shed light on the research aims and process. Finally, it reviews the personal development aspect, whether the achievement of learning for me personally has benefits that can be generalised and to what extent the discussion and demonstration of the gain of individual or personal knowledge is a defensible addition to wider knowledge.

The nature of the research topic – which includes a critical evaluation of my own development as an integral element of the process and findings – provides a set of research activities which interact so closely with some of my own employment based objectives and management activity as to be artificial in terms of separation. It is within this context that the final chapter reviews what has been achieved and what theoretical gain is demonstrable in terms of organisational behaviour and personal development.

In one very clear way, one of my original personal aims has been met. The Literature Review chapter summarises for me many of the elements of the conceptual theoretical framework I was seeking as my initial motivation for joining the Guided Doctorate Programme. As I have reflected critically on the concepts and issues and grounded these in my own experience, I have developed much of the underpinning knowledge and understanding I was seeking at the start. I believe that I am now working with the conceptual framework developed, together with the experiential learning during the period, as a part of my everyday management practice.

The original research aims

The original research plan document I produced in November 1996 to initiate the process, included a definition of the research scope as follows:

Staff in the Finance and Information Directorate will be encouraged to adopt a reflective approach to their work and the Directorate consciously and collaboratively developed as a learning organisation. Reviews will be undertaken to compare, between my own Directorate and others in the RO, effectiveness of staff development (as seen by the staff) and staff perceptions of the organisation as it develops - both RO and DH;

The way in which my management practices develop during this time and the way in which staff adapt, with a changing view of their own roles and the RO / DH will be reviewed as an integral part of these projects.

It may be helpful to deconstruct the above, including some of the underlying assumptions, in order to explore to what extent the initial aims have been realised.

Staff in the Finance and Information Directorate will be encouraged to adopt a reflective approach to their work.....

The staff in the Directorate were certainly encouraged to adopt a reflective approach and this was built into both informal and formal assessment / feedback processes, although the extent and effectiveness of the outcome clearly varied between different staff. The variation in staff enthusiasm for adopting a more structured reflective process was to be expected but, in general, the formal encouragement and building a reflective element into the appraisal routines and debriefings was successful. One of the positive results was that by formalising the reflection between the members of staff and myself, I gave them far more regular and comprehensive feedback. Increased feedback also occurred in less formal situations and resulted in the development of more open and responsive relationships.

The 'encouragement' per se took a great deal of time and effort. The reflective approach worked far better when the staff understood the theoretical reasons that underpinned the development efforts we were undertaking and when the process was explicitly addressed. As a group activity, the reflective approach was very powerful and built up higher levels of teamwork than might otherwise have been the case in a period in the SWRO which was uncertain and full of change.

...and the Directorate consciously and collaboratively developed as a learning organisation.....

A fairly early and obvious conclusion was that this objective would prove to be a real challenge. Whilst it was obvious at the outset that becoming a Learning Organisation would be a "journey not a destination" the true scale or impact of the objective did not become apparent until the effort was underway. The collaboration from the staff was actually forthcoming as a result of the Directorate away days and discussions about what we should actually try to achieve.

The LO concepts had a very positive reception from the staff and reflected many of the values the staff wished to work by. However, in analysing the difficulties encountered, a whole series of questions was posed - were the issues emerging the result of my management style, the approach I had adopted to try to achieve the objective or of a wider organisational culture impact? Were the difficulties intrinsic to the organisation and if so why was the SWRO response different to what one might have expected from the literature – or was it indeed different?

As stated above, the LO concepts are very much value laden and provide a great deal of intuitive attraction. If one assumes a social model (after Cohen, 1968) that fundamentally espouses commitment, cohesion, solidarity, consensus, reciprocity, co-operation, integration, stability and persistence, then adopting the LO principles becomes obvious and possibly the natural state to pursue. However, this social model of values and behaviours is not always apparent within the culture of individual organisations and there is considerable attraction in the Burrell and Morgan (1979) contention that underlying social and organisational models should not assume such a positive model of social and organisational behaviour, but can manifest through a number of other presentations.

What emerged from the research was an interpretation and understanding of the Directorate and a second picture of the SWRO as a whole which did exhibit different attributes. Whilst it was always clear that “could do better” was one conclusion on the attempt to instil LO principles into the organisation, there did seem to be inherent and significant organisational obstacles. Extended discussions with the Directorate staff and critical friends suggested that they were comfortable with the management style and approach adopted. Hence, the initial thoughts led to *Interim Conclusion 9* - that there could be some intrinsic differences in the SWRO context from those largely private sector environments represented in the literature.

The validity of these initial conclusions was supported by past personal experience, by some of the public sector based literature and from data collection/observation within wider parts of the department and NHS. Feedback was sought through the validation routes set up within the research to try to establish whether the issues encountered were likely to be generic (and if so what extent the lessons could be applied). The move to a national role and the nature of the projects led in that role enabled a comparative review of limited extent within the DH and two of its agencies to explore the issues further.

There was a reasonable but real progress demonstrated with the introduction of LO principles into the Directorate’s ways of working. But the hurdles encountered and analysis of the barriers to progress, too, presented a research catalyst and opportunities. At a very practical level, the following conclusions could be drawn:

- the sheer effort of moving an already well educated, fairly receptive and reasonably cohesive group of staff in the Department down this route was enormous;

- as the understanding of the “why?” and “how?” increased for the staff involved, the more self-generated the efforts of the staff became. The greater motivation became evident through the one-to-one sessions, individual appraisals and the away-day discussion sessions. One of the early decisions was to provide the staff with as much knowledge as possible for this reason and this proved to be of critical impact in that it allowed them to take ownership of much of the process and become genuine “partners” in the adventure;
- the small number of staff (25) involved in the Directorate was both a positive and negative. It was easier to be inclusive and to achieve understanding through personal contact, but the effects of restructuring and staff changes proved that much more disruptive, especially in the context of the organisational instability during the period. This instability and the shorter time scales of relative interim stability is an intrinsic difficulty of achieving lasting change and embedding it in organisational culture in today’s environment - this is dealt with in Chapter 7;
- the interfaces with the rest of the organisation (SWRO and DH) were always a problem - this was also found to be a critical issue on a larger scale during the review of the NHS Estates Agency.

Reviews will be undertaken to compare, between my own Directorate and others in the RO.....

The process of comparison, too, was not as easy as at first envisaged. Within my own Directorate, the collection of data of all sorts could be integrated with the management processes and interaction with staff. On a wider scale, the collection was far more difficult, partly because there were there other Directors / line managers to consider who were sympathetic to the process but knew relatively little of the detail and the data collection was not integrated in the same way into normal working. However, the nature of the feedback from the staff outside the Directorate could intrinsically only be very different from the internal feedback because of the difference in theoretical base that they brought to their organisational interpretation. This difference was due to the understanding my Directorate staff developed in the approach and concepts i.e. the wider staff did not understand the background to the questions posed in the same way as my staff. This was clearly going to result for most in a difference in language or description if not in underlying values. Finally, the more positive feedback received from the Directorate staff was probably in part due to a “Hawthorn effect”, i.e. my staff were getting more attention and proactive development but the others were being left to fend for themselves and not given attention to the same extent.

In the event, this comparative work relied more on the “more objective” tools within the methodology – the staff attitudinal questionnaires (SAQs) in particular, together with the documents and reviews which gathered information and took a view right across the SWRO. Examples would be the papers produced as a result of the IiP and RAP initiatives within the SWRO, commissioned research on other ROs – and on a wider basis the workshops and surveys done throughout the wider Department. Whilst the methods of data collection and analysis varied significantly, there were some common themes upon which this research was able to draw.

Because much of the quantitative data collection was initially drawn quite widely in terms of scope of the questionnaires developed, the SAQs were able to cope with and provide identification of some of the emerging themes in rather a fortunate way. However, since it was also initially intended solely to support a qualitative treatment, the potential statistical sampling benefits were not fully considered or set in place – so that only simple conclusions and a relatively unsophisticated quantitative treatment was possible. In the event, the fact that some issues did emerge from the trend analysis possible was a bonus as it was unanticipated.

.....*effectiveness of staff development (as seen by the staff)*.....

The way in which this specific aspect of the research was introduced and framed was misguided in terms of the research aims, at least in terms of the approach and context. The framing demonstrated a research naivety at the start – indeed both parts of the statement were full of pitfalls that could not be easily overcome. The core difficulty was accommodated in the development of the research methodology by recognising the dynamic learning (spirals) that would occur, but the full implications of the development of the staff understanding in terms of their interpretation and expectations were not recognised. The Directorate staff would clearly be learning through the process of introduction of LO principles (also the theoretical learning that supported this) and their development would lead to a shift in frames of interpretation and expectations. As noted above, the wider SWRO staff would not be experiencing the same general direction of “shift”, but would presumably also have changing frames of interpretation for all sorts of other reasons. The comparative exercise would not be possible as framed.

The original intention had been to address the issues of staff awareness and personal development through a reflective approach – and to approach this through a self/group assessment split between the Directorate staff and wider SWRO staff, possibly with some mixed groups. Even though a robust comparative exercise was not undertaken in the way envisaged, a number of issues became apparent in fairly short order:

- the underlying assumption that development of awareness is positive and leads to personal development within the organisation did not seem so obvious after the initial sets of questionnaire responses were analysed. There is also an impact of increased expectations which need to be fulfilled at the higher level to avoid disappointment;
- the impact of starting to understand what one does not understand, with an impact on the assessment made of how well one’s development is working – this was largely about expanding staff horizons and expectations – became more of a problem than anticipated, even across internal boundaries of the RO;
- the lack of definition of what comprised “development” or “effective” continued to be a difficulty throughout, leading back to the appropriateness (or not) of the defined competencies for the DH and their cultural congruence (or not) with the target Directorate model of working - and hence the commonality of valued competencies;

- the potential clash between Departmental PDP objectives and training based philosophy and the routes proposed for staff and organisational development within the Directorate.

This task of comparing outcomes was clearly not possible – the different staff frameworks of reference made the self assessment processes introduced for the staff intrinsically non-comparable.

..... and staff perceptions of the organisation as it develops - both RO and DH.

The exploration of staff perceptions was achieved through the SAQs, away day discussions, one-to-ones, formal appraisal and critical friend feedback – also a great deal of informal discussion with Director colleagues. In exploring this area, comparative work was not only possible but illuminating. Here it was exactly the changing staff perceptions (or potentially the differential rate and/or nature of change of staff perceptions) that made the comparisons interesting. These were explored for both research and management purposes – the boundaries between the two purposes and the activity that supported them became blurred (see *Interim Conclusion 7*). It was quite clear through the processes noted above that the staff were pleased to provide this feedback, even if part of the research, to someone in management who was prepared to listen and genuinely interested in what was said. Within the Directorate the process became that much more valued as we changed our internal procedures and working practices to accommodate the feedback provided.

The RET deliberations on the development and direction of change of the SWRO are noted in Chapter 6, but it was very evident through the above feedback that staff had at least as clear a view of the SWRO shortcomings and changes actually occurring on the ground. In many ways, there appeared to be a greater reluctance within the RET to address the issues emerging (see *Interim Conclusion 8*) and there seemed to be a “gap” in interpretation between the RET and the staff, perhaps the result of the different perspective or a greater disengagement.

The way in which my management practices develop during this time.....

Monitoring my own management practices and changes in approach worked reasonably well and more or less as anticipated in terms of a review process. There was no initial anticipation of direction of change as this was a journey into the unknown. The cycles of feedback, external triangulation and intentional experimentation with some of the findings that emerged were effective. One of the noticeable developments as I progressed was far more readiness to experiment in terms of approach – personal style alteration and to enter situations I might previously have avoided and to experiment and see how they worked out. I paid far more attention to the issues of communication that were summarised in *Interim Conclusions 4,5, and 6*. The way in which these emerged from the staff was far more cogent and focusing in its effect than the training courses I had actually attended during the years, largely I believe because it became personal and grounded in my own experience in terms of practical effect. The impact on staff perceptions and “reality” of the changes are dealt with in Chapter 5.

..... and the way in which staff adapt, with a changing view of their own roles and the RO / DH.....

A great deal of staff feedback did emerge, often through the appraisal processes or one-to-one meetings. To an extent, the impacts were both unforeseen and, in a short term organisational context, unfortunate. As staff explored the management concepts and the internal workings of the Directorate became more open, responsibility was devolved and a high degree of autonomy achieved – with support there when needed to enable and provide previous experience. The scheme of devolution that developed fitted in well with my own style and with the predominantly professional background of the staff. I was also perfectly happy and supportive in discussing career options and longer term development – often encompassing a move out of the organisation at a future date to fulfil personal development aims and ambition. As the staff moved through restructuring, the contrast in style between that emerging in the Directorate and the approach of the other directors proved to be unsettling and several have since moved on into similar roles in other organisations (some to other ROs and others back into the NHS).

.....will be reviewed as an integral part of these projects.

The collection and analysis of staff and external feedback was a focus of much of the detailed data collection and work. The only observation I would make at this final stage is that the objective was more easily stated than undertaken. On balance, much of the research effort was broadly in line with the initial intentions, although there was little original preconception about how this would work out.

