Cranfield University

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A Phenomenographic Study of British Civil Servants' Conceptions of Accountability

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Abstract

In the United Kingdom civil servants have traditionally been accountable to their managerial and political superiors for probity and due process in the execution of their duties. Recent parliamentary and administrative reforms have changed this view. Individual civil servants are now additionally accountable to a range of *external groups* for the *results* of their work. This change is reflected in the role of *Senior Responsible Owner* (SRO), a civil servant accountable to a management team for the achievement of a predefined project outcome.

This thesis challenges the idea that accountability is a unitary concept that can be defined by others and delegated in this way. The subjective nature of human understanding suggests theoretical grounds for the existence of different conceptions of accountability among different individuals for a given outcome. In this research I have applied the analytical approach known as *phenomenography* to the study of these different conceptions. The approach has been widely used, mainly in fields outside management, to establish the bounded number of qualitatively different ways in which a given aspect of reality is conceived by different individuals. Analysis of interviews with 30 SROs from 12 government departments revealed four different conceptions of accountability, each with multiple attributes. The conceptions can be arranged in a hierarchy of increasing richness and complexity.

This research contributes to theoretical knowledge of the concept of accountability in the field of public administration in four ways. First, the study adds *time* to the known attributes of accountability. Second, the study confirms *sanctions* as an attribute of accountability. Third, the hierarchy of four conceptions of accountability throws new light on the subject that calls into question the unitary view. Fourth, the results refute the notion of a schismogenic paradox of accountability and provide empirical support for meanings of accountability that transcend this paradox.

Acknowledgements

A PhD is supposed to be an individual piece of work. Yet 'no man is an island, entire of it self; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main' (Donne, 1624). Many individuals have supported me during the course of this PhD.

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A Note on Writing Style

The matter of writing style is one that all authors must deal with. A balance must be struck between allowing the nuances of an argument that the author may wish to portray in the mind of the reader and removing the glaring errors and outright absurdities that obscure an argument. To achieve this balance I have followed the guidelines laid out in 'The New Fowler's Modern English Usage' (1998) and 'The Economist Style Guide' (2003). One particular matter that has proved to be taxing is the avoidance of sexist language. As a result of the absence in English of a common-gender third person singular pronoun, I have used the plural pronouns 'their, them and they' to avoid any suggestions of sexism.

Glossary of Abbreviations

DEFRA   Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

DfES   Department for Education and Skills

DOH   Department of Health

DTI   Department for Trade and Industry

ECGD   Export Credit Guarantee Department

FCO   Foreign and Commonwealth Office

HMLR   Her Majesty's Land Registry

HMRC   Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

MOD   Ministry of Defence

NAO   National Audit Office

NHS   National Health Service

NPM   New Public Management

OGC   Office of Government Commerce

PAC   Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons

PFI   Private Finance Initiative

PPP   Public-Private Partnership

PSA   Public Service Agreement

SCS   Senior Civil Service

SHA   Strategic Health Authority

SRO   Senior Responsible Owner

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The concept of accountability is a cornerstone of modern governance (Dubnick, 2002). It is the principle behind the processes that hold to account those to whom power has been delegated by the public (Aucoin and Heintzman, 2000). Accountability has become one of the hallmarks of democracy, as accountable government is perceived as good government, whereas unaccountable government is likely to provide ideal conditions for the cultivation of the abuse of power (Pyper, 1996a). It is then a *sine qua non* for democratic governance (Bovens, 2005a).

Despite its importance, accountability is a 'complex, elusive and multifaceted concept' (Pyper, 1996a: 1). The meaning of accountability in government is dependent on the particular constitutional context and institutional arrangements between public servants and elected officials (Thomas, 1998). Since the establishment of the Permanent Civil Service in the mid-19th century, civil servants in the United Kingdom have been accountable only to their political and administrative superiors. The tradition has been for government ministers to accept accountability for the actions (or inactions) of the civil servants under their control (Dicey, 1959; Barberis, 1998). Under this arrangement the civil servant is an anonymous administrator, carrying out the instructions of their political and administrative masters. However, the increased scale and scope of state activity within the United Kingdom since the turn of the 20th century, changes in the operation of Parliament coupled with administrative reforms within the civil service, have resulted in civil servants being publicly and visibly held to account for their actions (Barberis, 1998). Political scandals such as those surrounding the sale of arms to Iraq (Scott, 1996), the sacking of the heads of the Prisons Service (Barker, 1998; Polidano, 1999) and the Child Support Agency (Harlow, 1999), together with the circumstances of the death of Dr. David Kelly (Hutton, 2004) all illustrate the extent to which civil servants are

no longer anonymous administrators but are visible public managers, who can be called to account for their actions in a variety of internal and external forums.

One manifestation of the increased accountability of civil servants is the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO). The role of the SRO was introduced in 2000 as part of a package of measures aimed at improving the delivery of public sector projects (Cabinet Office, 2000). Each SRO is accountable to a defined management team for the successful delivery of a project, the outcome of which is expressed as a performance target. However, this objective approach to accountability suffers from the subjective and cognitive limitations of human understanding. There is a risk that the performance target might not fully reflect the totality of the desired outcomes of the project. In addition to their managerial and political superiors, civil servants now also have to deal with a wide range of stakeholders, some external to government. In this scenario the SRO may put into effect a much wider understanding of accountability than that which has been officially defined, and may pursue outcomes that they believe would satisfy these multiple stakeholders. These complications, coupled with the clarity of intent surrounding SROs' accountability, suggest that potentially, there is an opportunity to study individuals' understanding of accountability that is mandated in objective terms. As a precursor to any empirical research, it is first necessary to examine the academic literature on accountability.

In the context of government, accountability has been the subject of much scholarly attention. A search of the World-Wide Political Science Abstracts database for the term "accountability" between 1995 and 2005 resulted in 1,415 hits in peer-reviewed journals (Schwartz, 2005). In the United Kingdom the notion of ministerial accountability (Finer, 1956; Woodhouse, 1994; Pyper, 1996b; Barker, 1998; Harlow, 1999; Polidano, 1999; Clarence, 2002; Woodhouse, 2004) and the institutional accountability arrangements between the various state institutions, such as Parliament, the courts, the government of the day (Dicey, 1959; Barker, 1982; Jordan, 1992; Giddings, 1995; Winetrobe, 1995; Pyper, 1995a; Scott, 2000) and more recently the European Union

(Christiansen, 1997; Rhodes, 1997; Harlow, 2002) have been the subject of much academic study. Studies that address civil servant accountability, in particular civil servants' conceptions of accountability, are fewer in number. In the latter category, only two relevant studies have been published at the time of writing. Sinclair (1995) examined how the CEOs of 15 Australian public sector organizations understood accountability. Similarly, Newman (2004) reviewed how accountability was understood by a mixed group of British local government officers, charitable organization executives and civil servants. The different constitutional context in the case of Sinclair (1995) and the mixed nature of the participants in the case of Newman (2004) together suggest that, in relation to the matter of how SROs understand accountability, these studies are of limited value.

This limitation, combined with the subjective and cognitive limitations of the current objective approach to SRO accountability, suggests that there is an opportunity to conduct research into individual accountability that uses individuals' own experiences as the basis for the definition of the concept of accountability and for developing our understanding of accountability.

This chapter has four further sections. Section 1.2 outlines the research objectives, research design and method. Section 1.3 sets out the contributions of the research and Section 1.4 presents the overall structure of the thesis. Chapter 1 is summarized in Section 1.5.

1.2 Research Outline

The principal objective of this thesis is to establish the different ways in which individual SROs understand accountability. This implies the need for a research design that would allow the exploration of individual understandings of a social phenomenon. To this end I selected the interpretive research approach known as *phenomenography,* which has been defined by Marton as 'the empirical study of the qualitatively different ways in which various phenomena in, and

aspects of, the world around us are conceptualized, understood, perceived and apprehended' (Marton, 1994: 4424). Chapter 3 contains an exploration of five possible approaches and a justification of this choice.

1.3 Intended Contributions

This thesis is intended to make a contribution to knowledge in the field of individual accountability within the public administration knowledge domain. This is a field where there has only been a limited amount of empirical research. A major proportion of the current literature on individual accountability is based either on anecdotal evidence or individual case studies (Schwartz, 2005).

1.4 Thesis Structure

The thesis has six further chapters. In Chapter 2 I review the history of civil servant accountability in the United Kingdom, the origins of the current accountability doctrine, and changes in the role and structure of the state that culminated in the introduction of the role of SRO. I then assess how SRO accountability is defined and examine the subjective and cognitive limitations inherent in the current approach to SRO accountability. From these limitations I draw two conclusions and develop my research question. Further, I examine the academic literature on accountability, present the historical and etymological development of the concept, the main components that make up the concept and some of the controversies that surround the meaning of accountability. I then explore the different ways in which accountability has been studied and conclude that despite the current emphasis in government on individual accountability, there is little theoretical knowledge about how individuals understand it.

Chapter 3 explores the question of how individuals understand a phenomenon. This is a matter of epistemology 'in which attention is directed towards determining not only the nature and sources of knowledge, but also the

strengths and weaknesses of particular ways of knowing' (Watkins, 2000: 93). I describe four different theoretical approaches to learning about understanding (*behaviourism, cognitivism, individual constructivism and social constructivism*) and review their inherent limitations. I then evaluate a fifth approach, *phenomenography*, and conclude that it offers the potential to avoid some of the limitations of the other approaches.

In Chapter 4 I describe the research design, including sample selection criteria, how I gained access to the sample, my data collection method and analysis technique. I also examine the issues of reliability and validity in relation to the research approach.

Chapter 5 reports the results of the analysis of the research interviews. I reveal five different aspects of accountability that were common to all respondents and how these were understood by each individual SRO in one of four qualitatively different ways. I also discuss possible sources of variation in the results.

In Chapter 6 I discuss the results in relation to the components of accountability presented in Chapter 2. I then compare the results with existing literature on how individuals understand accountability. I also review the results in relation to the New Public Management (NPM) view of accountability. Based on this discussion I present the claimed contributions to knowledge of this research.

In Chapter 7 I summarize the results of the research and consider their wider implications for theory and practice. I acknowledge the limitations of the research and outline directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Accountability

2.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on accountability. The chapter has five principal sections. In this first section I outline the structure of the remainder of the chapter.

In Section 2.2 I review the literature on the concept of accountability. I present the governmental origins of accountability, trace its chequered history as a concept, and appraise 12 different typologies of accountability derived from its practice in government. I then review five components of any accountability relationship, analyze six closely related terms that are often used synonymously with the term accountability and from these develop a definition of accountability suitable for the purposes of this thesis.

In Section 2.3 I review the origins of the current doctrine of civil servant accountability. Next, I examine a series of political and legislative changes that have given rise to today's *de facto* civil servant accountability. I consider how the subject of a civil servant's accountability - what a civil servant is accountable for has changed. I review the background to the creation of the role of the SRO in the civil service. I close the section with a review of the subjective and cognitive limitations of the current approach to SRO accountability and derive my research question.

In Section 2.4 I review empirical research on accountability in two fields of literature that have direct relevance to the question of how individual civil servants understand accountability - public administration and psychology. I conclude that in order to answer the research question, further empirical research is required. I then summarize the chapter in Section 2.5.

2.2   The Concept of Accountability

Accountability is a meaningful concept in a large number of fields including education, medicine, social and environmental accounting, political science and psychology, as well as public administration and management. It is a no-opposite concept (Bovens, 2005b). As a result it is seen as uniformly good (Koppell, 2005). Yet it is a term that 'has lost its meaningful "soul" in a world filled with rhetoricians, reformers and functionalists' (Dubnick, 2002: 1). This loss of meaning is apparent in a brief search for dictionary definitions of accountability. The Oxford English Dictionary (1995) defines accountability as:-

> Accountability: - responsibility: the quality of being required to account for one's conduct.

By way of contrast, "The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military" (2001) defines accountability as:-

> Accountability: - the legal or regulatory obligation imposed on an officer or other person for keeping accurate record of property, documents, or funds. The person having this obligation may or may not have actual possession of the property, documents, or funds.

In "A Dictionary of Nursing" (2003), accountability is defined as:-

> Accountability: - the obligation of being answerable for one's own judgments and actions to an appropriate person or authority recognized as having the right to demand information and explanation, according to the terms of reference of the Code of Professional Conduct. A registered practitioner (nurse, midwife, health visitor) is accountable for her actions as a professional at all times, on or off duty, whether engaged in current practice or not.

In "A Dictionary of Finance and Banking" (2005), accountability is defined as:-

> Accountability: - An obligation to give an account. For limited companies, it is assumed that the directors of the company are accountable to the shareholders and that this responsibility is discharged, in part, by the directors providing an annual report and accounts. In an accountability relationship there will be at least one principal and at least one agent. This forms the basis of an agency relationship.

So whilst there are two common components in each of the above context-specific definitions (stewardship and an obligation to account for the discharge of duties in that role of stewardship), there is some confusion as to the precise definition of accountability. In the context of nursing, the concept contains the ideas of obligation and answerability. This is similar to the finance and banking definition, where company directors are obliged to account to shareholders, yet contrasts with the US military definition, which is a requirement to keep proper records. This confusion over the term accountability is not surprising as 'the word's etymology does not encompass its conceptual history' (Dubnick, 2002: 3).

2.2.1 The Origins of Accountability

In etymological terms accountability has its origins in the related 14th Century Middle English terms *acompte* and *aconte,* which mean "to count" (Dubnick, 2002; Hoad, 2003). The first recorded use of the word accountability is in a history of the US state of Vermont published in 1794 (Dubnick, 2002). In many languages it has no direct equivalent. A search in a Japanese dictionary yields the term *akautabiritii,* a literal transposition from English. In northern European languages such as German, Dutch and Danish accountability has a meaning akin to obligation or duty, rather than its core sense of account-giving (Dubnick, 1998).

In conceptual terms, accountability has a history 'as old as civilization itself' (Gray and Jenkins, 1993: 53). Around 2000BC, Hammurabi, the King of Babylonia, introduced a legal code, a significant proportion of which codified the accountability of individuals entrusted with others' resources. These individuals had a duty to provide evidence of what they had received – an account (Bird, 1973). Accountability for the use of state resources, such as wheat and flour, was taken seriously in Egypt's New Kingdom (1552-1069BC) (Ezzamel, 1997). In democratic Athens (c.400-500AD) accountability was a brutal and direct affair. Ten times a year public officials were held to account in an open public forum where a vote was taken on their continuing in office, whether there was a complaint against them or not (Roberts, 1982). Athenian generals were in a far more precarious position; they were at greater risk of death from their own people, as a result of being held to account for their last performance in battle, rather than at the hands of the enemy (Roberts, 1982).

Accountability, then, 'is a device as old as civilized government itself' (Normanton, 1971: 312). Given these origins, it is easy to see that accountability is the 'foundation of any governing process' (Dwivedi and Jabbra, 1989: 8). Accountability is also 'a highly controversial issue and the subject of considerable political conflict' (Mulgan, 2003: 5). Its appeal to politicians and those aggrieved with the conduct of government is undeniable: it is 'one of those golden concepts that no one can be against' (Bovens, 2005b: 2). Accountability is '…often used as a basic benchmark against which systems of government can be judged. Accountable government is deemed to be good government, and carries with it connotations of advanced democracy. Governments which can be characterized as unaccountable, or not properly accountable, are likely to provide fertile ground for the cultivation of authoritarianism, totalitarianism and every type of abuse of power' (Pyper, 1996a: 1).

Accountability is, then, 'at the heart of governance within democratic societies' (Thomas, 1998: 348) because if an individual is given absolute power, 'his

former sanity will depart; for the advantage that he holds breeds hybris' (Roberts, 1982: 5). Accountability is a key part of the system of checks and balances against tyranny and as such 'should be irksome to those agents at whom it is directed' (Barberis, 1998: 463). In democratic Athens, accountability of public officials was seen as a hallmark of democracy: 'unaccountability meant lawlessness' (Roberts, 1982: 6). Yet despite the fundamental nature of accountability to both democracy and governance and almost because of the gravitas attached to the concept of accountability, it has taken on an almost iconic status (Dubnick, 2002). It is used 'as a synonym for many loosely defined political desiderata such as transparency, equity, democracy, efficiency, responsiveness, responsibility and integrity' (Bovens, 2005b: 6), with little regard for the meaning of the concept.

Despite these problems, accountability in this context of democratic governance is a powerful concept that fulfils four distinct purposes. Accountability requires the delegation of power to take a course of action, and 'if you give a man power to do right you also give him power to do wrong' (Finer, 1950: 133). Accountability then constrains the discretion inherent in accountability (Uhr, 1993). So the control of public power and assurance of the use of public resources are the two traditional purposes of accountability. More recently it has been proffered as a means of ensuring improvements in the quality of public services (Dubnick, 2005) – the third purpose of accountability. These three purposes all buttress the fourth – the enhancement of the legitimacy of government (Pollitt, 1999).

Given the importance of the concept of accountability and its origins in simple, ancient societies, it is worth reviewing the different types of accountability that have developed as a result of the complexity inherent in the modern state. One useful means of distinguishing different types of accountability and of revealing its complexity is a typology (Mulgan, 2003).

2.2.2 Typologies of Accountability

Accountability has a longstanding and important role in government, so typologies of accountability are derived from the practice of accountability therein. There are a number of different typologies, none of which has been widely accepted (Mulgan, 2003). The typologies can be split into three broad groups, discussed below. The first is based on two different components of accountability: the principal and the mechanism through which the steward is accountable. The second is based on different subjects of the accountability relationship (Mulgan, 2003). The third is based around information provision and the results of the principal's judgement.

Principal / mechanism typologies

Principal / mechanism typologies are dependent on the constitutional context in which they were developed. In this category there are two broad groups: the American group and the "Westminster" group. The latter group covers the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Whilst there are distinct differences in the constitutional arrangements between these nations (e.g. the European Union for the UK and federal state government in Canada and Australia), they do nevertheless have a number of common features. These include democratic elections to one or more legislative chambers, ministerial accountability, cabinet government and a constitutional monarch. Therefore they can be treated as a single group (as per Flinders (2001)). I thus use the term "Westminster" as shorthand for this group of national constitutions (Chapman, 2000).

The American group.

Romzek and Dubnick (1987), in their analysis of the loss of the space shuttle Challenger in 1986, defined four basic types of accountability: bureaucratic, legal, professional and political. These types were derived from an analysis of the degree of an institution's control over its own actions (high or low) and the source of agency control (internal or external). Thus, bureaucratic accountability is a function of a high degree of control over institutional actions from an internal

source; legal accountability is a function of a high degree of control over institutional actions from an external source; professional accountability is a function of a low degree of control over institutional actions from an internal source and political accountability is a function of a low degree of control over institutional actions from an external source. The conclusion of Romzek and Dubnick's analysis is that NASA officials placed greater emphasis on bureaucratic accountability than professional accountability, with tragic consequences.

Deleon (1998) reviewed Romzek and Dubnick's typology from a decision-making and an organizational structure perspective. Deleon suggested that the particular form of accountability depended on whether a) the goals were clear or not, and b) whether the means to achieve the goals were clear or not. This analysis produced four types of accountability: bureaucratic (goals clear, means known), political (goals unclear, means known), professional (goals clear, means unclear) and "anarchic" (goals unclear, means unclear).

The "Westminster" group.

These typologies are more numerous, with contributions from Lawton and Rose (1991), Oliver (1991), Sinclair (1995), Stone (1995), Pyper (1996a) and Flinders (2001). These scholars have defined a number of different types of accountability. For example Lawton and Rose (1991) defined five types of accountability: political, managerial, legal, customer and professional, whereas Oliver (1991) defined four types: political, legal, administrative and public accountability. These studies are summarized in Table 2-1. The overlaps and differences between the types of accountability are highlighted in the next ten paragraphs.

Table 2-1 Summary of "Westminster" Typologies of Accountability

Study	Level of Analysis	Constitutional Context	Type of Accountability				
Lawton and Rose (1991)	Institutional	UK	Political	Legal	Managerial	Consumer	Professional
Oliver (1991)	Institutional	UK	Political	Legal	Administrative	Public / Consumer	
Sinclair (1995)	Individual	Australia	Political	Public	Managerial	Professional	Personal
Stone (1995)	Institutional	"Westminster"	Parliamentary	Judicial	Managerial	Market	Network Relations
Pyper (1996a)	Institutional	UK	Parliamentary	Legal / Quasi - legal	Charterism & Consumerism	Popular	
Flinders (2001)	Institutional	UK	Parliamentary	Judicial	Managerial		
Newman (2004)	Individual	UK	Administrative	Managerial	Public	Local community	Personal

Political accountability refers to the accountability of ministers to Parliament – the doctrine of ministerial responsibility. Under this doctrine ministers are responsible for the actions of their department (Lawton and Rose, 1991; Oliver, 1991). Oliver (1991) extends this definition to include the accountability of civil servants to ministers and the accountability of local authorities to central government and Parliament. Sinclair (1995), in a different context and at a different level of analysis, has a different conception of political accountability, that of accountability of executive agency CEOs to ministers.

Parliamentary accountability: both Pyper's (1996a) and Flinders' (2001) definition of parliamentary accountability include the doctrine of ministerial responsibility, but add some of the mechanisms used to make that accountability effective, including parliamentary questions, select committees, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the National Audit Office (NAO) and the Parliamentary Commissioner (now known as the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman). Stone (1995) limits the definition of parliamentary accountability to ministerial accountability within Parliament.

Legal or judicial accountability refers to the ability of the courts to challenge actions taken by public sector organizations through the process of judicial review (Lawton and Rose, 1991; Oliver, 1991). Stone (1995) adds the body of administrative law, tribunals and various ombudsmen as well as freedom of information. Pyper (1996a) includes the Parliamentary Ombudsman in this type of accountability, despite the Ombudsman's inclusion in parliamentary accountability, as well as public inquiries and European legislation. Lawton and Rose (1991) also include European legislation, but place the NAO in this type of accountability. Flinders (2001) includes judicial review, European legislation, the European Courts, the Human Rights Act 1998 and public inquiries.

Managerial accountability is concerned with managerial internal control of government departments through the use of targets and the alignment of departmental structures with specific objectives (Lawton and Rose, 1991;

Flinders, 2001; Newman, 2004). Stone (1995) takes a broader view and includes strategic objective setting for departments allied with the delegation of authority, the use of contracts, audit processes and the use of objective organizational and individual objectives.

Public accountability and Charterism / Consumerism are concerned with accountability to the public, individuals and community groups (Oliver, 1991; Sinclair, 1995; Newman, 2004; Newman, 2004). This is a less formal type of accountability when compared with political or parliamentary accountability. Lawton and Rose (1991), Oliver (1991) and Pyper (1996a) also include consumer accountability, which covers a range of steps that attempt to increase the accountability of those delivering public services. This includes measures such as the Citizen's Charter, the Patient's Charter, increased choice amongst public service providers, complaints procedures and flexible points of contact for users of public services. Lawton and Rose (1991) define consumer accountability differently. They define it as accountability to consumers of public services by means of appeal tribunals, ombudsmen and complaints procedures. Newman (2004) does not include these more formal elements in her view of public accountability.

Professional accountability is concerned with 'the sense of duty that one has as a member of a professional or expert group, which in turn occupies a privileged and knowledgeable position in society' (Sinclair, 1995: 229). It also involves being the representative of a particular profession to a wider community. In government, professional accountability can conflict with political accountability (Lawton and Rose, 1991).

Personal accountability is concerned with an individual's adherence to 'internalized moral and ethical values' (Sinclair, 1995: 230) and from these values, doing the right thing (Newman, 2004).

Network Relations accountability is concerned with mutual relations between

individuals and organizations that work together in a particular area. It covers peer groups and agencies where public and private sector organizations overlap, and is focussed on reputation and legitimacy in administrative decision-making (Stone, 1995).

Market accountability is concerned with the satisfaction of public service customers' needs through the use of incentive-based service provision. It is concerned with 'the responsiveness of service providers to a body of "sovereign" consumers' (Stone, 1995: 521). It is therefore based more on an "exit" strategy rather than a "voice" one.

Popular accountability is concerned with the accountability of the government to the public through various means. This includes elections, political parties, pressure groups and the media. These processes and groups act as 'genuine facilitators of popular accountability' (Pyper, 1996a: 37).

Local community accountability is concerned with the accountability of local government officials to community groups and the wider community within their constituency (Newman, 2004).

Subject based typologies

These are far fewer in number than the principal / mechanism typologies. Day and Klein (1987) distinguished between political accountability, where the criteria for the judgement of action were contestable and managerial accountability, in which tasks were carried out in accordance with agreed performance standards. Managerial accountability is further subdivided into fiscal (or regulatory) accountability (that the money has been spent correctly), process (or efficiency) accountability (that the agreed task has been carried out efficiently) and programme (or effectiveness) accountability (that the action or investment has produced the desired outcome). Behn (2001) distinguishes between accountability for finance, fairness and performance.

Information Provision and Judgment Typologies

The only typology in this group is derived from the doctrine of ministerial responsibility in Parliament in the United Kingdom. In this typology accountability has five elements: redirectory, informatory, explanatory, amendatory and sacrificial elements (Marshall, 1984; McVicar, Judge and Hogwood, 1998; Flinders, 2001). Redirectory accountability involves those charged with giving an account redirecting questions to those best placed to provide answers (Flinders, 2001). Informatory accountability requires that the person charged with rendering an account does so (McVicar et al., 1998). Explanatory accountability goes further and involves the provision of an explanation in support of the account given. It therefore includes informatory accountability (Flinders, 2001). Amendatory accountability is the result of a negative judgement by the principal: it requires both an apology and action to rectify the shortcomings identified in the account. Sacrificial accountability takes this one step further and requires the steward involved to resign as a result of the judgement of the principal (Flinders, 2001). Sacrificial accountability is not consistent with Flinders' exclusion of the component of sanctions from the concept of accountability, as sacrificial accountability is based on the ultimate political sanction – resignation.

Typologies of Accountability: Summary

The various typologies of accountability highlight a wide range of different types. Each of the constitutionally based typologies 'works well within its own constitutional context' (Mulgan, 2003: 32), but is not universally applicable. Parliamentary accountability and some of the particular aspects of accountability under the "Westminster" systems of government (such as Ombudsmen, tribunals, the PAC and the NAO) do not appear in Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) typology.

Even within the "Westminster" typologies there are significant differences. There are overlaps between political and parliamentary accountability. For example Lawton and Rose (1991) and Oliver (1991) include the doctrine of ministerial

responsibility in political accountability, whereas Pyper (1996a), Flinders (2001) and Stone (1995) include it in parliamentary accountability. There are also overlaps between some aspects of parliamentary accountability and legal and judicial accountability. For example Pyper (1996a) and Flinders (2001) include the NAO in parliamentary accountability, whereas Lawton and Rose (1991) include it in legal and judicial accountability.

The subject-based typologies appear to be more applicable across a range of contexts. Accountability for finance, fairness and performance (Behn, 2001) fits well with Day and Klein's (1987) definitions of regulatory and programme accountability.

The situation with typologies is therefore somewhat confused and illustrates the complexity of accountability in modern government. Because of the significant variations in meaning across and within particular contexts, the various types of accountability 'do not carry uniform connotations' (Mulgan, 2003: 34).

2.2.3 The Components of Accountability

Even in a relatively simple society such as ancient Athens, public servants were entrusted with duties on behalf of the electorate (Roberts, 1982). In today's more complex societies we are all reliant on others for the provision of many things which, were we to provide them ourselves, would require the expenditure of much time and effort. We rely on government to provide a safe, secure society. We depend on companies, professionals and specialists to provide goods and services, to advise us and act on our behalf. 'Yet, once we have entrusted other people or institutions to act on our behalf, what guarantee have we that they will pursue our interests rather than their own?' (Mulgan, 2003: 8).

The answer to this question is that we cannot entirely do so. We must trust those who act on our behalf to behave in an ethical and conscientious manner, (O'Neill, 2002). However trust has its limits, so we must fall back on accountability (Mulgan, 2003). Accountability has been defined as a social

relationship in which an actor feels an obligation to justify his or her conduct to a significant other (Gray and Jenkins, 1993; Romzek and Dubnick, 2000; Lerner and Tetlock, 1999; Pollitt, 2003; Bovens, 2005a). It has five distinct components: a relationship, a subject, the provision and seeking of information on the subject, judgement of the conduct of the accountable party in relation to the subject and, finally, sanctions (Day and Klein, 1987). I shall examine each of these components in turn.

The Accountability Relationship

Accountability is 'not a thing, but a relationship' (Pollitt, 1999: 2). It is a relationship characterized by stewardship, with a principal delegating power and responsibility for a particular course of action to the agent. In this relationship 'stewardship is thus established when a steward accepts resources and responsibilities entrusted by a principal' (Gray and Jenkins, 1993: 55). Some scholars use different language to describe the relationship. For example, Pollitt (2003) uses the words *accountor* to describe the steward and *accountee* to describe the principal. Mulgan (2003) uses the term *account-holder* to describe the principal. The terminology reflects a principal-agent model. However, this model is not useful for the concept of accountability, as it performs the same role as that of a blueprint for a real structure – it provides a skeleton, but not a functioning concept (Dubnick, 2002). Given this, the choice of terminology is more a matter of linguistic preference rather than being based on a substantive difference in meaning between the different terms. I have therefore chosen to adopt the terms *principal* and *steward*. What is clear, however, is that an accountability relationship involves a degree of authority of one party over another and therefore the parties are not equal (Mulgan, 1997).

An accountability relationship is based on agreement between the principal and the steward. They are bound together by an accountability code, 'a system of signals, meanings and customs which binds the principal and the steward in the establishment, execution and adjudication of their relationship' (Gray and Jenkins, 1993: 55) that is specific to a particular context. The relationship is

based on this 'shared set of expectations and a common currency of justifications' (Day and Klein, 1987: 5). So 'accountability depends on an agreed framework of meaning' (Day and Klein, 1987: 243) between the principal and the steward in relation to action to be taken by the steward on behalf of the principal.

The Subject of an Accountability Relationship

A steward is accountable to the principal *for* something. Without a subject, an accountability relationship would become meaningless. A steward can be accountable either for outcome standards or for 'standards for the process of execution' (Gray and Jenkins, 1993: 56). Day and Klein (1987) suggest that the subject of an accountability relationship is context dependent. In the context of a managerial accountability relationship, the subject of this relationship is the performance of agreed tasks against pre-agreed performance criteria. This can be developed into three further components: fiscal or regularity accountability, where the steward is accountable for ensuring that money has been spent as agreed; process or efficiency accountability, where the steward is accountable for making sure that the desired outcome has been achieved in a financially efficient manner; and programme or effectiveness accountability, where the steward is accountable for achieving the desired outcome (Day and Klein, 1987). Behn (2001) states that accountability can be for one of only three things: finances, fairness or performance.

In an accountability relationship, the principal delegates authority and responsibility to the steward in relation to the subject. This delegation results in a degree of managerial discretion on the part of the steward over a course of action. This 'permits interpretation of responsibilities and selection of value premises to underlie decisions' (Linder, 1978: 182). In the absence of anything else, these value premises reflect the biases of those making decisions. The calling of a steward to account then becomes 'a response to the biases associated with discretion' (Linder, 1978: 182). So the subject of the accountability relationship can be regarded as the principal's response to the

steward's biases that arise out of the discretion granted to the steward by the principal.

The Provision and Seeking of Information

When the action is complete, or at the behest of the principal, the steward provides information to the principal, who then asks questions to verify the adequacy of the information (Romzek and Dubnick, 2000; Bovens, 2005a). This ability to call to account the steward acting on behalf of the principal is at the core of the concept of accountability. The state auditor is one of the first manifestations of this aspect of accountability: this role has been recorded in ancient Athens and the Roman Empire (Normanton, 1966). The account can take many forms, from a record of income and expenditure to responding to a specific query.

The nature of the enquiry from the principal may vary as well, ranging from information seeking to explanation and on to justification. This investigation of the actions of the steward by the principal is the 'essential basis of accountability' (Mulgan, 2003: 9). Scrutiny requires action on the part of both parties, as effective accountability 'cannot be reduced to periodic reporting, however formalized' (Uhr, 1993: 11). Accountability implies more than questioning and answering. It also goes beyond calling to account: the steward must be *held* to account (Mulgan, 2003). This reflects the balance of power in the relationship: 'It is the very essence of accountability, however, that [the] initiative must be held by the questioners ' (Normanton, 1971: 315).

Judgement

On the basis of the account provided and from the answers given in response to any questions, the principal passes judgement on the conduct of the steward in relation to the subject of the accountability relationship (Bovens, 2005a). Judgement is made against some criteria agreed with the steward that are consistent with the subject of the accountability relationship. These can range from the verification of a financial statement to agreement that a performance

target has been achieved. Historically, verification efforts have been focussed on public finances (Romzek and Dubnick, 2000). However, this judgement can either be positive or negative (Bovens, 2005b). It may take the form of the approval of an annual report or the condemnation of an individual or organization.

A mediating aspect of accountability in relation to this aspect is that it is not a certainty. It is a potential – account*ability*. The word reflects 'the potential of being called and held to account' (Mulgan, 2003: 10). This is on the presumption that something has gone awry and that an account needs to be called for, questions asked, with the possibilities of remedial action and the application of sanctions. So accountability usually only applies when the principal believes a negative judgement is possible.

Sanctions

In the event of a negative judgement, sanctions can be applied by the principal. These can be formal or informal. The nature of the sanctions applied also depends on whether the steward is an organization or an individual. Formal organizational sanctions include rectification, fines or failure to approve an account (Mulgan, 2003). Informal organizational sanctions follow from these formal sanctions and include the loss of, or damage to, the organization's reputation. Formal individual sanctions include the loss of bonuses, fines, disciplinary proceedings, loss of employment and even legal penalties. Informal individual sanctions again follow from these formal sanctions and include the loss of personal reputation and damage to an individual's career. Dr David Kelly's appearance before two Parliamentary select committees in the summer of 2003 severely damaged his reputation and arguably his own self-esteem, with lethal consequences (Hutton, 2004).

This aspect of accountability is controversial. Some scholars exclude sanction from the concept of accountability e.g. Thynne and Goldring (1987), Dwivedi & Jabbra (1989), Lawton and Rose (1991) and Flinders (2001). These scholars

restrict their definition of accountability to a relationship, a subject, the provision and seeking of information, and judgement. Accountability becomes 'the condition of having to answer to an individual or body for one's actions' (Flinders, 2001: 13). Accountability translates into answerability: liability is associated with the similar but different concept of responsibility (Flinders, 2001). This differentiation between accountability and responsibility has become known as the 'Butler doctrine' (Flinders, 2001: 47) after the Cabinet Secretary who first proposed the distinction. However, this view of accountability, that excludes the component of sanction, is not sustainable on two grounds.

First, there are accountability processes that confine themselves to information and explanation without the element of formal sanctions (e.g. the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (2005)). The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman has no formal powers to enforce sanctions in cases of maladministration. However, the Ombudsman's recommendations are nearly always followed by those departments and agencies that have been found to be at fault, and therefore they have been held to account. The view of accountability that excludes the component of sanction fails to recognize the power of informal sanctions, even if formal powers of sanction are not present. Without sanctions, formal or otherwise, 'the process of accountability would be seriously incomplete' (Mulgan, 2003: 10).

Second, the exclusion of the component of sanction from the concept of accountability falls foul of the daily usage of the term. 'When people screw up, there are a variety of ways to hold them accountable – to punish them' (Behn, 2001: 3). Accountability is incomplete without effective sanctions:-

> 'Where institutions or officials are found to have been at fault,
> there must be some means of imposing remedies, by penalising
> the offenders and compensating the victims. Where this does not
> happen, for instance where no one is prepared to accept
> responsibility or when no restitution is forthcoming, we complain

that there has been no accountability' (Mulgan, 2003: 9).

It is a presumption of accountability that 'unfavourable information leads to the imposition of sanctions' (March and Olsen, 1995: 165). To be accountable means that an individual or an organization assumes the liability for the correction of errors and the offering of recompense (Caiden, 1989). It entails 'being liable to be required to give an account or explanation of actions and, where appropriate, to suffer the consequences, take the blame or undertake to put matters right if it should appear that errors have been made' (Oliver, 1991: 22). To be accountable is to be liable to pay 'and this theme of punishment is essential to the core meaning of accountability' (Uhr, 1999: 99). So it is reasonable to include the sanctions component in the concept of accountability.

2.2.4 The Synonyms of Accountability

Based on the five components (a relationship, a subject, the provision and seeking of information on the subject, judgement of the conduct of the accountable party in relation to the subject and sanctions), I am now able to distinguish accountability from some of the terms that are often substituted for it. A search in a thesaurus (Waite, 2003) reveals three words synonymous with accountability:-

Accountability: - responsibility, liability, answerability.

Koppell (2005) adds three further terms that are used interchangeably with accountability: transparency, controllability and responsiveness. Together these terms represent the source of much confusion about the concept of accountability. Whilst they depart from the definition of accountability set out above, they nevertheless all have what Wittgenstein called 'family resemblances' (Wittgenstein, 2001: 27), that is they are intertwined by the 'relatedness we "see" in them, as we would see some resemblance among a group of very distinct individuals who are part of a family' (Dubnick and Justice, 2004: 11). Using the definition set out above, I will now distinguish

accountability from these terms.

Responsibility

There has been much scholarly 'territorial jousting between accountability and responsibility' (Mulgan, 2000: 558). It is a common error to confuse accountability with responsibility (Treasury and Civil Service Committee, 1994). These two words are used as if they were synonymous (Gregory, 2003). Like accountability, responsibility has its etymological roots in a duty to respond or reply to another party. Unlike accountability, whose meaning has broadened over time, the meaning of responsibility has become narrower (Mulgan, 2000). It has become restricted to an internal sense, 'from the logical connection between being able to answer externally for one's actions and having freely chosen them' (Mulgan, 2003: 15). In this sense, the two concepts overlap as 'holding someone to account usually implies (in the standard individual case where one person is designated as the agent of another) that the designated person is personally responsible for his or her actions' (Mulgan, 2003: 15).

So, whilst an accountable person is usually responsible, a responsible person is not accountable unless an external principal is involved who can call or hold them to account. However, it is possible to be accountable without being responsible. Nazi officials may have been fully accountable, 'yet at the same time profoundly irresponsible in their instrumental complicity in the pursuit of evil purposes' (Gregory, 2003: 560). So the obligations of accountability need to be fulfilled in a responsible manner. The definition of accountability I have set out earlier is concerned with an external principal who can scrutinize the actions of the agent. Responsibility is then limited to the internal aspects of ethics and morality (Uhr, 1993; Bovens, 1998).

Liability

Liability is sometimes used as a synonym for accountability (see for example Koppell, 2005). According to some scholars it is the difference between accountability and responsibility (Flinders, 2001). My discussion in section 2.2.3

demonstrated that liability is a component of accountability in that an individual or an organization will face sanctions (i.e. they are liable) if the judgement of their action by the principal is unfavourable. It is not then the same as accountability, but is rather one of its components. Although being accountable means an individual or organization is liable, the latter does not necessarily mean being accountable, as 'the mere revelation of wrongdoing or poor performance does not constitute accountability' (Koppell, 2005: 57). Accountability exists when all five components in Section 2.2.3 are present. Liability, then, is part of, but not the same as, accountability.

Answerability

Answerability is another term that is used synonymously with accountability. A key component of accountability is the requirement for the steward to provide an answer to the principal. This view of accountability is at the heart of the concept of ministerial accountability to the House of Commons, as 'the minister must always answer questions and give an account to Parliament for the actions of his department' (Scott, 1996: 1800). Some scholars also take this view and regard accountability as answerability, for example Lawton and Rose (1991: 17) state that 'accountability is a process where a person or groups of people are required to present an account of their activities and the way in which they have or have not discharged their duties'. Other scholars who take this view include Thynne and Goldring (1987), Dwivedi and Jabbra (1989) and Flinders (2001). However, answerability on its own does not equate with accountability. In Section 2.2.3 the threat of sanctions as a result of the principal's judgement was a key part of the concept of accountability, for without it 'we complain that there has been no accountability' (Mulgan, 2003: 9). Therefore, answerability is a part of accountability, but it is not the same as accountability.

Transparency

The term transparency is also used synonymously with accountability. It refers to the quality of the account provided by the steward to the principal, so that 'an

accountable organization cannot obfuscate its mistakes to avoid scrutiny' (Koppell, 2005: 96). So transparency is important to the judgement of the principal, but to rely solely on the transparency of the account is to deny the balance of power in the accountability relationship. As I have outlined in Section 2.2.3, accountability involves more than reporting; it involves the investigation of the actions of the steward by the principal. Thus, a transparent report at best is no more than a starting point in the *provision and information seeking* stage of accountability. Transparency is then a preliminary part of accountability, but no more than that.

Controllability

Controllability is another term that is used synonymously with accountability. It is distinct from the concept of accountability for two reasons. First, accountability is essentially backward-looking in nature. It 'involves inquiring into actions after they have occurred and imposing remedies or sanctions for past breaches of rules and instructions' (Mulgan, 2003: 18) and as such it 'provides the post-mortem of action' (Normanton, 1971: 312). It is therefore distinct from forward-looking controls such as laws and regulations, which limit action before any is taken. Laws act as *ex ante* constraints, whereas accountability acts as *post ante* oversight. Accountability, legislation and regulation can therefore be seen as part of a continuum of control (Scott, 2000). So accountability is part of the control mechanisms that limit the abuse of power. However, control is a far wider concept, in which accountability is 'only one part of the regulatory and controlling agenda' (Mulgan, 2003: 20).

Second, control is only one of the purposes that accountability is meant to serve (Aucoin and Heintzman, 2000). The other purposes are assurance that resources are being used appropriately and the encouragement of continuous improvement. All three contribute to the fourth and overarching purpose of 'the enhancement of the legitimacy of government' (Pollitt, 1999: 3). Control, then, is one of the possible purposes of accountability; however, it is not the same as accountability.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness is the sixth term that is used synonymously with accountability. Accountability is one means of ensuring that stewards are responsive to the needs and requirements of their principals (Mulgan, 2003). This view of accountability is highlighted in the customer-focussed approach to government proposed by Osborne and Gaebler (1993). However, many changes that have developed as a result of the "reinventing government" movement have improved responsiveness without any increases in accountability. Such measures include complaints procedures about public services, the setting out of obligations to the public and the publication of annual reports, for example Her Majesty's Land Registry (2006). Therefore, to ascribe improvements in responsiveness as increases in accountability (Considine, 2002) is incorrect. Accountability may require responsiveness on the part of the steward in relation to the requirements of the principal. Responsiveness, on the other hand, does not necessarily entail accountability as it is possible to be responsive without being accountable.

2.2.5 A Definition of Accountability

In section 2.2.3 I outlined five components that form the concept of accountability: a relationship, a subject, the provision and seeking of information on the subject, judgement of the conduct of the accountable party in relation to the subject and sanctions. In section 2.2.4 I differentiated accountability from six terms that are often used synonymously with the term accountability: responsibility, liability, answerability, transparency, controllability and responsiveness. Given this differentiation between these six synonyms and accountability, and based on the five components, accountability, for my purposes in this thesis, can be defined as **a social relationship, with resources and responsibilities entrusted to a steward for a particular task by one or more principals, with the consequent potential for an account to be called for, judgement made and remedies and / or sanctions imposed.**

2.3   Accountability in the United Kingdom Civil Service

The definition above is derived from literature. However, 'the practical meaning of any idea deeply woven into the social fabric seldom results directly and never results exclusively from what philosophers have said about it, a rule to which the notion of [accountability] is most certainly no exception' (Harmon, 1995: 34). One particular body where this is the case is the British civil service, where accountability is deeply intertwined with its historical and constitutional development. Therefore my starting point in this section lies with the origins of the civil service.

2.3.1 The Origins of Civil Servant Accountability

Etymologically, the terms *civil service* and *civil servant* originated in the East India Company that ran India from 1608 until 1858. The terms were used to differentiate between the company's civil and military servants (Hennessy, 2001). The conceptual origins of the civil service, though, are somewhat older. The origins of the British civil service are to be found in 'that bedraggled, uncomfortable caravanserai of court servants which followed the Saxon Kings of England round from one primitive resting place to another' (Hennessy, 2001: 18). This small group of servants performed a treasury function of money acquisition, storage and recording. The arrival of William I in 1066 brought forth the first chancellor. This was not the political role that we know today, but was rather a servant charged with the administration of the kingdom through the issuance of writs. The role was continually occupied during William's reign and the chancellor's writs became 'the most characteristic expression of the King's administrative will' (Douglas, 1964: 293). Over the next 500 years this treasury function developed as an adjunct to the Royal household. It was not until the reign of Henry VIII that the national administration of the state was formally organized into six departments, all dealing with revenue collection in various forms. In addition, the King's inner circle of advisors was institutionalized into a body that we recognize today - the Privy Council (Hennessy, 2001). Later on, Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council bore many of the hallmarks of today's civil

service including routine meetings and meticulous minute-taking. Peace with Spain in 1604 and the opening up of the European market resulted in the creation of the non-revenue raising Committee for Trade and Plantations, the forerunner of today's Department for Trade and Industry (DTI). The restoration of the monarchy resulted in the establishment of Treasury control of Whitehall (Hennessy, 2001). By the turn of the 18th century, further traces of today's civil service could be discerned: the Northern and Southern Departments were reorganized and renamed as the Home Office and Foreign Office respectively. However, government departments in the mid 19th century were, in effect, independent fiefdoms with recruitment methods that included patronage, influence and favouritism (Pyper, 1995b). Government employment was a job for life, with a publicly funded pension to boot. With public administration suffocating under this 'deadweight of patronage and inefficiency' (Hennessy, 2001: 27), pressure for change came from the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the day, Gladstone, and the then Permanent Secretary of the Treasury, John Trevelyan. The Report on the Organization of the Permanent Civil Service (Northcote and Trevelyan, 1854) set out the basis for the future organization, recruitment and employment of civil servants. With regard to the relative positions of ministers and these newly recruited civil servants,

> 'It may be safely asserted that, as matters now stand, the Government of the country could not be carried on without the aid of an efficient body of permanent officers, occupying a position duly subordinate to that of Ministers who are directly responsible to the Crown and to Parliament, yet possessing sufficient independence, character, ability, and experience to be able to advise, assist, and, to some extent, influence, those who are from time to time set over them' (Northcote and Trevelyan, 1854: 3)

Patronage and nepotism were to be replaced by selection by interview and examination, promotion based on merit and the division of labour into 'superior "intellectual" and inferior "mechanical" tasks' (Pyper, 1995b: 7). This, coupled

with the increasing scale and complexity of government, brought the matter of the accountability of civil servants in relation to that of ministers to the fore.