The way in which my management practices interacted with the perceptions of my staff made the 'review' complex. The issue of subjective perception and the impact of interpretative filters applied to feedback of all sorts – in analysing written data, in directing and interpreting verbal feedback received in the formal interviews and informal discussions was always to the fore – as dealt with in the methodology and methods set out in Chapter 3. A great deal of emphasis was placed on verification – working through different routes into the same data or perceptions. The role of some of my staff and the critical friends in reviewing and shaping much of what was written was also crucial in validating the data interpretation and conclusions drawn.

Personal and organisational changes

What do Chapters 5 and 6 and the data analysed say about the changes encountered and the initial research aims? In assessing the outcome, it is difficult to demonstrate conclusively the differences between staff groups because the Directorate moved only part way down the road towards the Learning Organisation ideals and there were significant comparability problems as discussed above. However, in terms of working relationships and perceptions – also handling of the NHS customers – there did seem to be a difference emerging in the comparative effectiveness of staff groups. Though this was difficult to measure it seemed to be grounded in working style, but differential measurements of effectiveness or performance proved impossible in an organisation where definitions of role, purpose and measurement were proving so difficult.

Does it matter that the research was inconclusive in respect of staff group comparability? Probably not. The issues that emerged indicated a number of topics for consideration for future studies (see later). They also raised a number of deeper questions about the relevance and applicability of the Learning Organisation concepts to Central Government and perhaps, to a lesser extent, other areas of the public sector. These are discussed at length in Chapter 7 and are research findings that do potentially impact on the theoretical base. The process itself also provided a huge personal learning opportunity in terms of practice, research methodology, methods and the analysis of social / organisational structures. Intrinsicly, these are personal gains rather than contributions to knowledge in the wider sense but again provided material for interpretation in a general way, especially in terms of the dynamic research model needed for an participatory action based research method in a real management setting.

The personal dimension

My management practice, in particular in terms of style, has changed and perceptibly so – specifically in ways identified in Chapter 5. Indeed, some of the ways in which this happened were not obvious to me before analysing some of the feedback and using this as a basis for further discussions with and feedback from the staff. Does this matter? Insofar as this has been set out as a process and as an account acceptable to those who can form a view on this, then yes it does. Whilst this is, clearly, a personal account, with elements which might be said to be subjective and individual, Chapter 7 brings out some strands which can be extended by others and develops a methodology that might be used effectively as a route into management learning. Because of the subjective nature of the learning and, particularly perhaps, the mental models developed, the material set out provides an illustration and template rather than a specific set of instructions. Here lies a paradox.

One of the starting points for this research was the importance of experiential learning, reflection and individual development in an increasingly complex and fast changing environment. Schon's premise originally was "beware the experts", and increasingly there is a reaction in management literature to "faddism" and packaged solutions. The exhortation has thus to be: take the results from this and tailor it to individual circumstances. However, there do appear to be a number of underpinning principles – amply covered in different research traditions or strands – that need to be accommodated in any such approach. They certainly seemed to be key within my approach and the personal model developed and this seemed to be borne out through staff feedback.

In the same way that the Learning Organisation concepts pulled together and principles that underlie them represent a critical core (rather than the "cook-books" of how to get there) the underlying approach to personal development would appear to be fairly general. In a parallel with Pedler (1998, p55):

"The learning organisation is but the latest in a long list of ideas and visions which have promised better futures for people in organisations. As a child of several of these, why should the learning organisation be any different? Unlike many packaged ideas the learning organisation has to be realised from within, based on the aims and aspirations of the people concerned."

The internalised approach advocated is certainly not the organisation driven view of many other commentators but it does encapsulate the fact that this is not a “one size suits all” or a “prescription for change”. The Chapter 7 approach developed is more about the basics that each individual has to tailor to his or her own personality, character, past experience and learning style. The details are indicative and the research documented provides a practical record of what has worked for me personally, but the principles should be common and the fundamentals discussed with staff in terms of their own experience and findings – and found to be common. In keeping with this finding, there are some principles which can be generally adopted. However, there are others whose general applicability across different boundaries, for example US to UK cultural contexts and reflected organisational values; private to public sector organisational cultures, need to be questioned to ensure that they remain valid and useful.

This crystallisation of what is working for me in practice, together with the theoretical framework now used on a daily basis really is an example of the Greek idea of practical knowledge. In Chapter 7 this is stressed in terms of grounding the management framework in personal experiences and developing a way of working that incorporates these – a real congruence of personal values, experiences and actions. One can develop working practices that sit comfortably in self without conflict. Perhaps this is an example, in a management context, of the concepts Whitehead (1989) introduced for educational purposes (see Chapter 2).

What is the contribution to knowledge of the research undertaken

The four key contributions to knowledge provided in this thesis are as follows.

- **An enhanced understanding of the difficulties of applying learning organisation concepts developed largely in a private sector setting, also largely in the US, to the public sector in the UK.**

The Chapter 7 conclusion is that although the concepts provide a valuable base they are not wholly and directly applicable. However, by adapting the approach and better understanding the difficulties, it should be possible to pursue the same ultimate objectives. An analysis of the key differences between the public and private sectors was developed to provide a basis for the development of an approach for introducing LO principles into public sector organisations. The work undertaken in the SWRO and DH was used to provide further insight into the difficulties faced and resources needed to ensure that this process could be successful. Effective leadership was identified as a critical aspect (see also *Interim Conclusion 3*).

- **The development of a methodology for enabling management learning for working practitioners.**

Chapter 7 stresses five aspects that need specific attention:

- the recognition of the critical need for motivation and emotional engagement in the learning process;
- the development of a personal model or conceptual framework of *management* behaviour or practice that is congruent with one's own values for evaluating further experience and continual learning;
- the importance of the development of personal models of *organisation* behaviour within which to ground existing management experience;
- the importance of achieving a balance between experiential learning, programmed theoretical learning and reflection;
- the development of self-awareness – especially in terms of others' perceptions and the impact of this on management actions and working relationships.

The value of a reflective approach within a management learning process was endorsed, together with the general motivation and staff enthusiasm for adopting such an approach (see also *Interim Conclusions 1,2*).

- **The development of a research methodology for the specific circumstances of research in a work setting by a management practitioner**

The further development of the research cycling model to recognise the interactive and dynamic relationship between the researcher with the researched in a Participative Action Research study, together with the cyclical validation model needed to ensure robustness of interpretation and conclusions in such a research approach.

- **The production of a case study and enhanced understanding of the management development of a practitioner in the public sector**

The entire research cycle was based within the work setting and provides a summary of the framework of understanding developed, together with the contextual environment in which the learning occurred. If the case study takes the debate forward at all then this has been worthwhile externally – as the individual primarily involved, the value to me has already been significant in terms of personal development.

The argument that such knowledge can *only* be developed as a 'living awareness', paraphrasing some of the work of Whitehead (1989) and Reason & Torbert (1999), appears to me to be inconclusive. However, linking this with the Glaser and Strauss (1967) concepts to arrive at a set of ideas which can be shared through personal grounding seems attractive.

The conclusion is, therefore, that although the original research aims were only partially achieved, the process of introduction of LO principles provided a great deal of data both to prompt a further interrogation of some of the original assumptions and the opportunity to explore and reflect upon the emerging findings. The resulting work provides some potential approaches for development in both the individual and organisational contexts.

The PAR process itself, together with the very close interface needed with working objectives for the research to be organisationally acceptable, means that a rigid adherence to initial research aims is probably not possible in such a research project. This is especially so since the PAR process involves an element of release of control – as indeed does the development of an organisation as a Learning Organisation.

What is there to be learned from the course of the research?

A number of positive issues emerged.

- There were a number of very positive personal outcomes: I learned a great deal; developed the outline of the personal framework that I had hoped for before starting out on this journey; changed some of my management practice in a positive way and became far more aware of my own impact on and of the environment with which I was interacting.
- The initial premise in terms of Learning Organisation concepts providing benefits appeared justified, but within the context of this research proved extremely difficult to measure and therefore remained inconclusive here in respect of 'hard' proof. There was evidence, however, in terms of improved staff development, better team work, more flexible and creative working, more open relationships and the specific development of individual staff, which all contributed to improvements in the Directorate.
- The problems that did arise provided in themselves a learning opportunity to explore further the basic concepts and to develop some real contributions to knowledge.
- The basic approach to the research worked well, although not directly drawn from any single methodology in Action Research documented to date. The synthesis developed from a number of approaches that varied in detail and emphasis. The overall strategy seemed to work reasonably and to be robust.
- The critical friends proved more pro-active and valuable than I could have foreseen, not merely in terms of validation and interpretation, but also in terms of encouragement. Access to their own research efforts and opportunities for joint working were real bonuses.

There were a number of less positive findings in terms of the original objectives that explain the limited progress made in terms of the introduction of LO principles. Nevertheless, these turned out to be sources of information or learning:

- The idea of direct comparability across staff groups within the RO was not as workable as initially anticipated, although some of the tools such as the Staff Attitudinal Questionnaire, SOLVED model, RO/NHS Executive documents and critical friends' input did provide data for comparison. The initial research approach had already highlighted the complexity of change factors and the uniqueness of any group situation. There were certainly no control group possibilities in this sort of dynamic change environment. However, the reality as opposed to the purely theoretical brought out all the practical difficulties involved.
- The RET remained dysfunctional throughout and this, together with the frequent internal organisation restructuring, resulted in a volatile and unstable environment within which to undertake the development work. This was not unpredictable, but provided an example of the impact of instability in the work environment where it is an increasingly common phenomenon.
- The continuing changes within the DH, NHS and political policies resulted in a volatile and stressed environment: this may well be representative of the wider environment, but frequently meant fighting on too many fronts at the same time. Any research process or approach has to be capable of working in such an environment and not just a more stable or controlled context.
- The staff turnover in the Directorate, for various reasons, meant that the resource input needed was greater than expected and hence greater time pressures were encountered – again a set of practical constraints and pressures which any research approach would have to tolerate.
- My own departure into a national role left the Directorate to be split into two (in three locations within the SWRO), so that after the end of March 2000, there was little further comparison possible – a real indication of limitations placed on the development of management research by practitioners.

A number of general points may be extracted from the above positive features and research difficulties encountered in terms of the research itself.

- A research methodology and set of practical methods that positively embrace and anticipate change and opportunistic actions, as opposed to merely tolerating them, is highly desirable. The nature of the changing environment and dynamic organisations now in evidence mean that long term planning, whether corporate strategy or research approach, is unlikely to be fully effective. Indeed, using the Mintzberg (1994) “emergent strategy” model as a comparison, using and expecting an evolutionary formation of action within a directional frame is important.

- Virtually every planned and unplanned event or personal interaction provided a learning opportunity: this is fascinating from a personal perspective, but difficult to record and interpret from a research perspective. The adoption of this as a practical approach opens up the learning cycle and makes the acceptance of controlled risk taking and exploration both enjoyable and profitable in terms of personal development.
- Flexibility of approach and action is critical to ensure that any similar management research can be carried out through a three to four year period. Of the 14 who started in our learning set/research cohort only 5 remain and only two remain in their original posts with the same employers.

What further development and work could be undertaken?

There is a great deal to explore in terms of the public sector and learning organisations issues highlighted, if the lessons postulated in Chapter 7 are to be taken forward. Indeed, there were far more questions raised through the course of the research than were either considered initially or answered – perhaps that is in itself part of the learning: understanding better the other questions posed or not yet posed.

1. What validity and benefits do the Learning Organisation concepts have in the public sector and how should the benefits be measured? How should they then be pursued? A wider range of organisations need to be examined and the conclusions drawn in Chapter 7 investigated in greater detail across the range of organisations to explore the validity of my findings and to refine the solution proposed.
2. How do different types of organisation in the public sector vary in this respect? An analysis across a wider range of organisation could be developed, together with further evidence from organisations that appear to have made progress towards the goals, with a greater analysis of the difficulties faced. Such organisation types would include Central Government, Agencies, Non-Departmental Public Bodies, NHS organisations, Local Authorities, Higher Education, Government itself (perhaps calling this an organisation is incorrect).
3. Are there cultural differences between the US and the UK in terms of applicability? The work of Alimo-Metcalf (1998) in the NHS could be extended to other areas and more generalised conclusions drawn in both the public and private sectors. I could find no Learning Organisation examples quoted in the public sector literature for the US and very little (and that not persuasive) in the UK.
4. How far can Learning Organisation concepts be taken within sub-divisions or discrete areas of larger organisations? Further research is indicated to explore this area, although the independence to develop leadership models and assert autonomy of structures and culture may be likely to provide an indication of likely success.