However, the publication of the Northcote and Trevelyan report (1854) was not the origin of civil servant accountability in the United Kingdom. Its origins lie with William I and his establishment of centralized authority in Britain by means of the Domesday Book (Dubnick, 1998), which contains the results of a detailed audit of the property held by every subject at that time (Douglas, 1964). The Domesday Book, together with the oath of allegiance that was sworn by the 'landowning men of any account' (Douglas, 1964: 355) at Salisbury in 1086, enabled William I to assert his sovereignty over the nation in two ways. First, the Domesday Book gave William I detailed knowledge of the contents of his kingdom (and was therefore his) and second, the oath of allegiance meant he had established a legal and moral claim over all that the landowners owned. William I had established an accountability-based relationship, in that they were now accountable to him as loyal subjects, bound by an oath of allegiance, and William I knew for what they were accountable (that which was enumerated in the Domesday Book) (Dubnick, 2002). These arrangements were strengthened further in the reign of Henry I, during which audit arrangements were centralized and formal account-giving arrangements were put in place (Dubnick and Justice, 2004). So accountability was based on a moral and legal relationship between the rulers and the ruled.

Civil servant accountability has continued to develop and change over the centuries and has survived the change from monarchical to parliamentary sovereignty (Dicey, 1959). The Northcote and Trevelyan report (1854) resulted in a further change. In 1864 Parliament was adamant that civil servants be accountable to the House of Commons (Woodhouse, 1994). This was compounded in 1870 by the arrival of the first civil servants under the new system, who found it difficult to accept that the departmental minister would be the main conduit between themselves and the wider public (Woodhouse, 1994). Yet, by 1873, the House of Commons rejected the notion of direct accountability

of civil servants; the focus was to be on ministers. Civil servants were to be accountable to their departmental superiors within the civil service and ultimately to ministers. Ministers were to be responsible to the House of Commons for every action or inaction in their departments. This is commonly referred to as the doctrine of ministerial responsibility. However, in practice it is about the minister providing an account to the House of Commons (Marshall, 1984; McVicar et al., 1998; Flinders, 2001).

This 'formal doctrine of accountability in the British government remains in the shadow of A. V. Dicey (1959) and those writers who followed in his wake during the earlier and middle decades of the [last] century' (Barberis, 1998: 451). The doctrine is consistent with the 'progressive' style of public administration of the era in which it was developed (Hood, 1995). As politicians were assumed to be inherently prone to corruption, waste and favouritism, the doctrine established buffers that prevented political and managerial discretion through the use of elaborate procedures and rules as well as the diffusion of power (Hood, 1995). The restricted nature of individual power and the complex rules governing activity effectively constrained the accountability of individual civil servants. The outcomes of policy implementation were the product of actions taken by a myriad number of individual civil servants. Complex rules restricted individual activity. This limited the subject of civil servant accountability to probity, equity and due process (Parker and Gould, 1999).

Given the doctrine of ministerial accountability, the notion that civil servants can be held or called to account by principals external to the civil service is 'extremely problematic' (Pyper, 1995b: 119). The civil servant would effectively become a politician and thus undermine Parliament, as it is only through the minister in Parliament that ministers, as part of the executive arm of the state, are held to account. Therefore, 'ancillary to ministerial accountability is non-accountability of civil servants' (Turpin, 1994: 120). Under the doctrine ministers were 'held to be comprehensively accountable whilst their agents - the permanent officials - retreated steadily into the mists of non-accountability'

(Johnson, 1974: 6).

This doctrine is reflected in today's principal documents that govern the relationships between ministers, civil servants and the House of Commons. The Code of Conduct for Ministers maintains that ministers are accountable 'for the policies, decisions and actions of their departments and "Next Steps" agencies' (Cabinet Office, 2001: 1). Its counterpart for civil servants, the Civil Service Management Code, sets out the rules that govern the appointment and management of civil servants. The code states that civil servants are accountable to the minister of their particular department (Civil Service Commissioners, 1995). Civil servants are also accountable to their superiors within their own departments or agency 'for the efficient, effective and economical discharge of their responsibilities to their civil service line managers' (Pyper, 1995b: 117). Civil servants are ultimately accountable to the permanent secretary of their department and finally to the minister. Successive versions of the "Armstrong Memorandum" state that civil servants are responsible for their actions to their ministers, whilst ministers are accountable to Parliament (House of Commons, 1985; House of Commons, 1987). Civil servants are accountable to ministers for the evidence they give when they appear before select committees and appear on behalf of ministers. The sole exception to this is the Accounting Officer, who is directly accountable to Parliament through the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) for the expenditure of their respective department or executive agency (Pyper, 1995b).

2.3.2 The Trend towards Civil Servant Accountability

The formal doctrine of accountability is a simple one. However, the 'reality of accountability has come to depart from the formal doctrine' (Barberis, 1998: 453) in two distinct ways. First, civil servants are increasingly held accountable for the outcome of their actions. A series of political scandals over the last two decades have resulted in civil servants being called to account by principals outside of the civil service. Lord Scott (1996), in his report on the sale of defence and dual-use equipment to Iraq, legitimized 'the splitting of the

constitutional seam between ministers and officials' (Barberis, 1998 : 452). He stated that if ministers were to avoid blame for the export of prohibited goods on the grounds of a lack of knowledge, they ought to assist with the provision of information, otherwise 'Parliament (and the public) will not be in a position to judge on whom responsibility for what has occurred should be placed' (Scott, 1996 : Vol.4, K8.16). This statement clearly moved the burden of accountability from the ministers to the civil servants involved. Sir Robin Butler, the Cabinet Secretary in his evidence to Lord Scott, differentiated between accountability and responsibility. Minsterial accountability, the duty of a minister to account to Parliament, could not be delegated (Flinders, 2001; Woodhouse, 2004), whereas civil servants were not directly accountable to Parliament for their actions, but were responsible for certain actions and could be delegated clearly defined responsibilities (Treasury and Civil Service Committee, 1994). This has become known as the 'Butler doctrine' (Flinders, 2001: 47), in which accountability is limited to answerability, whereas responsibility now includes liability. However, given the distinction I have made between accountability and responsibility in Section 2.2.4., under the 'Butler doctrine' (Flinders, 2001: 47), civil servants are accountable as they are liable. The appearance of Dr David Kelly before the Select Committee for Foreign Affairs and the subsequent inquiry by Lord Hutton (Hutton, 2004) demonstrated the extent to which civil servants can be held to account for the outcomes of their actions.

Second, the doctrine has departed from its original form by changing the nature of the subject of an individual civil servant's accountability. There has been 'a shift from accountability encompassing probity, stewardship and the concept of *ultra vires* to accountability focussing on positive action – managerial performance, the effective use of resources and professional and personal integrity' (Hinton and Wilson, 1993: 123). Civil servants are increasingly held accountable for the outcomes and outputs of their work.

There have been repeated reaffirmations of the doctrine of ministerial accountability over the intervening decades since the doctrine's inception

(Woodhouse, 1994; Winetrobe, 1995; Woodhouse, 2004) and it remains the keystone of the relationship between Parliament and the executive (Flinders, 2001). Despite this, there is a considerable amount of scholarly debate over the effectiveness of the doctrine, with some scholars suggesting that ministers appear to be less willing than ever to accept responsibility for the actions of their departments and executive agencies and hold civil servants accountable instead (Finer, 1956; Flinders, 2001), whilst others suggest that this is no longer the case (Woodhouse, 2004). Nevertheless, there has been a progressive increase in the accountability of civil servants over three decades. Indeed, 'one of the most significant developments during the 1980s and 1990s in relation to accountability has been the trend away from the anonymity of officials towards civil service accountability' (Woodhouse, 1994: 288-289). This trend is the result of three interrelated changes: the expansion in the role of the state in daily economic life since the 1870s, the introduction of the departmental select committee system to Parliament in 1979 and the introduction of the 'Next Steps' agencies in 1988.

The Expansion of the State

The role of the civil service in the daily economic life of the nation has undergone a major expansion since the mid-19th century. The arrival of state pensions, labour exchanges as well as health and unemployment insurance before the first world war resulted in the 'mutation of the regulatory to the social service state' (Hennessy, 2001: 57). After the second world war the arrival of the Welfare State, the NHS and nationalised industries further expanded the scope of the state. For the civil service these changes brought with them a whole new range of responsibilities and a more substantial role in the economic life of the country (Ling, 1998). This growth in civil service activity was not unproblematic for the doctrine of civil servant accountability. 'It is clear that much of the difficulty in respect of definition and enforceability [of accountability] can be attributed to the scale and character of the public activities and services for which we wish to establish accountability, and to the complexity and novelty of the executive structures which have been devised to undertake these tasks'

(Johnson, 1974: 3). Consequently, the meaning of the doctrine of ministerial accountability has become much more complex (Woodhouse, 1994). It is no longer possible for ministers to directly control the detailed activities of the departments and agencies under their control because of the sheer complexity and scale of departmental and agency activity. Ministers now carry out a supervisory function, with the power to intervene in activity or direct specific activities if they so desire. Ministerial accountability has at least become relative to the degree of control or supervision exercised by the minister rather than being absolute (Flinders, 2001). This being the case, 'it no longer appears that traditional ministerial responsibility for the acts of civil servants provides a sufficient measure of accountability to Parliament' (Turpin, 1994: 123). Given this lacuna in the doctrine of ministerial accountability, the accountability of civil servants would then appear to be a reaction to the problems of "many hands" (Thompson, 1980) and the perception by the public of 'rule by nobody' (Arendt, 1970: 38).

The Parliamentary Select Committee System

Introduced to the House of Commons in 1979 (Pyper, 1995b), the departmentally based select committee system has also contributed to the trend towards the accountability of civil servants. The intention behind their introduction was to improve the ability of Parliament to 'scrutinize the executive and hold ministers to account' (Woodhouse, 1994: 177). Select committees have the power to send for persons, papers and records, a practice rooted in the origins of Parliament as a High Court (Woodhouse, 1994). Civil servants regularly appear before select committees to be questioned about their activities. The accepted convention is that civil servants appear before select committees on behalf of their ministers. There have been some doubts over the effectiveness of select committees on the grounds that the "Osmotherly Memorandum" in effect gave the civil servant the opportunity to refer questions back to the minister. In practice, few civil servants have done so (Pyper, 1995b). The cumulative result of the introduction of 'the post-1979 regime of select committees was a challenge to the de jeure non-accountability of officials to

Parliament, to the point where a developing de facto accountability could be discerned' (Pyper, 1995b: 125). Therefore 'there has been a move in the direction of a de facto direct accountability of officials to Parliament' (Pyper, 1995a: 30).

The "Next Steps" Agencies

The "Next Steps" agencies were created to carry out the service delivery and implementation work that forms the bulk of the work of the Civil Service (Drewry and Giddings, 1995). The Next Steps initiative was aimed at providing a contractual basis for managing the performance of the operational activity which formed the bulk of government work (Talbot, 2001). Policy formation was intended to be carried out by a small parent department. The agencies were meant to remove the burden of operational activity from ministers, with accountability for operational activity being carried by the chief executives of the "Next Steps" agencies rather than ministers (Hazell, 1993). No changes in ministerial accountability arrangements were envisaged (Pyper, 1995a). In practice agency chief executives have appeared before parliamentary select committees, provided answers to MP's parliamentary questions and have become public spokespersons for their agencies (Talbot, 2004).

There have been two distinct impacts on the doctrine of accountability as a result of the "Next Steps" initiative. First, the split between operational and policy matters has caused confusion. In appearances before various select committees, the permanent secretaries of parent departments have been asked questions about operational matters that were the preserve of agencies; and the chief executives of "Next Steps" agencies have been asked questions that relate to policy matters that were the remit of parent departments (Massey, 1995). Some agency chief executives also appear at conferences and deal with the media. The end result is that agency chief executives are now accountable to the select committees and, in some cases to the public. These are both forms of accountability beyond that which is owed to ministers and their civil service superiors.

Second, the character of the accountability relationship has changed. What had previously been an internal civil service issue has become an external matter between the chief executive of the executive agency and the minister. Agency chief executives have, on occasion, publicly criticized government policy (Talbot, 2004). As Jordan observes, 'in reality it is now accountability to the minister by the chief executive rather than accountability of the minister to the House of Commons that is on offer: these are different' (Jordan, 1992: 13). The sackings of the chief executives of the Prisons Service and the Child Support Agency (Barberis, 1998; Harlow, 1999) and the resignation of the chief executive of the Scottish Qualifications Agency (Clarence, 2002) all support this thesis. In parallel there has been a move from permanent tenure to appointments based on contract (Hood, 1998; Haque, 2000). This has had the effect of increasing ministerial control over civil servants, especially at senior levels. So there has been an increase in the accountability of senior civil servants to ministers, whilst at the same time accountability has been extended outside the traditional hierarchical line to the select committees.

2.3.3 The Changing Subject of Civil Servant Accountability

Under the traditional doctrine, civil servant accountability has been limited to due process, probity, equity and transparency in the execution of their work (Parker and Gould, 1999). The arrival of a phenomenon known as New Public Management (NPM) has changed for what civil servants are accountable. NPM is not a uniform phenomenon. Four distinct, but interrelated versions have been identified. These include the assertion of cost-driven management control over organizations, decentralization in the form of splits between purchasers and providers, ideas such as quality, excellence and entrepreneurialism born out of the re-inventing government movement (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993) and more recently, a focus on the public as citizens and consumers of public services (Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald, and Pettigrew, 1996).

Despite these variants, NPM places a strong emphasis on the use of what are

perceived by the public sector to be the methods and practices of the private sector (Hood, 1991; Rhodes, 1994; Rhodes, 1997). In particular, NPM emphasizes 'hands on management, explicit standards and measures of performance, managing by results, value for money and more recently, closeness to the customer' (Rhodes, 1997: 48). In effect the public sector has engaged in both mimetic and coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and adopted the language and behaviours of the private sector, despite the significant differences between the two. The 'distinctiveness of the public sector lies in its emphasis on social justice and equity in the provision of goods and services that meet collectively agreed community needs' (Lupson and Partington, 2005: 8). This contrasts with the private sector, which is focussed on meeting the needs of paying customers through the provision of goods and services defined by the discipline of the marketplace (Parker and Gould, 1999). So NPM, with its emphasis on economy, efficiency and effectiveness, has had an impact on the subject of a civil servant's accountability.

NPM has resulted in a restriction of civil servant accountability to a limited range of performance measures, rather than for a wider set of public interests (Rhodes, 1994). Whereas accountability has traditionally been for probity and due financial process, the emphasis is now on financial performance, where accountability is for performance in relation to outputs (Parker and Gould, 1999). More traditional notions of accountability - such as socio-economic progress, law and order, the alleviation of poverty, fairness, integrity and justice - have been replaced with notions of increased productivity and efficiency, competition and cost effectiveness (Haque, 2000). The subject of an accountability relationship has increasingly been expressed in objective terms (Stone, 1993), particularly in relation to performance (Paul, 1991) (Glynn and Perkins, 1997). In terms of Day and Klein's (1987) description of managerial accountability, traditional public administration was more concerned with fiscal and process accountabilities. There is now a much greater emphasis on programme or outcome accountability (Day and Klein, 1987). A civil servant's accountability has been extended from a narrowly defined financial concept to a

much broader form covering finance, performance and effectiveness (Harlow, 2002). Accountability within the government is now framed in terms of agreed objective outcomes peculiar to a specific relationship (Public Services Productivity Panel, 2002). The net result is that the subject of accountability has changed from due process to objectives (Hood, 1991).

2.3.4 The Role of Senior Responsible Owner

The changes outlined in sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 have been felt in all parts of the civil service, with the widespread use of individual and organizational performance targets (Ferlie et al., 1996), the regular appearance of civil servants before parliamentary select committees (Pyper, 1995b) and the public removal of civil servants who are perceived to have failed in some way (Barberis, 1998; Barker, 1998; Harlow, 1999; Polidano, 1999). At the same time under the 'Butler doctrine' (Flinders, 2001: 47) (see section 2.3.2), civil servants have become accountable for the tasks and actions delegated to them. This focus on managerial accountability, performance and discretion (Hood, 1991) is clearly reflected in a relatively new role introduced to the civil service in 2000 – the SRO.

The role of SRO was introduced in 2000 as part of a package of measures designed to improve the government's track record in information technology (IT) projects. The "Modernising Government" White Paper (Cabinet Office, 1999) set out the new government's ambitions for improvements in the delivery of public services. IT was perceived to be fundamental to the success of these ambitions. However, the public sector is littered with examples of IT projects that have been delivered late, have exceeded their budgets or have proved unsuitable for their intended use. These include projects such as the computerised passport processing system, the National Insurance Recording System, the Benefits Card Payment project and the Libra project (Comptroller and Auditor General, 1999; Comptroller and Auditor General, 2000; Comptroller and Auditor General, 2001; Comptroller and Auditor General, 2003). The failure of these projects and the consequent negative impacts on the delivery of public

services has been widely reported in a regular succession of stories in the press. These have been accompanied 'by high levels of political and public concern that the benefits of the projects are lost and that large sums of public money are being wasted' (Lupson and Partington, 2005: 2).

When the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons reviewed public sector IT capital projects, it recommended that senior managers be held accountable for the 'specific anticipated benefits from IT projects' (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 1999: xiv). A comprehensive review of public sector IT capital projects found many instances of weak management and unclear lines of accountability diffused across committees or multiple individuals (Cabinet Office, 2000). The restricted nature of civil servant accountability was perceived to be a major contributor to the poor levels of project performance. Committee or diffused ownership was also perceived to be a contributor to poor project performance as it 'diluted accountability, diffused authority and led to slower, less responsive decision making' (Cabinet Office, 2000: 16-17).

The British government introduced a package of measures designed to address these criticisms, at the forefront of which was the role of the SRO (Cabinet Office, 2000). The role was created to achieve three objectives: first, to improve the speed of decision making; second, to improve the clarity of the public client's voice across the project and third, to improve the performance of public sector IT projects (Cabinet Office, 2000; Office of Public Services Reform, 2003). Every mission-critical or high risk project is now required to have a designated SRO (HM Treasury, 30/3/2004). SROs are meant to be senior figures that have the necessary authority to ensure the project can achieve its objectives (Office of Government Commerce, 2007). The SRO should also be 'recognized as the owner [of the project] throughout the organization' (Cabinet Office, 2000: 16) and 'as the owner and end-user, they should be in the best position to make judgements...as their business need is driving [the project]' (Cabinet Office, 2000: 16). Further, the SRO provides strategic direction for the

project by ensuring that the project is focussed on the needs of the business by engaging with stakeholders, that the risks associated with the project are 'tracked and mitigated as effectively as possible and by taking the key decisions on the project' (Cabinet Office, 2000: 17). Also, the identity of the SRO should remain unchanged for the duration of the project or change 'only when a distinct phase has been completed' (Cabinet Office, 2000: 18).

The designated SRO is accountable for achieving the project's objectives (Office of Government Commerce, 2002; Office of Government Commerce, 2003) and 'has overall responsibility for delivering the business objectives and benefits of any programme or project' (Cabinet Office, 2000: 14). The SRO's accountabilities are to be 'explicitly included in their personal objectives' (Cabinet Office, 2000: 18) in order to encourage personal ownership of the project. Yet SRO accountability is defined by the official literature only in the loosest terms: 'The Senior Responsible Owner has overall accountability for the programme', and is 'ultimately accountable for the success of the programme' (Office of Government Commerce, 2003: 19). SRO accountability is specific to a particular project, and is defined as a set of quantified project objectives, in line with published recommendations (Public Services Productivity Panel, 2002). These objectives are developed by the sponsoring group of which the SRO is a peer member (Office of Government Commerce, 2003). The SRO is accountable to the sponsoring group for achieving these objectives. The sponsoring group is often an existing senior management group within the department or agency, but is sometimes specifically created for the project.

In order to fulfil this role, the SRO needs to be able network effectively, both within their own organization and externally. They also need to have a broad perspective on the project so that they are aware of the wider issues that may impact their project. Further, they need to have the ability to influence and negotiate with people, the time to perform the role and be able to be frank and open about the project (Office of Government Commerce, 2007).

SROs report to the sponsoring group as well as to other senior management teams within their organization. Ministers often request briefings from SROs at key stages in a project's lifecycle, when the impact of a failure could have a negative impact on public services or generate negative publicity. The SRO is also meant to refer serious problems to the sponsoring group, top management or ministers as necessary (Office of Government Commerce, 2007). SROs also appear before select committees of the House of Commons alongside the departmental Accounting Officer to account for failed projects (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2002; House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 30th October 2006). The need for such an appearance can have a detrimental effect on an individual's career (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2002). SROs play a major role in Gateway Reviews (Office of Government Commerce, 2004), a review process that is used to evaluate projects at key stages. SROs work with the NAO on project audits. Yet as with any civil service role, an individual usually occupies the position of SRO for a period of one or two years before moving on. Nevertheless, poor project reviews, projects that have a negative impact on public services or that result in poor publicity can affect an SRO's performance-related bonus, career progression and employment status.

The introduction of the role of SRO and the use of project performance targets are based on the assumption that these will lead to improved project performance. This is consistent with the view taken by the Public Services Productivity Panel: 'clarifying and sharpening accountability will significantly improve performance and delivery' (Public Services Productivity Panel, 2002: 4). Whether this assumption is correct is open to debate. However, it does pose a challenge for the current doctrine of civil servant accountability because 'it is difficult to put such an outcome-based system under legislative scrutiny or debate due to the qualitative and controversial nature of public sector outcomes' (Haque, 2000: 609), as a significant part of the outcomes could be outside the scope of the SRO's jurisdiction. The efficacy of this approach, based on a mandated combination of individual accountability and objective performance

targets, is also open to question on three grounds.

First, it has already been established 'that the ways people actually work usually differ fundamentally from the ways organizations describe that work in manuals, training programs, organizational charts and job descriptions' (Brown and Duguid, 1991: 40). So an individual SRO will carry out the role in a manner that differs from that which has been proscribed.

Second, despite the use of objective performance targets, there is a risk of misinterpretation, for 'it is at once evident that such agreement can only be partial and incomplete, no matter who is involved' (Friedrich, 1940: 3-4). An individual SRO may not fully comprehend the performance targets for which they are accountable, potentially leading them to pursue the objectives they understand rather than what was intended (Lupson and Partington, 2005). Further, the objective performance targets may not fully reflect the totality of the desired project outcomes, as individuals tacitly know more than they are able to say (Giddens, 1984).

Third, an individual SRO may have a wider or narrower understanding of to whom an account must be given. The monolithic Weberian bureaucratic hierarchy has been replaced with a 'differentiated polity' (Rhodes, 1997: 4). The individual civil servant now sits at the centre of an extensive network of private sector suppliers, non-departmental public bodies, independent regulators, think tanks, citizens, customers, politicians and taxpayers, who must be dealt with. This has resulted in an increased number of 'multiple stakeholders, which is inconsistent with the hierarchical relationships expected from the Westminster system' (Parker and Gould, 1999: 119). It is also problematic for the traditional doctrine of civil servant accountability. In this context, an individual civil servant's understanding of their accountabilities may be more akin to Spiro's (1969) "multicentric accountability" in that they are accountable not only to the sponsoring group, but to other groups, organizations and individuals 'to different degrees, in different ways' (Spiro, 1969: 98). Therefore, accountability is more

likely to be subjectively than objectively defined in this 'differentiated polity' (Rhodes, 1997: 4). Further, it is likely to consist of more than *post ante* account-giving. The SRO might put into effect a broader understanding of accountability by taking into account the views of others beyond the sponsoring group (Donahue, 1989). Therefore 'the restriction of accountability to the sponsoring group carries with it the risk of unfulfilled accountability relationships and thus potentially a perception of a less than satisfactory outcome' (Lupson and Partington, 2005: 10).

Two conclusions can be drawn from these limitations: first, that an individual SRO's understanding of what they are accountable for may differ from the objectives defined by others for a particular project; and second, that an individual SRO's understanding of to whom they are accountable may differ from that defined by others for the particular project.

These conclusions suggest the two principal problems inherent in the objective definition of accountability. Individual SROs will have different understandings of their accountabilities and will pursue the outcomes they believe will satisfy a wider range of parties to whom they understand they are accountable. SROs, therefore, take action in the pursuit of the accountabilities they understand, rather than solely on the basis of those that have been mandated. These conclusions produce the following research question, *'What are individual SROs' subjective understandings of their accountabilities*?'

2.4   Accountability Research

One way of trying to establish how accountability is understood is to examine existing research. Two areas of literature offer the potential to resolve this: public administration and psychology.

2.4.1 Accountability Research: Public Administration

A systematic search of the public administration literature (Lupson, 2003) found

that there was little empirical research on accountability in this field. I have revisited this search process regularly since 2003 and have updated the results accordingly. The results of this process are summarized in Table 2-2 overleaf. These show that despite the importance of accountability and the increasingly widespread use of the term, the empirical literature on accountability remains sparse (Schwartz, 2005). Table 2-2 demonstrates three further points.

First, much of the empirical research in the table is based on individual case studies. This research does not answer the question of how individuals understand accountability.

Second, much of the research lacks a theoretically-based methodological foundation from which conclusions can be drawn about accountability and ideas for further areas for research into accountability can be generated. The studies by Day and Klein (1987), Romzek and Dubnick (1987), Harlow (1999), Lee (2000), Romzek and Ingraham (2000), Klingner, Nalbandian and Romzek (2002), O'Connell (2005), Koppell (2005) and Page (2006) do not have a clearly stated theoretically based methodological approach.

Third, much of the research is focussed on an organizational level of analysis. The studies by Harlow (1999), Johnston and Romzek (1999), Lee (2000), Romzek and Ingraham (2000), Flinders (2001), Considine (2002) Klingner, Nalbandian and Romzek (2002), Kluvers (2003), Ospina, Grau and Zaltsman (2004), O'Connell (2005), Koppell (2005) and Page (2006) focus on problems of accountability at an institutional level. The studies listed above represent 14 out of the 20 studies listed in Table 2-2. One further study (Roberts, 2002) leaves the reader unclear as to whether it is aimed at an institutional or an individual level of analysis. The remaining five studies all adopt the individual as the level of analysis (Sinclair, 1995; Bundt, 2000; Millar and McKevitt, 2000; Dunn and Legge, 2001; Newman, 2004). Of these five, four have either a clearly articulated methodology or, where none is stated, I have reviewed the language used and made a judgement accordingly.

In relation to the question 'What are individual SROs' subjective understandings of their accountabilities?' only two of the five studies at the individual level of analysis are relevant – Sinclair (1995) and Newman (2004).

Sinclair (1995) explored how the CEOs of 15 state government agencies understood and practiced their accountabilities. The study revealed five different types of accountability: political, public, managerial, professional and personal. This study suffers from two limitations. First, the study focussed on state government, a level of government that does not have a direct equivalent in the United Kingdom. Second, the study was carried out in Australia. Whilst both the United Kingdom and Australia are constitutional monarchies, there are substantial differences between the Australian constitution and that of the United Kingdom. The Australian system has a federal structure with a significant amount of power devolved to the states, whereas government in the United Kingdom remains highly centralized, despite devolution. Thus, the findings may not offer much insight into how SROs understand accountability in the setting of the civil service in the United Kingdom.

Newman examined how a group of public sector managers constructed accountability 'in the ambiguous terrain of network governance' (Newman, 2004: 17). The study revealed five different constructions of accountability: administrative, managerial, public, personal and local community. However, this study has one main limitation. The sample consisted of a wide range of civil servants, local government employees and voluntary sector workers, who expressed five different constructions of accountability. Due to the varied nature of the respondents, the degree to which these can be amalgamated is open to question. Civil servants operate within the boundaries that arise out of the doctrine of ministerial accountability and the practices of central government. Local government officers and the CEOs of charitable organizations do not. However, Newman does recognize that not all constructions were given equal weight by the respondents.

Table 2-2: Empirical Research on Accountability in the Public Sector

Study	Title	Context	Level of Analysis	Theoretical Basis	Method	Conclusion
Day and Klein (1987)	Accountabilities: Five Public Services	UK: Five public services	Organization	None stated	Qualitative interviews	Accountability is understood in terms of accountability to the community being served as well as sense of personal accountability.
Romzek and Dubnick (1987)	Accountability in the Public Sector: Lessons from the Challenger Tragedy	USA: Federal agency	Organization	None stated	Single case study	Inappropriate focus on bureaucratic and political accountabilities rather than on professional accountability resulted in the decision to launch the Space Shuttle Challenger.
Sinclair (1995)	The Chameleon of Accountability: Forms and Discourses	Australia: Public sector organization CEOs	Individual	Social constructionism	Qualitative interviews N=15	The CEOs constructed five types of accountability: political, public, managerial, professional and personal.
Harlow (1999)	Accountability, New Public Management and the problems of the Child Support Agency	UK: Executive Agency	Organization	None stated	Single case study	Feedback from internal accountability procedures may improve the administrative process. Ministerial accountability to Parliament was ineffective, as the CSA agency chief executive resigned. Parliamentary and judicial accountability generated publicity but failed to resolve underlying policy problems.
Johnston and Romzek (1999)	Contracting and Accountability in State Medicaid Reform: Rhetoric, Theories	USA: State medical agencies	Organization	None stated	Single longitudinal case study	Privatization of state resources impacts on previous accountability arrangements. Public contract managers need to develop rigorous

Study	Title	Context	Level of Analysis	Theoretical Basis	Method	Conclusion
	and Reality					accountability mechanisms that facilitate monitoring. There are tensions between the legal and political accountability mechanisms, with which the states' contract monitors are concerned, and the professional accountability mechanisms of the private sector case managers.
Bundt (2000)	Strategic Stewards: Managing Accountability, Building Trust	USA: City librarians	Individual	None stated	Qualitative: structured interviews	Librarians fulfilled their professional accountability, and in some cases were able to manage their accountability to city politicians and officials, despite the apparent conflict between these different forms of accountability.
Lee (2000)	The new Hong Kong international airport fiasco: accountability failure and the limits of the new managerialism	Hong Kong: State organization	Organization	None stated	Single case study.	Managerial accountability for results does not guarantee the efficient delivery of results due to the indirect nature of public authority and the diffusion of responsibility.
Millar and McKevitt (2000)	Accountability and performance measurement: an assessment of the Irish health care system	Ireland: Health authority managers	Individual	Grounded theory	Mixed: quantitative survey and qualitative interviews (N=46)	Performance measures can assist in delivering public accountability if the measures reflect the manner in which services are received and experienced by clients. Performance measures can also assist in the delivery of public accountability.

Study	Title	Context	Level of Analysis	Theoretical Basis	Method	Conclusion
Romzek and Ingraham (2000)	Cross Pressures of Accountability: Initiative, Command and Failure in the Ron Brown Plane Crash	USA: Military	Organization	None stated	Single case study.	Political and hierarchical accountabilities conflicted with the dictates of legal and professional accountabilities.
Dunn and Legge (2001)	U.S. Local Government Managers and the Complexity of Responsibility and Accountability in Democratic Governance	USA: Local government	Individual	None stated	Quantitative survey. N = 488	Accountability and responsibility are defined in practice in a more complex manner than either Friedrich (1940) or Finer (1950) would suggest. Responsibility and accountability are neither mutually exclusive nor paradoxical, but are blended to produce a workable arrangement.
Flinders (2001)	The Politics of Accountability in the Modern State	UK: Government department	Organization	None stated	Mixed: single case study and semi-structured interviews (N = 65)	Political accountability whilst effective, is characterized by defensiveness. It may also be exerting significant strain on an organization's resources. Judicial accountability is not a significant type of accountability, but will increase as European legislation takes effect. The introduction of managerial accountability has created tension as it conflicts with traditional forms of political accountability. Increased managerial accountability may also be contributing to the workload of organizations.

Study	Title	Context	Level of Analysis	Theoretical Basis	Method	Conclusion
Considine (2002)	The End of the Line? Accountable Governance in the Age of Networks, Partnerships and Joined-Up Services	International: Australia, Netherlands, New Zealand, UK: Public employment service organizations	Organization	None stated	Quantitative survey N = 1164	Horizontal accountability (outside of the traditional top down hierarchical line) is a problem when it is accompanied by public and private agencies competing in the same policy fields.
Klingner, Nalbandian and Romzek (2002)	Politics, Administration and Markets: Conflicting Expectations and Accountability	USA: State agency	Organization	None stated	Single case study	Privatisation of state foster care services increased the complexity of public management as a result of three competing forms of accountability: political, administrative and market.
Roberts (2002)	Keeping Public Officials Accountable Through Dialogue: Resolving the Accountability Paradox	USA: State government	Unclear	None stated	Single case study	Accountability paradox can be resolved through dialogue.
Kluvers (2003)	Accountability for Performance in Local Government	Australia: local government	Organization	None stated	Quantitative survey N=330	NPM has broadened the concept of accountability to cover performance. However, issues remain around asymmetric information and imbalanced relationships that prevent effective accountability for performance.
Newman (2004)	Constructing Accountability: Network Governance	UK: Public and voluntary sector managers	Individual	None stated: review suggests social	Qualitative interviews N=35	Accountability is constructed and reworked to guide everyday decision making. There were five

Study	Title	Context	Level of Analysis	Theoretical Basis	Method	Conclusion
	and Managerial Agency			constructionism		types of accountability: administrative, managerial, public, personal and local community.
Ospina, Grau and Zaltsman (2004)	Performance Evaluation, Public Management Improvement and Democratic Accountability	International: Four countries	National	None stated	Quantitative: data review and analysis	Managerial accountability for results does not hinder political and democratic accountability, but can be used to enhance them.
O'Connell (2005)	Program Accountability as an Emergent Property: The Role of Stakeholders in a Program's Field	USA: State agency	Organization	None stated	Single case study	Accountability is a function of the activities of the stakeholders in a program. Any one stakeholder holds some but not all of the other stakeholders accountable.
Koppell (2005)	Pathologies of Accountability: ICANN and the Challenge of "Multiple Accountabilities Disorder"	USA: Hybrid organization	Organization	None stated	Single case study	Organizations may find multiple accountabilities difficult to manage.
Page (2006)	The Web of Managerial Accountability: The Impact of Reinventing Government	USA: Federal agencies	Organization	None stated	Three case studies	Three hypotheses developed from the case studies: the reinvention of federal welfare, education and environmental programs has changed accountability arrangements, but not consistently across the three cases.

At the start of this section, I intended to establish what empirical research had been carried out that might offer some insight into how individuals understand accountability. Having examined the literature, I draw three conclusions. First, there has been little empirical research on how individuals understand accountability in the field of public administration. Second, only one study has been conducted at an individual level in the United Kingdom (Newman, 2004) and third, the mixed nature of the participants in this study suggests that the study attempted to answer a question different from 'What are individual SROs' subjective understandings of their accountabilities?'

Therefore, in relation to the meaning of accountability for individuals, the public administration literature does not offer any clear answers. Both Sinclair's (1995) and Newman's (2004) work offer only partial answers to the question of how accountability is understood by individuals, albeit with significant contextual limitations. I shall now turn my attention to a related area that has the potential to provide answers to the question of how individuals understand accountability: psychology.

2.4.2 Accountability Research: Psychology

Psychologists take a rather different view of accountability from that adopted by scholars of public administration. Accountability is seen by psychologists as a bridging element between individual and institutional levels of analysis (Tetlock, 1999). There has been significant effort by psychologists over the last 20 years or so to establish the effects of accountability on individuals. Table 2-3 lists some of the principal studies in this field.

From this body of research, a number of findings are relevant to this thesis. The psychological consequences of making an individual accountable depend on six main factors. These are presented below.

1) If an audience has known views, the accountable individual tends to conform

to those views (Tetlock, 1983). By way of contrast, if the views of the audience are not known, conformity is not possible. Under these conditions, the accountable individual adopts a more integrative and complex mode of thought and considers different perspectives on the issue (Tetlock, 1983).

2) Whether an individual is accountable for a process or an outcome. Outcome accountability has only negative effects on judgement quality, increasing inconsistency and reducing calibration. Process accountability has the opposite effect and increased judgement accuracy and calibration (Siegel-Jacobs and Yates, 1996).

3) Whether or not a demand for accountability is perceived to be legitimate or illegitimate has an impact on accountability. If the demand is perceived to be illegitimate, then a negative response (reduced motivation and excessive stress) is possible (Lerner and Tetlock, 1999).

4) When an individual learns they are accountable after their decision (post-decisional accountability), individuals focus more on the justification of earlier decisions, an effect known as bolstering. Pre-decisional accountability, in which individuals know they are accountable before they take a decision, attenuates their commitment, especially when individuals are accountable for the process through which they make decisions, rather than the outcomes of their decision (Simonson and Nye, 1992; Lerner and Tetlock, 1999).

5) Multiple principals also have an impact on accountability. Accountable individuals adopt one of either two coping strategies: they either try to avoid any decision at all, or engage in significant cognitive efforts to develop an integrated position on the issues that need a decision (Green, Visser and Tetlock, 2000).

Table 2-3: Psychological research on accountability

Study	Title	Conclusions
Tetlock (1983)	Accountability and Complexity of Thought	Accountability is not a certain method of encouraging complex and open-minded thought. When the views of superiors are known, there is considerable pressure to adopt policies that conform to those views. Accountability to an audience with unknown views may eliminate some cognitive and judgemental biases. Accountability may reduce overconfidence by prompting individuals to look for and consider alternative evidence and arguments.
Tetlock, Skita and Boettger (1989)	Social and Cognitive Strategies for Coping with Accountability: Conformity, Complexity and Bolstering	When individuals know the views of the audience and are not constrained by previous commitments, they shift their views to those of the audience when being held to account. When individuals do not know the views of the audience and are also not constrained by past commitments, they think in flexible, multidimensional ways. When individuals are accountable for positions to which they are already committed, they tend to expend effort on justification of those positions.
Weigold and Schlenker (1991)	Accountability and Risk Taking	Accountability reduces risk taking for those individuals who do not perceive themselves as high risk takers. High risk takers continue to take risks even when they are accountable.
Simonson and Nye (1992)	The Effect of Accountability on Susceptibility to Decision Errors	Accountability reduces errors if decision makers can identify which decision would be regarded as more rational. Decision makers desire a favourable evaluation of their decision and a decrease in the likelihood of criticism.
Siegel-Jacobs and Yates (1996)	Effects of Procedural and Outcome Accountability on Judgement Quality	Accountability for process produced increased judgement accuracy and calibration. Accountability for outcomes reduced calibration and increased judgemental inconsistency.
Gelfand and Realo (1999)	Individualism - Collectivism and Accountability in Intergroup Negotiations	Accountability affects negotiators' psychological states and behaviour and outcomes, High accountability enhanced co-operation in groups with high levels of collectivism and also enhanced competition in groups with low levels of collectivism. Accountability may have a positive effect on negotiators, depending on the level of collectivism.

Study	Title	Conclusions
Green, Visser and Tetlock (2000)	Coping with Accountability Cross-Pressures: Low-Effort Evasive Tactics and High-Effort Quests for Complex Compromises	In multiple principal situations, accountable individuals resort to one of two coping strategies: either a) decision avoidance, procrastination, buck-passing and leaving the situation, or b) engaging in high levels of cognitive effort to produce an integrated complex position on the issue.
De Cremer, Snyder and Dewitte (2001)	The less I trust, the less I contribute (or not)? The effects of trust, accountability and self monitoring in social dilemmas	Accountability for decisions increases the level of contribution to the discussion of a social dilemma. Low trust individuals contribute more when accountability is high.
Dobbs and Crano (2001)	Outgroup accountability in the minimal group paradigm: implications for averse discrimination and social identity theory	Accountable individuals adopt a more careful thought processing style than those who are not accountable.
Sedikes, Herbst, Hardin and Dardis (2002)	Accountability as a Deterrent to Self-Enhancement: The Search for Mechanisms	Accountability deters self enhancement. A focus on an individual's weaknesses in a performance domain can lead to lower self-appraisal scores.
De Cremer and Bakker (2003)	Accountability and Co-operation in Social Dilemmas: The Influence of Others' Reputational Concerns	Making individuals accountable to others can sustain and increase co-operation levels: this applies only when the decision maker believes that others use the social norm of co-operation as a guideline for their own behaviour.
Mero, Guidice and Anna (2006)	The Interacting Effects of Accountability and Individual Differences on Rater Response to a Performance-Rating Task	Respondents who exhibited high levels of the two traits, conscientiousness and public self-consciousness, felt a greater need to justify their decisions than those who exhibited lower levels of these traits.

6) When faced with a social dilemma, accountability for a decision can increase the level of contribution from an individual (De Cremer et al., 2001). This also leads to increased levels of co-operation when a decision maker believes that others use the social norm of co-operation as a guideline (De Cremer and Bakker, 2003).

In relation to the question 'What are individual SROs' subjective understandings of their accountabilities?' this body of research has two principal drawbacks. First, without a common definition of the concept of accountability, it would appear that the various scholars were investigating different phenomena. For example, Green, Visser and Tetlock define accountability as 'the social pressure to justify one's views to others' (Green et al., 2000: 1380), whereas Weigold and Schlenker (1991) go further and include the components of judgement and sanction. Mero, Guidice and Anna (2006) define accountability in terms of answerability for performance in order to fulfil duties, obligations and expectations. Lerner and Tetlock (1999) make the point that accountability is not a uniform phenomenon but has several distinct variations. These include the presence of another (who will observe an individual's actions), identifiability (what an individual says or does will be attributed to them), evaluation (their performance will be assessed against some set of criteria) and reason-giving (individuals must justify what they have done or said) (Lerner and Tetlock, 1999).

Second, it is apparent that the range of psychological studies presented here is aimed at understanding the effects of accountability on individuals and not how individuals understand accountability. Psychologists have sought to understand how accountability works, what factors can change it and the impact of a range of different types of accountability on other psychological processes. So the psychological research does not offer an answer to the question 'What are individual SROs' subjective understandings of their accountabilities?'

2.5   Summary

In this chapter I have established both the importance and complexity of accountability in government through a review of 12 accountability typologies. I have also examined five components of accountability and analyzed six synonymous terms. Based on this review, I have defined accountability as: **a social relationship, with resources and responsibilities entrusted to a steward for a particular task by one or more principals, with the consequent potential for an account to be called for, judgement made and remedies and / or sanctions imposed.**

I have then traced the development of the doctrine of civil servant accountability in the United Kingdom. Civil servants have traditionally been accountable solely to their organizational superiors and ultimately to ministers for the execution of their duties. Changes in the scale of government, coupled with parliamentary reforms and the arrival of NPM, have resulted in changes to the accountability of civil servants. Civil servants are now accountable for the outcome of their actions to a wide range of policy interest groups, parliamentary committees, stakeholders, politicians and the public. Whilst these changes have been seen across the civil service, they are clearly illustrated in a relatively new role, that of the SRO. The SRO is accountable for the delivery of a project performance target to a senior management group within their own organization. However, the subjective and cognitive limitations of objective accountability, coupled with the apparent wider accountability of civil servants, suggest that an individual SRO may have a far wider understanding of both what they are accountable for, and to whom they are accountable than the objective definition suggests. Therefore my research question is **'What are individual SROs' subjective understandings of their accountabilities?'**

With regard to this question I have reviewed research on accountability in the fields of public administration and psychology and found that little is known about how individuals understand accountability. Only two studies (Sinclair, 1995; Newman, 2004) have the potential to answer the research question.

However, both have contextual limitations that mean they do not provide an answer to the research question. In the field of psychology, accountability research is not concerned with individuals' subjective understandings of accountability, but with the effects of accountability on individuals. Therefore, given the paucity of relevant studies in the field of public administration and the irrelevance of the psychology research on accountability, empirical research is required to answer the research question.

Chapter Three: Methodology

A key step towards the provision of an answer to the research question developed in Chapter 2 is to examine the different theoretical explanations of how individuals learn about a social phenomenon (Watkins, 2000). This is a question of epistemology, 'in which attention is directed towards determining not only the nature and sources of knowledge, but also the strengths and weaknesses of particular ways of knowing' (Watkins, 2000: 93). My purpose in this chapter is to set out the basis for my decision to adopt a particular research method. In Section 3.1 I describe four theoretical approaches to learning about meaning, review the limitations inherent in each approach and, where previous research exists, illustrate its use in the study of accountability. In Section 3.2 I present an alternative approach – phenomenography. I trace its development, present its philosophical foundations, examine its relationship with phenomenology and review the principal criticisms that have been made. In Section 3.3 I review how a phenomenographic approach would avoid the limitations presented in Section 3.1 and select phenomenography for its ability to provide a more comprehensive answer to the research question. I summarize the chapter in Section 3.4.

3.1   Four Approaches to Learning about Meaning

The question "How do we gain knowledge about the world?" has challenged philosophers, educationalists, psychologists and academics since Meno challenged Socrates. When asked by Meno "Can one be taught virtue?", Socrates suggested that as neither of them knew the answer, both should search for it. Meno's response to this has since become known as Meno's Paradox: 'How can you search for something when you do not know what it is? And if you do not know what to look for and were to come across it, you would not recognize it as what you are looking for ?' (Marton and Booth, 1997: 2). The resolution of this question is fundamental to this research, as individuals must first gain knowledge of a phenomenon in order to understand it.

In Chapter 2 I established that the research question was 'What are individual SROs' subjective understandings of their accountabilities?' I also found that current research could not answer this question. The question I shall answer in this chapter is, 'How do individuals gain knowledge about, and form a meaning of, a phenomenon?'

Scholars have put forward numerous responses to the question of how individuals gain knowledge and develop meaning. These range from the early attempts by philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Protagoras and Democritus, who suggested that 'sensation and perception were the only sources of knowledge' (Reynolds, Sinatra and Jetton, 1996: 93), to more recent perspectives from scholars such as Skinner, Chomsky, Vygotsky and Greeno (Reynolds et al., 1996). Whilst there are significant differences between these approaches in a number of areas, I shall follow Watkins (2000) and describe four broad approaches that offer the possibility of learning about the meaning of a social phenomenon. These are behaviourism, cognitivism, individual constructivism and social constructivism. Each of these approaches has a distinctive orientation to learning and the self. Each approach also offers particular advantages and disadvantages for the study of any given aspect of social reality. This categorization is by no means mutually exclusive, as there are theoretical overlaps from one approach to another.

In the next four sub-sections, I summarize the central tenet of each position, and in relation to accountability review the weaknesses of each position and outline any previous research that has been carried out. In conducting this latter exercise, I have had to try to establish the particular theoretical basis of a study and allocate it to a relevant approach. This has not been difficult where previous researchers have been clear about the approach they have adopted in their work. However, the researcher's theoretical stance is not always clearly stated. Therefore I have made a judgement on the theoretical position of the research based on my understanding of the work.