5. To what extent and how can second-tier management collectively compensate for lack of top-level leadership – and can this be done through developing organisational consensus (possibly through developing a LO culture)? It is difficult to propose a strategy for exploring this given that access or setting up such a situation and research effectively would almost certainly involve acknowledgement from the top that there is an issue, itself possibly the first stage in rectification. Intuitively, this must be a common problem and one in which influencing strategies would be really beneficial to develop.
6. Conversely, is a Learning Organisation culture without positive executive leadership possible? An analysis of organisations which have moved down the Learning Organisation path (by whatever name) and the leadership style / inputs involved could shed light on this. If Schein (1992) is right and culture formation / change is basically the domain of leadership and its prime responsibility, then this may in all otherwise be a futile exercise.
7. During the course of the research I moved away from the Directorate becoming a Learning Organisation as a goal. The organisational objective became that of introduction of “LO concepts”, which represented a recognition that it was the underlying principles that were important rather than the specific images developed in many of the management texts. Research could usefully be undertaken to pull together the different strands of literature more completely to identify and consolidate similar concepts or constructs from different academic strands / persuasions to provide a richer, better justified and cross referenced set of underpinning research.
8. The amalgamation of the Management Learning Methodology with the research approaches developed need further trialling and refinement to provide a better justified generalisable approach. Whilst they worked for me and different aspects received the support and endorsement of a number of my staff, further work is needed.
9. The development and collection of a number and range of individual management learning experiences as case studies would be helpful in identifying common concerns, constraints, issues and opportunities.

Bibliography

- Acheson, Sir D. (1998), **Report of the Independent Enquiry into Inequalities in Health**, London, The Stationery Office
- Adair, J. (1983), **Effective Leadership: How to Develop Leadership Skills**, London, Gower
- Adair, J. (1999), **Leadership, Management Skills and Development**, May 1999
- Adams, S. (1996), **The Dilbert Principle**, New York, Harper Collins
- Adelman, C. (1993) "Kurt Lewin and the Origins of Action Research", **Educational Action Research**, V1,1,7-24
- Alimo-Metcalfe, B. (1998), **Effective Leadership**, London, Local Government Management Board, (MS0219)
- Allen, E. E. & Allen, S.D. (1998), **Winnie-the-Pooh on Success**, London, Methuen
- Amabile, T. M. (1998), "How to Kill Creativity", **Harvard Business Review**, Sep-Oct, 77-87
- Anderson, J. R. (1985), **Cognitive Psychology and its Implications**, (2nd Edn), New York, Social Science Research Council
- Appleby, J. (1998), "Performance Framework", **Health Service Journal**, 5 February 1998
- Argyris, C. (1977) "Double-loop learning in organisations", **Harvard Business Review**, Sep-Oct, 115-125
- Argyris, C. (1985), **Strategy, Change and Defensive Routines**, London, Pitman
- Argyris, C. (1990), **Overcoming Organisational Defences: Facilitating Organisational Learning**, Boston, Allyn and Bacon
- Argyris, C. (1991), "Teaching smart people how to learn", **Harvard Business Review**, May-Jun, 99-109
- Argyris, C. (1994) "Good communication that blocks learning", **Harvard Business Review**, Jul-Aug, 77-85
- Argyris, C. (1998), "Empowerment, the Emperor's New Clothes", **HBR**, May-June 1998
- Argyris, C. (2000), **Flawed Advice and the Management Trap**, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Argyris, C., Putnam R. and Smith D. M. (1985), **Action Science**, San Francisco, Jossey Bass
- Argyris, C. and Schon, D. (1974), **Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness**, New York, Jossey-Bass
- Argyris, C., and Schon, D. (1978), **Organisational Learning**, Addison Wesley
- Argyris, C. and Schon, D. 1983, Editorial, **Journal of Management Studies**, 20(1), 3-5
- Armstrong, J. S. (1985), **Long Range Forecasting**, 2nd Ed, New York, Wiley
- Armstrong, J. S. (1990), "Prediction of consumer behaviour by experts and novices", **The Wharton School**, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
- Ashkenas, R. N., DeMonaco, L. J. and Francis, S. C. (1998), Making the Deal Real: How GE Capital Integrates Acquisitions, **Harvard Business Review**, Jan-Feb, 166-178
- Atkins, S. and Murphy, K. (1993), "Reflection: A Review of the Literature", **Journal of Advanced Nursing**, 18, 1188-1192
- Axler, H., Donner, G. J., Underwood, E. and Van de Bogart, L. (1997), "Planning for Complex Change", **Healthcare Management Forum**, V10,2, 33-39
- Ball, A. (1992), **Profitable Learning**, Royal Society of Arts
- Bass, B. M. (1985), **Leadership and performance Beyond Expectations**, New York, Free Press
- Bass, B. M., and Stogdill, R. M. (1993), **Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership**, 3rd edn, New York, Free Press
- Bass, B. M. and Avolio, B.J. (1994), "Transformational Leadership and Organisational Culture", **International Journal of Public Administration**, 17, 3&4, 541-554
- Bateson, G. (1968) "The logical Categories of Learning and Communication" presented to **Conference on World Views**, August 1968
- Baume, J. (1999), "Heads Roll Down the Brain Drain", **Public Service Magazine**, March 1999
- Behrman and Levin, (1984), **Harvard Business Review**, Sep-Oct, (141), 31
- Benner, P. (1984), **From Novice to Expert: Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice**, California, Addison-Wesley
- Bengtsson, J. (1995), "What is Reflection ? On reflection in the teaching profession and teacher", **Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice**, 1,1, pps 23-32
- Best, G. (1997), "Smith's Crisps Thinking", **Health services Journal**, 2nd Jan 1997
- Black, D. (1982), **The Black Report – Inequalities in Health**, London, Penguin
- Bohr, N. (1928), "Atomic Theory and the Description of Nature", **Phys. Rev.** 48 6696 (1935)

- Boud, D., Keogh, R. and Walker, K. (1985), **Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning**, London, Kogan Page,
- Boyd, E. M. and Fales, A..W. (1983), "Reflective Learning: the key to learning from experience", **Journal of Humanistic Psychology**, V23,2,99-117
- Boyett J., and Boyett J. (1998), **The Guru Guide**, New York, Wiley
- Brown, J. S. (1991), "Research that Reinvents the Company", **Harvard Business Review**, Jan-Feb,102-111
- Bruner, J. S. (1966), **Essays for the Left Hand**, New York, Athenaeum
- Bryan, S. (1993), "A Hitchhiker's Guide to the History of the NHSME", NHS Executive (unpub).
- Bryman, A. (1988) **Quantity and Quality in Social Research**, London, Routledge
- Bryson, J.M. (1995), **Strategic Planning for Public and Non-profit Organisations**, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass
- Burgoyne, J. and Hodgson, V. E. (1983), "Natural learning and management action: a Phenomenological study in the field setting", **Journal of Management Studies**, 20,3,387-9
- Burnard, P. (1989), "Developing critical ability in nurse education", **Nurse Education Today**, V9, 271-275
- Burrell, G. & Morgan, G. (1979), **Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis**, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing
- Butt, R. L. (1990), "Autobiographical Praxis and Self-education: From Alienation to Authenticity", **Legacy of Romanticism**, Wilfred Lorne Press, 257-286
- Cabinet Office, Office of Public services, (1998), **QUANGOs: Opening the Doors**, London, Cabinet Office
- Cabinet Office SCS Group, (1998), **Training and Development in the SCS: "A Route Map"**, London, Cabinet Office
- Caines, K. (1998), "NHS Management", in **NHS Handbook 1997/98**, London, National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts
- Campbell, A. (1999), Tailored, Not Benchmarked: A Fresh Look at Corporate Planning", **HBR**, March-April 1999
- Campbell-Evans, G. (1993), "A Values Perspective on Schools Based Management", in Dimmock, C ed. (1993), **School-Based Management and School Effectiveness**, London, Routledge pps 99-101
- Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986), **Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research**, Lewes, Falmer Press
- Carter, R. (1998), **Mapping the Mind**, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson
- Caulkin, S.(1997), "Hospitals and Healthcare", **The Observer**, 6th Jul 1997
- Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, (1997), **Your Right to Know: The Governments proposals for a Freedom of Information Act**, London, The Stationery Office
- Choo, C.W. (1998), "The Knowing Organisation: How Organisations Use Information to Construct Meaning, Create Knowledge and Make Decisions", Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Clandinin D. J. and Connelly, F. M. (1990), "Series of Experience and narrative Inquiry", **Educational researcher**, 19(5) p 2-14
- Clandinin D. J. and Connelly, F. M. (1991), "Narrative and story in practice and research", in Schon , D. (ed.), **The Reflective Turn: Case studies of reflective practice**, New York, Teachers College Press
- Clarke, B., James, C. and Kelly, J. (1996), "Reflective Practice: reviewing the issues and refocusing the debate", **International Journal of Nursing Studies**, V33,2,171-180
- Claxton, G. (1992), **Live and Learn: An Introduction to the Psychology of Growth and Change in Everyday Life**, Milton Keynes, OUP
- Clutterbuck, D. (1999), "Learning Team", **Management Skills and Development**, Feb-Mar 1999
- Coffey, A. & Atkinson, P. (1996), **Making Sense of Qualitative Data**, London, Sage
- Cohen, P. S. (1968), **Modern Social Theory**, London, Heinemann
- Cohen, L.& Mannon, L. (1994), **Research Methods in Education**, London, Routledge (Ch13)
- Cockerill, R. and Barnsley, J. (1997), "Innovation Theory and its Applicability to our Understanding of the Diffusion of New Management Practices in Health care Organisations", **Healthcare Management Forum**, V10,1,35-38
- Conger, J. (1998), "The Necessary Art of Persuasion", **HBR**, May-June 1998, 85-95
- Connelly, F. M. and Clandinin, D. J. (1990), "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry", **Educational Researcher**, V19,5,2-14
- Connolly, M. (1999), "Managing Changing", **Inaugural Lecture**, UoG
- Connolly, M., Connolly, U. & James, C. (1999), "Leadership in Educational Change", UoG, (unpub)
- Cook, J. A., Staniforth, D. and Stewart, J. (1997), **The Learning Organisation in the Public Services**, Aldershot, Gower

- Cooke, R. A., Rousseau D. M. (1983), "The factor structure of Level 1: Life Styles Inventory", **Educational and Psychological Measurement**, 43, 449-457
- Cooke, R. A., Rousseau D. M. (1983), "Relationship of Life Events to Symptoms of Strain", **Journal of Applied Psychology**, 68(3), 446-458
- Cooke, R. A., Lafferty, J.C. and Rousseau, D. M. (1987), "Thinking and Behavioural Styles: Consistency between Self-Descriptions and Descriptions of Others", **Educational and Psychological Development**, 815-823
- Coopey, J. (1996), "Crucial Gaps in the Learning Organisation: Power, Politics and Ideology", in Starkey, K. (ed), (1996), **How Organisations Learn** (op. cit.)
- Cooper, C. (1999), "The workforce Contract", **Professional Manager**, September, 1999, P 39-40
- Cooper, C., Garner, A. and Altman, W. (2000), **Future Work**, London, Orion
- Coote, A. and Hunter, D. (1996), **New Agenda for Health**, London, Institute for Public Policy Research
- Critchley, B (1993), "Organisational Culture – Is it Just an Illusion", **Leadership and Organisational Development Journal**, V13,1,8
- Critchley, B. and Casey, D. (1996), "Second Thoughts on Teambuilding", in Starkey, K., **How Organisations Learn**, op cit, pps 335-347
- Cunningham, J.B. (1993), **Action Research and Organisational Development**, Westport CT, Praeger
- Dawes, R. M., Faust, D. and Meehl, P. E. (1989), "Clinical versus actuarial judgement", **Science**, 243, 1668-74
- Dawson, I. (1994), **Organisational Change: A Process and Approach**, London, PCP
- Dawson, S. (1992), **Managing Change: Analysing Organisations**, London, MacMillan
- Dawson, S. and Dargie, C. (1999), "New Public Management: An assessment and Evaluation with Special reference to UK Health", **Public Management**, 1,4 460-487
- Day, C. (1993), "Reflection: a necessary but not sufficient condition for professional development", **British Educational Research Journal** 19, 1 (pp83-93)
- De Geus, A. P. (1988), "Planning as learning", **Harvard Business Review**, Mar-Apr, 70-74
- Denton, J. (1998), **Organisational Learning and Effectiveness**, Routledge, London
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., (eds), (1994), **Handbook of Qualitative Research**, Sage, London
- Descartes, R. (1637), **Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting The Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences** (trans. Veitch, J.,(1974), *The Rationalists*, New York, Anchor)
- Dewey, J. (1933) **How we think**, Boston, D C Heath
- Dewey, J. (1938), **Experience and Education. The Kappa Delta Pi lecture series**, New York, Collier
- Dickens, L. and Watkins, K. (1999), "Action Research: Rethinking Lewin", **Management Learning**, 30(2), 127-140
- Dixon, N. M. (2000), **Common Knowledge: How Companies Thrive by Sharing What They Know**, Boston, Harvard Business School Press
- DoH, (1988), **Caring for People**, London, HMSO
- DoH,(1989a), **DoH Working Paper No.6**, London, HMSO
- DoH, (1989b), **Promoting Better Health**, Cm 5547, London, HMSO
- DoH, (1989c), **Working for Patients**, Cm 5555, London, HMSO
- DoH, (1990), **NHS & Community care Act**, London, HMSO
- DoH, (1991), **The Patients Charter**, London, HMSO
- DoH, (1995a), **The Patients Charter**, London, HMSO
- DoH, (1995b), **Health Authorities Act**, London, HMSO
- DoH, (1996a), **Primary Care Act**, London, HMSO
- DoH, (1996b), **A Service With Ambitions**, London, HMSO
- DoH, (1997a), **The New NHS: Modern, Dependable**, Cm 3807, London, The Stationery Office
- DoH, (1997b), **Priority Setting in the NHS – A Discussion Document**, London, The Stationery Office
- DoH, (1998a), **Our Healthier Nation: A Contract for Health**, Cm 3852, London, The Stationery Office
- DoH, (1998b), **Smoking Kills: A White Paper on Tobacco**, Cm 4177, London, The Stationery Office
- DoH, (1998c), **Modernising Social Services: promoting independence, improving protection, raising standards**, Cm4169, London, The Stationery Office
- DoH, (1998d), **Information for Health**, London, The Stationery Office
- DoH, (1998e), **A First Class Quality Service: Quality and the New NHS**, London, The Stationery Office
- DoH, (1998f), **Working Together, Securing a Quality Workforce for the NHS**, London, The Stationery Office
- DoH, (1998g), **Modernising Mental Health Services: Safe, Sound and Supportive**, London, The Stationery Office

- DoH, (1998h), **Caring about Carers: A National Strategy for Carers**, London, The Stationery Office
- DoH, (1998i), **Countering Fraud in the NHS**, London, The Stationery Office
- DoH, (1998j), **The Path of Least Resistance**, London, DH
- DoH, (1999a), **Health Bill**, (House of Lords Bills 1998/99), London, The Stationery Office
- DoH, (2000), **The NHS Plan**, London, The Stationery Office
- DSS, (1998), **Building a Better Britain for Older People**, London, The Stationery Office
- Dreyfus, S.E. (1982), "Formal Models vs Human Situational Understanding", **Office: Technology and People**, 1,133-155
- Dreyfus, S.E. and Dreyfus H.L. (1980), **A Five Stage Model of the Mental Activities Involved in Directed Skill Acquisition**, Berkley, University of California
- Drucker, P. (1974), **Management: Tasks, responsibilities, practices**, London, Heinemann
- Drucker, P. (1992a), **The New Productivity Challenge: Managing for the Future**, London, Butterworth Heinemann,
- Drucker, P. (1992b), "The New Society of Organisations", **Harvard Business Review**, Sep/Oct 1992
- Drucker, P. (1993), **The Post-Capitalist Society**, New York, Harper Business
- Drucker, P. (1999), "Managing Oneself", **HBR**, March-April 1999
- Easterby-Smith, M. (1990), "Creating a Learning Organisation", **Personnel Review**, 19,24-28
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R and Lowe, A. (1991), **Management Research: An Introduction**, London, Sage
- Ebbutt, D. (1983), "Educational Action Research: Some general Concerns and Specific Quibbles", (mimeo) **Cambridge Institute of Education**.
- Eden, C. & Huxham, C. (1995), "Action research for the Study of Organisations", in Clegg, S., Hardy, C. & Nord, W., (eds) **Handbook of Organisation Studies**, Beverly Hills, Sage
- Editorial, (1997), "Rational Healthcare Decisions", **The Economist**, 17th May 1997
- Editorial, (1998), "Indicators and League Tables", **Health Service Journal**, 29 January 1998
- Edwards, R. (1997), **NHS Waiting Lists: Towards the Elusive Solution**, London, Office of Health Economics
- Eisenhardt K.M., Kahwajy, J.L. and Bourgeois III, L.J. (1998), "How Management Teams Can Have a Good Fight", **HBR**, Sep-Oct 1998
- Ekpenyong, L.E. (1990), "Studying Adult learning Through the History of Knowledge", **International Journal of Lifelong Education**, 9(3)
- Ekvall, G. (1991), "Change Centred leaders: Empirical Evidence of a Third Dimension of leadership", **LODJ** 12(6)
- Elliot, J. (1981), "Action Research: Framework for Self-evaluation in Schools, TIQL working paper no.1", (mimeo) **Cambridge Institute of Education**.
- Elliot, J. (1989), "Educational Theory and the Professional learning of Teachers", **Cambridge Journal of Education**, 19(1)
- Eraut, M. (1985), "Knowledge Creation and Knowledge Use in Professional Contexts", **Studies in Higher Education**, 10, 2, pps 117-133
- Exley, M. (1999), "First Class Coach", **Management Today**, Sept 1999
- Fayol, F. (1916), "General Principles of Management", in Pugh, D.S., **Organisation Theory**, Op. Cit.
- Flannagan, H. and Spurgeon, P (1996), "**Public Sector managerial Effectiveness: Theory and Practice in the NHS**", Buckingham, Open University Press
- Flavell J (1963) **The developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget**, New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold
- Flower, J (1996a), "The root ideas in Dealing with Change", **The Physician Executive**, October, 41-44
- Flower, J (1996b), "More Skills of The Change Master", **The Physician Executive**, December, 36-41
- Flynn, N. & Strehl, F. (1996), **Public Management in Europe**, Hemel Hempstead, Simon & Schuster
- Franchini, N. (1999), "Why Stories", **Professional Manager**, Sep 1999
- Freud, S. (1921), **Group Psychology and the analysis of the Ego**, London, Hogarth (1967 edn)
- Garratt, R. (1987), **The Learning Organisation and the Need for Directors who Think**, London, Fontana
- Garratt, R. (1990) **Creating a Learning Organisation: A Guide to Leadership, Learning and Development**, Cambridge, Director Books
- Garvin, D. A. (1993), "Building a Learning Organisation", **Harvard Business Review**, Jul-Aug, 78-91
- Gill, J. & Whittle, S. (1992), "Management by Panacea", **Journal of Management Studies**, 30,2, (pps281-295)
- Gladstone, D. & Goldsmith, M. (1995), "Health Care Reform in the UK: Working for Patients?", in Seedhouse, J. (ed), **Reforming Healthcare: The Philosophy and Practice of Health Reform**, Chichester, John Wiley

- Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research*, New York, Aldine de Gruyter
- Goold, M. and Campbell, A. (1998), "Desperately Seeking Synergy", *HBR*, Sep-Oct 1998
- Green, M. and Gibbons, A. (1991), "Learning Logs for Self Development", *Training and Development*, Feb, 30-32
- Griffiths, Sir R. (1983), *NHS Management Inquiry*, PR 83/30 London, DHSS,
- Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. (1987), "The Countenances of Fourth Generation Evaluation: Description, Judgement and Negotiation", op cit
- Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. (1989), *Fourth Generation Evaluation*, Newbury Park CA, Sage
- Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994), "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research" in Denzin, D.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, op cit.
- Gummesson, E. (2000), *Qualitative Methods in Management Research*, London, Sage
- Gunn, L. (1989), A Public Management Approach to the NHS, *Health Services Management Research*, 2,1
- Hacket, M. and Sprgeon, P. (1996), "Leadership and Vision in the NHS: 'How do we create the vision Thing'?", *Health Manpower Management*, V22,1,5-9
- Hacket, M. and Sprgeon, P. (1998), "Developing our Leaders in the Future", *Health manpower Management*, V24,5,170-177
- Ham, C. (1999), Leading and Shaping: the New Role of Health Authorities, *Health Services Management Newsletter*, 5,1
- Hamblin, R. (1998), "Waiting Lists", *Health Service Journal*, 2 April 1998
- Hamblin, R., Harrison, A. & Boyle, S. (1998), *Access to Elective Care: Why Waiting Lists Grow*, London, King's Fund
- Handy, C. (1990a), *The Age of Unreason*, London, Arrow
- Handy, C. (1990b), *Inside Organisations*, London, BBC Books
- Hardy, C. (1997), "Understanding Power: Bringing About Strategic Change", *British Journal of Management*, V7, Special Issues, S3-S16
- Hare, P. (1999), *Transformational Change*, Abbots Langley, Kaizen Consulting
- Harrison, R.G. (1985), "OD in Central Government: Problems and Prospects", *LODJ*, 6,2
- Harrison, R.T. and Leitch, C. M. (2000), "Learning and Organisation in the Knowledge Based Information Economy: Initial Findings from a PAR Study", *British Academy of Management*, 11,103-119
- Hartley, J., Benington J. and Binns, P. (1997), "Researching the Roles of Internal Change Agents in the Management of Internal Change", *British Journal of Management*, 8, 61-73
- Harvey-Jones, J. (1994), *All Together Now*, London, Heinemann
- Hawkins, P. (1991) "The spiritual dimension of the Learning Organisation", *Management Education and Development*, V22,3,172-187
- Hayes, R. H., Wheelwright, S. C. and Clark, K. B. (1988), *Dynamic Manufacturing: Creating the Learning Organisation*, New York, The Free Press
- Hedlund, D. E., Furst, T. C. and Foley, K. T. (1989), "A dialogue with Self: the Journal as an educational tool", *Journal of Humanistic Education and Development*, V27, 105-112
- Heifetz, R.A. (1994), *Leadership without Easy Answers*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press
- Heifetz, R. A. & Laurie, D. L. (1997), "The Work of Leadership", *HBR*, Jan-Feb 1997
- Heisenberg, W. (1927), *Z. Physik* 43, 172 (trans Schiff, L.I.(1966), *Quantum Mechanics*, London, McGraw Hill)
- Hendry, E. and Caley, L. (2000), *A New Approach to Work-Related Learning*, Cambridge, Cambridge Programme for Industry
- Heron, J. (1996), *Co-operative Inquiry: Research into the Human Condition*, London, Sage
- Heron, J. & Reason, P. (1997) "A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm", *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3,3 pps274-294
- Herzberg, F., Mausner, B. and Snyderman, B. (1959), *The Motivation to Work*, New York, Wiley
- Herzberg, F., (1966), *Work and the Nature of Man*, New York, World Publishing Co.
- Hesseltine, M. (1999), "Public Purse Needs private Values", *Management Today*, April 1999
- Hettich, P. (1976), "The journal: an autobiographical approach to learning", *Teaching of Psychology*, V3,2,60-63
- Hoggett, P. (1992), "Why Being Good Enough is Good Enough", *Papers from the Second Public Service Conference (Association for Management Education and Development)*, pps 30-33
- Holbeche, L. & Hirsh, W. (1999), "Mix and Match", *Management Skills and Development*, Feb – Mar 1999

- HM Treasury, (1995), **Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money: the Government's proposals – Resource Accounting and Budgeting in Government**, London, The Stationery Office
- HSJ Editorial, (1999), "Does the Gentleman in Whitehall really know best?", *HSJ*, Feb 1999
- Holliday, I. (1995), **The NHS Transformed**, Oxford, Baseline Book Company
- House of Lords Select Committee, (1998), **Resistance to Antibiotics and Other Microbial Agents**, HL81,2, London, The Stationery Office
- Honey, P. and Mumford, A. (1992), "Learning and Self Development", **Manual of Learning Styles**, Ch 5, Peter Honey
- Hout, T.M., (1999), "Are Managers Obsolete?", *HBR*, March-April 1999
- Hughes, J. (1990), **The Philosophy of Social Research**, London & New York, Longmans
- Hunter, D. (2000), "Seeking Clarity with Confusion", **Health Service Journal**, 14 Sept 2000, 22-23
- IoM / UMIST, (1998), "Quality of Working Life – 1998", Manchester, UMIST quoted in Cooper, C., Garner, A. & Altman, W., (1999), **Professional Manager**, September, 1999
- Isaac-Henry, K., Painter, C. & Barnes, C. (1997), **Management in the Public Sector: Challenge and Change**, London, International Thompson Business Press
- James, C. (1995), "Developing a Reflective Approach to Life", Presented to Specialist Nurse Conference: **A Guide to Survival in an Evolving NHS**, (unpub)
- James, C. and Calderhead, J. (1993), **The contribution of journal writing to student teachers' professional learning**, Bath, School of Education, University of Bath
- James, C., Jones, N. and Thomas, P. (1997), "The guided doctorate in organisational leadership and change: the programme, the underpinning principles and early experience of practice", **Paper to British Academy of Management Conference**, September 1997 (unpub)
- Janesick, V. J. (1994), "The Dance of Qualitative Research Design", in Denzin. and Lincoln, **Handbook of Qualitative Research**, op.cit, pp 209-219
- Jarrold, K. (1995) "**Minding our Own Business**", 1995 NAHAT Conference, Birmingham
- Jarvis, P. (1992), "Reflective Practice and Nursing", *Nurse Education Today*, 12, 174-181
- Jones, A. M. and Hendry, C. (1992), **The Learning Organisation: A Review of Literature and Practice**, London, Human Resource Development Partnership
- Jones, A. M and Hendry, C. (1994), "The learning Organisation: Adult Learning and Organisational Transformation", **British Journal of Management**, 5, 153-162
- Kagan, J., Rosman, B. L., Day, D., Alpert, J. and Phillips, W. (1964) "Information processing in the child: Significance of analytic and reflective attitudes", **Psychological Monographs**
- Kanter, R. M. (1985), **The Change Masters**, London, Unwin Hyman
- Kanter, R. M. (1989), **When Giants Learn to Dance: Mastering the Challenges of Strategy, Management and Careers in the 1990s**, London, Simon & Schuster
- Kanter, R. M. (1996), "Beyond the Cowboy and Corpocrat", in Starkey, K., **How Organisations Learn**, op cit, pps 43-49
- Kemmis, S. (1985) "Action Research and the Politics of Reflection", in Boud et al **Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning**, op cit., pps 139-170
- Kennedy, C. (1991), **Guide to the Management Gurus**, London, Century Business
- Kickert, W.J.M. (1999), Discussion of the Paper of Sandra Dawson and Charlotte Dargie, **Public Management**, 1,4,1999
- Klein, R. & New, B. (1998), **Two Cheers: Reflections on the Health of NHS Democracy**, London, King's Fund Publishing
- Knowles, M. (1980), **The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Androgogy**, New York,
- Kolb, D. A., Rubin, I. and McIntyre J. (1971) **Organisational Psychology: An Experiential Approach**, Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall
- Kolb, D. A. and Fry, R. (1975) "Towards an applied theory of experiential learning", in Cooper, C L (Ed.) **Theories of Group Processes**, London: John Wiley. pp35-38
- Kolb, D. A. (1976) "Management and the Learning Process", **California Management Review**, V18,3,21-31
- Kolb, D. A. (1984) **Experiential Learning**, New Jersey, Prentice Hall
- Kolb, D.A.. (1996), "Management and the Learning Process" in Starkey, K., **How Organisations Learn**, op cit, pps270-287
- Korthagen, F. A. J. and Wubbels, T. (1995), "Characteristics off reflective practitioners: towards an operationalisation of the concept of reflection", **Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice**, V1,1 51-72
- Kotter, J. P. (1990), "What Leaders Really do", *HBR*, May-Jun 1990