3.1.1 Behaviourism

Behaviourism is the scientific study of behaviour and has its roots in the writings of J. B. Watson and I. B. Pavlov, amongst others (Skinner, 1987). It is based on the assumption that individuals gain knowledge and develop meaning from repeated sensory stimulation from an external source (Reynolds et al., 1996). When this response becomes habitual, the verbal aspects of the response produce meaning for the individual (Watkins, 2000). Behaviourism covers a range of intellectual perspectives including classical and operant conditioning. Classical conditioning is associated with the Russian physiologist I. B. Pavlov and takes the view that when an arbitrary stimulus is used with a main stimulus, after a number of repetitions the arbitrary stimulus alone will produce the conditioned response (Hilgard and Bower, 1966). Operant conditioning is associated with the scholar B. F. Skinner. In this, an association is formed between a behaviour and a result that reinforces that behaviour (Reynolds et al., 1996). The behaviour is then operant or instrumental in producing the result (Hilgard and Bower, 1966). The main form of learning is conditioning, in which repetition of the sensory experience results in the sensory experience taking on meaning for the individual (Marton and Booth, 1997). Learning, in operant conditioning, involves a change in the rate of response to a stimulus that achieves a beneficial result for the individual (Bredo, 1997). Variations in meaning are attributed to changes in reinforcement events, whilst changes in meaning are ascribed to changing environmental demands.

As a basis for the study of individuals' understanding of accountability, behaviourism has three weaknesses. The first is the depiction of individuals as uncritical, passive recipients of knowledge, 'incapable of learning through insight or conscious thought' (Bredo, 1997). In this scenario an SRO would have to be accountable for a number of projects before accountability for a project took on any meaning.

Second, behaviourism can only explain changes in meaning as a gradual process, as repeated reinforcement is needed to acquire meaning in the first

place. Therefore, individuals would find a new or ambiguous situation difficult to respond to, as there was no previous response reinforcement upon which to base a response. In this case an individual would adopt a trial and error approach and go through their repertoire of responses until the situation was resolved (Hilgard and Bower, 1966). For example projects with a European dimension would further complicate the generation of meaning by an individual SRO, due to the lack of equivalence in meaning. Further, if different accountability arrangements were put in place for a particular project, the absence of response reinforcement would suggest that an individual SRO might find it difficult to respond.

The third is the assumption that stimulus words are universally understood within a community. Dubnick (2002) notes that accountability suffers from "terminological incommensurability" (Kuhn, 1996) as the term "responsibility" (which I have already covered in Chapter 2) is used instead in Italian, French, Portuguese and Spanish. This linguistic problem defies the ready translation of the concept of accountability from one political and administrative context to another; it is often an English import into another language (Harlow, 2002).

3.1.2 Cognitivism

Cognitivism takes a diametrically opposite position to behaviourism in its claims regarding the acquisition of knowledge. The principal focus of cognitivism is on mental processes rather than habits. Cognitivism is based on the assumption that knowledge is gained from within the mind (Chomsky, 1963; Simon, 1957; Scott and Marshall, 2005). An individual makes use of prior knowledge to make sense of phenomena that are initially perceived as un-constructed (Hilgard and Bower, 1966). Individual acts are explained 'in terms of an internal representation of an external reality' (Marton and Booth, 1997: 9). An individual has a system of symbols which are used to process external stimuli and take the appropriate action (e.g. physical action) after processing (i.e. thinking) (Vera and Simon, 1993). These internal symbols (or representations) of an external

reality are at the core of cognitivism, as their contents are 'claimed to be the basis for determining the meaning of a phenomenon' (Watkins, 2000: 96). Learning is then not based around the acquisition of habits as behaviourism would suggest, but rather on the acquisition of mental representations such as symbol structures. Changes in meaning are the result of the acquisition of a more widely accepted mental representation. Similarly, variations in meaning are attributed to the possession of more or less complex representations (Watkins, 2000). Cognitivism then places a greater emphasis on individual learning when compared with behaviourism. It replaces reinforcement with mental representations and moves learning processes from the environment to the individual (Bredo, 1997).

In relation to the study of individuals' understanding of accountability, cognitivism has four main drawbacks. First, it does not explain the source of mental representations used by an individual to confer meaning to a phenomenon. When faced with an unstructured phenomenon, individuals use an existing representation to give meaning to it. The question then is 'Where do the contents of the representation derive their original meaning?' (Watkins, 2000: 97). Second, there is also the question of how an individual decides which representation to use when faced with an unstructured phenomenon (Marton and Booth, 1997). Third, cognitivism also assumes that there is a fixed way of defining a situation, so 'it is difficult to establish how individuals acquire their own unique representations or negotiate or redefine the contents of their representations' (Watkins, 2000: 97). This suggests that accountability meanings are initially defined by virtue of the compliant nature of individuals. Fourth, an individual would need a representation to decide to change the meaning of a given situation. This raises a question about the basis on which individuals decide to retrieve and apply a particular representation (Reynolds et al., 1996).

These limitations become more apparent when considering the case of the SRO. First, an individual would already have to be in possession of a mental

representation of accountability as an SRO before they were appointed. Yet the source of this representation is unclear. Second, different mental representations of SRO accountability are ascribed to variations in the complexity of these representations. Yet no explanation is offered as to the source of these variations. Third, changes in the meaning of accountability for an SRO are attributed to the acquisition of a more widely accepted representation. Again, cognitivism offers no explanation of the representation used to identify and process this new representation of accountability.

3.1.3 Individual Constructivism

Individual constructivists purport that knowledge is 'constructed by the mind's ability to actively explore and develop its own meaningful accounts of phenomena' (Watkins, 2000: 98). This construction takes place 'through her acts, through her interaction with the environment, by means of the complimentary adaptive mechanisms of accommodation and assimilation' (Marton and Booth, 1997: 6). These interactions are transformed into individual interpretations that have meaning for the individual. Knowledge then is 'individually and idiosyncratically constructed' (Liu and Matthews, 2005: 387). Differences in meaning are primarily the result of, first, variations in conceptual abilities between individuals and second, different individual interpretations of the same phenomenon (Watkins, 2000). Cognitivists suggest that these conceptual abilities may be genetically determined. Changes in meaning are the result of individuals adapting their interpretations according to their requirements. Major contributions to this approach include genetic epistemology (Piaget, 1983), radical constructivism (von Glaserfeld, 1995) and personal construct theory, which examines the ways in which individuals construct meanings of external phenomena through mental processes (Kelly, 1991). With its emphasis on the role of the individual in developing meaning, cognitivism offers a defensible basis for the creation of meaning, 'if one subscribes to the primacy of human agency over external or innately determined sources of knowledge' (Watkins, 2000: 98).

Individual constructivism can be criticized on three main grounds. First, 'if knowledge of a phenomenon is a product of an individual's unique interpretation, then how is it possible for one individual to truly know what another individual means when engaged in the act of communication?' (Watkins, 2000: 98-99). Taken to its logical conclusion, 'it tends towards a denial of the possibility of sharing and communicating knowledge between people' (Fox, 2001: 29), as 'knowledge is not directly transmittable from person to person' (Liu and Matthews, 2005: 387). Second, individual constructivism views all individual meanings of a phenomenon as equal (Ogborn, 1997), which does not provide a basis for the critical comparison of different meanings (Watkins, 2000). Third, it does not explain how individuals adopt a more complex construction whilst still working at a less complex level (Marton and Booth, 1997).

These limitations are even clearer when placed in the context of the SRO. How can an SRO be accountable if they do not understand for what a principal has asked? What meanings of accountability are more useful than others, given its widespread misuse and abuse (Dubnick, 2002)?

3.1.4 Social Constructivism

Social constructivists propose that knowledge is constructed by social groups and not just by individuals. Knowledge is then an intersubjective collaborative construction and, as such, meaning is based in the specific social context (Wittgenstein, 2001). It is gained through participation in the social practices of the broad spectrum of groups to which an individual can belong. Knowledge is therefore subject to a wide range of social, cultural and historical influences. Changes in meaning reflect the continual development of social practice and increased levels of individual participation in social groups. Differences in meaning are ascribed to variations in social practice as well as to diverse normative beliefs in the various social groups (Watkins, 2000). Major contributors to this approach come from a 'range of interesting psychological,

epistemological, sociological and historical directions' (Phillips, 1995: 6-7) and include situated learning theorists (Vygotsky, 1978), social constructionists (Gergen, 1995) and other scholars (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Kuhn, 1996).

There are three principal criticisms of social constructivism. The first is that social meanings take precedence over individual meanings. This emphasis denies the role of the individual in gaining knowledge (Ogborn, 1997), thus neglecting a potentially important dimension (Hung, 2001; Fox, 2001). Second, if the meaning of a social practice in a group changes, then there is an assumption that 'each individual sees these influences and responds to them in the same way as the others' (Watkins, 2000: 200). Third, social constructivism does not address how some individuals, who may be part of multiple communities, deal with multiple and potentially conflicting social practices, and therefore multiple and potentially conflicting meanings (Bredo, 1997).

These limitations can be clarified through an examination of their practical meaning in relation to the SRO. From a social constructivist perspective, accountability is constructed by participation in the practices of the various social groups in a project. As there is no role for individual meaning in social constructivism, all SROs would uniformly construct the same meaning in the same situation regardless of their own previous experience. Similarly, if a new set of accountability arrangements were put in place, all SROs would construct a new but identical meaning of accountability.

There is some empirical support for social constructivist explanations of accountability in studies by Sinclair (1995) and Newman (2004). Sinclair's (1995) study of the CEOs of 15 Australian public sector agencies is representative of the tenets of social constructivism. It locates accountability meanings in the socially constructed arena of competing accountability constituencies and their associated practices. The study also exhibits the limitations of the approach in that all CEOs appropriated the same meanings of accountability, and assumed that the individual CEOs responded to the

changing, and sometimes conflicting, accountability demands placed upon them in the same way.

Newman's (2004) study of a mix of civil servants, local government officers and managers from voluntary sector organizations has similar limitations. Accountability is perceived as a 'socially constructed and contested concept' (Newman, 2004: 17). It is difficult to see how accountability could be anything other than a contested concept given the mix of respondents. Despite this, all the respondents appropriated in the same way 'policy discourses, amplifying some and marginalising others, coupling them with other discourses in an active process of making meaning' (Newman, 2004: 29).

3.1.5 Limitations of These Four Approaches

The four approaches I have outlined in the preceding sub-sections all offer competing explanations of how individuals develop meanings of a social phenomenon. Each approach offers a feasible explanation for an aspect of meaning that is not accounted for by the other approaches.

Watkins (2000) suggests that there are four problems common to these approaches that are linked to the resolution of questions about meaning. These problems can be examined by relating them to individual meanings of accountability. First, the results of the application of each approach (see Table 3-1) do not focus on an individual's experience of accountability, but rather 'on the researcher's prescriptive theorizing' (Watkins, 2000: 101) about how individuals might experience a phenomenon, such as accountability, through the formation of habits, mental representations, individual interpretations or social practices. For example, Sinclair (1995) notes that her five types of accountability are derived from administrative and other literature.

Second, these approaches do not reveal individual differences in meaning, but rather attribute differences in meaning to variations in reinforcement histories,

genetic inheritances, conceptual abilities or group normative beliefs. This point is seen in Sinclair's (1995) study of 15 CEOs of Australian public sector agencies, where five different forms of accountability were socially constructed by the respondents, but there is no mention of whether there were any differences in understanding at the individual level. Newman (2004) notes that one accountability discourse – customer accountability – was expressed only once. This is attributed to a variation in the respondent's employment - in this case the respondent was a civil servant. However, other civil servants also participated in this study and did not express this discourse. Therefore the approach taken in this study - social constructivism - would appear to have a limited capacity to explain inter-individual differences in the meaning of accountability.

The third problem relates to the capacity of the different approaches to explain changes in meaning. The principal concern is that the different forms of knowledge set out in Table 3-1 'can be difficult to change' (Watkins, 2000: 101) and the capacity of these approaches to 'describe the dynamics of change is particularly problematic' (Watkins, 2000: 101). So in the case of Sinclair's (1995) study, changes in the meaning of accountability for a CEO would be attributed to differences in social practices. Although individuals do experience change in their social practices, it is not clear how a change in the meaning of accountability would take place.

Fourth, all the approaches 'commit their respective proponents to maintaining a philosophical dilemma that has remained unanswered since Socrates first grappled with the issue in the *Meno* some 2,500 years ago' (Watkins, 2000: 101). Social constructivism and behaviourism claim that knowledge is gained from the outside world, whereas individual constructivism and cognitivism maintain that knowledge is acquired from within an individual's mind. Each approach advances one source of knowledge whilst denying the role of the other. This raises the question of how an individual gains knowledge from either an internal or external source (Marton and Booth, 1997). In each case a

significant source of knowledge is left unexamined. In the cases of Sinclair (1995) and Newman (2004), the respondents' participation in social practices are advanced as the source of knowledge of accountability, whilst individual sources of knowledge of accountability are not considered. It can then be inferred that the world and individuals are two separate realities that are philosophically incapable of reunification (Watkins, 2000). The four approaches are summarized in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1: Summary of Four Approaches to Learning

Approach	Behaviourism	Cognitivism	Individual Constructivism	Social Constructivism
Location of knowledge.	External to human mind.	Internal to human mind.	Internal to human mind.	External to human mind.
Meaning for the individual.	Created through repeated association of a particular behavioural response with an external stimulus.	Developed through the use of mental representations to make sense of unstructured phenomena.	Constructed by individual through interaction with environment.	Constructed by social groups and appropriated by the individual.
Descriptions of knowledge.	Behavioural responses.	Mental representations (schema, rules, etc...).	Individual constructions of the world.	Social constructions of the world.
Changes in knowledge by individuals.	The result of environmental changes.	The result of learning to apply a representation to similar or dissimilar phenomena.	The result of changing individual needs.	Due to the ongoing development of social practices.
Differences in knowledge between individuals.	Due to different reinforcement histories.	Due to variations in the richness and complexity of mental representations.	Due to different interpretations and different conceptual abilities.	Attributed to differences in social practice.
Ontological assumptions.	Dualist ontology – person and world are distinct entities.	Dualist ontology - person and world are distinct entities.	Dualist ontology - person and world are distinct entities.	Dualist ontology - person and world are distinct entities.
Particular limitations.	Individuals are passive uncritical respondents to stimuli. No conscious thought required, only conditioning.	Source of representations is unclear. Means by which a particular representation selected is also unclear.	Individual constructions cannot be shared between individuals.	Understatement of individual meaning: focus on social meanings. Individuals respond to changes in social meaning uniformly.
Accountability.	Accountability for a number of projects before any meaning acquired by the individual.	Individual SRO would require an existing model of project accountability to understand project accountability.	Accountability takes on meaning through interaction of individual with social and physical aspects of accountability.	Accountability is constructed by social groups involved with a project. SRO appropriates meanings.

(Based on Watkins (2000))

3.2   An Alternative Approach

The limitations of the four approaches to learning about meaning, which I have outlined in the previous section, suggest that there is a need for an alternative approach. Such an approach would address the four limitations; it would adopt an experientialist perspective, have the ability to recognize variations in individual and collective understanding, be capable of revealing the dynamics of meaning change and adopt a singular view of the individual-world relationship. In this section I shall describe such an approach, known as *phenomenography*, review its philosophical foundations, discuss the relationship between phenomenography and phenomenology and review some of the criticisms of phenomenography.

3.2.1 Phenomenography

In etymological terms, phenomenography is derived from the Greek terms "*phainemenon*", which means that which is manifest, and "*graphein*", which means to describe in words or pictures (Pang, 2003). Phenomenography is an empirical research approach developed in the field of education research in Sweden in the 1970s. It is 'the empirical study of the differing ways in which people experience, perceive, apprehend, understand or conceptualize various phenomena in, and aspects of, the world around them' (Marton, 1994: 4425). In other words, phenomenographic research attempts to see the phenomenon of interest from the perspective of the respondent, what is known as a "second order" or *experiential* perspective (Ashworth and Lucas, 1998). The terms *experience*, *conceptualize*, *perceive* and *understand* together reflect the totality of this experiential perspective. As such, phenomenographic research does not differentiate between pre- and post-reflective thought. Also, it does not make statements about phenomena, but about people's *experience* of phenomena (Marton, 1986). Therefore, it is aimed at the 'description, analysis and understanding of experiences; that is, research which is directed towards experiential description' (Marton, 1981: 180).

Early phenomenographic studies aimed to answer the question 'Why are some people better at learning than others?' (Marton, 1994: 4424). Researchers intended to study learning under the conditions that the student would find familiar, based on their prior educational experience, (Marton and Säljö, 1976). Students were asked on an individual basis to read a text from a textbook. When the task had been completed, the students were told that they would now discuss their understanding of the text with the researcher. These interviews sought to establish what the student had understood and how they had undertaken the task of learning about the text. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Subsequent analysis of the transcripts revealed that 'a limited number of distinctly different ways of understanding the text could be identified' (Marton, 1994: 4424). These qualitatively different ways were then categorized according to distinct, significant characteristics that emerged from the data (Marton, 1986). A further piece of research identified five distinct conceptions of learning. These were i) the increase of knowledge; ii) memorizing; iii) acquisition of facts, methods, etc. for retention and practical use; iv) the abstraction of meaning and v) an interpretive process aimed at the understanding of reality (Saljo (1979) cited in Marton, Dall'Alba and Beaty, 1993). The finding, that an aspect of reality was understood in only a limited number of qualitatively different ways, has been found to be stable and consistent across a large number of studies, within and without of the original educational context (Marton, 1994).

These qualitatively different ways of experiencing a phenomenon are known as conceptions. A conception can be defined as one of the different ways in which people experience or make sense of their world (Sandberg, 2000), or more precisely

> '…the relation between man and an aspect of the surrounding world. It (the conception) is created by the activity of man. The activity implies a delimitation of, a differentiation within and a selection and organization of, meaning content of an aspect of the

experienced world' (Svensson cited in Sandberg, 1997: 203).

A conception is an aggregate of a group of individuals' understandings of a phenomenon that have a common selection, organization and delimitation of meaning content of a phenomenon. Conceptions are the unit of description in phenomenographic research (Marton and Pong, 2005).

Conceptions were found to have a logical relationship with each other (Marton, 1994). Based on this logical relationship, conceptions can be arranged into a hierarchy of increasing complexity, in which 'the different ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question can be defined as subsets of the component parts and relationships within more inclusive or complex ways of seeing the phenomenon' (Marton and Booth, 1997: 125). Less complex conceptions can be seen as partial experiences of a phenomenon, whilst more complex conceptions 'accord with the ability to discern and hold in awareness more parts or more ways of experiencing a phenomenon' (Watkins, 2000: 103).

This hierarchically ordered set of conceptions, in the educational context, is 'an instrument for characterizing, in qualitative terms, how well learners succeed in their learning task' (Marton, 1994: 4424). For instance, how matter is understood is crucial to how students understand chemical reactions (Renström, Andersson and Marton, 1990). Understanding the different ways in which students understand the principal phenomenon, principles and concepts in a knowledge domain is understood to be central to students' mastery of that domain (Bowden, Dall'Alba, Martin, Laurillard, Marton, Masters, Ramsden, Stephanou and Walsh, 1992). Table 3-2 overleaf summarizes eight pieces of phenomenographic research on learning and research in the educational domain. It also demonstrates the stability of the finding that any aspect of reality is understood in only a relatively limited number of different ways and how richer, more complex conceptions represent more complex and, in educational terms, more complete understandings of a phenomenon.

Table 3-2: Examples of phenomenographic research on learning and research in education

Study	Location and context of study	Phenomenon	Sample Size (N)	Conceptions	Hierarchical Relationship
Prosser and Millar (1989)	Australia: Higher education	Conceptions of tasks involving reducing velocity	N=16	Conceptions of tasks involving reducing velocity were:- C1: An external frictional force opposite to the direction of motion C2: An inherent force in the direction of motion less than the frictional force opposite to the direction of motion C3: An inherent force in the direction of motion greater than the external frictional force opposite to the direction of motion.	The conceptions form a hierarchy in relation to the understanding of Newtonian physics. Conception C1 is correct, conception C2 is partially correct and conception C3 is incorrect.
Renström, Andersson and Marton (1990)	Sweden: Secondary education	Students' conceptions of matter	N=20	Conceptions of matter were:- C1: Matter as a homogeneous substance C2: Matter as substance units C3: Matter as substance units with small atoms C4: Matter as an aggregate of particles C5: Matter as particle units C6: Matter as systems of particles	The conceptions form a hierarchy. In conception C1 matter is viewed as a substance; in conception C2 matter is viewed as a substance that may have more than one form; in conception C3 small particles are introduced; in conception C4 infinitely divisible particles are introduced; in conception C5 these particles are not divisible and may have certain attributes; in conception C6 the substance consists of systems of particles.

Study	Location and context of study	Phenomenon	Sample Size (N)	Conceptions	Hierarchical Relationship
Samuelowicz and Bain (1992)	UK and Australia: Higher education	Conceptions of teaching held by university teachers	N=13	Conceptions were:- C1: Teaching as supporting student learning C2: Teaching as an activity aimed at changing students' conceptions or understanding of the world C3: Teaching as facilitating understanding C4: Teaching as the transmission of knowledge and attitudes to knowledge within the framework of an academic discipline C5: Teaching as imparting information	The conceptions form a hierarchy. This hierarchy ranges from student focussed (conceptions C1 and C2), to teacher focussed (conception C3) and to knowledge focussed (conceptions C4 and C5).
Dall'Alba, Walsh, Bowden, Martin, Masters, Ramsden, Stephanou (1993)	Australia: Secondary and Higher education	Students' conceptions of acceleration	N=90 (Secondary education: n=60; Higher education: n=30)	Conceptions of acceleration were:- C1: Forces – acceleration due to gravity and acceleration of the ball C2: Differences in velocity C3: Acts as a force C4: Gravity is closely linked but not causally C5: Rate of change of velocity C6: Caused by gravity – rate of change of velocity	The conceptions form a hierarchy, with conception C1 exhibiting the highest level of understanding. Levels of understanding reduce from conception C1 to conception C6 successively.

Study	Location and context of study	Phenomenon	Sample Size (N)	Conceptions	Hierarchical Relationship
Marton, Dall'alba and Beaty (1993)	UK: Higher education	Students' conceptions of learning	N=29	Conceptions of learning were:- C1: Increasing one's knowledge C2: Memorizing and reproducing C3: Applying C4: Understanding C5: Seeing something in a different way C6: Changing as a person	The six conceptions form a hierarchy. Conceptions C1, C2 and C3 reflect quantitative, external aspects of learning, whilst conceptions C4, C5 and C6 are qualitative and focus on internal aspects of learning.
Boulton-Lewis, Marton, Lewis, Wilss (2000)	Australia: Higher education	Conceptions of formal and informal learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students	N=22	Conceptions of formal learning were:- C1: Acquisition of knowledge C2: Understanding C3: Personal growth Conceptions of informal learning were:- C1: Acquiring skills by observation and imitation C2: Acquiring cultural and social knowledge by transmission of information from family elders C3: Independently developing practical skills by active problems solving C4: Independently seeking information in areas of interest by finding appropriate resources	These sets of conceptions form a hierarchy of increasing complexity and awareness of more parts of the phenomenon. In the conceptions of formal learning, the focus of the conceptions moves from memory and rehearsal (C1 and C2) to a more elaborative based focus (C3). In the conceptions of informal learning, the conceptions move from elder driven learning (C1 and C2) to increasingly independent forms of learning (C3 and C4).

Study	Location and context of study	Phenomenon	Sample Size (N)	Conceptions	Hierarchical Relationship
Boulton-Lewis, Smith, McCrindle, Burnett and Campbell (2001)	Australia: Secondary education	Secondary teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning	N=16	Conceptions of teaching were:- C1: Transmission of contents / skills C2: Development of skills / understanding C3: Facilitation of understanding C4: Transformation of student Conceptions of learning were:- C1: Acquisition and reproduction of content / skills C2: Development and application of skills / understanding C3: Development of understanding C4: Transformation of learners	In each case the conceptions form a hierarchy. In the case of teaching the focus moves from a teacher / content focus (C1), to a teacher / student focus (C2), to a teacher / student interaction focus (C3) and ends with a student focus (C4). In the case of learning, the focus starts from a content focus (C1), to a competence focus (C2), to a meaning focus (C3) and ends with a growth focus (C4).
Brew (2001)	Australia: Higher education	Research in higher education	N=57	Researchers' conceptions of research were:- C1: domino C2: layer C3: trading C4: journey	The four conceptions form a hierarchy, with C1 treating research as the synthesis of separate elements, C2 as a process of discovery, C3 as a social market for the exchange of products and C4 as a personal journey of discovery.

In phenomenographic research neither the conceptions nor the hierarchical relationship are developed from preconceived ideas, existing theories or extant research. The conceptions and the relationship between them are developed solely from the data. The basic intention of phenomenography is to identify and describe the individual conceptions, and the hierarchy of conceptions, with the greatest degree of fidelity to individuals' experience of an aspect of reality (Sandberg, 1997). Therefore, phenomenographic research is a process of discovery that may reveal new and hitherto unrealized ways people understand, conceive and experience particular aspects of reality (Marton, 1986).

From its roots in educational research, phenomenography has evolved into a research approach that aims to describe conceptions of the world around us (Marton, 1981). Its use has spread from the field of general education research to specific educational domains such as medicine, and to other fields such as human competence at work. Table 3-3 overleaf summarizes six pieces of phenomenographic research from a variety of fields on subjects other than learning and research. Table 3-3 also shows that the finding from the original field of education research, that any aspect of reality is understood in only a limited number of distinctly different ways, is consistent in other knowledge domains.

Table 3-3: Examples of phenomenographic research on subjects other than learning and research

Study	Location and context of study	Phenomenon	Sample Size (N)	Conceptions	Hierarchical Relationship
Lundborg, Wahlström and Dall'Alba (1999)	Sweden: Medical practice	Asthma management	N=20	GPs' conceptions of asthma management were:- C1: Conveying information and instructions for the patient to follow C2: Informing and explaining so that the patient gains knowledge C3: Facilitating the patient's understanding C4: Listening, giving advice for improved / maintained quality of life	The four conceptions form a hierarchy. Conceptions C1, C2 and C3 focus on the disease, whilst conception C4 shifts the focus to the patient.
Sandberg (2000)	Sweden: Manufacturing	Engine optimization competence	N=20	Engine optimizers' conceptions of competence were:- C1: Optimizing separate qualities C2: Optimizing interacting qualities C3: Optimizing from the customer's perspective	The three conceptions form a hierarchy. Conception C1 is based on optimizing separate engine qualities. In conception C2 work is expanded so that it includes engine qualities and the relationships between them. In conception C3 the work is expanded further to include the relationship between the optimized engine and the customer.
McMahon and Bruce (2002)	Australasia: Development projects	Conceptions of information literacy needs of local staff in development	N=5	Conceptions were:- C1: Basic literacy skills C2: Understanding workplace systems C3: Communication skills	The conceptions form a hierarchy of increasing complexity and awareness of different aspects of the local worker trying to compete in the dominant system.

Study	Location and context of study	Phenomenon	Sample Size (N)	Conceptions	Hierarchical Relationship
		projects		C4: Accessing information sources C5: Understanding the dominant society	
Åkerlind and Kayrooz (2003)	Australia: Social scientists	Social scientists' views of academic freedom	N=165	Conceptions of academic freedom were:- C1: An absence of constraints on academics' activities C2: An absence of constraints within certain self-regulated limits C3: An absence of constraints within certain externally-regulated limits C4: An absence of constraints combined with active institutional support C5: An absence of constraints combined with responsibilities on the part of the academic	The conceptions form a hierarchy. Conception C1 is modified throughout the remainder of the hierarchy through controls (Conceptions C2 and C3) to support for academic freedom (Conception C4) and commensurate responsibilities on the part of the academic in conception C5.
Partington, Pellegrinelli and Young (2005)	UK: Multi industry (aerospace, software, pharmaceuticals, construction, financial services, telecommunications, public utilities)	Programme management competence	N=15	Programme managers' conceptions of competence were:- C1: Delivery of programme scope C2: Wider organizational impact of the programme C3: Achievement of high-level programme outcomes C4: Development of strategic capabilities	The conceptions form a hierarchy, with conception C1 focussed on the programme. Conception C2 expands this to include a concern for the organizational impact of the programme. Conception C3 expands this further to focus on the outcome of the programme, whilst conception C4 looks to the longer term development of the organization through the programme.

Study	Location and context of study	Phenomenon	Sample Size (N)	Conceptions	Hierarchical Relationship
Chen and Partington (2006)	Three conceptual levels of construction project management work	Project management competence	N=30	C1: Project management as planning and controlling C2: Project management as organizing and co-ordinating C3: project management as predicting and managing potential problems	The conceptions form a hierarchy. Conception C1 is focussed on construction work on site and subcontractors. Conception C2 expands this to include the organization and co-ordination of the interfaces in construction work. Conception C3 expands this again to include the management and prediction of potential problems.

3.2.2 Philosophical Foundations

Phenomenography is an empirical research approach. It is not derived from a system of philosophical theses and assumptions (Svensson, 1997). The conceptual structure of phenomenology can be used as a meta-language to describe aspects of phenomenography (Uljens, 1996).

Phenomenography adopts a non-dualistic epistemology based on the fundamental assumption that both the person and the world are 'inextricably linked through a person's lived experience of the world' (Sandberg, 2000: 11). In this epistemology, knowledge is neither internal nor external to the individual, but is constituted through an individual's participation in situations in which the phenomenon is present. In these situations an individual has social and intellectual experiences of the phenomenon and therefore they experience the understandings of others as well as their own. As knowledge of a phenomenon is based on an individual's understanding and experience of the phenomenon, learning occurs when an individual experiences and understands it in a way that is different from their previous experience and understanding. Differences in meaning between individuals are due to differences in awareness and experience of different aspects of the same phenomenon. Changes in meaning reflect changes in the content and structure of an individual's life-world experience of a phenomenon. These changes can be seen as increasingly complex layers of experience (Watkins, 2000). Given this experiential emphasis, phenomenography is not concerned with making statements about the world (a first order perspective), but with making statements about the world as experienced by individuals – a second order perspective (Marton and Booth, 1997). These statements are the object of phenomenographic research.

However, the way in which one individual experiences a phenomenon does not constitute the entire phenomenon: it is only one small facet (Marton and Booth, 1997). So whilst phenomenography takes as its point of departure an individual's experience, it has been developed as 'an approach for describing

qualitative variations in individuals' experiences of their reality' (Sandberg, 1994: 47). It is possible to assume that there are an infinite number of variations of experiencing a phenomenon due to our ongoing experience of the world. However, our existence is bounded within a common set of social contexts and we are unable to be aware of all the possible ways of experiencing a phenomenon. This leads to a similar set of experiences of a phenomenon, so individuals in a given population can 'be expected to share an experiential field of differentially constituted meanings' (Watkins, 2000: 103), and thus any aspect of reality is discerned in only a limited number of qualitatively different ways (Marton, 1981). By virtue of phenomenography's non-dualist epistemology, conceptions are functional entities, 'they are the ways in which the individual may see or understand a phenomenon when actually engaged in seeing or understanding it' (Marton, 1990: 613). A conception represents 'the indissoluble relation between what is conceived (the conceived meaning of reality) and how it is conceived (the conceiving acts in which the conceived meaning appears) (Sandberg, 2000: 12).

Conceptions are similar to the phenomenological notion of *"life-world"*, which is our existing, day to day world of experience and action that is always present (Uljens, 1996). In this life-world, we are bounded within our lived experience of the world and 'because we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: xxii). Our life-world is created through the intentional nature of consciousness (Sandberg, 1994). This means that 'human consciousness is always directed towards something other than itself' (Uljens, 1996: 106), for 'we do not merely love, we love somebody; we do not merely learn, we learn something; we do not merely think, we think about something' (Marton, 1986: 40). It is the intentional nature of consciousness that enables us to attain meaning of a phenomenon. Conceptions of accountability, as individuals' life-world experiences of accountability, are therefore intentionally constituted. Given that individuals can only fulfil their accountability when they conceive their accountability with particular meaning, conceptions of accountability precede and form the basis for each of its aspects. So knowledge

of accountability presupposes a meaning for accountability that is 'delimited, distinguished and organized' (Sandberg, 1994: 53). This further implies that essential aspects of accountability, or attributes of accountability used by individuals in fulfilling their accountability, are also intentionally constituted through individual experience. So intentionality 'characterizes the basic meaning structure of a conception in terms of a conceived meaning and a conceiving act' (Sandberg, 1994: 53). Intentionality is then an *a priori* correlation rule (Ihde, 1986), as it correlates both meaning and act in a conception. So the meaning accountability has for an individual is correlated with the conceived act, i.e. the act in which the meaning of accountability appears. A conception will rarely appear in a single act, but will rather be constituted by a number of conceiving acts which form a meaningful whole.

The acts and meanings that together form a conception take place within a boundary or horizon. This horizon represents the limit of conceived meaning: in a general sense it denotes the zone of human activity, but also a limit which cannot be reached, yet also frames the region within which man works (Sandberg, 1994). This horizon acts as the boundary within which all accountability meanings and actions take place. The hierarchy of conceptions can be viewed as a nested set of horizons, with the richer, more complex conceptions offering a more complete meaning of the phenomenon.

3.2.3 *Phenomenography and Phenomenology*

Phenomenography (a research approach) has been confused with phenomenology (a philosophy). Phenomenography does have a relationship with phenomenology through phenomenography's roots in Gestalt psychology, which also has its origins in phenomenology (Uljens, 1996). Initially, phenomenographers thought that phenomenology offered a philosophical basis for phenomenography (Marton, 1986). A phenomenological approach to the problem of learning has been developed by some scholars, e.g. Giorgi (1999). It is worth briefly reviewing the characteristics of phenomenology in order to

distinguish it from phenomenography.

Phenomenology is a philosophy and was initially developed by Husserl (2001). It aimed to 'achieve pure understanding, liberated from the relativism of historical and social entanglements' (Blaikie, 1993: 33) and is characterized by its focus on how objects and events appear to the consciousness of the beholder and is descriptive in nature (Giorgi, 1999). Phenomenological analysis aims to establish the relationship between acts, objects and meanings. Phenomenology can also be used to describe the essential features of phenomena, that is 'that without which the phenomenon could not be what it is' (Giorgi, 1999: 81). Husserl did not develop an approach to 'phenomenological science' (Giorgi, 1999: 80), but a philosophy. However, an approach based on phenomenological philosophy has been developed over many years.

The phenomenological approach 'seeks to obtain the essence of various lived experiences that are of psychological interest' (Giorgi, 1999: 80). Variations in experience are seen as part of the process of improving the clarity of the essence of a phenomenon. To obtain this essence, that is, 'the most invariant meaning for a specified context' (Giorgi, 1999: 81), requires the analysis of descriptions obtained from others 'from within the perspective of the phenomenological reduction which teases out the *psychological* essential meanings of the experiential descriptions through a process of free imaginative variation' (Giorgi, 1990: 65). These descriptions are obtained from individual life-world experiences of the phenomenon, that is, the way the phenomenon is lived and experienced in the everyday world (Giorgi, 1990). These descriptions are then reduced in order to find the essence of the phenomenon. This reduction requires the bracketing off of the analyst's own experience and knowledge of the phenomenon as far as it is possible. This does not require 'total conditionlessness' (Giorgi, 1990: 80), but rather the 'transcending of the many forces that modify subjectivity' (Giorgi, 1990: 80).

It is clear then that there are similarities and differences between a

phenomenological research approach and phenomenography. Both take an individual's life-world experience of a phenomenon as the point of departure, acknowledge that there are different ways in which a phenomenon is understood and have a descriptive orientation (Giorgi, 1999). Both also use six further features: the intentionality of consciousness, the "bracketing off" of researcher preconceptions in the data collection and analysis stages, the concept of a distinguishable phenomenon, the correlation between the meaning object and the meaning act, the concept of a limiting horizon and the use of "data reduction" to achieve their respective research objectives (Uljens, 1996; Giorgi, 1999).

However, there are four key differences. First, phenomenology aims to establish the psychological essence of a phenomenon, whereas phenomenography is focussed on the different ways of experiencing it (Marton and Booth, 1997). Second, phenomenology distinguishes between conceptual thought and pre-reflective experience, whereas phenomenography does not (Barnard, McCosker and Gerber, 1999). Third, phenomenology adopts a first order perspective in which the world is described as it is, whereas phenomenography adopts a second order perspective in which the world is described as it is experienced. Fourth, phenomenological analysis leads to the identification of meaning units, whereas phenomenographic research results in the identification of a number of qualitatively different conceptions of the phenomenon (Barnard et al., 1999). So phenomenology, whilst similar to phenomenography in some respects, is distinctly different in others. I have summarized both the common areas and differences in Table 3-4 (overleaf).

3.2.4 Criticism of phenomenography

Phenomenographic research is not without its critics. These criticisms can be grouped into two broad types: theoretical and methodological. The theoretical criticisms are two-fold: first, that differences in conception can be attributed to variations in the interpretation of the researcher's interview questions (Säljö,

1996), and second, that the development of a conception results in the loss of the individual's voice in the research (Bowden, 2000). I shall answer these in turn.

Table 3-4: A Comparison of Phenomenography and Phenomenology

Common Areas	
• Concept of life-world • Intentionality of consciousness • "Bracketing off" of researcher preconceptions • A distinguishable phenomenon of interest • Correlation between the meaning object and the meaning act • A limiting horizon of meaning • The use of data reduction in the analysis phase • Descriptive in nature	
Areas of Difference	
Phenomenography	Phenomenology
• Aim: Establish qualitatively different ways of experiencing a phenomenon • Conceptual thought and pre-reflective experience are not distinguished • Adopts a second order perspective • Results: Conceptions of phenomenon	• Aim: Establish essence of a phenomenon • Conceptual thought and pre-reflective experience are distinguished • Adopts a first order perspective • Results: Identification of meaning units

In relation to Säljö's (1996) criticism, there are two points: first, phenomenographic research does not take place in a vacuum. Respondents agree to participate in research and therefore there is a prior notion of what the research interview will be about. From the researcher's perspective, the focus is the phenomenon of interest and it is the respondent's interpretations of this phenomenon in which the researcher is interested.

Second, phenomenographic research seeks to establish the variation in the meaning of a phenomenon for a group of individuals. Therefore, variations in the interpretation of the researcher's interview questions form part of the basis upon which phenomenographic research is conducted. In relation to the loss of an individual's voice in the research (Bowden, 2000), 'phenomenographic research aims to explore the range of meanings within a sample group, as a group, not the range of meanings for each individual within the group' (Åkerlind,

2005: 323). Therefore, it is aimed at a collective level rather than the individual level of understanding. So these theoretical criticisms of phenomenography are based on a misunderstanding of the nature of phenomenography.

The methodological criticisms are threefold. First, there are clear methodological requirements for the study of an individual's life-world and it is not clear whether these have always been met by some phenomenographic research (Ashworth and Lucas, 1998; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000). Entry into a respondent's life-world requires bracketing off, or the 'setting aside of prior assumptions about the nature of the thing being studied' (Ashworth and Lucas, 1998: 418). This is not the Husserlian notion of the detachment of the consciousness (Husserl, 2001), but rather Merleau-Ponty's (2002) notion of the intention to put to one side existing assumptions and theories in order to engage with lived experience. Ashworth and Lucas (1998) suggest that there are eight types of prior knowledge that require suspension. These are listed in Table 3-5.

Table 3-5: Types of Prior Knowledge that Require Suspension in Phenomenographic Research (Based on Ashworth and Lucas (1998)

Types of Prior Knowledge
1. Theories or findings from earlier research 2. Other 'authoritative' evidence 3. The researcher's own personal knowledge and beliefs 4. Prior interpretive categories and hypotheses 5. Any prior assumptions with regard to specific research methods 6. Any assumptions on the ordering or prioritization of conceptions 7. Questions as to the source or cause of particular conceptions 8. Questions on the relationship between the conceptions and objectivity

Some phenomenographic research has explicitly failed to bracket off previous research (Ashworth and Lucas, 1998). For example, Laurillard (1979) based her phenomenographic study of student learning on the results of earlier work carried out by Ference Marton (Ashworth and Lucas, 1998). More recently Alsop and Tompsett (2006) have questioned the relationship between a set of conceptions and their objectivity (Point 8, Table 3-5). The comparison of a set of conceptions and the notion of an objective reality is founded on a

misunderstanding of phenomenography. The misunderstanding is based on the assumption of an objective epistemology (Kvale, 1979), whereas phenomenography is based on a subjective epistemology.

Second, phenomenographic research has also been criticized for a lack of transparency, particularly in relation to interview practice (the avoidance of leading questions, the bracketing off of researcher preconceptions) and in relation to the data analysis process (the bracketing off of researcher preconceptions, the lack of a clear audit trail in the process) (Francis, 1996). Further, Francis notes 'that it is important to know more of the setting up of the interview, what sort of prompts were in fact used' (Francis, 1996: 38) in interviews. In a similar vein, she also observes that 'the point of making procedural and decision criteria as explicit as possible is that the reader of the research report will be able to judge on what grounds and in what sense they can accept that the final categorisation is the most satisfactory' (Francis, 1996: 44).

Third, there is also a considerable degree of variation in practice amongst phenomenographic researchers, particularly in three key areas. These are the extent to which each transcript is considered in the analysis process, the process of analyzing a large amount of data and the development of a logically related set of conceptions (Åkerlind, 2005).

In response to these methodological criticisms, a consensus is starting to emerge amongst scholars as to how phenomenographic research can be carried out (Ashworth and Lucas, 1998; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000; Bowden and Walsh, 2000; Åkerlind, 2002; Åkerlind, 2005; Bowden and Green, 2005). This consensus suggests that the methodological criticisms are being addressed by the research community.

3.3   The Selection of a Research Approach

In Section 3.1 I reviewed four approaches that offered the possibility of learning about the meaning of accountability. These are behaviourism, cognitivism, individual constructivism and social constructivism. In Section 3.1.5 I presented four limitations that limit the ability of these four approaches to provide a comprehensive answer to the research question 'What are individual SROs' subjective understandings of their accountabilities?' These limitations are summarized in Table 3-6.

Table 3-6: Summary of Limitations of Four Approaches

Advancement of one source of knowledge at the expense of the other
Previous literature or researcher's own ideas as source of unit descriptions of knowledge
Limited ability to account for change in meaning
Limited ability to explain inter-individual differences in meaning

(Based on Watkins (2000))

Based on the limitations in Table 3-6 and the discussion of phenomenography in Section 3.2, it is worth considering how a phenomenographic approach to the research question would avoid these four limitations.

First, phenomenographic research adopts a non-dualistic epistemology. It is based on the fundamental assumption that both the person and the world are 'inextricably related through a person's lived experience of the world' (Sandberg, 2000: 11). Individual knowledge of accountability is assumed to be gained through participation in situations in which accountability is present. Through this participation, SROs experience their own understandings of accountability (as proposed by cognitivists and individual constructivists) as well as the understandings of others (as proposed by behaviourists and social constructivists) (Watkins, 2000).

Second, phenomenographic enquiry is not based on the researcher's preconceived theories or notions developed from previous empirical research on accountability, but is aimed at the 'description, analysis and understanding of experiences; that is, research which is directed towards experiential description'

(Marton, 1981: 180). So the focus of phenomenographic research into accountability is an individual's experience of accountability.

Third, in relation to changes in meaning, phenomenographic enquiry posits that changes in the meaning of a phenomenon reflect, and are responsive to, changes in individuals' life-worlds (Watkins, 2000). Changes in an individual's life-world can be understood as layers of experience that reflect progressively more complex ways of experiencing the phenomenon. So changes in the meaning of accountability reflect the accumulation of successively more comprehensive experiences of accountability.

Fourth, phenomenographic research does not attribute individual differences in the meaning of accountability to either social or individual factors. Instead, differences in meaning between individuals 'correspond with changes in individuals' ways of seeing the individual-world relationship' (Watkins, 2000: 103). So different conceptions of accountability are based on different individual experiences of accountability.

Therefore, phenomenographic research into accountability enables the researcher to view SROs as the bearers of different experiences of accountability. Phenomenographic research into accountability would complement both the social constructivist's and behaviourist's concern with external sources of knowledge of accountability, and the individual constructivist's and cognitivist's interest in internal sources of knowledge of accountability. A phenomenographic approach would also distinguish and illustrate a limited number of experiences of accountability amongst a sample of SROs. These descriptions would illuminate the arrangement of meanings of accountability in varying patterns of temporal awareness and reveal how experiences of accountability could be ordered according to their complexity. All five approaches are summarized in Table 3-7. A phenomenographic approach to answering the question 'What are individual SROs' subjective understandings of their accountabilities?' would avoid the drawbacks summarized in Table 3-6

and would give the researcher the opportunity to provide a more comprehensive answer to the research question. Therefore I have decided to adopt phenomenography as my research method.

Table 3-7: A Summary of Five Approaches to Individual Understanding. (Based on Watkins (2000)).

Approach	Behaviourism	Cognitivism	Individual Constructivism	Social Constructivism	Phenomenography
Location of knowledge.	External to human mind.	Internal to human mind.	Internal to human mind.	External to human mind.	Individual life-world.
Meaning for the individual.	Created through repeated association of a particular behavioural response with an external stimulus.	Developed through the use of mental representations to make sense of unstructured phenomena.	Constructed by individual through interaction with environment.	Constructed by social groups and appropriated by the individual.	Gained though participation in situations in which phenomenon is present.
Descriptions of knowledge.	Behavioural responses.	Mental representations (schema, rules, etc...).	Individual constructions of the world.	Social constructions of the world.	Meaning structure of lived experience.
Changes in knowledge by individuals.	The result of environmental changes.	The result of learning to apply a representation to similar or dissimilar phenomena.	The result of changing individual needs.	Due to the ongoing development of social practices.	Changes in the content and structure of life-world experience of a phenomenon.
Differences in knowledge between individuals.	Due to different reinforcement histories.	Due to variations in the richness and complexity of mental representations.	Due to different interpretations and different conceptual abilities.	Attributed to differences in social practices.	Due to differences in awareness and experience of different aspects of phenomena.
Ontological assumptions.	Dualist ontology – person and world are distinct entities.	Dualist ontology - person and world are distinct entities.	Dualist ontology - person and world are distinct entities.	Dualist ontology - person and world are distinct entities.	Non-dualist ontology – person and world are a single entity.
Particular limitations.	Individuals are passive uncritical respondents to stimuli. No conscious thought required, only conditioning.	Source of representations is unclear. Means by which a particular representation selected is also unclear.	Individual constructions cannot be shared between individuals.	Understatement of individual meaning: focus on social meanings. Individuals respond to changes in social meaning uniformly.	Limitations of accessing an individual's life-world experience. Only their statements can be accessed.
Accountability.	Accountability for a number of projects before any meaning acquired by the individual.	An SRO would require an existing model of project accountability to understand project accountability.	Accountability takes on meaning through interaction of individual with social and physical aspects of accountability.	Accountability is constructed by social groups involved with a project. SRO appropriates meanings.	The meaning of accountability is created from the individual life-world experience of accountability.

3.4   Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed four approaches to learning about meaning (behaviourism, cognitivism, individual constructivism and social constructivism) and established that these four approaches suffer from four limitations that limit their ability to provide a comprehensive answer to the research question. I have also reviewed an additional approach – *phenomenography,* an empirical research approach developed in the field of education research. I have traced the development of phenomenography, examined its relationship with phenomenology and reviewed the principal criticisms that have been made. In relation to the research question, phenomenographic research would focus on an individual's experience of accountability and use a set of collective experiences of accountability as the basis for the generation of a group of different conceptions of accountability. This focus on experience, coupled with phenomenography's non-dualistic epistemology, suggests that a phenomenographic approach would produce a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals understand accountability than the four approaches examined earlier.