- Kotter, J. P. (1999), "What Effective General Managers Really do", *HBR*, March-April 1999
- Landsberg, M. (1996), *The Tao of Coaching*, London, Harper Collins Business
- Laing, R.D. (1970), "Knots", Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Langlands, A. (1996), "Personal Perspective on the Future of the NHS", *Proceedings of First York Symposium on Health*, (unpub.)
- Laskow, G. (1997), "Guiding health care providers during redesign", *Patient Focused Care*, Mar, 32-35
- Lawton, A. & Rose, A. (1994), *Organisation and Management in the Public Sector*, London, Pitman
- Leguin, U. (1999), "Change Management", *Professional Manager*, September 1999
- Lessem, R. (1990), *Developmental Management: Principles of Holistic Business*, Oxford, Blackwell
- Lewin, K., (1946), "Action Research and Minority Problems", in G.W.Lewin (Ed.) *Resolving Social Conflicts*. New York: Harper & Row (1948)
- Lewin, K. (ed) (1948), *Resolving Social Conflicts*, New York, Harper
- Lewin, K. (1951), *Field Theory in Social Science*, New York, Harper
- Lickert R. (1961), *New Patterns of Management*, New York, McGraw-Hill
- Lickert, R. and Lickert, J. G. (1976), *New Ways of Managing Conflict*, New York, McGraw-Hill
- Livingstone, H. and Wilkie, R. (1981), "Motivation and Performance among Civil Service Managers", *Public Administration*, 59, Summer, (pps151-172)
- Lucas, E. (2000), "Creating a Give and Take Culture", *Professional Manager*, May 2000
- Lukes, S. (1973), *Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Lyth, I. M. (1989), *The Dynamics of the Social*, London, Free Associated Press
- McGregor, D. (1960), *The Human Side of Enterprise*, New York, McGraw-Hill
- McLaughlin, H. and Thorpe, R. (1993), "Action Learning – a Paradigm in Emergence: the Problems Facing a Challenge to Traditional Management Education and Development", *British Journal of Management*, 4, 19-27
- McNiff, J. (1988), *Action Research: Principles and Practice*, London, Routledge
- McTaggart, R. (1997), "Revitalising management as a scientific activity", *Management Learning*, V28,2,177-195
- McTaggart, R. and Kemmis, S. (1982), *The Action Research Planner*, Geelong, Victoria, Deakin University Press.
- Machiavelli, N. (1521) *The Prince*, Ch 25 (trans Detmold, D.E. (1997) Wordsworth Classics, Ware)
- Mark, A. L. & Dopson, S. (1999), *Organisational Behaviour in Healthcare: The Research Agenda*, Chippenham, Rowe
- Marnoch, G. (1996), *Doctors and Management in the National Health Service*, Buckingham, Open University Press
- Marsick V.J. and O'Neil, J. (1999), "The Many Faces of Action Learning", *Management Learning*, 30(2)
- Maslow, A. H. (1970), *Motivation and Personality*, New York, Harper and Row
- Mayerson, D. and Martin, J. (1987), "Cultural Change: An integration of three different views", *Journal of Management Studies*, V24,6,167-191
- Maynard, A. (1998), "Primary Care and Rhetoric", *Health Service Journal*, Jan 1998
- Mayo, E., (1949), *The Social Problems of an Industrial Civilisation*, New York, Routledge
- Menzies-Lyth, I. (1989), "A psychoanalytic perspective on social institutions", *The Dynamics of the Social*, London, Free Associated Press
- Messer, F. (1948), "The National Health Service", *Hospital and Social Service Journal*, LVIII,2940
- Mezirow, J. (1981), "A critical theory of adult learning and education", *Adult Education*, V32,1,3-24
- Mezirow, J. (ed.) (1990), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood*, San Francisco, Jossey Bass
- Miller, G.A.. (1956), "The magic number seven, plus or minus two: some limits in our capacity for processing information", *The Psychological Review*, Vol63, No 2 1956, pp 81-97
- Mintzberg, H. (1973), *The Nature of Managerial Work*, London, Harper and Row
- Mintzberg, H. (1975), "The Manager's Job: Folklore and Fact", *HBR*, March-April 1990 (reissue)
- Mintzberg, H. (1994), *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, London, Prentice-Hall
- Mintzberg, H. (1996), "Governing Management", *Harvard Business Review*, May/June 1996
- Mintzberg, H., Waters, J., Pettigrew, A. and Butler, R. (1990), "Studying Deciding: An Exchange of Views between Mintzberg and Waters, Pettigrew and Butler", in Hickson, D. (Ed.) *Management of Change and Innovation*, Organization Studies, 11(1)
- Morgan, G. (1983), "Rethinking Corporate Strategy: A Cybernetic Perspective", *Human Relations*, V36,4,345-360
- Morton-Cooper, A. (1997), "The Politics of Health Care", in Morton-Cooper, A. & Bamford, M. (eds), (1997), *Excellence in Health Care Management*, Oxford, Blackwell Science

- Mosak, H. (1970), "Lifestyle" in Nikelly, A.C. & Thomas, C.C. (1970), **Techniques for Behaviour Change**, (Ch 11), Illinois, Springfield
- Mumford, A. (1994), "A review of Action Learning Literature", **Management Bibliographies & Reviews** 20 (6/7) (2-16)
- Myers, I. B., McCauley, M.H, Quenk, N.L. and Hammer, A.L. (1998), **MBTI Manual**, Palo Alto, Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.
- Newbold, D. V. (1982), "Introduction", in Revans, R. (1982), op cit.
- Nicholson, N. (1998), "How Hardwired is Human Behaviour", **HBR**, July-August 1998
- Obeng, E. (1999), "Change: It's the Law", **Management Skills and Development**, May 1999
- Olins, R. (1999), The Future of Work is in the Balance", **Management Today**, August 1999
- Oswick, C., Keenoy, T. and Grant, D. (1997), "Managerial Discourses: words speak louder than actions?", **Journal of Applied Management Studies**, V6,1, 4-12
- Park, P. (1999), "People, Knowledge and Change in Participatory Research", **Management Learning**, 30(2)
- Pascale, R. (1990), **Managing on the Edge**, London, Penguin
- Partington, D. (2000) "Building Grounded Theories of management Action", **British Journal of Management**, Vol 11,91-102
- Pattison, S. (1996), Change Management in the British NHS: A Worm's Eye Critique", **Healthcare Analysis**, V4,252-258
- Pattison, S., Manning, S. & Malby, B. (1999), I Want to Tell You A Story, **HSJ**, 25 Feb 1999
- Pearn, M., Roderick, C. and Mulrooney, C. (1995), **Learning Organisations in Practice**, London, McGraw-Hill
- Pearson, M. and Smith, D. (1985), "Debriefing in Experienced Based Learning", in Boud et al. (1995)
- Pedler, M. (ed.) (1997), **Action Learning in Practice** (3rd edn), Aldershot, Gower
- Pedler, M., Boydell, T. and Burgoyne, J. (1988), **The learning Company Project: A report of work undertaken October 1987 to April 1988**, Sheffield, Training Agency
- Pedler, M., Burgoyne, J. and Boydell, T. (1992), **The Learning Company**, Maidenhead, McGraw-Hill
- Pedler, M. and Aspinwall, K. (1998), **A Concise Guide to the Learning Organisation**, London, Lemos & Crane
- Perry, C. and Zuber-Skerritt, O. (1992) "Action Research in Graduate Management Research Programs", **Higher Education**, 23, pps 195-208
- Perry, C. and Zuber-Skerritt, O. (1994), "Doctorates by Action Research for Senior Practising Managers", **Management Learning**, London, Sage, pps 341-364
- Perry N. W. and Ware, M. E. (1987), "Facilitating Growth in a Personal Development Course", **Psychological Reports**, 491-500
- Peters, T. J., and Waterman, R.H. (1982), **In Search of Excellence**, New York, Harper & Row
- Pettigrew, A. M. (1975), "Towards a political theory of organisational intervention", **Human Relations**, V28,3,191-208
- Pettigrew, A. M. (1985), **The Awakening Giant**, Oxford, Blackwell
- Pettigrew, A., McKee, L. & Ferlie, E. (1988), "Understanding Change in the NHS", **Public Administration**, 66 (pps297-317)
- Pettigrew, A. and Whipp, R. (1993), "Understanding the Environment", in Mabey, C. and Mayon-White, B. (eds) (1993) **Managing Change**, London, PCP
- Pfeiffer, J. W. and Jones, J. (Eds.) (1978), **The 1978 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators**, San Diego, Pfeiffer & Co
- Plato, (c 357 bc), **Book 7 The Republic**, (trans Lindsay, A.D.), London, Dent
- Plotinius, **Enneads** (ii,iii,7), London, Dent
- Pollitt, C. (1992), "The Struggle for Quality: the Case of the NHS", **Paper to UK Political Studies Association conference in Queen's University**, Belfast (unpub)
- Powell, J. H. (1989), "The reflective practitioner in nursing", **Journal of Advanced Nursing**, V14, 824-832
- Preskill, H. and Torres, R.T. (1999), "Building Capacity for Organisational Learning Through Evaluative Inquiry", **Evaluation**, London, Sage
- Preston, D., Smith, A., Buchanan, D. and Jordan, S. (1996), "Symbols of the NHS: Understanding the Culture and Communication Processes of a General Hospital", **Management Learning**, 27, 3, 343-357
- Prime Minister's Office, (1996), **The Citizen's Charter Five years On: a Report to Mark Five Years of the Charter Programme**, London, The Stationery Office
- Prokesh, S. E. (1997), "Unleashing the Power of Learning", **HBR**, Sep-Oct 1997
- Proudfoot, J. (1998), "Getting Real and Thinking PIG", **Knowledge Management**, June 1998

- Pugh, D.S. (ed), (1990), **Organisation Theory: Selected Readings**, London Penguin
- Purnell, S. (1999), "It's Whitehall, Jim, but not as we know it", **Public Service Magazine**, Dec 99 – Jan 00, pps 15-17
- Putnam, R. W. (1999), "Transforming Social Practice: An Action Science Perspective", **Management Learning**, 30(2)
- Raelin, J. A. (1991), **The Clash of Cultures: Managers Managing Professionals**, Boston, Harvard Business School Press
- Raelin, J. A. (1999), "Preface", **Management Learning**, 30(2), (Special issue)
- Rajan, A. and van Eupen, P. (1997), "Take it from the Top", **People Management**, October 1997
- Ranade, W. (1994), **A Future for the NHS? – Health Care in the 1990s**, London, Longman
- Ranson, S. & Stewart, J. (1994), **Management for the Public Domain**, Basingstoke, Macmillan
- Reason, P. (1988), **Human Inquiry in Action**, London, Sage
- Reason, P. (1997), "Political, Epistemological, Ecological and Spiritual Dimensions of Participation", **Studies in Culture, Organisations & Societies**, London, Sage
- Reason, P. (1999), "Integrating Action and Reflection through Co-operative Inquiry", **Management Learning**, 30(2)
- Reason, P. and Heron, J. (1997), "A Layperson's Guide to Co-operative Inquiry", Occasional Paper, University of Bath
- Reason, P. and Torbert, W.R. (1999), "towards a Transformational Social Science: A Further Look at the Scientific Merits of Action Research", **Draft Paper**
- Revans, R. (1982) **The Origins and Growth of action Learning**, Bromley, Chartwell-Bratt
- Richardson, L.(1994), "Writing: A Method of Enquiry" in Denzin. and Lincoln, **Handbook of Qualitative Research**, op.cit, pp 516-529
- Rogers, E. M. (1995), **Diffusion of Innovation**, 4th ed, New York, Free Press
- Rogers, J. (1997), **Sixteen Personality Types at Work in Organisations**, Cambridge (UK), Management Futures Ltd
- Rowden, R. (2000), "Health Managers Size up new Labour's agenda", **Public Sector Management**, Jan 2000
- Rowden, R. (2000), "Learning to Let Go", **Public Sector Management**, Aug 2000
- Ryan, C. (1999), "A Gap in the Accounts", **Public Service Manager**, September 1999
- Santillana, G. (1961), **The Origins of Scientific Thought**, New York, Mentor
- Schein, E. H. (1992), **Organisational Culture and Leadership** (2nd Ed), San Francisco, Jossey-Bass
- Schein, E. H. (1993), "How can organisations learn faster? The challenge of entering the green room", **Sloan Management Review**, Winter, 85-92
- Schneiderman, A.M. (1998), "Are there limits to Total Quality Management", **Strategy & Business**, 11, pps 35 – 45, Boston, Booz Allen & Hamilton
- Schofield, P (2000), "Ignorance is Bliss", **Accountancy**, July 2000, 63-64
- Schon, D. (1987), **Educating the Reflective Practitioner**, San Francisco and London, Jossey-Bass
- Schon, D. (1991), **The Reflective Practitioner**, 2nd edn, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass
- Schwandt, T. A. (1994), "Constructivist, Interpretive Approaches to Human Inquiry", in Denzin, D.K. & Lincoln, Y.S., **Handbook of Qualitative Research**, op cit
- Senge, P. M. (1990a), "The Leader's New Work: Building Learning Organisations", **Sloan Management Review**, Fall, 7-23
- Senge, P. M. (1990b), **The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation**, New York, Doubleday
- Senge, P. M. (1996), "The Leader's New Work: Building Learning Organisations", in Starkey, K., **How Organisations Learn**, op cit, pps 288-315
- Senge, P.M., Roberts, C., Ross, R. B., Smith, B. J. and Kleiner, A. (1994), **The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook**, London, Nicholas Brealey Publishing
- Shapiro, E. C. (2000), Managing in the Cappuccino Economy, **HBR**, Mar-Apr 2000, 177-184
- Shaw, G., Brown, R. and Bromiley, P. (1998), "Strategic Stories: How 3M is rewriting its Business Planning", **HBR**, May-Jun 1998
- Sherman, R.R and Webb, R.B. (1986), "Qualitative Research in Education: A Focus", **Draft paper**
- Shorter, E. (1997), **A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac**, New York, John Wiley
- Simons R. and Davila A. (1998), "How high is your return on management", **HBR**, Jan-Feb 1998, 71-80
- Smircich, L. and Morgan, G. (1982), "Leadership: The Management of Meaning", **The Journal of Applied behavioural Science**, 18(3) 257-273

- Smith, E. W. L., (1977) (Ed.), **The Growing Edge of Gestalt Therapy**, New Jersey, Citadel Press
- Smyth, W. J. (1986), **Reflections in Action**, Victoria, Deakin University Press Starkey, K., (ed) (1996), **How Organisations Learn**, London, Thompson
- Spender, J-C. (1994), "Knowing, Managing and learning: A Dynamic Managerial Epistemology", **Management Learning**, (25(3), 387-412
- Spurgeon, P. (ed.) (1998), "**The New Face of the NHS**", London, Royal Society of Medicine Press
- Stacey, R. (1993), "Strategy as Order Emerging From Chaos", **Long Range Planning**, 26(1) p10-17
- Stata, R (1989), "Organisational Learning: The Key to Management Innovation", **Sloan Management Review**, Spring, 63-74
- Stephen, L. (1987), "Assessing your learning style", in Bard, R, Bell, C R, Stephen L and Webster, L (1987) **The Trainer's Professional Development Handbook**, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Stirling, A. & Lisle, B. (1999), **Guiding the Way: A Summary of People's Reactions to Merger Implementation**, Newcastle, Stirling Lisle Partnership
- Sun Tzu (c 450BC), **The Art of War**, (tr.) Tao Hanzhang / Yuan Shibing, (1993), Ware, Wordsworth Editions
- Sutton, D. (1990), "Action Learning in Search of P", **Industrial and Commercial Training**, 22
- Taylor, F. W. (1947), **Scientific Management**, Harper & Row, New York
- Thoubboron, L. (1998), "Planning your Merger for Long Term Success", **The Health Summary**, June 1998
- Torbert, W. (1999), "The Distinctive Questions Developmental Action Inquiry Asks", **Management Learning**, 30(2)
- Torbert, W. & Fisher, D. (1992), "Autobiographical Awareness as a catalyst for managerial and organisational development", **Management Education and Development**, 23,3 (pps184-198)
- Townley, B. (1994), "Know Thyself: Self Knowledge and Management Education", paper presented at British Academy of management, Lancaster, Sept 12-14, 1994 (later published in **Organisation: ethical structures?** 2(2), 271-289, 1995, London, Sage
- Tranfield, D. and Starkey, K. (1998), "The Nature, Social Organisation and Promotion of Management Research: Towards Policy", **British Journal of Management**, 9 (341-353)
- Ulrich, D. (1998), "A New Mandate for Human Resources", **Harvard Business Review**, Jan-Feb, 125-134
- Vail, S. (1999), "Marriage Guidance", **Computers & Finance**, March 1999
- Van Manen, M. (1977), "Linking Ways of Knowing with Ways of Being Practical", **Curriculum Inquiry**, 6(3)
- Van Manen, M. (1991), **The Tact of Teaching**, New York, University of State of new York Press
- Van Manen, M. (1995), "On the Epistemology of Reflective Practice", **Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice** 1(1)
- von Glasersfeld, E., (1991), "Knowing without metaphysics: Aspects of the radical constructivist position", in Steier, F., **Research and Reflexivity** (pps12-29), Newbury Park CA, Sage
- Vince, R. (1995), "Emphasising Learning in Management Research", **Management Learning**, 26,1 pps55-71
- Walker, D. (1994), "Writing and Reflection" in Boud et al **Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning**, op cit, pps 52-68
- Walsh, K. (1995), "**Public Services and Market Mechanisms**", Basingstoke, Macmillan
- Ward, I. L. D. (1983) "Warm fuzzies v hard facts: Four style-behaviour models in training", **Training**, V20,11,31-33
- Weber, M. (1947), "Legitimate Authority and Bureaucracy", in Pugh, D.S., **Organisation Theory**, Op. Cit.
- Whitehead, J. (1989), "Creating a living educational theory from questions of the kind 'how do I improve my practice?'", **Cambridge Journal of Education**, V19,1
- Whipp, R. (1991), "Human Resource Management, Strategic Change and Competition: the role of learning", **Occasional Paper**
- Whyte, W.F. (ed.) (1991), **Participatory Action Research**, Newbury Park CA, Sage
- Winter, R. (1989), **Learning from Experience: Principles and Practice in Action Research**, London, Falmer Press
- Wood, P. (1988), "Action Research: A Field Perspective", **Journal of Education for Teaching**, 14,2 (p 135-150)

Glossary

C&L	Coopers & Lybrand (now PricewaterhouseCoopers)
CS	Civil Service
CHI	Commission for Health Improvement
DH	Department of Health (DoH in some of the bibliography due to change in internal reference)
E&Y	Ernst & Young
HAZ	Health Action Zone
HFEA	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority
IiP	Investors in People
NAO	National Audit Office
NICE	National Institute for Clinical Excellence
PAR	Participative Action Research
PAC	Parliamentary Accounts Committee
PCG	Primary Care Group
PCT	Primary Care Trust
RAP	Regional Agenda for People
RD	Regional Director
RDF	Regional Director of Finance
RET	Regional Executive Team
RHA	Regional Health Authority
RO	Regional Office (of the NHS Executive – now the Department of Health)
SAQ	Staff Attitudinal Questionnaire
SCS	Senior Civil Service
SERO	South East Regional Office
SSI	Social Services Inspectorate
SWRO	South West Regional Office
S&WRHA	S&W Regional Health Authority

Appendix 1

Research Planning – up to Transfer Paper

The following action plan was developed and discussed with the UoG supervision team in September 1996 after the first residential sessions, with the July and August 1996 actions already undertaken – to extend to December 1997, then updated to the point at which the Transfer Paper was proposed.

Date	Interventions	Data Collection	Literature Search
<i>July 96</i>		<i>Start IIP reviews Undertake PDP reviews with all Directorate staff – regular annual exercise</i>	
<i>Aug 96</i>	<i>Work with individual staff to redefine own roles as a part of the business planning process</i>	<i>Redesign baseline data collection survey – Staff Attitudinal Questionnaire (SAQ)</i>	
Sep 96	Directorate focus on RO based IIP work	SAQ circulated to all Finance Directorate staff Access received to all previous questionnaires and summary for RHA based staff questionnaire for September 1995 Re-completed LSI personality profile for myself Secretary, Deputy and staff member to complete personality profile for self Half year staff appraisal reviews. Own half-year review with Regional Director.	Read papers circulated to the group as a whole prior to the first residential
Oct 96	Introduction of biweekly feedback sessions with Directorate staff Introduction of bimonthly Directorate forum to discuss issues	Completion of biography as initial benchmark and to provide a formal opportunity for reflection on development to date	Background reading to place management theory development into context

		External Interviews with 3 HA Chief Executives and 3 Directors of Finance to explore perceptions of the R.O. and my own practices – plus 2 National Directors.	
Nov 96	Introduce explicit staff reflective sessions into working practices	Quantify and process the data collected in September	Start working through the papers copied and circulated in October
	Agree joint definitions of IIP data and monitoring with IIP manager	Collect views amongst colleagues during the RO business plan workshops and away-days for the Exec Team	
	Initiate group to further “Single Centre” working - including DH		
Dec 96 - Mar 97	Detailed reworking of Directorate Business Plan	Continue with: Journal Biweekly staff reviews Bimonthly for a	Concentrate on action learning papers and search out papers on public sector mgt
	Reset personal objectives for 97/98 in advance to include reflective learning and Single Centre actions		
(Jan 97)		“Mock” assessment for IIP	
April 97		96/97 PDP interviews	
May 97 - Sept 97		Continue with: Journal Biweekly staff reviews Bimonthly for a	
(Jul 97)		IIP assessment for certification	
Oct 97		Half Year staff PDP reviews and half year RO review	

		Re-run of overall RO <i>SAQ</i> questionnaires and debriefing interviews	
		IIP/RAP seminars and workshops re RO progress in with IIP manager	
Nov/Dec 97		Processing of data and preliminary evaluation	
Jan/Feb 98		Individual discussions with staff re profile changes	3 Day residential – continue literature review
March	Directorate workshop	Reissue <i>SAQ</i> Redo <i>LSI</i> with staff	
May	Directorate workshop	Annual staff appraisals	
(end)June	Directorate workshop	Own annual appraisal PDP	Reading over summer to verify data work to date and collect Transfer Paper quotes
Aug	Directorate Workshop		
Sept 1998	Transfer Paper Submission – half way stage? Circulate paper to staff – discuss at workshop	Half year staff reviews	

Appendix 2

Chronology of Personal Events

1996

1st February Took up post as Director of Finance in the South & West Regional Health Authority.

The two previous Regional Health Authorities (Wessex and South West) had merged together on 1 April 1994 and incorporated the South and West Regional Outpost of the NHS Executive on 1 April 1995. During these two years the staff numbers had reduced from 650 to around 130 and the relationship with the NHS Executive had been totally reframed. The Functions and Manpower Review (FMR) undertaken jointly with HMT had provided an outline of the new role and responsibilities. Half the 18 staff in the Finance and IM&T Directorate were recruited into post between September 1995 and February 1996, many from Health Authorities or Trusts.

1st April The Regional Health Authority was disestablished as a separate legal entity within the NHS, the RHA Board discontinued and the staff incorporated into the Civil Service. The organisation was now the South & West Regional Office of the NHS Executive, an integral part of the Department of Health. Although many of the functions remained the same and the Health Authorities reported through to the organisation, the RO was now a part of the DH rather than a RHA as part of the NHS so that its focus and responsibilities changed significantly.