Chapter Four: Method

This chapter has five sections in which I describe my research design and my approach to data collection and analysis. In Section 4.1 I describe how I gained access to the sample. Section 4.2 consists of my pilot study, the interview process and the lessons I learned. I present the main study and the revised interview process in Section 4.3. In Section 4.4 I describe my method of data analysis. The issues of reliability and validity are examined in Section 4.5.

4.1   Sampling

My intention was to obtain my sample from the population of SROs across central government (i.e. government departments and executive agencies, excluding non-departmental public bodies). I decided to seek volunteers from as wide a range of government departments and executive agencies as possible, so that the relationships uncovered in the data taken from a sample would be generalizable to the whole population (Johnson and Harris, 2002). This approach would also 'stretch the diversity of the data as far as possible' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 61) and thus maximise the probability of achieving theoretical saturation. Previous phenomenographic research suggests that theoretical saturation is reached at a sample size of between 20 and 30 (Alexandersson, 1994; Åkerlind, Bowden, and Green, 2005), after which no further conceptions emerge from the data. The target size of my sample was 30 SROs.

In order to recruit a sample appropriate to the target population, I used two criteria to select interviewees:

- Respondents were to be from government departments and executive agencies only.
- Respondents were formally appointed in the role of SRO and were carrying out the role at the time of interview.

4.2   Access

I gained initial access to the SRO population via an employee of the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) who was attending a research meeting at Cranfield School of Management. The OGC is responsible for providing project management and procurement support to public sector organizations (Office of Government Commerce, 2006) and consequently has access to SROs across government. My request was circulated within OGC together with a set of ground rules I developed for the research interviews. These rules were:-

- The interview would be conducted under the "Chatham House" rule (the interviewee could be quoted but not identified);
- Only I would have access to the recording and the transcript;
- I would make a return visit to the interviewee and share the results with them.

The OGC provided me with the contact details of SROs in the House of Commons, Export Credit Guarantee Department (ECGD), Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Her Majesty's Land Registry (HMLR), the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and the Home Office. My contact at the OGC provided me with either the telephone number or email address of the SRO, together with a message saying that the SRO was expecting me to get in touch. I then contacted the SRO (although invariably I dealt with the SRO's assistant or secretary first) and set up a suitable date and time for the interview. This was normally 5-6 weeks after first contact. I then sent a short email to the SRO reiterating the purpose of the research, the ground rules for the interview and confirming its time, date and location.

Whilst I was dealing with the OGC, I was also able to establish that the nature of the relationship between the OGC as a central department of government, and other departments and agencies, was variable. As a result of this some departments and agencies were more willing than others to provide volunteers.

I decided that I needed to use other routes to gain access to my target population and used five other means to gain access.

First, I was able to gain access to respondents in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) through my supervisor's contacts in these departments. I got in touch with the individual concerned and sent them a short email setting out the purpose of the research, my request to interview a number of SROs in the department, the ground rules that applied to the interviews and my contact details. I was then sent the contact details of SROs in the respective departments. The contact routine for setting up an interview with a respondent was the same as I have set out previously.

Second, I made use of Cranfield School of Management's alumni database. I searched it for individuals who worked in departments and agencies where I had previously not been able to gain access. I emailed them to set out the purpose of my research, stating that I was looking for SROs to interview, the ground rules for the interview and the selection criteria. A reply email followed giving either names of individual SROs who had agreed to be interviewed or giving the name of another individual whom I should approach for access. It was through this approach that I was able to gain access to the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Again, the contact routine for setting up the interview with the SRO was repeated.

Third, whilst I had access to one SRO in the Home Office via my OGC contact, I gained further access through the alumni as I have described above. However, I was asked to first meet with a senior manager and set out the benefits of the research to the Home Office, the confidentiality regime and provide evidence that I was a bona-fide student. I was able to provide satisfactory answers and shortly afterwards I was granted access to a further four Home Office SROs.

Fourth, I gained access to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) through a member of

Cranfield's staff. After a brief conversation on the purpose of my research, he wrote letters of introduction to two SROs in the department. I was then able to make contact with them.

Fifth, I gained further access through what Arber (2001) describes as network or snowball sampling, where access is gained through personal recommendation of the interviewer to another member of the population of interest. This is normally used to obtain samples in numerically small groups or where group members are engaged in sensitive activities. Given that SROs typically occupy senior management positions in their organizations and the political sensitivity that surrounds many government projects, I was aware of a certain amount of scepticism surrounding my intentions. However, at the end of an interview I always asked if they were aware of any other SROs who would be willing to participate in the research. Most interviewees, having been interviewed, were willing to assist with further access to fellow SROs who worked in the same or other organizations in government. Using this approach I was able to gain additional access to SROs in the FCO, DEFRA, DfES and DOH.

Despite the clarity of my selection criteria and my unstinting efforts to achieve them, some compromise was necessary. One SRO was from the House of Commons, the legislature, rather than the executive. Further, two of the DOH SROs were on secondment from Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) to the DOH for a particular project. These compromises were necessary given the difficulty in getting access and the time constraints of the PhD.

In all, the final sample consisted of 30 SROs from 12 different departments and executive agencies. A summary of the sample is set out in Tables 4-1 and 4-2. In order to assure the anonymity of the respondents, I have only used the names of the parent departments, rather than those of the specific executive agencies and have not linked specific respondents to particular departments.

Table 4-1: Sample Summary by Department

Department	Number of SROs in the sample
DEFRA	2
DfES	4
DOH	3
DWP	3
ECGD	2
FCO	3
Home Office	5
House of Commons	1
HMRC	3
HMLR	2
NIO	1
MOD	1
TOTAL	**30**

Table 4-2: Sample Demographic Data

Respondent	Age (years)	Educational Attainment	Length of time in civil service (years)	Length of time in senior civil service (years)
R1	48	U	27	8
R2	47	U	26	9
R3	42	M	18	7
R4	57	P	1	1
R5	49	M	28	17
R6	37	M	*	3
R7	59	A	41	19
R8	61	U	37	4.5
R9	44	M	*	4
R10	49	U	27	4
R11	50	U	16	5
R12	46	U	7	6
R13	48	U	28	*
R14	54	U	30	16.5
R15	43	U	21	*
R16	49	M	25	14
R17	54	M	29	14
R18	46	P	20	11
R19	53	U	30	15
R20	55	M	15	2
R21	48	A	28	2
R22	43	U	19	9
R23	50	U	8	4
R24	50	M	8	2.5
R25	52	M	20	12
R26	43	U	21	10
R27	56	U	35	*
R28	53	U	30	14
R29	48	M	0.75	0.75
R30	48	M	25	2

Key: * = Respondent did not provide the data; A = "A" levels; U = undergraduate degree;
    M = masters degree; P = doctorate

4.3   Data Collection

The purpose of this section is to describe the design of the interview protocol and the pilot study and main data collection phases. In section 4.3.1 I describe the development of the initial interview protocol. I then conducted a pilot study which is depicted in Section 4.3.2. Section 4.3.3 sets out the main study phase of the fieldwork.

4.3.1 The Interview Protocol

The dominant method of collecting data in phenomenographic research is the research interview (Francis, 1996). The main aim of a phenomenographic interview is to encourage interviewees to reveal 'through discussion, their ways of understanding a phenomenon, that is, to disclose their relationship to the phenomenon under consideration' (Laurillard, 1979: 9). This emphasizes the importance of the interviewee's experience of the phenomenon in question, rather than any preconceptions held by the interviewer. As a result, questions are open-ended 'in order to let the subjects choose the dimensions of the question they want to answer' (Marton, 1986: 42). In this type of interview, follow-up questions are used throughout the interview process to clarify meaning, improve the researcher's understanding of what the interviewee has said and to seek examples from the interviewee's experience of the phenomenon of interest.

Empathy can also assist in engaging with the interviewee's experience of the phenomenon of interest (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000). It 'requires a detachment from the researcher's life-world and an opening up to the life-world of the [interviewee]' (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 299). It therefore assists in the process of bracketing off the interviewer's preconceptions and focuses the interviewer on the world that is being described by the interviewee.

I developed the preliminary interview protocol from ten sources. These were the guidelines set out by Ashworth and Lucas (1998; 2000), Äkerlind (2002; 2005), Bowden and Walsh (2000), Bowden and Green (2005) as well as a review of

phenomenographic research methods (Francis, 1996) and previous phenomenographic research (Bowden et al., 1992; Sandberg, 1994; Barnard et al., 1999). The preliminary interview protocol is set out in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3: Preliminary Pilot Study Interview Protocol

• Personal Statement by the Interviewer
• Interview Outline
• Biographical Information
– Age
– Highest level of education
– Time in Senior Civil Service (SCS)*
– Current projects as SRO
– Information: budget, technology, status
• Primary Questions
– What does your work as an SRO involve?
– Based on this project and any previous experience as an SRO, what does accountability for this project mean to you?
• Follow-up Questions
– Can you give me an example?
– What do you mean by that?
– Please can you explain that further?

* Created in 1996, The Senior Civil Service consists of all civil servants at Assistant Secretary (old Grade 5) or above and forms the senior management of a department or executive agency.

The primary questions in the protocol were intended to elicit what the SRO conceived as their accountability, whilst the follow-up questions were meant to establish how they conceived it through examples drawn from their experience. My objective was to continue this dialectic process until no further progress could be made.

The use of open-ended questions in the protocol and the emphasis on empathy with the interviewee reflect two key dimensions of phenomenographic interviewing: a confidence and an object dimension (Sandberg, 1994). The confidence dimension relates to the need for the researcher to develop and sustain a relationship with the interviewee (Sandberg, 1994). I considered this important, because it is 'a prerequisite for maintaining an efficient object dimension' (Sandberg, 1994 :81), as without it interviewees may not be willing to co-operate with the interviewer. I tried to build confidence in three ways. First, my previous experience of project management generally, and of project

management in government in particular, provided me with the opportunity to develop a sound social relationship with the interviewee early on in the interview process. I decided to initially establish the relationship by making a brief statement about my experience and background. This would establish my credentials in the field of project management. A copy of this statement can be found in Appendix A. Second, previous personal experience had taught me that the collection of the demographic data at the start of the interview was a relatively easy way of building up rapport. Third, outlining the structure of the interview would also help build a more confident relationship between the SRO and myself.

The object dimension relates to the need to keep in focus the interviewee's lived experience of the aspect of reality of interest (accountability) to the researcher (Sandberg, 1994). The key here was to give the interviewee the opportunity to talk about the project and its progress. Through this process I would then be able to identify situations where they as the SRO for a project were being accountable. This approach ensured that meaning would be grounded in the particular context of the project, as meaning is bound to the social context in which it takes place through "language games" (Wittgenstein, 2001). I could also challenge any less well grounded statements by asking for an example, which is reflected in the interview protocol (Table 4-2). This dialectic approach, taking social praxis as the starting point for the follow-up questions, would also enable me to assess the pragmatic validity of an SRO's statements and my interpretation of them (Sandberg, 1994).

Whilst these two dimensions are interrelated, they are reflected in different parts of the interview protocol: the confidence dimension is mainly reflected in the first part of the interview protocol and the object dimension in the second part. I shall now turn my attention to the pilot study, in which I used the protocol for the first time.

4.3.2 Pilot Study Fieldwork

I tested the protocol by interviewing two SROs in June 2004. The course of events prior to each interview was as follows. When I received the contact details of each individual SRO from the OGC, I made contact by email or telephone according to the details with which I was provided. I contacted the SRO's assistant or secretary, who usually disclaimed all knowledge of who I was and did not know the purpose of my request for an interview, but agreed to speak to the SRO. The SRO's assistant usually contacted me again within 24 hours. At this time I requested a one hour interview at a date and time to suit the SRO's diary and made it clear that I would attend the SRO's office for the purpose. The date was usually set some four to six weeks later. About a week before the interview, I sent a short email to the interviewee, setting out the purpose of the interview, the confidentiality regime and confirmation of the date, time and location. I also provided my mobile telephone number so that I could be contacted should the need arise for the date to be moved at short notice. In this week, I also visited the organization's website and tried to find out what post the interviewee occupied, the main issues that the organization was dealing with at the time and also, if possible, the projects that were being undertaken. This background work gave me a useful insight into the interviewee's organization and improved my ability to build confidence with the interviewee.

On the day of the interview I allowed plenty of time for my journey and arrived at the location about one hour earlier than the agreed interview time. Once I had found the organization's building, I then found a suitable place nearby to wait and focus my mind on the protocol and the interview ahead. This focussing also helped me to prepare to engage in 'empathetic listening to hear the meanings, interpretations and understandings' (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 302) of the statements to be made by the interviewee. I then returned to the location approximately ten minutes before the interview was due to allow time to get through security and arrive at the SRO's office. I was usually escorted from reception to the location for the interview by a member of the SRO's team. Each pilot interview took place in the SRO's own private office.

The first interview took 31 minutes. I was escorted to the SRO's office some ten minutes after the scheduled start time for the interview and after being introduced, the SRO told me that due to a problem with a project, he would have to terminate our discussion fifteen minutes earlier than the scheduled finish time. I then conducted the interview in line with the interview protocol (Table 4-2). Despite the limited time, I was able to cover the areas of interest that arose. The second interview did not suffer from any time constraints and took 40 minutes to complete.

I then reviewed the interviews to see how the protocol worked in practice and to consider where I needed to further develop my interviewing skills. I found two areas where I needed to adapt my approach. The first was in the sheer volume of field notes I had taken. I had used these notes as an aide-mémoire in the course of the interview, so that I could refer back to points that the interviewee had made and seek clarification or practical examples. I decided that I would henceforth formalize these notes and chose to use parts of Richardson's (2000) note format. These were Observation Notes (notes on the interview environment, the interviewee and points raised for further exploration in the interview) and Methodological Notes (notes on where I thought that I had deviated from the interview protocol or talked excessively). I deliberately decided not to write any Theoretical Notes during an interview in case I introduced concepts that were not part of the interviewee's experience and would thus no longer "bracket off" personal preconceptions or ideas (Richardson, 1999; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000; Åkerlind, 2002). With regard to Richardson's (2000) Personal Notes, I already kept a research journal in which I recorded these, so again I opted not to make notes of this type during an interview.

The second area arose out of my review of these first two interviews. I assessed the interviews using Kvale's interview quality criteria (Kvale, 1996) and found that I had followed the protocol and had let the interviewee speak at length. However, I needed to be more prepared to follow up in areas where I did

not fully understand what was being said, and seek further explanation and examples where necessary. These points were related to my confidence as a novice interviewer, rather than there being any fault with the protocol. I resolved that in future to bear in mind the need to check understanding and seek examples when necessary. To this end I wrote up this review of the first two interviews and included it with my copy of the interview protocol as an *aide-mémoire*. A copy of the review can be found in Appendix B.

On the basis of my review of these first two interviews, I decided to proceed with the pilot study and to use these first two interviews in the research, rather than dismissing them as interview practice. The pilot study consisted of a further eight interviews of SROs from six organizations and was conducted between June and November 2004. The aims of the pilot study were twofold: first, to test the methodology; second, to generate a set of results for use in the School's second PhD review (the first being concerned with literature and the research question).

An issue arose in the course of the pilot study. This was the loss of the recording of one interview, which was held in a small meeting area in the middle of an open-plan office. The noise generated from other individuals in this office area reduced the audibility of the interview to a point where I could not hear speech on the recording. Despite efforts to improve the quality of the recording, I lost that set of data. I also decided that I could not repeat the interview, for two reasons. First, it would damage my credibility as a researcher in the SRO population and, second, one of the ontological assumptions of phenomenography is that a respondent's experience of a phenomenon is both time- and context-sensitive (Marton, 1981). There may have been differences in the respondent's experience of accountability between the time of the initial research interview and at any repeat. As a result, I decided in future to ask in what type of room the interview was going to be held. If the answer was an open-plan office, I subsequently asked if the interview could be moved to a meeting room.

I also reviewed the quality of these later interviews again using Kvale's quality criteria (Kvale, 1996) as the study progressed and by the sixth interview, I decided to incorporate a final question to close off the interview. This was, 'Is there anything else you would like to say about your accountability?' This is reflected in the final pilot study protocol (Table 4-4).

Table 4-4: Final Pilot Study Interview Protocol

- Personal Statement
- Interview Outline
- Biographical
    – Age
    – Highest level of education
    – Time in SCS
    – Current projects as SRO
    – Information: budget, technology, status

- Primary Questions
    – What does your work as an SRO involve?
    – Based on this project and any previous experience as an SRO, what does accountability for this project mean to you?

- Follow-up Questions
    – Can you give me an example?
    – What do you mean by that?
    – Please can you explain that further?
    – Is there anything else you would like to say about your accountability?

4.3.3 Pilot Study Analysis

My first step in the analysis process was to transcribe the interviews myself. I initiated the analysis by developing an open coding scheme (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) through the use of memos. I read the first two transcripts a couple of times to get a thorough understanding of what had been said. I then wrote a memo under each statement made by the interviewee, questioning what they had said about accountability. Using this method I was able to develop a preliminary set of attributes of accountability. However, I could not see any substantial difference in how these first two respondents conceived accountability.

Next, I applied this approach to two more interview transcripts. However, different conceptions of accountability became more apparent from the data as I

analyzed more interviews. I then followed the 'intentional analysis' (Sandberg, 1994: 85) approach, which seeks to interpret, in this case, *what* the SRO conceives as their accountability and *how* they conceive their accountability. Whilst this is an ongoing, iterative process, there are four distinguishable phases (based on Sandberg, 2000): 1) transcript familiarisation, 2) what an SRO conceives as their accountability, 3) how an SRO conceives their accountability, 4) the "collapse" of the *what* and the *how* an SRO conceives their accountability into a single description of the SRO's conception of their accountability. As a result of my analysis, I was able to identify five different attributes of accountability at three different levels of conception. These are set out in Table 4-5. I presented these results at a research conference (Lupson, 2005).

Table 4-5: Pilot Study Results

	Attribute of conception of accountability				
Conception	**Subject**	**Principal(s)**	**Fulfilment**	**Time Horizon**	**Consequences**
	What the SRO understands they are accountable for.	To whom the SRO understands they are accountable.	How the SRO understands they fulfil their accountability.	When the SRO understands they will be held to account.	What the SRO understands to be the consequences of being held to account.
3	The delivery of a benefit to or outcome for the public.	Themselves and fellow professionals.	Advocacy, criticism and being the driving force.	When the outcomes or benefits are apparent.	Personal achievement or personal failure.
2	An aspect of their department	The public, official review bodies (NAO, PAC) and stakeholders external to own organization.	Questioning, influencing and negotiation.	Potentially: if failure is apparent.	Damage to an aspect of the department.
1	Project targets and project management	Individuals and groups within own department.	As co-ordination and reporting.	During the implementation of the project.	Loss of job, personal reputation and / or bonus: damage to future career.

These findings are limited by the small size of the sample (ten). Previous phenomenographic research suggests that theoretical saturation occurs at a sample size of around 20 (Sandberg, 2000). I would need to carry out further investigation in order to refine and fully develop these results. Nevertheless, the pilot results suggest the existence of a number of different attributes of accountability and three different conceptions of accountability, although these are not particularly robust. These results and my more practiced approach to conducting phenomenographic interviews provided me with a sound foundation for the main study ahead.

4.4   Main Study

In this section I describe the main study which I carried out between April 2005 and March 2006. I continued to use the interview protocol I had developed in the pilot study. However, early on in the main study interviews with two SROs resulted in my making changes to the tried and tested pilot study protocol. First, one of the SROs I interviewed was not a member of the Senior Civil Service (SCS). I was surprised by this, as previous interviewees had all been in the SCS. The OGC guidance is clear that an SRO 'must have enough seniority and authority to provide leadership to the programme team and take on accountability for delivery' (Office of Government Commerce, 2003: 19), which would suggest that the SRO should be a senior civil servant. As a result, I revised my interview protocol to cover this point (see Table 4-6 overleaf).

The second issue related to recording. In the pilot study I had kept the matter of recording the interview deliberately low-key. After my personal statement I sought the respondent's permission to record the interview. This was normally given without any further comment. However, one respondent in the main study refused to be recorded under any circumstances. Given that I did not want to damage future prospects for access within that organization, I carried out the interview regardless. I have not included it in my data as my notes did not capture the full richness and complexity of this respondent's answers. Given

this course of events, I modified my approach. When I sent the initial email asking for an interview, accompanying the information on the purpose of the interview and the confidentiality regime, I now incorporated a request to record the interview for future transcription. A copy can be found in Appendix C. I also reminded the respondent that I would need to record the interview in the confirmatory email I sent a week or so before the interview. On the day of the interview itself, I again sought verbal permission. After this change in approach, I had no further problems with recording interviews.

Table 4-6: Final Main Study Interview Protocol

> • Personal Statement
> • Interview Outline
> • Biographical
>   – Age
>   – Highest level of education
>   – Time in the Civil Service
>   – Time in the SCS
>   – Current projects as SRO
>   – Information: budget, technology, status
>
> • Primary Questions
>   – What does your work as an SRO involve?
>   – Based on this project and any previous experience as an SRO, what does accountability for this project mean to you?
>
> • Follow-up Questions
>   – Can you give me an example?
>   – What do you mean by that?
>   – Please can you explain that further?
>   – Is there anything else you would like to say about your accountability?

In the main study I interviewed a further 26 respondents from nine organizations. I discarded data from six interviews for two reasons: first, as I have already stated, one respondent refused to be recorded and second, five respondents did not meet the criteria I had laid down. This gave me a final sample size of 30 (Table 4-7).

Table 4-7: Summary of Interviews Conducted

Stage	Respondents	Contribution to the research
Pilot Study	12 Respondents (Data from two interviews was discarded, one due to recording problems, one respondent was not an SRO)	10 interviews
Main Study	26 Respondents (Data from six interviews was discarded: one respondent refused to be recorded, five respondents did not meet the sample criteria)	20 interviews
Total for the study	38 Respondents	30 interviews

4.5   Analysis

In this section I set out how I analysed the data from the main study. I detail the interview transcription process in Section 4.5.1. In Section 4.5.2 I present how I analyzed the data.

4.5.1 Interview Transcription

I first transcribed the interviews. Whilst I attempted to do this immediately after each interview, I found that inevitably some time elapsed between an interview and the completion of the transcript. I transcribed each interview in five stages. First of all I generated a face-sheet (Lofland and Lofland, 1984), that set out the interview number, the name of the respondent, the date of the interview, and information about the respondent's organization as well as the demographic information I collected (see Table 4-5). Second, I played back the recording of the interview at a slow speed and typed the words into the computer. I then played back the interview with a printed copy of the transcript in front of me, making corrections by hand. Occasionally I found that I had inserted phrases into the transcript that the interviewee had not used. When I had completed this process, I corrected the transcript on the computer. To complete the process, I played the recording back again and checked the transcript for any remaining errors. The transcript was then complete. It took approximately 12 hours to transcribe each interview using this process.

I found this process useful as I became familiar with the data. This familiarization had three distinct advantages. First, I often highlighted particular phrases that stood out in a transcript for later reference. Second, on occasions theoretical insights occurred to me that I subsequently noted down in my research journal. Third, I found that it enabled me to continue to reflect on my performance as an interviewer and to improve my interview technique, a point made by Ashworth and Lucas (2000) in their guidelines for the conduct of phenomenographic research.

4.5.2 Analysis

I then started to analyze the transcripts. I pursued the 'intentional analysis' (Sandberg, 1994 :85) approach that I used in the latter stages of the pilot study. This is an iterative process in which there are four distinguishable phases (based on Sandberg, 2000). I have set these out in the following four paragraphs. Whilst the theoretical process is linear, clear and precise, in practice it was highly iterative and disordered as I restarted the analysis whenever I added new transcripts, or picked up the analysis at a convenient point from where I had halted the previous day.

First, I read each transcript a few times in order to understand each SRO's conception generally. I then grouped each transcript according to this general conception. As a result I had four preliminary groups of conceptions, albeit these were very imprecise and unclear at this stage. These conceptions had a project, organizational, public and personal focus respectively. With regard to the data I had gathered from the pilot study, I analyzed the transcripts again rather than reusing my existing analysis. I considered that there was a risk that the pilot study analysis might not contain all the conceptions or attributes and that I might have neglected some aspect of accountability because of the small sample size.

I then systematically searched the transcripts for statements about what the

SRO conceived as their accountability focussing not only on the statements themselves, but also the meaning of each statement in the context that it was made. I noted down on the face sheet of each transcript what conception was expressed in that particular interview and regrouped the transcripts accordingly. I compared conceptions across transcripts, first within each group and then between groups. This resulted in some movement between the groups as I improved the definition of each conception.

At this point I shifted my focus from *what* the SRO conceived as their accountability to *how* the SRO conceived their accountability. *How* statements are based on acts, so I systematically searched each transcript for statements about how SROs delimited and organized accountability. To do this I marked each statement with a different coloured highlighter according to its subject matter. This search resulted in five different attributes of accountability (see Chapter 5). I then organized the statements by attribute by cutting and pasting them into a table complete with the surrounding text which gave meaning to the statement. I re-organized the table according to the four conceptions and then attempted to produce a preliminary definition of the attributes. At the end of this process I first compared the statements in each conception with each other, first within each attribute and then between attributes. This produced some movement between the different conceptions and attributes. I then compared the statements for each attribute across the four conceptions. This also resulted in some movement between the different conceptions and attributes.

I then re-read the transcripts, attempting to focus simultaneously on *what* and *how* each SRO conceived their accountability. This did not change the groupings, but further refined and stabilised the definition of the conceptions and attributes. I compared the various statements that I had grouped in each attribute within a conception with each other and then compared them with statements for the same attribute in other conceptions. I found that the table made this task easier, as it was some 70 pages long compared with the transcripts, which amounted to over 750 pages. I was able to improve the clarity

and definition of the conceptions and attributes by repeating this final stage of the process a number of times. As a result of this process, whilst there were no changes in the numbers of respondents in each conception, I did make small changes to the definitions of both the attributes and conceptions. I continued this process until the definitions of the attributes and the conceptions were stable and consistent with the data.

My final step was to review the results against Marton and Booth's (1997) three criteria for judging the quality of the results of phenomenographic research. These are:-

- Each conception reveals a distinct aspect of how a phenomenon is understood;

- The conceptions are related in a logical manner, usually in the form a hierarchy of nested relationships;

- The variations in experience in the data are represented in as few conceptions as possible – i.e. the conceptions were parsimonious.

The use of these criteria did not result in any changes to the results.

4.6   Data Validity and Reliability

A key indicator of the quality of qualitative research is its credibility. This can be developed further into questions around validity and reliability (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe, 2002). The meaning of these words depends on the epistemological and ontological position of the research. As already set out in Chapter 3, I have adopted a phenomenographic approach which is based on the fundamental assumption that an individual and the world are 'inextricably related through a person's lived experience of the world' (Sandberg, 2000 :14). I have adopted an approach to the questions of validity and reliability consistent with this assumption. These questions are dealt with in the next two sections.

4.6.1 Validity

Validity is a '"limit question" in research, one that repeatedly resurfaces, one that can neither be avoided nor resolved' (Lather, 1993 :674), but nevertheless must be tackled. In social science, validity has often been based on 'a correspondence theory of truth within the context of positivist epistemological assumptions' (Kvale, 1995: 22). In such research validity is defined as ' a term to describe a measurement instrument or test that accurately measures what it is supposed to measure' (Vogt, 1999: 301). Most common validity criteria in the social science field have been uncritically adopted from psychometric research (e.g. concurrent, predictive, logical, content and construct validity) (Kvale, 1979). Psychometric research is part of the science of psychological assessment (Rust, 2004). It uses measures of either knowledge or personality to establish human abilities and characteristics normally in the context of employment through the use of constructs. The measurement of constructs suggests that psychometric testing has an objective view of knowledge and this is not an appropriate approach in interpretive research.

Other validity strategies include various forms of triangulation (e.g. data triangulation, investigator triangulation and methodological triangulation) (Flick, 1992). These normally require further data sources, multiple investigators and multiple methods respectively. However, triangulation results in the subject under study becoming 'necessarily objectivated' (Flick, 1992: 179). Therefore, again it is not an appropriate approach in interpretive research.

Sandberg (2005) describes three different forms of validity and a number of different actions that a researcher can take in pursuit of achieving validity in interpretive research. These are summarized in Table 4-8 (overleaf).

Table 4-8: Summary of Three Interpretive Approaches to Validity (Based on Sandberg, 2005)

Form of Validity	Supporting Action
Communicative Validity	• Form a community of interpretation • Treat the interview as a dialogue • Develop coherent interpretations • Discussion of results
Pragmatic Validity	• Use of examples • Observe interviewee reaction to interpretation • Engage in participant observation • Develop implications for practice
Transgressive Validity	• Search for contradictions and differences

Communicative Validity

Communicative validity entails 'testing the validity of knowledge claims in a dialogue' (Kvale, 1996: 244). Sandberg (2005) sets out four different means of achieving communicative validity (Table 4-8). I shall address each of these in turn. In the fieldwork phase I established a community of interpretation (Apel, 1972) in two ways: first, at the start of each interview, by setting out my experience in project management both generally and within the public sector, thus establishing some common ground; second, from first contact, through my subsequent confirmatory emails and at the start of the interview, I reminded each respondent that my purpose was to discuss their experience of accountability in the role of SRO. This engagement at the start of the interview developed a basis for mutual understanding, for as Sandberg notes, 'the production of valid knowledge claims presupposes an understanding between researcher and research participants about what they are doing' (Sandberg, 2005 : 54).

Kvale observes that 'valid knowledge is constituted when conflicting knowledge claims are argued in a dialogue' (Kvale, 1996: 244). I conducted the interviews as a dialogue, using questions to gain access to the respondents' experiences of accountability, listening carefully to the responses and using follow-up questions to improve my understanding. This dialectic approach 'conveys an openness toward the research object' (Sandberg, 2005: 55). I used two primary

questions to encourage respondents to describe and identify what they conceived as their accountabilities (Table 4-5). I dialectically used three follow up questions to help improve my understanding of the respondents' ways of conceiving accountability (Table 4-5). This small number of questions enabled me to stay focussed on the respondents' experiences of accountability and thus achieve high levels of communicative validity.

Communicative validity can also be achieved by striving for coherent interpretations in the analysis phase. This is based on the idea of the hermeneutic circle, which seeks to achieve coherence such that 'the parts of a text fit in with the whole and the whole must fit the parts' (Sandberg, 2005: 55). This is particularly apposite as 'communication is a dialogical relationship [in which] the hermeneutic circle assumes a community of meaning shared by the speaker (or author) and the hearer (or reader)' (Blaikie, 1993: 29). In this case, I sought to create a community of meaning between myself, as the researcher, and the transcript. In the analysis phase, I strove to make interpretations of respondents' statements that were consistent with both the interview transcript as a whole and with the context in which the statement had been made. I also sought coherence when I grouped the SROs transcripts according to conceptual level, and again when I compared transcripts both within and between conceptions.

Communicative validity can also be achieved through discussion of the results with fellow researchers and relevant professionals. I have shared the results of the pilot study with other researchers in the field of accountability (Lupson, 2005) and as such this is one source of communicative validity (Åkerlind, 2002). I have also agreed to share the results with the respondents on an individual basis (as the *quid pro quo* for participation) and with the OGC, although these events have not been arranged at the time of writing. I have deliberately not sought to check the results with respondents prior to completion. Åkerlind (2002) notes that phenomenographic research has been criticized for not using this means of ensuring communicative validity. There are three reasons why it

is not appropriate. First, the results are developed from a group of understandings, not those of any one individual, and as such the classification of a particular interview cannot be seen outside the context of the entire set. Second, whilst the respondent may be explicit about the research subject at the time of the interview, the interviewer's interpretation of the transcript may go beyond that and reveal hitherto implicit meanings with which the respondent may disagree. Third, one of the ontological assumptions of phenomenography is that a respondent's experience of a phenomenon is both time and context sensitive. There may be differences in a respondent's experience of a phenomenon between the time of a research interview and any review of the analysis of the interview. A review of the interview analysis by the respondent may again result in disagreements in the light of new experience.

Pragmatic Validity

Pragmatic validity is concerned both with the usefulness of the research outcomes (Åkerlind, 2002) and with the capture of knowledge in action (Sandberg, 1994). It goes further than communicative validity as it is based on actions rather than words, and as such 'it represents a stronger knowledge claim than agreement through a dialogue' (Kvale, 1996: 248). Seeking pragmatic validity also focuses on practical knowledge, rather than what Argyris and Schön (1996) have described as "espoused theories". Sandberg (2005) describes four methods of achieving pragmatic validity: seeking responses from a respondent's experience; the misrepresentation of a respondent's statement; observation of participants in situations where the phenomenon of interest was present and the use of the results of the research in practice.

Pragmatic validity can be achieved through the use of follow-up questions that seek to place a respondent's statement in a concrete situation. In the fieldwork I sought to ground the interviewees' replies in their experience by stating in my outline of the interview process that I would like them to provide examples from their experience, and when a statement was not supported by an example, I used the follow-up question 'Can you give me an example of that? For

example:-

> *A: The fact is that the programme is a partnership, that's what's in its name, managing information across partners so there is an expectation by the partners that the Department will actually drive this forward. They have committed time to it, we are committing time to it, so there is accountability to them to actually deliver too.*
>
> *Q: Can you give me a concrete example of where that's happened, based on your experience?*
>
> *A: Well, it's happening in the programme.*
>
> *Q: Can you give me an example where this has happened?*
>
> *A: I think about an example like [Person A], he's the Chief Executive of [An Agency] and he has committed an awful lot of time to the programme, he comes to the Programme Boards, he goes to quite a few Project Boards, he actually since last year when we reconfigured and consolidated our work and actually set up a piece of work called Common Data Definitions. He's actually led that as a project. So these organizations have given a huge amount of their time to actually make this happen and they're driving it forward. So the Department and myself, as SRO for the programme, needs to recognise that and celebrate that and also say well, you doing that is putting me under even more account to actually make sure this happens, because we're sharing the load and we can't just waste people's time and effort, so we must take it forward.*

Pragmatic validity can also be achieved though the misrepresentation of a statement made by a respondent. In the fieldwork phase I occasionally paraphrased what I understood to be the meaning of a statement. Interviewees usually responded quickly to this and clarified or confirmed the meaning of the statements I had paraphrased. For example:-

> *Q: So taking the views of others into account? Those others?*
>
> *A: Do you mean do I take them all into account to the same degree?*
>
> *Q: No. But as a summary phrase, to sort of put a bracket round it, would that be a fair description of what you're doing?*
>
> *A: No, I don't think it is actually, I don't think it is.*

Sandberg (2005) also notes that pragmatic validity can be achieved through

observation of the respondents in situations where the phenomenon of interest is present. However, the sensitive nature of many government projects and the seniority required for the SRO role meant that it was highly improbable that I would be granted permission to sit in on meetings with ministers or with senior management groups in an SRO's organization. Also, the SRO role is usually taken on in conjunction with a senior role in the SRO's organization, such as Director of Finance. I thought that it was most unlikely that if I engaged in observation I would be present when a discussion relevant to their SRO role occurred. I therefore decided not to attempt to carry out observation.

Pragmatic validation can also be achieved through the use of the results in practice. This is 'a particularly pertinent validity check for phenomenographic research' (Åkerlind, 2005: 14). To this end I have discussed the practical implications of the work with a senior civil servant. I also set out the implications for practice and outlined my recommendations for future research in Chapter 7. I have also made the pilot study findings available to both researchers and practitioners through a presentation at a conference (see Lupson, 2005). Further conference papers and journal articles are planned. I have also agreed to share the overall findings with the OGC and the Home Office, with the intention of assisting in the future selection and development of SROs.

Transgressive Validity

Sandberg (2005) notes that both communicative and pragmatic validity 'tend to encourage the researcher to search primarily for consistent and unequivocal interpretations of lived experience' (Sandberg, 2005: 57). The aim of achieving transgressive validity forces the researcher to address ambiguous and complex data and become aware of their own perspectives.

One way to achieve transgressive validity is not to search for coherence in lived experience, but rather to look for contradictions and differences. To achieve this, at points in the analysis where I grouped or re-grouped the transcripts (see Section 4.5.2), I intentionally searched for contradictions and differences in the

transcripts. After I had initially grouped them according to conception, I examined the transcripts in each group, looking for data that did not fit or was not coherent with my interpretation of that particular conception. This process helped me to improve the clarity and definition of each conception, as it resulted in either the move of a transcript from one conception to another or the redefinition of an attribute or conception.

Together, these three forms of validity have different strengths and weaknesses that complement and correct each other. These are summarized in Table 4-9.

Table 4-9: Summary of Relative Strengths and Weaknesses of Three Interpretive Approaches to Validity (Based on Sandberg, 2005)

Validity	Strength	Weakness
Communicative	• Focus on meaning coherence	• Does not deal with action based data • Cannot deal with contradictory data
Pragmatic	• Focus on action based data	• Cannot deal with contradictory data
Transgressive	• Focus on contradictory data	• Cannot deal with meaning coherence

4.6.2 Reliability

Reliability in social sciences is often defined as replicability of results (Sandberg, 1994). This definition can be subdivided into either the replication of the conceptions (e.g. a coder reliability check or dialogic reliability check) or an interjudge reliability check (Åkerlind, 2002). This definition is derived from 'a positivist approach to research that attempts to study an objective reality' (Åkerlind, 2005: 329). This approach to reliability is inappropriate for two reasons. First, it focuses on what the researcher has done, rather than 'the extent to which the categories of description are faithful to the individuals' conceptions of reality' (Sandberg, 1997: 206). Second, it is based on an objective epistemology, where reality is external to and separate from the

individual. It attempts to establish 'the extent to which the categories of description are stable and correspond accurately to the objective reality under investigation' (Sandberg, 1997: 207). As I have noted in Chapter 3, I have adopted an interpretive epistemology in this research in which both the person and the world are 'inextricably related through a person's lived experience of the world' (Sandberg, 2000: 11). In summary, 'reliability of results relating to objective reality falls outside the domain of interest' (Sandberg, 1997: 209). Instead, consistent with the interpretive approach and non-dualistic ontology I have adopted in this research, I shall adopt "reliability as interpretive awareness" (Sandberg, 1997; Sandberg, 2000; Sandberg, 2005).

"Reliability as interpretive awareness" means 'acknowledging that researchers cannot escape from their own interpretations but must explicitly deal with them throughout the research process' (Sandberg, 2000: 14). One approach to this is phenomenological reduction, in which the researcher withholds their preconceived ideas, theories and prejudices in the course of the research (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000). Sandberg (1997; 2005) defines five steps that can be used to achieve phenomenological reduction. These steps, together with the supporting practical actions that I took in the course of the research, are summarized in Table 4-10 (overleaf). I attempted to follow these steps throughout my research and I shall deal in turn with each of these five steps and the practical actions I took.

In order to be attentive to the complexities and variations in the respondents lived experience of accountability I did two things. First, prior to each interview I arrived early so that I could focus my mind on the forthcoming task. I found that this helped me concentrate on listening carefully to what the respondent said. Second, in the interviews I tried to listen intently to what the respondent said and to take note of all aspects of their experience. I then followed up these lines of enquiry so that I could understand the subtleties and nuances of their experience of accountability.

Table 4-10: Summary of Five Steps of "Reliability as Interpretive Awareness" using Phenomenological Reduction (Based on Sandberg, 1997, 2005)

Step	Action
Researcher orientation to the phenomenon and how it appears in the research process	• Being attentive and open minded to the complexities and variations of lived experience
Researcher orientation towards description of the phenomenon	• Use of "how" and "what" questions
Horizontalization in data collection and analysis	• Treating all aspects of lived experience equally
Search for structural features	• Repeated testing of interpretations against data until stability is achieved
Use of intentionality as a correlational rule	• Identification of what the individuals experience as reality • Identification of how individuals experience reality • Integration of how individuals experience reality with what individuals experience as reality

In order to focus on describing accountability, I made extensive use of "how" and "what" questions, as I have set out in the interview protocol (Table 4-5). I found that this tended to focus the respondents on describing in detail what accountability meant to them. I also found that my focus on descriptions of lived experience of accountability helped me to analyze the data. I checked the various conceptions I developed from the data during the analysis by repeatedly asking myself "What does the data say?" or "Is this supported by the data?" This approach helped me to suspend any theoretical perspectives I had become aware of in the course of the research.

I strove to achieve horizontalization in three ways. First, in the interviews I tried to treat all respondent statements as equally important. I was concerned that there was some subtle aspect of the respondents lived experience of accountability that I might miss, so I made extensive use of the follow-up questions to obtain practical examples and clarify my own understanding. Second, in the analysis phase I tried to give equal weight to all statements made by the respondents. Third, in relation to the four conceptions, I initially

made no assumptions about whether one conception was "higher" than another, but rather treated them equally.

I searched for structural features in the data in two ways. First, when I developed a preliminary interpretation of the data, I compared the interpretation with the data and adopted it accordingly. This process refined the definition of the attributes and the conceptions (see Chapter 5). Second, having developed the various conceptions, I then established how these formed a hierarchy through a comparison of the conceptions with the interview data.

A conception's fundamental structure is the intentional correlation between what the SROs conceived as accountability and how they conceived it (Sandberg, 1994). I used intentionality as a correlational rule throughout the analysis phase. First, I read each transcript a few times (typically around four) to get a sound grasp of the SROs' understanding of accountability. As I have previously set out in Section 4.5.2, I then systematically searched the transcripts for what each SRO understood as accountability, and then repeated the exercise by systematically searching for how each SRO understood accountability. I repeated the exercise, trying to focus simultaneously on what and how each SRO understood accountability. I then transcribed and analyzed the transcripts.

4.6   Summary

In this chapter I have set out the basis for my selection of the role of the SRO as a means to study individual accountability. The sample was drawn from as wide a range of central government departments and their executive agencies as was feasible, given limitations on access. I have set out the basis upon which my sample was selected, my research design and the various practical issues that occurred as I conducted the field work. I have described the analysis of the data I undertook, both in the pilot and main studies, in order to achieve logically related, parsimonious and stable conceptions. Finally, I have discussed the concepts of validity and reliability as they apply to interpretive research and

have set out the measures I took to achieve both validity and reliability in the research. In Chapter 5 I describe the results of my research.

Chapter Five: Results

In this chapter I set out in five sections the results of the research. In the Section 5.1 I illustrate each of the four conceptions of accountability. Sections 5.2 and 5.3 respectively describe the structure of accountability in each of the conceptions and the hierarchical relationship between these conceptions. Possible sources of variation in the conceptions of accountability are examined in Section 5.4. The findings are summarized in Section 5.5.

5.1   Four Conceptions of Accountability

Based on my analysis of the interview transcripts, accountability was conceived in four qualitatively different ways. Each civil servant interviewed conceived accountability in one or more of these different ways. The four conceptions are summarized in Table 5-1.

Table 5-1: Four Conceptions of Accountability

Conception	Description
Conception C1	Intra-organizational accountability
Conception C2	Inter-organizational accountability
Conception C3	Public accountability
Conception C4	Individual responsibility

The respondents organized and delimited their accountabilities in terms of five common attributes. These are presented in Table 5-2 (overleaf). These attributes were common to each conception but therein took on different meanings. Figure 5-1 (overleaf) illustrates the relationship between five notional attributes and a notional conception, which is labelled CX. This labelling scheme is used in the next four sub-sections, in which I describe the four conceptions, outline their principal features and illustrate the meaning of the five attributes within each one and their different principal foci.

Table 5-2: Five Attributes of Accountability

Attribute	Description
To whom	To whom the SRO understands they are accountable
Subject	For what the SRO understands they are accountable
Fulfilment	How the SRO understands they fulfil their accountability
Timeframe	When the SRO understands they will be accountable
Consequences	What the SRO understands to be the consequences of being held to account

Figure 5-1: General Attribute / Conception Relationship
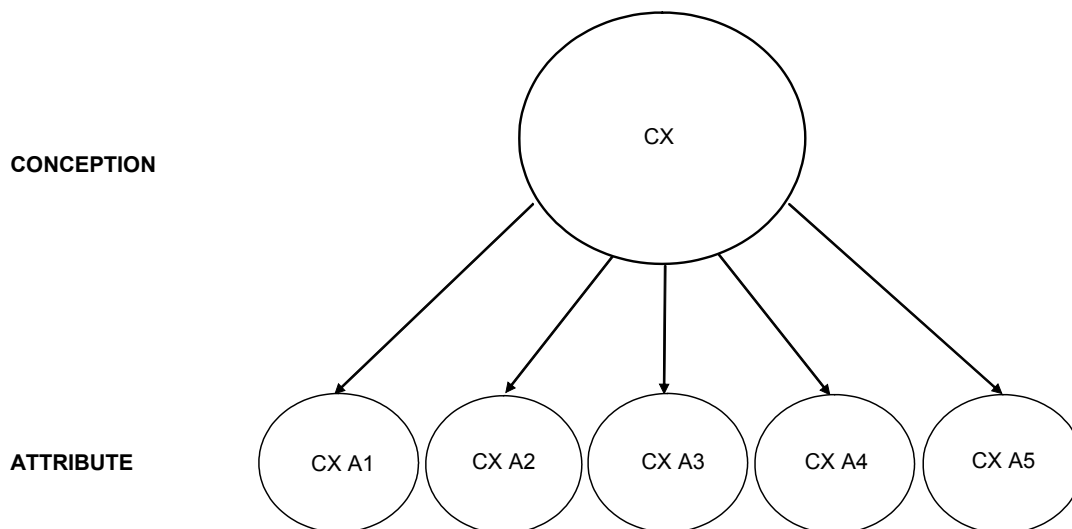
5.1.1 Conception C1: Intra-Organizational Accountability

The defining characteristic of this conception is its focus on accountability for the SRO's project within the boundaries of their own agency or department. The attributes of this conception are elaborated below, with examples of typical statements drawn from the data. The relationship between the attributes and conception C1 is presented in Figure 5-2. Further data examples can be found in Appendix D.