1st Sept *Started the PhD with reading the journal articles provided.*

12th Sept *Questionnaires to staff in Directorate (questionnaire reframed in August) to follow up those by Deardon's circulated in the S&WRHA during September 1995 as a prelude to the IiP exercise.*

16th Sept *LSI psychological profiles to 4 staff to complete on me – plus redo the profile myself.*

24 Sept *Half yearly staff appraisals commence – start data collection through interviews. Initially concentrate on own style at the end of the interviews.*

4th Oct *Ideas about Action Research, Schon reflection and professional development start to pull together. Start experimenting with feedback bases in 1-1s in work.*

7th Nov *Hand in Biography. Review biographies from Alun, Lorraine and Carl – amazed at difference in style and openness with which each has written their biographical details.*

2nd Dec **Father diagnosed with stomach cancer.**

1997

- 20th Jan Committee of Public Accounts (PAC) hearing with Alan Langlands over the disposal of the RHA computer centre SWift (thankfully before I arrived). Big learning experience on CS culture and parliamentary interface.
- 10th Feb **Wendy to hospital for operation.**
- 13th Feb RET decision to go for IiP accreditation in October.
- 17th Feb *3 day residential at Miskin. Start to get a much better feel for methodology and research issues.*
- 3rd Mar *IiP discussions with the two responsible managers – tie in with my research and use both processes to collect / share / interpret data.*
- 14th Mar *Psychological profiles with another 3 staff.
Decide in 1-1s that sharing the basis behind the reflection / feedbacks and my research is the only way this is going to be feasible.*
- 25th Mar *Annual appraisals with staff commence – continue data collection. This time work through their reflection routines and views on me. Include far more process development ideas into their PDPs.*
- 27th Mar *Psychological profiles done at home with Wendy and 3 old friends.*
- 9th Apr *Questionnaire reissued – throughout RO in addition to my own staff: hence expect 110 plus responses.*
- 11th Apr *First of the eight planned external Chief Executive / Director of Finance interviews: Kate Barnard in Basingstoke. Tape recorded etc.*
- 29th Apr *Own first annual appraisal with Tony. PhD and progress an important part of the discussions.*
- 1st May *New government. Great expectations within the service of major freeing up of the planning blight which had afflicted the NHS over the previous 12 months in respect of changes and consultations.*
- 8th May *360 degrees exercise with John Burton – results. Myers Briggs test for good measure.*
- 2nd Jun *Last of the 8 interviews. Ian Carruthers and Ian Tipney in Dorset.*
- 12th June *Working parties established for construction of the new White Paper.*
- 14th July *Regional Executive Team meeting informed by RD that the RO internal restructuring to address the likely impacts of the White Paper (drawing together Purchasers and Providers closer together) should now proceed without delay.*

22 nd Aug	<i>Methodology Chapter drafted and reasonable.</i>
24 th Aug	<i>Directorate meeting started with management topic (Kolb in this one – Senge next, then Schon). Discussion about Myers Briggs results.</i>
1 st Sep	Judith Riley joins RET as our OD member.
13 th Sep	Dad dies.
23 rd Sep	<i>Half Year appraisals commence. Increasing process content – requirement to bring documentation in respect of reflection.</i>
28 th Sep	<i>Psychological profiles redone with first set of staff.</i>
18 th Oct	iP accreditation assessment successfully negotiated.
24 th Oct	New RO structures finally agreed, together with posts: interviews commence.
5 th Nov	Purchasing Effectiveness Review results announced for Region. Judicial Review probable.
20 th Dec	White Paper “The New NHS”
20 th Dec	Mum puts house on the market.
1998	
1 st Jan	New RO structures formally implemented.
6 th Jan	<i>3 day residential at Miskin.</i>
9 th Jan	<i>Discussions individually with staff about changes in profiles.</i>
13 th Jan	RET decide on new way of working after second away day.
28 th Jan	RDF meeting focused on new structures emerging – all 8 ROs appear to be heading for slightly different models.
2 nd Feb	First RET in new format – Finance and R&D first into the spotlight with Directorate presentations.
6 th Feb	Green Paper – Public Health.
7 th Feb	RET agree on responsibilities in respect of WP implementation.
9 th Feb	<i>Progress report substantially first drafted – need to sort out the related reading for support to turn this into transition paper.</i>
20 th Feb	All change in RO in respect of accommodation.
6 th Mar	<i>First Directorate meeting since restructuring, change of staff and absorbing the 6 Estates staff. Teamwork item as management learning exercise.</i>
13 th Mar	<i>Reissue Opinions Questionnaire.</i> <i>Redo profiles with the “March staff”, plus 3 new staff extra.</i>

16 th Mar	<i>Share first draft Progress Report with John Burton, Pauline Sinkins and Judith Riley with request for comments.</i>
17 th Mar	Assimilate further 6 IM&T staff from IMG.
19 th Mar	<i>Annual assessment interviews commence. Further / continued emphasis on Schon approach but also start to discuss learning organisation issues and their part in it.</i>
1 st May	<i>Directorate away day</i>
29 th May	<i>Last annual appraisal meeting for 97/98</i>
26 th June	<i>CPE day – Directorate workshop</i>
16 th July	Final PDP meeting with Tony re 97/98 appraisal – propose more national role for development
26 th July	Exchange visit to assess US finance regime for health services
10 th August	<i>Directorate workshop – tell staff more national role or move on by March 1999</i>
23 rd Sep	<i>Present Transfer paper at UoG</i>
22 nd – 24 th Sept	<i>Learning Set at UoG</i>
25 th Sept	New restructuring announced for RO – to take effect 1 st Jan 1999 Consultation begins
28 th – Sep	<i>Half year staff reviews and appraisals</i>
2 nd October	<i>Directorate away day</i>
11 th Nov	IM&T National Strategy Launch in SW
12 th Nov	Agree structures and budgets with RD re restructuring – including my move to National role as from 1 st April: other Regional responsibilities to change from 1 st January re staff moves.
19 th Nov	<i>Learning Set UoG</i>
10 th Dec	Tax Enquiry re Wendy's shop accounts – first meeting
14 th Dec	Ethiopian Foreign and Health Minister re NHS funding regimes
18 th Dec	Final meeting with MoD re military hospitals and transfer of funds
21 st Dec	<i>RO Workshop re 'SOLVED'</i>
22 nd Dec	<i>Directorate away day – 'SOLVED'</i>

1999

11 th January	<i>First of final set of external interviews (Jaki Meekings)</i>
14 th January	Agree agenda of work with Colin – brainstorm new finance regime
8 th Feb –	<i>UoG days: Learning set plus extra days</i>
12 th Feb	
15 th Feb	<i>Directorate away day</i>
16 th Feb	<i>Share first draft thesis chapters with Gabriel, Lis, John, Erica and Pauline</i>
17 th Feb	<i>Transfer to PhD approved by RDC</i>
10 th March	DH away day
11 th March	<i>RO workshop – ‘SOLVED’</i>
26 th March	<i>Final Directorate away day</i>
1 st April Start	National role working directly for Colin Reeves Transfer of responsibilities for Finance and Estates Retain responsibility for IM&T until 31 st December 1999 Retain responsibility for U.o. Portsmouth litigation until complete
22 nd April	<i>Final appraisal with RD</i>
1 st May	Initiate/Lead NHS wide planning for Economic & Monetary Union
4 th May	Conclude settlement with University of Portsmouth re NMET contracts
10 th May	<i>Final annual appraisal / feedback with Finance Staff</i>
11 th May	<i>Final external interview (Kate Barnard)</i>
14 th May	First meeting ASB PSNC to consider Public Sector Statement of Principles for Accounts
17 th May	<i>UoG day</i>
1 st June	Public Sector Productivity Panel Review NHS Estates
21 st June	<i>Away day for IM&T – join with Policy for development session</i>
29 th June	Public Enquiry meeting re Cornwall – testimony meeting
15 th August	Paper to RDFs to recommend Payroll & HR project
1 st September	<i>Commence Agency Review – NHS Estates</i>
1 st October	OJEC advert – HR/Payroll system – project with HR
8 th October	Complete NHS accounts pilot and report to RDFs
11 th October	Complete National Cash Management review and report to RDFs
29 th October	First draft National NHS EMU changeover plan to Treasury

15 th Nov	Formally agree HR/Payroll project with HR: shortlist suppliers
22 nd Dec	IM&T final away day – including Lunch
2000	
1 st Jan	Hand over Regional IM&T responsibilities (after managing Y2K project for the Region) to Policy Directorate
12 th Jan	<i>UoG study day</i>
23 rd Jan	Staff accommodation changes to mirror structures
1 st March	<i>Commence Agency Review – Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority</i>
9 th March	<i>UoG study day</i>
4 th April	<i>UoG study day</i>
11 th April	Uncle (father's brother) dies after brief illness
14 th April	Specification of HR/Payroll to suppliers
17 th April	NHS Estates report to parliament
19 th April	Final NHS Litigation Authority report to ministers
20 th April -	<i>Push on thesis development – days off (Wendy to N York)</i>
25 th April	
27 th April	<i>Share first complete draft of thesis with:</i> <i>UoG: Paul, Chris, Nora</i> <i>SWRO: Pauline, John, Erica, Sylvia, Gabriel</i> <i>NHS Estates: Melanie</i>
May – Jul	<i>Feedback and discussions on contents, conclusions and perceptions</i>
June – Aug	P&HR evaluation effort – Business Case – Project planning – Project Board approval 29 th
August	Final 2 suppliers shortlisted
14 th Aug	<i>Share complete thesis draft with Jean Paskell</i>
30 th Aug	European Monetary Union consultancy agreed
30 th Aug	NHS working party reporting back in respect of ASB Statement of principles Job interview
31 st Aug	HFEA Agency Review final report drafted
1 st Sep	<i>Draft thesis (mk II) to Paul Thomas and Chris James – also Jennie</i>
4-18 Sep	Holiday
15 th Sep	Plans back from all 510 NHS organisations re EMU preparations
26 th Sep	EMU Steering Group

27 th Sep	EMU Programme Board
2 nd Oct	ASB Working group re Public Sector SoP
3 rd Oct	Second Interview DETR
17 th Oct	Torex Contract negotiations
18 th Oct	Final Interview for DVLA at DETR
19 th Oct	Thesis discussions with Paul and Chris at UoG
27 th Oct	New post of FD at DVLA confirmed
30 th Oct- 3 rd Nov	Interview support consultants
31 st Oct	ASB re NHS Accounting Regime
31 st Oct	HFEA Final Report to Ministers
1 st – 3 rd Nov	Final interviews with “Critical Friends” – John, Pauline and Erica; also Jane
7 th Nov	HR&P Evaluation Group
8 th Nov	Meetings at DVLA – Directors Strategy meeting
13 th – 17 th Nov	HR&P Product Demonstrations
16 th Nov	HR&P Project Board
21 st Nov	DVLA Strategy Board
23 rd Nov	HR&P Steering Group
1 st Dec	Thesis Draft to Pieter Strydom, Christine Daws, Alun Morgan and Mike Harrington - also Jennie, Jean, Melanie, Pauline and John for final SWRO / NHS Estates based comments
2 nd Dec	Thesis Draft to Chris James
2 nd – 8 th Dec	HR&P Final Reference Site visits – Munich, Frankfurt, Salt Lake City and Tampa
8 th Dec	NHS Executive Board Presentation
14 th Dec	HR&P Steering Group
15 th Dec	HR&P Project Board Invitation to Suppliers to provide Final Proposals
18 th Dec	DVLA Board meeting
2001	
2 nd Jan	Take up post at DVLA
10 th Jan	Latest draft and discussions with Chris James
14 th Jan	Feedback from Jennie
15 th Jan	Feedback from Pauline
15 th -19 th Jan	HR&P evaluation
22 nd -24 th Jan	EFQM and Strategy development at DVLA – DETR and DVO interfaces
29 th Jan	Final DoH Staff appraisal for 2000
30 th – 1 st Feb	Final HR&P decision on systems / consortium – contract award. Last DoH involvement.
9 th Mar	Final comments from Chris and Jennie

Appendix 3

Personality Profile Detail

The LSI schedules a whole series of behaviours and traits (240 words in the questionnaire), grouped as follows:

Encouraging

Humanistic; thoughtful; understanding; considerate; encourages others; developing; supportive; knows peoples needs; popular leader; makes others think for themselves; good teacher; good listener; enjoys teaching; sees good in others; willing to take time;
Helps others; trusting; thinks of others; settles disputes; respects confidences

Affiliative

Helpful; friendly; co-operative; good at relationships; genuine concern for others; pleasant; diplomatic and tactful; warm and open; helps others; leads because liked; trusted; sincere; people centred; accepts change easily; judgement affected by liking people; inclusive; liked; relaxed and at ease with people; sees best in others; shares feelings and thoughts

Approval

Over-optimistic; seeks approval; generous to a fault; needs to be liked; friendly always; accepts others values; spoils people; overly sympathetic; needs approval; naïve; wants to be liked; agrees with all; forgives anything; upset if not accepted; upset by conflict; thinks in terms of what others think; does things purely for approval; dependent on family and friends; wants to be trusted but it's difficult; vague and uncertain

Conventional

Restrained; too concerned with looking good; agreeable; conservative; very conventional; conforming; suggestible; avoids conflict; very respectful to others; achieves by conforming; inconsistent; offers tentative ideas; indecisive; thinks rules more important than ideas; often uncertain; concerned with others views; tends to accept the status quo; seems to understand others but doesn't; enjoys being recognised by superiors; reliable and steady

Dependent

Over-cautious; very tactful; eager to please; modest; dependent on others; self-doubting; compliant; easily fooled; apologetic; obeys too willingly; easily influenced; reacts rather than initiates; predictable; very respectful to superiors; meek; says what's expected; good follower; does things by the book; seeks guidance from others; worries

Avoidance

Tense and uneasy; self-deprecating; not aggressive; easily embarrassed; lacks self-confidence; evasive; self-condemning; reserved; takes few chances; has difficulty being accepted; presents safe ideas; avoids decisions; concerned with own problems; easily led; doesn't relate well too others; seems to have strong conflicts; easily upset; leaves decisions to others; little interest in achievement

Oppositional

Resentful; cynical; unfeeling; negative; complaining; stubborn; opposes new ideas; hard to impress; suspicious; slow to forgive a wrong; concerned with status; usually against things; critical of others behind their backs; blames others for own mistakes; distrusts others; doesn't accept criticism well; doesn't talk about things directly; opposes things indirectly; never opposes authority directly; snobbish

Power

Hard and tough; bossy; dominating; hostile and aggressive; believes in force; argumentative; runs things by self; vengeful and mean; dictatorial; abrupt; dogmatic and rigid; critical of others; easily offended; on the offensive; sees others as selfish; needs to control others; gets angry easily; little confidence in people; resists suggestions made by others; seldom admits mistakes

Competitive

Proud and self-sufficient; likes to compete; boastful; thinks only of self; self-assertive; tries to be too successful; tries hard to impress others; egotistical; likes to be seen and noticed; builds self up; strong need to win; gets upset over losing; expects to be admired; constantly comparing self o others; makes snap judgements; everything is a challenge; overestimates ability; inclined to be reckless; always has to be right; tries to maintain a sense of superiority

Perfectionistic

Believes in actions not words; practical; businesslike; competent; looks for challenges; tends to be perfectionistic; tries hard to prove self; stern but fair; forceful and direct; persistent and enduring; tries to be the best; impatient with own errors; self-centred; can be indifferent; shrewd and calculating; driven to succeed; de-emphasises feelings; doesn't seem to need others; often seems unfriendly; seeks recognition

Achievement

Ambitious; realistic; achieving; enthusiastic; thinks for self; high level of aspiration; likes tasks that require skill; enjoys a challenge; sets own goals; honest and direct; enjoys planning; thinks ahead; good analytical skills; earns others confidence and respect; enjoys difficult tasks; explores alternatives before acting; learns from mistakes; shares responsibility; goes to the heart of the matter; results orientated

Self-actualising

Self-respecting; optimistic and realistic; likes responsibility; confident and relaxed; energetic and alive; spontaneous; good leader; alive person; aware of own feelings; independent in thought; open about self; knows how people feel; sound judgement; non-defensive; creative and original thinker; communicates ideas easily; not easily upset; high personal integrity; exciting to know; respected and well thought of

Appendix 4

Myers Briggs Detail

Completion of the MB test provides a profile output. This has been a common tool within the NHS to address team relationships and compatibility of personal styles. In 1997, my profile was assessed as “INTJ” - a profile characterised by “*inner energy, restlessness and commitment: difficult to know well, individuals with this profile sometimes have an air of critical detachment which can cause problems for them with other people.*”

INTJ profile

<i>Overriding need</i>	independence
<i>Seen by others</i>	impressively calm; self-reliant; unflappable. May seem enigmatic or intimidating.
<i>Works best</i>	as an equal with other talented people who accept that “you’re only as good as your last assignment”
<i>Works least well</i>	with people who believe that both observing rules and paying attention to detail are important
<i>As team member</i>	contributes solutions to problems, focus on the task, deadline consciousness; keeps team alert to waste of resources or time
<i>Leads by</i>	creating a challenging framework for the future; developing a vision where the emphasis is on excellence; developing people through patient coaching; being tough when necessary
<i>Ideal organisation</i>	a flat hierarchy where creative people work with minimal supervision and no one says “how we’ve always done it round here is...”; a place which invests in development for its people
<i>Ideal boss</i>	another competent performer who gives autonomy and trust
<i>In relationships</i>	prefers long-standing circle of close associates; loyal, discreet, tolerant; may find intimacy challenging, keeping others at a distance without meaning to; may sometimes rush into relationships too soon

<i>Makes mistakes</i>	when having to deal with too much routine activity
<i>Decides</i>	swiftly on what seems fair overall; may sometimes decide too quickly without knowing all the facts – but is always willing to reassess
<i>Sees change</i>	as a challenge; copes best when can contribute to its design
<i>Thinks</i>	broadly; focuses on the big picture; attracted by new ideas; loves the idea of creating simplicity and elegance out of complexity and chaos
<i>Communicates</i>	sparingly; may be most comfortable doing it in writing
<i>Irritated by</i>	intrusions into privacy; lack of commitment in others; being over-supervised; pedantry
<i>Irritates by</i>	demanding too much; being over-focused on the task; taking too much for granted
<i>Relaxes</i>	with difficulty; may tend to set tough tasks, for instance to learn something new
<i>Under stress</i>	gets obsessed with unimportant detail; becomes snappy and critical

Surprisingly close in terms of assessment with the way I see myself and there are only two characteristics noted above that I would disagree with – I don't think I seem intimidating: I just don't take myself seriously enough for that. Also under stress, I tend to go back to reprioritise and work through what is really essential – I probably am not communicative enough and also become more directive. Otherwise this triangulates well with the other feedback from staff.

The above profile also fits reasonably well with the personal context in Chapter 4. The details correlate even better with the biographical exercise the whole learning group undertook at the initial stages of the research process. The profile provides a complementary picture to the LSI profile built up. At the final stages of the process, I completed the MB test again and this showed a move to the ENTJ profile. Whilst both scores were close to the E/I borderline, there was a difference picked up and, again, this seems to correspond to the LSI profile changes and staff feedback. The change and implications are dealt with in Chapter 5.

Appendix 5

Learning Organisation Profile

The survey document used within the workshops and which staff used to assess the organisational culture was developed to include the following definitions and instructions.

Supportive Management

The extent to which managers genuinely believe that encouraging and sustaining development results in improved performance by those who are much closer to the work actually done and the Service. Managers see their role as enabling and coaching rather than control and monitoring.

To take into account

Are managers generally receptive to new ideas?

Are all staff trusted to perform to their level of competence with the minimum of supervision?

Do managers act as though they really believe that performance will be improved if decisions are pushed down the hierarchy as far as possible?

Is it the manager's *prime* role to coach and develop rather than control and monitor?

Are managers trying to support staff to do their jobs better?

Are managers receptive to messages about the way in which they see things and work – and encourage staff to do likewise?

Do managers encourage staff to reflect and review their work and actions as an important part of improving?

Scoring

1 or 2	Managers behave and are rewarded for behaving in ways which encourage “old” ways of working and passive adherence to “laid down” rules and systems.
3 or 4	Managers understand the importance of development but have not yet changed their approach to encourage development in staff. Directors are not demonstrating commitment to development.
6 or 7	Some areas work very well but others are still at the stage of not encouraging staff.
8 or 9	Managers in all parts of the organisation actively support and encourage development for themselves and staff.

Organisational Flexibility

The extent to which the organisation has been designed and operates to make transfer of ideas and development easy between different areas and staff levels – and allows for change and adaptation. It is managed in a way that encourages and rewards innovation, learning and development.

To take into account

Are there only as many managerial and supervision layers as necessary?

Is the encouragement of development the responsibility of all managers?

Is the work, especially projects, organised into self-managed teams with a high level of independence and control over their own activities?

Is work defined in terms of objectives and projects rather than tasks and rules?

Does the organisation ensure that functional boundaries do not prevent sharing of knowledge and ideas as far as possible?

Are all parts of the organisation focused on the Service?

Is central control only exercised when necessary?

Is everyone given as much independence as possible?

Is cross-functional working encouraged and treated as normal?

Is the management team itself functionally diverse?

Scoring

- | | |
|--------|---|
| 1 or 2 | The organisation does not even know it has a problem with its structure and systems. |
| 3 or 4 | The organisation is hierarchical and rigid. There is little communication or mutual understanding between different parts and functions of the organisation. |
| 6 or 7 | Some parts of the organisation work well and have structures and culture which support the flexibility but others do not. |
| 8 or 9 | The organisation works well in a multi-disciplinary way, with an emphasis on partnership but provision for independence. The structure is flat and responsibility taking encouraged, with an emphasis on development. |

Learning Environment

The extent to which the organisation has put structures, and processes to encourage development and learning for all staff.

To take into account

Are all staff encouraged to think about why and how things happen rather than deal with the symptoms?

Are you encouraged to use open or distance learning?

Does the organisation make use of cross-functional groups to work through common problems – both internal and external?

Are personal development plans widely used in practice and are they used to encourage development and learning?

Do trainers support development or do they merely provide training?

Are staff encouraged to reflect on achievements and development needs as a part of their appraisal and assessment processes?

Does the organisation make use of mentoring, learning groups or a “learning consortium”?

Are development sessions for staff integrated into the ongoing activities?

Scoring

- | | |
|--------|--|
| 1 or 2 | Methods to enhance individual development and learning are rarely used, with the whole emphasis on training courses for improvement. |
| 3 or 4 | The methods used to enhance learning are sporadic and tend to be confined to management. |
| 6 or 7 | Some areas make good use of a number of development methods and actively provide a good development environment. |
| 8 or 9 | All staff can benefit from a variety of techniques and use those which are best suited to their own learning styles and personalities. |

Vision for the Future

The extent to which there is a shared vision which includes the organisation’s ability to adapt to changes in the future. Part of this vision recognises the need to continue to develop at both organisation and individual level to respond to changes in role and function in a time of continuing change.

To take into account

Is there a clear consensus of what the organisation is going to do?

Is there a clear vision of where the organisation is going?

Does everyone understand and agree with the vision?

Do the business plans and objectives support this vision?

Does the organisation recognise the importance of flexibility of structure and responsiveness to achieving these objectives in a time of change?

Does the organisation recognise the importance of continuing organisation and personal development in meeting the challenges of change whilst still achieving its objectives?

Is everyone encouraged to develop themselves as an important step in fitting the organisation for its changing role?

Scoring

- | | |
|--------|--|
| 1 or 2 | The organisation has no vision – it merely exists. |
| 3 or 4 | There is a vision but it is fragmented and mainly confined to management levels. |
| 6 or 7 | The vision has been created and communicated downwards – but only in parts of the organisation. |
| 8 or 9 | The vision is shared and understood by all members of the organisation and there is a common commitment to it. |

Encouragement to Experiment

The extent to which staff are encouraged to challenge the *status quo*, develop new ways of working and question the assumptions behind the current ways of doing things. Experimenting, learning from mistakes and openness to debate on options and alternatives are a well established way of approaching the objectives.

To take into account

- Is development of individuals, groups and the organisation itself a valued activity?
- Are there frequent opportunities to experiment without suffering serious consequences?
- Is there a general climate of mutual respect, openness and trust?
- Are “learning on the job”, coaching and open discussion within work activities recognised as development opportunities?
- Are people encouraged to learn from one another by making their reasoning explicit and sharing this with colleagues?
- Is everyone encouraged to question the way things are done?
- Are mistakes treated as learning opportunities?
- Are reflection and review given importance for individual development?
- Is everyone encouraged to find new ways to do things better?

Scoring

- | | |
|--------|---|
| 1 or 2 | There is active intolerance of questioning and challenge. Mistakes are concealed but when revealed are treated punitively. There is a fear of making mistakes. |
| 3 or 4 | Managers benefit and / or talk about these things but do not manifest this in practice with the rest of the staff. |
| 6 or 7 | This works well in some areas but not in all. |
| 8 or 9 | There is general support for examining established ways of thinking and working throughout the organisation. The value of personal contribution and development is recognised as important to organisation success. |

Development Motivation

The extent to which the staff as a whole is motivated to learn and develop – the extent to which they are individually encouraged and committed to self-development and learning from experience.

To take into account

Is everyone convinced of the need to continue to develop and learn?

Does everyone take responsibility for their own development, but is supported to do so?

Does everyone identify their own personal development needs?

Is everyone given the opportunity to translate these needs into a plan to address the development needed?

Does everyone try to improve the way in which things are done and organised?

Is everyone confident about gaining new skills and knowledge?

Is everyone good at learning – have all the opportunity of exploring how they learn?

Does everyone challenge the status quo and ask questions?

Are people who do develop given the recognition that they have done so?

Scoring

- | | |
|--------|---|
| 1 or 2 | Most staff are passive and reluctant to take on learning opportunities because of fear of failure. |
| 3 or 4 | Managers talk about these things but do not practice what they preach. |
| 6 or 7 | This works well in some areas with staff well motivated – but not others. |
| 8 or 9 | All staff are encouraged in their personal development and recognise the importance to both themselves and the organisation of continuing to learn and develop. |