Figure 5-2: Conception C1: Attribute / Conception Relationship
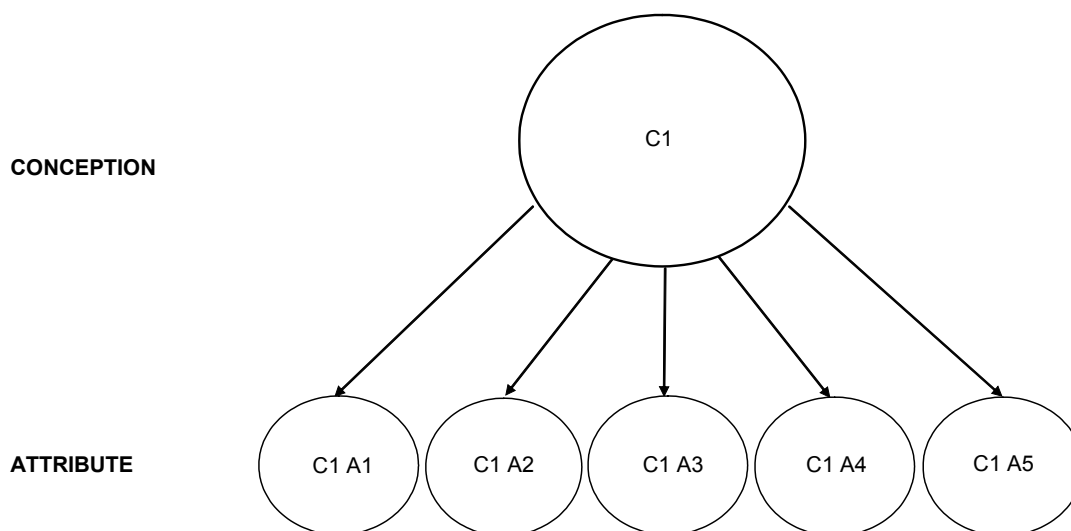
Attribute C1A1: To whom the SRO understands they are accountable

SROs understood that they were accountable to their superiors, various management groups and ministers within their own organization. To whom the SRO was accountable was not expressed in singular terms. SROs understood that they were accountable to more than one principal within their organization. For example:-

> I am answerable to the board and to ministers, who I have dealt with a fair amount on this project… R2

> As an SRO I am responsible to ensure that I can account to our ministers and to our perm sec, and through them, or directly to, ministers. R3

> So I think that's where the accountability, I mean ultimately it's to the management board and permanent secretary… R24

> I have to be clear who, within my organization at official level, particularly accounting officers and who within my organization at ministerial level, I am reporting to and engaging with on the progress of

discharging that programme that I've been tasked to lead its delivery of.
So it's about an accountability chain that inevitably links both the
political factors around big programmes and they've all got big risks
obviously, these two certainly have, and the formal sort of "Have we
spent the money wisely?" to the accounting officer bit. R26

Attribute C1A2: For what the SRO understands they are accountable

SROs understood they were accountable for four different aspects of the
project. These were meeting targets associated with the project (such as the
budget, project completion dates and system performance targets), the
provision of information, ensuring the project had adequate resources and
delivering the project. Meeting project targets was sometimes expressed in very
specific terms:-

I mean, this system I've got at the moment has still got some
performance problems. Now, I've got a performance target that I know
how many milli-seconds each transaction is supposed to take, and that
is very hard-edged and I will know myself and my team will know,
whether or not we've succeeded. R2

…the performance metrics on that are very much linked to achieving
specific milestones at specific times. R10

So I think you know I do feel accountable and responsible for bringing in
this project on time and on budget - absolutely. R12

I am accountable to the Group Investment Board for delivering within
the envelope that they have set me. I'm accountable to my line manager
for delivering the outcomes and managing within the budget, and
headcount and other requirements. R27

These performance targets were also incorporated into personal performance
plans, against which an individual was appraised:-

So my own performance targets, are to basically develop and deploy the [system] solution to our 50 pilot users and get a positive result from the evaluation at the end of that to say they basically like the solution, it's, that is the thing on which I will be judged. R9

These targets were, however, not always achieved:-

…one of my targets was actually to bring [the project target] off last December, which we missed… R14

The provision of information is the second part of this attribute:-

I'm responsible for regular reporting of all of these things. I'm responsible for myself and other people knowing how far we've got, what resource we're hitting, how we're managing them. I'm responsible for ensuring that our ministers are up to speed and when they have their monthly stock-takes on policy, their monthly stock-takes on implementation, we have the messages that don't hide anything, that actually sort of prioritize and explain what we've got up to and what we haven't got up to. R3

Making sure that the project is properly organized is the third part of this attribute:-

…so I'm responsible for negotiating the resources both in staffing, headcount terms and in money terms, making sure that we've got the right enablers in terms of decent HR or IT or legal advice, or actuaries or whatever, you can get that stuff, so I'm responsible for getting our house in order. I'm responsible for the good management of my team so that I've got appropriate level leaders and team size, that they work in a physical environment which is decent and conducive to work, that they know how to get the access to the training and the skills, and the mentoring and anything else that they need R3

This aspect is ongoing throughout the project lifecycle:-

> I have always felt accountable to the team for helping to clear the way or for explaining to them why the way can't be cleared. And it might be because of bigger priorities than what they are doing at that point in time. But I'm also accountable for ensuring that they got that kind of service from the person who isn't usually, not always, but from the senior person involved in the project. R17

The fourth part of this attribute relates to the delivery of the project. SROs understood they were accountable for the delivery of the project:-

> I'm there to make sure that the programme is going in the right direction and will fulfil its deliverables and meet its objectives. R21

> It means I'm responsible for getting it delivered. R25

Attribute C1A3: How the SRO understands they fulfil their accountability
SROs understood that they fulfilled their accountability in two ways. First, through reporting to their superiors within the organization and second, by working with their superiors and other senior managers within their own organization to ensure support for the project. For example:-

> On programme [name] I saw ministers every week for two years. I brought them up to date with the progress, covered the hot spots, listened…heard what they were thinking about it, what the political dimensions were, what they thought would be happening on the floor of Parliament, handling that. On the others, the smaller ones, the less sensitive ones, I tend to go perhaps every couple of months, and we will try and find an hour which is quite a long time with a minister, try and find an hour when I would get the team to explain where we are and how it is going and we will try to get in advance most of the questions. R17

> Well, I see him [the overall programme SRO] over a period of two days every month at something that they call a 'top team' meeting, which is him and his [project name] directors for all parts of [the department] and all of the [departmental agency] chief execs. R20

> So, we have a lot of reporting responsibilities in terms of fairly detailed monthly reports to the permanent secretary and to various other forums. R24

At particular times in the project life cycle, these reports can become more ad-hoc and personal in nature:-

> And [the minister] had me in, twice I think, because he had been very badly burnt by ICT projects in [a previous department] and broadly he said to me, well, you know, I want to know is this going to work, because I'm not going to agree to it going live unless you can persuade me. R2

Working with other senior managers and ministers within the organization to ensure their support for the project is the second part of this attribute:-

> …so managing outwards into the senior stakeholder community, managing upwards to the very top of the shop to make sure you've got the, if you like, the, as complete a buy-in as we can, keeping the seniors abridged of what's going on, and drawing from them – if I need it – whether it's championing the cause at the board level, which obviously people like the second permanent secretary and the [senior manager] do from time to time on my behalf, but also accounting to the, for example the [named management] group and to the board how we're getting on… R10

> …we'd pulled together all the findings, developed a proposal and went and sold it round this building and in London, to ministers, signed up lots of people to it, signed up our stakeholders to it and had a proposal

that we could actually take forward. R21

There's an influencing, decision makers, key influencing the decision makers responsibility around the SRO, whatever it is, you need to explain, it's not that difficult to do because most ministers have either been singed when something went seriously wrong and they do not want to be in charge of the next project that fails, the next big IT cock-up so that's good, they've been educated by that experience and you can put the fear of God into them to some extent. R22

Attribute C1A4: When the SRO understands they are accountable

Within this conception, the timeframe for being accountable was conceived as being within the project lifecycle. For example:-

I just put my business case together and it went to the change board last week. And I said to [the permanent secretary] on the telephone, "What is it you want me to do, do you want a presentation or what?", and he said, "About 20 minutes, have you got it together now?" And I said, "Pretty well. Let's talk about it then." "Alright, well send it all into me, and then come in a couple of days afterwards." So I thought, "Half an hour". He actually gave me an hour and a half… R4

I mean, when it comes to the [monthly] board I am required to brief the board on where the programme's at, what the issues are, what the challenges are and they quiz me on what we are doing about it and in some cases how they could help. R10

I have to give a monthly report to the department – to the overall senior responsible owner, [name]. R20

…you have whatever reporting arrangements you have in place. There are a number in the [department name], which culminate in the report, which goes monthly from each major report to the Group Executive Board in which I, as SRO, have to sign off what I believe the status of

my project to be. R27

Attribute C1A5: What the SRO understands to be the consequences of being accountable

SROs conceived the consequences of being accountable in five ways: first, as a reduction in their financial rewards; second, as a difficult session with their senior manager; third, as damage to their career prospects; fourth, as damage to their own reputation within their own organization and fifth, as the loss of their job. For example in relation to a reduction in financial rewards:-

> It probably would have led to some loss of bonus I suppose, but frankly, bonuses are so small around here that's not really a significant factor in our thinking, I don't think. R2

> I am the Senior Responsible Officer both for the policy and delivery of these things. It's in my work, job description, it's the basis upon which my performance is appraised and my reward determined. It matters in quite practical terms, therefore, that I am successful at what I do. It matters because I've got a husband and 5 children to feed, you know, that sort of thing. R3

> I mean, it's also linked to my reward basis as well. R5

> Practically, it means that written into my personal objectives is a successful outcome for both of those two projects as specific objectives. Now, that means that I'm appraised against those set of objectives and my pay and overall reporting, sorry, overall performance marking is based on how I do in achieving those objectives amongst the others, the others that I have. So that's what it means at a practical, at a practical level. R9

Second, the consequences of being accountable were also understood as a difficult meeting with senior management:-

I would be hauled over the coals, I suppose, by the Accounting Officer for failing to live up to my responsibilities in this area. R6

You often have a budgetary responsibility because, in the end, there's this much for solving this problem, and again the project manager has day to day responsibility for that, quite often the money nonetheless is coming out of your budget at a higher level, and therefore, someone will want to know why you've used up more of your budget than you'd planned to, and therefore the opportunity cost that you haven't got that money to spend on something else, so you have got a properly rigorous conversation to have with somebody more senior about why that project, for which you're the SRO, either hasn't happened on time, or ended up causing a problem or cost a lot more money that it should have done. R18

…life is made pretty uncomfortable, probably quite rightly, if you do something and it goes wrong, and you are culpable for what goes wrong… R23

Third, some individuals also thought that career opportunities might be limited if the project went wrong:-

…that if I don't deliver project [name] adequately, then I have failed and that I should carry a penalty. Now, whether that penalty is in terms of career whatever the opposite of advancement is, retrogression…. R2

I think the worst that would happen to me is that I wouldn't be asked to take on SRO roles in future and as I'm not being offered any at the moment it's no real hardship… R15

In practice what does my accountability mean? Almost the worst that could happen is "You're the wrong person to be doing this, we don't want you to be SRO any more, off you go to run our pay service in Bootle" or something career developmental of that sort. R25

Fourth, SROs were also concerned about the impact of the project on their own reputation:-

> I personally would have taken it very badly because one of the things which matters most in the civil service, in my experience, is your reputation, that's what you have in the civil service after 25 years. That's all you've got is your reputation, for either being somebody who can get things done and make them work, or somebody who is, you know, a bit sloppy and lets the catches slip. It would have hurt me personally in terms of how I regard my position within the organisation and, I think, how my colleagues see me, if this thing had been a complete Horlicks and I'd rolled it out and caused people an immense amount of trouble and then would have had to pull it. So there is accountability in that sense. R2

> I feel accountable to the chairman, success or failure there would have a significant impact on my status... not my status but my reputation, my future prospects and all those sorts of things. R16

Fifth, other individuals also understood that they would lose their jobs:-

> What does it mean to me is I get sacked if we don't deliver, that's what it feels like. R10

> I think in the end it does mean that if either the thing goes down in flames or it takes a little bit longer that it should have done for no good reason, you are in the firing line because your job is to make sure that the project manager is good enough and is getting there and has the support, whether that's in resource terms or because the interactions have been sorted and the supporting people are in place to do it, so in a sense you're quite clear, you've failed in ensuring that the project manager has the expertise, or the support or whatever to keep the show on the road. R18

In reality, if they say "Jump," I jump. My career prospects are very much led by my relationship with that team, and also if we're not delivering in [the project], ministers will get involved and I will come under considerable pressure to deliver or do the other thing. R20

What's the other thing? (Interviewer)

Well, go! R20

If you mean, do I get the sack for it, well, it would have to be fairly extreme before I got the sack. R23

This, however, does not always happen when the project goes awry:-

So I put it up, notified it [the project status] as a red, justified, you know, what, why I was marking it as red and waited for the sun, you know for the roof to fall in and the thunder clouds to clap and all this kind of stuff. Not a sausage, not a sausage. R13

5.1.2 Conception C2: Inter-Organizational Accountability

Civil servants who expressed this conception organized and delimited their accountability more widely than in conception C1. Accountability in this conception is conceived at an organizational level across, but also within, the boundaries of government. Civil servants who expressed this conception also expressed conception C1, intra-organizational accountability (see Appendix D). The relationship between the attributes and conception C2 is presented in Figure 5.3 (overleaf). The attributes remain unchanged but have correspondingly different foci. These are elaborated below.

Attribute C2A1: To whom the SRO understands they are accountable

At this level of conception SROs understood that they were accountable to two further distinct groups of organizations: first, to organizations external to their own but within the boundaries of government; and second, to Parliament and its supporting organizations. For example:-

Figure 5-3: Conception C2: Attribute / Conception Relationship
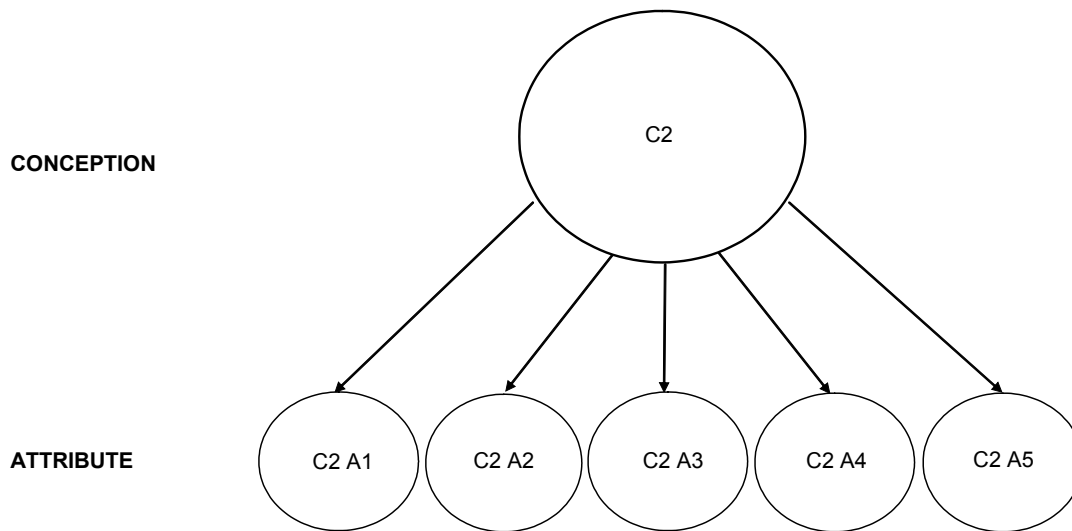
I think it's if you look at other government departments, you know we have a relationship with [another department], that's the clearest one there...and there is an accountability there… R5

Also in dealing with the [another department] in the sense of managing their expectations on occasion, or being warned that potentially we are not going to get a green light from [another department], we are going to get an amber, because we haven't got certain elements of the project quite right. R6

The other important part is the representation, that's something that's very big in any area but particularly in this one, where our stakeholders are many and various, I mean this is not just [my department] talking to [other departments], this is [my department] talking to [department 1], [department 2], the [external] agency. R22

In this case, probably, it's mainly the [department] family, i.e. [department] policy, and the [executive] delivery agencies that respond. R23

SROs also understood they were accountable to central government organizations. For example:-

> Well, the most important stakeholders are our ministers and Treasury, Treasury being a sense, the shareholder in a corporate analogy, they have the power of life and death in that sense... so yes, you feel accountable to these people, you feel, you know, if I don't deliver my piece of this jigsaw, lots of other people are going to be pretty disgruntled about that. R12

> I found there the way, what was helpful was there was talk to Treasury first, you know, get Treasury on our side and then ventilate it internally in the office, and once the Treasury was on our side it was much easier in the office because, basically in [my department] the service is provided... R14

> I feel accountable to them [OGC] as a police person. They are the police, I mean the joke, well it is not a joke, it is the old cliché. You know the OGC, anybody at the centre, the Cabinet Office, they're here to help, oh yeah, actually they are not here to help. R16

> I feel accountable in some respects to the Cabinet Office/OGC/central government because the degree of central government, Cabinet Office sort of process... R22

Parliament and the organizations that support the Parliamentary audit and accountability processes are the second part of this attribute at this level of conception:-

> I take the National Audit Office seriously. I think that they do try and arrive at good and clear judgements. R2

> He [the permanent secretary] said, and that's the key thing about this, and by the way, just to make sure you really understand all this, there is

a Parliamentary Accounts Committee, and your organization is named and your modernization programme which you've just closed down, so you will be a witness with me. R4

Significant amounts of public money were involved, questions in Parliament, emergency debates, Public Accounts Committee and it had to get the select committee very rapidly involved and the senior responsible officer of the time, the accounting officer, the permanent secretary, very, very unhappy indeed about the pretty tough time at the Accounts Committee where the first question was, 'So, [accounting officer name], are you going to resign?' R18

Attribute C2A2: For what the SRO understands they are accountable

At this level of conception an SRO conceived that they were accountable for two different aspects of their organization: its reputation and the benefits to the organization of the project. SROs conceived that they were accountable for the reputation of the organization. For example:-

There is an accountability there [to the National Audit Office] in terms of the reputation of the department, which is important to me. I've worked here for a long time and the way in which the department is profiled publicly matters to me and it matters to my colleagues, and I would feel I've let the organization down if I ran a project which then was so awful that the National Audit Office, quite rightly, came in and ripped it to shreds. I would feel we'd let ourselves down. R2

I mean, reputational risk is not only important in a personal context, it's to everybody. It's very important in the context of these big visibility programmes to the reputation of the enterprise, and I think that is something that you're aware of becoming increasingly sensitive to with these big change programmes, because it's not just the department's reputation, it's the reputation of the, of what that contributes to the reputation of the public sector as a whole. R9

…this department has a reputation with the Treasury of being a competent place, and not because the more they think we know what we're doing, the less they bother us. R18

…the fact is that if I make a mess of it, then that reflects back on the department. R21

Reputation is crucial … [the department] has not had a great deal of confidence in its own ability to deliver projects, and it was extremely important to us that we delivered this project on time and on budget, because it showed that the [the department] could do that. What we actually did was to deliver our project on time, on budget. R27

Organizational benefits were conceived as new organizational configurations and improved administrative efficiency and effectiveness. For example:-

So these all are activities which are designed to make us into a slightly different shaped organization, but where there are quite a lot of linkages and dependencies. R1

…we're going with the pilot training fund. By definition I have some accountability for that decision, some responsibility to make sure it happens. R12

That I have all things delegated to me that the permanent secretary has on his shoulders, but just for this agency, which is about financial efficiency, probity and all those sorts of things. R4

…it's also that the products that they deliver at the end of the day deliver the business benefits that we are taking forward and they may be efficiencies within the operating business. R5

[The project] is substantially about the 'virtual' environment. It's about the way that we manage and handle information, it's about efficiency with which we do that, it's about our ability to move to electronic working

properly, as against just, sort of, word processing. It's about improving
the efficiency in our ability to deliver the [the department's] objectives
and it's also about ensuring that we are able to meet our government
objectives for freedom of information and for the handling of information
more generally. R27

Attribute C2A3: How the SRO understands they fulfil their accountability

For this attribute at this level of conception SROs understood that they fulfilled
their accountability in four ways: first, by questioning the continuing relevance of
the project to the organization; second, by actively raising the profile of the
project externally; third, by engaging with the stakeholders external to their own
organization; and finally, by answering the questions of the PAC. For example:-

> I am representing all of us, come on, is it actually going to deliver the
> thing we need for the department or have we redefined it out of
> existence? R16

> It's making sure that what we're developing fits within that bigger
> picture, so that's an important way of making sure that we have a senior
> commitment to it. R21

> One is, you have to be able to step outside of your sectional enthusiasm
> for your project and take the wider view… R22

The active marketing of the project outside of the SRO's own organization but
within government is the second part of this attribute at this level of conception:-

> I have had to sell [the project] and actively market it. Not just as meeting
> this particular need, but we can go beyond it and achieve this. R6

> I think there's quite a lot of work with my colleague [external
> organization] chief executives who, if it's this is a part time job for me,
> it's even more of a part time job for them, and it's important to enthuse
> them with what this programme can do for them and get their

commitment to attend the [project] board meetings which we have, which since I've been in post I've moved around from being fairly operational, led by the chief information officers, largely because they're the full time guys in each [project area], to being led by the chief executives on what we want to discuss in terms of what are the strategic goals, aims, what's the vision for this programme in the [project area] and what can we do to maximize the benefit out of this programme? R20

Engaging with stakeholders external to their own organization but within government is the third part of this attribute at this level of conception:-

It means working upwards and outwards, both within the business and across Whitehall to a degree… R2

I was responsible for making that happen, not personally, I didn't draft everything you'll be glad to know, but for pulling the levers, internally, for pulling the levers in quite a lot of other places across Whitehall. I did some things myself which only my position or my knowledge or whatever, were able to do… R3

I'm the chairman of the [government activity] board in [an area] which has all the agencies on it, so that was a natural position from which to give them this vision, and to raise it with them and work through any problems they had, and to get an agreement on it and we formed a separate sponsor group for [the project], which is really just the [government activity] board wearing different hats, it's the same people, it's the director of [executive agency 1], the director of [executive agency 2], the director of [executive agency 3] and so on, so it's people with whom I have quite a strong relationship anyway for a whole wider range of business reasons… R14

Providing answers to the PAC is the fourth part of this attribute at this level of conception:-

…my accountability is to be able to answer any of their [the PAC] questions about decisions I have taken in the course of a programme about levels of investment, particularly on the risk management. What analysis has been done, what actions have been taken about the, you know, what contingency has been built in, about advice that's been sought, about sourcing decisions that might have been taken. R5

At the end of the day you ought to be able to explain to ….the Public Accounts Committee, it may be Parliament …... "What the hell's going on here?" And that 'accountability' (in inverted commas) is just never far out of your mind, or it's not far out of my mind anyway. R29

Attribute C2A4: When the SRO understands they are accountable

Timeframes at this level of conception were expressed as a potential, i.e. if the project had succeeded or not:-

But I was very conscious, whilst I was doing that that, I had to have enough of an audit trail that if there was a public accounts hearing I would be able to say yes, we did look at the question of liability, I did assure myself as to how much I genuinely thought it was our fault, or their fault and what the contract said. R2

But I suppose I would think about it in terms of the PAC. If I was asked why I'd done this, I would say because it has a major benefit, not a marginal benefit just for a few people. We spend that money, does it really have a significant effect? And it would be avoiding what happens at the moment, which is money being wasted. R4

…if the system is falling over every day, the general public are unhappy because their [public service] is being delayed because of us. That is something the minister needs to be aware of, because he may be asked a Parliamentary Question on it by an angry citizen… R6

Ministers are seized of the fact that it's happening and believe it's a

good thing and would want to know if it suddenly crashed, so I'm accountable there. R14

If it goes belly up, it's me who has to justify it. R23

Attribute C2A5: What the SRO understands to be the consequences of being accountable

SROs understood the consequences of being accountable at this level of conception as a negative impact on the organization:-

And there was a very big impact on the organisation, because actually those savings are going to be put into our bottom line by the Treasury. And therefore our budget will reflect the assumption they're being made, if they're not being made, someone somewhere is going to have less money. R1

…if I ran a project which then was so awful that the National Audit Office quite rightly came in and ripped it to shreds, I would feel we'd let ourselves [the organization] down. R2

…that was a very tough time for the department politically and managerially, because these were things that we should've seen coming and on the whole didn't. R18

…the fact is that if I make a mess of it, then that reflects back on the department. R21

5.1.3 Conception C3: Public Accountability

In this conception accountability is conceived as accountability to the public for the delivery of benefits at some point in the future. SROs who expressed this conception also expressed conceptions C2 and C1 (see Appendix D). The relationship between the attributes and conception C3 is presented in Figure 5.4. The five attributes are elaborated overleaf.

Figure 5-4: Conception C3: Attribute / Conception Relationship
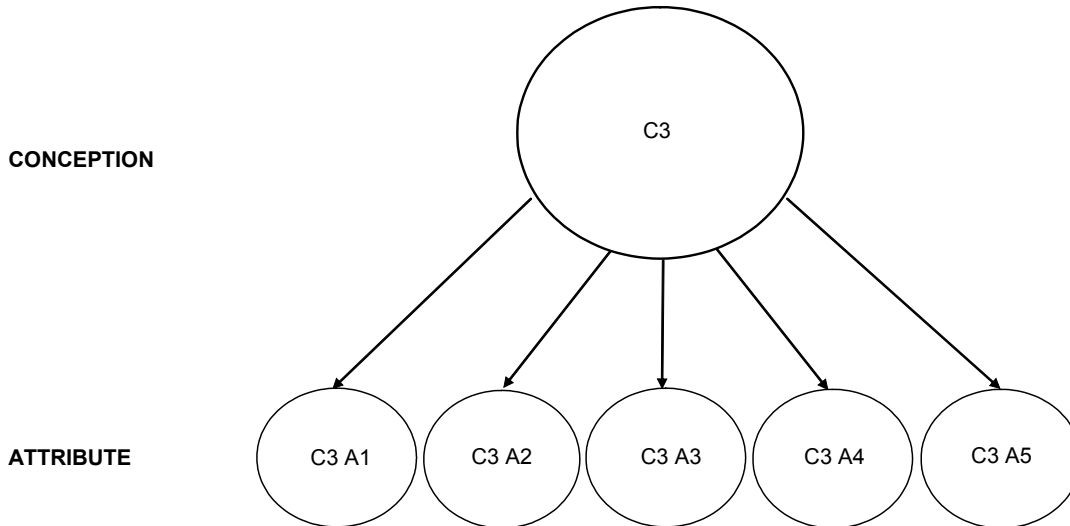
Attribute C3A1: To whom the SRO understands they are accountable

SROs holding this conception understood they were accountable to the two distinct groups: the public (although other terms were used, such as taxpayer or citizen) as well as charities and professions. For example, in relation to the public:-

> It will be a good outcome for the public good, the UK citizenry, if by 2050 the generation that is retiring then, okay, work out therefore that it is our children, has throughout its educational and working life, understood the importance of planning for retirement both through working and saving… R3

> I feel accountable to the taxpayer because there's a lot of money entrusted to us… R5

> I feel most accountable to the public because, as a public servant, I mean all, the whole of the public service is about making life better for citizens. That might sound all too altruistic but, I mean, surely that is at the essence of what we're all trying to do?… R7

> …my SRO proposition involves the effective use of large amounts of public funds and the benefits are of direct interest to a large proportion of the average punting population… R29

SROs also understood that they were accountable to charities or specific professions. For example:-

> …it's still Mrs Bloggs and such like, but also it's a service to [a charity] or [another charity] or people like that, who might be acting on their behalf. R5

> it's a very wide-ranging programme, a large range of stakeholders that …we've got the [name] profession…we've got [name] agents, we've got [a profession], most importantly we've got Joe Public … R7

> I do feel accountable to them [several professions]. I do feel a lot of my input into this board is to keep people aware that the systems we need to deliver, and deliver them in a way in which these people want to use them, are those systems, which make a difference to their job. And those are the decision support, the order of [products], the results reporting, the PAX system, the electronic transmission of [output], which is different to electronic [output] writing. Those sorts of systems are really, really important to [several professions]. R20

Attribute C3A2: For what the SRO understands they are accountable

At this level of conception SROs conceived they were accountable for a public benefit. For example:-

> It will be a good outcome for the public good, the UK citizenry, if by 2050 the generation that is [activity] then, okay, work out therefore that it is our children, has throughout its educational and working life, understood the importance of planning for [activity] both through working and saving… R3

I am very proud of the fact that for [government product] that by March this year we had taken an extra million people out of poverty. And that's what gets me up in the morning. R5

So what we, the focus has changed. If you look at our strategy you'll see the main focus is on benefits for the [a particular public group] bringing greater certainty and clarity to the process of [activity by the public]. R7

I might be asked by lots of people before that, but at the end of the day this is public money being invested for public benefit and therefore, ultimately, you need to plan on being able to account in the normal way that an accountable officer does. R29

Attribute C3A3: How the SRO understands they fulfil their accountability

At this level of conception SROs understood that they fulfilled their accountability by questioning whether the project would deliver a benefit to the public. For example:-

It would be getting, I can't quite remember what the expression is, getting the most for my bucks? If I have that amount of money to do, to use within those parameters, how can I get the best bang for my bucks? So, how can I get some things at the end of the day? It is a system by which individuals can seek redress for not being awarded [government product]. So, how can I make that system work in the best way possible? So, if I spent a million quid so that they can pick up the telephone, that sounds good. But is that actually the best way of spending that million quid or is there something else we could've done which would make it much more effective and make it much more likely that it was a fair system? So, working out the best ways of using that money would be really important for me. R4

…so its actually ensuring that we reach a decision you take, that you know what it's contributing to the overall successful delivery of the

programme and taking a judgement about whether that's value for money and actually is providing value and contributing to the success of the programme. R5

I have to say, not everybody has a strong consciousness of "is this a good use of taxpayers money?" and I have always had a very strong sense of "I could have travelled first class, but I'll be perfectly comfortable in second class," which I think the taxpayer would rather I did that actually, than threw their money about. R16

Attribute C3A4: When the SRO understands they are accountable

For this attribute at this level of conception, SROs understood they were accountable when the benefits of the project become apparent. For example:-

It will be a good outcome for the public good, the UK citizenry, if by 2050 the generation that is [public activity] then, okay, work out therefore that it is our children, has throughout its educational and working life, understood the importance of planning for [public activity] both through working and saving. R3

So, like at the moment, the end of last month, [the public] are being offered choice from the end of last month. R20

Attribute C3A5: What the SRO understands to be the consequences of being accountable

At this level of conception SROs understood the consequences of being accountable as the potential loss of benefits to the public if the project failed. For example:-

That accountability to me means the difference between … outcomes for the public good, and not outcomes for the public good, less excellent public outcomes, if I can put it like that. R3

I think there's a real governance issue - in clinical terms – for you as a

patient who might pitch up in a hospital, having had an accident, and might also have a rare condition being treated in another hospital, and the hospital you pitch up at won't know that. And unless you're conscious and capable of telling them, they might not discover it. R20

5.1.4 Conception C4: Individual Responsibility

In this fourth and last conception, the individual SRO understood that they were no longer accountable to an external agent. Instead they were accountable to themselves. In line with the definition I set out in Chapter 2, I have described this as individual responsibility. SROs who expressed this conception also expressed conceptions C3, C2 and C1 (see Appendix D). The relationship between the attributes and conception C4 is presented in Figure 5.5. The attributes at this level of conception are described below.

Figure 5-5: Conception C4: Attribute / Conception Relationship
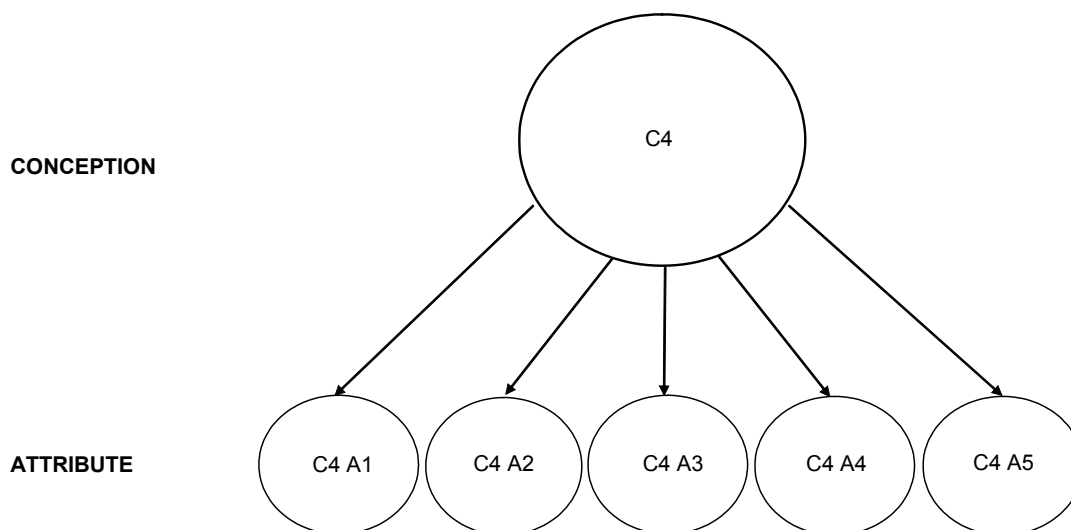
Attribute C4A1: To whom the SRO understands they are accountable

At this level of conception SROs understood that they are accountable to themselves. For example:-

So it's very personal, it matters to me, that's what my job is designed around, to deliver those things. R3

Well, to myself I suppose, in some ways, you know. You want to do things, you want to make sure that it's successful so there's a personal pride, isn't there? You're accountable to yourself. R12

I hold myself to account as well for it, I suppose in that sort of sense. R21

Attribute C4A2: For what the SRO understands they are accountable

At this level of conception SROs understood they were accountable for making the project a success and hence making a difference:-

It's my opportunity to make a difference, in a tangible way through what I am and what I do. Sometimes it means governancey sort of things which I loathe, I have to say, but a necessary evil. Sometimes it means seeing something happen as a result of something I've instigated and supported. And that's it, it's personal pride in the job in the end. R3

You want to do things, you want to make sure that it's successful, so there's a personal pride, isn't there? R12

I'm totally committed to making sure this happens. R21

Attribute C4A3: How the SRO understands they fulfil their accountability

At this level of conception SROs understood that they fulfilled their accountability by trying to do the right thing to ensure the success of the project by taking personal ownership of the project and committing to it:-

So you wanted to switch it from a pull from the consumer to a push to the consumer in terms of this sort of environment. And so that was something that I took quite passionately and personally, as an example of where we were going to make this happen, because it mattered. It was a bit sort of peripheral to departmental concerns four years ago. It

is now mainstream. R3

It took quite a lot of effort and quite a lot of pushing and the sort of personal, you know - we can make this happen, there is nothing to stop it except organizational bureaucracy, it's not high enough up anybody's priorities, there is nothing physically stopping us. R3

Have you done enough, have you done all the right things? There's a list of things I haven't done right, an absolute litany. Well, there's a few things I've probably done right too, and on balance I think we're where we are. R12

So there is an inner commitment to it, isn't there? R21

Attribute C4A4: When the SRO understands they are accountable

At this level of conception SROs understood that they were accountable when they were making a difference. This occurred at different points in time. For example, one respondent stated:-

I was responsible for bringing in the [government product], the [government product], okay, back in 2001 and I think the thing that made me proud about that was we did in fact make a difference to the market in [a policy area]. R3

Another respondent stated:-

Yeah, next week when the family go off on holiday and I don't - sorry, the week after next. Where do I feel I should be? Here, always here, so I've made that decision. R12

Attribute C4A5: What the SRO understands to be the consequences of being accountable

At this level of conception SROs understood the consequences of being accountable as being able to live with themselves through achieving personal

success, or being unable to do so through personal failure:-

> That accountability to me means the difference between personal
> achievement and personal failure. R3

> But could you live with yourself sitting on the beach? I personally
> couldn't, it's a personal thing. R12

5.2   The Structure of Accountability

In the preceding section I have described the four conceptions of accountability at the attribute level using data from the interviews. The quotations exemplify the meaning of each attribute within each conception. These meanings are consistent with each other and together form a distinctive structure of accountability within each conception. This distinctive structure of accountability at each level of conception is elaborated below and summarized in Table 5-3 (overleaf).

Conception C1: Intra-organizational accountability is characterized by its focus on the project within the respondent's own organization. Civil servants who expressed this conception reported regularly on various aspects of the project to their superiors and the various management groups within their organization. This covered areas such as progress against plans and budgets, the degree of progress on the achievement of performance targets and decisions that needed to be taken. Consistent with this was a strong emphasis on the provision of regular reporting on these matters to the various principals within the timescales dictated by the project plans and the organizational governance arrangements. The consequences of being accountable were understood as consequences for the individual – the loss of their performance bonus, the limitation of future career prospects, damage to their reputation within the organization and even loss of their own job. These consequences are consistent with the regular reporting of project progress to superiors within the organization. Together these understandings are internally related to each other

and form a consistent set of understandings. In summary, the focus is on the individual being accountable within the boundaries of their own organization.

Conception C2: Inter-organizational accountability is characterized by its additional focus on organizational aspects of accountability. Individuals were not only accountable to their masters within their own organization (conception C1), but were also accountable to organizations within government and to Parliamentary bodies for the reputation of their own organization and the resulting organizational benefits. This was achieved through questioning the relevance of the project to organizational objectives and marketing the project across government by engaging with the relevant organizational stakeholders. The SRO also fulfilled this accountability by answering questions put forward by the PAC if a hearing was called. The SRO was accountable when, or if, the project went wrong. The consequences of being accountable were understood as damage to the reputation of their organization and the loss of the organizational benefits if the project went awry. This can be summarized as inter-organizational accountability.

Conception C3: Public accountability is characterized by its additional emphasis on the public. Civil servants who expressed this conception articulated a further accountability beyond that expressed in conception C2 and understood that they were accountable to the public, charities and professions for the delivery of a public good. This was achieved by individuals judging whether the result of a project would deliver an improvement to some aspect of public life, and they would be accountable when these benefits were delivered to the public, which was in some cases many years in the future. The consequences of being accountable were understood as less desirable outcomes for the public. This conception can be characterized as public accountability.

Table 5-3: The Structure of Accountability: Conceptions and Attributes

	Attribute of conception of accountability				
	Principal(s) To whom the SRO is accountable	**Subject(s)** For what the SRO is accountable	**Fulfilment** How the SRO fulfils their accountability	**Timeframe** When the SRO is accountable	**Consequences** What the SRO understands to be the consequences of being accountable
C1: Intra-organizational accountability	Superiors and management groups within own organization	Project objectives, project targets, the provision of information, project resources and project delivery	Regular reporting, answering questions and obtaining support for the project within their own organization	Within project timeframes	Loss of bonus, damage to promotion prospects and individual reputation, loss of employment
C2: = C1 + Inter-organizational accountability	Other organizations within government	Organization reputation and the benefits to the organization of the project	Questioning project relevance, project marketing, inter-organizational engagement and answering PAC questions	If or when the project goes wrong	Damage to the reputation of their organization, loss of organizational benefits
C3: = C2 + Public accountability	The public or the taxpayer, charities and professions	An outcome for the public good, a public benefit	Questioning whether the project would deliver a public benefit and engaging with the public, charities or professions	When the benefits are realized (or not)	Less excellent outcomes for the public good
C4: = C3 + Individual responsibility	Themselves	Programme / project success	Doing the right thing	Always	Personal pride (or failure).

Conception C4: Individual responsibility is characterized by its focus on the additional focus on the self. SROs who expressed this conception understood that not only were they accountable to their political and managerial superiors (conception C1), their own organization (conception C2) and the public (conception C3), but that they were accountable to themselves. In Chapter 2 I differentiated accountability from responsibility. Accountability involves an external principal, whereas responsibility does not (Mulgan, 2003). Accountability implies the potential to be called to account for actions by someone else, whereas responsibility 'refers to internal aspects of action' (Mulgan, 2003 :15) where an individual acts on the basis of free choice and in line with their obligations but without concern for external scrutiny. I have therefore characterized this conception as individual responsibility. Those who expressed this conception took personal pride in making a difference and fulfilled this responsibility by doing what they understood to be the right thing. They conceived that they were personally associated with the potential success or failure of that project. As a result, they understood that they were perpetually accountable – it did not occur within a particular timescale.

5.3   The Hierarchical Nature of the Four Conceptions of Accountability

The four conceptions of accountability I have described in the previous section are different understandings of accountability. Each successive conception builds on its predecessor to form a hierarchy of increasing complexity and richness. In the following section I put forward the basis for this hierarchical nature, and in the subsequent section I describe how this hierarchical aspect of the results is reflected in the attributes.

5.3.1 A Hierarchy of Conceptions of Accountability

Within conception C1, accountability was focussed on the specific project for which the SRO was accountable within the boundaries of their agency or

department. Individuals who expressed this conception talked extensively about the reporting regimes with which they had to comply. Conception C2 was concerned not only with the accountabilities expressed in conception C1, but also with the SROs own organization. SROs expressed a need to be aware of what was going on in other organizations and events that potentially could impact their own project. This wider perspective was matched with a greater degree of pro-activity from the SRO, with an emphasis on asking questions of other organizations within government and actively marketing the project across government. Conception C3 took an even wider view, so that accountability not only the accountabilities of conceptions C1 and C2, but also covered accountability to the public, charities and professions for the delivery of a public benefit. Conception C4 included all of the aspects of conceptions C1, C2 and C3 but expanded accountability further to include individuals being responsible to themselves for doing the right thing.

In Table 5-4 (overleaf) I present a summary of the interview data arranged according to the level of conception from all respondents. This table demonstrates that the conceptions are cumulative in nature. SROs who expressed conception C2 also expressed conception C1 (but not vice versa), those SROs who expressed conception C3 also expressed conception C2 (but not vice versa) and those SROs who expressed conception C4 also expressed conception C3 (but not vice versa). In summary, SROs who expressed the more complex conceptions also expressed the least comprehensive ones, but not vice versa. This reflects the notion, from phenomenography, that experiences can be ordered according to their increasing complexity and completeness (Marton and Booth, 1997). More detailed data, in the form of typical quotes from each interviewee arranged by conception, can be found in Appendix D.

5.3.2 The Hierarchy of Conceptions of Accountability within the Attributes

Each conception had the same attributes, but with different meanings at the

different levels of conception. The variation in meaning of the attributes is outlined in the next five sections.

Table 5-4: Summary of Interview Data Arranged by Conception

Respondent	Conception			
	Conception C1	Conception C2	Conception C3	Conception C4
R1	√	√		
R2	√	√		
R3	√	√	√	√
R4	√	√	√	
R5	√	√	√	
R6	√	√		
R7	√	√	√	
R8	√			
R9	√	√		
R10	√	√		
R11	√			
R12	√	√		√
R13	√			
R14	√	√		
R15	√			
R16	√	√	√	
R17	√			
R18	√	√		
R19	√			
R20	√	√	√	
R21	√	√	√	√
R22	√	√	√	
R23	√	√		
R24	√			
R25	√			
R26	√			
R27	√	√		
R28	√			
R29	√	√	√	
R30	√			

Key: √= Data

Principals

In conception C1 the attribute *to whom the SRO was accountable* was conceived in terms of superiors, management groups and ministers within the SRO's own organization. In conception C2 this understanding was expanded further to include accountability to organizations external to their own but within the boundaries of government and Parliament. This included other departments, executive agencies and Parliamentary organizations such as the NAO. SROs

understood that they needed to engage with other organizations to establish the possible impacts of initiatives in other organizations that could potentially impact their project. They also understood that if the project went wrong, potentially they would have to account for the project to the NAO, the PAC or the relevant Parliamentary select committee.

Conception C3 expanded this understanding further and added accountability to the public and organizations external to government, such as charities and professions. SROs understood that if they were to deliver what they conceived as a public good, they would have to engage with the public, or with those charities and professional bodies that would be interested in the welfare of the public. In conception C4 SROs developed this understanding further and understood that they were responsible to themselves for doing the right thing.

Subject

The subject of an SROs accountability was conceived in terms of budget, project milestones and performance targets in conception C1. This was expanded to include the reputation of their organization and the organizational benefits of the project in conception C2, as SROs recognised the organizational impacts of the project and further understood that if the project went awry, the reputation of their organization would be damaged by the ensuing NAO report and PAC hearing. As such, limiting their accountability to performance targets, project milestones and budgets was insufficient.

Conception C3 expanded this meaning further and added an outcome for the public good. Neither a focus on the time, budget and performance targets of conception C1, nor the reputation of their own organization and the organizational benefits of the project in conception C2 were sufficient to meet this objective. In conception C4 the meaning was developed further: individuals understood that they were responsible for the success of the project.

Fulfilment

In conception C1 the attribute *how an SRO understood they fulfilled their accountability* was expressed as regular reporting to superiors within their own organization and answering any questions from their superiors. In conception C2 this was not sufficient when it came to being accountable to other organizations within the boundaries of government. Instead, a more proactive approach was adopted and the meaning was expanded to include questioning the relevance of the project to organizational objectives, marketing the project across government by engaging with the various organizational stakeholders and, if the project went awry, answering questions from the PAC. Conception C3 expanded the meaning still further. Accountability to the public was understood to be fulfilled by questioning whether the project would deliver a public benefit and by engaging with the public or proxies for the public, such as professions or charities. In conception C4 individual responsibility was fulfilled by doing what was conceived to be the right thing.

Timeframe

The timeframe attribute also had different meanings according to the level of conception. Consistent with the intra-organizational focus of conception C1 was an emphasis on timeframes within the project lifecycle, i.e. the next board meeting or a 'go live' date for the project. Conception C2 also included this, but placed an additional emphasis on being accountable when the project had failed in some way, which was generally understood to be a possibility at some point in the future. Consistent with being accountable to the public, charities and professions, conception C3 extended the meaning of the timeframe attribute through the SRO being accountable when the expected benefits of the project be realized. This is an expansion of conception C2, as if the project has not failed in some way, it would then go on to deliver the anticipated benefit to the public. Conception C4 expanded the meaning of the attribute to cover all aspects of time, as the individual SRO was always responsible for doing the right thing.

Consequences

The consequences of being accountable also had different meanings according to the level of conception. In conception C1 this attribute was understood as a possible reduction in financial rewards, a difficult session with a senior manager, damage to the SRO's reputation and ultimately the loss of employment. At this level of conception SROs reported to various individuals and management groups within their organization, some of which would play a significant role in individual performance reviews and the assessment of an individual's future prospects. Conception C2 expanded this meaning further. SROs understood that their own organization could be damaged if the project went wrong. The reputation of their organization in government, or operational aspects of their organization such as performance or budget, could all be negatively impacted in these circumstances.

Conception C3 developed this understanding further. Consistent with being accountable to the public, SROs understood that the public would be impacted by the failure to deliver the project. In conception C4 SROs understood the consequences of being accountable as either personal success or failure.

5.3.3 Attributes, Conceptions and Accountability

Figure 5-6 is a graphical representation of the relationship between the attributes, the conceptions and the concept of accountability. The cumulative nature of the conceptions across the attributes is reflected in the diagram. Conception C1, represented by the smallest circle, is the least complex conception and as such it represents a partial representation 'in which fewer parts or fewer ways of experiencing the phenomenon are discerned in awareness' (Watkins, 2000: 103). Conceptions C2, C3 and C4 represent successively more complex representations that 'accord with the ability to simultaneously discern and hold in awareness more parts or more ways of experiencing the phenomenon' (Watkins, 2000: 103).

However, the most complex conception, conception C4, does not represent a complete understanding of accountability. The conceptions represent 'an experiential field of differentially constituted meanings' (Watkins, 2000: 103) within a common social context – the civil service in the United Kingdom. As I established in Chapter 3, a common social context results in a limited number of qualitatively different ways of experiencing a phenomenon. However, accountability is a feature of many other social contexts. So other groups of individuals in other contexts may have different conceptions that do not form part of the results of this research.

Figure 5-6: Accountability, Conceptions and Attributes: The Relationship
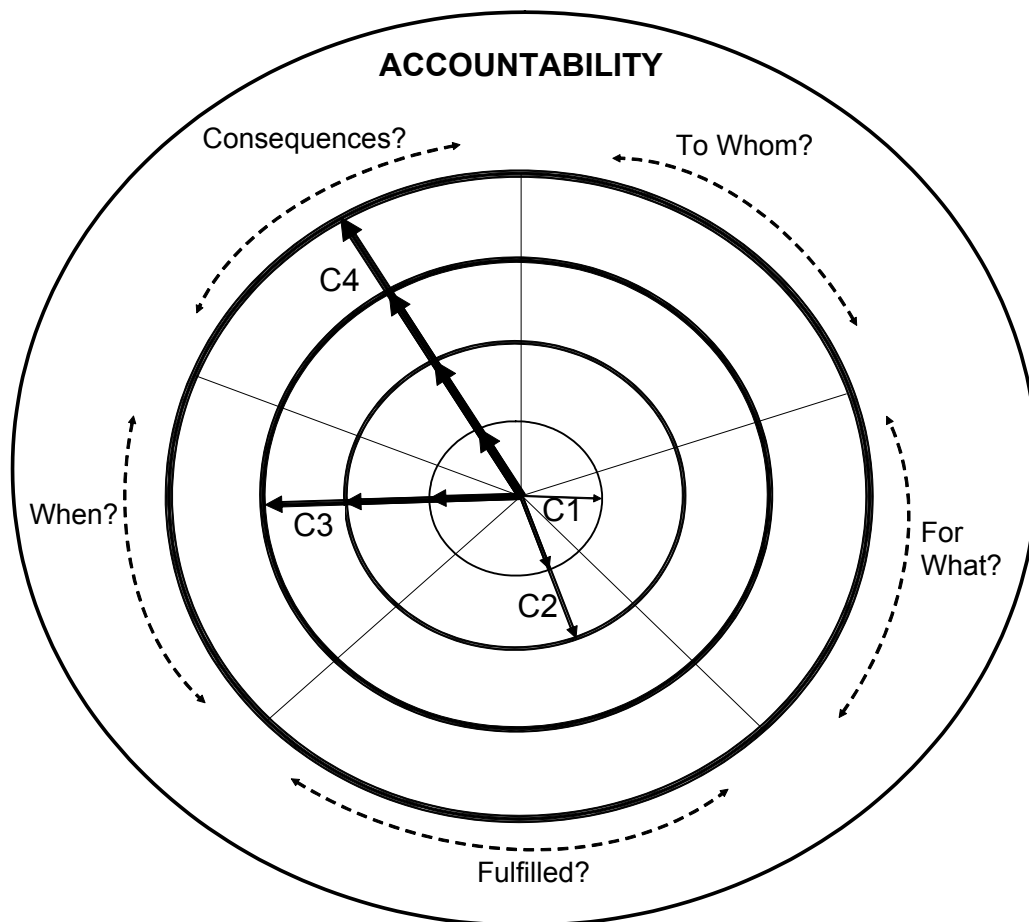
5.4   Possible Sources of Variation

I have described the four conceptions of accountability and the hierarchical relationship between them. The question 'What are the possible sources of variation?' has not been addressed so far. There are two possible sources of variation: (1) project demographics and (2) the project rationale. These are explained in the next two sections.

5.4.1 Project Demographics

As part of the data gathering process, I asked the respondents to provide general information about the project for which they were accountable (see Table 4-3). The respondents provided me with information on the nature of the project and the approximate project budget. I shall deal with each of these aspects in turn.

All respondents were accountable for IT enabled business change projects, that is, projects that used IT as the basis for changing an aspect of a respondents' business area. Some projects involved multiple business areas such as finance, human resources and procurement, whilst others involved only one business area. The quality of information provided varied considerably between respondents, as some respondents were accountable for politically sensitive projects, whilst other respondents were not. However, all projects had this common foundation, albeit across a range of different business areas. Therefore variations in conception cannot be attributed to differences in the type of project.

Project budgets were a contentious issue for most respondents. Some were able to provide detailed information about the size and source of their budget, whilst other respondents declined to answer on the grounds that the information was confidential. However, all projects were financed directly from public funds rather than being funded from the private sector through PFI (private finance initiative) or PPP (public-private partnership) arrangements. As there was no

variation in funding sources, variations in conception cannot be attributed to differences in funding arrangements.

5.4.2 Project Rationale

Whilst carrying out the fieldwork I became aware of a variety of different rationales that were used to justify the various projects for which the respondents were accountable. These ranged from achieving compliance with Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets, efficiency savings, the delivery of new organizational capabilities and the delivery of policy objectives. When questioned on this, SROs often replied that projects had multiple rationales. I also discovered that SROs often justified their projects through the use of relatively recent rationales (such as the achievement of efficiency savings arising out of the Gershon Review (2004)) even though the project was initiated at an earlier time. Frequently I was unable to obtain a clear unambiguous answer from a respondent. I therefore abandoned this line of investigation due to the highly variable nature of the answers from the respondents on this question.

5.5   Summary

Based on my analysis of the data, accountability is conceived in four qualitatively different ways. Conception C1 is concerned with accountability for the project to senior managers and management groups within the SROs own organization. SROs who expressed this conception fulfilled their accountability within the timeframe of the project by reporting regularly to their superiors and understood the consequences of being accountable as damaged promotion prospects and loss of financial benefits. Conception C2 expands this understanding further and is focused on accountability for the organization's reputation and benefits to other organizations within the realm of government. SROs who expressed this conception fulfilled their accountability through question the relevance of the project to organizational objectives, engaging with

other organizations within government and answering questions if the project went wrong. They also understood that they were accountable if the project went wrong, in which case both their organization and its reputation would be damaged. Conception C3 develops this understanding further and is concerned with accountability to the public for a public good. SROs who expressed this conception fulfilled their accountability by questioning whether the project would deliver a benefit to the public and engaging with the public, charitable organizations or professions. These SROs also understood that they were accountable when the benefits of the project were realised. Conception C4 enlarges this understanding. SROs who expressed this conception understood that they were not accountable to anyone, but rather were responsible to themselves for the success of the project. They fulfilled their accountability by doing what they understood to be the right thing and understood that they were always accountable to themselves

These conceptions do not stand in isolation from each other, but form a hierarchy of increasing complexity. SROs who expressed conception C4 also expressed conceptions C3, C2 and C1, SROs who expressed conception C3 also expressed conceptions C2 and C1 and SROs who expressed conception C2 also expressed conception C1. Those SROs who only expressed conception C1 only expressed this conception.

Chapter Six: Discussion

This chapter has eight sections. In Section 6.1 I summarize the research aims, methods and results. In Section 6.2 the results of the research in relation to my definition of the concept of accountability are discussed. I compare the results to existing literature on individual conceptions of accountability in Section 6.3. In Section 6.4 the results are compared and contrasted with other typologies of accountability. I examine the results in relation to the NPM view of accountability in Section 6.5. In Section 6.6 I outline how accountability functions in the 'differentiated polity' (Rhodes, 1994: 4). In Section 6.7 the results are discussed in relation to the paradox of accountability. I summarize the chapter and the contributions to knowledge in Section 6.8.

6.1   Research Outline

This research questions the assumption of a singular understanding of accountability that is inherent in the mandating of accountability for the SRO. My review of the literature on accountability in the field of public administration demonstrates that, due to the subjective nature of human understanding and the complex environment in which senior civil servants operate today, there are theoretical grounds for the existence of a range of understandings of accountability. The same literature review found that empirical research on how individuals understand accountability was limited; psychological research dealt with the impacts of accountability on individual behaviour, whilst the public administration literature had only two relevant studies. These two studies suffered from contextual and methodological limitations that raised questions over their relevance to the role of the SRO in the civil service. The paucity of current literature on individual understanding of accountability, coupled with the failure of the current approach to SRO accountability to recognize the subjective and cognitive limitations of human understanding, results in the creation of two linked paradoxes. First, individual civil servants known as SROs have been made accountable for the objectives of public sector projects, yet little is known

about how individuals understand accountability. Second, a singular objective understanding of accountability has been assumed, yet there are theoretical grounds for the existence of a range of understandings of accountability. Taken together, these produce the following research question:-

> What are individual SROs' subjective understandings of their accountabilities?

In this research a conception means 'people's ways of experiencing or making sense of their world' (Sandberg, 2000: 12).

In line with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) notion of theoretical saturation, I selected a sample of 30 SROs from as broad a range as possible of civil service departments and executive agencies. Following the traditions of my chosen research approach (phenomenography), I collected data through in-depth interviews using an open-ended question protocol. I then transcribed and analyzed the interviews using 'intentional analysis' (Sandberg, 1994: 85), an iterative approach that alternates between a focus on *what* the SROs conceived accountability as, and *how* they conceived it.

From this analysis I identified four conceptions of accountability (see Table 5-3). These are:-

> Conception C1: Intra-organizational accountability
> Conception C2: Inter-organizational accountability
> Conception C3: Public accountability
> Conception C4: Individual responsibility

Each conception has the same five attributes - principal, subject, fulfilment, time frame and consequences, but the attributes had different foci according to the particular conception. The conceptions reflect four qualitatively different understandings of accountability in the United Kingdom's civil service. Some

SROs had richer and more complex conceptions. Based on the data, each successive conception builds upon and expands the meaning of its predecessor, starting from conception C1. The conceptions then form a hierarchy of increasing complexity and richness in conceiving accountability.

6.2   The Results and the Definition of Accountability

In Section 2.2.5 I defined accountability as **a social relationship, with resources and responsibilities entrusted to a steward for a particular task by one or more principals, with the consequent potential for an account to be called for, judgement made and remedies and / or sanctions imposed**. I also outlined the five components that make up the concept of accountability: a relationship, a subject, the provision and seeking of information, judgement and sanctions. In this section I discuss the results in relation to the above definition and the five components.

6.2.1 The Conceptions and the Definition of Accountability

In conception C1 the SRO is accountable to superiors and management groups within the organization for the achievement of project targets. In conception C2 the SRO is accountable to other organizations for the reputation of the SRO's own organization and the benefits to the organization of the project. In conception C3 the SRO is accountable to the public for the delivery of a benefit to the public. In conception C4 the SRO is accountable to him or herself for doing the right thing. So all four conceptions are consistent with the definition of accountability which I developed from the literature, but in different ways

There are, however, three subtleties that distinguish the formal definition from the conceptions. First, in conception C1 the SRO not only has formally defined principals who delegate to the SRO the accountability for the project, but also subjectively defined principals whose support is vital to the achievement of the project's objectives. As such, these principals are defined by the SRO, unlike the formal principals who are imposed on the SRO. In this conception

'accountability is the formation or enactment of informal and formal mechanisms for dealing with expectations and experience' (Dubnick and Justice, 2004: 9). The subjective definition of additional principals by the SRO increases progressively through the other conceptions. In conception C2 accountability is not only to the formal principals of the NAO and the PAC, but also subjectively to other peer organizations in the civil service. In conception C3 the SRO is accountable to the public, which is again a principal subjectively defined by the SRO. These subjective principals do not entrust resources and responsibilities to the SRO, but are a 'reflection of the legitimized "certainties" within a community – certainties that accompany beliefs about how the world (including social relationships and causality) is organized' (Dubnick and Justice, 2004: 10). In conception C2 the SRO is also accountable for the organizational benefits of the project, as well as the reputation of their own organization to other organizations within government and also to Parliament. This reflects two legitimized certainties. The first is that organizations must benefit from a project and the second is that organizational reputation is important within government and in dealing with Parliament. In conception C3 the SRO is also accountable to the public for a public benefit or good. This reflects a wider perspective in which the legitimized certainty is that the purpose of the civil service is to improve the public lot. The addition of these subjectively defined principals is the first difference between the definition of accountability I have derived from the literature and the results.

Second, the formal definition of accountability is focussed around the steward giving an account to the principal. Conceptions C2 and C3 both reflect a wider, more subjective view of accountability, that of taking the views of others into account (Donahue, 1989). They also reflect a complex task environment, in which accountability as both giving an account to others and taking the views of others into account, 'is a means for managing an otherwise chaotic situation' (Dubnick and Justice, 2004: 10). This wider view of accountability, as *taking the views of others into account*, is the second difference between the formal definition of accountability and the results.

Third, conception C4 is focussed around the individual being accountable to their own self for doing the right thing. Given that there is no external steward, either explicit or implicit, to hold the SRO to account, this relationship is no longer accountability, but rather the similar concept of responsibility. This conception reflects 'an internal dimension….in which the individual takes into account the consequences of his actions and the criteria which bear on his choices' (McKeon, 1957: 5) and as such carries with it the notion of incontestable authorship of an event (Sartre, 2003). This internalization of accountability to become responsibility is the third difference between the formal definition of accountability and the results.

The conceptions can then be seen as a continuum ranging from a defined and externally imposed accountability with some subjective aspects in conception C1, through increasingly subjective forms of accountability in conceptions C2 and C3, to an entirely subjective, internal responsibility in conception C4. Conceptions C1, C2 and C3 retain the core concept of the definition of accountability as a social relationship between a principal and a steward for a particular task, but in an increasingly subjective manner. In conception C1 the SRO is accountable for the delivery of the project as defined by a performance target. The forums in which the SRO is held to account are the formal ones with senior managers and management groups in the SRO's own organization. In addition to the formal sanctions of loss of bonus or employment, the results of these meetings could influence the subjective opinion of senior management on the individual SRO and therefore have an impact on the SRO's own reputation within their own organization. The progressive nature of the higher conceptions means that an increasing degree of subjectivity is added to conception C1 throughout the hierarchy. In conception C2 the SRO is also accountable for the reputation of their organization, which is a subjective matter, as well as for the objective benefits of the project to the organization. Further, the SRO is also accountable to two mandated principals, the PAC and NAO, whilst also being accountable to a subjectively defined set of other peer organizations. The

regular exchanges of views between SROs in different organizations can be seen as a more subjective approach to accountability, with the SRO taking the opinions of others into account. So conception C2 has both objective (the formal aspects of conception C1 plus the organizational benefits of the project, the NAO and PAC) and subjective components (the reputation of their own organization, the opinions of other organizations). Conception C3 adds further to the degree of subjectivity. There are no further defined principals, subjects or consequences. Instead, the SRO is accountable for a public good and engages with those bodies that represent interested parties, who are presumed to act on behalf of the public and represent their views. In doing so the SRO further increases the degree of subjectivity when compared with conceptions C1 and C2. In conception C4 responsibility is an entirely subjective affair, with the SRO acting in accordance with his or her own internalized values and norms to do the right thing to make the project a success, and so be able to live with his or her self. So the conceptions represent a hierarchy of increasingly rich, complex and subjective understandings of accountability. The four qualitatively different conceptions and their hierarchical relationship are two contributions that arise from this research.

6.2.2 The Attributes and the Components of Accountability

In Chapter 2 I outlined the five components that make up the concept of accountability: a relationship, a subject, the provision and seeking of information, judgement and sanctions. In this section I compare these components with the five attributes discovered in the data.

Relationship

The results showed that there was always a relationship between the SRO and various principals at all levels of conception. In conception C1 these are primarily formal, defined relationships between the SRO and senior managers and management teams within their own organization. There are also subjective elements in that the SRO has to seek additional support for the project from

other senior managers within their own organization. In conception C2 additional formal, objective relationships are limited to those between the SRO, the NAO and PAC. The principal additional relationships are subjective ones between SROs and other peer organizations within government. In conception C3 the only additional relationships are subjective ones between SROs and public interest groups, charities and professions. In conception C4 there is only one further relationship, a purely subjective one that is internal to the SRO. So the nature of the relationships across the four conceptions change from the primarily objective in conception C1, to more subjective relationships in conceptions C2 and C3, to a subjective internal relationship in conception C4.

Subject

The results showed that there was always a subject to an accountability relationship, in other words the SRO was always accountable for something. In conception C1 these were the project target, the provision of information, project resources and the delivery of the project. These objectives were defined by others. In conception C2 the SRO was also accountable for the reputation of their organization and the organizational benefits of the project. These reflect an increased degree of subjectivity (organizational reputation) whilst retaining some objectivity (organizational benefits). In conception C3 in addition to what the SRO was accountable for in conception C2, the SRO was also accountable for a public benefit. This is an entirely subjective notion, as it depends on what the SRO understood to be a public benefit. In conception C4 the SRO was accountable for the success of the project. This again is a subjective notion, as it is the SRO alone who defines project success. So the subject of the SRO's accountability ranges from the project performance targets in conception C1, with the addition of the subjective subjects of organizational reputation and a public good in conceptions C2 and C3, and the inclusion of a purely subjective notion of project success as perceived by the SRO in conception C4.

Provision and Seeking of Information

The *provision and seeking of information* component is reflected in the *fulfilment* attribute. However, the specific means of fulfilment varies across the conceptions. In conception C1 the SRO fulfils their accountability through regular reporting, answering questions and obtaining support for the project from within their own organization. This changes in conception C2 to questioning the relevance of the project, marketing the project by engaging with other peer organizations and, if required, answering the questions of the PAC. In conception C3 this changes again to questioning whether the project will deliver a public benefit and engaging with the public, charities and professions. In conception C4 this becomes a matter of the SRO's internal values and beliefs. The SRO fulfils their accountability by doing what they perceive to be the right thing. So the means of fulfilment changes from objective ones such as formal reports and board meetings, to increasingly subjective ones, i.e. as perceived by the SRO, informal means such as conversations and dialogue with colleagues in other departments (conception C2) and with charities and professions outside government (conception C3). In Gray and Jenkins's (1993) terms, there is a change from an internal, explicit, relationship-specific code in conception C1 to an external, implicit, general code (such as a professional ethical code) in conceptions C2, C3 and C4.

Judgement

The component *judgement* does not directly appear in any of the attributes found in the data. It is, however, implicit in the attributes. In each conception the SRO is accountable for a particular subject to a particular set of principals, fulfils that accountability in a particular way, and at some point in time faces the consequences. The final attribute, consequences, implies that the principal must have passed judgement on the SRO's actions in relation to the particular subject. However, judgement is an action of the principal, not the SRO. It is logical that judgement does not form part of an SRO's conceptions.

Sanctions

Sanctions are the final component of the literature based definition of accountability, and is reflected in the *consequences* attribute. SROs understood that there were consequences if the project went wrong. The attribute, therefore, implicitly reflects Mulgan's (2003) point that accountability is a potential – the SRO may be called to account, but it is not a certainty. The consequences in the data are the loss of a bonus, damaged promotion prospects, the loss of employment, and damage to the SRO's own reputation (conception C1), damage to the organization's reputation and the loss of organizational benefits (conception C2), reduced public benefits (conception C3) and being able to live with themselves (conception C4). Only conception C4 implies that a positive judgement by the principal (in this case the SRO themself) is a possibility. These reflect the full range of individual, organizational, formal and informal sanctions in the literature (Mulgan, 2003).

A further point relates to this component. As I stated in Section 2.2.3, this component of accountability is controversial. Some scholars exclude it from the concept of accountability on the grounds that accountability is answerability, whereas responsibility is liability (Dwivedi and Jabbra, 1989; Flinders, 2001). My definition does exclude the *sanctions* component (see Section 2.2.4). The empirical evidence is that SROs were in no doubt that sanctions, both formal and informal, would apply in the event of a project going wrong. Again these ranged from objective sanctions such as the loss of a bonus (conception C1) to subjective ones such as damage to the organization's reputation (conception C2) and less excellent outcomes for the public good (conception C3). In conception C4, the sanctions were entirely subjective and revolved around whether the SRO understood that they had personally succeeded or failed. So the empirical evidence is that accountability does include the component of sanction. So the results support both Behn's (2001) and Mulgan's (2003) definition of accountability, which includes the component of sanctions.

One sub-component that is missing in my data, when compared to the

sanctions component in the definition, is that of rectification. Both Behn (2001) and Mulgan (2003) include rectification as part of the consequences that might arise in the event of a negative judgement by the principal. The results do not support this. There were no SROs who stated that if something went wrong they would be asked to put it right. Instead, sanctions were applied. The implication is that putting the problem right was someone else's task. This is logical and is arguably a function of the difference between individual accountability and institutional accountability. When something goes awry, an institution may well have to rectify the problem, and although the accountable individual may have sanctions imposed, the task of putting matters right would probably fall to someone else. So individual accountability, based on the data, does not include rectification but does include sanctions. The confirmation of sanctions and the refutation of rectification are two further contributions from this research.

Timeframe

One component that appeared in the data but was not in the literature was that of time. Different conceptions had different time horizons in which SROs understood they were accountable. In conception C1 SROs were accountable within the timeframe of the project. In conceptions C2 and C3 SROs were also accountable if or when the project went wrong, and when the project benefits to the public were realized, respectively. In conception C4 SROs were responsible to themselves in perpetuity. Previous literature on accountability has only related time to accountability as part of the continuum of control, with accountability as an *ex ante* oversight mechanism (Scott, 2000).

The findings, that there are different conceptions of when the SRO is accountable, can be explained in terms of the *time-span of discretion* (Jaques, 1976; Jaques, 1982). An empirical concept, it is defined as 'the maximum time during which the manager must rely upon the discretion of his subordinate' (Jaques, 1976: 109). So in the context of a permanent organization such as the civil service, the CEO may be concerned with a time span of up to 100 years, whereas a team manager may be operating within a one year time span

(Stamp, 1986). A development of the concept of the time span of discretion is that of the temporal domain, i.e. the temporal area within which all individual activity takes place (Jaques, 1982). At the edge of the temporal domain is the temporal boundary, which can be understood as the maximum time span that figures in an individual's thinking.

In relation to accountability and the results, the time span of accountability can be defined as the maximum time span at the end of which the SRO understands he or she will be called or held to account. The time spans in the different conceptions have both prescriptive and discretionary elements. Time in conception C1 is conceived in both prescriptive and objective terms, whereas in the other conceptions it is conceived in discretionary and subjective terms. In conception C2 the time span is also framed around when or if the project goes wrong. This can be the time taken for an NAO inquiry, report and subsequent PAC hearing, or it can be the time taken for organizations outside the SRO's own to hear that there are problems. In conception C3 the time span also relates to when the benefits to the public of the project will be realized. This is highly dependent on the type, scope and scale of the project. Some projects, such as the *Connecting for Health* project for the NHS (2006), have a time span of ten years, whereas other projects may have much shorter time spans. The point in time when the SRO understands he or she will be accountable for the delivery of a public benefit is entirely subjective in nature. Conception C4 extends this conception of time further still. The SRO is always responsible to him or herself. Time, then, almost becomes irrelevant – there is no "when" (as in some point in the future): the SRO is permanently and always responsible.

These views of time are consistent with the description of conceptions in phenomenographic research. A conception has a horizon that is the limit or extent of conceived meaning within which activity takes place (Sandberg, 1994). In these results, accountability has temporal horizons, which frame the time-span within which the SRO conceives that they will be accountable. In Section 5.3 I established that each successive conception builds on its predecessor to

form a hierarchy of increasing complexity and richness. Each conception represents a distinct, nested set of temporal domains with different temporal horizons. These change from being objective and prescriptive in conception C1 to more subjective and discretionary in conceptions C2, C3 and C4. The addition of time is a further contribution from this research.

6.2.3 Summary

In this section I have reviewed the results in relation to both the definition of accountability and the five components of accountability found in the literature. In relation to my literature-derived definition of accountability, conceptions C1, C2 and C3 are all consistent with the definition, but conception C4 is different and can be classified as individual responsibility. Together, the conceptions can be viewed as a continuum ranging from an objective, external accountability to a subjective, internal responsibility. In relation to the five components of accountability, the results are consistent across four of the five literature-derived components. The component of *sanctions* forms part of the concept of individual accountability, but *rectification* does not. *Time* is a new component of accountability that was not suggested by the literature. Regarding when the SRO is accountable, each conception is different, ranging from within the project timeframe, through if or when the project goes wrong to when the benefits to the public are realized. Conception C4 has a different view of time in that responsibility is ever present.

6.3 The Results and Other Individual Conceptions of Accountability

As I set out in Section 2.4.1, Sinclair (1995) and Newman (2004) are the only other authors to have conducted empirical research into individual conceptions of accountability: Sinclair (1995) identified five forms of accountability: political, public, managerial, professional and personal. Newman (2004) identified seven forms of accountability: professional, public, financial, administrative,

managerial, user and community. These are summarized together with the results in Table 6-1 below:-

Table 6-1: Comparison of the Results of this Study with Other Studies on Individual Accountability

Study	Sinclair (1995)	Newman (2004)	Results of this Study
Form of Accountability	Political	Professional	Intra-organizational
	Public	Financial	Inter-organizational
	Managerial	Administrative	Public
	Professional	Managerial	Individual Responsibility
	Personal	User	
		Community	

I shall use the results of this study as an organizing perspective for the purposes of comparison with Sinclair's (1995) and Newman's (2004) studies. Table 5-3 contains a full description of this study's results.

6.3.1 Conception C1: Intra-Organizational Accountability

This form of accountability is focussed around the regular reporting of progress against project targets to senior managers, management groups and political leaders within the organization. This is comparable with Sinclair's (1995) managerial accountability, which is concerned with the monitoring of inputs, outputs and outcomes. It also has some elements of Sinclair's (1995) political accountability, which is concerned with the accountability of public servants to politicians. This conception also has some overlaps with Newman's (2004) *managerial and financial accountabilities*, the former being concerned with accountability to line managers and the latter with accountability for finances. In this conception SROs were accountable to managers and management groups within their own organizations for compliance with their allocated budgets as well as other resources. In some cases, this conception also overlaps with Newman's (2004) *user accountability,* as the users of an SRO's project were located within their own organization. There are also overlaps with Newman's (2004) *public accountability*, which includes accountability to funding sources, as SROs were accountable to funders, who were usually senior managers or management teams inside the SRO's own organization.

6.3.2 Conception C2: Intra-Organizational Accountability

Conception C2 is concerned with accountability for organizational aspects of the project (such as reputation and benefits) to other organizations within government (such as other departments, executive agencies, the NAO and the PAC). This has some similarity to Sinclair's (1995) *public accountability*, where CEOs were accountable to parliamentary committees as well as to the wider public. The overlap between conception C2 and Sinclair's (1995) public accountability also extends to accountability to parliamentary committees. Both the results and Sinclair's (1995) work recognize public accountability as including parliamentary bodies such as the NAO and PAC (although Sinclair does not name the bodies). This conception also partially overlaps with Newman's (2004) *user accountability*, as the users of an SROs project were users in other departments or executive agencies. It has further parallels with Newman's (2004) *managerial and financial accountabilities*, since the latter can be expressed in organizational terms. However, organizational reputation is absent from both Sinclair's (1995) and Newman's (2004) work.

6.3.3 Conception C3: Public Accountability

This is concerned with SRO accountability to the public, charities and professions for an outcome for the public good. Some characteristics of this conception are common to Sinclair's *public accountability*, which is defined as 'informal but direct accountability to the public, interested community groups and individuals' (Sinclair, 1995: 225). SROs who expressed this conception talked about engaging with charities and professions. They also recognized that the public was a difficult body with which to engage directly, so charities and professions became proxies for the public.

Newman (2004) does not define public accountability. The varied nature of the participants in the research (civil servants, local government officers and voluntary sector managers) makes it difficult to define a public to whom to be accountable. However, Newman (2004) suggests that public accountability is

about demonstrating what you are doing – 'to funders, to government, to local communities, to service users, to partners and a range of other constituencies' (Newman, 2004: 26). This would appear to resonate with the concept of public accountability in conception C3. Newman's (2004) *consumer and user accountabilities* also match this conception, as the users of a project or the consumers of a service that is supported by the SRO's project could be members of the public.

6.3.4 Conception C4: Individual Responsibility

This conception is based on SROs being responsible for doing the right thing. This has similarities with Sinclair's (1995) *personal accountability*, which is defined as 'fidelity to personal conscience in basic values such as respect for human dignity and acting in a manner that accepts responsibility for affecting the lives of others' (Sinclair, 1995: 230). As such, it is based on internalized ethical and moral beliefs and values. The results have strong parallels with this view of personal accountability, as the SROs who expressed it were concerned with acting in accordance with their own values. One respondent who expressed this conception stated that when faced with a decision that challenged their values, they would try to do what they thought was the right thing, or resign. A similar sentiment was expressed by one of Sinclair's respondents: 'Ultimately, if the government insists, I either implement their policies or step down. One would hope it doesn't come to this – but I guess that's the bottom line' (1995: 231). Newman also recognizes personal responsibility. It is 'based on qualities such as integrity, honesty, trust, professionalism and inclusiveness' (2004: 25). It is not entirely clear whether Newman's definition is completely consistent with conception C4. However, conception C4 is based around personal values, of which integrity, honesty, trust and professionalism were part.

6.3.5 Summary

The results of this research confirm many aspects of the extant literature on individual accountability. However, the nature of the results coupled with the

different contexts of the existing research make comparisons fraught with difficulty. There are significant overlaps between the forms of accountability outlined by other scholars and conceptions C1, C3 and C4. Public, personal, managerial, financial, user, community and administrative accountabilities all have overlaps with intra-organizational (C1) and public accountability (C3) as well as with personal responsibility (C4).

In the case of conception C2 (intra-organizational accountability) the parallels are much smaller. The reasons for this are not clear: it may be that accountability for an SRO's own organization is a form of accountability peculiar to the civil service. Sinclair (1995) and Newman (2004) both used existing forms of accountability derived from the institutional accountability literature rather than empirically derived forms of accountability. Overall there are significant parallels between the existing research on individual accountability and the results of this research. What the conceptions do reveal is that unlike both Sinclair's (1995) and Newman's (2004) studies, accountability is not a uniformly understood concept. It is understood in four qualitatively different ways. The refutation of accountability as a uniformly understood concept is a further contribution from this research.

6.4   The Results and Other Typologies of Accountability

In Chapter 2 I divided the various typologies of accountability into three broad categories: principal / mechanism typologies, subject based typologies, and one information and provision typology. I shall now discuss the results of this study in relation to these three groups.

6.4.1 Principal / Mechanism Typologies

In Section 2.2.4 I identified two distinct groups within this set of typologies: an American set and a "Westminster" set. I shall compare each of these in turn.

American Typologies

In relation to the American set of typologies, it is difficult to make a comparison

between the results of this study and Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) four types of accountability. This typology is based on the degree of institutional control over its own actions (high or low) and the source of agency control (internal or external). It is difficult to make any significant statement about how the results of this research relate to this typology, as I was not concerned with the source of accountability demands placed on the SRO. This means that I have not been able to establish or differentiate between the dimensions of institutional control and agency control on which Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) study is based.

In relation to Deleon's (1998) work, different conceptions reflect different forms of accountability. Conception C1 reflects a bureaucratic accountability (goals clear, means known). So in conception C1, the SRO is accountable for an objectively defined outcome (known goals) to a defined set of managers and management teams through a set of formal reporting mechanisms (known means). It is not entirely clear to what extent conceptions C2, C3 and C4 reflect different forms of accountability in Deleon's (1998) typology. It is arguable that they reflect more than one form of accountability in this typology. If the goals are clear but the means are not, then conceptions C2, C3 and C4 reflect professional accountability (goals clear, means unknown). The goals in conceptions C2, C3 and C4 are the different subjects of the SRO's accountability in Table 5-3: an aspect of the organization, a public benefit and doing the right thing respectively. The means are the different forms of fulfilment in each conception. If the goals are unclear and the means are unclear, this would suggest that conceptions C2, C3 and C4 reflect anarchic accountability. Similarly if the goals are clear but the means are clear, then they reflect political accountability. None of these different forms of accountability derived by Deleon (1998) can entirely be ruled out of the results, as there are overlaps with the conceptions. However, it is not possible to make a direct comparison for conceptions other than conception C1.

"Westminster" Typologies

The similarities between the results and the "Westminster" typologies are far

more evident. Conception C1 contains elements of Oliver's (1991) political accountability, since Oliver allocates to ministers the accountability of civil servants in this category. Conception C1 also has a considerable degree of overlap with *managerial accountability*, which is concerned with managerial control of government departments though the use of specific objectives (Lawton and Rose, 1991; Stone, 1995; Flinders, 2001).

There are strong parallels between conception C2, inter-organizational accountability and *parliamentary accountability* (Pyper, 1996a; Flinders, 2001) due to the inclusion of the NAO and PAC in the conception. The NAO and PAC also crop up in *legal / judicial accountability* (Lawton and Rose, 1991). It also has some similarities with Stone's (1995) *network relations accountability*, which is concerned with relationships between individuals and organizations that work together in a particular area.

Conception C3, public accountability, has a direct relationship with the public accountability defined in the literature: accountability to the public, individuals and community groups (Oliver, 1991; Pyper, 1996a). The data does not, however, include the Citizen's Charter, the Patient's Charter and consumer accountability (Lawton and Rose, 1991; Oliver, 1991; Pyper, 1996a).

Conception C4, personal responsibility, also has a direct relationship with personal accountability as defined by Sinclair (1995) and Newman (2004), as explained in Section 6.3.

6.4.2 Subject Based Typologies

In Chapter 2 I outlined two subject based accountability typologies. Day and Klein (1987) differentiated between *political accountability* (where standards for the judgement of action were contestable) and *managerial accountability* (where standards for the judgement of action were agreed). Managerial accountability can be further subdivided into fiscal, process and programme accountabilities

(or economic, efficiency and effectiveness accountabilities). Behn (2001) takes a similar view - accountability can be for finance, fairness or performance.

Conception C1 has a managerial accountability focus, as it is concerned with both fiscal and programme accountabilities (Day and Klein, 1987) and with finance and performance (Behn, 2001). Conception C1 is concerned with the SRO being accountable for both resources and the achievement of project performance targets. Conception C2 does not directly fit with either of these typologies - the SRO is accountable for an aspect of their own organization. However, an NAO report and PAC hearing can be concerned with financial, process and performance aspects of a project. The outcome of either of these events can have a substantial impact on an SRO's own organization. There is then an indirect relationship between conception C2 and the two typologies.

Conception C3, public accountability, has no direct relationship with either of the subject based typologies. It does have an indirect relationship with accountability for fairness (Behn, 2001). In this conception SROs are accountable for the delivery of a public benefit. Fairness in the administration of public services is arguably a public benefit, so the delivery of a project that, say, improved support to individuals appealing against the dismissal of a claim for benefits, would in effect mean that the SRO was accountable for fairness. Conception C4 - *individual responsibility* - has no relationship with either of these typologies.

6.4.3 Information Seeking and Provision Typologies

The one typology in this category has five elements: redirectory, informatory, explanatory, amendatory and sacrificial (Marshall, 1984; McVicar et al., 1998; Flinders, 2001) (see Chapter 2 for more details). I shall deal with each of these in turn.

There are no parallels between redirectory accountability and the results of this

research. The SRO is accountable for the project and there is no one else that the SRO can redirect any queries to. Many respondents talked about how they understood that they alone carried the accountability for the project. There are overlaps between informatory and explanatory accountability and conceptions C1, C2 and C3. SROs gave out information and provided explanations to the superiors and management teams within their own organization (conception C1), to the NAO, PAC and other peer organizations (conception C2) and to the public, charities and professions (conception C3). There are no parallels between the results and amendatory accountability. The results make no mention of putting matters right should a project go wrong. However, there is a strong overlap between the results and sacrificial accountability. All SROs understood that they faced significant personal consequences if a project went wrong, including the loss of employment.

6.4.4 Summary

In this section I have compared the findings of this thesis with existing typologies of accountability. There are some parallels between the findings and the existing typologies of accountability. The degree of overlap with the American typologies is not large, although there are far greater overlaps with the "Westminster" typologies. The findings exhibit a high degree of commonality with political, parliamentary, public and managerial types of accountability. The results also exhibit some parallels with the subject based typologies, with conception C1 exhibiting a high degree of resonance with managerial accountability (Day and Klein, 1987). Conceptions C2 and C3 only have an indirect relationship with these typologies and conception C4 has no relationship at all. The data and results provide empirical evidence for the co-existence of theoretically derived types of accountability with three conceptions of accountability. There are also some parallels between the *information provision and judgement* typology. These overlaps are partial, as the typology is based on the doctrine of ministerial accountability and this research concerns only SROs who are civil servants. This demonstrates the difficulty of using theoretically derived typologies in practice.

6.5   The Results and Accountability under NPM

In Section 2.3.2 I described how NPM has had an impact on the accountability of civil servants. The NPM model of accountability requires the clear assignment of power rather than the diffusion of power, a clear, objective statement of goals and a focus on results rather than procedures (Hood, 1991). NPM has shifted the traditional objectives of governance away from socio-economic progress, the alleviation of poverty, impartiality, fairness and justice to values such as efficiency, effectiveness and economic growth (Parker and Gould, 1999; Haque, 2000). Accountability for process has become accountability for results (Kernaghan, 2000). These changes have highlighted and exacerbated an existing accountability gap between the rhetoric of the doctrine of ministerial responsibility and the practice of civil servant accountability, a gap that has developed as a result of the expansion of the state since the mid-19th century and the introduction of the parliamentary select committee system (Pyper, 1996a; Barberis, 1998). Some literature is strongly suggestive of the displacement of traditional accountability subjects and principals by those propagated by NPM (Parker and Gould, 1999). Bowerman (1998) suggests that there are conflicts and tensions between traditional public sector accountabilities and those created by NPM. These tensions also arise out of different interpretations of accountability and between the demands of different principals (Bowerman, 1998).

There are three points that arise from the results in relation to NPM. First, the NPM emphasis on clearly assigned accountability for an objective performance target has been universally adopted and understood by SROs. All SROs expressed conception C1. Conception C1 is consistent with the NPM approach to accountability: clear, objectively defined goals, a defined set of principals, the clear allocation of authority and responsibility through hierarchical control (Rhodes, 1997). It is also consistent with the intra-organizational focus of NPM (Rhodes, 1997).

Second, contrary to the suggestions made by some scholars, the NPM

approach to accountability has not entirely displaced traditional accountabilities. Conception C2 is consistent with the traditional characteristics of the bureaucratic organization with its emphasis on the needs of the organization (Kernaghan, 2000). Conception C3 is consistent with the traditional notions of accountability for the delivery of a benefit to the public and is concerned with accountability subjects such as fairness, justice and the prudent use of public resources by questioning whether a project is in the public interest. So in conceptions C2 and C3 traditional notions of accountability sit side by side with NPM accountabilities for performance. These findings, that traditional forms of accountability have not been displaced by NPM derived accountabilities together with their co-existence, represent two further contributions from this research.

Third, there did not appear to be any tension or conflict between conception C1, with its NPM approach to accountability, and conceptions C2 and C3. SROs who expressed conceptions C2 and C3 did not express or reveal any hints of conflict in the way they expressed their conceptions of accountability. Instead, they formed a unitary, integrative and complex understanding of it. Those SROs who expressed conception C4 did suggest that they could see the potential for conflict between their own ethical and moral values and the requirements imposed on them by their respective organizations. They suggested that given the choice between what they believed in and what they could be asked to do, they would choose what they believed in and resign. This represents a further contribution from this research.

6.6   The Results and Accountability in the Differentiated Polity

In Section 2.3.3 I described the changes in the structure of the civil service since the inception of the current accountability doctrine in the 1870s. Civil servants no longer work in a Weberian hierarchy, but rather at the centre of a wide network of private sector suppliers, public agencies, non-departmental public bodies, policy interest groups, charities, professions, customers, citizens,

politicians and tax payers - described by Rhodes as a 'differentiated polity' (Rhodes, 1994: 4). Public services and policies are not decided by the prime minister and the cabinet: 'rather, policies "emerge" from the deliberations of discrete, organized, closed networks of policy actors, although ministers and their departments are important players' (Rhodes, Carmichael, McMillan, and Massey, 2003: 8). This emphasis on networks is a notable feature of the Labour government, which has emphasised the importance of trust-based networks for the delivery of public services (Rhodes and Bevir, 2001). Considine explains why these networks are problematic for traditional notions of accountability in the civil service.

> 'Accountability cannot be defined primarily either as the following of rules or as honest communication with one's superiors. Rather it now involves what might be thought of as the appropriate exercise of a navigational competence: that is, the proper use of authority to range freely across a multirelationship terrain in search of the most advantageous path to success' (Considine, 2002: 22).

The results of this study reveal the complexity of accountability in government. Conception C1 shows that accountability to one's superiors remains the dominant form of accountability in the civil service, since all SROs expressed this conception. Conceptions C2 and C3 add further complexity to this basic intra-organizational and hierarchical conception of accountability, revealing the extent to which public service definition and delivery is dependent on inter-organizational co-ordination both within and without government.

Conception C2, with its emphasis on peer organizations within government (and therefore momentarily excluding the NAO and PAC), reflects a form of accountability known as *mutuality*, which 'involves accountability to a peer-group rather than an external regulator, and shapes individual behaviour by group influence' (Hood, 1998: 11). Mutuality is a characteristic of networks, where accountability is enforced by peers, and of traditional professions, where accountability is enforced by fellow professionals (Hood, 1998). It is similar to

Stone's (1995) *network relations accountability* (see Section 2.2.2). The mutuality apparent in conception C2 reflects the 'multiple sites of discretion in a complex, multi-level and dispersed field' (Newman, 2004: 20). It is at least as important as accountability to managerial superiors and ministers (Stone, 1995). Mutuality is distinct from other types of accountability by virtue of the large number of actors that can be involved and 'by the means through which administrative decision-making is legitimized' (Stone, 1993: 518). In this case, mutuality works in both formal and informal ways. Formally, an SRO may have to co-ordinate their work with that of other departments and executive agencies. Informally, the SRO may wish to keep a peer in a related area informed on matters of mutual interest, rather than there being any formal relationship.

Conception C3 also involves mutuality. In this conception the 'dispersed field of agency and power' (Newman, 2004: 20) now extends outside the realm of government. The SRO may seek advice and information on solutions to policy problems from charities, professions, policy interest groups as well as industry. This engagement is informal in nature, as the data suggests that the SRO engages with these bodies on an ad-hoc basis, with no formal mechanism for the SRO being held to account for their actions. SROs, as senior civil servants, are then important players in these exogenous networks (Rhodes et al., 2003). Conception C3 represents a more complex picture of a network, as in addition to the inter-departmental network of conception C2, there is now a wider, external network.

The cumulative nature of the conceptions suggests that not all SROs recognize or navigate their way around these complex networks. Those who expressed conception C1 conceptually remained within the bounds of their organization, whereas those who expressed conceptions C2 and C3 went beyond these boundaries to co-ordinate and co-operate with other departments and executive agencies, and with a range of bodies outside government respectively. Those SROs who expressed either of these two conceptions have an understanding of accountability strongly akin to Spiro's (2005) "multicentric accountability", in that

SROs are accountable not only to their management, but to others 'to different degrees, in different ways' (Spiro, 1969: 98). These conceptions reflect the evolution of accountability from a top-down hierarchical form to a wider, more subjective form that reflects the complexity of the networks which comprise governance in the United Kingdom (Rhodes et al., 2003).

6.7   The Results and the Paradox of Accountability

In Sections 2.2.5 I have defined the concept of accountability. In the context of democratic government this definition raises a paradox, the resolution of which poses fundamental questions over the nature of the relationship between administrators and politicians. The paradox is as follows:-

> 'If public servants are accountable solely for the effective achievement of purposes mandated by political authority, then as mere instruments of that authority they bear no personal responsibility as moral agents for the products of their actions. If, on the other hand, public servants actively participate in determining public purposes, their accountability is compromised and political authority is undermined' (Harmon, 1995: 163-164).

This paradox goes to the heart of the definition of accountability and the distinction I have drawn between it and responsibility. The paradox has been the source of an ongoing debate in the field of public administration since the 1940s, first expressed in terms of different forms of responsibility, but latterly pursued in terms of different types of accountability (Mulgan, 2003). Harmon (1995) has split the antagonists into two camps - "hard-core" rationalist and "soft-core" rationalist groups. The former group, consisting of the scholars Finer (1941), Simon (1945) and Burke (1986), 'cleave more strictly to the assumptions of rationalism' (Harmon, 1995: 40), whilst the latter group, consisting of the scholars Friedrich (1940), Waldo (1952) and Cooper (1998), 'relax those assumptions without abandoning then altogether in order to subsume a wider range of opinion, or in the interest of flexibility, to account for practical difficulties in applying them in real-world situations' (Harmon, 1995:

40).

This debate has been characterized as a schismogenic paradox (Harmon, 1995). The term "schismogenic" 'refers to arguments, theories or perspectives that are broken or split at the outset' (Quinn, 1988: 26). A schismogenic paradox can be defined 'both as statements, singly or in sets, that either lead to self-contradictory conclusions or contradict one another, and as situations in which particular actions produce consequences that are contradictory to those intended, but which on closer examination are predictable and even logically inevitable' (Harmon, 1995: 76). In the case of the paradox of accountability, there is 'an irreconcilable conflict between hard-core and soft-core rationalism in which each side is able to marshal crippling objections against the other' (Harmon, 1995: 164).

The paradox of accountability is a result of dialectical interaction between the paradoxical character of both human nature and the institutional environment (Talbot, 2005). Whilst there are many different paradoxes, Lewis (2000) categorizes three types of paradox: learning, organizing and belonging. The paradox of accountability is both an organizing paradox, as it involves 'conflicting yet simultaneous demands for control and flexibility' (Lewis, 2000: 765-766) that arise out of the conflict between the delegation of administrative power and political control, and a belonging paradox as it involves the 'complex relationships between self and other' (Lewis, 2000: 766), the self being the accountable individual and the other being politicians and the public. This latter paradox arises out of the fundamental nature of individual accountability as a relationship between human agents and social systems (Tetlock, 1999).

This paradox suggests that SROs are either accountable or responsible, but cannot be both. Conception C1 is consistent with a non-paradoxical view of accountability, as SROs who expressed this conception were accountable for achieving their projects' objectives. However, these objectives were defined by their managerial superiors and ultimately emanated from their political leaders.

One SRO recounted that a minister had left the SRO's department for a number of years and then returned to find the project he had mandated had not been completed. He then directed that it should be completed - and quickly.

Conception C2 is also consistent with this non-paradoxical view of accountability, which in this conception, is focussed on the achievement of organizational improvements, an objective that is jointly determined with others. SROs also engage with other departments in order to market their projects and establish its relevance both to their own organization and others. This requires agreement, which cannot be imposed (Habermas, 1984). In seeking and making such an agreement, the SRO is seeking to achieve a particular end – the enhancement or protection of the reputation of their organization.

In conception C3 SROs actively participated in the determination of public purposes through engagement with the public or their assumed proxies – charities and professions. In doing so they are agreeing and determining public purposes. However, because of the cumulative nature of the conceptions, those SROs who expressed this conception also expressed conceptions C2 and C1.

Therefore conception C3 should reflect the paradox of accountability. Allowing civil servants to decide on public purposes results in either the atrophy of political control or, if they do not decide on such purposes, the atrophy of personal responsibility (Harmon, 1995). However, this conception has both the political and managerial control of conceptions C1 and C2, and the determination of public purposes (conception C3). The SROs who expressed this conception have therefore 'become purposive without becoming schismogenic' (Quinn, 1988: 43). So they have in some way dealt with this paradox. Lewis (2000) states that paradox can be dealt with through either avoidance, confrontation or transcendence. Unlike conceptions C1 and C2 where the paradox is either unrecognized or avoided, the SROs who expressed this conception have either confronted the paradox or transcended it. Confronting a paradox suggests conflict and tension between the opposing

sides and involves reframing the paradox as an antinomial one, which 'can only be struggled with rather than solved' (Harmon, 1995: 77). Yet tension and conflict are not present in the data, either in the nature of the responses or their tenor. The SROs who expressed conception C3 have transcended the paradox and changed it from 'either/or to both/and' (Chen, 2002: 187). The 'opposites in a paradox are not simply elements bound in a state of tension, but components interacting to form a state of wholeness' (Chen, 2002: 188). These opposites have become interdependent rather than mutually exclusive.

This notion, that the paradox has been transcended, also applies to conception C4, individual responsibility. The cumulative nature of the conceptions means that those SROs who expressed conception C4 also expressed all the other conceptions. In this case the determination of public purposes not only involves political authority and the public, but the personal beliefs and values of the SROs themselves. Conception C4, therefore, contains the political and managerial control of conceptions C1 and C2, the active determination of public purposes of conception C3 and the SROs own personal beliefs and values. They have then transcended the paradox of accountability and yet remained cognizant of the potential for conflict between their own values and beliefs and the organizational demands placed upon them. These findings, that the paradox of accountability is either ignored or transcended, are two further contributions from this research.

6.8   Summary

In this chapter I have presented the aims, methods and results of my research and discussed the relationship between the results and six key areas of literature: the definition of accountability; existing work on individual conceptions of accountability; existing typologies of accountability; the NPM view of accountability; accountability in the 'differentiated polity' (Rhodes, 1997: 4); and the paradox of accountability. I have also discussed the significance of the fact that a "public contact" department is correlated with conception C3.

The four conceptions of accountability identified in this study are consistent with the definition of accountability I presented in Section 2.2.1. All SROs understood that accountability included the component of sanction, a finding that contradicts the views of some scholars. Rectification, a component of accountability that most scholars would include in a definition of accountability, was absent from the data. A newly identified component of accountability – *time* – showed that those with different conceptions of accountability took different views of when they were accountable. This reflects a concept known as the *time-span of discretion.* In relation to accountability, this is the maximum time-span at the end of which the SRO could be called to account. The four conceptions exist on a continuum ranging from the objective, explicit accountability of conception C1 to the subjective, implicit responsibility of conception C4. Each conception has a distinct temporal domain, at the edge of which is a temporal boundary representing the temporal limit of the perceived meaning of accountability within a conception.

The results have significant overlaps with both Sinclair's (1995) and Newman's (2004) work. However, these overlaps are imprecise as a result of the differences between the inductive, data-driven approach inherent in phenomenography and the theoretically-based social constructivist approaches that both Sinclair (1995) and Newman (2004) have used. Whilst the parallels with the American constitutional accountability typologies are not significant, there is a considerable degree of resonance between the "Westminster" typologies and the results of this research. The extent of the resonance depends on the particular scholar's definition of public, political, parliamentary or managerial accountability adopted. The results also show that the NPM approach to accountability has been universally understood by SROs in the sample. The literature suggests that the NPM emphasis on the clear assignment of accountability for the achievement of a performance target has displaced traditional notions of accountability such as fairness, equity and justice. However, the data shows that this is not the case for conception C3,

which is concerned with assigned accountability for an objective target and more traditional notions of accountability such as fairness, justice and the prudent use of public resources. Finally, those SROs who expressed conceptions C3 and C4 show that the paradox of accountability first posed by Friedrich (1940) and Finer (1941) has been transcended. Conceptions C3 and C4 also reveal a subjective, communicative accountability to the public co-existing with an instrumental accountability to political masters in conceptions C1 and C2. In conception C4 this subjective, communicative accountability to the public co-exists with a further internalized subjective individual responsibility to personal values.

Based on the review of the results presented in this chapter, the contributions to knowledge made by this research and summarized in this section are presented in Table 6-2 (overleaf).

Table 6-2: Summary of Research Contributions to Knowledge

Research Findings	Contributions to Fields of Knowledge
Five attributes of accountability	Contributions to concept of accountability at the level of the individual: • _Confirmation_ that the concept of accountability includes the attribute of _sanction_ • _Refutation_ that the concept of accountability includes the component _rectification_ • _Addition_ of the attribute of _time_ to the concept of accountability • _Addition_ of _four qualitatively different understandings_ of the attributes of accountability
Four levels of conception of accountability	Contributions to individual conceptions of accountability: • _Addition_ of hierarchy of conceptions of accountability • _Refutation_ of accountability as a uniformly understood concept • _Refutation_ of Harmon's (1995) paradox of accountability • _Addition_ of conceptions of accountability as an interdependent, integrated whole
Four levels of conception of accountability	Contributions to NPM perspective of accountability • _Refutation_ of complete displacement of traditional accountabilities such as accountability to the public by NPM performance based accountability • _Refutation_ of tension between NPM performance based accountability and traditional accountabilities such as accountability to the public _Addition_ of co-existence of NPM performance target based accountability alongside traditional accountabilities such as accountability to the public

.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

This chapter has five sections. In section 7.1 the wider theoretical implications of the research are discussed. I present the practical implications for theory and practice in section 7.2. In section 7.3 I examine the limitations of this research. I suggest an agenda for future research in this area in section 7.4 and close the thesis in section 7.5.

7.1   Implications for Theory

Table 6-2 presents 11 contributions to knowledge that are based on this research. I shall deal with the theoretical implications of these contributions in the next three sub-sections.

7.1.1 Contributions to the concept of accountability at the individual level

The results have four implications for the concept of accountability at the individual level. First, the results demonstrate that the concept of accountability at this level includes the component of *sanctions*. In section 2.2.3 I reviewed the literature on this aspect of accountability. Both Behn (2001) and Mulgan (2003) argue that accountability is ineffective without sanctions. This contrasts with the views of other scholars such as Thynne and Goldring (1987), Dwivedi and Jabbra (1989), Lawton and Rose (1991) and Flinders (2001). These scholars exclude sanctions from their definition of accountability. The results provide empirical support of a definition of accountability at this level that includes the component of sanctions.

Second, the results refute that the concept of accountability at the level of the individual includes the component of *rectification*. Both Behn (2001) and Mulgan (2003) propose that rectification is part of the consequences that potentially could arise if the principal delivers a negative judgement. In Chapter 6 I argued that this was a result of the difference between individual and institutional accountability. Institutions may be asked to correct mistakes, whereas

individuals have sanctions imposed on them. The task of putting matters right falls to someone else. The data provides empirical support for excluding the component of *rectification* from the definition of accountability at this level.

Third, the addition of the component of *time* to accountability implies that the definition of accountability would have to be extended to cover this component. This is not aspect of accountability that appears in the extant literature on accountability. However, the component *time* is consistent with the empirical concept *the time-span of discretion* (Jaques, 1976; Jaques, 1982). The four conceptions reflect different temporal boundaries within which the SRO conceives they will be accountable. The data supports a definition of accountability that includes time as one of the components of accountability at this level.

Taking these points together and based on my earlier definition of accountability in Chapter 2, individual accountability can now be re-defined as **a social relationship, with resources and responsibilities entrusted to a steward for a particular task by one or more principals, with the consequent potential for an account to be called for <u>at some future time</u>, judgement made and <u>sanctions</u> imposed.**

7.1.2 Contributions to individual conceptions of accountability

Four implications arise from the four conceptions of individual accountability (Table 6-2). The first implication is based on the four qualitatively different conceptions of accountability. In Section 2.3.4 I concluded that SROs may have understandings of what they are accountable for and to whom they are accountable that are different from those defined by others. In Section 3.4 I further developed these conclusions. I proposed that first, the different ways in which accountability is understood by different SROs should be classifiable as one of a limited number of qualitatively different conceptions, and second, that the different ways in which individual accountability is conceived by different SROs could be arranged as a hierarchy of increasing inclusiveness and

complexity. I reviewed these conclusions in this research and the findings provide empirical evidence that the conclusions are correct.

Second, the four conceptions demonstrate that accountability is not understood in the same way by all individuals in this particular social group. This finding refutes the implication of previous research, that accountability is uniformly understood by individuals (Sinclair, 1995) and provides empirical support for Newman's (2004) view, that not all accountability discourses were given equal weight by her respondents. The data supports the notion that accountability is conceived by individuals in one (or more) of four qualitatively different ways.

Third, conceptions C3 and C4 show that accountability is not understood in schismogenic terms, but rather as a complex, integrated, interdependent whole. This finding implies that the long-running debate, between the "hard-core" and "soft-core" rationalists in the field of public administration (Harmon, 1995) described in Chapter 6, is a theoretical one. The data establishes that those individuals who expressed conceptions C3 and C4 adopted a more complex and integrative understanding of accountability than the bi-polar nature of the debate between the "hard-core" and "soft-core" rationalists would imply. For these individuals there is no atrophy of either the political authority inherent in conception C1 or of the wider accountabilities of conceptions C3 and C4. Instead these individuals have transcended the paradox (Chen, 2002). These opposites, derived from the paradox of accountability (Harmon, 1995), become interdependent in these higher conceptions (Chen, 2002). The implication is that it is possible to determine public purposes without undermining political control. This challenges the notions put forward by the "hard-core" rationalists such as Finer (1941), Simon (1945) and Burke (1986) that civil servants cannot participate in determining public purposes without undermining democratically elected politicians. Instead the data tends to support the notions put forward by scholars such as Friedrich (1940), Waldo (1952) and Cooper (1998), that the practical limitations of political control result in the partial determination of public purposes by civil servants.

Fourth, the conceptions form a new typology of accountability. Whilst it is difficult to compare the American typologies such as those from Romzek and Dubnick (1987) and Deleon (1998) because of the different constitutional context, there are strong similarities between the conceptions and the "Westminster" typologies. Conception C1 is consistent with *managerial accountability* (Lawton and Rose, 1991; Stone, 1995; Flinders, 2001). Conception C2 reflects both *parliamentary accountability* (Pyper, 1996a; Flinders, 2001) and *legal / judicial accountability* (Lawton and Rose, 1991). Conception C3, public accountability, has a more direct relationship with the public accountability defined by scholars such as Oliver (1991) and Pyper (1996a). Conception C4, personal responsibility, has a direct relationship with both Sinclair's (1995) and Newman's (2004) personal accountability. The differences between current typologies and the results arise out of the perspective adopted in this research – that of the steward, the accountable individual.

7.1.3 Contributions to the NPM perspective on accountability

In Table 6-2 I presented three contributions in this field of knowledge. The theoretical implications of these contributions are twofold. The first relates to the finding that individuals fulfil the accountability relationships they conceive rather than just those that are mandated in conceptions C1 and C2. The implication of this finding is that defined and mandated accountability has not entirely displaced traditional notions of accountability. Whilst the SRO is accountable to a defined management group for the achievement of a performance target, the four different conceptions reveal the complex nature of accountability. Traditional notions of accountability to the public and to the SROs own organization (Parker and Gould, 1999; Haque, 2000) sit alongside accountability for results (Kernaghan, 2000) in conceptions C2 and C3. Expressed differently, accountability for outcomes has not replaced traditional process accountability, but instead is conceived in complementary terms in conceptions C2 and C3. Neither is there tension between these traditional notions of accountability and the defined and mandated accountabilities of

conceptions C1 and C2 (Bowerman, 1998). Instead, those SROs who expressed conceptions C3 and C4 integrated the defined and mandated accountabilities of conceptions C1 and C2 with traditional accountabilities.

The second implication of the four conceptions in this field of knowledge relates to the notion of governance. The nature of the British state has changed from a departmental hierarchy to a series of 'self-organizing, inter-organizational networks' (Rhodes, 1997: 53). The civil servant sits at the centre of a wide network of private sector suppliers, public agencies, non-departmental public bodies, policy interest groups, charities, professions, customers, citizens, politicians and tax payers. Organizations within these networks are interdependent and interact with each other according to a set of negotiated rules (Rhodes, 1997). The networks themselves are self-organizing and autonomous: the state can only indirectly steer or influence them (Rhodes, 1997). This leads to the idea of *governance*, rather than government. Flinders has defined governance theory as 'the study of the structural manifestation of state adaptation to its external social, political and economic environment with particular reference to the evolving processes and mechanisms of control, co-ordination, accountability and the location of power within complex networks' (2002: 54). My focus is on the accountability aspect of this theory.

The four conceptions represent the evolution of the practice of civil servant accountability, from a restricted practice internal to the civil service, to one that has changed to suit the networked nature of governance. The conceptions also reveal that a form of accountability known as *mutuality*, in which peer-group accountability shapes and regulates individual behaviour, plays a significant role (Hood, 1998) both within and without government. The conceptions also reflect Considine's (2002) view of accountability as a means of navigating these complex networks. They also reveal how SROs have reconciled traditional accountabilities with the demands of performance management whilst working within intra- and extra-governmental networks. The implication of this reconciliation is that whilst the doctrine of accountability remains unchanged, individual SROs have developed four different conceptions of accountability

that, to different degrees, reflect the evolving form of the state.

7.2   Implications for Practice

Two practical implications arise from the four conceptions of accountability. The first relates to the current accountability doctrine. The Ministerial Code of Conduct (2001) states that ministers are accountable to Parliament for every act of their departments or associated executive agencies. However, 'a lacuna has become apparent in the system of responsibility to Parliament, only partially closed by the emergence of a limited direct accountability of civil servants' (Turpin, 1994: 109). In Chapter 2 I outlined the changes that have produced this disparity. Without either constitutional reform or a regression of government to the state of affairs that existed in the latter half of the 19th century when the current doctrine was developed, these changes, and the resultant disparity between practice and doctrine, are unlikely to disappear. One means of resolving this disparity is to recast the doctrine of ministerial accountability (Barberis, 1998). Any revision to the doctrine would have to determine the exact scope of authority delegated to civil servants and the boundaries between civil servants and ministers (Giddings, 1995). Barberis (1998) suggests a clearly defined set of zones of civil servant accountability: these include accountability for management, administrative functioning, discretion and finance to select committees, ombudsmen, the NAO and individual citizens. Ministerial accountability would then cover legislation, policy and the system boundaries within which management operates. Ministers would also continue to be accountable to the public, the Prime Minister and to Parliament.

Under this recasting, the management of projects would fall within the boundaries of civil servant accountability. Project management has become a matter of great interest to select committees (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 30th October 2006), with calls for the results of OGC Gateway Reviews to be made public (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2005) and thus subject to examination by the committees. However, the rationale for any project would remain with ministers as part of their policy accountability. The recasting of the doctrine and the formalization of civil service

accountability would in effect 'mean the transposition into certain other areas of the kind of "competencies" already discharged by accounting officers' (Barberis, 1998: 467). In this case, the recasting would recognize the accountability of the SRO for the project. The accountability of the SRO to select committees for the management of the project would at least then be on an official basis.

The second implication of the four conceptions relates to the audit of government projects. The political accountability of ministers to Parliament is dependent on effective managerial accountability for economy, efficiency and effectiveness by civil servants (Power, 1997). These notions are the focus of conceptions C1 and C2, where accountability is concerned with the achievement of performance targets (conception C1) and if the project goes wrong, to the NAO and PAC (conception C2). The inter-organizational aspects of conception C2, the public accountability aspects of conception C3 and the individual responsibility of conception C4 are outside the notions of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. These are aspects of accountability that are not currently captured in the audit process. Capturing these aspects may assist the NAO with its work but may also create problems for the NAO. The NAO is a 'neutral relay which enables Parliament to monitor the executive' (Power, 1997: 47) and as such does not evaluate the ends of government activity, only the means. Auditing what constitutes a public good (conception C3) or inter-organizational accountability (conception C2) implies evaluating the ends which the projects are attempting to achieve. In the new accountability model I have described earlier, these ends would fall into the realm of the accountability of politicians, so the NAO would be making value judgments that could challenge the perceived neutrality of the NAO. Such a report from the NAO could potentially divide the PAC on party lines, thus undermining its credibility (Power, 1997). It may well be that rather than capture these dimensions of audit, these should be left to the judgement of civil servants and politicians. Nevertheless, the extension of audit into these areas may well yield additional audit information that may provide further support for the decisions taken by an SRO in the course of a project. A scholarly and political debate is required on the relative merits and demerits of an extension of the scope of current audit

practices in the light of the results of this research.

7.3   Limitations

This research has four principal limitations which arise out of its method, context and sampling constraints.

Method. The aim of phenomenographic research is to access an individual's life-world experience of the phenomenon of interest (Uljens, 1996). However, it is not possible to directly access the respondent's experience of accountability; I have only been able to access the respondent's *statements* about their experience of accountability. It is not possible to entirely overcome this limitation, as one individual cannot share another person's experience of the world. One possible way of reducing the impact of this limitation would be to engage in observation of the respondents. I would then have been able to observe situations in which they were being accountable. However, access constraints and the fragmented nature of the SRO role meant that this was not possible.

Context. The results of this research are based on data obtained from SROs for IT based projects. This provides a consistent and stable context for capturing SROs' conceptions of accountability. However, there are other types of projects such as non-IT based business change projects (one respondent was also SRO for a major project that aimed to renegotiate conditions of employment with the trades unions without provoking a strike) and construction projects. SROs for these types of project may have different conceptions of accountability.

Sampling Constraints. The respondents come from a limited range of departments and executive agencies. I was not able to gain access to respondents from the Cabinet Office, H. M. Treasury, the Department for Transport and its associated executive agencies (e.g. Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency), the Department for Communities and Local Government and its associated executive agencies, the Department for International Development, some of the larger executive agencies such as the Defence

Procurement Agency, the Defence Logistics Agency and the Identity and Passport Service. It is possible that SROs in these organizations have conceptions of accountability that are different from those revealed in this research.

Further, one respondent did not come from the executive arm of government, but the legislature. Potentially this could introduce an element of variation into the results, as the House of Commons is run by a Board of Management which reports to the House of Commons Commission which consists of six MPs (House of Commons Information Office, 2005). This distinction between the legislature and the executive changes the assumption of the doctrine of ministerial accountability, as no minister is in charge of the House of Commons. Neither are the staff of the House of Commons civil servants (House of Commons Information Office, 2003). Nevertheless, there are strong similarities between the civil service and the House of Commons in terms of the managerial arrangements in place. The Clerk of the House of Commons is both the accounting officer and the chief executive of the administration of the House of Commons (House of Commons Information Office, 2003). Operational practices are drawn from the civil service (hence I was able to gain access to one SRO from my contact at OGC). An SRO may have to account to The House of Commons Commission, which, as I have already noted, is staffed by six MPs. So there are significant overlaps at the operational and practical level between the administration of the House of Commons and the civil service as the administrative arm of government, even if there are substantial legal differences.

7.4   Future Research

The results of this research provide five pointers for further research. First, this research could be extended. Research into how SROs conceive accountability for non-IT based projects would add further to our knowledge of how accountability is conceived. Construction projects in particular offer a less controversial context than IT projects. Therefore, it may be possible to both observe and interview the respondents. The research could also be extended

into those organizations that have not participated in this research (see Section 7.3).

Second, this research has established how accountability is conceived by individual civil servants. The results reveal a hierarchy of conceptions of increasing richness and complexity from conception C1 through to conception C4. Previous phenomenographic research into work-based phenomena has established a hierarchy of conceptions and then arranged them relative to a specific criteria, such as performance (Sandberg, 2000; Chen and Partington, 2004; Partington et al., 2005). The assumption that accountability improves performance is a longstanding and deep-rooted one (Dubnick, 2005). However, I have not established performance as the specific criterion for the hierarchy of conceptions, because earlier psychological research suggests that making an individual accountable does not necessarily improve performance (Lerner and Tetlock, 1999). Only certain forms of accountability result in increased cognitive effort, which may in itself not be beneficial (Lerner and Tetlock, 1999). One limitation of the extant psychological research on accountability is that it has been limited to different forms of *individual* accountability. No empirical comparison has been made between individual accountability and the collective form of accountability traditional in the civil service. Such a comparative study would provide a basis for deciding whether or not making an individual accountable for the outcome of a project was more beneficial than the traditional form of collective accountability.

Third, one of the assumptions behind the introduction of the role of the SRO is that such a role increases the chance of a project being successful. SROs are usually senior managers who, in hierarchical terms, are distant from the tasks where mistakes can be made. The success or failure of a project then becomes a 'question of interpretation rather than objectivity' (Holgersson, 2001: 114). Further, definitions of project success use objective criteria such as budget compliance, performance criteria and project plans (Association for Project Management, 2006). These definitions suffer from the same cognitive limitations as the objective definition of accountability that I have outlined in

Chapter 2. Given these limitations, interpretive research into the definition of project success would contribute to our knowledge and understanding of project success.

Fourth, this research has focussed on one particular role in the civil service in which accountability plays a significant part. Further research into how accountability is conceived by other civil servants, such as accounting officers, or a cross sectional study within one organization, would add both to our knowledge of accountability and to the case for the formal recognition of civil servant accountability.

Fifth, in Chapter 5 I established that conception C3, public accountability, was correlated with SROs working in organizations that had a high degree of public contact. This suggests that there are differences between organizations in how accountability is conceived, as the culture of a department or executive agency provides a framework within which civil servants act (Flinders, 2002). The statistical correlation can be ascribed to cultural differences between departments: those departments that have regular contact with the public appear to have responded to the ambition of the Modernising Government White Paper (1999) and focussed on the users of public services. Departments that do not have the same degree of contact with the public appear not to have responded. This is an area where further research is required.

I also found that despite the mandatory nature and objective focus of the SRO role, there were differences between organizations in how the role of SRO was carried out. For example, one major department with a large number of projects had ten SROs. This meant that an individual was SRO for a considerable number of projects. Other organizations took the view that, given the burdens of the role, an individual should be SRO for no more than one project at a time. Again, this is an area for further research.

7.5   End Note

Accountability has a long history, conceptually and etymologically as a means of overcoming the problems of discretion, the abuse of power and poor

performance in the public sector (Aucoin and Heintzman, 2000). These problems were features of even the simplest democratic society such as Athens (Roberts, 1982), and remain features of today's complex democracy. It would seem then that accountability will remain a 'salient factor in the day-to-day conduct of government and the efficacy of parliamentary democracy' (Barberis, 1998: 451) and with it the continuing need to improve and add to our understanding of this tricky yet important concept.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Personal opening statement

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I am interested in establishing the different ways in which SROs understand their project accountabilities. The purpose of my research is to establish the range of understandings of SRO project accountabilities.

First of all, let me assure you that this interview will be conducted under the Chatham House rule. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the recording and the transcript. The recording and transcript will be used solely for research purposes. Any quotations from or references to the interview will be completely anonymous.

I would like to start with some background questions (age, length of service, time in departments and time as an SRO) before moving on to some specific questions about the specific project (or projects) for which you are an SRO (type of project, status and approximate budget). I would like to then move on to questions about your work and your accountability. These questions will be very open in nature and I will be asking you for examples to support your understanding.

It's only fair to tell you something about myself. I am a civil and structural engineer by background, managing projects from early on in my career. MBA 1998, then onto management consultancy (PA) where I was involved with delivering business improvement projects ranging from new IT systems for a UK bank in its emerging markets business to assisting a UK government department with the technology aspects of its move into new accommodation. I then went to work for Energis as a programme director running business change programmes before I took up the opportunity to study for a PhD at Cranfield.

Appendix B: Review of first two interviews with SROs

Interview Quality Assessment (Based on Kvale, (1996))

Interviews 1&2

CRITERION	DESCRIPTION	ASSESSMENT	COMMENTS
1	Extent of spontaneous, rich, relevant answers	Minor improvement required	Replies were spontaneous and rich, but relevance needed to be improved. **Action**: Focus more on the understandings and experience of accountability.
2	Length of interviewees answers versus interviewer questions.	Minor improvement required	Lengthy replies from interviewee, but marred by minor interjections from interviewer. **Action**: Less interruptions, more listening.
3	Degree of follow up and clarification by interviewer.	Minor improvement required	Points on accountability were missed on occasions. **Action**: Listen for points on accountability, clarify, exemplify and repeat as required. Jot down the points as aide memoir.
4	Extent of in-interview interpretation	Improvement required	Did this once, but other interpretations may have been missed. **Action**: Check and clarify meanings.
5	Verification of answers by interviewer.	Improvement required	Did not do this. **Action**: Use 'You said XXX, do you mean YYYY?' type of questions.
6	Degree to which interview is self contained.	OK	**Action:** None

Appendix C: Email sent approximately one week prior to interview

Dear SRO,

I write to confirm our interview on [date] at [time]. The aim of the interview, which is to be conducted under Chatham House rules, is to explore your understanding of your accountabilities as an SRO. This form of qualitative research necessitates the recording of the interview for detailed post interview analysis. Please be assured that the recording remains absolutely confidential and is for research purposes only. I look forward to meeting you on the [date].

Kind regards,

Jonathan Lupson

Appendix D: Table of quotations from respondents

Conception	Attribute of conception of accountability				
Conception 1	**To Whom** To whom the SRO is accountable	**Subject** What the SRO understands they are accountable for	**Fulfilment** How the SRO fulfils their accountability	**Consequences** What the SRO understands to the consequences of being accountable	**Timeframe** When the SRO will be accountable.
	R1: *'I felt I was accountable to the board for delivering this thing, but that in a sense the board's assessment of its successful delivery would be heavily influenced by the views of the stakeholders.'*	R1: *'I was the SRO for first of all our Internet presence, which was basically revitalising our website, redoing it entirely and building a virtual platform on which XXXX could plonk their websites so they were all served and managed here, rather than over there.'*	R1: *'It's partly about getting buy in particularly from our board, so they will themselves promote and defend what we are doing. It's about having relatively regular contact with the main people delivering the work to ensure that I'm comfortable with where it's got to. It's a sort of combination of being a sort of a pacemaker, pulling it along and sheepdog at the back, making sure that the stragglers don't get lost, I find.'*	R1: *'…ultimately the board in crude terms decides my future, my pay amongst other things…'*	R1: *'there was a rather big issue as to whether to go live before Christmas or whether to delay it, which was going to delay it quite a long time. We had said, partly pushed by me that we would do it by the end of the year, and it was quite a difficult decision to take and ultimately, I felt a lot of accountability, because I suppose, as I was saying I was accountable this being, happening in the way I had promised…'*
	R2: *'And Minister X had me in, twice I think, because he had been very badly burnt by ICT projects in Dept Z and broadly he said to me well, you know, I want to know is this going to work, because I'm not going to agree to it going live unless you can persuade me.'*	R2: *'I mean this system I've got at the moment has still got some performance problems. Now I've got a performance target, that I know how many milli-seconds each transaction is supposed to take and that is very hard edged and I will know, myself and my team will know whether or not we've succeeded.'*	R2: *'It means working upwards and outwards, both within the business and across Whitehall to a degree, mostly within the business, keeping the board from not being restive over the project, keeping then reassured as far as it is right to reassure them, keeping the business engaged, doing heavy lifting with the senior business community, really trying to make sure that if they don't at least support the project, at least they understand what it is and are prepared to send good messages down to their*	R2: *'I personally would have taken it very badly because one of the things which matters most in the Civil Service, in my experience, is your reputation, that's what you have in the Civil Service after 25 years. That's all you've got is your reputation, for either being somebody who can get things done and make them work, or somebody who is, you know, a bit sloppy and lets the catches slip. It would have hurt me personally in terms of how I regard my position within the organisation and I think how my colleagues see me, if this thing had been a complete Horlicks*	R2: *'Firstly last November we were very close to going live, we were already six months late with the project. Do we go live, do we not go live. We started to see some networking difficulties around the project which we didn't entirely understand and the performance was a little bit uncertain. In the end I had to take the decision as to whether we're going to live and you could hedge around it with all sorts of things and I had a board there to advise me. Yes, I had an accounting officer and a Secretary of*

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			troops about its relative importance. Working with stakeholders internally to release resource and to focus on the big issues which affect this project.'	*and I'd rolled it out and caused people an immense amount of trouble and then would have had to pull it. So there is accountability in that sense. '*	*State, both of whom made it clear that they were in the decision making loop.'*
	R3: 'As an SRO I am responsible to ensure that I can account to our ministers and to our perm sec and through them or directly to ministers for the way in which we are, we have understood the commission, which indeed have often come from ourselves but not always, that we have created proper plans and managed the risk knowledge, to deliver timetables, products and outputs that meet the needs of the objectives.'	*R3: 'So my job is to ensure that that's all there but actually my job as the SRO is to ensure that it all comes together and that at regular times I understand where we've got up to, so an update on progress, update on risks, what we are doing…'*	*R3: 'I'm responsible for regular reporting of all of these things. I'm responsible for myself and other people knowing how far we've got, what resource we're hitting, how we're managing them. I'm responsible for ensuring that our ministers are up to speed and when they have their monthly stock takes on policy, their monthly stock takes on implementation, we have the messages that don't hide anything, that actually sort of prioritise and explain what we've got up to and what we haven't got up to.'*	*R3: 'I am the Senior Responsible Officer both for the policy and delivery of these things. Its in my work, job description, it's the basis upon which my performance is appraised and my reward determined. It matters in quite practical terms therefore that I am successful at what I do. It matters because I've got a husband and 5 children to feed, you know, that sort of thing.'*	*R3: '…so it's up to me to make sure that the XXXX exists on the fifth of April next year…'*
	R4: 'So I have to manage the [External] stakeholders as well, but I've chosen to hang onto the guy who's going to give me the money or not, who is the permanent secretary.'	*R4: '…when I came you had an IT programme and it was costing £30 million and I closed it down. So I only lost £2 million because I closed it down quickly and all I now want for my IT programme is £2 million*	*R4: 'I actually have a boss, a boss or the bank manager, he's probably the bank manager is a better analogy than the boss and he's only going to give me the money if I fulfil these conditions. So I'm just going to look at him all the*	*R4: '...when things go wrong he stands in the witness box and he puts me alongside and says I will support you or let you swing. If you didn't think to sort things out with me in the first place, then well God help you.'*	*R4: 'I just put my business case together and it went to the change board last week. And I said to [THE PERMANENT SECRETARY] on the telephone what is it you want me to do, do you want a presentation or what,*

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		anyway.'	*way through and that's it.'*		*and he said about 20 minutes. Have you got it together now? And I said pretty well. Let's talk about it then. Alright, well send it all into me, and then come in a couple of days afterwards. So I thought half an hour. He actually gave me an hour and a half…'*
	R5: '…at the highest level my work involves reporting to the next level up which is the Permanent Secretary on how things are going.'	*R5: 'My accountability to him is not over spending my budgets, is delivering what I've said I will deliver in terms of products and achieving the outcomes that we've agreed will be the outcomes for the business overall.'*	*R5: 'Ministers take a day-to-day interest I mean sometimes they are actually wanting more information than actually I as an SRO felt I needed, but that's all about trust when something is just so politically high-profile.'*	*R5: ' Well it means I'm sacked if we don't achieve it. '*	*R5: 'With the Ministers it's your prior event and sort of looking forward to delivery, so it's like inter-parliament, it's usually post hoc when, and it's usually when something's gone wrong.'*
	R6: '…I think when you are an SRO and you have, we have a very, very good relationship with our Ministers, XXX and ZZZ, who are our key Ministers…'	*R6: 'We changed every single system over a weekend and we have the largest online transactional database in the world.'*	*R6: '…in my SRO role I was able to say 'ah, I need some even higher executive support on this' so I was able to go to the Chief Executive and say 'look, we are in this situation. Unless we do something about it soon this is going to escalate and we are going to be a serious issue of throwing this project off course.'*	*R6: 'So as much as I would be hauled over the coals I suppose by the Accounting Officer for failing to live up to my responsibilities in this area…'*	

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	R7: 'He's my boss, you know so clearly I am accountable to him. If things did go wrong he is the Accounting Officer for the XXXX so I mean he couldn't dodge his responsibilities either, but you know there's no way. But I guess the way of looking at it is you'd have to ask him how he looks at it, but the way I look at it is that he looks to me, he relies on me to ensure that things are going as they should be and for him to be informed where there is sort of real difficulty in which he, or perhaps the Directing Board or others, might be able to help…'	*R7: 'I'm the SRO for electronic XXXX.'*	*R7: 'I chair the Programme Board, we have a Programme Board to help me, I am approached for advice, decisions, I receive a mass of papers to approve, I, importantly endorse the regular submissions that we send to the Minister…'*	*R7: 'So they look to me for the answers if things do not go to plan, I would also hope because this is what's going to happen that when it's a success people will say, 'and R7 is mainly responsible for that''*	*R7: 'I've mentioned the Chief Executive, I haven't mentioned our Directing Board because, perhaps I ought to because I also report regularly to our Directing Board on our progress as well as the sort of bi-laterals with the Chief Executive.'*
	R8: '…our Director of Finance comes from the Civil Service and like most Directors of Finance, he operates on a hand-to-mouth basis and doesn't worry about slippage, delays and his deadlines and so on and we had great difficulty in convincing him that we actually needed to take on more staff and then keep them on, but you know the project isn't going to end when go live starts, because	*R8: 'Well it means that I've got to do whatever is within my power to make sure that the system is delivered.'* *R8: 'I suppose my other responsibility has been to ensure that we have adequate resources ourselves to do what we need to do to ensure that the system is delivered'*	*R8: '…chairing the Project Board and what goes with that which is partly a matter of diplomacy shall we say, sometimes making sure that all the documentation is produced on time…'*	*R8: '…in the end the buck stops with me…'*	*R8: '…the fact that the financial commentary on our business case was held up for 6 weeks which meant that it didn't get to the XXX until after the House went up for the summer recess meant that the XXXX didn't get this at all. So all my contingency went.'*

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	there is then the next stage.'				
	R9: 'I get held accountable to a number of other people as well, the director-general of corporate affairs, who is XXX's' line manager and who, well who now chairs the Departmental Investment Strategy Group…'	*R9: 'So in my own performance targets, are to basically develop and deploy the remote working solution to our 50 pilot users and get a positive result from the evaluation at the end of that to say they basically like the solution, its, that is the thing on which I will be judged…'*	*R9: 'So obviously I receive reports of progress, I chair regular meetings to establish where we are and what the issues are and deal with those issues. But I actually have to report progress onto, if you like, the owners of the overall strategy.'*	*R9: 'Practically, it means that written into my personal objectives is a successful outcome for both of those two projects as specific objectives. Now that means that I'm appraised against those set of objectives and my pay and overall reporting, sorry, overall performance marking is based on how I do in achieving those objectives amongst the others, the others that I have. So that's what it means at a practical, at a practical level…'*	*R9: 'Well yes, really, our XXX strategy committee meets quarterly. Strictly it should be a gathering of the programme SROs, so XX as the head of this unit and the Senior Responsible Owner for the entire infrastructure programme is the one who should be held accountable at that, at that board, but in practice one of my other jobs is I actually act as secretary to that board as well because of my role in trying to coordinate all these things so I'm actually always there, so I'm always called upon to report where we stand with projects for which I'm responsible.'*

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	R10: 'I mean I'm accountable to my boss, I'm accountable to the Board, I'm accountable to the XXX XXX Group because that's the process that we have in place to, if you exercise governance over this corporate endeavour.'	*R10: '…the performance metrics on that are very much linked to achieving specific milestones at specific times.'*	*R10: 'I mean when it comes to the Board I am required to brief the Board on where the programme's at, what the issues are, what the challenges are and they quiz me on what we are doing about it and in some cases how they could help.'*	*R10: 'What does it mean to me is I get sacked if we don't deliver, that's what it feels like.'*	*R10: 'I mean when it comes to the Board I am required to brief the Board on where the programme's at, what the issues are, what the challenges are and they quiz me on what we are doing about it and in some cases how they could help.'*
	R11:'I mean in terms of what actually happens, the Chief Executive has, and is kept informed of, plans, budgets, the usual and each week I've got to set a series of reports that we've agreed between us, but basically a progress chasing report,'	*R11: 'I regard myself as responsible for everything but the very lowest level of detail. If the projects aren't working well I consider myself accountable … well accountable for making sure they do work well, that the resourcing, that everything is there that they need.'*	*R11: 'Because I go up every week, it's part of the Executive Committee Meeting, now if they've got a full agenda I can be on there for 10 minutes or I can be on there for an hour depending on how much time they want to spend, and it doesn't necessarily reflect the amount that I might need from them, so I find that a little bit constraining.'*	*R11: 'I think there will clearly be a disappointment in me but I wouldn't say it's the career damaging level or worse, mainly because I was brought in at a fairly late stage and I think, and there was a general recognition that the programme wasn't doing terribly well so to that extent, I mean there is a sort of certain cushion there…'*	*R11: 'And each week I go up [TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE] and do a blow by blow account*
	R12: '…our Accounting Officer, our Chief Executive… he delegates, he has delegated on this occasion to me this project, so I am accountable to him so that he meets his objectives if that's not too around the houses but that's how it is.'	*R12: 'So I think you know do I feel accountable and responsible for bringing in this project on time and on budget absolutely.'*	*R12: 'when we decided that we would take back the migration area which had been run under someone else's stewardship, our concerns were mounting, ultimately I had to say no, stop, I'm drawing a line here and making very clear to you, you the Board that this is*	*R12: 'So for example if the budget was three times over what it was expected to be, am I directly accountable for that? Question. Ultimately someone might say well you didn't do a very good job and hence by that, through that process you for example might not get a bonus, you might not get a pay increase,*	*R12: '' Well I have to give him a report every week at the Board.'*

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			where it stops.'	*you might not get another job.'*	
	R13: 'We did at the time we introduced XXX we were working to the [Minister] and we did briefings before we went live with it and had to report on how it went.'	*R13: 'Well, I'm accountable in the sense that there are specific spending review targets to which my projects and the programme contributes, the main one of which is about achieving paperless transactions. I can't remember the exact words but you know most government transactions to be fully electronic by, actually it is this year, 2005. But there are others about reducing the cost of compliance with tax and other regimes. So in terms of, you know, running the programmes to deliver those benefits, they are linked into SRO for targets. So I am directly accountable for achieving those and feeding those through to the centre and in that sense you know I am accountable to the top of the office.'*	*R13: 'We did at the time we introduced XXX we were working to the [Minister] and we did briefings before we went live with it and had to report on how it went.'*	*R13: 'So I put it up, notified it a red, justified, you know, what, why I was marking it as red and waited for the sun, you know for the roof to fall in and the thunder clouds to clap and all this kind of stuff. Not a sausage, not a sausage.'*	*R13: 'I was talking about and they would meet sort of as and when in the run up to implementation of XXXX, sort of every six weeks or so. It was quite intensive.'*

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	R14: 'I'm accountable, I mean Ministers are seized of the fact that it's happening and believe it's a good thing…'	*R14: '…one of my targets was actually to bring TARGET 1 off last December, which we missed…'*	*R14: 'I will provide the top cover and ensure that the resources were there and ensure that Ministers remain committed and so on…'*	*R14: 'I report to the Permanent Secretary and one of my targets was actually to bring TARGET 1off last December, which we missed, but he says he doesn't mind that too much because he understands the reasons….'*	*R14: 'I mean I talk to him about it, I give him six monthly reports, written reports, on it and we talk about those a bit…'*
	R15: 'I'm accountable up the line, ultimately to Ministers, my successive heads of unit have left me to get on with the job which I've appreciated, the Grade 3's I know and get on with but rarely see, people above that I hardy see these days. Ministers I don't think I've seen in months on the project, probably because it's gone well, not gone badly.'	*R15: 'Well success now means starting the new contracts on time and the new contracts working properly with no major glitches…'*	*R15: 'Yes, we have at the moment we have a formal meeting once a week, a check point meeting to take stock of where we are on the transition, and that involves everyone reporting on what they've been doing for the past week and what their current issues are and we go through actions from the previous week.'*	*R15: 'I think the worst that would happen to me is that I wouldn't be asked to take on SRO roles in future and as I'm not being offered any at the moment it's no real hardship…'*	*R15: '…we in fact are being subjected to a Gateway, Gate 4 at the very moment so you should ask me at the end of the week and I will say how it's going <u>but so far we are on track to deliver new contracts on the first of April.</u>'*
	R16: 'I would be the person to speak to the Board. So I would have to sit there with my Programme Manager and my colleagues and say I am very sorry this all went horribly wrong and we were in fact doing the wrong thing and it was a bit of a waste of investment really. So I would be accountable, they would	*R16: 'It's a data programme to give us IT systems to support measurement of whether we are achieving our public service agreements across the department.'*	*R16: 'The day to day XXXX Committee, particularly the YYYY Committee of which I am a member, there is six or seven of us, though never that number turn up, on the YYYY Committee, meets weekly, will be reviewing before it goes through a process of review for major change projects, RAG status, are they on track.*	*R16: 'I feel accountable to the Chairman, <u>success or failure there would have a significant impact on my status... not my status but my reputation, my future prospects and all those sorts of things.</u>'*	*R16: 'We are implementing the project in phases so that we are starting with PSA 1 which is the one about the XXXX and we are starting that, I have got my dates muddled up but later this summer and then we are progressively rolling out the others. I was going to say July but I am slightly*

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	call me to account.'		*This is not one of our mission critical projects in terms of OGC so you know we wouldn't hit the radar often but it would hit the radar if it is going off track, if it is showing in the red and on a rolling basis we would say now how is that going, is it still relevant that I would be the person to speak to the Board.'*		*uncertain as to whether it is July, as we've not had a project board for about a month.'*
	R17: 'Well Programme XXX is a good example, when it got into difficulties our ministers, XXX and XXX, were on their feet in Parliament fairly regularly, having to explain themselves. I felt very accountable to them for having delivered something that didn't work as it was supposed to work.'	*R17: 'I mean meeting the objectives set for the programme as amended during its life, that for me is success, it is quite simple.'*	*R17: 'On Programme XX I saw ministers every week for two years. I brought them up to date with the progress, covered the hot spots, listened…heard what they were thinking about it, what the political dimensions were, what they thought would be happening on the floor of Parliament, handling that. On the others, the smaller ones the less sensitive ones, I tend to go perhaps every couple of months and we will try and find an hour which is quite a long time with a minister, try and find an hour when I would get the team to explain where we are and how it is going and we will try to get in advance most of the questions.'*	*R17: 'I was the person who could provide space with the programme director and others when people maybe were being rather cross with them, take that, I was the person who got some skills and experience from other bits of my work which helped manage the crisis that we had'*	*R17:On Programme XX: 'I saw ministers every week for <u>two years</u>.'*

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	R18: 'But one way or the other if there's a brief for the <u>Permanent Secretary</u> about that appearance it'll be a pretty uncomfortable conversation.'	*R18: '…<u>you are going to be able to get your T&S online</u>, won't that be splendid because you won't have to fill in all those boring forms, or your PA's won't and by the way you get the money more quickly too.*	*R18: 'So actually the key points for me are the meetings, the monthly meetings of the Project Board, which I chair and what I want is good material, I need the highlight report from the Project Manager, I want the things in pods diagram and anything else they think I need to know, including anything they want me to say to the Programme Board, because actually me saying it will help, so there's a bit of sort of quiet underpinning as it were, then there's the kind of formal documentation and it's my job then to go through that documentation either so I can say good things at the Board about how it's going or to ask the awkward question about why that thing in our next case somehow they haven't made much of it in the highlight report actually looks to me quite troubling and is that right or have I misunderstood or, what are they going to do about it?'*	*R18: 'I think in the end it does mean that if either the thing goes down in flames or it takes a little bit longer that it should have done for no good reason, <u>you are in the firing line</u> because you're job is to make sure that the Project Manager is good enough and is getting there and has the support, whether that's in resource terms or because the interactions have been sorted and the supporting people are in place to do it, so in a sense you're quite clear, you've failed in ensuring that the Project Manager has the expertise or the support or whatever to keep the show on the road.'*	*R18: 'We have once a month the Board director's KIT, keeping in touch session, which is where the top sort of 16 people or so in the Department come together…'*

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	R19: 'But I would say that my accountability still fell backwards, in other words ministers have said that they want this thing done and I'm doing it so they expect me to deliver it, _therefore I'm accountable [TO MINISTERS]…'_	R19: 'So that… and I was supposed to deliver x,y and z and, as I said, it was the complication that I did not directly command the full resource of the programme but nobody questioned the fact that _I was SRO and was accountable to delivering those outcomes.'_	R19: '_So I needed to sort that out and that involved giving some messages about, if you like, the effective practice of programme and project management_ as distinct from reading the manual and applying it with all the heavy handedness, it was dysfunctional, frankly. _So I spent quite a lot of time with people, sometimes upset people, trying to sort the budget out._ A lot of very, frankly, no great suffrage and you'd expect a programme of that nature in this Department to be ship-shape more or less, but it wasn't and _so I was given some fairly basic remedial work, because everybody had got very uptight about things_ and there were some difficult things. _So I had to wade in_, it often felt like wading through treacle.'	R19: 'I don't think I read that as particularly that if I would be blamed or sacked or something like that, but that the first line of accountability rested with me in a sense in which it didn't rest with either those working for me or with my boss. Now quite what the practical exercise of that would be I don't know.'	R19: '…we did make a number of our customers quite cross quite quickly by saying that we were going to deliver this stuff by early January 2006 and then we're not going to, so there were very clearly shifting, timescales In particular, which to me suggested that it wasn't properly grounded…'
	R20: 'You know when you've been in to see a Minister and they're not happy, you know it… but the Secretary of State's not averse to ringing up and saying, hey…'	R20: 'We've got a Programme and we need to deliver this Programme and we need to keep it as close to target and time as possible. And it's about budget, making sure we can deliver it on budget. So those	R20: 'So the time I spend on it is probably, averages four to five hours a week, _but I would have fairly daily contact with my Regional Implementation Director,_ he's the guy who's full time on delivering the	R20: 'To the Department of Health? Well actually, in strict terms, none at all…. In reality, if they say "jump," I jump._My career prospects are very much led by my relationship with that Team, and also if we're not	R20: 'Well I seem him over a period of two days every month at something that they call a 'top team' meeting, which is him and his National Directors for all parts of the NHS and all of the SHA Chief

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		are, if you like, the three priorities I have in mind at the time and in order to do that as an SRO, I suppose leadership is the, a key thing on that. The ultimate responsibility for this Cluster's delivery it lies with me, rests with me, but it does require pretty clear and visible leadership from me to make sure that all of the elements are pulling together on this.'	*Eastern Regions Programme. The sorts of things that I will be dealing with him will be, how is our Local Service Provider performing against the Plan, and are there issues of which we need to escalate with that Provider?*	*delivering in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, Ministers will get involved and I will come under considerable pressure through the Civil Servants to deliver, or do the other thing. WHAT'S THE OTHER THING? Well, go!*	*Execs.*
	R21: 'Either my Director, my Director General, Ministers and external stakeholders are all committed, that this will actually support the strategy, so that's sort of pulling the strings.'	*R21: 'I'm there to make sure that the programme is going in the right direction and will fulfil its deliverables and meet its objectives.*	*R21: '…we'd pulled together all the findings, developed a proposal and went and sold it round this building and in London, to Ministers, signed up lots of people to it, signed up our stake holders to it and had a proposal that we could actually take forward.'*	*R21: 'I mean obviously credibility, people see that you've actually managed a programme effectively then they're more likely to give you another programme to manage effectively, but you know they have trust in you and especially this type of programme which involves so many organisations, the partnership working and there is a lot at stake, your own personal credibility 'cos a lot of people see you actually in a lot or organizations.'*	*R21: 'we've just gone to Gateway 1 of the actual project in terms of the XXX PROJECT and learner registration service and the YYY PROJECT.'*

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	R22: 'My only accountability actually is to my line manager and to the Minister, formally, there's nice clarity around that.'	*R22: … I'm the responsible owner for something called the Integrated Working Project, which is about operating integrated working across children's services, health education, social care and the family and the XXXX Project, which is a several hundred million pounds IT enabled programme…'*	*R22: 'There's an influencing, decision makers, key influencing the decision maker's responsibility around the SRO, whatever it is, you need to explain, it's not that difficult to do because most Ministers have either been singed when something went seriously wrong and they do not want to be in charge of the next project that fails, the next big IT cock-up so that's good, they've been educated by that experience and <u>you can put the fear of God into them to some extent</u>.'*	*R22 'I think I feel it around your credibility and pride in your public service role, that yes you're there to serve the Government of the day and your Minister and people understand that in a democracy that's the way decisions get made…'*	*R22 '…we're about to set a budget for the next 9 months, but we were talking there about a budget of several million pounds.'*
	R23: 'We have now created and put in place a body, a committee, if you like, to whom I will be accountable, who will help me to account, so that if SPIRE, as a XXXX family project, goes belly up, that group, the XXXX Collaboration Group, will want to know why.'	*R23: 'There are very definitely efficiencies to be had, because we are running too many GI utilities, and if you can actually provide one core one, albeit you'll still have some GI capability within your organisations, that's owned by them, rather than corporately, that's fine, but actually, at the moment we don't have that, and therefore we tend to run overlapping functions, and, yes, there's therefore a rationalisation issue which will deliver the efficiencies.'*	*R23: '…<u>and your name is very much attached to that, as the leader of that programme, then there is a clear reputational issue, because these things are high profile, they're visible. If you do well, if you like, you're associated with it in a positive way, if you do poorly you don't, basically.'</u>*	*R23: 'If you mean, do I get the sack for it, well, it would have to be fairly extreme before I got the sack.'*	*R23: 'The whole of my funding review programme will be gatewayed after Christmas..'*

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	R24: 'So I think that's where the accountability, I mean ultimately it's to the Management Board and Permanent Secretary…'	*R24: 'It means that insofar as it is within our power… we have to deliver. We've got clear deliverables, clear interdependencies and they have to be met and that's what we stand and fall by and everything outside that is kind of not worth a hill of beans. The rest of it is needed.'*	*'R24: 'So we have a lot of reporting responsibilities in terms of <u>fairly detailed monthly reports</u> to the Permanent Secretary, and to various other forums.'*	*R24: '…<u>we get beaten up</u> by the other programmes and by our peers who say, "You're not delivering. I thought you were going to give us this by then, da-da-da-da-da-da."'*	*R24: '<u>About nine months ago</u> we had a Gateway Review (Gateway Zero). This was our second Gateway Zero. We went red again, but not surprisingly.'*
	R25: '<u>There's also a direct accountability line to the Permanent Secretary</u> for the processes he's set up to manage all programmes in the office, where there is a separate reporting system and format that goes with it and at quarterly meetings on the performance of the group as a whole, it would come up and perhaps you could raise it directly if you felt sufficiently worried about something.'	*R25: '<u>It means I'm responsible for getting it delivered</u>. It doesn't mean I have to do the work, in fact I shouldn't be doing all the work, but I'm overseeing it<u>. It ought to be green, if it's not green, my job is to ensure that the action is being taken that will get it to green and it's explaining their position to Ministers and the Permanent Secretary.'</u>*	*R25: '…in the briefing for the last ministerial meeting covering XX we were quite open about the status of our programme being red…'*	*R25: 'In practice 'What does my accountability mean?' Almost the worst that could happen is ,"You're the wrong person to be doing this, we don't want you to be SRO any more, off you go to run our pay service in Bootle," or something career developmental of that sort.'*	*R25: 'I was told, in effect, the answer is XXXX, <u>it goes live on 1 April '06 in two years time</u>, your task is to deliver it…'*
	R26: 'I actually thought the lines of accountability were reasonably clear. Organisationally, it was straight to XXXX in effect, to the Permanent Secretary. My boss, who was the Second	*R26: 'I think it was overall health it seems to me was what it was about. Are you providing confidence to all those key stakeholders, particularly the ones you're directly accountable for that this*	*R26: 'The Steering Group was just one of a number of mechanisms that I had to engage with – including the Ministerial, it's called XXXX Committee, plus the Group Board at the XXXX…'*	*R26: 'It gives me the shivers just thinking about it.'*	*R26: 'So we're six months in, but I'm signing in effect blank cheques to XXXX who delivers the IT to whom this voice is saying, "We haven't got the money for this yet, but I am underwriting, I have*

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	Permanent Secretary, XXXX, and this wasn't only normally XXXX's style I must say but he kept pretty much out of that relationship. He just left it to XX because XX was very 'mission critical programme' focussed.'	*Programme is basically in good shape, recognising what point of its cycle it's at and that there are always going to be issues and problems. Is this Programme in overall good shape or isn't it? And if it isn't what are you doing about it? That's what I felt accountable for.'*			*spoken to my Accounting Officer XXX, we are underwriting this because if you don't get that money then the Programme's going to slip another six months and you're going to end get into a self-fulfilling prophecy.'*
	R27: 'Oh my accountability is absolutely to the Permanent Secretary and to the Home Secretary. My accountability is to my bosses.'	*R27: 'My job as the SRO is to make sure that the projects are delivered.'*	*R27: '…you have whatever reporting arrangements you have in place. There are a number in the XXXX, which culminate in the report, which goes monthly from each major report to the Group Executive Board in which I as SRO have to sign off what I believe the status of my project to be.'*	*R27: 'To me, if I don't deliver, my position is on the line.'*	*R27: '…you have whatever reporting arrangements you have in place. There are a number in the XXXX, <u>which culminate in the report, which goes monthly from each major report to the Group Executive Board in which I as SRO have to sign off</u> what I believe the status of my project to be.'*
	R28: 'I had a session last week in front of what's called the <u>Performance Delivery Board</u>, which is a fun occasion on which the <u>Permanent Secretary and a distinguished non-Executive member of our Board and our Director of Strategy and our DG of Finance</u> get hapless	*R28: 'I do have this accountability for the delivery of benefits…'*	*R28: 'One is keeping her in touch through, you know, copies of papers, you know, Programme Board papers, etc., all the usual things, risks and issues … we do a weekly Risks and Issues Log, etc. Partly through, you know, the sort of catch-up sessions that we have. I mean I have*	*R28: I am PROGRAMME X as it were in a … so the Permanent Secretary thinks PROGRAMME X, yeah, that's ME and, you know, there's a sort of … and conversely, in terms of successes that we have, you know, <u>I sort of represent what's success and what's failure about, around the programme.'</u>*	*R28: "<u>I had a session last week</u> in front of what's called the Performance Delivery Board,…'*

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	Directors in front of them to account for their performance and that is a sort of illustration, if you like, of what I would mean by accountability…'		*regular one-to-ones with her when we run through what are the main issues of the moment, etc., and then of course, to some extent, we're in it together when we get caught up with something like the Performance Board where I'm up in front of the Permanent Secretary and she's sort of up in front of him as well of course as my Line Manager…'*		
	R29: *'In my SRO role I meet regularly with those who are actually owning and doing the work to achieve the objectives that I've taken ownership of.'*	R29: *'So he and I sat down, we discussed objectives, we have an agreed set of objectives that I'm working to, he sits down with me, we review them on a regular basis; adjust them accordingly.'*	R29: *'And that's how I spend 50% of my time, looking across DH, and trying to get that alignment, what I would call the alignment. How do I get the IT proposition smack in the mainstream with everything pointing in the same direction to make it the opportunity it is? Then the other 50% of my time is spent really relating out to the NHS and trying to find the things that will enable the NHS that can only and should only be done once, nationally. So the discipline is not to do things they should be doing, but to do the things that they really, logically, would expect someone with a National*		R29: ON MEETING THE PROGRAMME SRO: *'Once a week, minimum, on one subject or another, either directly or indirectly, more that that if you include email and telephone it's going to be more than that.'*

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			Director's role, to do.'		
	R30: '. I'm held to account for my London performance by the SRO above me. That was a guy called XXXX and still is actually he's just had a change of role. He was the Chief Operating Officer for the Department.'	*R30: 'At the National Board, and indeed the National Programme Executive, each month we review the performance of each of the Clusters. We have to give account for the performance of our own Clusters…'*	*R30: '…from governance perspective is that there is a Cluster Board and I Chair the Cluster Board. The Cluster Board is made up of a range of NHS colleagues, also some people from 'Connecting for Health' Leeds, senior people from the 'Connecting for Health' London office (the Cluster office), most particularly the so-called RID (the Regional Implementation Director) and then a range of Primary Care Trusts and Acute Trusts and Mental Health Trust Chief Executives. So chairing that Cluster Board, which is the peak of local, London governance on this particular topic, is one of my chores. I also participate in a thing called The Programme Executive which meets fortnightly. The Cluster Board has met monthly for most of its existence. The PEX meets fortnightly and it's formed*		*R30: 'I acquit that by my … I think it's monthly meetings or bi-monthly meetings, I can't remember which, but you go in there with a much more detailed array of performance indicators to talk about I guess.'*

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			mainly of Chief Information Officers. I've been involved in it pretty much along, and from time to time I've chaired it to make sure that there's a linkage between perhaps the governance arm and the operational arm.'		

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	R1: '…the board's assessment of its successful delivery would be heavily influenced by the views of the stakeholders. So if I popped up and told the board this was a brilliant project, magisterially run and hugely successful, but AGENCYX said it didn't work for their XXXX customers, AGENCY Y said it didn't deliver XXXX advice and half the XXXXX said they couldn't use it because the technology was incompatible with their own, <u>they would have a fairly big impact on the assessment of my performance…</u>'	R1: '…these rather difficult internal changes which the efficiencies programme involves, the efficiencies plan involves<u>, because we are going to end up having to save a lot of money, which in a people based organisation comes down to people in some way. Either we have fewer of them, or we pay them less, or they spend less on buying things.</u>'	R1: 'Now my view is that it is my job to decide on the overall global level of savings we are trying to achieve and then to say to the folk, here you are, it's now up to you to come up with your propositions as to where the savings should be, to actually identify actually where we're going to make the savings, which jobs are going to go.'	R1: '<u>So quite what the accountability will mean in terms of what happens to me I couldn't tell you yet. But I think you'll be pretty apparent it hasn't worked. It will be very difficult for me to persuade people that it isn't at least in part my responsibility that it hasn't worked.</u> <u>And there was a very big impact on the organisation, because actually those savings are going to be put into our bottom line by the Treasury. And therefore our budget will reflect the assumption, they're being made, if they're not been made, someone somewhere is going to have less money.</u>'	R1: 'So I think that it will be pretty clear to people from 18 months from now probably, whether this is a project which is likely to succeed or not. <u>And if it is not, we are going to a great black hole in our finances. So quite what the accountability will mean in terms of what happens to me I couldn't tell you yet. But I think you'll be pretty apparent it hasn't worked. It will be very difficult for me to persuade people that it isn't at least in part my responsibility that it hasn't worked.</u>'
	R2: 'I take the <u>National Audit Office</u> seriously. I think that they do try and arrive at good and clear judgements.'	R2: 'There is an accountability there [to the NAO] <u>in terms of the reputation of the Department,</u> which is important to me. I've worked here for a long time and <u>the way in which the Department is profiled</u>	R2: 'It means working upwards and outwards, both within the business <u>and across Whitehall to a degree,</u>'	R2: '…if I ran a project which then was then so awful that the National Audit Office quite rightly came in and ripped it to shreds. <u>I would feel we'd let ourselves [THE DEPARTMENT] down.</u>'	R2: 'But I was very conscious whilst I was doing that that I had to have enough of an audit trail <u>that if there was a Public Accounts hearing I would be able to say yes, we did look at the question of liability, I did assure myself as to how</u>

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		publicly matters to me and it matters to my colleagues and I would feel I've let the organisation down if I ran a project which then was then so awful that the National Audit Office quite rightly came in and ripped it to shreds. I would feel we'd let ourselves down.'			*much I genuinely thought it was our fault or their fault and what the contract said.'*
	'R3 *''Their [DEPT XXX] timetable wasn't particularly transparent to us. I needed to negotiate at my level with their director to ensure that we sat on their steering group and vica versa and shared the documentation and had joint planning sessions.'*	R3: *'I was responsible for making that happen, not personally, I didn't draft everything you'll be glad to know, but for pulling the levers, internally, for pulling the levers in quite a lot of other places across Whitehall.'*	R3: *'I was responsible for making that happen, not personally, I didn't draft everything you'll be glad to know, but for pulling the levers, internally, for pulling the levers in quite a lot of other places across Whitehall. I did some things myself which only my position or my knowledge or whatever, were able to do'*	R3: *'I was responsible for that sort of putting all that round it, getting the right people in the right places to be able to do this, making the atmosphere correct so that it would happen and doing some of the negotiation, providing a really honest assessment of where we were heading with ministers balanced against the probability of defeat in the House if we didn't do something…'*	R3: *'I was responsible for that sort of putting all that round it, getting the right people in the right places to be able to do this, making the atmosphere correct so that it would happen and doing some of the negotiation, providing a really honest assessment of where we were heading with ministers balanced against the probability of defeat in the House if we didn't do something…'*
	R4: *'I need Dept XXs' agreement and because we're going to move across to Dept XY, I need Dept XYs' agreement.'*	R4: *'That I have all things delegated to me that the Permanent Secretary has on his shoulders, but just for this agency, which is about financial efficiency, probity and all those sorts of things. And that I have to act*	R4: *'I have a duty, I was going to say duty of care, it's probably not a bad expression to use, to understand what it is that they're [EXTERNAL DEPT] trying to set up and wherever possible to make*	R4: *'And I almost try to forget actually while this just goes on and just see where it settles and recognising that it may not settle, we [THE ORGANIZATION] may not actually get a programme.'*	R4: '. *But I suppose I would think about it in terms of the PAC. If I was asked why I'd done this, I would say because it has a major benefit, not a marginal benefit just for a few people. We spend that money, does*

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		accordingly and therefore whatever programme I come up with has to be set within that context and that we are in a particularly difficult era because of the Gershon Review and I have to take account of that as well and that is my prime responsibility.'	*sure that my programme fits with that.'*		*it really have a significant effect and it would be avoiding what happens at the moment which is money being wasted.'*
	R5: '…ultimately just being the person who will in fact sit in front of the Public Accounts Committee and be accountable for the programme at the end of the day.'	*R5: '…the programme expects that through the investment in the IT, the business process change and such like we're putting through, we'll be able to make a head count saving of about 8,000 people, so as SRO I am thinker, I think I am responsible for ensuring that what goes in comes through, actually can deliver into the business a saving of 8,000 people.'*	*R5: '…my accountability is to be able to answer any of their [The PACs] questions about decisions I have taken in the course of a programme about levels of investment, particularly on the risk management. What analysis has been done, what actions have been taken about the, you know, what contingency has been built in, about advice that's been sought about sourcing decisions that might have been taken.'*	*R5: 'we deal in very large sums of money, just in the business that I'm in, we're doing, if we're doing things on the XXXX Fund I have 11 million customers so any changes you make, they're and you know, things that you do actually cost a lot of money to do and we spend vast sums of money.'*	*R5: 'With the Ministers it's your prior event and sort of looking forward to delivery, so it's like inter-parliament, it's usually post hoc when, and it's usually when something's gone wrong.'*

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	R6: 'Also in dealing with the DEPT C in the sense of managing their expectations on occasion, or being warned that potentially we are not going to get a green light from DEPT C, we are going to get an amber, because we haven't got certain elements of the project quite right.'	*R6: 'Going from a one main frame with a back-up main frame, the intricacies of this, the business benefits, the success of it wasn't the fact that, yes, technically it was always achievable. The benefits and the successes of that were the fact that the business is now more resilient, so the success is to the business...'*	*R6: 'I have had to sell PROJECT X and actively market it. Not just a meeting this particular need, but we can go beyond it and achieve this. And when the figures come out and we have to tender for it is going to cost X million, I can justify that by saying we are getting value for money and things like that.'*	*R6: 'Being responsible for IT and IS doesn't mean that I just focus in the success of the fact that the IT guys actually pulled it off and made it happen. It's actually <u>the success it has given to the business.</u>'*	*R6: '…if the system is falling over every day, the general public are unhappy because their XXXX is being delayed because of us. That is something the Minister needs to be aware of because he may be asked a parliamentary question on it by an angry citizen…'*
	R7: 'So there is a reporting regime to the OGC which goes on to the Prime Minister…'	*R7: '<u>And we could see then that there were clear administrative efficiencies from creating a paperless system</u>, as the kind of development at least in our mind was progressing, we began to see that the real winners in this, but not the only winners, but the biggest winners, would be the XXXX public…'*	*R7: '…<u>we know we have to do is proceed by consensus and agreement, that's so we've got to take those stake-holders</u> along with us. So it is consensus that we seek and it's contemplation that lies behind all that we do as, speaking at what's called XXX [EXTERNAL] Forum meeting just over a week ago and ….'*	*R7: '…we'd be cutting off our nose to spite our face really, we want to see this happen and at this early stage, it would sat an appalling example if we were to move to that…'*	*R7: '…to put it in simple terms, <u>if things do not go as well as people have been led to expect, then they will look to me for the answers</u> and they will regard it as my responsibility to ensure that things do go well and that is of course what I am endeavouring to do. <u>So they look to me for the answers if things do not go to plan,</u> I would also hope because this is what's going to happen that when it's a success people will say, 'and Ted is mainly responsible for that'.'*

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	R9: *'So it's a corporate endeavour but with if you like with a certain singularity for the department that is you're holding this endeavour on behalf of the [EXTERNAL] stakeholders and making it happen so that's how I would characterise that.'*	R9: *'it really involves me… if you like owning the benefits on behalf of the organisation..'*	R9: ON EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS: *'I am to an extent acting as their agent in some respects so, not always necessarily in ways that they might fully appreciate.'*	R9: *'I mean reputational risk is not only important in a personal context, it's to everybody. It's very important in the context of these big, visibility programmes to the reputation of the enterprise and I think that is something that you're aware of becoming increasingly sensitive to. With these big change programmes, because it's not just the departments' reputation it's the reputation of the, of what that contributes to the reputation of the public sector as a whole.'*	R9: *'I will have to explain where we stand and why we delivered the things or why we didn't deliver the things to the top of the office, to the board, to the Permanent Under-secretary, more frequently to the ICT strategy committee and to the head of the IT strategy unit here….*
	R10: *'So it's a corporate endeavour but with if you like a certain singularity for the department'*	R10: *'I think in a strategic sense, although responding to this being more joined up which we saw as being the business imperative, it was also about driving out efficiency and so there is, there was a 10% efficiency target associated with the XXX as well.'*	R10: *'...it's a professional focus in the sense that I am employed by this organisation to do the best I can for the organisation, within the overall corporate framework that we have…*	R10: *'I could end up with the best IT system in the world but if my user base out there of 300,000 people all think it's no good then I have failed, even though I've got the best IT system in the world.'*	R10: *'I could end up with the best IT system in the world but if my user base out there of 300,000 people all think it's no good then I have failed, even though I've got the best IT system in the world.'*

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	R12: 'Well the most important stakeholders are our Ministers and <u>Treasury, Treasury being a sense, the shareholder in a corporate analogy</u>, they have the power of life and death in that sense… <u>so yes you feel accountable to these people</u>, you feel you know if I don't deliver my piece of this jigsaw, lots of other people are going to be pretty disgruntled about that.'	R12: '<u>I want to provide it to the organisation in the best way we possibly can so that the organisation will flourish and prosper</u> as a result of hopefully having good core systems, so I see it in that sense.'	R12: '<u>So I see myself in a sense as stewarding this move, call it business change if you like</u> but it's partly that, that says for the good of all…'	R12: 'I want to provide it to the organisation in the best way we possibly can so that the organisation will flourish and prosper as a result of hopefully having good core systems, so I see it in that sense.'	R12: 'Come and talk to me afterwards, don't forget we've gone live, I've just got the keys to my new Ferrari, am I going to drive it at 180mph on a test track, of course I'm not, but in three months time I might, after I've been round the track a few times, building up, getting a feel for it, seeing where it slips.'
	R14: 'I found there the way, <u>what was helpful was there was talk to Treasury first, you know get Treasury on our side</u> and then ventilate it internally in the office and once the Treasury was on our side, it was much easier in the office because basically in DEPT N the service is provided…'	R14: On the wider change: '… I was sort of <u>overseeing that wider change</u> but it was quite helpful to know the details of that in order to persuade both the XXXX and the XXXX that PROJECT A wasn't just another short-term problem…..	R14: 'I'm the Chairman of the XXXX Board in XXXX XXXX which has all the agencies on it <u>so that was a natural position from which to give them this vision and to raise it with them and work through any problems they had and to get an agreement on it</u> and we formed a separate sponsor group for PROJECT A which is really just the XXXX Board wearing different hats, it's the same people, it's the Director of External Agency X, the Director of External Agency Y, Director of External Agency Z and so	R14: 'we have a slightly bad sort of record with the Treasury in terms of XXX under-spending, you know being passed a lot of money and then of course the police need it and they don't spend it and so there's a slightly jaundiced view of the XXX…'	R14: '…<u>if there was some grossly inefficient use of the money or fraud or something</u> he would have to answer for that to the Public Accounts Committee and he would therefore expect me to ensure that nothing like that does happen.'

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			on, so it's people with whom I have quite a strong relationship anyway for a whole wider range of business reasons…'		
	R16: 'I feel accountable to them [OGC] as a police person. They are the police, I mean the joke, well it is not a joke it is the old cliché. You know the OGC, anybody at the centre, the Cabinet Office, they're here to help, oh yeah actually they are not here to help.'	*R16: 'It is a corporate good, this PSA Information System, it is for all of us.'*	*R16: 'I am representing all of us, come on is it actually going to deliver the thing we need for the department or have we redefined it out of existence?'*	*R16: 'I am much more bothered (a) that we bought something out of departmental money that was a complete waste, you know we poured n million down the drain, it didn't give us what we wanted, it was irrelevant as it turned out…'*	*R16: 'I think it means that if for whatever reason the project fails to deliver, fails to deliver a product which the department wants, delivers it at a price we can't afford, on a timescale that is unacceptable to us or fails to then I am accountable.'*
	R18: 'Significant amounts of public money were involved, questions in Parliament, emergency debates, Public Accounts Committee and it had to get the Select Committee very rapidly involved and the Senior Responsible Officer of the time, the Accounting Officer, the Permanent Secretary, very, very unhappy indeed about the pretty tough time at the Accounts Committee where the first question was so are you going to resign	*R18: 'I am not in Civil Service terms accountable to the Treasury, but nonetheless they are there to keep an eye on the Department. They're perfectly entitled to ask awkward questions if they want to and you would have to deal with them, it's very important, this Department has a reputation with the Treasury of being a competent place and not because the more they think we know what we're doing*	*R18: 'I mean actually there's something about making sure that the rest of the Department or whoever, at least intermittently knows that this is going on. Clearly in so far as you can domesticate it and get on with it, that's absolutely fine you must not waste people's time, you don't need to tell them now, but just occasionally you need to give it a bit of surface around the Department, higher up in the Department, whatever,*	*R18: '…that was a very tough time for the Department politically and managerially because these were things that we should've seen coming and on the whole didn't.'*	*R18: '…the fact is if something gets to that level of political profile and crossness as it were, then if you're the SRO for the thing that's gone wrong, just conceivably you might get dragged along with the Permanent Secretary, although they'll do the talking. But one way or the other if there's a brief for the Permanent Secretary about that appearance it'll be a pretty uncomfortable*

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	XXXX?'	*the less they bother us.'*	*so people remember this is happening, it's a good piece of work, that people are working really hard at it, I mean partly to they can hold you accountable for how it's going, but actually because lots of hard work going into it and people need to be celebrated and given the degree of kind of profile every so often and you can do that.'*		*conversation.'*
	R20: 'I do feel accountable to them [EXTERNAL AGENCY EMPLOYEES]. I do feel a lot of my input into this Board is to keep people aware that the systems we need to deliver and deliver them in a way in which these people want to use them, are those systems, which make a difference to their job. And those are the Decision Support, the order of XXXX, the results reporting, the PAX system, the Electronic Transmission of Prescriptions, which is different to Electronic Prescription Writing. Those sorts of systems are really, <u>really important to clinicians.'</u>	*R20: 'So when you're implementing major database changes to your business, you do need to find some resources to have staff trained, to have staff available to do the changeover and so on, and I think that's the usual sort of battle; we don't want to give anymore than we have to give to that.'*	*R20: 'I think there's quite a lot of, work with my colleague SHA Chief Executives who, if it's this is a part time job for me, it's even more of a part time job for them, and it's important to enthuse them with what this Programme can do for them and get their commitment to attend the Cluster Board meetings, which we have, which since I've been in post I've moved around from being fairly operational, led by the Chief Information Officers, largely because they're the full time guys in each SHA, to being led by the Chief Executives on what we want to discuss in terms of what are the*	*R20: 'But on the whole, the NHS is paid for by people who don't use it, by taxpayers who are healthy, and it's funding people who are not healthy, and those taxpayers are, and will increasingly, make choices to go and get their healthcare elsewhere, and will withdraw support for the NHS if we don't do something about it.'*	*R20: 'So we've got various levels of achievement of the programme, I think we're talking a 0-6 level, so it's getting from having no connectivity or functionality to having functionality at the top level, Level 6, which we expect to have in 2009.'*

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			strategic goals, aims, what's the vision for this programme in the Eastern Cluster, and what can we do to maximise the benefit out of this programme?'		
	R21: 'Either my Director, my Director General, Ministers and <u>external stakeholders</u> are all committed, that this will actually support the strategy, so that's sort of pulling the strings.'	*R21: 'Well at the outset I explained to some of them the reductions in bureaucracy, the efficiency savings and those are the direct benefits that we will actually measure through the programme.'*	*R21: 'I need to be conscious of and be able to represent the Department, so my credibility is not just in respect of this, but in actually representing the Department.'*	*R21: '…the fact is that if I make a mess of it, then <u>that reflects back on the Department</u>'*	*R21: '…<u>if we don't deliver</u>, being able to explain, so everything that could be done, has been done that we've managed it along the way and coped with the risks and developed contingencies if the risk ever came to be.'*
	R22: 'I feel accountable in some respects to the Cabinet Office/OGC/Central Government because the degree of Central Government, Cabinet Office sort of process…'	*R22: '…, if you're accountable, you have to be the person who doesn't let the difficult issues go, that forces their confronting.'*	*R22: 'We called a meeting with him [THE INFORMATIO COMMISSIONER], got him in, sat him down and gave him a good listening to and tried to reassure him…'*	*R22: 'I think I feel it around your credibility and pride in your public service role, that yes you're there to serve the Government of the day and your Minister and people understand that in a democracy that's the way decisions get made…'*	*R22: 'if Ministers decide tomorrow they want nothing more to do with this, then the SRO will be confident that they had done so on the basis of the best advice and that the work that had been done had been done to the relevant standard all that had been done well. So the decision that they would take would be about the relative priority of these particular [ORGANIZATIONAL] objectives.'*

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	R23: *'In this case, probably, it's mainly the XXX family, i.e. XXX policy, and the delivery agencies that respond.'*	R23: *'I think my definition of professional is to be clear what it is your responsibilities are, to deliver those to the best possible standard, and most certainly to an acceptable standard, and to ensure that that is nested within the corporate objectives of the organisation you work for.'*	R23: *'…it's actually about if you're committed to the organisation, and to the things it does and the things it stands for, and you have a significant chunk of responsibility for helping you to do that, then you want that to work, and you want it to be successful.'*	R23: *'…the reputation of the organisation, if we're seen to foul up that sort of thing that's pretty poor, it doesn't look good for us as an employer…'*	R23: *'And it is accounting for the things that go wrong <u>if they go wrong,</u> and feeling that you are the one who actually does need to go in front of the Management Board and explain why the blooming thing didn't work when it ought to have done.'*
	R27: *'And in that sense we are accountable to Parliament, and through Parliament to the public.'*	R27: *'…but our reputation was on the line if they had failed to follow them.'*	R27: <u>*'I got very closely involved in agreeing both the remit for the 'business change' elements*</u>*, with agreeing that with the Senior Board within the Department at the time, and in the nature of the delivery of what was going to be delivered.'*	R27: *'Reputation is <u>crucial …</u> The XXXX has not had a great deal of confidence in its own ability to deliver projects, and it was extremely important to us that we delivered this Project on time and on budget because it showed that the XXXX could do that. What we actually did was to deliver our Project on time, on budget.'*	R27: *'It's me that gets fired <u>if the project doesn't produce the benefits.'</u>*
	R29: *'I mean before that I might be asked by the OGC…'*	R29: *'you've accepted a particular responsibility and accountability for an organisation…'*	R29: *'Well like any Headquarters job it means that you don't do it yourself. It means that you … so I basically look at all the levers, opportunities, policies that might either incentivise, inhibit, speed up, decelerate*		R29: *'In my case then the ultimate thing to think about is what <u>I might be asked</u> at the Public Accounts Committee. I mean before that <u>I might be asked by the OGC</u> or <u>I might be asked by the overall SRO</u> for the Programme or by the*

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			the take-up of the IT opportunity, and try to manage them to where they will provide maximum leverage and minimum hindrance.'		*Permanent Secretary for DEPT or XXX in the financial part. I might be asked by lots of people before that…'*

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	R3: 'It will be a good outcome for the public good, <u>the UK citizenry</u>, if by 2050 the generation that is XXXX then, okay, work out therefore that it is our children, has throughout its educational and working life, understood the importance of planning for XXXX both through working and saving…'	*R3: <u>'Public outcomes are far more, far less tangible</u> but we're seeking to try and start building them into our project planning now, that's actually quite hard, so long-term economic benefits now start featuring in our business case, they're a bit beyond where we sometimes get<u>. It will be a good outcome for the public good, the UK citizenry, if by 2050 the generation that is XXXX then, okay, work out therefore that it is our children, has throughout its educational and working life, understood the importance of planning for XXXX both through working and saving…</u>.'*	*R3: 'So I was responsible for thinking through in fairly quick order what needed to be done, with the right sort of people, put sufficient resource into it without putting resource into it, as it were, officially, to think through it in sufficiently orderly way to know what had to be done, be able to give an assessment to ministers of the policy solution we had in mind, its risks, which are high because it requires an open partnership with industry in a way that government normally doesn't do with primary legislation, with a timetable which will get us XXXX in the spring of 2005, for reasons I really won't go into now, without too many obstacles and what have you. I was responsible for that sort of putting all that round it, getting the right people in the right places to be able to do this, making the atmosphere correct so that it would happen and doing some of the negotiation, providing a really honest assessment of*	*R3: 'That accountability to me means the difference between personal achievement and personal failure, job satisfaction and job disappointment, leadership success and leadership disappointment and outcomes for the public good and<u>, not outcomes for the public good, less excellent public outcomes, if I can put it like that</u>. So it's very personal, it matters to me, that's what my job is designed around, to deliver those things. It matters to my staff through my leadership and it matters to the actual policy outcomes.'*	*R3: <u>I am striving to ensure that when someone looks back and it's not going to be me in 2050</u>, that they can see that what we were doing even back here was on the right road…'*

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			where we are at.'		
	R4: *'I have to recognise on the one hand that our clients, which are my XXXX, are socially disadvantaged, have manifest needs and therefore need a lot of support in order to put their case forward.'*	R4: *'….it would be getting, I can't quite remember what the expression is, <u>getting the most for my bucks?</u>*	R4: *'If I have that amount of money to do, to use within those parameters, how can I get the best bang for my bucks? So, how can I get some things at the end of the day, it is a system by which individuals can seek redress for not being awarded XXXX. So how can I make that system work in the best way possible? So if I spent a million quid so that they can pick up the telephone, that sounds good. But is that actually the best way of spending that million quid or is there something else we could've done which would make it much more effective and make it much more likely that it was a fair system? So working out the best ways of using that money would be really important for me.'*	R4: *'I feel bad, very bad, that in practice something like 68% of our people will lose their jobs. I don't feel very proud about any of that, but probity, financial consciousness means that we're doing things in an inappropriate way and that money is better used in some other way. So we will reduce it to one. So even if that means a number of people lose their jobs, a number of people lose their jobs.'*	R4: *'Which means that XXX can ring us up and we'll help them fill the forms in and we'll answer their questions <u>and instead of leaving them wondering what happens over 13 months,</u> we are going to do an awful lot more to communicate with them as to where their case is, what they have to do next.'*
	R5: *'…I've got an accountability to the 4 million plus households that actually have entitlement to this product.'*	R5: *'I am very proud of the fact that for XXX that by March this year we had taken an extra million people out of poverty. And that's what gets me up in the*	R5: *'…it is actually at looking at treating every pound as if it were your own.'*	R5: *'I'm very firmly accountable to Ministers for the steps we had taken to on you know, sourcing, contingency capacity, really to make sure it was a smooth delivery in there and*	R5: *'I think a lot of people think the accountability ends when the project goes live in there, <u>I think it actually goes on from coming through until the benefits are actually realised…</u>*

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		morning.'		*they are very concerned about the risk management as it comes through because <u>anything that goes wrong is just on the front page of the Press.</u> The business we are in, <u>Government IT project goes wrong, you're going to immediately get the coverage in the papers'</u>*	
	R7: '<u>I feel most accountable to the public</u> because as a public servant, I mean all, the whole of the public service is about making life better for citizens that might sound all too altruistic but I mean surely that is at the essence of what we're all trying to do…'	*R7: 'So what we, the focus has changed if you look at our strategy you'll <u>see the main focus is on benefits for the XXX public bringing greater certainty and clarity to the process of XXXX</u>…'*	*R7: 'Yeah, the best and most recent example perhaps is last week where I spoke to at an evening dinner, the XXXX Forum, this is, it's a sort of loose association the XXXX Forum, the leading light is the Chief Executive of one of the XXXX channels, it also owns XXXX companies and the theme is, the thing that brings them all together is XXXX and the use of technology.'*	*R7: 'I can tell you that I would think it must be as high as three or four and probably more people who've said 'Have you XXXX recently' and they will recount an experience which really added to the stress and trauma that they felt and very, very often not always of course, but very often. The problem is of the nature of my XXXX told me that further down the chain, somebody is not ready to xxx, you know they're still waiting at xxx, and the problems come up just at the last minute and nobody was aware of it…'*	*R7: 'So people will be able to see, we believe, I believe that they should be able to make choices as well you know if you're in the happy position as some people are of having maybe a couple of people, two or three all wanting to buy your home, maybe at slightly different prices, well what you could say is, in electronic XXXX environment, you told me that you're you know, you're just about to exchange contracts or whatever, well let me have a, take me into your chain so I can see for myself that this is in fact the case.'*

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	R16: 'I have always had a very strong sense of I could have travelled first class, but I'll be perfectly comfortable in second class which I think the tax payer would rather I did that actually, than threw their money about. And I think in XXXX department one has a very, very strong sensation that actually it is not just a game. You know that £25 million or whatever could be being spent on a new hospital or my children's school or you know so I do have a sense of accountability to the tax payer.'	*R16: 'You know this is 25 years in the civil service. I am much more bothered (a) that we bought something out of departmental money that was a complete waste, you know we poured n million down the drain, it didn't give us what we wanted, it was irrelevant as it turned out. It didn't do what we wanted it to do and more importantly the XXX... we put a lot of effort in here to XXXX, I like to see it spent on things that the tax payer would like us to spend money on.'*	*R16: 'I have to say not everybody, has a strong consciousness of is this a good use of tax payers money and I have always had a very strong sense of I could have travelled first class, but I'll be perfectly comfortable in second class which I think the tax payer would rather I did that actually, than threw their money about.'*	*R16: '...we bought something out of departmental money that was a complete waste, you know we poured n million down the drain, it didn't give us what we wanted, it was irrelevant as it turned out. It didn't do what we wanted it to do and more importantly the XXX... we put a lot of effort in here to XXXX, I like to see it spent on things that the tax payer would like us to spend money on.'*	*R16: '...we are starting with PSA 1 which is the one about the XXX gap...and we are starting that, I have got my dates muddled up, but later this summer''*
	R20: 'What we do here is on behalf of patients, and it's very easy to lose that view. You often find with clinicians, although a clinician's clearly got a vocation, most of them have, the vast majority of them have, they do lose sight of the patient sometimes because the job is so important. The science of what they're doing becomes very important. Patients just pass that scientific process. I think it's very important for people in	*R20: 'The NHS's ability to provide comprehensive services is restricted by the difficulty of transferring data between organisations. I think there's a real governance issue - in clinical terms – for you as a patient who might pitch up in a hospital, having had an accident, and might also have a rare condition being treated in another hospital, and the hospital you pitch up at, won't know that. And unless you're conscious and*	*R20: 'I had I think a fairly clear view in my mind about what the power of IT could be in terms both of enthusiasm … well, it being better for patients, raising quality, giving decision support and therefore improving safety, and also enthusing the clinicians who were doing it that they were going to be able to … working with patients and they would have all of this information at their fingertips.'*	*R20: 'I think there's a real governance issue - in clinical terms – for you as a patient who might pitch up in a hospital, having had an accident, and might also have a rare condition being treated in another hospital, and the hospital you pitch up at, won't know that. And unless you're conscious and capable of telling them, they might not discover it.'*	*R20: 'So like at the moment the end of last month, patients are being offered choice from the end of last month.'*

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	my position who are, if you like, within a helicopter above them, to root that out, just to identify it, root it out and make people aware all the time that <u>we are here to provide a service for patients</u>, and if they don't like the service we've got, then we're not doing the job we're supposed to do.'	*capable of telling them, they might not discover it.'*			
	R21: 'I have a responsibility for actually understanding our requirements in terms of the 14-19 agenda'	*R21: 'I look after a programme called XXXX and that programme is looking at improving how information about learners and learning is accessed and shared across the whole of the learning and the skills sector, which is everything from age 14 upwards, so it's education in schools, colleges, work based learning providers, adult and community learning and higher education and the aim of this programme is to improve the services that are provided to young people and adults in terms of the support, guidance, advice, information, support services when they're actually in learning and also financial support and entitlement.'*	*R21: 'Then there are a huge range of policy benefits, which <u>we will probably seek to evaluate and measure through other programmes</u>…'*	*R21: '…through improved decision making by learners, improved decision making by providers, by funders, because they have more information, can easily access information, can make better decisions about their future choices, about which provider they go to, which will help them to stay in education rather than choosing the wrong course and dropping out…'*	*R21: 'So policy agenda since the 1st 2001 has also reinforced the need for XXXX and even more recently has been the efficiency agenda, because this approach should also secure efficiency savings.'*

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	R22: '…a good first point of contact in terms of promoting the welfare and wellbeing of children…'	*R22: '…the rationale for XXX is that it will secure better outcomes for children, a better experience of public services for children and their families if we can join up the delivery of education, health, social services, youth offending services at local level. If we can do that and the reason why that will have that desired effect is that that will enable earlier intervention, more effective intervention, at the early stages when something is going wrong with a child's life, whether that's educational attainment, family background, youth offending behaviour etc. that is the basic rationale.'*	*R22: '…this is the DEPT X talking to…Primary Care Trusts, [PROFESSION A], [PROFESSION B], endless, endless stakeholders, the [CHARITIES], [CHARITY A], [CHARITY B], so the representation, whether that's clearing the text of bits of written communication, but more often doing presentations, doing one to one meetings, representing the project at other parts of the programme, you're doing around and talking to people and the civil servants working on XXXX and YYYY….'*		*R22: '…one of which is the role out of 3,500 children's centres, that's the integrated services for the 0 - 5 years olds, by 2010.'*
	R29: '…my SRO proposition involves the effective use of large amounts of public funds and the benefits are of direct interest to a large proportion of the average punting population…'	*R29: 'I might be asked by lots of people before that, but at the end of the day this <u>is public money being invested for public benefit</u> and therefore, ultimately, you need to plan on being able to account in the normal way that an Accountable Officer does.'*	*R29: 'I'm absolutely clear that what I do has to pass what I call 'the mother test,' which is … I can't sit with own my mother and explain what I spend my time doing and why it's useful, and I'm unlikely to pass the test at some point further down the track.'*	*R29: 'If you're taking responsibility for something that nobody has ever done before, it's reasonable to assume that you're going to have to make some judgments based on experience rather than evidence of past success, failure, or whatever. So it's just, you just have to adjust that that proposition and be ready for the question, "Well*	*R29: 'What that means is that whether or not one believes one has the means or whether one believes one has the authority or whether one believes that it's doable the point is you've accepted a particular responsibility and accountability for an organisation in the case of Accountable Officer for an NHS Trust, and in the case of this, <u>the responsibility for</u>*

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				couldn't you have done it better?" Well the answer is, "Undoubtedly." In that situation if we stick at this for any length of time there are going to be occasions where you look back and say, "Actually I could have done that there."	*the benefits being realised from £6bn worth of IT investment over 10 years.'*

Conception	Attribute of conception of accountability				
Conception 4	**To Whom** To whom the SRO is accountable	**Subject** What the SRO understands they are accountable for	**Fulfilment** How the SRO fulfils their accountability	**Consequences** What the SRO understands to the consequences of being accountable	**Timeframe** When the SRO will be accountable.
	R3: *'It's my opportunity to make a difference, in a tangible way through what I am and what I do. Sometimes it means governancey sort of things which I loathe I have to say, but a necessary evil, sometimes it means seeing something happen as a result of something I've instigated and supported. <u>And that's it, it's personal pride in the job in the end.'</u>*	R3: *'That accountability to me <u>means the difference between personal achievement and personal failure</u>, job satisfaction and job disappointment, leadership success and leadership disappointment and outcomes for the public good and, not outcomes for the public good, less excellent public outcomes, if I can put it like that.'*	R3: <u>*'It took quite a lot of effort and quite a lot of pushing*</u> *and the sort of personal ,you know, we can make this happen, there is nothing to stop it except organizational bureaucracy, it's not high enough up anybody's priorities, there is nothing physically stopping us….'*	R3: *'That accountability to me <u>means the difference between personal achievement and personal failure</u>, job satisfaction and job disappointment, leadership success and leadership disappointment and outcomes for the public good and, not outcomes for the public good, less excellent public outcomes, if I can put it like that.'*	R3: *'I was responsible for bringing in the XXXX, the XXXX, okay, back in 2001 and I think the thing that made me proud about that was we did in fact make a difference to the market in XXXX.'*
	R12: *'Well, to myself I suppose in some ways, you know. You want to do things you want to make sure that it's successful so there's a personal pride isn't there. <u>You're accountable to yourself.'</u>*	R12: *'You want to do things you want to make sure that it's successful so there's a personal pride isn't there.'*	R12: *'Have you done enough, have you done all the right things, there's a list of things I haven't done right, an absolute litany, well there's a few things I've probably done right too and on balance I think we're where we are.'*	R12: *'But could you live with yourself sitting on the beach, I personally couldn't, it's a personal thing.'*	R12: *'Yeah, next week when the family go off on holiday and I don't, sorry, the week after next. Where do I feel I should be? Here, always here, so I've made that decision.'*
	R21: *I'm totally committed to making sure this happens and although we're transferring responsibility for delivery, I will be still*	R21: *'…it's also to report on, celebrate success so in reviews with any of those there will be saying, they will be saying we have done*	R21: *I'm totally committed to making sure this happens…'*	R21: *'. It wouldn't have happened if I hadn't told it, this whole programme is my programme and so people know that I am committed to*	*'R21: <u>I'm totally committed to making sure this happens</u> and although we're transferring responsibility for delivery, I will be still retaining the SRO role and if I*

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	retaining the SRO role and if I move jobs I will be making, being very clear about who is it gonna take on the SRO role, I want to make sure that they retain, that the programme moves forward, continues at the level that it's being managed to date. So there is an inner commitment to it isn't there? I hold myself to account as well for it I suppose in that sort of sense.'	*this on the XXXX front, progress was made, let's celebrate it.'* '		*it, it's my baby, it might be an ugly baby, but it's mine, so there's that sort of recognition I suppose that people have seen.*	*move jobs I will be making, being very clear about who is it gonna take on the SRO role, I want to make sure that they retain, that the programme moves forward…'*

Appendix E: Summary demographic data

Summary demographic data

Respondent	Age (years)	Educational Attainment	Length of time in civil service (years)	Length of time in senior civil service (years)	Conception
R1	48	U	27	8	C2
R2	47	U	26	9	C2
R3	42	M	18	7	C4
R4	57	P	1	1	C3
R5	49	M	28	17	C3
R6	37	M	*	3	C2
R7	59	A	41	19	C3
R8	61	U	37	4.5	C1
R9	44	M	*	4	C2
R10	49	U	27	4	C2
R11	50	U	16	5	C1
R12	46	U	7	6	C4
R13	48	U	28	*	C1
R14	54	U	30	16.5	C2
R15	43	U	21	*	C1
R16	49	M	25	14	C3
R17	54	M	29	14	C1
R18	46	P	20	11	C2
R19	53	U	30	15	C1
R20	55	M	15	2	C3
R21	48	A	28	2	C4
R22	43	U	19	9	C3
R23	50	U	8	4	C2
R24	50	M	8	2.5	C1
R25	52	M	20	12	C1
R26	43	U	21	10	C1
R27	56	U	35	*	C2
R28	53	U	30	14	C1
R29	48	M	0.75	0.75	C3
R30	48	M	25	2	C1
Average	**49.4**		**22.17**	**8**	

Key
- * = Respondent did not provide the data
- A = "A" levels
- U = undergraduate degree
- M = masters degree
- P = doctorate